

Screenplay Writing Rules

General Format

All typing needs to be done in 12pt. Courier or New Courier Font. This is industry standard. Margins are 1" top, bottom, left and right.

Title

Title and Author should be centered at the top of the screenplay. Title should be in "quotes."

"As the Stomach Turns"
Tom Thumb

Slug Line

Scenes are always preceded by a slug line that tells whether the scene is inside or outside, the location, and whether it is day or night. Examine the following slug line and see if you can easily write one yourself:

INT. ENRIQUE'S APARTMENT - LATE AFTERNOON

INT. = Interior, EXT. = Exterior

Description Lines

These tell more about the setting, who is in the scene, and sometimes where they are located and what they are doing. Important instructions are placed here.

Scene instruction lines occur throughout the scene as needed. They often instruct about essential character physical actions.

Characters sometimes talk when they aren't within camera range, or are on the phone, radio, etc. When this happens, you write the character name and dialogue as usual, but next to the character name write (O.S.) when they are off screen, or (V.O.) when the voice is dubbed or reproduced (voice over).

Two other conventions: Everything is written in present tense - don't put *ed* on the end of words. Put a character's name in ALL CAPITALS in the scene description lines the first time the character appears in the script.

Dialogue

Dialogue is the words that people say. There is no place for a *he said*, or *she felt*, just the words.

Example:

SERGEI

Thanks for the memories, Sweetheart!

Notice how the character's name is in CAPITALS and centered over the line. Also, remember to indent the dialogue with 2 tab spaces.

Dialogue should be as short, or *crisp*, as possible. The standard dialogue line is three inches long. Three of those lines are about as long as will play well. When it is longer, it needs to be focused, broken up, or polished.

Trying to say too many things at one time is a common problem. Make the line say just one thing, or respond to the previous line and say something new. Take the following poor dialogue for example:

JOHN

I've been looking all over for you. Where were you today?
I've looked up and down the hall and in all the classes.
I couldn't figure it out! What do you want to do after
class? I'm going to the frog races, do you want to come?

ELIZABETH

I've been around - you know me, I'm lost half the time.
Sorry you missed me. I don't know what I want to do after
class. Frog races! I may be out of my mind, but I'm not
crazy. No, let's do something else.

Elizabeth responded to each of John's questions, but I doubt that even John could understand.

Compare to this:

JOHN

Where were you today?

ELIZABETH

How should I know? I just inhabit this body. I skipped out
again.

JOHN

Not again! I was afraid of that. I've been looking all over for you.

ELIZABETH

I'm so sorry, John. It's sweet of you to look out for me.

JOHN

I'm going to the frog races after class. Want to come?

ELIZABETH

Frog races! Just because my mind is gone, that doesn't mean I'm crazy.

JOHN

Then can I give you a lift home?

Elizabeth staggers across the sidewalk and looks faint. John holds her steady.

JOHN

Yes, I will take you home.

Back and forth dialogue will help to move your plot in a more effective manner. Your audience will also be more engaged in your story when you present your dialogue this way.

Source:

Cole, Dorian Scott. "How to Write a Movie."

<http://www.visualwriter.com/HowTo/rewrite.htm>. December 8, 2003.