



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Pd: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **BASIC SCREENPLAY FORMATTING**

There are some general rules and people have little preferences and things like that. But the key here is to understand the most important thing- and that is you want your screenplay to be as economical and direct as possible.

Here are the 8 kinds of items, or "lines", you can find in a screenplay.

- Header
- Action Line
- Character ID
- Dialogue
- Character Parenthetical
- Dialogue Parenthetical
- Transition
- Over Black (& Titles)

### **1. HEADERS (OR SLUG LINES)**

These are lines up at the top of the scene in all caps. The first part tells you whether it is interior or exterior, which is important to know if you're shooting indoors or outdoors. Then it's the location, followed by a dash, followed by the time of day. It looks like this:

INT. JOEY'S KITCHEN - DAY

A new slug line is needed any time the location, time of day, or scene changes.

○ When a scene is transitioning from an interior to exterior without cutting, write "\_\_\_\_\_."

### **2. ACTION LINES**

○ The action line is a line of description underneath the header that describes in more detail what is happening in the scene. Important thing to consider: Action lines should only be \_\_\_\_\_ information – things you can actually see on screen. Also, the first time we see a character in a script, their name should be in all \_\_\_\_\_.

INT. JOEY'S KITCHEN - DAY

JOEY walks into the kitchen, scratches his butt, and gets milk out of the fridge.

### **3. CHARACTER ID**

A character designation (or ID) goes right above a character's dialogue. This lets you know who is talking:

INT. JOEY'S KITCHEN - DAY

JOEY walks into the kitchen, scratches his butt, and gets milk out of the fridge.

JOEY  
Why do you have me keep  
scratching my butt?



#### 4. DIALOGUE

A character's words are put below the character's name, like in the previous example. And then when a second person talks, it looks like this:

INT. JOEY'S KITCHEN - DAY

DANNY walks in to the kitchen.

JOEY

Oh hey Danny, what are you doing in this scene?

DANNY

I dunno. Mike just told me to show up to go over what dialogue looks like with two people in a scene.

#### 5. CHARACTER PARENTHETICAL

These are the parentheses next to the character's name that tell the reader if the character is talking besides just to another person on screen like normal. Here are a few examples: \_\_\_\_\_, "V.O.", \_\_\_\_\_ dialogue, "O.S.", as well as some special designations for things like talking into a phone, "INTO PHONE":

INT. JOEY'S KITCHEN - DAY

Danny leaves to set up the game as Joey's phone rings. He picks up.

JOEY (INTO PHONE)

Hello? ... Okay, you can play too, Cherish.

DANNY (O.S.)

Four races. Random. All items. On hard-com!

JOEY

NO! No hard com! It's not a pure test of skill!

Joey puts his phone back to his ear.

JOEY (INTO PHONE)

Yes. I know. That's what I said, Cherish.

Joey looks up, confused, as a voice-over gently fades in.

BRIAN FIRENZI (V.O.)

And so the great debate of what setting of  
com-difficulty raged for nearly a  
fortnight!

## 6. DIALOGUE PARENTHETICALS

Dialogue Parentheticals are placed right below the character line, and right above the dialogue, indented just a little. The purpose of this parenthetical is to illustrate \_\_\_\_\_ the person is talking or what their tone or emotion is. It can also indicate when another language is being used.

INT. JOEY'S HOUSE - DAY

Joey rants at Danny as he tries to calm Joey down.

JOEY  
(angrily)  
It's not fair, Danny!!

DANNY  
(calmly)  
I know. That's the point.  
Life is unfair. It's difficult...  
it's hard.

JOEY  
(overwhelmed)  
It's... just not fair.

You really don't want to use them that much. Honestly, the reason we use them is to inform the reader when an actor should be behaving or delivering a line differently than the dialogue would have us expect on its own.

## 7. TRANSITIONS

Transitions come at the end of a scene, on the \_\_\_\_\_ hand side of the page. Their job is to explain the kind of transition being made between scenes.

You really only want to transitions when you are emphasizing a cut and its importance to the story-- specifically how it links the action. Think of a "CUT TO:" as a "Therefore..."

INT. JOEY'S KITCHEN - DAY

Joey is getting ready to juggle a bunch of huge knives.

DANNY  
Dude, are you sure you should be  
doing that?

JOEY  
Yeah, Mike said he could make me do  
whatever I want!

CUT TO:

INT. DANNY'S CAR - DAY

Joey has stabbed himself in the neck. Danny starts the car to head to the hospital.

JOEY  
OH GOD, THIS IS ALL MIKE'S  
FAULT!!!

You can "SMASH CUT TO:" any time you want a cut to land really, really hard to rock the audience and have them notice it. And there's "FADE TO BLACK", which you can use to end your film, or any time you want to emphasize a slow transition over time. "INTERCUT WITH:" is for when two characters are in two different locations and instead of re-writing the sluglines every time you want to cut back and forth, you can instead leave it up to the editor to choose.

#### **8. OVER BLACK; (AND TITLES)**

Write "OVER BLACK;" in the header when the screen is black and you're doing a title card or just audio or whatever. It looks like this:

INT. RJFS OFFICE - DAY

Lauren watches over Joey's shoulder as he edits.

LAUREN  
How much longer is the edit going  
to take?

CUT TO:

OVER BLACK;

TITLE CARD: "38 HOURS LATER"

The sound of yelling can be heard..

#### **FREE SOFTWARE:**

Celtx - [www.celtx.com](http://www.celtx.com)

Writer Duet - [www.scripped.com](http://www.scripped.com)

Trelby - <http://www.trelby.org>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9CjIKQclsWo>