

Screenwriting Basics

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Humans have an almost unreasonable and insatiable craving for stories. They surround us night and day, every day of the week. The stories. At home, work, school, parties, malls, diners... People are always narrating and listening to anecdotes and chronicles. It may be something as notorious as the Madoff scandal or as trivial as a mean cab driver who refused to give the right change. Regardless of their nature, relevance, or truthfulness, stories have permeated society. And we love them. Movies tell stories, so we love them as well.

In filmmaking, the story is first developed in the screenplay. Every movie, short or feature, starts with a script – the blueprint for the construction of the motion picture. The screenplay furnishes the framework for every movie production; it is the basis for the decisions made from the early stages of **pre-production** to the final phase of **post-production**.

The Process

Writing a screenplay is no easy task, especially features. Those blank sheets of paper are intimidating. Characters, locations, plot, genres... The variables are one too many.

Attempting to follow a current trend is usually a big mistake and a waste of time. Today's gold is tomorrow's trash. Plus, after you take the time to write and sell it, the producers will take from several months to a few years to actually finish the movie. By then, there will be another demand in town.

If you have an original story that is remarkably executed, buyers will come sooner or later. Rule #1 is to be true to yourself. Don't write a screenplay because you think it will sell, and you need money. Write it because you love the story and characters. Write it because you want to entertain or instruct or move an audience.

The Rules

Screenwriting has no hard and fast rules, not even the one mentioned above, so ignore it if you want. Writing for the screen is a subjective craft in which anything might work, but probably nothing will. William Goldman said: "Nobody knows anything." That is the greatest truth in the business.

However, in the absence of rules, we're left with the norm – a set of guidelines that has proved valuable and efficient throughout the years of filmmaking. The main concepts to fathom are: the [3-act structure](#) and [character arc](#). Those two are standard in the industry, followed practically by every movie, both commercial and independent. Another nugget of knowledge is high-concept, though those are much rarer to find.