

FADE IN:

INT. LECTURE THEATRE - DAY

MIK, a geek-bearded lecturer, stands by a lectern as he addresses a room full of STUDENTS.

MIK

Okay, screenplay formatting might sound like the least important part of the screen-writing process.

Mik pauses for effect as he scans the faces of his students.

MIK (CONT'D)

(Suddenly bellowing)

But it's not!

Mik pauses to sip from the glass of water by his notes before handing a large pile of script handouts to the groups. The students open them up as he continues.

MIK (CONT'D)

In the real world any script not formatted correctly will be treated as if it's the work of an amateur and will likely not be read. So dialogue, scene headings and action must be presented correctly. This is not negotiable.

JAKE, a hung-over looking student in an Arcade Fire T-shirt raises his hand.

JAKE

But what if it's a great script? Then how it's formatted shouldn't matter.

MIK

But it does matter. If you're giving professional script readers an excuse to dismiss your writing automatically then, nine out of ten times, they will.

JAKE

Bummer.

MIK

You will notice that every scene begins with a Scene-Heading or Header.

(MORE)

MIK (CONT'D)

This tells us where we are, and if it's an exterior or interior shot. INT or EXT, followed by a full stop. After one space the location is described. There's then a space-hyphen-space before the scene is marked as day or night.

Mik pauses, staring off into the middle distance, lost in thought. A BORED GIRL, chewing bubble gum and idly glancing at her phone, blows a large bubble. It ruptures with a loud SNAP. Mik blinks, returning to Planet Earth...

MIK (CONT'D)

You'll also note that action is written in the present tense. That every new character's name is written in UPPER-CASE. And dialogue is placed in a central column beneath the character's name. There are specific spacing requirements regarding dialogue but, if you're using software like Final Draft or the popular free package Celtx that formatting is automatic.

Mik pauses to catch his breath. The fluorescent lights above flicker on and off.

MIK (CONT'D)

I'll not bore you by speaking in Inches and Tabs. Now, if there's a break in dialogue but no change in whose speaking you should add CONT'D in brackets like so.

Mik looks up at the flickering lights.

MIK (CONT'D)

And if somebody is acting in a specific manner when speaking you need to add that information as a parenthetical note. That is the screen direction for that particular line is placed above the dialogue and placed in parenthesis.

JAKE

(Confused)

Sorry what?

MIK

Exactly!

MIK (CONT'D)

And it's important that you have your margins set correctly. Left, 1.5 inches. Right, 1.0 inches. Top, 1.0 inches to the body, 0.5 inches to the number. Bottom, 0.5 to 1.5 inches. That's to allow enough space for binding. Make your margins too small and the edges of your pages will be harder to read and the whole thing will be impossible to photocopy too. Again, screen-writing software will have these as the default settings. Don't tamper with them.

JAKE

But can we use any font we want? I love Times New Roman. And Comics Sans.

Mik shakes his head wearily and takes another sip of water before continuing.

MIK

No, it has to be Courier, 12 point, 10 pitch. The software you'll be using may offer other fonts but Courier is the industry standard.

JAKE

What about bolds and italics?

MIK

Nope.

JAKE

(Weeping)

Rules, so many rules.

Jakes runs SCREAMING from his chair and heads straight for the fire exit. Mik gives chase following him out into:

EXT. ALLEY-WAY - DAY

A rubbish strewn-side street, walls plastered with fading bill posters. Jake knocks a bin over as he flees. Mik leaps over it as he follows.

MIK

Yeah, we're on page 3 now. You have to put page numbers up in the upper right hand corner.

Jake accelerates, hauling ass down the alley. Mik is gaining on him.

JAKE  
Leave me alone!

MIK  
No dice, punk! You'll also note that simply by changing the scene heading we've moved the action to another location.

INT. MOJAVE DESERT - DAY

Jake stares around in utter bewilderment.

JAKE  
How the hell did I get here?

Mik appears from behind a rock

MIK  
Simple. There was another cut. Now we're somewhere else. It used to be customary to add CUT TO as a transition between scenes. These days that's no longer the fashion. We can logically infer that one scene will cut to another.

JAKE  
Okay, I get it. But what if we want to stay here and move forward in time? Like maybe an hour from now when you've stopped speaking.

EXT. MOJAVE DESERT - DAY - LATER

MIK  
Yeah, we do that. That's exactly what we do. Now if you want the transition to have a major impact you can add CUT TO but it will need to be for a specific effect. Maybe sudden ironic juxtaposition.

JAKE  
Like what?

MIK

For example what if I told you  
we're 150 miles from the nearest  
town and we'll die of heat  
exhaustion if we don't stay  
hydrated but I've only brought  
enough water for one of us.

Jake's brow furrows as he ponders this news. Mik smiles  
nervously.

CUT TO:

Mik rolls along the ground and groans in agony, his face  
bruised watching as Jake, water canteen in his hand, runs  
gleefully away.

FADE OUT:

THE END