Lesson: Tips for scripts

Scripts can both help you tell your story and help you stay on schedule (and budget).

✔️ What can I use a script for?

Scripts are used mainly to set the scenes in a story. They provide actors and speakers with dialogue, offer direction for shooting and give guidance to the crew. In the film and television industry, production teams follow guidelines such as adding shot-codes and differentiating between B-roll and voiceovers, but for your productions it’s best to create and use a style that fits your needs. The amount of information you include in a script is up to you, but typically the basics people will cover include things like outlining the main parts of the story, detailing specific actions and identifying locations.

See it in action
Jane Austen meets vlogging

“The Lizzie Bennet Diaries” is a vlog-style retelling of Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice. The script writing and vlog format helps bring the story to life for present-day audiences. (Video in English)

Using screenwriting as a blueprint to create a multi-dimensional world

A young woman is thrust into an unknown galactic world and forced to be the representative that saves the earth. (Video in English)

✔️ OK, what's a good way to get started?

You've already got a basic story in mind: a plan with characters, a general direction and some scenes roughly sketched out. Now all you need to do is add the words. Jump right in! Once you get started, you can always take a break to do some research and then write some more. Don’t worry about making mistakes; scripting can be a tough process, and you can always edit the script and fill up the scenes with action when you aren’t sure which words to use yet. If you get the dreaded writer's block, it can help to bounce ideas off friends. You’ll be surprised how inspiring other people can be when you’re working on an idea.

✔️ Help! I have writer's block!
Writer's block, or when you’re having a hard time coming up with new ideas to write, can happen to anyone so don’t worry if you get stuck! Here are a few creative tips that can help you get through it to create a masterpiece!

- **Write with your own flair:** Everyone has their own way of writing, so it may not be necessary to take creative writing classes or attend production training. Instead, try to write your scripts from your own perspective. It can be beneficial to put as much of yourself into what you write as possible.

- **Focus on words and language:** Observe people and the way they really speak so that your script sounds as authentic as possible. (This is also known as “investing in personalities”.) Think about what these people would say, how they'd act and what makes them special or interesting. In this way you’ll get closer to the characters you’re exploring.

- **Research your locations to find out how scenes will pan out:** You might find that you get inspiration from going to the places you want to shoot and exploring. While you’re there, think about checking noise levels and observing how busy places are to make sure that shooting is actually possible.

- **Writing can be collaborative; try a table read:** Ask family or friends to get together to act out your script. This can make editing and alterations easier and faster. It also can bring realism and fun to the process.

✔ How do the pros write scripts?
Unless you’re writing scripts to use on a set with actors, it’s unlikely that you’ll need to stick to industry standard rules. You might write out what you want to say and then ad lib during shooting. (This can actually help you to appear more natural.) However, if you’re writing scripts for a bigger shoot, then you may want to adhere to some of the accepted industry standards such as writing one page of script for one minute of film, specifying the locations and times in the script, indenting the dialogue to separate it from action, or even using scripting software such as Celtx.

In the world of screenplays and theatre, several scenes typically make up an act and three acts make up a script. Each act contains a specific part of the story, for example:

- Act 1: The introduction – you meet the characters, get a sense of what’s happening and find out the purpose of the story.
- Act 2: This is usually the main part of the story. Twists, turns and challenges are often introduced.
- Act 3: The conclusion of the story. Order is restored and conflicts and obstacles are resolved.

In the end, whatever style you use for creating and presenting your scripts should depend on what suits your needs.

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**Try it**

What are your tips for creating a good script? What kind of feedback do you ask for on your scripts? Share them below.

**Test your knowledge**

You’ve got access to film equipment and a killer location next week but you haven’t written down your ideas yet. Should you set aside time to write a script?
Yes, it's best to determine every detail for my shoot ahead of time.

No, I'm great in front of a camera and I will do just fine without a script.

Yes, even if it just contains ideas that you will ad lib, it's a good idea to have a script so that you can help others better understand your idea.

No, I will just tell everyone about it and what I need them to do on the day of shooting.

When you’re writing a script, what should you include for the benefit of the crew?

- An extensive list of everything needed for the shoot.
- All the dialogue with notes for actors.
- Details about action, locations and times of shooting.
- A rough outline of the words to be spoken.

You’re having a bit of writer’s block and need to flesh out the dialogue for a scene. What’s one of the best ways to get yourself writing again?

- Do a table read and act out the scenes.
- Post your ideas online and ask for comments from everyone in your social circle.
- Give your script to a script editor to finish.
- Don’t worry about it. You can wing it when shooting.

You’ve got your basic story laid out and you want to start writing a script. What should you do first?
- Develop a schedule for writing.
- Investigate all the locations thoroughly before writing anything.
- Brainstorm scripting ideas with a friend.
- Just start writing and see how far you get.