

# Annotated screenplay—how to format a screenplay correctly using Word

It is industry standard to start with the editing cue, FADE IN: Editing cues are aligned left, but this opening one is the exception.

To ensure the margins are correct keep these pegs at 0—15 respectively. If you are having a problem with tabbing the dialogue check they've not moved.

Page numbers can either be top right or bottom right. No page numbers on the title page. The first page of your script is page 1. Go to the insert tab in Word to add page numbers.

**Slugline** is always in CAPITAL LETTERS. An abbreviation of exterior or interior followed by a full stop. A brief description of the location and then a dash (-) followed by the time of day. Some writers like to put the slugline in bold, but I prefer not to.

FADE IN:  
EXT. EDGE OF PLAYGROUND - DAY  
We are at the edge of an empty school playing field, presumably after school. Next to a chain-link fence is NICK, a scowling 10-year-old boy, who wears a school uniform. He appears to have wooden legs. From his hinged knees are some protruding strings leading to traditional crosses of wood, similar to those found on marionettes. These crosses and strings have been tangled around the fence and NICK is stuck. Every so often a ball flies into frame, hitting the fence perilously close to NICK. We soon see who is kicking the ball. It is ROB, also 10, dressed in the same school uniform. He wears Reebok Classics with foil spurs, a large cowboy hat and is looking down, so the brim hides his face. His friends stand behind him in V-formation, all laughing at NICK. He kicks the ball at NICK again, missing by a little. Over this scene, we hear NICK talking to his THERAPIST. ROB slowly lifts his head and we see his face. He is staring evilly at NICK and appears to be chewing tobacco, or maybe gum.

After a slugline there is almost always a concentrated block of **stage directions**. They are written in the present tense. Stage directions set the scene and introduce characters. Characters names are always in capital letters. Some writers like stage directions to be in *italics*, but it is a personal preference.

**Characters' names** are always in capital letters and centre aligned.

**Dialogue** is always left aligned and then tabbed (pressing the tab key) x3 or x4.

Use the cursor at the beginning of your sentence to do this.



NICK  
(O.S.)  
His name's Rob Forrest. It's nothing I can't handle.

THERAPIST  
(O.S.)  
You say that Nick, but it's obviously having an effect on you...

**Parenthesis** or brackets can be used to either tell the reader / actor that it is voice over (V.O.) or off screen (O.S.).

During this exchange ROB has been lining up the ball as though he is about to take an important penalty. With a particular malicious look at NICK he kicks the ball hard and with accuracy. The CAMERA focus in tight on a CLOSE UP of NICK. At the moment of impact, we snap to the next scene...

It can also be used to add emotion or emphasis- (Sad) or (Angry) etc.

Unless you are writing a shooting script, most writers don't reference technical attributes such as **camera cues** or non diegetic **music**. If however you wish to do so, make it clear in the stage directions, by using capital letters for camera info and 'inverted commas' for song titles.

CUT TO:  
INT THERAPIST'S OFFICE - DAY  
...Where the THERAPIST sits behind a desk.  
THERAPIST  
...After all, you are awfully jaded for a ten-year-old.

**Editing cues** are right aligned, in capital letters, with a colon:

A good rule for a writer to consider is "show, don't tell". If you have a character that is sad or upset— don't tell the reader / actor in the stage directions — show that the character is sad / upset in the stage directions. Show it cinematically using the mise en scene.

**Line spacing** should be consistent throughout. Don't over use the enter / return key. Line spacing should be 1.15 or 1.5. 2.0 is too far apart.

**Font** is always Courier New, size 12. An A4 page with correct font and font size roughly equals a minute of screen time.

Left, centre, right and justify alignment options.

