



Introduction To

SCREENWRITING



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INTRODUCTION TO SCREENWRITING

If you have ever had an idea pop into your head that you thought would make a blockbuster film or compelling television show, you may have found yourself wondering where to get the process started. The process of getting a script, whether it is for television or the big screen, on paper is known as screenwriting. While the process of committing your idea to paper might seem simple enough, if you really want to succeed in the world of television and feature films you need to know the precise formula and rules that are used when writing a script.

Isn't writing all about creativity, you might ask? Yes, that is certainly true and without creativity there would likely be no scripts for award winning films and television programs, but like anything else, there are rules and conventions that must be adhered to, especially if your goal is to have your script read by professionals in the industry who really have the power and connections to bring your script to life on screen.

Keep in mind that the real power powers, such as producers and commissioning editors, all receive a ton of scripts on their desk almost on a daily basis and in order to sort through those scripts to separate the gems from the junk they must be able to quickly and easily pick out those that seem to have the potential to be real winners. This means they must be able to quickly pick up those that scream 'newbie' and separate them from the clear professionals.

The latter category is where you want your script to fall. Unconventional formatting may seem creative to you, but to the powers that be it simply announces you as someone new to the industry and likely will land your script in the trash without it having even been read. It might well be the greatest script ever written, but keep in mind that if you cannot get it into the right hands, no one will ever know that. Writing to the correct standard and format will immediately give you the best opportunity to have your script read.

In this guide we are going to take a look at some of the standard formatting regulations for writing scripts both for television and film and give you an insider's look at the industry.

Are you ready to find out what it takes to write a successful script?

Let's get started!

CHAPTER 1

What's in a Script?

Before we begin to look at the various components of a script and how you actually go about writing a compelling script, it is a good idea to first examine what a script is. Simply put, a script is a document that is used to outline the elements that are needed to tell a story. The key difference between a script and the story itself is that the script is actually a collaboration that involves not only the writer but also the director, editor, cast and various production crew members. There are many people involved in the process of creating television or film and the script that you write must conform to all of the standard conventions including notations, margins, layout and formatting in order for those numerous people to be able to work effectively together.

A script is also different from a novel or any other type of written work in that it is a medium that is visual in nature. With a script, your job is not to tell the story to the audience but rather to show it to them. This means that you must learn to write in a way that is visual so that the audience can see the story come alive. While your character's thoughts may be quite alive inside your own head, you must be able to reveal what they are thinking and show it on screen through their actions. This can sometimes be accomplished with a mere look.

The Right Elements for a Good Story

We all know a good story when we see one on screen. The characters sweep you right along with you, force you to become involved, captivate you with the emotions they portray and leave you wanting more. A good story not only allows the audience to develop an interest in the characters but to become passionate about them. This does not necessarily mean they always like the characters; but it does mean the characters evoke a strong emotional response.

One of the hallmarks of any good story is that there is always something at stake. Whatever it is; whether it is romance, something for the good of mankind or something monetary; whatever it is it must be extremely powerful and the drive to obtain it must be more important than anything else and as the story continues to unfold, the drive to obtain it must become more important and more desperate.

Naturally, there must also be obstacles along the way. The story would not amount to

much if the hero or heroine obtained whatever it was they wanted within the first five minutes. There must be conflict. Something or someone is continually getting in the way of whatever the main character is seeking.

You also need to provide a hook to initially gain the interest of the audience. Something that catches their attention. Many writers begin by thinking "what if?" What if such and such happened? If you are able to craft a good enough 'what if' scenario, your script will be able to stand apart from the crowd on its own strength and merits.

Finally, there is the matter of formatting, which is something that we will address in greater depth in a subsequent chapter. The importance of formatting cannot be stressed enough. Your script must look as though it was written by someone with years of experience in the industry. The volume of script submissions received by producers each and every day is nothing if not sheer astounding. If you want to play the game, you must know the rules and you must follow them. To the letter.

CHAPTER 2

Styles of Scripts

Before we begin looking at the various components that make up a script and the correct formatting procedure for writing a script, it is a good idea to first examine the different types of script formats that are used.

Scriptwriters for television dramas and feature films typically present their work in one of two different styles. The difference usually depends upon whether the work has already been sold and production is in process or whether the scriptwriter is currently trying to sell the work.

Submission Script

A submission script is also frequently known as a spec script. This is a script that is written and which has not been bought or commissioned to date. In other words, it is written on the speculation or hope that it will be purchased.

Shooting Script

Once a script has actually been purchased, it will usually go through a number of rewrites before it ever goes into production. Once it goes into production the script then becomes a production or shooting script. All of the shots and scenes contained inside the shooting script will then be numbered and each scene as well as each shot will be broken down into the number of relevant components that are needed for filming. The director and production assistance can arrange scenes in the order that they will be shot in order to make the most efficient use of the cast, stage and resources for location. This means that scenes are often not shot in the order they will actually appear on screen.