NOTE: Title, date, your name and contact details go on the front page, and not on the other pages.

MY $1 MILLION SCRIPT LAYOUT
by
Your Name

Based on a true story by
Your Name

Revisions by
Genius Writer

Current Revisions by
Writer's Friend, September 2014

Your Postal Address
In full

Email
Phone

FADE IN:

All scripts start four
lines down with
FADE IN:

INT. WRITER'S WORKROOM – DAY

The WRITER sits slumped over his computer, a tousled young
man with a certain air of genius about him. But just now
things aren't going too well.

                    WRITER
          Oh, God!

                    WRITER'S FRIEND
          Problems?

A figure stirs in the corner – the WRITER'S FRIEND – an
older, wiser, man with a twinkle in his eye.

                    WRITER
          My script's brilliant. But I don't know
          how to lay it out, to make it look
          professional. If I don't --

                    WRITER'S FRIEND
          Relax. It's easy. There are general
          rules, and more specific ones.

He walks over to the computer and taps the keys with
confidence.

                    WRITER'S FRIEND (CONT.)
          First the specific.

The Writer says nothing. The Writers Friend is absorbed in
what he is doing. He types stage directions. He lays them
out with care: 1½"– 2" from the left (USA: 2").

Stage directions

                    WRITER'S FRIEND (CONT.)
          Dialogue goes here, indented another 1"
          from the left and a bit from the right.
          The character's name goes above the
          dialogue, in capitals and indented
          another 1½".

Character's Name

Dialogue

He swiftly adjusts the font to Courier, 12pt.

                    WRITER'S FRIEND
          That's the one that looks like a
          typewriter. And left aligned, not centred
          or justified. Use A4 paper for European
          scripts, Quarto for USA.

EXT. GARDEN – DAY

Writer and Writer's Friend walk across the lawn together.

> WRITER'S FRIEND
> At the start of each scene you have what we call a "Slug Line" – like the one at the top of this page. This introduces the scene, in capitals.

> WRITER
> Capitals?

> WRITER'S FRIEND
> Always. Start the slug line with INT. or EXT. then the PLACE and finally the TIME OF DAY – use only DAY, NIGHT, DAWN or DUSK or very, very rarely CONTINUOUS if there's no camera break. (But no scene numbers unless you're about to shoot).

Single space scene descriptions and dialogue, double space between paragraphs, and three spaces above the slug line.

These specific rules help ensure that the script is clear and easy to read. Now for some more general rules.

INT. WRITER'S WORKROOM – NIGHT

The Writer's Friend retypes the stage directions. He always starts a scene with directions (not dialogue) mentioning the name of any speaker before they speak.

He puts them into the present tense – and makes sure they describe only things we can see or hear. He writes that someone's "angry" or "happy" but deletes "he's silently remembering his father's sharp wit and strange smell".

> WRITER'S FRIEND
> (mutters to himself)
> You can put extra dialogue description in brackets, ½" to the left of the character name, as above. But use this sparingly, or it becomes irritating.

SUDDENLY

He SPEEDS up.

HIS FINGERS – a blur on the keyboard.

...you can be creative with layout – within limits – using caps and shorter or longer lines (for example) to bring out the rhythms of different scenes.

MIX TO:

INT. KITCHEN – DAY

A Transition

The Writer's Friend puts transitions in caps, FADE OUT., MIX TO:, WIPE TO:, etc, on the right. And CUT TO: but only if the cut is dramatic.

                    WRITER'S FRIEND
          Some people get very confused about when
          to use capitals.

Capitalise a character's name in the stage directions for the <u>first</u> appearance only. You should give a brief, evocative, description at this point, as per:

New character

GERALD, a short, unshaven, evil-looking police detective climbs in through the window. This is a man you would not want dealing with your parking ticket.

From now, Gerald will not be in caps unless he's a speaker.

                    GERALD
          Quite right, too.

TRACK in to his glass eye... which winks.

Use caps for TECHNICAL directions, which should only be included when absolutely essential. The same with SOUND and MUSIC.

                    GERALD (O.S.)
          You can use (O.S.) to show I'm speaking
          out of shot, or (V.O.) for voice-over,
          ie: narration.

He takes out his glass eye and wipes it on his sleeve with a strange SQUEAKING sound.

                    GERALD (CONT.)
          And (CONT.) shows that dialogue was
          interrupted by action, description or a
          new page. But don't overdo the dialogue.

INT. WRITER'S WORKROOM – DUSK

A single candle flickers in the draught of the open window as Gerald watches the Writer dash off the pages.

Tell the story through visuals, more than dialogue. Describe visuals briefly but vividly, and ensure they are always relevant to the drama. Don't put in description for the sake of description – and never tell the director, camera operator, set designer, etc, what to do.

                         GERALD
                  Very unprofessional.

Experienced writers cleverly get round this by subtly
implying how the film might be shot through evocative use
of description. For example...

EXT. SWISS ALPS – DAY

A vast mountain range stretches across the horizon,
glittering in the sunshine. Half way up a narrow mountain
path, a rickety wooden cart GROANS ever upwards. On the
cart sit the Writer's Friend, and the Writer, slumped half
asleep, clutching his laptop and his script.

Clearly, this suggests a panoramic wide shot, followed by
increasingly closer shots. No need to write LS or CU.

Dialogue should be brief and oblique – it should hint at
the characters' true feelings between the lines.

                    WRITER'S FRIEND
               In addition, old chap, follow the "rule
               of thumb". Cover every speech with your
               thumb. If it extends below your thumb, (4
               lines) it's probably too long!

He fixes the writer with an emphatic stare.

                    WRITER'S FRIEND (CONT.)
               Of course, knowing you, you'll want one
               or two longer speeches – not too many –
               to develop character.

He thrusts the first, corrected pages of script at him.

                    WRITER'S FRIEND (CONT.)
               But even then, you can be clever in the
               way that you lay it out. See?

                         WRITER
               You break it up with action, like you did
               there, to make it look more dramatic!

The Writer can hardly contain his excitement, turns on his
laptop and starts to hammer away at the keys, as the cart
jolts onwards up towards the snow-capped summit.

                                        FADE OUT.

...and always end with FADE OUT or
FADE TO BLACK.