

Screenwriter

Cadette *aMAZE* badge

When it thrills, makes you laugh, or has a fantastic twist, a movie or TV show can seem like magic. And a great show starts with a great script! Screenwriters write scripts meant to be filmed. In this badge, put all your viewing experience to good use – let it inspire you as you try your hand at writing for the big (or small) screen.

Steps

1. Decide what makes a good script good
2. Come up with an idea for a story
3. Get to know your characters
4. Build the plot
5. Write a 12-page script – and share it!

Purpose

When I've earned this badge, I'll know how to create a screenplay for a show or movie.

TIP: In general, one page of script equals about one minute of film. It depends on how much action is on the page and how the director and the actors interpret the words.

The Elevator Pitch

Hollywood writers often have an “elevator pitch” – a quick and flashy summary of their script in case they run into a producer. If you had 12 seconds in an elevator with the CEO of XYZ Studios, what would you say to make her read your script before all the others in the pile on her desk? Creating an elevator pitch is a great way to test whether your story idea sounds exciting enough to pursue.

Step 1 Decide what makes a good script good

In this step, think about the movies or television shows you love most. Then examine them for clues as to what makes them work. Look beyond the actors, and focus instead on the characters' worlds, the scenery changes, and the situations though which the screenwriter puts the characters – and how all three elements work together.

CHOICES – DO ONE:

Watch one movie or three shows in your favorite genre. (A genre is a category, like adventure, comedy or drama.) Take notes on how at least three elements, such as the ones mentioned above, make things entertaining. Refer to them for inspiration while working on your own script.

FOR MORE FUN: Analyze one movie or three shows you don't find entertaining. Looking at what doesn't work can be as helpful as concentrating on what does. If you could remake a film or show to make it more entertaining, what would you do differently? Add a talking cat? Make the main character obsessed with chocolate?

OR

Host a script-dissection part with friends. Watch one movie or three shows in the same genre, then discuss and write down what everyone likes and doesn't like about the script.

OR

Read two scripts. What better way to learn the craft of writing for the screen than by reading a real script? Look for the scripts of your favorite shows or movies, or scripts from shows you've never seen. Ask a librarian for help or team up with an adult to look online. You can also find examples in books about screenwriting.

More to Explore

Pretend you're a Girl Scout in 1940. As girls did to earn their Dramatic Appreciation badge, find out several ways in which styles have changed in both the writing and the acting of plays for motion pictures.

Step 2 Come up with an idea for a story

Most tales have a beginning that introduces the situation a middle that builds on the story until it reaches a climax, and an ending that shows how everything turns out. Before you can write any of these pieces, you need a basic idea to build your script around.

CHOICES - DO ONE:

Look into your own life. Have you had an adventure that could be made into a movie? Did something hysterically funny happen at school? Is there a great family story your relatives tell every time they get together? Any of these could be the seed of a great script.

OR

Add to a story you already know. Choose a fairy tale, book, or nursery rhyme and tell how the characters got there or what happened later. How did the old woman end up living in a shoe? After Dorothy, who was the next adventurer in the Land of Oz?

OR

Play Story Maker. Divide at least 24 index cards or slips of paper into two piles, one for characters and one for situations/settings. Write an idea on each (you can start with the ideas on the chart). Then draw two from the character pile and one from the situations/settings pile and see if they spark any story ideas.

Story Maker Starters

Characters

coffee barista
storm chaser
undiscovered singing sensation
parade pooper scooper
cheerleader hopeful

Add your own!

Situations/Settings

taking a driving test
boarding an airplane
playing in a dodge ball tournament
getting a speeding ticket
checking into a hotel in a foreign country

Step 3 Get to know your characters

Whatever your story idea, you'll need a protagonist and an antagonist. Get to know them by writing a one-page description of each. Use one of these choices to add details, from their hobbies to their jobs to their postures and the sound of their voices. The boxes at the bottom of the page might help you get started.

Protagonists and Antagonists

Protagonist: The main character, good or bad. Their story moves the action along.

Antagonist: The person or situation who gets in the way of the protagonist's dreams or schemes.

Some protagonists, like Nancy Drew or Wonder Woman, have a new antagonist with each adventure. And some antagonists are nonhuman, such as diseases, bad habits, or natural disasters.

Examples:

- Harry Potter and Voldemort
- Red Riding Hood and the Wolf
- Student athlete and insomnia
- Superman and Lex Luthor
- Climber and Mt. Everest

CHOICES – DO ONE:

Spend some time people watching. Take notes on what people wear, how they act, and what they say at school, the library, a coffee shop, or a park. Then, choose three or four details from your observations to make part of your characters' personalities and life stories.

OR

Add Exaggerate details about people with whom you're familiar. Perhaps you know someone who loves red; maybe your character wears only red velvet suits. Or your local newscaster speaks loudly – your character might insist on speaking through a megaphone wherever she goes.

OR

Add Mix and match. Take three aspects of people or characters you know and combine them to round out your characters. Your protagonist could have a celebrity's curly hair, a friend's dream of being a pilot, and a neighbor's habit of eating a peanut butter sandwich every day at noon.

Name _____

What the character wants: _____

Distinguishing details: _____

Careers to Explore

Screenwriters write for:

Television
Movies
Video games
Smartphone apps
Webisodes
Podcasts
Audio dramas

In many genres:

Comedy
Drama
Documentary (voice-over and narration is scripted)
Biography
Newscasts
Educational
Action/adventure

Musical
Industrial how-to
Commercial
Religious
Crime/mystery
Family
Animation
Science fiction
Fantasy

Step 4 Build the plot

You have a story idea and characters. Now you need a plot! A plot is an outline of the situations your protagonist will face. A protagonist's circumstances generally grow more dire as the story unfolds toward the climax, where the protagonist faces their most difficult challenge. (That challenge usually involves something the antagonist said or did!) The chart on the last page will help you with this step.

CHOICES - DO ONE:

Fill out the worksheet using your imagination. Challenge yourself to find all the plot twists in the creative corners of your mind.

OR

Add Find your plot twists in the news. How are protagonists and antagonists acting and reacting in newspapers or magazines? Collect three editions and hut through their pages for plot ideas.

OR

Add Use plot twists from a familiar story. Think about the twists from other stories. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Romeo misses a very important message from Juliet. In *Up*, the boy accidentally ends up in a flying house. You could even put twists from two or three different stories.

Tips

- If your story idea is from real life, you'll want to make sure it has enough plot points to make an interesting screenplay.
- Remember, your story is meant for the screen. So, you'll want to think about what kinds of conflicts would be interesting to *watch* not just read about.

Step 5 Write a 12-page script – and share it

It's time to put everything together! Screenplays include not only dialogue, but also descriptions of action that clarify how the scene is intended to look on-screen. See the example below for what details to include. Then pick one choice and write your script.

CHOICES – DO ONE:

Work solo. Some writers prefer to work their magic alone! If that's you share your script when you're finished perhaps by reading it aloud at a group meeting. You could ask other girls to read different parts.

OR

Add Work with a friend. Two minds can take creativity to a whole new level – and it's fun to try out dialogue as you go along. If your friend is another Cadette earning her Screenwriter badge, try to write a 24-page script.

OR

Add Work with a mentor. Perhaps a playwright director, or actor; an English or drama teacher; or a film or drama student at a local college would be willing to help? Ask your mentor to give you feedback on your pages.

More to Explore

Make a movie. Cast actors and film your screenplay. You can learn how in the [Digital Movie Maker badge](#).

The Screenplay Form

Screenplays are written in a very precise format that includes information for the actor, the director, and the camera people.

SLUG LINES tell where and when each scene takes place. Use a new one whenever time or location changes. "INT" is used for interior scenes, and "EXT" for exterior. Time is usually DAY or NIGHT.

INT. BIG TOWN THEATER—DAY

Shy Understudy paces across the stage, shouting into her cell phone. Behind her, a carpenter is building the set, HAMMERING.

SHY UNDERSTUDY

Mom, I can't believe Wanda is
sick! She won't be back for
three whole weeks.

(listens)

My big chance? Yeah, but
everyone will be watching me.
I wish I'd never agreed to be an
Understudy. Why did you make me?

ACTION:

Describe what's happening on-screen.

Capitalize **SOUND EFFECTS** to be added to the sound track.

Indent **DIALOGUE** to set it apart from the action.

Capitalize and center the **CHARACTER** name over their dialogue.

Put **STAGE DIRECTIONS** for the actor in parentheses.

Five Parts of a Plot

Most movie scripts are fewer than 130 pages. That translates into approximately an hour and a half of screen time. If you're telling your story in a 12-minute film, write a 12-page script. You might want to pace it like this.

Background Info: We meet the protagonist, and find out her general circumstances and goals.

EXAMPLE: The understudy who's painfully shy and doesn't want to go onstage.

My Plot Notes:

The Kickoff Incident: Our hero is launched into her story whether she likes it or not.

EXAMPLE: The lead actor gets the flu; the understudy must take over the starring role.

My Plot Notes:

The Lead-up: Most of your action happens here as your plot twists unfold, your characters develop, and your story moves toward the climax.

EXAMPLE: The understudy develops a stutter and keeps messing up her lines - until the stage manager (on whom she has a crush) starts helping her.

My Plot Notes:

The Climax: The moment when the hero shows the world - and herself - what she's got.

EXAMPLE: On opening night, the stage manager is sick. But against all odds, the show must go on!

My Plot Notes:

The Wrap-up: The tying up of loose ends.

EXAMPLE: The show gets terrible reviews, but our hero and the stage manager find happiness together.

My Plot Notes:

Add the Badge to Your Journey

For step 2, come up with an idea for a story about navigating the maze of relationship issues in your life. Some of your characters could then try the skills you're explored in *Justice* to get through the plot twists in their lives.

Not that I've earned this badge, I can give service by:

- Teaching a younger girl about the plot elements of her favorite show
- Sharing my screenplay with my school's theater department
- Creating a script with a message that I want to spread

I'm inspired to.