



Cadette Screenwriter

When it thrills, makes you laugh, or has a fantastic twist, a movie or TV show can seem like magic. And a great show starts with a great script! Screenwriters write scripts meant to be filmed. In this badge, put all your viewing experience to good use—let it inspire you as you try your hand at writing for the big (or small) screen.

Steps

1. Decide what makes a good script good
2. Come up with an idea for a story
3. Get to know your characters
4. Build the plot
5. Write a 12-page script—and share it!

Purpose

When I've earned this badge, I'll know how to create a screenplay for a show or movie.

Step 1: Decide what makes a good script good.

In this step, think about the movies or television shows you love most. Then examine them for clues as to what makes them work. Look beyond the actors, and focus instead on the characters' words, the scenery changes, and the situations the screenwriter puts the characters through—and how all three elements work together.

CHOICES – DO ONE:

Watch one movie or three shows in your favorite genre. (A genre is a category, like adventure, comedy, or drama.) Take notes on how at least three elements, such as the ones mentioned above, make things entertaining. Refer to them for inspiration while working on your own script.

For More FUN: Analyze one movie or three shows you *don't* find entertaining. Looking at what doesn't work can be as helpful as concentrating on what does. If you could remake a film or show to make it more entertaining, what would you do differently? Add a talking cat? Make the main character obsessed with chocolate?

OR

Host a script-dissection party with friends. Watch one movie or three shows in the same genre, then discuss and write down what everyone likes and doesn't like about the script.

OR

Read two scripts. What better way to learn the craft of writing for the screen than by reading a real script? Look for the scripts of your favorite shows or movies, or scripts from

shows you've never seen. Ask a librarian for help, or team up with an adult to look online. You can also find examples in books about screenwriting!

Step 2: Come up with an idea for a story.

Most tales have a beginning that introduces the situation, a middle that builds on the story until it reaches a climax, and an ending that shows how everything turns out. Before you can write any of these pieces, you need a basic idea to build your script around.

CHOICES – DO ONE:

Look into your own life. Have you had an adventure that could be made into a movie? Did something hysterically funny happen at school? Is there a great family story your relatives tell every time they get together? Any of these could be the seed of a great script.

OR

Add to a story you already know. Choose a fairy tale, book, or nursery rhyme and tell how the characters got there or what happened later. How did the old woman end up living in a shoe? After Dorothy, who was the next adventurer in the land of Oz?

OR

Play Story Maker. Divide at least 24 index cards or slips of paper into two piles, one for characters and one for situations/settings. Write an idea on each (you can start with the ideas in the chart). Then draw two from the character pile and one from the situations/settings pile and see if they spark any story ideas.

Sidebar: The Elevator Pitch

Hollywood writers often have an “elevator pitch”—a quick and flashy summary of their script in case they run into a producer. If you had 12 seconds in an elevator with the CEO of XYZ Studios, what would you say to make her read your script before all the others in the pile on her desk? Creating an elevator pitch is a great way to test whether your story idea sounds exciting enough to pursue.

Step 3: Get to know your characters.

Whatever your story idea, you'll need a protagonist and an antagonist. Get to know them by writing a one-page description of each. Use one of these choices to add details, from their hobbies to their jobs to their postures and the sound of their voices. The boxes at the bottom of the page might help you get started.

CHOICES – DO ONE:

Spend some time people watching. Take notes on what people wear, how they act, and what they say at school, the library, a coffee shop, or a park. Then, choose three or four details from your observations to make part of your characters' personalities and life stories.

OR

Exaggerate details about people you're familiar with. Perhaps you know someone who loves red; maybe your character wears only red velvet suits. Or your local newscaster speaks loudly—your character might insist on speaking through a megaphone wherever she goes.

OR

Mix and match. Take three aspects of people or characters you know and combine them to round out your characters. Your protagonist could have a celebrity's curly hair, a friend's dream of being a pilot, and a neighbor's habit of eating a peanut butter sandwich every day at noon.

Sidebar: Protagonists and Antagonists

Protagonist: The main character, good or bad. Their story moves the action along.

Antagonist: The person or situation who gets in the way of the protagonist's dreams or schemes.

Some protagonists, like Nancy Drew or Wonder Woman, have a new antagonist with each adventure. And some antagonists are nonhuman, such as diseases, bad habits, or natural disasters.

Examples:

- Harry Potter and Voldemort
- Red Riding Hood and the Wolf
- Student athlete and insomnia
- Superman and Lex Luthor
- Climber and Mt. Everest

Step 4: Build the plot.

You have a story idea and characters. Now you need a plot! A plot is an outline of the situations your protagonist will face. A protagonist's circumstances generally grow more dire as the story unfolds toward the climax, where the protagonist faces their most difficult



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challenge. (That challenge usually involves something the antagonist said or did!) The chart on page 6 will help you with this step.

CHOICES – DO ONE:

Fill out the worksheet using your imagination. Challenge yourself to find all the plot twists in the creative corners of your mind.

OR

Find your plot twists in the news. How are protagonists and antagonists acting and reacting in newspapers or magazines? Collect three editions, and hunt through their pages for plot ideas.

OR

Use plot twists from a familiar story. Think about the twists from other stories. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Romeo misses a very important message from Juliet. In *Up*, a boy accidentally ends up in a flying house. You could even pull twists from two or three different stories.

Step 5: Write a 12 page script.

It's time to put everything together! Screenplays include not only dialogue, but also descriptions of action that clarify how the scene is intended to look on-screen. See the example below for what details to include. Then pick one choice and write your script.

CHOICES – DO ONE:

Work solo. Some writers prefer to work their magic alone! If that's you, share your script when you're finished, perhaps by reading it aloud at a group meeting. You could ask other girls to read the different parts.

OR

Work with a friend. Two minds can take creativity to a whole new level— and it's fun to try out dialogue as you go along. If your friend is another Cadette earning her Screenwriter badge, try to write a 24-page script.

OR



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Work with a mentor. Perhaps a playwright, director, or actor; an English or drama teacher; or a film or drama student at a local college would be willing to help? Ask your mentor to give you feedback on your pages.

Now that I've earned this badge, I can give service by:

- Teaching a younger girl about the plot elements of her favorite show
- Sharing my screenplay with my school's theater department
- Creating a script with a message that I want to spread

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