



Figure 1 The Writing Center and Academic Resource Center logo

**STARTING A SCREENPLAY**

“If you have to tell a story in words, you’re in trouble.” – Preston Sturges, Director

Movies use images (SHOTS) of objects, persons, buildings, and landscapes to tell stories. A screenplay lays out the dialogue involved in those shots.

\*A new scene heading will indicate a location and/or time change.

**SCREENPLAY TERMS to help you navigate a screenplay page:**

SCENE HEADING – whether the shot occurs interior (INT.) or exterior (EXT.), location and time (DAY or NIGHT) (e.g., INT. COMPUTER LAB – DAY\*)

ACTION LINE - what the characters are doing: ANDY and ROBERT enter the lab

CAPITALIZE character names only for 1st introduction

CHARACTER & DIALOGUE – the character talks; dialogue is what they’re saying.

Watch out for “on the nose” dialogue – predictable phrases announcing a character’s action.

(In other words: “If your dialogue is about what your dialogue is about, you’re in deep ‘trouble’.” – Robert McKee’s *Story*)

ROBERT

Hey Andy, let’s go knock over a bank.

PARENTHETICALS – conveys tone, mood and mannerisms. Overuse is the sin of “directing from your computer.” Dialogue creates imagery. Actors interpret emotion. Directors guide performances. The cinematographer frames the shot.

Sentence fragments are O.K. in dialogue but not in scene or character descriptions.

ANDY  
(Quizzically)

A blood bank, a savings & loan, a credit union?

OFF SCREEN (O.S.) –Dialogue or sounds heard while the camera is on another subject.

VOICE OVER (V.O.) - a narration.

TRANSITION - Indicate the beginning with "FADE IN" and the end of the screenplay


## THE LOOK OF THE SCREENPLAY PAGE

**SCENE HEADING** - where action occurs. Describes in or outside, location and time.

**FADE IN:** - transition that begins a script.  
The transition feature will put it on the right side of the page.  
Some production houses prefer it on the left. The easiest way to put this in is to choose General, and type FADE IN:

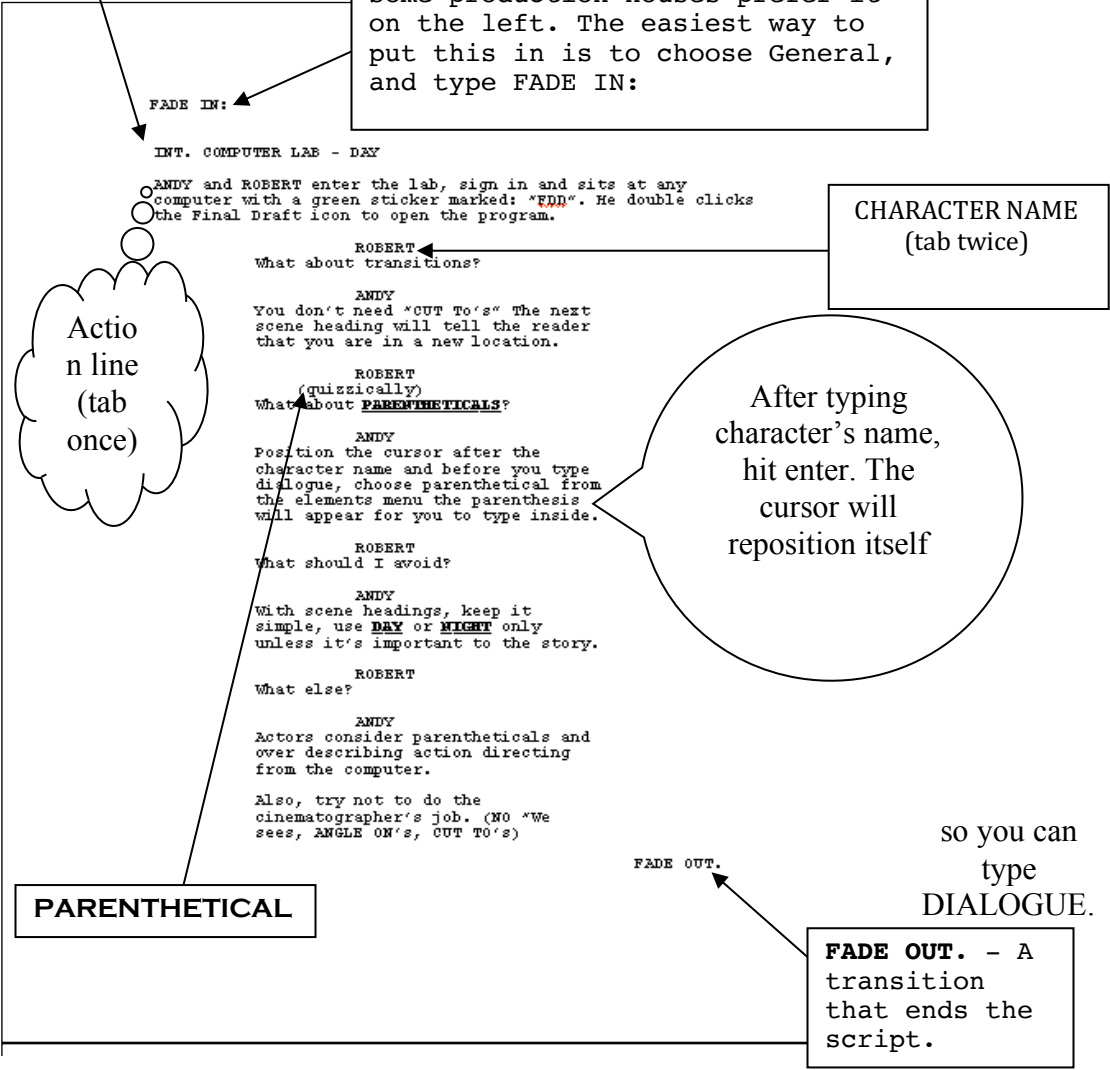
**GETTING STARTED**

- Open Final Draft.



Final Draft 7

- First type FADE IN at the top left hand side.
  - Type **SCENE HEADING** at the first cursor position: INT. COMPUTER LAB - DAY
  - Hit TAB on a blank line or after each element and you'll get a smart type list.
  - As you name new locations, those names will also populate a smart-type list.
- Tab once to type an **ACTION LINE**. (When you introduce a character for the first time, type the name in ALL CAPS): ROBERT enters the lab and sits at eMac
- Hit tab twice and type your characters name. (The program will save a character list.)
- Hit return or enter after the character's name. The cursor will appear underneath and you can type dialogue.



## HOW TO NUMBER PAGES



1. Go to Documents, choose Header and Footer, and then choose the Options tab.
2. Uncheck the Header on first page box and Final Draft will begin numbering pages with page 2 of the screenplay.

A numbered page will look like this:

2.

INT. COMPUTER LAB - CONTINUOUS

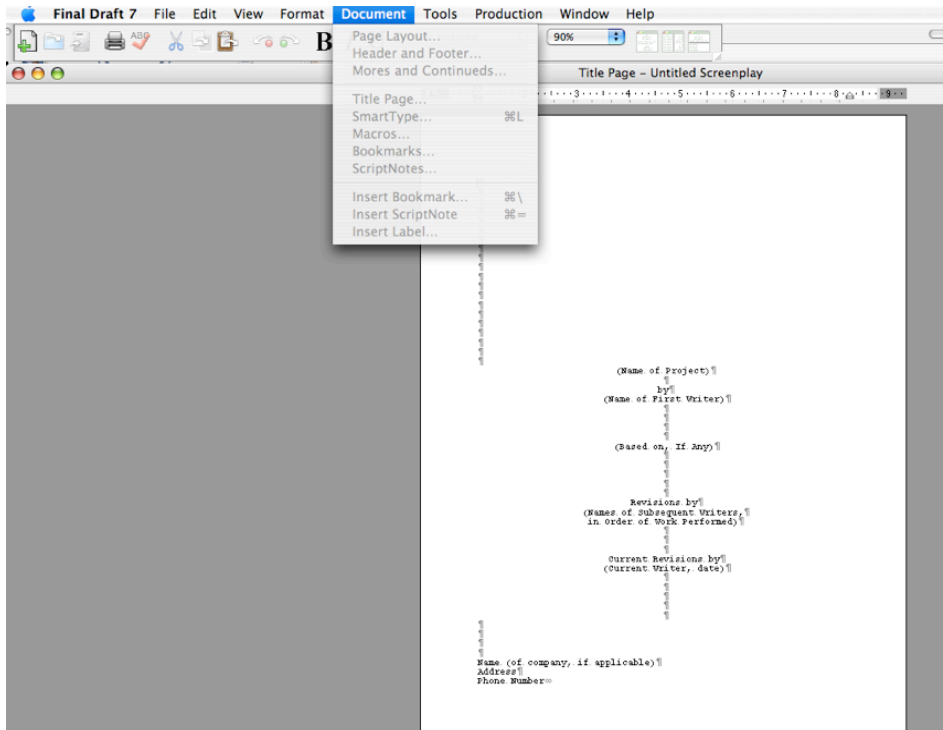
ANDY  
CONTINUOUS means we're still in  
the Lab and the location has not  
changed.

FADE OUT.

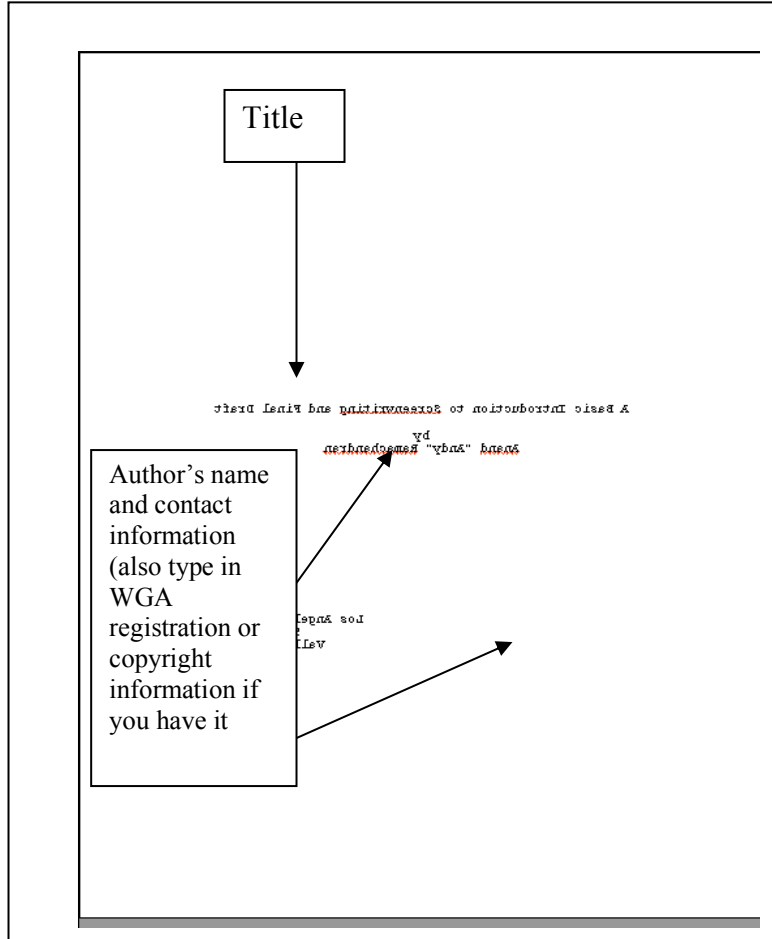
Choose transition from the drop-down box & type: "FADE OUT." This indicates the end of the screenplay.

## THE LOOK OF THE TITLE PAGE

TITLE PAGE PUBLISHER – go to Documents menu, and choose Title Page. It formats, centers and put in the correct number of carriage returns. Delete unnecessary information. Save. The title page becomes part of your screenplay.



The title page does not have to be numbered and will look like this:



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### Movies about the Movies:

Adaptation. Screenplay by Charlie Kaufman. Dir. Spike Jonze. Perf. Nicholas Cage, Chris Cooper. Universal. 2003.

American Cinema. Produced by the New York Center for Visual History in association with KCET/Los Angeles and the BBC. 1995.

Bad and Beautiful. Writers: Story/Screenplay by George Bradshaw/Charles Schnee. Dir. Vincente Minnelli. Perf. Kirk Douglas, Lana Turner, Walter Pidgeon. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM). ©1952. USA.

The Big Knife. Stageplay/Adapted Screenplay by Clifford Odets/ James Poe. Dir. Robert Aldrich. Perf. Jack Palance, Ida Lupino, Rod Steiger, Shelly Winters. United Artists ©1955. USA.

Bowfinger. Screenplay by Steve Martin. Dir. Frank Oz. Perf. Steve Martin, Eddie Murphy. Universal Pictures. ©1999. USA.

Day of the Locust. Novel/Adapted Screenplay by Nathanael West/Waldo Salt. Dir. John Schlesinger. Perf. Donald Sutherland, Karen Black, Burgess Meredith, William Atherton. Paramount Pictures. ©1975 France.

The Kid Stays in the Picture. Novel/Adapted Screenplay by Robert Evans/Brett Morgen. Dir. Nanette Burstein, Brett Morgen. Perf. Robert Evans. Produced by Highway Films and Ministry of Propaganda Films. © 2002 USA - Limited.

The Last Tycoon. Novel/Adapted Screenplay by F. Scott Fitzgerald/Harold Pinter. Dir. Elia Kazan. Perf. Robert DeNiro, Tony Curtis, Robert Mitchum. Paramount Pictures. ©1976 USA.

The Player. Novel/Adapted Screenplay by Michael Tolkin. Dir. Robert Altman. Perf. Tim Robbins, Peter Gallagher. Fine Line Features. ©1992 USA.

Swimming With Sharks. Screenplay by George Huang. Dir. George Huang. Perf. Kevin Spacey, Frank Whaley. Cineville, Mama'z Boy Entertainment, NeoFight Film.

©1994 USA.

Visions of Light. Screenplay by Todd McCarthy. Dir. Arnold Glassman, Todd McCarthy, Stuart Samuels. American Film Institute (AFI). ©1992 USA.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES (CONTINUED)

### Books about Screenwriting:

Argenti, Paul. *Elements of Style for Screenwriters*. Hollywood: Lone Eagle/IFILM © 1998.

Biskind, Peter. *Easy riders, raging bulls: how the sex-drugs-and-rock-'n'-roll generation saved Hollywood*. New York: Simon & Schuster © 1998.

Biskind, Peter. *Down and Dirty Pictures: Miramax, Sundance and the Rise of Independent Film*. New York: Simon & Schuster. © 2004.

Boorstin, Making Movies Work: Thinking Like A Filmmaker. Beverly Hills: Silman-James Press. © 1990, 1995.

Cooper, Dona. *Writing Great Screenplays for Film and TV*.

Field, Syd. *Screenplay – The Foundations of Screenwriting*. New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell. © 1984.

Field Syd. *The Screenwriter's Workbook*. New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell. © 1984.

King, Viki. *How To Write A Movie in 21 Days*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers. © 1988.

Kelly, Karin and Edgar, Tom. *Film School Confidential*. New York: Berkley Penguin Putnam. © 1997.

McKee, Robert. *Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers Inc. © 1997.

Pintoff, Ernest. *The Complete Guide to American Film Schools*. New York: Penguin

Books. First published © 1994.

*The Directors: The Playboy Interviews*. Ed. Stephen Randall. Milwaukee: M Press.

© 2006.

Vogler, Christopher. *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers, Third Edition*.

Studio City: Michael Wiese Productions. © 2006.

Whiteside, Rich. *The Screenwriting Life: The Dream, the Job and the Reality*. New

York: Berkley Boulevard Books. © 1998

Wilson, Lee. *The Copyright Guide*. New York: Allworth Press. © 2000.

## **GRAMMATICAL CONCEPTS AND WRITING CENTER HANDOUTS**

Active /Passive Voice - knowing the difference is important for writing clean and clearly defined action lines for characters. Exclude to be, has/had/have been forms.

Adjectives & Adverbs – adjectives describe nouns (evil genius). Adverbs modify verbs (drives recklessly).

Apostrophes are important for distinguishing possessives and contractions from plurals.

Commas matter when constructing scene descriptions and dialogue dependent on complex & compound sentences.

Fragments I & II are important for correctly structuring dialogue and scene descriptions.

Gerunds and Infinitives - Differentiate between an action in progress and a proposed action.

Prepositions – Never let the “F.A.N.B.O.Y.S.:" (for, and, not, but, or, yet, so) begin a written sentence as you would find in a scene description (a.k.a., action line).

Pronouns – In scene descriptions/action lines try as much as possible to make reference to characters using proper names and nouns. Pronouns are best used in dialogue to refer to an absent character in the third person.

Punctuation – Proper punctuation will indicate when a thought or series of thoughts continues or ends.



Run-Ons/Comma Splices/Semicolons- Strategies for deciding when to end a sentence with a period or continue a series of thoughts using an “and” or a semi-colon (;)

Subject/Verb Agreement – The subject is what the sentence is about. The verb is what the subject does. This is important for writing clear scene descriptions/action lines.

Verb Tenses/ Verbs with “-ed” endings – The difference between present (now) and past (then) tenses. Scene descriptions/action lines are always present tense and active voice.

Writing A Summary/Paragraph Development are important for communicating what a character is about to do in the scene description/action lines. Sentence development is important for clearly structured dialogue between two or more characters.

*The handouts mentioned above are available in The Writing Center, which is located in Humanities 100.*

### SOFTWARE

Final Draft	Final Draft 8	<a href="http://finaldraft.com/downloads/demo-final-draft.php">finaldraft.com/downloads/demo-final-draft.php</a>
Screenplay.com	Movie Magic Screenwriter 6	<a href="http://screenplay.com/t-mmsdemo.aspx">screenplay.com/t-mmsdemo.aspx</a>

### WRITERS' RESOURCES

Group	Website	Contact info
Scriptwriters Network	<a href="http://www.scriptwritersnetwork.org/swn/index.php?page=Home">http://www.scriptwritersnetwork.org/swn/index.php?page=Home</a>	info@ScriptwritersNetwork.org
LAVC Media Arts	<a href="http://lavc.edu/mediaarts/html/mainmenu.html">http://lavc.edu/mediaarts/html/mainmenu.html</a>	Eric Swelstad, Chair 818-778-5503
IDEAS	<a href="http://www.lavc.edu/ideas/aboutideas.html">http://www.lavc.edu/ideas/aboutideas.html</a>	Richard Holdredge <a href="mailto:holdrere@lavc.edu">holdrere@lavc.edu</a> (818) 947-2642 Dan Watanabe (818) 778-8256

### LOS ANGELES VALLEY COLLEGE SCREENWRITING CLASSES

Broadcasting 25 – Radio/TV/Film Writing – Requires writing and analysis of the form and style of radio, television and film scripts. Students earn three (3) units of CSU transferable credit. This gateway class to the screenwriting major is offered every Fall and Spring semester. It is the prerequisite for Media Arts 130, advanced screenwriting.

Required text: *Screenplay* by Syd Field  
Recommended text: *The Screenwriter's Workbook* by Syd Field

Media Arts 129 – Mythology, Spirituality and the Art of Story -- Analytical and critical overview of storytelling, the historical and modern roles of mythology, spirituality, legends and parables in today's motion picture and television writings. This class is taught every Fall and has no prerequisites. Many students take it with Broadcast 25 to prepare for Media Arts 130. Students earn three (3) units of UC/CSU transferable college credit.

Required text: *The Writer's Journey* by Christopher Vogler

Media Arts 130 – Advanced Screenwriting -- Broadcasting 25 is the prerequisite. This workshop course emphasizes the skill and understanding of structure, character and story. Students write an initial draft of an original feature length screenplay or teleplay in a writer's group with four or five fellow students.

Recommended text: *Screenwriting 434* by Lew Hunter

Consult the most current college catalog and semester course offerings. For online tutoring and additional information about The Writing Center, visit our website at <http://www.lavc.edu/WCweb/index.html>

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