



Screenwriting Tips

The following list is a collation of tips from Screenwriter's on the topic of good script writing:

- **Professional screenplay manuscript format is a must.**
Use Script Smart listed on our portal for best results.
- **Use a 3-act structure.**
With a Crisis or Turning-point in the story at the end of Act I and Act II.
- **Make Acts I & III about the same length with Act II about twice the length of Act I.**
Screenplays are continuous -- don't label the Acts. They're your secret, though the pros will know where to look.
- **Tell your story visually with just enough dialogue to fill in the cracks.**
Remember that difference: Film is a sequence of **visual** images; theatre is a sequence of **verbal** images.
- **Keep your lines of dialogue short.**
Even in the most play-like of films, dialogue is extremely brief.
- **American films are about *what happens next*.**
The technology of cutting from one image to the next has a lot to do with this. European cinema is the only market for character studies similar to stage plays.
- **Establish a strong Suspense Plot.**
Even in a romantic comedy. Film doesn't cope well with the mild suspense plots that work well in plays.
- **Put the Hook [in theatrical terms, the Inciting Incident] in the first 2 pages.**
If you're unproduced, go for page 1.
- **Keep your scenes short.**
3 pages is a good absolute maximum before you cut to a new location; half a page to a page is typical.
- **Use less Subtext.**
In film, Subtext floats to the surface of the dialogue much more often, mostly because Hollywood tends to have a very dim view of the intelligence of its audience.
- **Put an Emotional Pattern in the Obligatory Scene.**
These things are tailor-made for film. The obligatory scene is when you bring your protagonist and antagonist together for the climatic confrontation.
- **Aim toward a Happy Ending.**
It's the norm.
- **Do a detailed outline of scenes *before* writing the script.**
A synopsis of the main idea for your picture would be a good start. Use your treatment and add the details for Act 2 and 3.
- **Practice answering the question, "So tell me, what's this about?"**
In one sentence... And tag on a comparison to another recent [and financially successful] Hollywood film. If you can't do this easily, or if the mere idea of doing it annoys you, go back to playwriting.