
Film Title

When (inciting incident),

(hero) struggles against (antagonistic force)

in order to (goal)

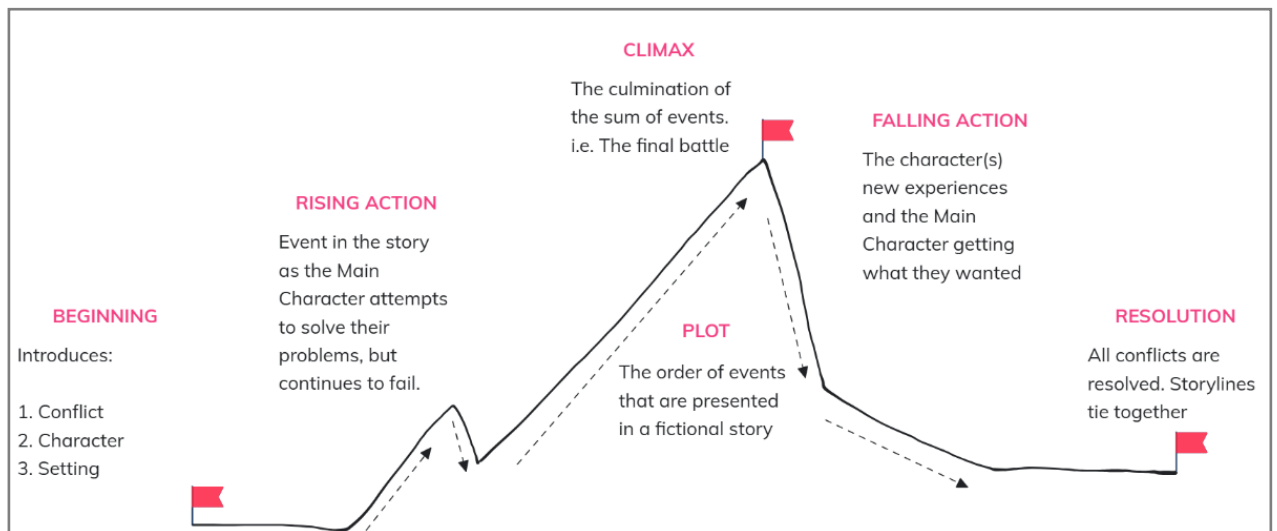
before (stakes are lost)

Author

Year

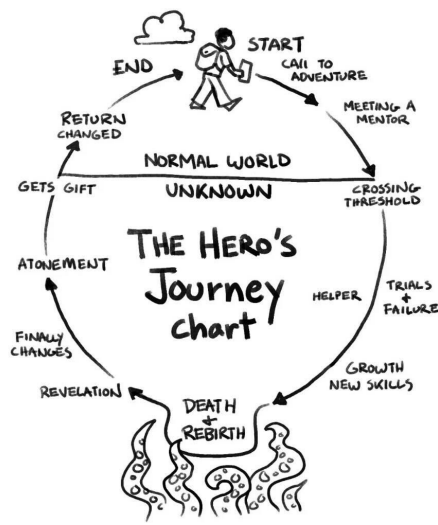
Development

This phase of the production process includes fleshing out the story idea & writing a draft of the script.



Try listening to cinematic or orchestral music while you write.

- Soundtracks to movies *you've never seen* can be especially useful!
- Perhaps a genre or time period that inspires you.
- Imagine your character(s) in the music you hear. What might be happening?



Start

Call to Adventure

Meeting a Mentor

Crossing Threshold

Trials & Failure

Helper

Growth & New Skills

Death & Rebirth

Revelation

Finally Changes

Atonement

Gets Gift

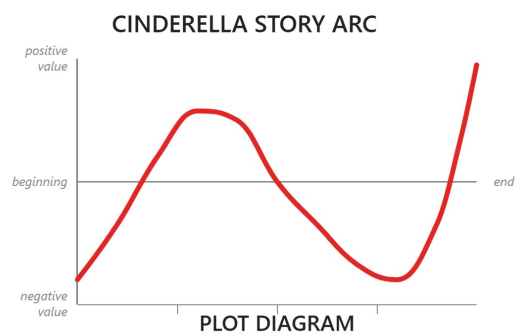
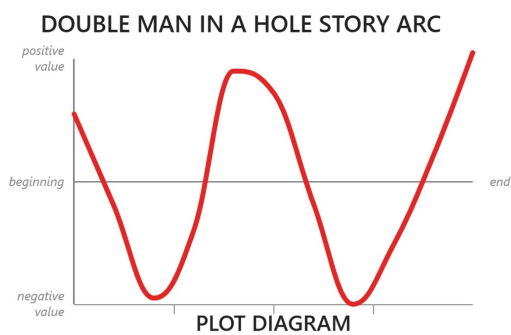
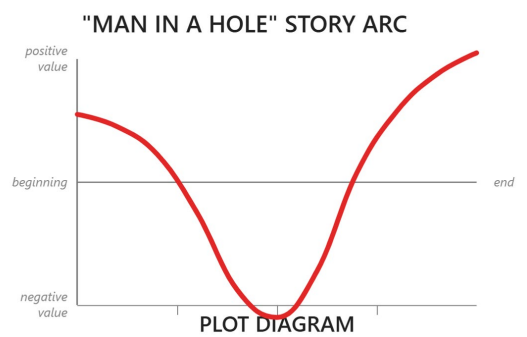
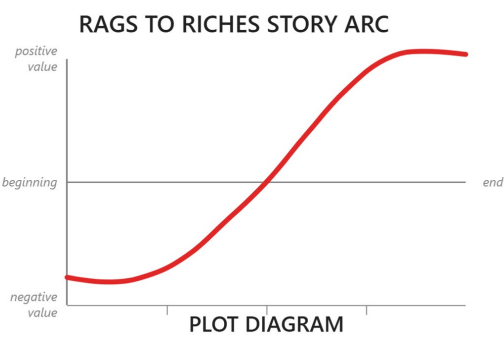
Return Changed

End

Story Arc



Examples



Primary Character Arcs

	Change	Steadfast
Positive	Name: _____ Name: _____ Name: _____	Name: _____ Name: _____ Name: _____
Negative	Name: _____ Name: _____ Name: _____	Name: _____ Name: _____ Name: _____

Examples

	Change	Steadfast
Positive		
Negative		

Brainstorming

You can use some tools & techniques to brainstorm, by yourself or with help!

Activity Examples:

Role on the wall

- Words or phrases describing the character are written directly onto the drawing or stuck on with sticky notes.

Hot Seating

- One person embodies a character, who is questioned by the others about their background, behavior and motivation. It could be a primary, secondary

Freeze Frames

- Participants freeze their bodies to create a scene. It's just like pressing pause on a video.

Thought Tracking

- Characters in a freeze-frame speak their inner thoughts aloud. Very useful for turning images into scenes.

Most involve an element of improvisation.

*Tina Fey's Rules of Improvisation That Will Change Your Life and Reduce Belly Fat**

1. The first rule of improvisation is AGREE. Always agree and SAY YES.
2. The second rule of improvisation is not only to say yes, but YES, AND. Agree and then add something of your own.
3. The next rule is MAKE STATEMENTS. This is a positive way of saying "Don't ask questions all the time."
4. THERE ARE NO MISTAKES, only opportunities

* Improv will not reduce belly fat

--From Bossypants by Tina Fey

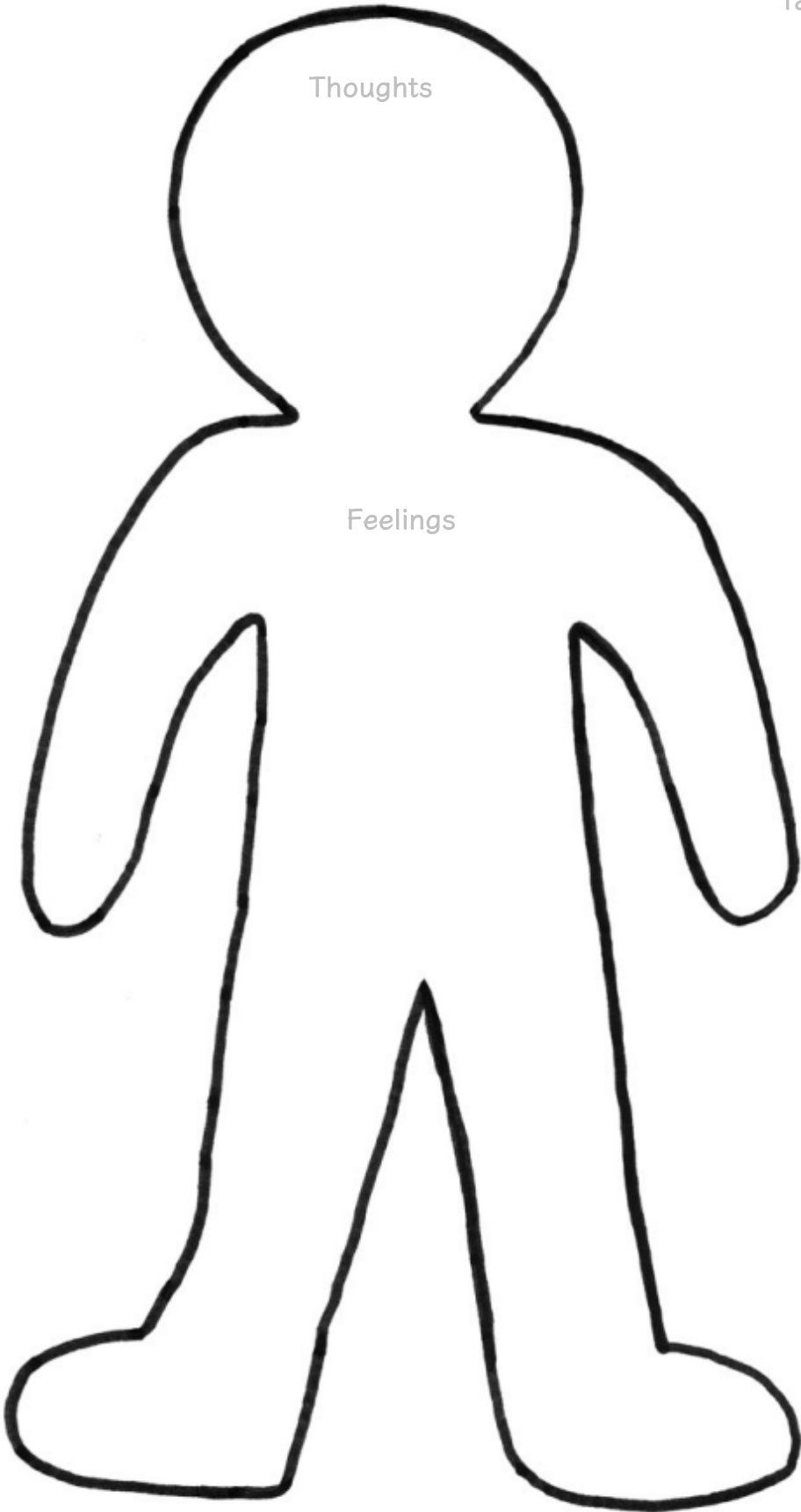
Not everything has to be funny to be interesting.

Character: _____

Known
facts

Thoughts

Feelings



Story Outline

Brainstorm scenes using the 14 Hero's Journey beats before building your scene list or script.

This section comes before your scene list and screenplay.

Each beat helps you brainstorm possible scenes, choices, conflicts, surprises, images, and character changes.

Later, you'll choose the strongest ideas and arrange them into a scene list.



Remember

- Some Ideas may disappear later, and that's ok.
- Focus on what the audience can see & hear!

Who's the story about?

What does everyday life look like / what should the audience know / what introduces the character's world?

Scene Ideas

Notes, dialogue ideas, visual ideas, character moments

Call to Adventure

What problem or invitation pulls them into the story?

What disrupts ordinary life / makes the story begin / can no longer be ignored?

Scene Ideas

Notes, dialogue ideas, visual ideas, character moments

Meeting a Mentor

Who gives them advice, training, direction, or inspiration?

Who gives advice, training, direction, warning, encouragement, or inspiration?

Scene Ideas

Notes, dialogue ideas, visual ideas, character moments

Crossing the Threshold

What moment sends them into the unknown?

What choice commits them to the journey / creates a point of no return / moves them into a new situation?

Scene Ideas

Notes, dialogue ideas, visual ideas, character moments

What challenge(s) force them to grow?

What obstacles test them / where do they fail or struggle / what shows difficulty instead of instant success?

Scene Ideas

Notes, dialogue ideas, visual ideas, character moments

A Helper

Who joins or supports them along the way?

Who stands with them / changes the journey / helps build an important relationship?

Scene Ideas

Notes, dialogue ideas, visual ideas, character moments

What new skill, courage, or lesson do they gain?

What changes inside them / what do they learn to do or believe / how can growth be seen?

Scene Ideas

Notes, dialogue ideas, visual ideas, character moments

What is their lowest point, where they almost give up?

What feels lost / why does this moment hurt / what makes the audience wonder whether they will continue?

Scene Ideas

Notes, dialogue ideas, visual ideas, character moments

What truth do they finally understand?

What do they see clearly now / what were they wrong about before / what reveals the truth?

Scene Ideas

Notes, dialogue ideas, visual ideas, character moments

What choice proves they have changed?

What decision would they not have made at the beginning / what action proves the change / what shows the new self replacing the old self?

Scene Ideas

Notes, dialogue ideas, visual ideas, character moments

Who or what do they make right?

What relationship, mistake, or wrong must be repaired / who needs reconciliation or justice / what gets made right?

Scene Ideas

Notes, dialogue ideas, visual ideas, character moments

What have they gained, received, or brought back?

Is the gift an object, truth, skill, courage, relationship, or opportunity / how is it received or earned / why does it matter?

Scene Ideas

Notes, dialogue ideas, visual ideas, character moments

Return Changed

How does everyday life show that they've changed?

Where do they return / how is normal life different now / what shows the change in action?

Scene Ideas

Notes, dialogue ideas, visual ideas, character moments

Who notices the change, and what is different going forward?

What final image summarizes the story / who recognizes the difference / what should the audience remember?

Scene Ideas

Notes, dialogue ideas, visual ideas, character moments

Scene Planning

Now, put your scene ideas into the order the audience will experience them. This becomes the map for your screenplay draft.

How to use it

- List each scene in story order.
- Connect each scene to a journey step.
- Keep each scene description short.
- Combine scenes that do the same job.



Ask of every scene...

- Does something change?
- Does it reveal character?
- Does it move the story forward?
- Can the audience see or hear what happens?

Scene List

Scene #	Journey Step	Location	Characters	What Happens?
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
12				
13				
14				
15				
16				
17				

Scene List (cont.)

Scene #	Journey Step	Location	Characters	What Happens?
18				
19				
20				
21				
22				
23				
24				
25				
26				
27				
28				
29				
30				
31				
32				
33				
34				

Screenplay Guide



Screenplays use special formatting so a film crew can quickly understand what appears on screen.

Screenplay Vocabulary Guide

FADE IN:	The screen begins black, then the image slowly appears.
FADE OUT:	The image fades away. Often used at the end.
INT.	Interior. The scene is inside.
EXT.	Exterior. The scene is outside.
Slugline (Scene Heading)	The line that tells where and when the scene happens.
Action	What the audience can see or hear, usually in present tense.
Character Cue	The name of the character speaking, usually centered and capitalized.
Dialogue	The words the character says.
Parenthetical	A short note about how a line is said or what the character is doing.
V.O.	Voice-over: A voice the audience hears that is not visible in the scene.
O.S.	Off-screen. The character is in the scene but not visible.
SUPER	Text appears over the image, like a date, place, or title card.

Simple Example

FADE IN:

EXT. FOREST PATH - DAY

A young boy runs through the trees, clutching a torn map.

JONAH
Wait for me!

He trips, falls, and looks back toward the sound of footsteps.

SUPER: THREE HOURS EARLIER

Write what the audience can see and hear. Save long explanations for your outline notes, not the screenplay page.

Pixar's 22 Rules of Storytelling

1. You admire a character for trying more than for their successes.
2. You gotta keep in mind what's interesting to you as an audience, not what's fun to do as a writer. They can be very different.
3. Trying for theme is important, but you won't see what the story is actually about til you're at the end of it. Now rewrite.
4. Once upon a time there was _____. Every day, _____. One day _____. Because of that, _____. Because of that, _____. Until finally _____.
5. Simplify. Focus. Combine characters. Hop over detours. You'll feel like you're losing valuable stuff but it sets you free.
6. What is your character good at, comfortable with? Throw the polar opposite at them. Challenge them. How do they deal?
7. Come up with your ending before you figure out your middle. Seriously. Endings are hard, get yours working up front.
8. Finish your story, let go even if it's not perfect. In an ideal world you have both, but move on. Do better next time.
9. When you're stuck, make a list of what WOULDN'T happen next. Lots of times the material to get you unstuck will show up.
10. Pull apart the stories you like. What you like in them is a part of you; you've got to recognize it before you can use it.
11. Putting it on paper lets you start fixing it. If it stays in your head, a perfect idea, you'll never share it with anyone.

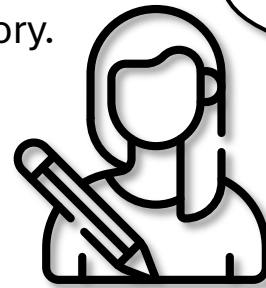
Pixar's 22 Rules of Storytelling

12. Discount the 1st thing that comes to mind. And the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th – get the obvious out of the way. Surprise yourself.
13. Give your characters opinions. Passive/malleable might seem likable to you as you write, but it's poison to the audience.
14. Why must you tell THIS story? What's the belief burning within you that your story feeds off of? That's the heart of it.
15. If you were your character, in this situation, how would you feel? Honesty lends credibility to unbelievable situations.
16. What are the stakes? Give us reason to root for the character. What happens if they don't succeed? Stack the odds against.
17. No work is ever wasted. If it's not working, let go and move on – it'll come back around to be useful later.
18. You have to know yourself: the difference between doing your best & fussing. Story is testing, not refining.
19. Coincidences to get characters into trouble are great; coincidences to get them out of it are cheating.
20. Exercise: take the building blocks of a movie you dislike. How'd you rearrange them into what you DO like?
21. You gotta identify with your situation/characters, can't just write 'cool'. What would make YOU act that way?
22. What's the essence of your story? Most economical telling of it? If you know that, you can build out from there.

Creative Leadership Roles

Once your first script draft is completed, your film doesn't just need a writer: it needs a creative leadership team!

The writer creates the story.



Here's a story!

WRITER

Here's how we'll tell it.

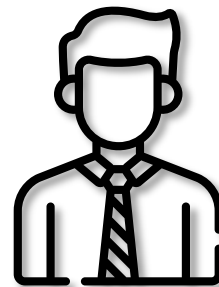
The director creates the film from the screenplay.



DIRECTOR

Here's how we'll make it happen.

The producer makes sure the movie gets made.



PRODUCER

Director Name

Producer Name

Visual Storytelling

Visual storytelling is the process of communicating ideas, emotions, and information through images rather than words.

By carefully choosing what the audience sees, filmmakers can reveal character, mood, relationships, and story without needing dialogue.

“Show, don’t tell.”



Take some time to review the scenes in your script.

- Is all of the dialogue required?
- Could you communicate some of the information by showing instead?

Part of Visual storytelling is the hierarchy and composition of the frame.

Consider:

- What do you want the audience to notice?
- How do you want them to notice it?
- What should they notice first?
- What should they notice second?

YOU *At some point you may come back to read this line.*

WILL READ

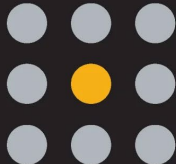
THIS FIRST.

And then you will read this line next.

You will go back and read this body copy if you want to know more.
Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit at consectetur.

This is why it's important to draw attention to your message using visual hierarchy.

You'll probably read this before the paragraph.



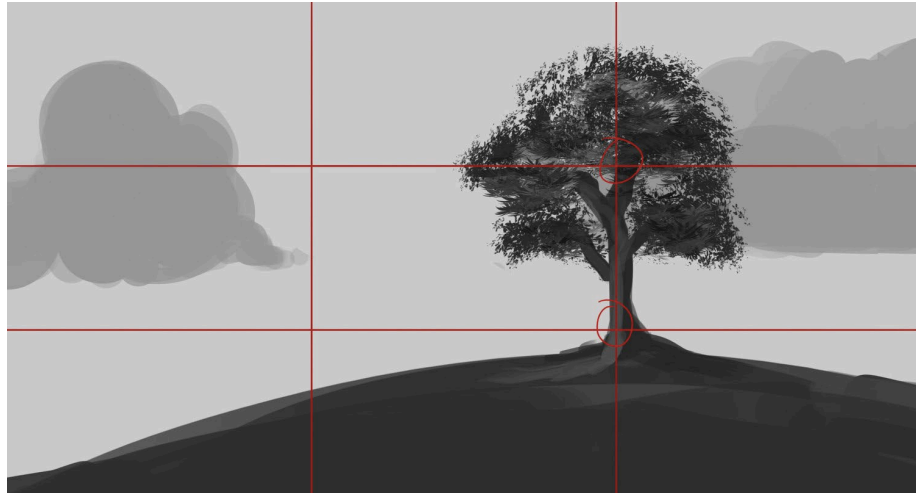
Example A

Example B



Tricks of the trade

The Rule of Thirds



The rule of thirds is an effective way to frame the elements in your scene so that the resulting image is much more visually captivating.

Leading Lines



If you have ever seen a photograph or a shot in a film and found your eyes wandering across the frame only to land at something significant... odds are, leading lines were used to direct your attention.

Tricks of the trade

Negative Space



What about the space around the subject? That seemingly “empty” area, often overlooked, is what we call negative space, and it’s one of the most powerful, yet subtle, tools in your visual storytelling arsenal.

Symmetry



The visual nature of symmetrical balance draws attention toward itself. While this can take away from the naturalism or realism of a composition, it can be an effective tool at directing the viewer’s eye toward a specific focal point.

Script Breakdown

Creating a script breakdown is when you tag various “elements” in a scene to better understand its shooting requirements.

SCRIPT BREAKDOWN CATEGORIES

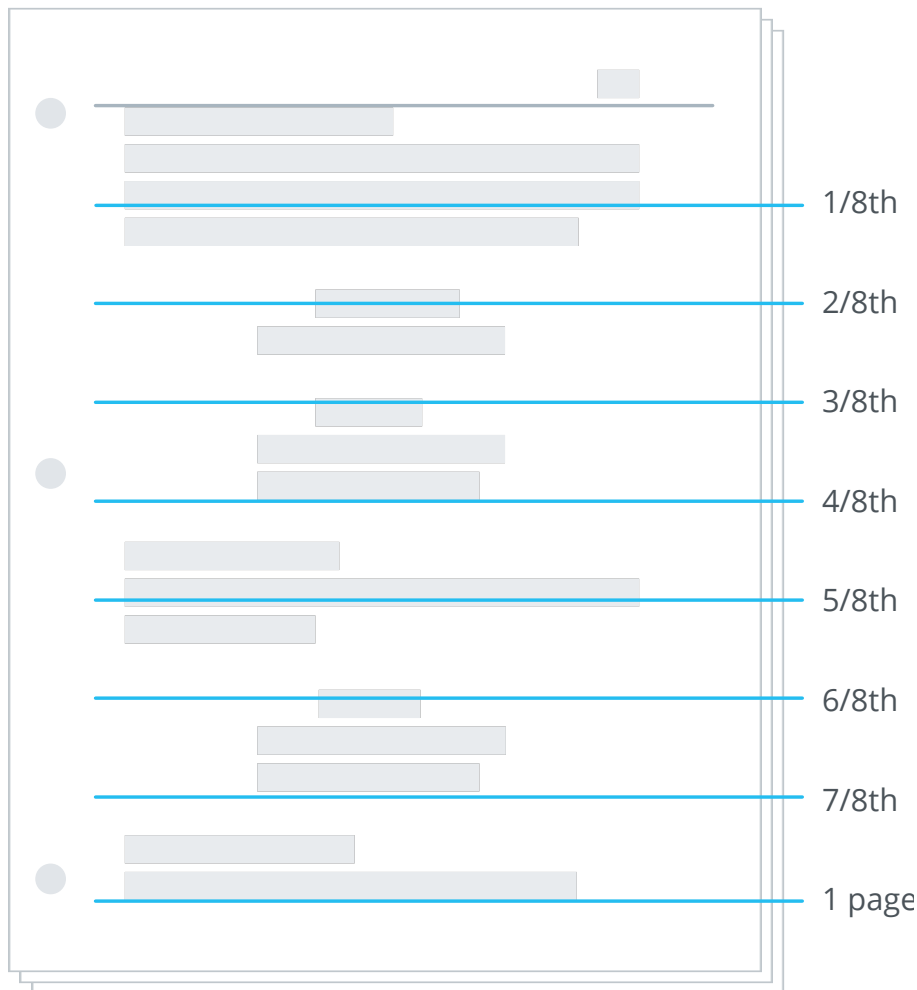


Industry standard script breakdown colors.

- **Cast** - Characters in your script that speak at some point during the movie.
- **Extras** - Characters who don't speak in the entire film.
- **Props** - If a character interacts with an object in the scene, that object is a prop.
- **Costumes** – What your characters are wearing.
- **Makeup** - Unusual makeup (prosthetics, wounds, etc).
- **Vehicles** - Cars, trucks, motorcycles, boats, or any large object that could transport characters or objects within a scene.
- **Stunts** - Stunts require extra equipment and personnel.
- **SPFX** - Effects that are achieved on-set, rather than during post-production.
- **Livestock** - Big animals that might require their own vehicle to transport to and from the set.
- **Wrangler** - Dogs, cats, and other small creatures that could be brought to set by their handlers.

Script Breakdown

Start breaking down your script into 8ths!



Marking 1/8s of a page is exactly like it sounds. Divide every page into eight, 1-inch parts. This measurement is used to estimate the screen time and shooting time for a scene.

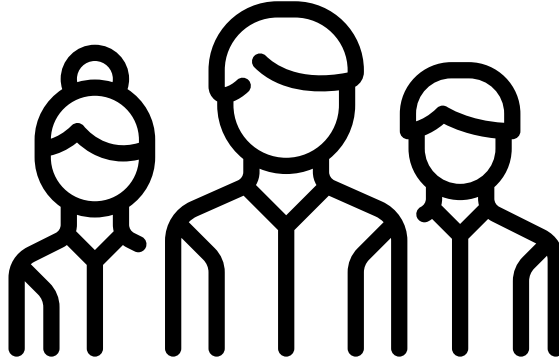
Page 1/8ths are usually visible on the top of your scene breakdown sheets, shot lists, and shooting schedule.

Traditionally, an Assistant Director would measure by eyeballing the script or taking actual printed script pages, a pen, and a ruler to mark 8ths.

On a typical dialogue-heavy indie production, you can expect to shoot roughly five pages per day where one page equals one minute of screen time.

Script Breakdown

This is likely the point in time that you can select and engage the rest of your crew.



They will need to help you begin to plan for the elements that fall within their role. You may need to assign the same person to multiple categories.

Category	Responsible Person
Cast	
Extras	
Props	
Costumes	
Makeup	
Vehicles	
Stunts	
SFX	
Livestock	
Wrangler	

Cinematography

Cinematography is the art of using cameras, lenses, movement, and light to shape how the audience experiences a story.

ANGLE	SHOT SIZE	MOTION
 eye level	 close up, extreme	 360-degree
 dutch	 medium shot	 zoom
 low angle	 long shot, extreme	 pan, tilt
 high angle, top angle	 single, two, three shot	 dolly, crane
 over the shoulder	 POV	 random

Cinematography involves controlling light, camera movement, framing, composition, lens choice, and exposure to create the look and emotional tone of a film.

In practice, cinematography combines creative decision-making with technical execution, shaping how an audience experiences a story moment by moment.

Cinematography

Camera Level & Shot Size



Camera Movement

