THE COMPLEAT SCREENPLAY FORMAT GUIDE

Screenplay formatting isn’t rocket surgery. If you follow some simple rules, which are laid out here. Final Draft and Celtx do a lot of this automatically, but it should still look like this:

1. **Typeface:** Use **COURIER NEW 12.** Why? The 1-page = 1 minute formula is based on this typeface and margin settings. **NO BOLDING or ITALICS EVER!** Use **underlining** for emphasis.

2. **Margins:**
   - Left = 1.5 in. (to make room for hole punches for when it’s bound)
   - Right = 0.75 in.
   - Top = 0.5 in. with a header of one line and formatted page number in top right;
   - Bottom = 0.75 in.

3. **Spacing:** Single spacing, ALWAYS. Some elements, such as location slugs, paragraphs (aka ¶s), etc. are followed by an extra line-space.

4. **Location slugs:** ALL CAPS, full margins, flush left. [For our purposes, we won’t use scene numbers; don’t worry about them.]

   **Example:**

   {1.5” Margin} **EXT. AMBERSON MANSION – DAY**
   {line-space} An imposing Victorian mansion with a mansard roof, surrounded by well tended grounds.
   {line-space} A carriage drawn by two horses pulls into the porte-cochere and stops.

5. **Screen directions** (abbreviated as “S.D.”): Full margins (1.5” left/0.75 right), normal capitalization.

6. **Character name before dialogue:** ALL CAPS at Left margin + 2.5 in. (equivalent to 5 default tabs to right, basically the middle of the margin)—CENTERING IS WRONG AND HAZARDOUS TO YOUR GRADE!

   **Example:**

   {1.5” Margin} **He faces the fireplace and looks into the dying embers.**
   {line-space} **MAJOR AMBERSON**
   It must be … the sun. The sun was here before everything and we came after the sun…

   {line-space} George looks at his grandfather from the entryway […]
7. For Offscreen Dialogue Or Voiceover Cues add (O.S.) or (V.O.) to the name.

Example:

{1.5" Margin} Major Amberson faces the fireplace and looks deeply into the dying embers.

{line-space}

NARRATOR (V.O.)
As he recognized that he was finally, truly an old man, the fire went out of the Major's manner.

8. Parenthetical before dialogue [e.g. (sarcastically) or (to Cinderella)]: Lower case except for first letter of proper nouns at Left margin + 1.5 in. and should not pass Right dialogue margin. If so, break out as an S.D.

Example 1:

{1.5" L Mar} Major Amberson faces the fireplace and looks deeply into the dying embers.

{line-space}

MAJOR AMBERSON
(to no one in particular)
It must be ... the sun. The sun was here before everything and we came after the sun...

Example 2:

{1.5" Margin} Major Amberson faces the fireplace and looks deeply into the dying embers.

{line-space}

MAJOR AMBERSON
(as if speaking to someone)
It must be ... the sun. The sun was here before everything ... isn’t that so?

{line-space}

He looks to the painting of his father for a reply.

{line-space}

MAJOR AMBERSON (CONTINUED)
And we came after the sun...

9. Dialogue: Increase margins on both sides by + 1.0 in. (aka a L/R indent) See examples above.

10. CAPITALIZATION:

   ALL CAPS is used to indicate anything that needs to be called out for the producer/designer/actor, etc. including:
a. FIRST APPEARANCE BY A CHARACTER (this is usually accompanied by a short description) or of a group of EXTRAS.

Example 1:

{1.5" Margin} EXT. AMBERSON MANSION – DAY
{line-space} An imposing Victorian mansion with a mansard roof, surrounded by well tended grounds.
{line-space} GEORGE AMBERSON MINAFER (a young 21, athletic and handsome), dressed in the height of 1892 male fashion, paces the entryway nervously.

Example 2:

{1.5" Margin} EXT. AMBERSON MANSION – DAY
{line-space} An imposing Victorian mansion with a mansard roof, surrounded by well tended grounds.
{line-space} A CREW OF GARDENERS attends to the lawn and hedges as we are just able to make out ISOBEL AMBERSON (40s, still-glamorous heiress) in a dressing down looking out of a second floor window.

b. SOUND EFX (SFX, i.e., sound cues that will have to be recorded separately from the sync sound).

Example:

{1.5" Margin} EXT. AMBERSON MANSION – DAY
{line-space} An imposing Victorian mansion with a mansard roof, surrounded by well tended grounds. The SHARP CRACK OF A PISTOL SHOT is heard, followed by a WOMAN’S SCREAM.

c. UNUSUAL PROPS OR DECOR, i.e., not something that you'll find in any prop shop or interior design outlet that the production designer will have to fabricate or research.

Example:

{1.5" Margin} EXT. AMBERSON MANSION – DAY
{line-space} An imposing Victorian mansion with a mansard roof, surrounded by well tended grounds. Rising from the lower roof between the two cupolas is a LARGER THAN USUAL WEATHERVANE IN THE SHAPE OF A RECLINING NUDE.
d. INSERTS, GRFX (GRAPHIC) OR TITLE CARDS

Example 1:

{1.5" Margin} EXT. AMBERSON MANSION – DAY
{line-space} An imposing Victorian mansion with a mansard roof, surrounded by well tended grounds.
{line-space} INSERT: GOLD SIGNET ON FRONT DOOR:
{line-space} ONE AMBERSON AVENUE
{line-space} A carriage drawn by two horses pulls into the porte-cochere and stops.

Example 2:

{1.5" Margin} EXT. AMBERSON MANSION – DAY
{line-space} An imposing Victorian mansion with a mansard roof, surrounded by well tended grounds.
{line-space} GRFX: MEDIAN INCOME IN THE UNITED STATES IN 1892, which shows the Amberson Family in the top 1%.
{line-space} A carriage drawn by two horses pulls into the porte-cochere and stops.

Example 3:

{1.5" Margin} EXT. AMBERSON MANSION – DAY
{line-space} An imposing Victorian mansion with a mansard roof, surrounded by well tended grounds.
{line-space} TITLE (LOWER THIRD): FROM THE NOVEL BY BOOTH TARKINGTON
{line-space} A carriage drawn by two horses pulls into the porte-cochere and stops.

e. Transitions and EFX (EFFECTS): We no longer add lines for “CUT TO:” or place them near the right margin (though Celtx and Final Draft sometimes do). The various types of DISSOLVE TO:, SPLIT SCREEN: or other EFX are done in ALL CAPS either as separate lines or as callouts in the text:
Example 1:

{1.5" Margin} EXT. MONTAGUE VILLA, FLORENCE – DAY
{line-space} An imposing white stucco mansion with with a terracotta roof, surrounded by lush palmy grounds.
{line-space} LONG DISSOLVE TO: {or INTERCUT WITH:, etc.}
{line-space} EXT. CAPULET PALAZZO, VENICE – DAY
{line-space} A grand marble palace on the Grand Canal; a GONDOLA is moored by the ornate entryway.

Example 2:

{1.5" Margin} EXT. MONTAGUE VILLA, FLORENCE – DAY
{line-space} An imposing white stucco mansion with with a terracotta roof, surrounded by lush palmy grounds. A HORSE-DRAWN COACH waits outside.
{line-space} SPLIT SCREEN TO INCLUDE:
{line-space} EXT. CAPULET PALAZZO, VENICE – DAY
{line-space} A grand marble palace on the Grand Canal; a GONDOLA is moored by the ornate entryway.
{line-space} At both residences, SERVANTS are loading the conveyances with wicker hampers and cases [...]
2) EXT. SMALLVILLE H.S. FOOTBALL FIELD -- DAY
A WIDE RECEIVER crashes into Clark, knocking off his glasses. 
Clark barely registers it.

3) INT. KENT HOUSE -- CLARK'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT
A MOSQUITO lands on Clark's forehead. Clark slaps it, hard, 
and knocks himself out.

END MONTAGE

Example 2:

MONTAGE:

1) AT THE STABLE: The Mule kicks Superman in the butt. 
Superman doesn't notice.

2) SMALLVILLE H.S. FOOTBALL FIELD: A WIDE RECEIVER crashes 
into Clark, knocking off his glasses. Clark barely registers 
it.

3) CLARK'S BEDROOM: A MOSQUITO lands on Clark's forehead. 
Clark slaps it, hard, and knocks himself out.

END MONTAGE

12. Title Page: There should always be a title page (even one that says “UNTITLED”) and it should 
contain the following fields:

TITLE in ALL CAPS;
{double space}
by {lowercase}
{double space}
Author's Name in Initial Caps

all centered and starting about 2.5 in. from the top margin.

If the work is an adaptation, start higher and add:

based on a/the {type of work: novel, short story, original story, video game, etc.}
{double space}
by {lowercase}
{double space}
That Author's Name in Initial Caps

also all centered.

a. Draft number, date, and registration number (if any), single space, flush left, beginning about 9.5 
inches from the top of the page;

b. on the opposite side, the last entry on the same line as the lowest line on the left: CONTACT: 
Contact's name, address, phone and e-mail, single space.
CHINATOWN
by
Robert Towne

{the following is not true; just an example of the format}

Based on an original story
by
Roman Polanski
and
Robert Towne

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