

What's coming up...

There will be a couple of exercises, and then we'll be into creative writing. The course is based on twelve weekly assignments where you will write a short script in response to a given brief, and a major project – an original short film script.

So let's get right into it...

Format

Format is something to be taken seriously.

Occasionally you'll see books that say that the format is not so important, and they have a point. No one is ever going to look at your screenplay and say, "Gee this story is really great. It grabbed me right from the start, and I couldn't put it down. It would make a great movie! Shame there are so many errors in the format. We'll have to pass on it."

And this is true - if you do write a great screenplay no one will reject it because it is in the wrong font, spelled wrong, or typed in ALL CAPS.

But no one will read it either.

Every now and again someone sends me a script that they'd like me to help shoot. Often these are in a font like this (Gill Sans) or in Times, and if they are, they are usually in some weird format that the writer made up themselves.

And I do try to read them. Even though the overall look screams "amateur hour" I try to give them a fair chance. But I'm already looking for problems. So many of the scripts look like they are going to be nightmares to shoot because the writer just doesn't know what they are doing. My impression of the script is already coloured.

I'm generous. I don't get a dozen scripts a week. If I did get more scripts I know what I'd be doing with the ones that looked unprofessional. They'd go at the bottom of that pile of stuff that I'll get around to one day. In a decade or two.

So get the format right, not only for that reason but because a properly formatted script runs about a page to a minute of screen time – really useful to keep track of how long your movie might be. Also, when you get used to it, a properly formatted script is easier to read. I'm going to be reading all your work, so please make it easy for me 😊

The long and the short of it is in the following script, that can also be downloaded from the address at its top. I have adjusted it slightly for A4 paper as it's written for the American size. This will tell you everything you need to know about format.

The information regarding the margins is not relevant since it refers to US paper sizes, and you can use the Format script document to format your script much more easily anyway. This is a word file that contains the correct formatting for a screenplay. The page-a-minute guidelines refer to US letter pages that don't hold quite as much as an A4, and to Windows fonts, which are slightly different in size to Mac fonts. Having said that, I found the time estimation to be fairly accurate even though I'm using A4 on a Mac.

Coming up there's a script that details everything you ever needed to know about the standard script format.

NOTE: At the end of the format script is your first weekly task, designed to make sure you picked up all the info in the format script.