

# Film Script Terminology

Action description:	In film or television script. Concise, vivid description of what happens in a scene and where it occurs.
Antagonist:	The character determined to prevent the protagonist/hero/main character from achieving her/his goal.
Characters:	The fictional people in a screenplay.
Camera script:	A television script to which the director has added his camera directions. Usually only distributed to the cameramen.
Docudrama:	A dramatisation or re-enactment using actors but based on actual events using authentic detail background.
Documentary:	A programme based on fact and using 'actuality' - material shot at the actual event.
Drama:	A play for stage, film, radio or videotape, in which a protagonist struggles against an antagonist to reach a goal. Also a story told by actors using actions and dialogue.
Establishing shot:	Camera shot which establishes the relationships between the setting and elements of the scene, including characters.
Ext.	Exterior. Scene with an outside location.
Fade in:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Sound gradually rises from nothing to normal level.</li><li>2. Image gradually becomes fades in from black screen. Not usually written in unless a particular effect is desired.</li></ol>
Fade out:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Sound becomes gradually fainter.</li><li>2. Image fades to black. Only write in for a particular effect.</li></ol>
Idea or concept:	A sentence or two encapsulating the essential elements of the film or programme.
Int.	Interior. Scene with an indoor location.
Montage:	A rapid series of shots, usually around a central theme and often accompanied by music eg. the falling in love montage.
Outline:	A summary of the plot of drama, written in the present tense and without dialogue. It should set out the story structure clearly and is the basis for the script.
POV:	Point of view. A shot from a specific character's perspective.

Protagonist:	The main character/hero whose needs and desires set the drama in motion and propel it to the climax and resolution.
Scene:	A dramatic unit which deals with a single event, has a clear aim or purpose in the narrative, and unity of time and place. If there is a change of time or place begin a new scene.
Scene breakdown:	The stage in a TV script between the Outline and the Script. The Outline is divided into individual scenes which are summarised.
Script:	Usually a manuscript or screenplay. The blueprint for production. A good script is essential for a successful programme and provides the inspiration, structure and guidelines for the production.
Script formats:	Layout and style details which vary with different media, genres and production house requirements.
Serial:	The never-ending story. Episodes of a continuing drama with familiar characters and multiple plotlines eg. Soap opera.
Series:	Drama with an ongoing theme or story and main characters. However the major narrative of each episode is resolved eg. Situation comedy.
Setting:	The location where the action takes place.
Sequence:	A series of linked scenes dealing with a section of the story eg. the opening sequence.
SFX:	Sound effects. An important mood setting device for radio and the screen.
Shooting script:	The last stage of a film script before shooting. Written by the Director from the writer's script and consisting of shots rather than scenes.
Slug line:	A director to the actor, in brackets, at the beginning of or within the dialogue. Use with discretion.
Synopsis:	See Outline.
Teaser:	Dramatic pre-title sequence which 'hooks' audience attention, encouraging them to watch the rest of the programme.
Three Act structure:	The classic dramatic structure- beginning, middle and end.
Titles:	

Opening sequence showing the title of the film or programme, and names of stars, director, producer and writer. See Credits.

The basic transitions from one scene to another are:

- **cuts** - instantaneous changes from one scene to the next, as in "Cut to...."
- **lap-dissolves**, also called **dissolves** - where two scenes momentarily overlap during a transition from one to the other
- **fade-out** and **fade-in** -- fade-out consists of a two-or three-second transition from a picture to black and silence; and, of course, a fade-in is the opposite

Traditionally, screenplays (dramatic film scripts) start with *fade in* and close with *fade out*. Fade-ins and fade-outs within the production can signal a major change or division within the story structure, such as a passage of time.

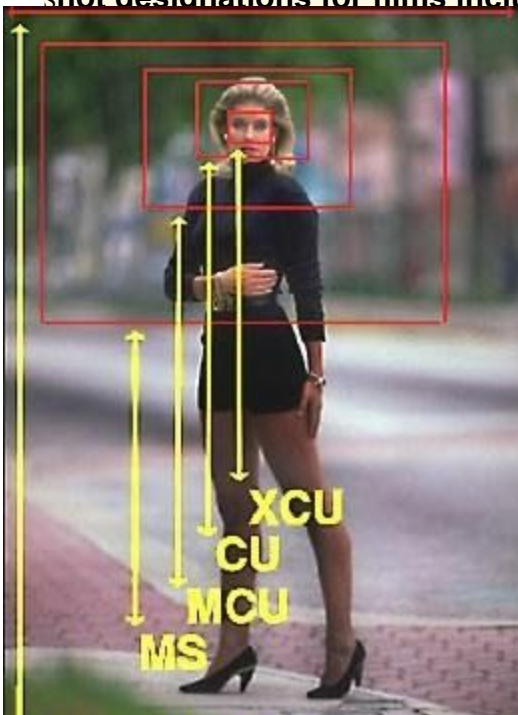
An **insert shot** is a close-up of something within the scene. For example, after a man looks at his watch, you might see a cut to close-up of the watch where you can clearly see the time.

A **cutaway** is a related shot that is "away" from the basic scene. During a basketball game you might "cut away" from the game to a shot of the cheerleaders, the coach, or cheering fans.

When the entire camera is moved toward or away from the subject, it's referred to as a **dolly**.

A **zoom**, which is an optical version of a dolly, achieves somewhat the same effect.

shot designations for films include:



With people, this is a shot from the top of their heads to at we've used a vertical rather than a horizontal format for this

by a shot from the waist up.

shot cropped between the shoulders and the belt line.

irable to catch changing facial expressions, which are sation.

eserved for dramatic impact. The XCU shot may show just the

so apply to objects, as in "close-up of toaster shows toast

An **establishing shot** is a wide shot (WS) or a long shot (LS). This type of shot gives an audience a basic orientation to the geography of a scene—who is where—after which there should be cuts to closer shots.

A **master shot** is similar to an establishing shot, but this term is generally reserved for the special needs of film. Once master shot action is filmed the scene is generally shot over again from different camera positions so that there are shots (especially close-ups) of each actor. Dialogue, and actor reactions and movements are repeated each time the camera is repositioned.

These scenes are referred to as **coverage**. Often, numerous **takes** (segments repeated with variations) are required before a director is satisfied.

A **two-shot** or **three-shot** (2-S and 3-S) designate shots of two or three people in one scene.

In addition to these basic script terms, there are a number of other abbreviations used in script writing.

- **EXT** and **INT** designations are commonly listed in film scripts to indicate exterior and interior settings.
- **VO (voice over)** refers to narration heard over a scene. It can also refer to narration heard at a higher level than a source of music or background sound.
- **POV (point of view)**. Screenplays will sometimes note that a shot will be seen from the point of view of a particular actor.
- **OS (shot-over-the-shoulder shot)**. The scene shows the back of one person's head and possibly one shoulder.
- **SFX (special effects)**. These may be audio special effects or visual effects—effects that alter reality and are created in the postproduction and editing phases.