

Screenwriting



Film Adaptation for Novel Writers

How to Write a
Screenplay From
Your Own Novel

by Michael Barmish



Introduction

You believe that your novel would make a fantastic film and you want to write the screenplay adaptation. That's great! And, of course, who better than you, as the novel's author, to write that adaptation?

To achieve this, you will need to forget all the rules of novel writing and become a screenwriter. To think as a screenwriter is to leverage the power of images to best tell your story.

In this guide, we will explain the differences between writing a book and writing a screenplay, from a style and technical standpoint as well as a story point of view.

It also contains guidelines on how to transform a literary text into a visual medium in order to condense an average of a 15-20 hour reading story into a 2-hour reading script.

Audience

We've heard it numerous times—people complaining how disappointed they are by the film they've just seen. They much prefer the book. There are many reasons for this. But one of the opinions most often voiced is that too many elements from the book have been changed or are missing in the film.

Unfortunately, this is inevitable. After all, how can you transform a 15-20 hour reading text into a 2-hour movie without losing elements, without changing part of the story? This is something you have to accept when writing an adaptation, so long as you don't change the essence of the story.

When you tackle the adaptation, you must focus, not only on those who have read your book (and are most likely to be disappointed), but in terms of a new audience to whom you

are going to deliver a story through images and visual storytelling.

Format

Unlike novels, where writers can utilize font and size of their choosing, there is a very strict format when it comes to writing and presenting a screenplay. A screenplay looks like a play, and all screenplays - from a formatting standpoint - are identical.

It is strongly advisable to keep to the traditional format convention or you may risk being rejected before the first page is read. Why? Because, even if you are willing to break the rules, potential readers who don't know you may consider you unprofessional. Once you've established yourself as a screenwriter, no matter how much success you've had as a

novelist, that's when you can consider breaking the rules. Within reason.

Most screenwriting software programmes such as Final Draft® or WriterDuet provide ready-to-use script templates with the standard font, which is Courier. So there's no worry about how to format the page. Just concentrate on your writing.

However, there are some basic writing rules that screenwriters use to sharpen their text. The following sections will address them.

The style

In the world of novels, the author's writing style is essential and unlimited. It contributes to the success of a writer. But in the world of cinema, while the author does have a certain