

*SCREENWRITING /
PLAYWRITING
NOTES*



Act

A large division of a full-length play, separated from the other act or acts by an intermission.

Scene

Action taking place in one location and in a distinct time that (hopefully) moves the story to the next element of the story.

**To Quote Hamlet
Act III, Scene III
Line 87,**

"NO"

Intermission

A break between acts or scenes of the play to allow for set changes, and for the audience to go to the bathroom, stretch, and buy concessions.



Scene Heading

A short description of the location and time of day of a scene, also known as a "slugline."

For example: EXT. MOUNTAIN CABIN - DAY would denote that the action takes place outside a mountain cabin during daylight hours.

Centered, all CAPS heading at the start of an act or scene. Act numbers are written in Roman numerals, scene numbers in ordinals.

INT. VILLAIN'S LAIR - DAY

ADAM enters through the concealed hatch behind the bookcase and steps up to his COMMAND CONSOLE, a 7-monitor Mac setup atop a cabinet of blinking lights.

ADAM
(laughing to himself)
Our vast media conspiracy is just
days away from taking over the
world.

A static-y silhouette appears on the LARGE MONITOR that hangs over the bookcase.

SILHOUETTE
The last flash-drive is in place,
Master...

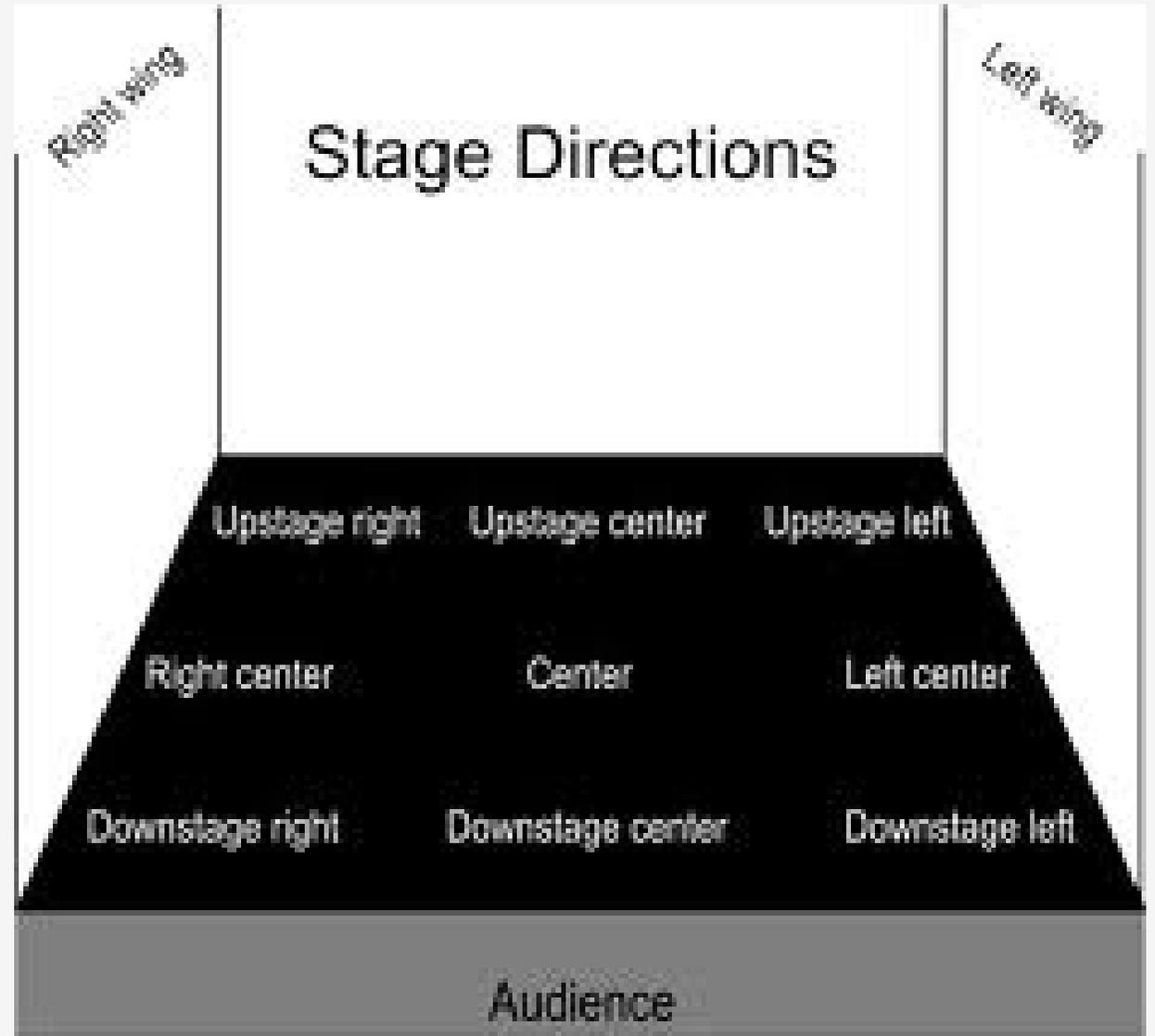
CUT TO:

EXT. AIRCRAFT CARRIER - DAY

The flight deck is a beehive of activity.

Stage Directions

In a stage play, the instructions in the text for the actors (e.g. entrances, exit, significant actions or business) and stage crew (e.g. lights fade).



Script

The blueprint or roadmap that outlines a movie story through visual descriptions, actions of characters and their dialogue. The term "script" also applies to stage plays as well.

Set

The physical elements that are constructed or arranged to create a sense of place.



Setting

The time and place of a play or screenplay

Character

Any personified entity appearing in a film or a play.

Character arc

The emotional progress of the characters during the story.

The Transformational Arc

Act I

Act II

Act III



Dara Marks

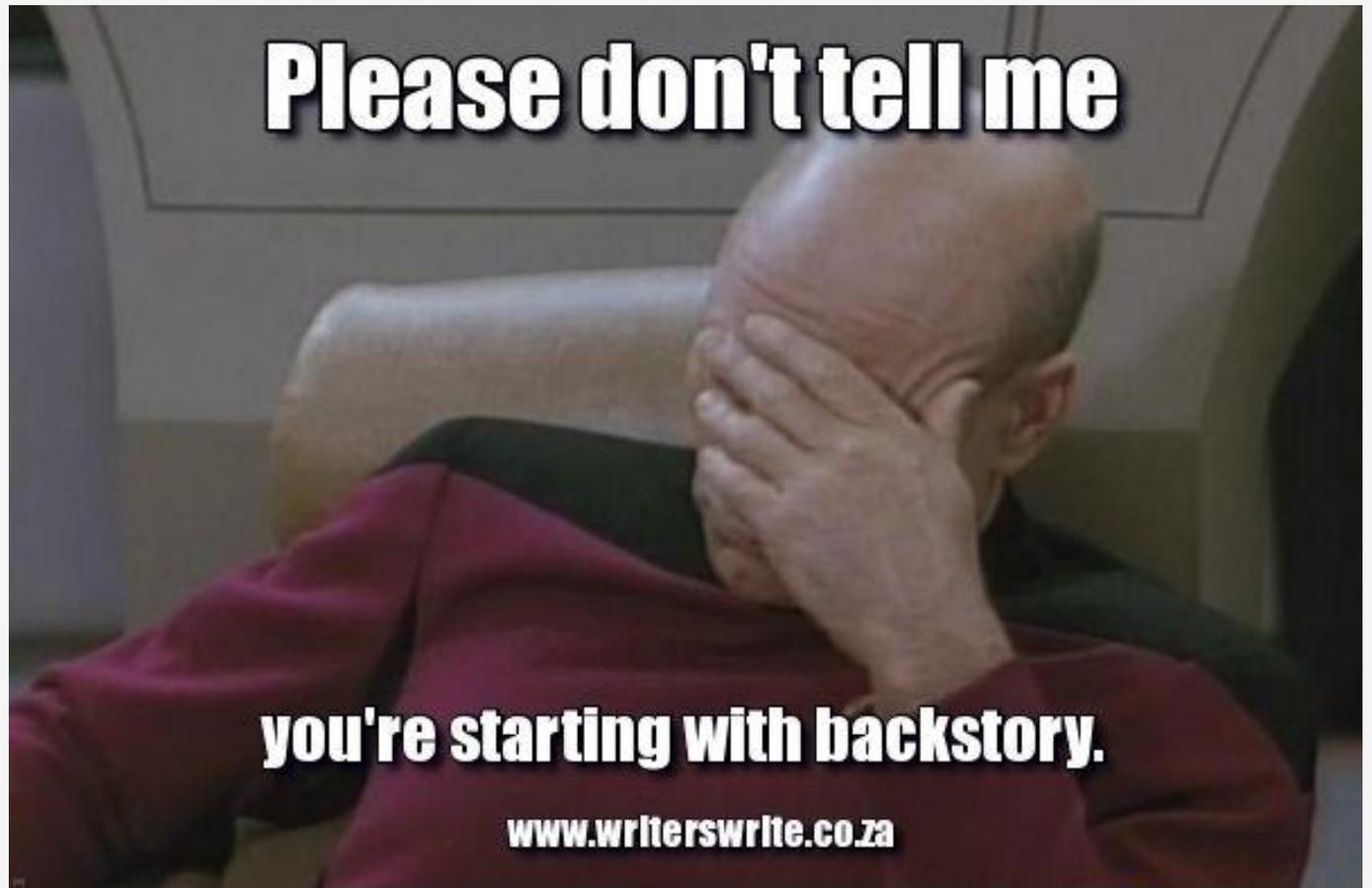
Inside Story: The Power of the Transformational Arc
805-640-1307 / dara@daramarks.com / www.DaraMarks.com

Event

What causes a play. For example, Big Daddy's birthday is the event in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.

Back Story

Experiences of a main character taking place prior to the main action, which contribute to character motivations and reactions.



Exposition

The first act of a dramatic structure, in which the main conflict and characters are revealed. Also, any information about the characters, conflict or world of the play.



Conflict

The heart of drama; someone wants something and people and things keep getting in the way of them achieving the goal. At times, the obstacles can be common to both the hero and villain, and the ultimate goal a worthy one for both parties.



Resolution

The third act of a dramatic structure, in which the conflict comes to some kind of conclusion: the protagonist either gets it or doesn't.

Reversal

A place in the plot where a character achieves the opposite of his aim, resulting in a change from good fortune to bad fortune.



FLASHBACK

A scene from the past that interrupts the action to explain motivation or reaction of a character to the immediate scene.



Establishing Shot

A cinematic shot that establishes a certain location or area.

Angle

A particular camera placement.

POV

Point of View; a camera angle placed so as to seem the camera is the eyes of a character.

FRAMING: ESTABLISHING SHOTS

An **ESTABLISHING SHOT** introduces a new location – a church, a city street, a rooftop, a hospital room – from a vantage point that allows the audience to see all the relevant characters in the filmic space.



ESTABLISHING SHOT in *Little Miss Sunshine* (2006) shows the entire family.

Shot

*What the camera sees.
For example,
TRACKING SHOT
would mean that the
camera is following a
character or character as
he walks in a scene.*

*WIDE SHOT would
mean that we see every
character that appears
in the scene, all at once.*



Close Up A very close camera angle on a character or object

FREEZE FRAME

The image on the screen stops, freezes and becomes a still shot.



Lights Fade

A common stage direction to end a scene or an act.

Blackout

A common stage direction at the end of a scene or an act.

EXAMPLE LIGHTING CUE SHEET

1,2,5+6 = No Gels 3+4 = Red Gels

LFX	CUE	LIGHTING OPERATOR'S NOTES	BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF LFX
LFX1	When all actors are in place and begin to laugh	F.U(3) 1, 2, 5 + 6 to level 10	The stage is filled with wash of light to show the merriment of the bar.
LFX2	When Billy the Kid is USC	C.F(2) 1,2, 5 + 6 TO 2,3,5 to level 10	A cross fade to show Billy has entered and is in a bad mood. The lights should be focussed on him.

Montage

A cinematic device used to show a series of scenes, all related and building to some conclusion.



SMASH CUT

A quick or sudden cut from one scene to another.

Transition

*A script notation denoting an editing transition within the telling of a story. For example, **DISSOLVE TO:** means the action seems to blur and refocus into another scene, and is generally used to denote a passage of time.*

INT. TUNNEL - NIGHT

John turns the corner, sweat dripping from his brow, now. Right then, and LOUD NOISE echoes behind him and John spins to see a RIFLE BUTT connecting with his face.

John crumbles to the ground, knocked-out cold.

FADE TO BLACK

FROM BLACK

INT. CAR TRUNK - NIGHT

John awakes with a START. As he gets his bearings, he checks his pockets. No cellphone. DULL VOICES leak in from the cab.

PAN

A camera direction indicating a stationary camera that pivots back and forth or up and down.



At Rise Description

A stage direction at the beginning of an act or a scene that describes what is on stage literally "at rise" of the curtain, or more commonly in contemporary theater, as the lights come up.



Cast

The characters who are physically present in the play or film. These are the roles for which actors will be needed. When we talk about a role in a stage play as being double-cast with another, it means that the same actor is expected to play both roles. This happens in film as well (e.g. Eddie Murphy), but only rarely.

Cast Page *A page that typically follows the Title Page of a play, listing the characters, with very brief descriptions of each.*



Character name

When any character speaks, his or her name appears on the line preceding the dialogue. In screenplays, the name is tabbed to a location that is roughly in the center of the line. In playwriting, typically the name is centered, but with the advent of screenwriting software that automatically positions the character name correctly, it has become acceptable to use a similar format for character names in stage plays.

INT. DON'S OFFICE - DAY

Hagen is alone in the office. He is drinking. He looks up at the sound of cars; the caporegimes are arriving. Then he hears footsteps.

The door opens and in a robe with slippers, Don Corleone slowly enters the room. He walks directly to his stuffed armchair and sits down. His face is stern as he looks into Hagen's eyes.

DON CORLEONE

Give me a drop of anisette.

Hagen rises, and pours a glass for the old man.

DON CORLEONE

My wife was weeping before she fell asleep, outside my window I saw my caporegimes to the house, and it is midnight. So, consigliere of mine, I think you should tell your Don what everyone knows.

HAGEN

(quietly)

I didn't tell mama anything. I was about to come up and wake you and tell you. Just now.

DON CORLEONE

But you need a drink first.

HAGEN

Yes.

DON CORLEONE

Now you've had your drink.

Pause.

HAGEN

They shot Sonny on the Causeway. He's dead.

Don Corleone blinks. One feels that just for a second he loses all physical strength; he clasps his hands in front of him on the top of the desk and looks into Hagen's eyes.

Dialogue The speeches between characters in a film or a play.

Continuing Dialogue
Dialogue spoken by the same character that continues uninterrupted onto the next page, marked with a (cont'd) in a stage play.

SAM
Are you thirsty?

SUZY
No.

SAM
Well, if your throat gets parched, stick a pebble in your mouth and suck on it. You can quench your thirst with the spit, supposedly.

Sam shows Suzy some bits of green and yellow sticking out from under his coonskin cap.

SAM
Sometimes I stick leaves under my hat. It cools your head down.

SUZY
That's a good idea. It might help also if you didn't wear fur.

SAM
(hesitates)
True, but this adds camouflage.

Sam stands in a clearing and pulls a handful of dry grass. He holds it in his fist.

SAM
Here's a trick. Throw grass in the air, and you can see which direction the wind's blowing.

Sam throws up the grass. It swirls and drifts vaguely. Suzy squints.

SUZY
Which way?

SAM
Unknown. I guess it doesn't really matter, as long as we cover our tracks.

Sam and Suzy stop to investigate and discuss: a patch of mushrooms, moss on a stump, ferns, poison ivy, and a low bush with purple fruit. Sam looks skeptical.

SAM
These might be poisonous.

Simultaneous Dialogue

When two characters speak at the same time, written in two columns side by side.

Interrupt

When one character cuts off another character's dialogue, sometimes marked with an ... but better marked with an em dash (--).

ad lib

Dialogue in which the characters or actors make up what they say in real time on the movie set or on stage. From the Latin ad libitum, "in accordance with desire."



Director In a stage play, the individual responsible for staging (i.e. placing in the space or "blocking") the actors. In a musical, there will typically be a separate musical director responsible for the musical elements of the show.

Alan Smithee A fictional name taken by a writer or director who doesn't want their real name credited on a film.



Designer

Theater professional whose job it is to envision any of the following elements in a play: costumes, sets, lights, sound or properties.

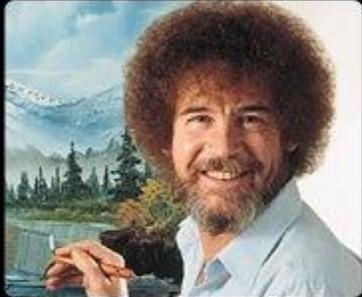
Playwright

A person who writes stage plays.

PRODUCTION DESIGNER



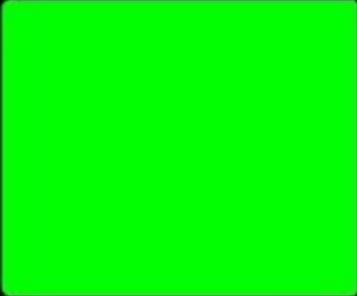
What my friends think I do.



What my parents think I do.



What society thinks I do.



What James Cameron thinks I do.



What I think I do.



What I really do.

FILMMAKER 

Abbreviations shortcuts used in scripts

- **EXT.** Outdoors.
- **INT.** Indoors.
- **f.g.** Abbreviation for "foreground" (i.e. In the f.g., kids are fighting).
- **b.g.** Abbreviation for "background" (i.e. In the b.g., kids are fighting).
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- **O.C.** Abbreviation for Off Camera, denoting that the speaker is resident within the scene but not seen by the camera.
- **O.S.** Abbreviation for Off Screen, denoting that the speaker is not resident within the scene.
- **Off** Short for offstage. Typically written as (off) next to a character name when a character speaking dialogue is offstage while she speaks.
- **M.O.S.** Without sound, so described because a German-born director wanting a scene with no sound told the crew to shoot "mit out sound."
- **SFX** Abbreviation for Sound Effects.
- **V.O.** Abbreviation for Voice Over, denoting that the speaker is narrating the action onscreen.
- **SUPER/Title Over** Abbreviation for "superimpose" meaning the laying one image on top of another, usually words over a filmed scene (i.e. Berlin, 1945).