

The H[elp] Files

For ... Some Technical Notes

Sometimes technicalities with terminology and structure can cause confusion between different forms of writing — one such example probably exists between playwriting and screenwriting. The following points hopefully will help differentiate one from the other.

- Playwrights write scripts or playscripts; Screenwriters write screenplays but these can also be referred to as scripts.
- Plays are performed live (although they can be recorded or screened live for television etc); Screenplays are acted out and recorded for an audience.
- Plays are written in Acts. Generally, most plays are either One-Act or broken into Three or more Acts.
- Screenplays are written in Scenes. Each time the location or time changes a new scene is created.
- At the beginning of each Act ‘the scene is set’ with descriptions of setting and which characters are present, as well as any information relevant to the mood of the play.
- Each scene in a screenplay is headed by a Logline which states whether the scene is set inside or outside (INT/EXT), the location (DAVE’S LOUNGEROOM), and time of day (DAY/NIGHT/TWILIGHT/DAWN). If it is important, the location can be denoted specifically DAVE’S LOUNGEROOM/FIREPLACE.
- Actions or character actions within a play are written in italics and placed within brackets beneath dialogue or the character’s name (*Opens the door.*), (*Recovers – changes her tone.*)
- Actions in screenplays each have a separate line within the body of the work, and character’s names are always in capitals YORK turns to LANCASTER. Style or direction speech (whispering) (to LEICESTER) is placed under the character’s name or directly before the associated dialogue.
- Plays are weighted towards dialogue predominately moving the story forward.
- Screenplays are moved forward firstly by action and then with dialogue.

For further clarification, check out examples of both formats either on the internet or at your local library.

Please note: a transcript of a film is not its screenplay.

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