

Screenwriting Reminders

1) Screenwriting is different than most writing you're used to: **you don't have the luxury of giving background and explanations.**

- -- You cannot write in a script what the audience can't see or hear:
 - you can't write: "He thinks about his girlfriend..." in an ACTION line or "(thinking of wife)" in a PARENTHETICAL because we can't see or hear that
- -- **SHOW what you mean, don't explain it**

2) The Action Line

- The “action” line should be written formally – meaning in **complete sentences**. This is where you are setting the scene: **the who and the where**.
- While not too lengthy, give all info you can that will help give insight/foreshadowing/general useful information about the characters/situation.

... action
line

- Do NOT add phrasing like:
 - "starts to"
 - "begins to"
 - "he says"
 - "she seems"
 - etc... just do it/write it!

3) Dialog

- Meanwhile, when your characters are speaking, try to write with more **authentic dialog**
 - Try to write how people actually talk...
 - Many of our sentences are **not complete** or we have a certain way of talking/certain repeat phrases, we **always use contractions**, etc.

4) Scene Heading

- Your “**scene heading**” line (it will be gray when you are writing in the program) is just for **location and time** (and is all caps)
 - -- should begin with INT (for interior) or EXT. (for exterior) then location - time of day
 - -- example: INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - NIGHT

5) Break-up dialog with "action" lines...

- -- action lines are not necessarily for just action - they can describe the location/room, what your characters are physically doing, etc.
- -- this makes for better reading and with lets you give characteristics to your characters, it helps you tell your story even more through what is in the room, what the characters are physically like, the habits they may have, etc.

6) Do NOT
include
camera
angle or
shot types

- Unless it is very essential, **do NOT include camera angle or shot types.**
- You may want to include an occasional "action" line indicating an ECU (extreme close-up), but do not continually dictate where the camera is/should be - **that's the director's job.**

7) Character Names

- Try to give all of your character's names
 - try to avoid things like Man #1, Robber #1, etc.
 - it makes it harder for the reader to follow the different people...
 - additionally, don't give them too similar names (ie: Bob, Rob, etc.)
- *You don't want to waste the reader's time thinking about who's who, you want them to just keep reading your story*

8) What's in ALL CAPS?

- 1. The first time a character is introduced in the action line.**
 - *This is for the director and the actor to know when they appear in the script*
- 2. Specific/important/integral** sounds, visual effects, or props that either have to be **captured during filming or added in during post.**
- 3.** And screenwriting programs should do this for you, but these as well:
 - *Character names above their dialog (for actor)*
 - *Scene headings (for director & set design & \$)*
 - *Transitions, including FADE IN, CUT TO, FADE OUT (for director & editor)*

9) EDIT your Script

- You must **edit your script** for **grammar and punctuation**.
 - -- action lines AND dialog
 - -- misspellings, missing caps & periods distract from your ideas: you don't want that

10)
Include
only what
you can
see and
hear

- And to repeat #1 – **only include in your script what the audience can see or hear** – avoid all else.
- Indeed, it's a whole different kind of storytelling. Don't include phrases like "We see..." etc. **Show, don't tell.**

End note: You are the screenwriter, you shape the narrative structure and create every character, action, line of dialogue and the setting... **with the fewest lines possible.** It's difficult, but the more you do it, the better you will get - the more you will be able to visualize and put into words what you want (ie: keep working!).