



ANSWERS

HOW ARE FILM SCRIPTS FORMATTED? AND WHY?

Did You Know A Film Script Is Not Considered 'Literature'?
It's Considered 'Performing Arts'. What Does That Mean?

INT. CATERING BUSSING STATION - DAY

Billie is piling dirty dishes on a huge bussing tray on a stand. She is dressed in a white service jacket, white shirt, black tie and pants.

CAPTAIN (O.S.)

Hurry, entrée is almost up. You need to be in line in five!

Billie struggles to lift the tray. She balances it on one shoulder, and tilted to one side, she hustles the huge tray away.

SET

Keep it simple?
Tray stand next to wall

EXTRAS?

Does the budget allow showing other waiters or will it be shot tight just on Billie?

WARDROBE

White waiter jacket
Plain white shirt
Black pants, tie, shoes, socks

PROPS

Tray stand, large bussing tray
Dirty dishes, leftover food

PRODUCTION DESIGN

Lighting - Bright or shadowy?
Sound - Can guests be heard?
Is Billie's uniform clean or soiled?

You Can Be An Avid Reader, Part Of Book Clubs, And Still Struggle To Get Through A Film Script! A film script is not aimed at you, the audience. It's aimed at the people who can finance a film and the artists and craftspeople who can make a film – turning words on a page into performing art for an audience. Don't approach reading a script like you would read a book. **Instead Approach A Script Like It's A Cake Mix!**

A CAKE MIX IS NOT A CAKE!

Think about a cake mix. A cake mix is not the cake. A cake mix doesn't taste or look like a cake. Someone has to open the box, shake out the mix, add the listed ingredients needed (and you can even change some of those), and then mix, pour, and bake before you have a cake.



A Script Looks Nothing Like The Film It Will Become

The script provides the dialogue the characters will say, but has no sound. It describes objects and images to create a world around the characters, but has no dimensions, textures or colors. To fill out the story outlined in the script for performance new kinds of StoryTellers need to join in --- Actors / Director / Cinematographer / Lightning Wiz / Wardrobe and Props Masters / Set Designer --- and someone (Producer) who holds it -- the people, resources, locations, and schedules – all together. When you read a script it might feel clunky, slow, and missing something --- until you too become a StoryTeller and have fun proposing how you would turn the words into a visual performance!

HOW ARE FILM SCRIPTS FORMATTED ? AND WHY ? (cont.)

SCRIPT SAMPLE

Below is an excerpt from the feature script 'BILLIE'S SONG, An Urban Fairy Tale'. The different script components that are tagged are explained on the next page.

FYI: BILLIE'S SONG is set in the year 1995. Billie, the main character has been introduced earlier in the script. She is a Black woman in her 30s with a short natural haircut and an edge to her unique, dramatic costume-like-style. In the setup before this scene Billie has been revealed as the only Black actress in a line of white actresses waiting to audition.

INT. REHEARSAL HALL - DAY

SCENE HEADING

A small, raised platform lit with a harsh stripper's spotlight dominates a shadowy, film-noirish* room. The white DIRECTOR's silhouette looms behind a table set back from the stage.

CHARACTER INTRO

ACTION

Billie steps up on the platform into the spotlight. She shields her eyes from the harsh light, trying to see the Director.

DIRECTOR
(harsh bark)

I take it you are not familiar with
this play!

BILLIE
I love this play.

DIALOGUE

DIRECTOR
Honey, I am not the new Joe Papp.**
This is legit theater, not an urban
fairy tale.

BILLIE
I'm here to read!

DIRECTOR
Well, read!

From the shadows the Assistant's hand passes Billie's
headshot to the Director, who tosses it aside.

DIRECTOR
(hissing)
She doesn't even have hair!

PARENTHETICAL

(cont.)

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HOW ARE FILM SCRIPTS FORMATTED? AND WHY? (cont.)



A SCRIPT IS A BLUEPRINT

With Info That Helps A Producer Figure Out The Budget And Resources Needed To Make The Film

- All film scripts are written with Courier 12 pt. font and the same exact margins. When properly formatted 1 script page = (approx.) 1 minute of film time.
- Scripts are loosely bound with 3 brass fasteners because as the production team figures out how to tell the story in a world they will create, there will be many changes and new pages with the changes will be added to the script.
- Everything is always written in the present tense – even flashbacks. You can't include a character's interior thoughts because they can't be seen or heard !

A SCRIPT IS MADE UP OF SCENES. WHAT DEFINES A SCENE ?
A SCENE HAPPENS IN ONE PLACE IN CONTINUOUS TIME

TAGGED SCRIPT COMPONENTS (from pg. 12)

SCENE HEADING: The start of a scene is designated by a Scene Heading (also called Slug Line), that is in all caps. It tells the reader the location and the time of day. INT. for Interior (scene happening indoors) or EXT. for Exterior (scene happening outdoors).
EXAMPLE:

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

If the characters go in continuous time from living room to hallway it's a new scene:

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Why ? For shooting purposes it is considered a new location because it might need a new camera and lighting setup. Also sometimes when you watch characters move from a room into a hallway, even though it seems the locations are adjoining, it's possible that the hallway is actually in a totally different location (or even country !), and the scenes were shot at different times then edited together to look continuous !

ACTION (also called NARRATIVE) is text that tells the reader what to see in their mind's eye as if it were up on the screen – the setting, characters, wardrobe, props, and movement.

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TAGGED SCRIPT COMPONENTS (cont.)

DIALOGUE: The spoken words the characters say. It is indented with shorter margins than the ACTION text so that it stands out for the actor. The character's name is written in all caps, and below that the dialogue.



I TAKE IT
YOU
ARE
NOT -- !

PARENTHETICAL: It appears within the dialogue on its own line. It is a direction for how a particular line of dialogue is to be delivered emotionally, or if the actor is to do an action while speaking the dialogue.

DO THIS !
(while talking)

CHARACTER INTRO: To call attention to when a character's name is first introduced in the Action it is put in all capitals – 'DIRECTOR'. After that if the character is mentioned again only the first letter is capitalized – 'Director'.



***FILM-NOIRISH:** Scriptwriters sometimes use a shorthand to indicate the type of visuals they imagine by referencing a well-known style of décor or film. FILM NOIR (French: dark film) was a genre of American crime dramas popular in the 1950s, post-World War II. It featured dark and cynical heroes and stark black and white lighting effects with lots of shadows. Check out the classic Film Noir style: www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFkUbDQW1u4

****JOE PAPP:** What does it mean when the white Director, seeing Black Billie, says, "I am not the new Joe Papp." ? **HERE'S THE BACKSTORY:** The script is set in New York City 1995, when most theatre parts were for white actors. Joseph Papp was a cultural pioneer who did non-traditional casting of people of color, women, and gays in roles not originally written for them, and produced new plays showcasing their lives. He took theater productions out to NYC parks to reach audiences who'd never been to Broadway theaters. For more about Joseph Papp: www.nytimes.com/1991/11/01/theater/joseph-papp-theater-s-champion-dies.html

You've been given the basic info you need to know to review excerpts from the BILLIE'S SONG script. There's of course more to know about script format. For more technical information on scriptwriting: www.studiobinder.com/blog/brilliant-script-screenplay-format/

Yes, But...

The information given are industry standards. But if you make your own film with your own resources --- you can write the script anyway you want ! But know it won't look professional or be easy to understand by people who might help you.



**Let's Take a Look at the Opening Page of
BILLIE'S SONG, An Urban Fairy Tale.....**