

An illustration of a theater stage. Red curtains are pulled back to reveal a black stage. Two spotlights shine from the top onto the stage. In the foreground, the tops of several yellow seats are visible. A large white cloud shape is in the center, containing the title text.

# HOW TO FORMAT YOUR PLAY THE RIGHT WAY **EXECUTION PLAN**

**THE PRODUCER'S PERSPECTIVE**

**EXECUTION PLAN SERIES**

**PRO**

# HOW TO FORMAT YOUR PLAY THE RIGHT WAY

I'm sure you've heard the age-old saying "you never get a second chance to make a first impression." Well, I'm here to tell you it is 100% TRUE! Whenever you meet someone, no matter who it is, you only get one opportunity, one shot, to make a good first impression.

Now I know what you're thinking- what does this have to do with formatting my script? Well, the second your script lands on someone's desk, whether it's a producer, director, a festival, etc., the very first thing they're going to notice is how it's formatted. Your script is making its first impression and should look the part. You wouldn't go into a job interview wearing sweats (at least I hope you wouldn't!) so why would you send in your script without proper formatting?

We want to make sure your script gets the attention it deserves. And guess what? Formatting your script is easier than you'd think.

Now, let's do it!

## CHECKING IN

Don't get me wrong, there is no one 'right way' when it comes to formatting a script. People use lots of different tools, programs, and software to help them get their scripts looking industry ready. But I want to help you learn how to do this on your own, and the best place to start is by evaluating where you're at now. Let's do a check-in to see!

**ACTION EXERCISE:** Take a look at your current script; however far along you are in the process. Maybe it's a finished product or maybe you're staring at a blank page, but either way I want you to list below at least 5 things (if not more) that you think you could improve on with your current formatting. Maybe your margins look a little too small, or maybe you aren't sure how to set up your title page. Whatever it is, just jot it down now.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

Will ya look at that? Now you already have a handful of things to work on before we've even gotten into the nitty gritty of formatting! Speaking of formatting, it's time to get to work.

## STEP ONE: THE TITLE PAGE

What's the first thing that every script should start with? A title page! This page is the VERY first thing people will see when viewing your script- so it's important to do this right. There are several pieces of information that belong on the title page, but the first is, you guessed it, a title!

But before we even get that far, let's have a little conversation about font. The most common script font is Times New Roman set in 12-point size because it's easy to read. That's not to say that you can't use another font, but that's the standard and what I recommend to keep your script as clean and clear as possible.

Now let's add your title. Your working title should be centered on the page followed by the genre of the play, such as a one-act period comedy, and your name on the line just below.



It may be called the *title* page, but there is more that goes onto it than just the title. In the lower left-hand corner of the page, provide contact information including your name, physical address (including city, state, and often country), telephone number and email address. Not all of this information is necessary, but I think it's always best to make it as easy as possible for the script reader to get into contact with you. If you have an agent, their contact information should be substituted for your own.

Now that you know what belongs on a title page, let's take a minute to make sure you have everything you need to put yours together.

**ACTION EXERCISE:** Fill out all of the blanks below with the information you should put on your title page when formatting your script. Don't forget, if you have an agent, be sure to replace your own contact information for theirs.

**TITLE OF SHOW:** \_\_\_\_\_

**GENRE OF SHOW:** \_\_\_\_\_

**YOUR NAME/AGENT'S NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

**YOUR ADDRESS/AGENT'S ADDRESS:** \_\_\_\_\_

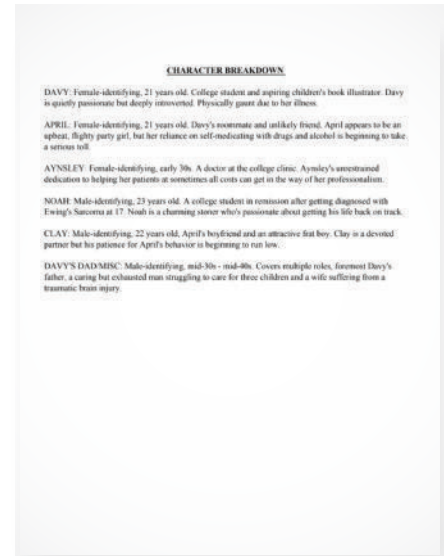
**YOUR PHONE NUMBER/AGENT'S PHONE NUMBER:** \_\_\_\_\_

Alright, one page down, the rest of the script to go! Let's move on to the character breakdown.

## STEP TWO: CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

So now your show has a title page formatted properly and ready to go! What's next? Characters. It's important to have a page that gives a breakdown of who your characters are, your vision for them, and any other helpful casting notes.

**ACTION EXERCISE:** Let's talk about your characters. On the lines below, I want you to take the time write a short description of the characters in your show. Include things like their age, gender (if it is essential to the story), along with any other factors that could help the theater or director make an informed decision about who to cast in each role. Do this for every character in your show, and feel free to use another piece of paper if needed.



**Pro Tip:** Don't forget to include any opportunities for doubling, or casting the same actor in more than one role. This could be very helpful in cases where a theater may have a limited budget to hire actors!

Now that you've got all that information put together, we're done with your second page!

## STEP THREE: THE SCRIPT

Now we're finally getting to what you've all been waiting for: how to format the script! Before we get started, I'm going to lay out some simple rules to keep in mind that will make the formatting process a breeze. All you have to do is stick to these rules and you'll have a finished script in your hands before you know it!

**Rule #1:** The title should be centered, followed two lines down with the act number.

**Rule #2:** The scene number should be on the next line.

**Rule #3:** New acts and scenes should begin on a new page.

**Rule #4:** The word ACT should be in all caps (as shown here).

**Rule #5:** The word Scene should only have the letter 'S' capitalized (as shown here).

**Rule #6:** The setting should be described in italics, and should begin on the center of the page and run to the right margin.

**Rule #7:** Character names will appear in all caps when being mentioned in the setting.

**Rule #8:** Dialogue is all single spaced.

**Rule #9:** The name of the character speaking is centered on the page and typed in all caps.

**Rule #10:** The actions of a character are typed on the next line, indented to begin ½ inch left of center and out to one inch of the right margin and enclosed in parentheses.

**Rule #11:** Dialogue is written in normal font, with no necessary alterations.

**Rule #12:** Dialogue that is cut off is indicated with a dash (--).

**Rule #13:** Dialogue that indicated an incomplete sentence is followed by an ellipsis (...).

**Rule #14:** Page numbers are placed in the upper right corner beginning on the first page of action.

**Rule #15:** When numbering pages, you may choose to use just the page number, the page number with a word description of the title and the author's last name, or the older format of "act number-scene number-page number". For example, 1-3-16 would indicate ACT 1, Scene 3, page 16.

**Rule #16:** The setting should be provided at the top of each scene.

**Rule #17:** When stage action occurs after dialogue is delivered, you may leave a blank line before and after the action (which should be indicated in parentheses).

**Rule #18:** Stage action associated with the dialogue begins one-half inch to the left of and below the character's name.

**Rule #19:** Unrelated action begins in the center of the page and is not contained in parentheses.

**Rule #20:** If songs are to be included in the play, indicate where they are going to be placed on a separate line with the title of the song enclosed in parentheses).



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## STEP THREE: THE SCRIPT

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**Pro Tip:** Planning to add prop and set descriptions in your script? I know it can be tempting to create a world for your reader using elaborate descriptions of settings and props- we've all been there- but depending on who's producing your show, along with space and budget constraints, that may not always be practical. Most times it's best to stick to including just a few set pieces and simple props in your show. When writing in props, always be sure to ask yourself, "will this \_\_\_\_\_ really help me to tell the story?" Be honest with yourself, and if the answer is no, don't include it in your script.

**ACTION EXERCISE:** Now I know all those rules may have been a lot to take in, so I'm going to help you break things down a little bit. Do you remember on the very first page when I had you write down at least 5 improvements you wanted to make with your script formatting? Well, now we're going to do just that. I want you to go back and look at what you wrote down, and on the lines below, jot down the number of at least one of the rules above that could help you make that improvement. Here's an example; if one thing I wanted to improve was my method of page numbering, I would put down Rule #14 and Rule #15 as two rules to help me make that change. Now it's your turn! Be sure to do this for each improvement you wrote down in the first action exercise.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

And it's that simple! Now you have a much smaller list of action steps you can take to have your script industry ready in no time!

Remember, the main purpose of writing a script is to tell an engaging story the audience will remember long after they leave the theater. By formatting your script the right way, you'll be one step closer to getting your work onto a stage and turning your dreams into a reality- and I can't wait to see you get there!

Still feeling stuck on formatting your script? Join The Producer's Perspective PRO to access my training courses on "How to Self-Diagnose Your Script", "How to Write a Script in 30 Days", and "How to Get Your Show Off the Ground". Plus, members of The Producer's Perspective PRO also get access to my live Office Hours calls where they can ask me anything they want each month and 300+ other resources and benefits!

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