

Introduction to Screenwriting

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Key concepts, structure, and practical tips for getting started

1. What Is Screenwriting?

Aspect	Description
Definition	The craft of writing scripts for film, television, or digital video that translate a story into visual and auditory instructions.
Primary Goal	Show, don't tell – convey narrative through actions, dialogue, and visual cues that can be filmed.
Industry Role	Provides the blueprint for directors, actors, producers, editors, and the whole production team.

2. Core Elements of a Script

Element	Function	Formatting Tips
Scene Heading (Slugline)	Identifies location, time of day, and whether the scene is interior (INT.) or exterior (EXT.).	INT. COFFEE SHOP – DAY
Action	Describes what is seen and heard on screen. Keep it concise; focus on what the camera captures.	One?paragraph blocks, present tense.
Character Name	Centers above the dialogue line. Appears in all caps on first introduction.	JULIA
Dialogue	The spoken words of characters. Keep it natural, purposeful, and subtext?rich.	Indented, under the character name.
Parenthetical (wry)	Brief direction for delivery or small action within dialogue. Use sparingly.	(sarcastic)
Transition	Optional cues for editing (CUT TO:, DISSOLVE TO:). Modern scripts rarely need them.	Right?aligned, caps.

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Element	Function	Formatting Tips
Shot/Camera Direction	Rarely used; only when essential to the story.	Keep minimal; leave visual decisions to the director.

Standard screenplay length:

- Feature film: ~90–120 pages (1 page ? 1 minute of screen time).
 - TV drama (hour?long): ~45–60 pages.
 - TV comedy (half?hour): ~22–30 pages.
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3. Story Structure Basics

3.1 The Three?Act Model

Act	Approx. Page Range	Purpose
Act?1 – Setup	1–30	Introduce protagonist, world, inciting incident, and the main conflict.
Act?2 – Confrontation	30–90	Protagonist faces obstacles; midpoint twist raises stakes; escalating tension.
Act?3 – Resolution	90–120	Climax (final confrontation) ? outcome ? denouement (wrap?up).

3.2 Alternative Structures

- **Four?Act (TV)** – Splits Act?2 into “Complications” and “Midpoint” for clearer pacing.
 - **Hero’s Journey** – 12-step mythic template useful for genre scripts.
 - **Save?the?Cat Beat Sheet** – 15 beats (Opening Image, Theme Stated, etc.) popularized by Blake Snyder.
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4. Developing a Strong Concept

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1. **Logline (1-2 sentences)** – Summarizes the protagonist, goal, antagonist, and stakes.
Example: “A cynical detective must team up with a brilliant teenage hacker to stop a rogue AI from launching a global cyber-attack.”
2. **Premise** – Expands the logline into a “what if?” question that fuels the story.
3. **Genre & Tone** – Decide early (drama, comedy, thriller, sci-fi). Consistency guides dialogue, pacing, and visual style.