**[Screenwriting.info](http://www.screenwriting.info/)**

**Glossary**

**A Page**

A revised page that extends beyond the original page, going onto a second page. (i.e. Page 1, 1A, 2, 3, 3A)

**Abbreviations**

shortcuts used in scripts such V.O., O.C.

**Above-the-line**

In film, those costs that occur before filming, this includes salaries of the talend and creative team (director, producer, screenwriter), plus any rights required for adapted scripts. Sometimes, above-the-line can also refer to the people included in the above-the-line payment category.

**Act**

A large division of a full-length play, separated from the other act or acts by an intermission.

**Act/Scene Heading**

Centered, all CAPS heading at the start of an act or scene. Act numbers are written in Roman numerals, scene numbers in ordinals.

**Acting Edition**

A published play script, typically for use in productions in the amateur market or as reading copies. Often has a list of prop list or set design sketches.

**Action**

The moving pictures we see on screen. Also, the direction given by a director indicating that filming begins.

**Ad lib**

Dialogue in which the characters or actors make up what they say in real time on the movie set or on stage. From the Latin ad libitum, "in accordance with desire."

**Against**

A term describing the ultimate potential payday for a writer in a film deal. $400,000 against $800,000 means that the writer is paid $400,000 when the script is finished (through rewrite and polish); when and if the movie goes into production, the writer gets an additional $400,000.

**Agent Submission**

A method of play submission, in which a theater requires that a script be submitted by a recognized literary agent.

**Alan Smithee**

A fictional name taken by a writer or director who doesn't want their real name credited on a film.

**Angle**

A particular camera placement.

**Approved writer**

A writer whom a television network trusts to deliver a good script once hired.

**Arbitration**

Binding adjudication by members of a Writers Guild of America committee regarding proper onscreen writer credit of a movie; arbitration is available only to WGA members or potential WGA members.

**Artistic Director**

A theater company's chief artistic officer and usually the last stop before a play is selected for production.

**Associate Artistic Director**

An artistic officer of a theater company, frequently a director and often second to the Artistic Director, integrally involved with its artistic decisions.

**At Rise Description**

A stage direction at the beginning of an act or a scene that describes what is on stage literally "at rise" of the curtain, or more commonly in contemporary theater, as the lights come up.

**Attached**

Agreement by name actors and/or a director to be a part of the making of a movie.

**Audio/Visual Script**

A dual column screenplay with video description on the left and audio and dialogue on the right, used in advertising, corporate videos, documentaries and training films.

**b.g.**

Abbreviation for "background" (i.e. In the b.g., kids are fighting).

**Back Door Pilot**

A two-hour TV movie that is a setup for a TV series if ratings warrant further production.

**Back End**

Payment on a movie project when profits are realized.

**Back Story**

Experiences of a main character taking place prior to the main action, which contribute to character motivations and reactions.

**Bankable**

A person who can get a project financed solely by having their name is attached.

**Beat**

A parenthetically noted pause interrupting dialogue, denoted by (beat), for the purpose of indicating a significant shift in the direction of a scene, much in the way that a hinge connects a series of doors.

**Beat Sheet**

An abbreviated description of the main events in a screenplay or story.

**Bill**

The play or plays that together constitute what the audience is seeing at any one sitting. Short for "playbill."

**Binding**

What literally holds the script together. As a writer submitting your manuscript, you might use either brads with cardstock covers or one of a number of other pre-made folders (all available from The Writers Store).

**Black Box**

A flexible theater space named for its appearance.

**Blackout**

A common stage direction at the end of a scene or an act.

**Book**

The story and the non-musical portion (dialogue, stage directions) of a theatrical musical.

**Brads**

Brass fasteners used to bind a screenplay printed on three-hole paper, with Acco #5 solid brass brads generally accepted as having the highest quality.

**Bump**

A troublesome element in a script that negatively deflects the reader's attention away from the story.

**Button**

A TV writing term referring to a witty line that "tops off" a scene.

**Cable**

A cable television network such as HBO, or cable television in general.

**Cast**

The characters who are physically present in the play or film. These are the roles for which actors will be needed. When we talk about a role in a stageplay as being double-cast with another, it means that the same actor is expected to play both roles. This happens in film as well (e.g. Eddie Murphy), but only rarely.

**Cast Page**

A page that typically follows the Title Page of a play, listing the characters, with very brief descriptions of each.

**Center (Stage)**

The center of the performance space, used for placement of the actors and the set.

**CGI**

Computer Generated Image; a term denoting that computers will be used to generate the full imagery.

**Character**

Any personified entity appearing in a film or a play.

**Character arc**

The emotional progress of the characters during the story.

**Character name**

When any character speaks, his or her name appears on the line preceding the dialogue. In screenplays, the name is tabbed to a location that is roughly in the

center of the line. In playwriting, typically the name is centered, but with the advent of screenwriting software that automatically positions the character name correctly, it has become acceptable to use a similar format for character names in stageplays.

**Cheat a script**

Fudging the margins and spacing of a screenplay on a page (usually with a software program) in an attempt to fool the reader into thinking the script is shorter than it really is.

**Close Up**

A very close camera angle on a character or object.

**Commission**

A play for which a theater company gives a playwright money to write, typically with the understanding that the theater will have the right of first refusal to premiere it.

**Complication**

The second act of a three-act dramatic structure, in which "the plot thickens," peaking at its end.

**Conflict**

The heart of drama; someone wants something and people and things keep getting in the way of them achieving the goal. At times, the obstacles can be common to both the hero and villain, and the ultimate goal a laudable one for both parties.

**Continuing Dialogue**

Dialogue spoken by the same character that continues uninterrupted onto the next page, marked with a (cont'd) in a stage play.

**Continuous Action**

Included in the scene heading when moving from one scene to the next, as the action continues.

**Copyright**

Proof of ownership of an artistic property that comes with registering your script through the United States Register of Copyrights.

**Copyright Notice**

Placing © Your Name on the Title Page of a script.

**Courier 12 pitch**

The main font in use in the U.S. by both publishers and the Hollywood film industry.

**Coverage**

The notes prepared by script readers at literary agency, film production company, theater company or script competition. Coverage is typically divided into three sections: plot synopsis, evaluation / discussion of the quality of the writing, and a recommendation that either passes on the script or kicks it on to the next level. Typically, coverage is for internal use and almost never shared with the writer.

**Designer**

Theater professional whose job it is to envision any of the following elements in a play: costumes, sets, lights, sound or properties.

**Development**

The process of preparing a script for production.

**Development Hell**

The dreaded creative death malaise that occurs when the development process lasts too long.

**Dialogue**

The speeches between characters in a film or a play.

**Direct Solicitation**

When a theater contacts a playwright or his agent about submitting a script. Theaters that use this method typically do not want the playwright to initiate the contact.

**Direction, Stage Direction**

(See Stage Directions in Revised above.)

**Director**

In a stageplay, the individual responsible for staging (i.e. placing in the space or "blocking") the actors, sculpting and coordinating their performances, and making sure they fit with the design elements into a coherent vision of the play. In a musical, there will typically be a separate musical director responsible for the musical elements of the show. In a Dramatists Guild contract, the playwright has approval over the choice of director (and the cast and designers). In film, the director carries out the duties of a stage director and then some (e.g. choosing the shot list), with considerably more say-so over the final product.

**Downstage**

The part of the stage closest to the audience, so named because when stages were raked (slanted), an actor walking toward the audience was literally walking down. Called "Down" for short.

**Draft**

A version of a play. Each draft of rewrites/revisions should be numbered differently.

**Dramatists Guild of America**

The professional organization of playwrights, composers and lyricists, based in New York.

**Dual Dialog**

When two characters speak simultaneously

**Emphasized Dialogue**

Dialogue that the playwright wants stressed, usually identified with italics.

**Establishing Shot**

A cinematic shot that establishes a certain location or area.

**Evening-Length Play**

A play that constitutes a full evening of theater on its own (a.k.a. Full-Length Play).

**Event**

What precipitates a play. For example, Big Daddy's birthday is the event in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.

**Exposition**

The first act of a dramatic structure, in which the main conflict and characters are "exposed" or revealed. Also, any information about the characters, conflict or world of the play.

**EXT.**

Outdoors.

**Extension**

A technical note placed directly to the right of the Character name that denotes HOW the character's voice is heard. For example, O.S. is an extension that stands for Off-Screen.

**f.g.**

Abbreviation for "foreground" (i.e. In the f.g., kids are fighting).

**Feature Film**

A movie made primarily for distribution in theaters.

**Film Festival**

A festival of short and/or feature-length films shown over the course of between a few days to a few weeks. Festivals are places for films and filmmakers – particularly in the case of independent films – to gain exposure and critical buzz and, in many cases, distribution. Perhaps the two best-known festivals in the world are Sundance and Cannes.

**FLASHBACK**

A scene from the past that interrupts the action to explain motivation or reaction of a character to the immediate scene.

**Font**

The look of the printed text on the page. For screenplays, Courier 12 point is the standard (a fixed font which in practical terms means that an l or an m, although the m being wider, occupy the same width of space). For stageplays, while Courier 12 point is often used, Times Roman and other proportional spaced, clearly readable fonts are also acceptable. (Proportional spaced fonts make adjustments for skinnier letters; text usually takes less space.) – this has been edited.

**Formula**

More commonly used in the world of film than for describing the stage, it usually refers to a "sure-fire" method of structuring a script (i.e. it must include certain elements and arrive at a certain ending). For example, there have been a slew of movies where a group of misfits are thrown together and ultimately become the David that slays Goliath on the athletic field (e.g. *The Bad News Bears*).

**FREEZE FRAME**

The image on the screen stops, freezes and becomes a still shot.

**Full-Length Play**

Also known as an Evening Length Play, a play that constitutes a full evening of theater.

**Genre**

The category a story or script falls into - such as: thriller, romantic comedy, action, screwball comedy

**Green Light**

A project OKed for production.

**Header**

An element of a Production Script occupying the same line as the page number, which is on the right and .5" from the top. Printed on every script page, header information includes the date of a revision and the color of the page.

**Heat**

Positive gossip about a project on the Hollywood grapevine.

**High concept**

A brief statement of a movie's basic idea that is felt to have tremendous public appeal.

**Hip pocket**

A casual relationship with an established agent in lieu of a signed, formal agreement of representation.

**Hook**

A term borrowed from songwriting that describes that thing that catches the public's attention and keeps them interested in the flow of a story.

**In the Round**

A type of theater space in which the audience is, usually in a circular configuration, on all sides of the playing area.

**Indie**

A production company independent of major film studio financing.

**INT.**

Indoors.

**Intercut**

A script instruction denoting that the action moves back and forth between two or more scenes.

**Intermission**

A break between acts or scenes of the play to allow for set changes, and for the audience to go to the bathroom, stretch and buy concessions.

**Interrupt**

When one character cuts off another character's dialogue, sometimes marked with an ... but better marked with an em dash (--).

**Left**

On stage, the actors' left, assuming they are facing the audience. Short for Stage Left.

**Lights Fade**

A common stage direction to end a scene or an act.

**Line Reading**

When a director or playwright gives an actor a specific way to perform a line of dialogue.

**Literary Manager**

The artistic officer of a theater in charge of at least the first stages of reviewing scripts for possible production. She may have dramaturg responsibilities as well.

**Literary Office**

Usually headed by the literary manager and often staffed with interns and in-house or freelance readers. Typically the place to direct script submissions and inquiries.

**Locked Pages**

A software term for finalized screenplay pages that are handed out to the department heads and talent in preparation for production.

**Logline**

A "25 words or less" description of a screenplay.

**Lyrics**

The words that are sung by characters in a musical.

**M.O.S.**

Without sound, so described because a German-born director wanting a scene with no sound told the crew to shoot "mit out sound."

**Manuscript**

A script before it has been published.

**Manuscript Format**

The ideal submission format in the United States and in a number of other countries, with character names centered and CAPS before their dialogue, and indented stage directions.

**Master Scene Script**

A script formatted without scene numbering (the usual format for a spec screenplay).

**Match Cut**

A transition in which something in the scene that follows in some way directly matches a character or object in the previous scene.

**Miniseries**

A long-form movie of three hours or more shown on successive nights or weeks on U.S. television networks.

**Montage**

A cinematic device used to show a series of scenes, all related and building to some conclusion.

**Movie of the Week**

Also known as an "MOW," a movie made primarily for broadcast on a television or cable network.

**Multimedia**

Writing and filmmaking encompassing more than one medium at a time which, script-wise, usually refers to CD-ROM games or Internet-based programming.

**Multiple Casting**

When an actor plays more than one character.

**Musical**

A play in which songs and music are an integral part of the dramatic structure.

**Musical Numbers Page**

A page in a musical script, usually following the Cast Page, that lists the musical numbers, divided by act, and the characters that sing in them.

**Notes**

Ideas about a screenplay shared with a screenwriter by someone responsible for moving the script forward into production, which the screenwriter is generally expected to use to revise the screenplay. A similar paradigm exists on stage, with notes coming most often from the dramaturg or director. A key difference between stage and film is that the playwright still owns his script and has final say on revisions. Writer can hire consultants to receive feedback (notes) to help improve the script, prior to submitting it to an agency, production company or theater.

**Numbered Scenes**

Numbers that appear to the right and left of the scene heading to aid the Assistant Director in breaking down the scenes for scheduling and production.

**O.C.**

Abbreviation for Off Camera, denoting that the speaker is resident within the scene but not seen by the camera.

**O.S.**

Abbreviation for Off Screen, denoting that the speaker is not resident within the scene.

**Off**

Short for offstage. Typically written as (off) next to a character name when a character speaking dialogue is offstage while she speaks.

**One-Act Play**

Technically, a play that has only one act, but in more common usage, a play that is not an evening unto itself but instead usually runs no more than an hour. A common arrangement is to produce three half-hour long one-acts on the same bill.

**One-hour Episodic**

A screenplay for a television show whose episodes fill a one-hour time slot, week to week.

**Opening Credits**

Onscreen text describing the most important people involved in the making of a movie.

**Option**

The securing of the rights to a screenplay for a given length of time.

**Package**

The assembly of the basic elements necessary to secure financing for a film.

**PAN**

A camera direction indicating a stationary camera that pivots back and forth or up and down.

**Parenthetical**

Also known as a "wryly" because of the propensity of amateur screenwriters to try to accent a character's speech -- as in BOB (wryly) -- an inflection to a speech noted by a writer. Of course, in stageplays, all stage directions (at least in Manuscript Format) are in parentheses, but "directing off the page," as it's often called, is equally frowned upon.

**Pass**

A rejection of a property by a potential producer or an agent.

**Pitch**

To verbally describe a property to a potential buyer in the hope it will be bought.

**Play**

Sometimes known as a stageplay, it's a production which is meant to be performed on stage in front of a live audience.

**Playwright**

A person who writes stage plays.

**Playwriting**

The craft or act of writing scripts for the stage (i.e. the live theater).

**Points**

Percentage participation in the profits of a film.

**Polish**

In theory, to rewrite a few scenes in a script to improve them. In practice, a screenwriter is often expected to do a complete rewrite of a script for the price of a polish.

**POV**

Point of View; a camera angle placed so as to seem the camera is the eyes of a character.

**Producer**

The person or entity financially responsible for a stage or film production.

**Production Script**

A script in which no more major changes or rewrites is anticipated to occur, which is used day by day for filming on a movie set.

**Professional Recommendation**

A method of submission in which a writer may submit a full script if it's accompanied by a theater professional (typically a literary manager or artistic director, though sometimes a director is acceptable as well).

**Property**

Any intellectual property in any form (including a play or screenplay) that might form the basis of a movie. In theater, usually called a "prop," an item (e.g. a gun, spoon, hairbrush, etc.) that can held by one of the characters.

**Proscenium**

A type of stage in which the actors play opposite the audience, from which they are separated. Most high school auditoriums are prosceniums.

**Published Play Format**

The format typically found in an Acting Edition, meant to save space, in which the character names are on the left and stage directions occur on the same lines as dialogue.

**Query**

A method of submission in which a writer approaches a theater with a brief letter, accompanied by a synopsis and sample pages.

**Rake**

A stage that is slanted so that as an actor moves away from the audience, he gets higher. Few contemporary theaters have raked stages. It's more likely that the house (i.e. where the audience sits) will be raked.

**Reader (aka Script Reader)**

A person who reads screenplays for a production company or stageplays for a theater company and writes a report about them, often being paid per report.

**Reading**

A "performance" of a play in which the actors are script-in-hand. It could either take place around a table (called a "table reading") or with some blocking or staging (a "staged reading").

**Register of Copyrights**

The US government office that registers intellectual property (e.g. scripts), necessary prior to filing a claim for copyright infringement in court.

**Release**

A legal document given to unrepresented writers for signing by agents, producers or production companies, absolving said entities of legal liability.

**Resolution**

The third act of a dramatic structure, in which the conflict comes to some kind of conclusion: the protagonist either gets it or doesn't.

**Reversal**

A place in the plot where a character achieves the opposite of his aim, resulting in a change from good fortune to bad fortune.

**Revised Pages**

Changes are made to the script after the initial circulation of the Production Script, which are different in color and incorporated into the script without displacing or rearranging the original, unrevised pages.

**Right**

On stage, the actors' right, assuming they are facing the audience. Short for Stage Right.

**Romantic comedy**

Also known as a "romcom," a comedic movie in which the main story resolves around a romance.

**Scene**

Action taking place in one location and in a distinct time that (hopefully) moves the story to the next element of the story.

**Scene Heading**

A short description of the location and time of day of a scene, also known as a "slugline." For example: EXT. MOUNTAIN CABIN - DAY would denote that the action takes place outside a mountain cabin during daylight hours.

**Screening**

The showing of a film for test audiences and/or people involved in the making of the movie.

**Screenplay Contest**

A submission opportunity for screenwriters in which a group of readers (judges) select one or more winners from the entered scripts. Typically, contests require entry fees that may be as high as $40-$50, but can often result in prizes as high as $20,000 or more for the winner(s), as well as important exposure to agents and production companies. Some “fellowship” opportunities effectively function as contests (e.g. Nicholl), choosing a handful of fellows (i.e. winners) from the pool of entrants.

**Screenwriter**

The most important and most abused person in Hollywood. The screenwriter writes the script that provides the foundation for the film, though it may go through any number of changes, both in the rewriting process before production, during production, and in the editing process afterward. While in the world of theater, there is usually only one playwright on any given play (or one collaborative team), in film there may be many screenwriters throughout the life of a project.

**Screenwriting**

The art of writing scripts for a visual medium.

**Script**

The blueprint or roadmap that outlines a movie story through visual descriptions, actions of characters and their dialogue. The term "script" also applies to stageplays as well.

**Script cover**

What protects the script on its travels between the writer and its many potential readers. The Writers Store carries a number of acceptable covers.

**Script reader**

(See above as Reader.)

**Script Writing Software**

Computer software designed specifically to format and aid in the writing of screenplays and teleplays.

**Securely Bound Script**

Typically, a stageplay contest's request that a script be more firmly bound than brads will do. Either it is literally bound, or it is securely held in a folder.

**Set**

The physical elements that are constructed or arranged to create a sense of place.

**Setting**

The time and place of a play or screenplay.

**SFX**

Abbreviation for Sound Effects.

**Shooting Script**

A script that has been prepared to be put into production.

**Shot**

What the camera sees. For example, TRACKING SHOT would mean that the camera is following a character or character as he walks in a scene. WIDE SHOT would mean that we see every character that appears in the scene, all at once.

**Showrunner**

A writer/producer ultimately responsible for the production of a TV series, week to week.

**Simultaneous Dialogue**

When two characters speak at the same time, written in two columns side by side.

**Situation comedy**

Also known as a "sitcom," a normally 30-minute (in the United States) comedic television show revolving around funny situations the main characters repeatedly fall into.

**Slugline**

Another name for the SCENE HEADING

**SMASH CUT**

A quick or sudden cut from one scene to another.

**Soap Opera**

Daytime dramas so named because they were originally sponsored by the makers of laundry detergent in the early days of television.

**Spec Script**

A script written without being commissioned on the speculative hope that it will be sold.

**SPFX**

Abbreviation for Special Effects.

**Split Screen**

A screen with different scenes taking place in two or more sections; the scenes are usually interactive, as in the depiction of two sides of a phone conversation.

**Stage center**

More commonly known as Center Stage, it is the center of the performance space, used for placement of the actors and the set.

**Stage Directions**

In a stageplay, the instructions in the text for the actors (e.g. entrances, exit, significant actions or business) and stage crew (e.g. lights fade). Also, in a musical, the person who directed the non-musical elements of the show may be credited with "Stage Direction" to distinguish him from the Music Director, who will be credited with "Music Direction."

**Stage Left**

On stage, the actors' left, assuming they are facing the audience. "Left" for short.

**Stage Right**

On stage, the actors' right, assuming they are facing the audience. "Right" for short.

**Stock Shot**

A sequence of film previously shot and available for purchase and use from a film library.

**Submission**

Name for a script once it is submitted to producers or agents.

**Suggested Setting**

A setting on stage in which a few set pieces or lighting or other technical elements take the place of elaborate set construction.

**SUPER**

Abbreviation for "superimpose" meaning the laying one image on top of another, usually words over a filmed scene (i.e. Berlin, 1945).

**Synopsis**

A two to three page, double-spaced description of a screenplay.

**Tag**

A short scene at the end of a movie that usually provides some upbeat addition to the climax.

**Technical Demands**

The extent to which a play requires specific lighting, sound, sets, etc. Plays with minimal technical demands are easier and less expensive to produce.

**Ten-Minute Play**

A complete play, with a beginning, middle and end, designed to play in ten minutes.

**The Business**

Show business in general; more specifically, Hollywood moviemaking and television business.

**Thriller**

A fast-paced, high stakes crime story in which the protagonist is generally in danger at every turn, with the most danger coming in the final confrontation with the antagonist.

**Thrust**

A stage configuration in which the playing area protrudes into the audience; the actors have audience on three sides of them.

**Ticking Clock**

A dramatic device in which some event looming in the near future requires that the conflict reach a speedy resolution (hence, the ticking clock).

**TITLE**

Text that appears onscreen denoting a key element of the movie, a change of location or date, or person involved in the making of the movie.

**Title Page**

A page of the script that contains the title and the author's contact information.

**Touring Play**

A play with minimal technical demands that is meant to be easily packed up and moved from one performance space to another.

**Transition**

A script notation denoting an editing transition within the telling of a story. For example, DISSOLVE TO: means the action seems to blur and refocus into another scene, and is generally used to denote a passage of time.

**Treatment**

A scene by scene description of a screenplay, minus all or most of the dialogue.

**Tweak**

A minor change made in a scene or portion of a screenplay or a stageplay.

**Unsolicited Script**

A method of script submission in which the writer sends the script, without prior contact, to the theater or production company. Some theaters allow this, most don't-and very few film production companies, for liability reasons, can read unsolicited materials.

**Upstage**

The part of the stage farthest from the audience, so named because when stages were raked (slanted), an actor walking away from the audience was literally walking up. Called "Up" for short.

**V.O.**

Abbreviation for Voice Over, denoting that the speaker is narrating the action onscreen.

**WGA Signatory**

An agent, producer or production company that has signed an agreement to abide by established agreements with the Writers Guild of America.

**Workshop**

A developmental "production" of a play, with a significant amount of rehearsal, but with less fully realized production values (e.g. set) than a full production.