

Glossary of Terms

Act: A series of sequences ended by a major turning point in the story

Action: Scene description, written in present tense

Antagonist: Principal source of conflict faced by the protagonist or hero

Background (b.g.): Description of action taking place behind foreground action

Backstory: Significant events occurring in a character's past relevant to the main story

Beat: i) Pause in dialogue ii) Smallest unit of storytelling in which something happens i.e. that brings about a change

Beat Sheet/Outline: Breakdown of a story beat by beat

Character: Any personified entity

Character Arc: Emotional or psychological development made by a principal character

Conflict: The lifeblood of drama. Any obstacle standing between a character and his/her objective

Copyright: Set of exclusive rights regulating the use of intellectual property (e.g. a screenplay)

Coverage: Industry analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of a screenplay

Development: Process of readying a screenplay for production, from initial idea to final draft

Development Notes: Detailed analysis and feedback assisting the development of a project

Development Hell: Breakdown in development process caused by an inability to get the project to 'work' to the satisfaction of all parties involved

Dialogue: Anything said by a character in a screenplay

Dramatic Stakes: Incentives motivating characters to achieve goals through positive consequences of success and/or negative consequences of failure

Exposition: i) Information critical to the plot but not depicted through action ii) Sometimes describes information revealed about character and setting before the inciting incident takes place iii) Occasionally describes the entire first act, or set-up

The Script Connection

where talent and technique come together

Flashback: Scene or sequence taking the narrative back in time in order to reveal information that has become crucial to the telling of the story

Genre: A story type categorised by shared elements or 'genre conventions' e.g. Thriller

Hero: Often describes any story's central character although technically a character that prioritises greater good over self-interest or learns to do so – see protagonist

High Concept: Project with an easy-to-pitch premise that has universal appeal

Hook: Device that 'hooks' an audience by arousing curiosity about what will happen next

Intercut: Script term indicating that action moves back and forth between two or more scenes of simultaneous action.

Logline: Very brief (one or two sentence) synopsis of a screenplay

Mise-en-Scene: i) Visual information within a scene e.g. sets, props, actors ii) All elements of visual style iii) Style of filmmaking that conveys information within single shots rather than in montage

Midpoint: Increasingly common structural point that comes midway through the second act, usually causing an unexpected set-back for the protagonist(s), often by revealing the problem they are facing is more serious and/or more dangerous than first imagined

Montage: Storytelling technique that relies on editing together a series of single shots or scenes concentrated around a theme, a unit of action or the passage of time

Off Camera (O.C.): Script term indicating a speaker or source of sound is present within the scene but is not seen by the camera

Off Screen (O.S.): Script term indicating that speaker or source of sound is not present within the scene

Pitch: Concise verbal presentation of a screenplay or screenplay idea made to a potential buyer

Plot: Not the story itself but the way in which the story is revealed i.e. the arrangement of story material

Polish: A minor rewrite that takes place once the major development issues are resolved

Protagonist: Often describes any story's central character but technically the character that undergoes emotional or psychological change as a consequence of story events – see hero

Resolution: i) The moment when any conflict reaches a conclusion ii) The moment when the central conflict reaches its conclusion and the dramatic question is answered iii) Sometimes

refers to the whole third act, which resolves the conflict set-up by the first act and complicated by the second

Reversal: When the outcome of a character's action is the opposite of his or her intention

Revisions: Changes made to a screenplay after it has already been circulated for production. These pages do not replace the originals but are incorporated alongside and differ in colour, allowing them to be told apart

Scene: Unit of action taking place in a single location and more or less continuous time. Each scene should result in a change through conflict that has necessary significance to the story, however slight

Scene Heading: See 'Slug-line'

Script Reader: A person employed by an agent, production company or funding body to read, summarise and assess the strengths and weaknesses of a script in a written report (coverage)

Setting: Period and location in which a screenplay's action is set

Shooting Script: Version of the final script that often changes scene order for the purposes of production and includes new scene numbers, camera angles and director's notes

Slug-line: Line at the beginning of each scene that describes whether the scene is interior or exterior, the location and time of day e.g. EXT. HARBOUR – NIGHT. See 'Scene Heading'

Spec script: A screenplay written on speculation (that someone may buy it) rather than on commission

Submission: Any script that has been submitted to an agent, producer or studio etc for their consideration

Synopsis: Prose summary of a screenplay that varies in length depending on required detail

Tag-line: Short phrase used for marketing purposes that conveys the tone and premise of a movie in one line e.g. 'In space, no-one can hear you scream' – Alien

Unsolicited Script: An un-requested submission made without prior contact

Voice over (V.O.): Script term indicating the speaker is narrating the action