
Screenplay 101

— Avoiding Formatting —
Faux Pas and learning the Industry
Standard

Planning your Script

Treatments, and **Beat Sheets** are helpful tools to outline your story before you start writing your screenplay.



Outlines vs Beat Sheet vs Treatment

- **Outlines** are for you, the writer, to plan your story and can be in any format that speaks to you (Bullets, Notecards, Mind Maps...)
 - Outlines for scenes in your Beat Sheet are fleshed out with the conflict, resolution, tension and other elements you would exclude in the Beat Sheet
- **Beat Sheets** are the skeleton of your screenplay, and will have everything that happens, in the order it will appear in your script.
- **Treatments** Sometimes written before your script to help with planning, and other times written after to share with others to get a quick idea of what your film is about.

Treatment: 4 Elements

1. Title
2. Logline
3. Key Characters
 - a. 1-3 lines about both appearance and personality
4. Plot Summary
 - a. Written in prose, but still 3rd person present tense.

For a short film, 1-3 pages, for a feature 2-6 pages.

Logline

A one sentence description of your story that aims to convey genre, story, character, and grabs audience's attention.

Usually includes:

- Main Character
- Their Goals/Journey
- Hints to how their Goals/Journey will transform them
- Central Conflict

Logline Examples

Two young lovers associated with rival gangs in the slums of New York try to escape the bigotry and violence that surround them to find a better life.

A weatherman finds himself living the same day over and over again.

An 8-year-old boy, who is accidentally left behind while his family flies to France for Christmas, has to defend his home against idiotic burglars.

Beat Sheet

- What is a beat? Depending on who you ask...
 - Emotional Change in a Scene
 - Important Plot Point

Blake Snyder's Beat Sheet

Author of *Save the Cat* books
on screenwriting and story
structure.

Try to stay between 40-50
beats for a feature.

Opening Image
Theme Stated/Set-Up
Catalyst
Debate
Break int Act II
B-Story
Fun and Games
Midpoint
Bad Guys Close In
All is Lost
Dark Night of the Soul
Break into Act III
Finale
Final Image

Audience's first impression, set the tone, mood, and genre of the movie.

Opening Image

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Finale

Final Image

Set-up the main Character's world.

Theme Stated during the Set Up, what is your story about? Not on-the-nose, and not usually understood or even noticed by the main Character

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Final Image

Also called the Inciting Incident, it is the moment or thing that sets the rest of the story in action and changes the Main Character's world for ever.

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Final Image

The main Character debate with whether or not they can face the challenge or journey brought up by the Catalyst.

Opening Image

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Catalyst

Debate

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Fun and Games

Midpoint

Bad Guys Close In

All is Lost

Dark Night of the Soul

Break into Act III

Finale

Final Image

The main Character makes the choice and the journey starts. We enter the new, upside down world.

(If the 'thesis' is presented in the Set-Up, this is the 'antithesis')

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The 'Love Interest' is introduced if it hasn't already and the Theme is discussed between the main Character and the Love Interest.

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AKA the “Promise of Premise”
the most entertaining part of
the story, the parts on the
posters and trailers, moments
of the Character exploring the
new world.

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Either 'great' or 'awful'

The character gets everything they think they want, or they don't get it and their world seems to collapse.

Opening Image

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Final Image

Both physical and emotional
foes start to defeat the
Character.

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The opposite of the Midpoint.
The main Character either
loses all they had gained, or
everything they gained has no
meaning. The initial goal
seems hopeless and usually
something or someone dies.

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The main Character reacts to the defeat, mourns the loss of the something/someone who died.

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Midpoint

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Final Image

The A-Story and B-Story intertwine and the main Character figures out a way to beat the bad guy and get the romantic interest.

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The final battle to their goal,
and the main Character finally
understands the Theme
because of Story-A and B. Tie
up loose ends and solve
puzzles.

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Opposite of the Opening Image. Proof that change has occurred within the main Character.

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“Industry Standard”

Industry Standard or "standard in the industry" means the usual and customary practices in the delivery of products or services within a particular business sector.



Formating

Font: Courier, size 12

Margins: 1.5 Inch Left, 1 Inch Right (between .5 and 1.25, 1 inch top and bottom

Line Spacing: 1.0

Character Margins: 3.7 inch from left

Parentheticals Margins: 3.1 inch from left

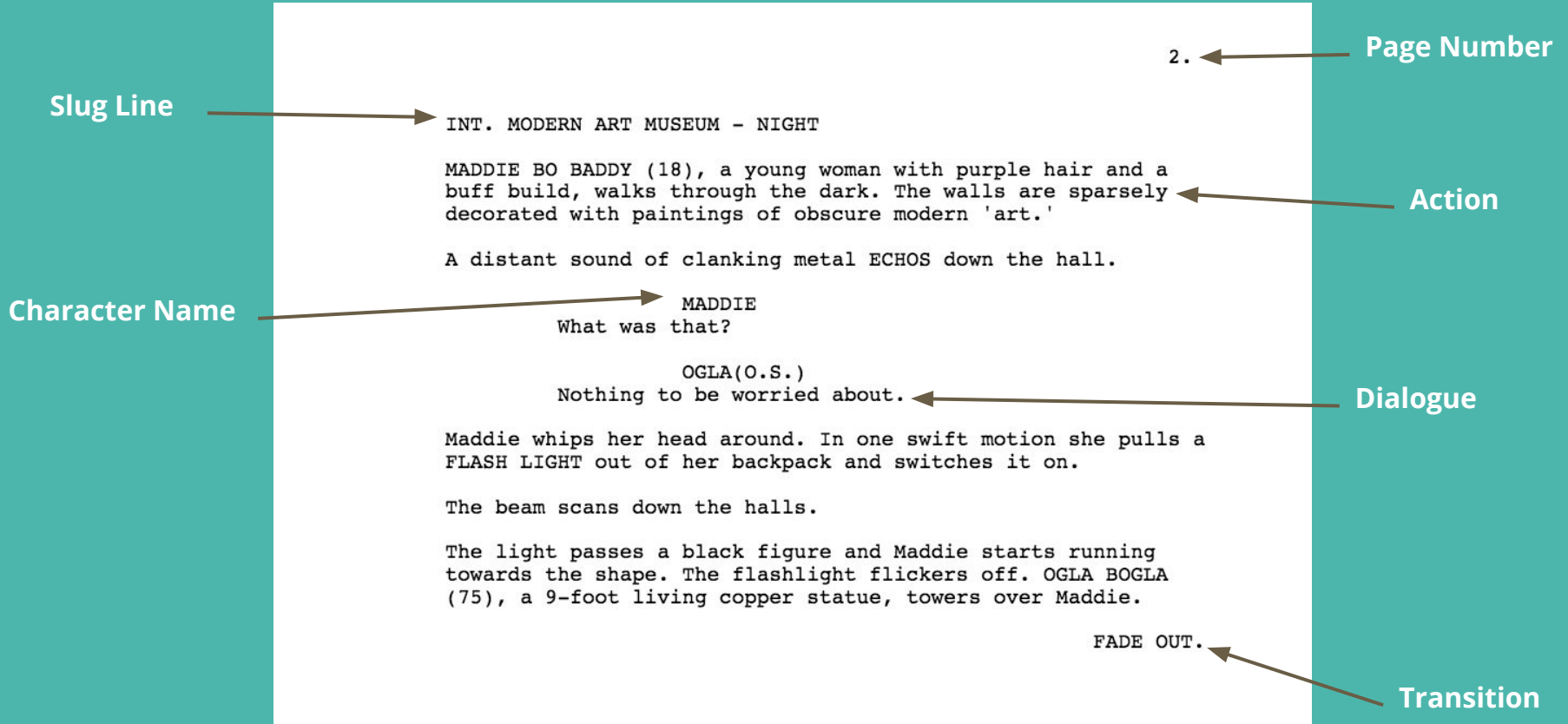
Dialogue Margins: 2.5 inches from left

Page Numbers: Top Right, flush to right margin, half inch from top. First page is not numbered, second page is numbered 2.

Formating Tools

- **Final Draft** - “Industry Standard” aka 250\$
- **Celtx** - first three scripts are free, but just make more emails
- **Writerduet** - also free, browser based
- **Studio Binder** - for writing script as well as almost all other aspects of making a film (Call Sheet, Shot List, Storyboard, Schedules...)

Anatomy of a Screenplay



Slug Line/Scene Heading

2.

INT. MODERN ART MUSEUM - NIGHT

MADDIE BO BADDY (18), a young woman with purple hair and a buff build, walks through the dark. The walls are sparsely decorated with paintings of obscure modern 'art.'

A distant sound of clanking metal ECHOS down the hall.

MADDIE

What was that?

OGLA(O.S.)

Nothing to be worried about.

Maddie whips her head around. In one swift motion she pulls a FLASH LIGHT out of her backpack and switches it on.

The beam scans down the halls.

The light passes a black figure and Maddie starts running towards the shape. The flashlight flickers off. OGLA BOGLA (75), a 9-foot living copper statue, towers over Maddie.

FADE OUT.

Slug Lines/Scene Heading Format

INT. or EXT. *space* LOCATION NAME *space "-" space* DAY or Night

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

EXT. SHOPPING MALL PARKING LOT - DAY

INT. SHOPPING MALL - CONTINUOUS

INT. BEDROOM - EVENING

EXT. OUTER SPACE - 5:04 AM

When to Use a Slug Line

Add a new Slug Line each time your script changes to a new scene.

A new scene starts when ever:

- There is a change in location

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Poppy brushes her teeth and leaves the bathroom.

INT. HALLWAYS - CONTINUOUS

Poppy enters the hallway and slips on a sock.

- There is significant change in time

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Poppy lays down and closes her eyes.

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

Poppy wakes up.

Dialogue

2.

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Dialogue

LINDA (O.S.)
Does anyone want a piece of pizza?

Linda is Off Screen (O.S) when she says her line

LINDA (V.O)
Does anyone want a piece of pizza?

Linda's dialogue is Voice Over (V.O.)

LINDA
Wow there is so much pizza!

Linda dances around with the box of pizza in her hands and hums a happy tune.

Linda's dialogue is continuous, but a line of action splits it in the script. (CONT'D) is short for continued.

LINDA (CONT'D)
Does anyone want a piece of pizza?

LINDA
(furious)
Who ate the last piece of pizza?

The (furious) is a parenthetical which describes how a character is saying something.

Writing Dialogue Do's and Don'ts

- **Do** have fun with characters' accents, grammar skills, and slang
- **Do** read the dialogue outloud to yourself and imagine it being said on screen
- **Do** try to break tropes that are common in the film industry
 - (dumb blonde, nerdy asian, angry black woman, manic pixie dream girl, mean mom, flamboyant gay... list goes on and on)
 -
- **Don't** explain the whole plot or character background in a couple lengthy lines of dialogue (avoid exposition)
- **Don't** have pages of Dialogue with no actions - this is not a play

Action

2.

INT. MODERN ART MUSEUM - NIGHT

MADDIE BO BADDY (18), a young woman with purple hair and a buff build, walks through the dark. The walls are sparsely decorated with paintings of obscure modern 'art.'

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FADE OUT.

Action Formatting

The **first time** a character appears in your script, they should be in ALL CAPS it is also common to put their age in parenthesis.

```
LINDA AZIZ (42) walks through the door.
```

Any **sound effects** or special effects should be in ALL CAPS.

```
Linda puts down her bag as the phone RINGS in the next room.
```

The first time an **important item** is mentioned should be in ALL CAPS.

```
As Linda leaves, a GOLD CHAIN falls out of her bag.
```

Dialogue is not written in the action, but other things such as written notes or signs are.

```
On the table are keys and a single opened letter that reads:
```

```
DEAR LINDA, I'VE LEFT PIZZA IN THE FRIDGE. LOVE PATTY.
```

Writing for Film vs Theater: Show Not Tell

- In a theater script, Dialogue is the dominant way of conveying story because of the theater's limitations of space in time.
- In film, we can take advantage of the medium by conveying our story through Actions.
- Taking this into consideration, avoid writing a full page of just dialogue, and see if you can replace dialogue with action

Writing for Theater

[Stage set: *The backdrop is painted to show the inside of a living room. A couch and a tv are on the stage.*]

NARRATOR:

Here we have Linda Aziz, a 40 year old woman with a back problem and an insatiable desire for salt and vinegar almonds. She's watching her favorite tv show: "Extreme Patio Ponds."

LINDA: Oh me oh my, how I love this show and these almonds. I wish my daughter would get back from school, she's almost an hour late.

Writing for Film

INT. LIVING ROOM - 4:15 PM

Linda enters the living room carrying a bowl from which she stops every few steps to eat a handful of almonds from. She sits at a worn-down spot on the couch and switches on the tv without changing the channel.

TV HOST (O.S.)

Today on extreme Patio Ponds we visit back with Miss Anne Newton and her fabulous koi collection...

Linda eats another almond, checks her watch, and shakes her head.

Action to Dialogue Ratio

Action/Description
Dialogue

Film

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Linda eats another almond, checks her watch, and shakes her head.

Theater

[Stage set: The backdrop is painted to show the inside of a living room. A couch and a tv are on the stage.]

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Writing For Film vs Prose

- A screenplay needs to be much more economical with words than a book or poetry
- The screenplay's job is to put into words what the audience will see on film, which means:
 - No descriptions of what the character's are thinking
 - No backstory or other information written in the action
- Screenplays are in present tense with active verbs
 - **Kicks** vs. Kicking

Introducing Characters and Locations

- When introducing a new Character or Location you may choose to include a short and telling description.

INT. DEPT. OF HEALTH, OFFICE - MORNING

CLOSE ON ARTHUR (30's), tears in his eyes from laughing so hard. He's trying to get it under control. His greasy, black hair hanging down over his forehead. He's wearing an old, faded green cardigan sweater, a threadbare gray scarf, thin from years of use, hangs loosely around his neck.

He's sitting across from an overworked SOCIAL WORKER (50's), African American. Her office is cramped and run-down in a cramped and run-down building. Stacks of folders piled high in front of her.

Joker (2019)

EXT. MEADOW - DAY, APRIL 6TH 1917

A rolling landscape. The rustling of leaves, and birdsong.

Thunder rumbles in the distance. There is no rain.

A figure lies against a tree, eyes closed - this is SCHOFIELD, early-20s. Soft features.

A man is sleeping next to him on the grass - BLAKE, 19, youthful, strapping.

SERGEANT SANDERS (O.S.)

Blake.

Blake doesn't stir.

SERGEANT SANDERS (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Blake!

1917 (2019)

What Not To Put in a Screenplay:

“You got to know the rules to break the rules”

What Not to Put in a Screenplay

Don't put descriptions of places, objects, or characters **that can not be seen by the audience**. Imagine what this line of action would look like in a movie:

```
LINDA AZIZ (43), a mother of four and professional knitter  
with two doctorates in bird behavior.
```

Likewise, **don't write the thoughts**, fears, dreams or anything else that goes on in a character's head. Again, imagine what this line of action would look like in a movie:

```
Poppy remembers the last time she was in this park she had  
been 4 years old.
```

What Not to Put in a Screenplay

Keep descriptions short and sweet, screenplays should convey everything in as economically as possible:

X

The dew drops sit on the newly blossomed roses of the park, children play against the spring breeze and birds chirp their familiar song. Poppy and Linda sit at a wooden bench covered in a emerald-green moss.

✓

Poppy and Linda sit together in a lush green part of the park.

What Not to Put in a Screenplay

Don't add camera or editing directions or specific details of how you want the movie to be made. This is the Director, Editor, and Cinematographer's job, and they will likely ignore your notes.

X

WIDE ANGLE: On a large park full of 4 TREES, 3 BENCHES, and a path 5 JOGGERS.

CUT TO: A close up of Poppy eating crackers.

PAN TO: Linda staring at her.

Furthermore, don't try to direct the actors, and **avoid using parentheticals.**

X

POPPY
(pointing at Linda)
Wow, Linda, you smell like pizza.

LINDA
(starting to cry)
It's not my fault.

POPPY
(laughing)
I was just kidding, don't be so sensitive.

What Not To Put in a Screenplay:

When to Break the Rules

- Once you know the rules, and your audience
 - If you are writing just for yourself, by all means break all the rules!
- If you are going to Direct the film you are making
 - Writer-Director scripts are more likely to have some camera direction
 - If you don't need to 'sell' your script you don't have to be nit-picky
 - But avoid going completely off the track, your crew will be used to reading a certain type of script
- When you are famous

Different types of Scripts: TV Shows

TV Shows follow the same formatting rules as film screenplays, but have additional elements unique to TV such as a TEASER or COLD OPEN at the start of an episode, and a three act structure that is clearly labeled. ACT ONE and again END OF ACT ONE

THE OFFICE "E-mail Surveillance" [R2557] 1.
1st Revised Green Shooting Draft 10/18/05

COLD OPEN

FADE IN:

1 INT. MICHAEL'S OFFICE - DAY 1 1

MICHAEL is sipping coffee, staring out the window. A concerned look comes over him. The camera looks out the window and finds...

2 EXT. PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS - D1 2

A YOUNG MUSLIM MAN with a backpack is walking into the building.

3 INT. MICHAEL'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS - D1 3

Michael dials his phone in a panic.

MICHAEL
Pick up, pick up, dammit.

TEASER

INT. BAR - NIGHT

A PASTY BUREAUCRAT, late 40's, may be hitting the jackpot with an attractive but skeezy blond standing at the bar.

BLOND
Seriously? The President?

PASTY BUREAUCRAT
At this level, there aren't that many people he can trust.

BLOND
How do I know you're not making all this up?

INT. FRASIER'S LIVING ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT - NIGHT/4
(Frasier, Martin, Eddie, Daphne)

WE PAN ACROSS THE APARTMENT TO SEE FRASIER AND HIS NEW "FAMILY" WATCHING TV. MARTIN IS SITTING IN HIS BARCALOUNGER. EDDIE, FRASIER AND DAPHNE ARE SITTING ON THE COUCH.

FRASIER (V.O.)

You're mourning what you thought your life was going to be. Let it go. Things don't always happen how you plan. It's not necessarily bad. It doesn't mean things won't work out anyway.

EDDIE PUTS ONE PAW ON FRASIER'S LEG.

FRASIER (CONT'D) (V.O.)

Have you ever heard of Lupe Velez?

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

Different types of Scripts: Commercials and Music Videos

VIDEO	AUDIO
<p><i>WIDE:</i> Girl is standing in her kitchen making dinner.</p> <p><i>MEDIUM CLOSE UP:</i> Girl reaches for her phone and opens text.</p> <p><i>CLOSE UP:</i> Phone shows new text "Hey what's up?"</p> <p><i>CLOSE UP:</i> Girl is reading the text, and begins to respond.</p> <p><i>CLOSE UP:</i> shot of phone screen as she types "Just making dinner. You?"</p> <p><i>MEDIUM CLOSE UP:</i> Guy is driving down the highway.</p> <p><i>MEDIUM CLOSE UP:</i> Guy reads the text, and begins to respond.</p> <p><i>MEDIUM CLOSE UP:</i> Girl is leaning up against the kitchen counter, and receives his text.</p> <p><i>CLOSE UP:</i> Phone reads "On my way home. This road construction is terrible!"</p> <p><i>MEDIUM CLOSE UP:</i> Girl begins to respond again.</p> <p><i>MEDIUM CLOSE UP:</i> Guy receives text message, and he looks down to read it.</p>	<p><i>SFX:</i> TV on quietly in the background. Water is running in the sink, and the microwave beeps. Cell phone alert goes off for a new text message.</p> <p><i>SFX:</i> Traffic sounds can be heard from outside the car. The radio is playing quietly in the background. A new text message alert goes off on his phone.</p> <p><i>SFX:</i> Horn honks. Tires squeal. There's a sound of a crash.</p>

These don't follow the formatting of a film or tv script, but instead have two columns:

One for **Video**, or the visual components, and one for **Audio**

They also include camera direction

SFX/FX: Special Effects

Music Videos **color code** their different Audio components:

LYRICS / **NARRATION** / **MUSIC** / **FX**

Music Video Script

	VIDEO	AUDIO
		LYRICS / NARRATION / MUSIC / FX
3.	<p>The songs pace picks up a lot at this point, so this is where the lighting of the video goes more high key. The shots will get quicker. There will be low angle shot looking up at a character with them spinning (this will be slowed down). Behind them will be blue skies. Then the same shot but with bad weather, preferably heavy rain. Quicker shots will then be added of hand-held cameras making the shot look like the girls are spinning holding hands.</p>	<p><i>"So stay there, 'Cause I'll be coming over, While our blood's still young It's so young, it runs, We won't stop 'til it's over Won't stop to surrender"</i></p> <p>From 1:22 - 1:55 No FX No Narration</p>
4.	<p>The beginning of this scene will start with a view out of the window of a train. It will be high key and will include a pan shot round to the girls on the train. The next shot will be of the girls in college, we will see a few seconds of a girl writing on a piece of card, it will then cut to the other girls holding the sign that will say "weekend" and the camera will zoom in from a medium, to a close up on the sign.</p>	<p><i>"Songs of desperation, I played them for you"</i></p> <p>From 2:00- 2:24 No FX No Narration</p>
5.	<p>A high angle long shot will be used to see the characters and a few extras dancing at a house party. This part of the video will be inspired by the film "project X" but obviously not to that extent. I just mean with the hand held camera and the music over the video footage.</p>	<p><i>"A moment of love, A dream, A laugh, A kiss A cry, Our rights, Our wrongs" (x2)</i></p> <p>From 2:24- 2:44 No FX No Narration</p>

Screenplay Rule of Thumb

- One page of script = one minute of film

(Of course this is a very loose rule, for example if you have three pages of script describing a important fight sequence that is actually very fast, or one page of monologue that is performed slow for *drama* it's going to vary)

Links

Celtx: <https://www.celtx.com/>

Writer Duet: <https://writerduet.com/>

Studio Binder: <https://www.studiobinder.com/scriptwriting-software/>

Awesome Film (For Reading Scripts) <http://www.awesomefilm.com/>

More Scripts to Read! <https://www.scriptreaderpro.com/best-screenplays-to-read/>

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