“Screenplay Format”

by

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The scene must be introduced in the following way: interior or exterior, the location’s name, and the time of day.

***DO:*** INT. FILM CLASSROOM – DAY

You may then describe the necessities and overall feel of the location. Don’t over-describe the room, as it may dissuade designers and producers from wanting to work on it.

***DO:*** The classroom is that of an elite private school. It is clean, with expensive tables, and containing more than enough state-of-the-art computers for the size of the class. The room is decorated in movie posters, but only those of Steven Spielberg films – showcasing the preference of the teacher.

***DO NOT:*** The classroom has a door on the north wall where students enter. It is brown with a narrow window in it. The doorknob is silver, and is a lever. There are four tables, each with six chairs. The table tops are black and the chair backs and seats are red. There is a “u” shaped desk around the room with twelve Mac computers, and some televisions and recording equipment. Behind the door there’s some lithographs from “Snow White” and “Aladdin”, and a “Jaws” and “Shrek” poster. On the back wall there is a “Wizard of Oz” and “Man of Steel Poster”, and some “Frozen” lithographs and some student animation cells. The teacher’s desk is brown wood opposite the door. There are many books in the shelves. The first shelf has art history and animation books. The second shelf has art history books only. The third shelf has film and art history books. There are maquettes on the shelves. The first shelf has a man with his hands in his pockets.

The names of characters, when first introduced, should appear in all capital letters. Whether you continue to use this format in subsequent appearances is personal preference. You should describe only the necessary attributes of characters, and in a way that is appealing to actors. Include age, gender, important physical traits; steer clear of over-describing them.

***DO:*** MR. BIONDOLILLO stands before the class. He is a ruggedly handsome man in his late twenties or early thirties. He carries himself with confidence and appears very approachable to his students.

***DO NOT:*** Mr. Biondolillo stands before the class. He is white and 5’8 ½, with brown hair that’s fuller on the sides. He has nice eyebrows, and blue-green eyes. He has a small nose, and full lips, and really straight teeth. He’s about twenty to thirty pounds overweight. On this day, he wears a white shirt with a Mickey Mouse tie and navy pants. He’s wearing navy Polo socks and black Kenneth Cole loafers.

Any necessary action should be described, but avoid describing things that don’t pertain to the story – let the actors and director do their job. You should also avoid describing camera angles.

***DO:*** Biondolillo looks bored, and wanders the room aimlessly while his students take their test. He spots a butterfly on top of the computer in the back of the room and discreetly walks to it, so as not to disturb the students.

***DO NOT:*** Mr. Biondolillo looks bored and walks from his desk to the door. He leans on the door for ten seconds, and then walks back to the desk. Close up on a butterfly on a computer screen. Close up on Biondolillo’s eyes, shocked. Medium shot of Biondolillo as he looks around to see if the students have noticed. Wide shot of the students not noticing. Biondolillo walks around the room to the computer, passing Jennifer, Michael and Larissa’s desks.

When writing dialogue, everything must be between the two-inch margin and the five-inch margin. The name of the character must be capitalized and centered. The dialogue is left-justified. Any pertinent action should be in parenthesis. Do not write the character’s name and then their action in this format if there is no dialogue. If the character is thinking, then this should be indicated.

***DO:***

BIONDOLILLO

At this point, you should all put your books away. Take out a number two pencil.

(spots Jennifer with a pen)

A *number two pencil*, Miss Jensen.

***DO NOT:***

BIONDOLILLO

At this point, you should all put your books away. Take out a number two pencil.

(spots Jennifer with a pen)

A *number two pencil*, Miss Jensen.

***DO NOT:***

BIONDOLILLO

At this point, you should all put your books away. Take out a number two pencil.

(spots Jennifer with a pen)

A *number two pencil*, Miss Jensen.

***DO NOT:***

BIONDOLILLO

 (Biondolillo scratches his head and walks over to his desk. He leans against the desk and sighs.)

***DO NOT:***

BIONDOLILLO: At this point, you should all put your books away.

Take out a number two pencil.(spots Jennifer with a

pen)A *number two pencil*, Miss Jensen. 🡨 This in particular is stage play format, not screenplay.

Grammar and punctuation are important. Without them, your actors will have no idea how to read their lines.

***DO:***

JENNIFER

I didn’t study because I was fighting with Brody all night about the prom. We broke up, so that leaves me dateless. Whatever. I didn’t want to go anyway.

***DO NOT:***

JENNIFER

I didn’t study because I was fighting with Brody night about the prom!!!!! We broke up so that leaves me dateless. Whatever I didn’t want to go anyway.

If it’s in your movie, it should be important. It should move the story forward, and be of interest to the audience. Try to avoid too much exposition, especially if it doesn’t drive the story. Also make sure the dialogue flows naturally, and doesn’t feel like you’re spoon feeding the audience the story.

***DO:***

MICHAEL

Perfect! I finally get accepted to a college that will get me out of this stupid town, and the girl I’ve loved since I was seven will be going to school ten thousand miles away!

***DO NOT:***

MICHAEL

I’m so upset. I hate my town, and all I want to do is go away to school so that I can get out of here. Today I got my acceptance letter to Cornell, which is in Ithaca, New York, and that’s about six hours from my home. But I’ve always loved Jennifer, ever since the first time I saw her in Miss Clark’s class in first grade, and now she’s going to school in Berkley, California.

Is it absolutely necessary that we know that he’s going to Cornell and she’s going to Berkley? Is it important that their first grade teacher was Miss Clark, or is it important that we know they met in first grade? Phrasing is very important.

Teenagers tend to write about how they feel about their friends, and will often include unnecessary characters because they want to represent each one of their friends in their story. If two or three characters serve the same purpose, combine them into one character. This will save you from having to deal with many actors.

***DO:***

MICHAEL

I can’t believe that this is happening!

DAVID

I know. You and Jennifer haven’t been apart for more than one day since first grade! There must be something you can do.

***DO NOT:***

MICHAEL

I can’t believe that this is happening!

DAVID

I know.

LARISSA

You and Jennifer haven’t been apart for more than one day since first grade!

SAM

There must be something you can do.

Don’t forget to include page numbers!!!

The next page shows what a completed screenplay page should look like.

INT. FILM CLASSROOM – DAY

The classroom is that of an elite private school. It is clean, with expensive tables, and containing more than enough state-of-the-art computers for the size of the class. The room is decorated in movie posters, but only those of Steven Spielberg films – showcasing the preference of the teacher.

MR. BIONDOLILLO stands before the class. He is a ruggedly handsome man in his late twenties or early thirties. He carries himself with confidence and appears very approachable to his students.

MICHAEL and DAVID are speaking to one another quietly. Michael is seventeen, and very athletic. He is handsome in an All-American way. David, also seventeen, is not as classically good looking, but he is tall and seems much more confident than Michael.

MICHAEL

I can’t believe that this is happening!

DAVID

I know. You and Jennifer haven’t been apart for more than one day since first grade! There must be something you can do.

BIONDOLILLO

At this point, you should all put your books away. Take out a number two pencil.

(spots Jennifer with a pen)

A *number two pencil*, Miss Jensen.

David and Michael exchange a look, and begin taking the test. Biondolillo looks bored, and wanders the room aimlessly while his students take their test. He spots a butterfly on top of the computer in the back of the room and discreetly walks to it, so as not to disturb the students.