Creative Writing Tips: How to Write A Script

What is a Script?

A script is a piece of writing that is used for plays, television and movies. It has the dialogue (speech) for characters and stage directions, which give information about the settings and actions.

It is the writer's roadmap for how they wish their story to appear on stage or screen. The director and actors will bring it to life based on the information in the script.

A script is intended to be performed for an audience, rather than being read directly.

Steps for Writing a Script

❓ What is it about? Before you start writing your script, make sure you know what your story will be about. Write a summary of your plot.
A script can be a completely fictional story or based on a true story.
❓ What is going to happen? Write a detailed plan. This is important so that you know all the events that need to happen to get your characters from the beginning of the plot to the end.
❓ What are the different scenes? Divide the plot into scenes. These will act almost like chapters in your script. Think about what events will happen in each scene, and how they move the story along.
Remember, a story is like a domino effect – something happens and how your characters react will determine what happens next.
❓ How do you write it? There is a standard way to set out a script, we'll look at that next.

How to Format a Script

There is a standard way of laying out a script, so if you follow this from the start you'll soon become a pro at it!

There are also script formatting programmes available that do it all for you, but they do cost money!

👉 Font: Courier, size 12
👉 Page size: 8.5" x 11"
👉 Paper: white

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👉 Margins: top, bottom and right – 1”, left margin – 1.5” (this extra space allows for hole punches to bind your script together)
👉 Spacing: single spaced
👉 Length: One page of script in font size 12 will be roughly one minute of screen time, so the number of pages you have is roughly the time your script will take to perform.

Setting the Scene
Scene descriptions should be at the start of every change of scene. Use EXT. for outside (exterior) and INT. for inside (interior).

E.g.
INT. A SCHOOL STAFFROOM – MORNING

Then include a short description of who is there, where they are positioned or what they are doing.

Include any details that are vital for what they are doing. There is no need to describe everything, only stick to the things that are important to the plot.

Here you can also include actions that the characters make, but again only include those that are vital to the plot. The director and actors will fill in the rest!

E.g.
Inside the staffroom of Blackrock School, teachers GREG and AVA are seated in chairs drinking coffee. LUCY is standing, looking through a bag.

Dialogue
Now we have the characters and where they are, it’s time to get the story going. In a script, this is mostly done through speech:

LUCY
Have you seen the permission slips for the trip? I’m sure they were in my bag.

You can include stage directions between speech which describe what the characters do:

AVA
No, sorry.

Lucy tips up her bag, spilling its contents everywhere. Greg jumps up out of the way and spills his coffee.

GREG
Great, now I’ve got to find a clean shirt!

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Remember to include if people leave or enter the scene:

Exit Greg.

You will notice in these examples some things are upper case or aligned differently. Here are the layout rules for the different elements:

- Settings are in all caps, left aligned.
- Scene descriptions are in normal sentence case, left aligned.
- The first mention of character names in stage directions will be in upper case.
- Subsequent mentions of character names will be in normal case.
- Character names to indicate speech are centered, all upper case
- Dialogue should be left aligned, but indented so it appears in the centre of the page below the name of the character speaking

And there you have it! Now you have the tools to write your very own script!

Top Tips for Young Writers

- Read scripts of your favorite play or TV show to get an idea of how much detail to include.
- Remember, stage directions won't be read by the audience! They are there to help the director and actors with performing and to make sure the characters' actions match their words and the plot – they're not for filling in extra details for the audience.
- Watch your favorite TV show and take notes – how often does the scene change, how do the characters talk to each other, what do you think works well?
- Don't worry too much about all the formatting! The important thing is getting your story down clearly – you can always go back and sort the layout afterwards.

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