

Zach Bucholtz  
“The Designated Driver”  
Production Plan

A screenplay is unlike any other type of written art; it follows a totally unique set of rules seen nowhere else. A primary reason for this is that a screenplay is written, always, with the intent on being produced as a movie, and therefore the form and style of the script is written to be easily read by the director, actors, and crew of a movie.

My project, *The Designated Driver*, will be in the form of a screenplay. My future intent is to revise and polish later drafts of this script and market it as a spec script to sell in Hollywood.

### **What is a Screenplay?**

A screenplay is the script used when shooting a movie. A screenplay is defined by its three primary aspects: the creative, the structural, and the technical.

#### **Creative**

Like any story, a good screenplay has a protagonist with flaws and goals, an opposition to that goal, and a means of achieving that goal. There are basic story elements such as plot, setting, struggle, climax, and resolution. The key for a movie is that the character and goal need to be established quickly and followed closely, because a viewing audience only has so much time (90-120 minutes, usually) to fall in love with the story and see it end.

#### **Structural**

This is where a screenplay differs from any other form of narrative storytelling. Because of the attention span of a viewing audience and time constraints, screenwriters have long adhered to a basic structure for the story. Known as the three-act structure, it lays the groundwork for any screenplay, but can be tweaked and varied for each unique story.

A screenplay is broken into three acts, and further subdivided into eight sequences of 12-15 pages each. The first and third acts are two sequences long, while the second is four sequences long. Each act, and each sequence, serves a specific purpose and each sequence ends with a key plot point. Each sequence usually centers on, or builds to, one event.

Act One is the introduction, or set-up, of the story and the primary characters and conflicts. This shows the characters in their life before the story really gets going. The First Sequence, known as the **Routine**, introduces the main character and setting, including the character's flaws, personality quirks, and basic interests. The first sequence ends with the **Catalyst**, the incident that jump-starts the story. The second sequence, **The Collision**, is when the protagonist decides a plan of action and any possible problems. It ends with the Act One break, the **Big Event**, which starts the second act. By the Big Event, the character should have a clearly defined outer goal, and less obvious inner need.

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Act Two is the journey, the protagonist in a new world with a new goal. Often, second acts take place in a new setting and introduce new characters as a result of the protagonist's venture from their comfort zone. The third sequence (or first of the second act), is the **Lowest Obstacle**, a time for the character to attempt to reach their goal by doing the easiest thing first. This is often the sequence where trailers or previews get their clips from, as it is often one of the funniest, yet least revealing sequences. The fourth sequence is **The Next Attempts**, ending with the **Midpoint**, a critical turning point either positive or negative for the protagonist, often changing their course in an unforeseen way.

The fifth sequence is known as **The Sequence of Love**, because this is often where a “B story” – typically a romance – takes over for a few minutes. This often serves to show the protagonist the consequences of their decisions (for example, a romance that conflicts with their goals only teases the protagonist, and makes them question their goals). The sixth sequence is **The Hardest Thing To Do**, usually centered around a specific challenge that ends with the **Crisis**, the Act Two break. The Crisis presents the lowest point for the protagonist, where the good and bad forces in the story meet at last.

Act Three resolves the conflict from the first two acts. Sequence seven, the **Showdown**, begins with the **Dark Night of the Soul**, the low emotional point where the protagonist must weigh their options and decide to act. The rest of the sequence is him or her attempting to solve their problems once and for all. It ends with the **Twist**, an unforeseen good or bad twist to the plot that leads into the final sequence, the **Resolution**.

### **Technical**

This is where a screenplay is most different from any other type of writing. Because the script is meant to be eventually shot, it must be written in a form that is universally recognizable and easy to produce for the directors, art team, actors, and production crew.

There are several screenwriting programs that create a template for the writer, and there are several basic elements of the template: scene headings, character names, action lines, dialogue, parentheticals, and transitions. The spacing and tabbing of each is meant to be easy on the eye, and quick to read, so that one page is equal to one minute of screen time. This way, it is easier to know exactly how long the movie will be.

There are lots of rules and tips that screenwriters follow, but the key points are to: a) be concise, but clear. Every action that happens on screen is written into the script, but it can't be too wordy. And, b) be interesting. Scenes in a “park” or “coffee shop” get tired. Also, be true to how people actually speak. A great script can be ruined by unrealistic dialogue.

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### **Production Schedule**

The following schedule is based on my own experience writing screenplays, and derived from the three screenwriting classes I have taken so far. It includes various elements of pre-writing, allows time for revision, and limits the workload to about 15 pages per week.

January 29	Reading List Production Plan Overview Outline: a one page breakdown of key plot points
February 5	Step Outline: scene-by-scene summaries with headings Treatment: 1500-word synopsis of the story Character Profiles: brief descriptions of the main characters
February 12*	Sequence 1: The Routine
February 19	Sequence 2: The Collision
February 26*	Sequence 3: The Lowest Obstacle
March 5	Sequence 4: The Next Attempts
March 12*	Sequence 5: The Sequence of Love
March 19*^	Sequence 6: The Hardest Thing To Do
March 26	Sequence 7: The Showdown
April 2*	Sequence 8: The Resolution
April 9*	Revised Complete Draft
April 11*	Polished Complete Draft
April 16	Final Complete Draft

\*denotes class Workshop Day

^coincides with class "Rough Draft" due date

### **Grading Rubric**

The following rubric shall be used to assess the final complete draft of this script, based on the aforementioned qualities of a successful screenplay.

The script "Meets Expectation" if all following items can be checked off. On a letter-grade scale, a script that meets these basic expectations earns at least a "B."

#### Logistics

- Each deadline in the Production Schedule adhered to
- A final, complete, polished draft uploaded to Capstone Portfolio by 4/16
- 90-120 pages in PDF format, with title page and page numbers
- Little to no spelling mistakes or typos

#### Creativity

- Story is unique, cohesive, and thought out
- Protagonist has clear flaws, personality, look, and oral style
- Protagonist has a clear objective, and a means of achieving it
- Secondary characters are rounded and add to the story
- An antagonist, either physical or abstract, conflicts with the protagonist
- The struggle for the protagonist gets harder in each scene
- No scene is without conflict
- Each scene moves the story forward or presents new, vital information. No scene exists purely for exposition
- The setting is realistic, and is incorporated into the action
- The protagonist exhibits change and follows a steep character arc
- The writer makes effective use of motifs
- The story is generally interesting and keeps a reader's attention

#### Structure

- All 8 sequences are represented, each 12-15 pages in length
- The First Act introduces the main characters, setting, and conflicts
- A Catalyst ignites the story around page 15
- By the Big Event, the protagonist has a clear outer goal and a clear inner need
- The Second Act changes the world of the character and forces them to make decisions they normally wouldn't have made before
- The Midpoint advances the story, and progresses the character arc upward or downward significantly from where it was going
- A B-Story is thoughtful and contributes to the overall growth of the protagonist
- The Second Act ends with the protagonist facing a major Crisis, their toughest obstacle yet and the lowest point for them
- Act Three sees the protagonist face the Crisis head on
- An unforeseen Twist complicates the Third Act
- Any loose ends are tied up and plotlines resolved

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### Screenplay Technicalities

- The script follows basic screenplay formatting
- Action lines are never longer than three lines
- Dialogue is realistic of spoken word
- Each scene has a scene heading indicating the location, INT/EXT, and time of day
- Each scene heading is followed immediately by an action line
- Characters are introduced in all caps the first time, with their age and basic physical attributes given, and they are referred to by the same name throughout
- Action lines give all the necessary details of the shot
- Dialogue never includes action (i.e. "I'm going outside now") unless absolutely necessary and realistic
- Character names are rarely spoken aloud in second-person conversation
- Special situations, such as inserts, phone conversations, point-of-view shots, and jumps in time are properly formatted
- Each scene gives only the necessary information, starting "late" and ending "early."  
No character ever walks into a room or exits a room unless for effect

In order to earn an "A" and be considered to have "Exceeded Expectations," the script should accomplish all or most of these story-specific goals. The difference here is that these terms are to be considered on a more subjective scale.

### Story-Specific

- Zach is an interesting and likeable character
- Zach is active, constantly making his own decisions
- Zach's goal to make friends is clear and suitable
- Zach is established early on to NEED friends, at least in his own mind. The reader believes making friends is absolutely necessary for Zach, and that becoming a designated driver is the best way for him to do it.
- The scenes with drunk people add comedy
- The juxtaposition of Zach with his drunk friends adds comedy
- Comedy comes from situations, and physicality, as much as from dialogue
- Zach's struggle to make friends is clear
- The balance of personal, academic, and social life issues guides Zach's arc
- The reader laughs while reading the script
- The story is realistic, and feels like it could be a true story
- Zach is constantly challenged
- The Crisis is strong enough to warrant a third act
- The ending is satisfying to the reader
- The ending is not predictable throughout the script

This list may be amended as the story takes shape during the term.

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### **Reading List**

#### **Inspirations**

*Funny People*. Dir. Judd Apatow. By Judd Apatow. Perf. Adam Sandler, Seth Rogen, and Leslie Mann. Universal, 2009. Film.

*National Lampoon's Animal House*. Dir. John Landis. By Harold Ramis, Douglas Kenney, and Chris Miller. Perf. John Belushi. Universal Pictures, 1978. DVD.

*Silver Linings Playbook*. Dir. David O. Russell. By David O. Russell. Perf. Bradley Cooper and Jennifer Lawrence. The Weinstein Company, 2012. Film.

*Superbad*. Dir. Greg Mottola. By Seth Rogen and Evan Goldberg. Perf. Jonah Hill and Michael Cera. Columbia Pictures, 2007. DVD.

#### **References**

Prasad, Veerendra. *How To Format Your Screenplay When You're Not Already A Successful Writer/Director*. N.d. Ann Arbor, MI.

Prasad, Veerendra. "Screenwriting II: The Rewrite." University of Michigan. 2012. Lecture.

Trottier, David. *The Screenwriter's Bible: A Complete Guide to Writing, Formatting, and Selling Your Script*. 4th ed. N.p.: Silman-James, 2005. Print.