**Screenplay Elements**

These terms will guide you as you read and will clarify the screenplay directions. It is important that you understand that you are reading a *screenplay*. The screenplay has specific guidelines intended for camera direction and character demeanor (actions/behavior). It is important to read these directions to preserve the true meaning of the text.

**ACTION-**The scene description, character movement, and sounds as described in a screenplay.   
For example:   
  
The sounds of TYPING rise above all the rest as MAX sits at his computer writing his essay. He stops to sigh. Looks at what he's written. Reaches over to the mouse. Highlights it all. And erases it.

**ANGLE ON-** A type of shot. This usually occurs in scenes taking place in large settings.   
  
For example: if you're at a playground and little Billy is playing in the grass while his sister Jenny is playing on the structure. To get from a detail shot of Billy playing to Jenny playing you'd use "ANGLE ON STRUCTURE" to suggest a new shot featuring Jenny. You're still in the same location, but the director knows to point the camera a different direction.

**BEAT-** Many scripts will use “beat” to interrupt a line of dialogue. A "beat" suggests the actor should pause a moment, in silence, before continuing the scene. "Beats" are often interchangeable with ellipses

**b.g. ( BACKGROUND)-** Used to describe anything occurring in a rear plane of action (the background as opposed to the main action or attention is focused in the foreground). Always use this term in lower case initials or written in full ("background"). For example: two people talk as Bill and Ted fight in the b.g.

**CHARACTER-** In a screenplay, the name appears in all caps the first time a character is introduced in the "Action." The character's name can then be written normally, in the action, the rest of the script.   
  
For Example: The limo pulls up to the curb. DAISY, an elderly woman sits in the car as MORGAN, the driver, steps out and opens the door for her. Daisy is dressed in eveningwear, ready for an Opera. Character's names always appear in all CAPS when speaking.   
  
For Example:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | DAISY |
| You've been a darling, Morgan. Here's twenty dollars. | |

**CLOSE ON**- (May also be seen as CLOSEUP / C.U. or CLOSE SHOT) -is a shot description that strongly suggests a close-up on some object, action, or person (an expressive body part such as the face, or a fist).

**CUT TO-** The most simple and common transition. Since this transition is implied by a change of scene, it may be used sparingly to help intensify character changes and emotional shifts. The transition describes a change of scene over the course of one frame.

**DISSOLVE TO-** A common transition. As one scene fades out, the next scene fades into place. This type of transition is generally used to convey some passage of time.

**EXT.   EXTERIOR-**This scene takes place out of doors.

**FADE TO: / FADE IN** See also **DISSOLVE TO-**   
  
This is commonly used as a DISSOLVE to a COLOR. Commonly, you'll see this as:

|  |
| --- |
| FADE TO: |

BLACK

FADE IN:

NEXT SCENE

This usually suggests it's not the end of the movie, but it is the end of a major movement in the film. The "Next Scene" is often days, months, or years after the previous scenes. Sometimes titles will appear in the blackness to declare a passage of time. But this transition is often a sign of a major shift in time or emotional status for the main characters. It may also be used to suggest a character has been knocked out or killed. Fade In is also sometimes used at the start of a screenplay.

**FLASHBACK-**Sometimes used as a transition or at the start of slugline to denote a sequence that happened in the past. This can be followed by BACK TO PRESENT DAY if required or the writer can use PRESENT DAY as the time of day at the end of the proceeding slugline instead of just DAY.

**INSERT -** When a writer pictures a certain close-up at a certain moment in the film, he or she may use an insert shot. This describes a shot of some important detail in a scene that must be given the camera's full attention for a moment. Inserts are mainly used in reference to objects, a clock, or actions, putting a key in a car's ignition.

**INT. (INTERIOR)-** This scene takes place indoors. This is mostly for producers to figure out the probable cost of a film project.

**INTERCUT or INTERCUT BETWEEN**- as a transition. At this point, two scenes will be shown a few moments each, back and forth. For example, if Laura is stuck in her flaming house and the fire department in on the way, a screenplay may call for intercutting between the flames closing in on Laura and the fire fighters riding across town to save her.   
  
**POV (POINT OF VIEW)-** The camera replaces the eyes (sometimes the ears) of a character, monster, machine, surveillance camera, etc. As a result, we get to see the world through the sensory devices of some creature. This can be used to bring out the personal aspects of a scene, or it can be used to build horror and suspense.

**SCENE-** An event that takes place entirely in one location or time. If we go outside from inside, it's a new scene. If we cut to five minutes later, it's a new scene. If both, it's a new scene. Scenes can range from one shot to infinity and are distinguished by **slug lines**.

**SLUG LINES**-The text in all CAPS at the beginning of a scene that briefly describes the location and time of day.

For example:   
INT. JIMMY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT   
Note: sometimes sluglines are abbreviated to something as simple as "LATER" or "BEDROOM" to maintain the pace and flow of a sequence.

**SUPER**- Abbreviation for superimpose. It is the superimposition of one thing over another in the same shot. Sometimes TITLES are superimposed over scenes. Or a face can be superimposed over a stream-of-consciousness montage shot.

**TIGHT ON-** A close-up of a person or thing used for dramatic effect. A tight frame encloses a subject with very little space surrounding it.

**TRANSITION-** These describe the style in which one scene becomes the next. Used appropriately, these can be used to convey shifts in character development and emotion.

**V.O. (VOICE OVER)-** This abbreviation often appears beside a CHARACTER'S name before their dialogue. This means the character voices that dialogue but his or her moving lips are not present in the scene. Voice-over is generally used for narration, such as in the beginning of The Mummy. Or a character's inner thoughts said out loud such that only the audience will hear.