

Common Questions About Screenwriting

1) How do I write a Montage?

A montage is a collection of shots or very short scenes over music. Usually it is used to show the passage of time. Typically, it is used to show a student learning something—like how to fight, study, etc.

Montages have a scene heading like other scenes (such as MONTAGE: ALLISON FALLS IN LOVE), then it is followed by descriptions of the scenes separated by two hyphens: --

Example:

MONTAGE: MARVIN STUDIES

--Marvin opens *Macbeth*, reads for a few seconds, then closes it and takes a deep breath.

--Marvin looks down at his math worksheet, sweating profusely.

--Marvin starts counting to five on his hands, struggling with it.

--Marvin opens *Macbeth* again. He starts reading, but collapses a few moments later with a thud.

--Marvin looks up a video on the internet called "How to count to five."

--Marvin once again looks down at his math worksheet, and goes to work.

--Marvin sits up in his chair and opens *Macbeth* again. This time, he starts reading, and smiles with satisfaction.

MARVIN

I did it!

END MONTAGE

Notice how you can include dialogue in montages and you end a montage with END MONTAGE.

2.How do I have text on the screen?

You can have text appear on the screen two ways—one over the movie or freeze frame, the other over black screen. For each you will use SUPER: before the text that should appear (text appears in quotes).

For text over a Black Screen, write the scene heading: BLACK SCREEN.

For example:

BLACK SCREEN:

SUPER: "It is the year 2022. WHS has greatly changed in the aftermath of the PLC Wars."

To have it over a freeze frame:

FREEZE FRAME over Jack in Kung-Fu stance.

SUPER: "Jack Parlance. Super Spy."

To have it over the movie, simply write SUPER:

EXT. CARL'S HOUSE - DAWN

Carl walks out of his front door.

SUPER: "One Week Later"

3)How do I write a cutaway shot?

A cutaway shot could be used to show what a note or text says, etc. In a script this is called an INSERT. Simply use INSERT - CUTAWAY DESCRIPTION as a scene heading, then in quotes what we see on screen.

For example:

INT. MATH CLASSROOM - DAY

Caroline has her novel open, suddenly she hears the vibration of her cell phone. She looks around and slyly opens the phone.

INSERT - THE TEXT MESSAGE

"Meet me after lunch at my locker. -HK"

BACK TO SCENE

Caroline closes the text, a smile appears on her face.

Notice that you need the BACK TO SCENE to tell the audience we are back on the action of the scene.

4)How do I write a Flashback?

To tell the audience that we are flashing back in time (either something we've already seen or not), just add on FLASHBACK to your scene heading.

For example:

INT. MATH HALLWAY - DAY - FLASHBACK

To tell the reader that we are back in the present, simply end the flashback scene or sequence with BACK TO PRESENT DAY.

The same can be used for Dreams and Daydreams:

EXT. FIELD OF ROSES - DAY - DREAM

5)How do I write a Voice Over?

Lets just clarify: A VOICE OVER is when you hear a characters voice that is not in the scene. OFF SCREEN is when you hear a character's voice in the scene, but he/she is not seen. Both are easy to write. Just use (VO) or (OS) next to the character's name speaking the dialogue.

Example:

NICK (VO)
God, I wish I were back in bed
right now.

You can use (VO) for hearing a voice through the phone, but (through phone) as a wryly works better. Which brings us to the next question...

6)How do I write a phone conversation?

If you just want to hang on one character on the phone, use (through phone) as a wryly for the other character's voice.

If you want to show these characters in the location they're in, you can literally go back and forth between the scenes of the two characters on the phone or you can INTERCUT .

To use the INTERCUT you must set up each scene that each charcter is in, then write INTERCUT ~ SCENE 1 DESCRIPTION/SCENE 2 DESCRIPTION

For example:

INT. MATH CLASSROOM - DAY

Caroline has her novel open, suddenly she hears the vibration of her cell phone. She looks around and slyly opens the phone.

CAROLINE

Hello.

INT. JACK'S KITCHEN - DAY

Jack sits at his kitchen with his laptop open.

JACK

Hey. Listen very carefully. The classroom you're in is bugged.

INTERCUT - MATH CLASSROOM/JACK'S KITCHEN

CAROLINE

What?

JACK

Just trust me. Get up and leave now.

You don't need to write END INTERCUT because your new scene heading will indicate that the phone conversation has ended.

7)How do I write a scene that takes place in a huge room or setting?

These are called MASTER SCENES. You need a Master Scene Heading, like INT. LIBRARY, then you describe the scene. After that you can separate the location into smaller scene headings.

For example:

INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

A crowd of students make their way to the different lunch tables.

RANDALL'S TABLE

Randall and Tyff silently eat their lunch.

Randall looks up and sees Oswald approach.

RANDALL

Oh crap. Here he comes.

Randall and Tyff quickly start to scarf down their food awaiting the wrath of Oswald.

OSWALD

What's up, losers?

In one quick motion, Oswald overturns both Randall's and Tyff's trays of lunch, splattering it all over the two.

Oswald doesn't stop for their reactions, but leaves the mess before any teacher sees the commotion.

ENTRANCE TO CAFE

MRS. LAUGHLIN stands at the entrance of the cafe, as Oswald approaches.

MRS. LAUGHLIN

Where are you going?

OSWALD

Bathroom.

All three scenes take place in the cafe, but they're split up into smaller scenes because the cafe is such a big setting. Crews may shoot these scenes on different days, so they are counted as

different scenes. Save it for LIBRARY, CAFE, AUDITORIUM, GYM, and FOOTBALL FIELD, etc.

8) How do I write a scene where two different scenes are shown at once?

Once in a blue moon, students will inquire about how to write a SPLIT-SCREEN scene. A decision to split the screen is something that might be better left up to the director. However, if you feel it is necessary here is an example to follow:

INT. DIFFERENT HALLWAY

Adorn runs at full speed, knocking PEOPLE out of his way at every turn.

SPLIT SCREEN

ADORN:

Adorn turns the corner, then
and
stops and stares.

The camera zooms in close on
baton
Adorn's face.

The camera backs away as
Adorn grabs the baton with one
the
hand and chops the arm of the
Cop with his other arm.

REINFORCEMENTS:

SWAT TEAMS armed with batons
riot shields move in on Adorn.

The CLOSEST COP swings his
at Adorn from behind his riot
shield.

The Cop is disarmed and then
struck by Adorn. He sinks to
the floor in intense pain.

SPLIT SCREEN ENDS as...

Adorn barrels through the line of Swat Cops, and they all
fall to the floor. Adorn continues to run, turning the corner
out of view.