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## The main things about screenplay writing (by Remi)

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So many rules, advices and samples. Yes - it is confusing.

Make sure, you pay most of your attention to the main things.

*As a person born in Lithuania, I struggled to understand what I needed most to write a screenplay. I still do sometimes. But I am learning. I am.*

A screenplay focuses on the visual and emotional aspects of the scene.

Find great ideas. It should be fresh and marketable.

Spec script – is a screenplay written to be sold. No shooting directions, no scene numbers, no specific information.

Shooting script – it's an improved (rewritten) screenplay with a lot of instructions on its pages (shooting angles, specific information on sets, costumes, lighting and so on).

You should write a spec screenplay.

You can read all books about screenplay writing, but before you do it, ask your self 'what I am looking for?' and 'what do I need right now?'. Make useful notes for future reference.

Adaptation. Are you sure you can do it? You need written permission to get it done (started). Make sure you don't waste your time. Better to write an original script.

Does your TITLE reflect the story? Or just a part of it?

*I always argue with my literary agent because of the titles of my screenplays, as he always wants to change it and I never agree. Well, usually he wins.*

The title must stop the reader and pull into the story. Some titles make sense after one has read the script. The title you choose should be short enough to fit your story.

e.g. film 'Pretty Woman' was originally supposed to be called '\$3,000', but later was named after the 'Roy Orbison – Oh, Pretty Woman' song.

If you want to write as a team – make a written agreement before you start. Letter '&' between writers names used to mark their worked together and they may own copy rights equally (or so). If 'and' used between names, it means that other writers were rewriting, improving only or joined later.

Logline - it's a one sentence summary of your story. It's a very important thing. Some say 'if you can't describe your story in one sentence - it's not a story'.

The beginning is 25%, a middle 50% and end is 25%.  
Act 1 is the beginning, Act 2 is the middle and Act 3 is the end.  
The beginning is usually the first 25 pages, the middle is next 50 pages and the end is last 10 – 25 pages. Total - 100 pages or so.

Act 1

Back-story - usually happens before the story begins.

Catalyst – a part of story's setup.

Big Event – changes the character's life.

Act 2

Midpoint – a point where there is no way back.

Act 3

Showdown – finally sorting things out.

Realization – the final results.

*3 Acts are not necessary. I never use it my self.*

The opening image is the first impression. Don't use the most common elements.

Scene heading.

Where action takes a place 'EXT.' or 'INT.?' Then location and time (DAY or NIGHT, not late afternoon or so).

There is no need to number scenes.

*In my drafts – I always do. It helps me quickly find what I am looking for.*

These days, it is advised NOT to date scripts and NOT to write draft numbers.

*Well, I always do – I like to be 'up to date'.*

Also, these days NO need to use 'CONTINUED' at the top and bottom of each page, neither 'CUT TO:'.

The script MUST be a story only. NO budget details, NO cast list, NO bios about your characters.

NO bolds or italicization, if possible. And NO spelling or grammar mistakes. It MUST be written professionally.

Use SUPER (superimpose) if you want the audience to see the words on the screen.

SUPER: 'Two days later'.

To describe the sound, you can put it in CAPS, but don't tell the composer what soundtracks to use and where.

You have to use CAPS for: first CHARACTER appearance, SUPER, special effects.

You can use CAPS for: superimposed phrases, titles, sounds, words on signs, ...

MONTAGE it's a collection of very short scenes. At the end of it need to use END OF MONTAGE.

FLASHBACK (or QUICK FLASHBACK) – it's a technique to reveal a backstory. Use it only when it moves the story forward.

Parenthetic – it's the additional information in the dialog, how it must (should) be said. You can place some action, what a character (who is speaking) is doing at the moment. It also can indicate, who the character is talking to, if it's not clear.

REMI  
(smiling)  
You wish.

A key to make the story dramatic – is to create a strong central character. And a strong opposition character, who tries to stop the central character from achieving his goal. After central character loses a balance, he spends the rest of the film trying to get the balance back. The goal is whatever your central character strives for. Some writers present 2 or more central characters, but usually it is only the one.

O.S. – character is at the scene, but can not be seen, only can be heard.

V.O. – character is not at the scene at all - can be heard only.

If you want to see both characters, which are not at the same scene, talking on the phone - you can use INTERCUT – TELEPHONE CONVERSATION (no V.O. needed after).

Avoid common elements. Every story has its own structure, life and way. Let your story express it self.

Film genres. In film theory, genre refers to the method based on similarities in the narrative elements from which films are constructed.

A plot is the structure of action and emotion. It comprises the important events in a character's story.

Narrative description.

A paragraph should be up to five lines.

Make sure you use only what is absolutely necessary, but don't make it too short. Make it easily readable for the reader, NOT confusing.

Most important characters must be given names. Others can be named as descriptions, like 'SEXY BOY', 'FATTY', 'PRETTY LADY' and so on.

Don't describe your characters' appearance too much – it's up to film makers to choose how they will look like.

Dialogs should be as short as possible. Avoid long speeches, monologs and saying other character's name they are talking to. Characters should speak to each other, not to the audience.

Every character speaks with its own accent, style and dialect.

Don't talk about things you can show – just show it. If it's a low budget film – make it look simple (simpler).

Even the true stories should (must) be more 'dramatic'. If a story is 100% true – it can be very boring, daily and common.

You can create 'something from nothing', or you can improve some plots from other stories and deliver it into current days.

Use what helps to get into the creativity: pictures, music, memories, ...

Avoid very common things:

flashbacks, kidnapping, bombs, terrorist attacks, shooting, flat love stories, sex scenes.  
Not easy, but possible.

Make sure, everything you use – is moving story FORWARD.

Nothing is written in stone. Don't be afraid to use your imagination and fiction elements.

Ask your self:

How promising this story is?  
Is it commercial?  
Is this story for the audience or ... it's just for you?  
Is it original?  
Will the audience ask for more after they will see it?

After you finished your first (any other) draft – get some rest for a week or so. You need it. After that – it will (may) be easier to see what is wrong, should be improved.

Make sure you POLISH and REGISTER your screenplay BEFORE send it out to producers and/or Literary Agents.

*I register my scripts at [The Script Vault UK](#).*

It's not easy to find a Literary Agent to represent your screenplay(s).  
Don't send them your script at first contact. Send them short letter about your self and your project. If an agent will be interested – he/she will ask you to send out the screenplay.

I found a Literary Agent just after my screenplay '[R.E.M.I.](#)' (drama, based on a true story) won the **Award of Excellence 2013** at the Canada International Film Festival.

Professional Literary Agents do NOT charge for reading scripts. They will make money only if your screenplay(s) will be sold.

Literary Agent gets between 10% - 20%. If your Literary Agent helped you a lot (improved your script or so) – you can give 30% or so (it must be on the contract before you both sign it).

*Don't worry and don't be greedy – you still will get your 80% + (70% +).*

It can take a few years for a Literary Agent to sell your screenplay(s). It depends on what production companies are looking for and stories (scripts) you deliver to them.

It doesn't matter where you live. If you deliver a screenplay with a very attractive and fresh story, written in the right language – THEY will notice you.

*I use [CELTX](#) screenplay writing program. And you?*

*A lot of text and video information about screenplay writing can be easily found on line. Also, a few useful links and simple wallpapers can be found [HERE](#).*

Good Luck ;)