

Anatomy of a Screenplay

The screenplay, or script, is where a movie is born. It contains almost everything the actors and film crew need to bring the movie to life. What the actors say, what they do, how the camera moves, what the setting looks like—all this is in the screenplay.

If you've ever read a play, a screenplay will look familiar. Take a peek at an excerpt from the screenplay of *His Girl Friday*, written by Charles Lederer.



FADE IN: INT. ANTEROOM CLOSE SHOT SWITCHBOARD

Two telephone operators sit at switchboard busy plugging in and out answering calls.

1ST OPERATOR

Character

This is the Morning Post... The City Room? Just a moment, I'll connect you.
(plugs in call)

Dialogue

2ND OPERATOR

Character

Morning Post... Sports Department?
Just a moment --
(plugs in call)

Camera operating instructions

CAMERA PULLS BACK to disclose the rest of the anteroom. To Camera left are the elevators -- at back wall directly behind switchboard are chairs and a table for visitors.

Setting description

At a table sits an office boy, about fifteen, doing a crossword puzzle. The big clock on the back wall shows that it is nearly one o'clock.

Camera operating
instruction



CLOSE SHOT OFFICE BOY

as he bends over paper. We catch a glimpse of the squares of a crossword puzzle.

MED. SHOT

as a reporter comes out of the City Room, clanging the gate behind him. The office boy looks up.

● Actor's
instruction

OFFICE BOY

What's a seven-letter word for --?

REPORTER

Don't ask me! If I knew any seven-letter words, I'd be something better than a reporter!

He catches a glimpse of the far elevator going down.

REPORTER

Hey! Down! Down!

MED. SHOT ELEVATORS

as reporter runs into the closed elevator door and pounds on it. It comes back, the door opens, and he gets in. The door closes. The near elevator comes up and discharges Hildy Johnson and Bruce Baldwin. Bruce carries an umbrella and wears a raincoat.



MED. CLOSE SHOT TABLE

office boy looking over his puzzle as
Hildy and Bruce come into the scene.

HILDY

(with a smile)

Hello, Skinny. Remember me?

OFFICE BOY

(looks up; then a
glowing smile)

Hildy Johnson!

CLOSE SHOT SWITCHBOARD

Hildy approaches the switchboard.

HILDY

(to operator)

Hello, Maisie.

The first operator looks up.

MAISIE

Hello -- Hildy! You coming back?

HILDY

No, just visiting.

Tell me, is the lord
of the universe in today?



MAISIE

He is -- and in a very bad humor. I think somebody stole one of his crown jewels. Shall I announce you?

HILDY

No, never mind -- I'll blow my own trumpet.

THREE SHOT BRUCE, HILDY AND OPERATOR

Hildy turns to Bruce.

HILDY

I won't be more than ten minutes, I promise you.

BRUCE

Even ten minutes is a long time to be away from you.



Think you've got a screenplay in you? Conjure up your own tale, use an event from your life or the life of someone you know, or even borrow a section from your favorite book. Once you have an idea for a story, you can write your very own screenplay! Make sure to include these elements: character names, dialogue, setting description, actor instructions, and camera operating instructions.

A large rectangular area with a dotted teal border, containing 15 horizontal dotted lines for writing.



You now have a screenplay on your hands that you want to turn into a movie. But where to start? Run a search online or at a library to see how screenwriters go about getting their words made into a movie. Write about the next steps you'd need to take on the back of this sheet.