



# Planning Your Movie Scripts & Shotboards

DIFFICULTY



## Step One: Get Conceptual!

### So, what's your film going to be about?

Making a good film requires lots of work before you even think about picking up the camera. First, you need a concept: what is your film going to be about? Here are a couple of tips for coming up with some movie ideas:

1. Already have an idea? Write it down *right now*! You won't remember it later, trust me.
2. **BLAB!** Get out a pen and paper or open up a word document and just write...about *anything*. Start writing and *keep* writing. Don't worry about what you write, just keep going. An idea will arise sooner than you think!

### Defining Your Problem: Conflict & Climax

What's the "problem" that your **protagonist** (main character) has to overcome? This event will provide the **climax** (the peak of action) in your film. Follow these three steps to define your "problem":

1. Take a concept.
2. Define it. Put the concept into *your own* words.
3. Come up with three examples of the concept—real or imaginary.

Can't come up with a concept? Here are a few to get you started.

- An encounter
- A twist of fate
- A surprise
- An oddball
- A disruption
- A dream

### Give it the Treatment!

Once you've decided on your concept, it's time to **give it the treatment**. This means writing a short essay about your concept. ACK! Not an essay! Don't worry, this isn't a 5-page paper on Shakespeare. Just **write a 1/2 page or less about your concept**. Be sure to mention your main character. Here are some questions to keep in mind when writing up your treatment:

- Who's the main character?
- What are they trying to do?
- What or who gets in their way?
- How do they overcome this obstacle?

What you're doing is coming up with your movie's plot, which is super important. A good movie = a good story and a good story = a good plot. Most plots follow this pattern.

1. **Exposition:** introduce your character
2. **Rising action:** conflict arises
3. **Climax:** your character takes on their challenge
4. **Falling action:** the dust settles
5. **Resolution:** and everyone lives happily ever after...or not.

## Step Two: Write Your Script!

Now it's time to take your treatment and turn it into a script. Scripts help convert your plot ideas into good movie storylines, making your film seem not-so-amateurish. Scripts are crucial for:

1. Organizing your plot and action in an easy-to-read format.
2. Getting the pacing right in your film. In other words, *plan out the action!*

### Script Formatting

It's important to follow a consistent format for your script—this will make it easy to read for everyone involved in your movie. Follow these key script formats:

- **1 page = 1 minute** in your movie
- Use **2 format styles:**
  - One for **Directions**
  - One for **Dialog**
- Directions should be typed **margin-to-margin** and **single-spaced**
- Dialog should be indented and centered

**Your script should look something like this:**

**Slug Line:** info (in ALL CAPS) about the location and time of day.

SKATE PARK – AFTERNOON

The skate park is empty, though you can hear the distant sounds of skate boarders approaching the park. Two teenagers—a girl and a boy of about 15—emerge on their skateboards from behind the camera and ride into the park. Their names are SARAH and TIM. They ride up to the half pipe, stopping at the edge.

SARAH

No sign of them yet.

TIM

Nope. But they'll be here. You can count on that.

Both look around nervously, then at each other. TIM hops on his skateboard and rides down into the half pipe. SARAH looks around once more, and then rides off (screen left).

**Stage Directions:** descriptions of key visual elements to a scene.  
**TIP:** Don't over describe! Write just enough to organize the action.

**Dialog:** the actual lines spoken by the characters.

Okay, it's time to script your first scene! Remember to include:

- **Slug Lines**
- **Stage Directions**
- **Dialog**

### Dialog Tips:

- Create unique voices for each character (you should know them by their lines!).
- Limit dialog. Too much dialog can be boring!
- Avoid back story. Don't spend your whole movie describing your character's pasts.

## Step Three: Shotboarding (a.k.a. Storyboarding)

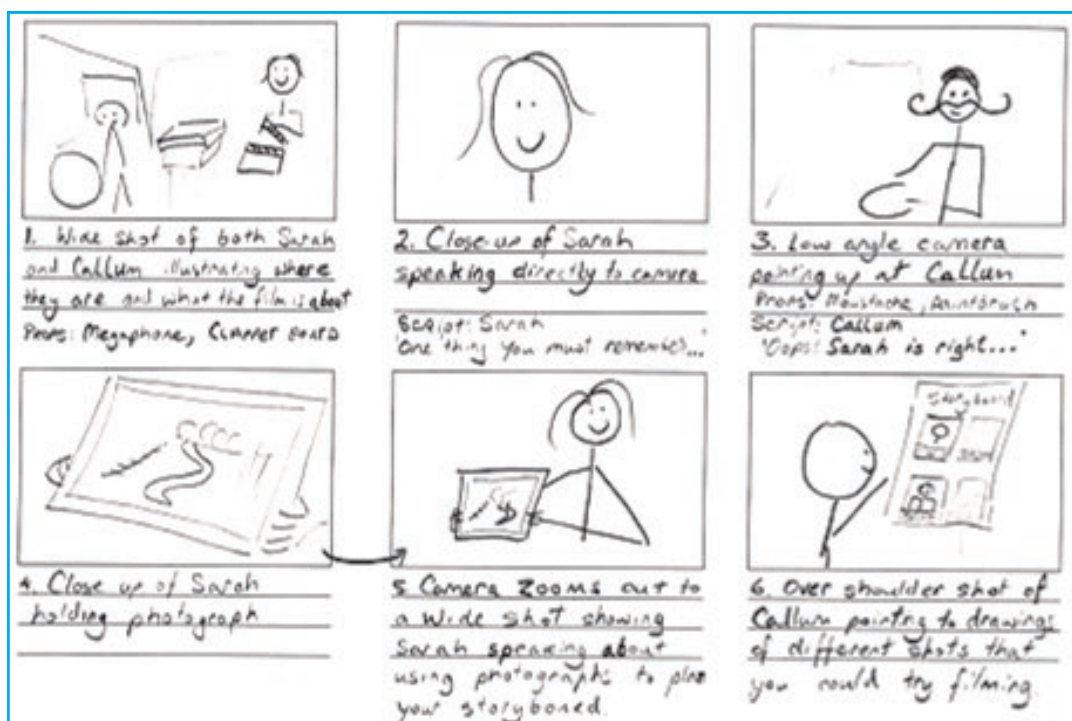
Once your script is done, you need to take those words and turn them into images. It's time to *think with your eyes!* But there's one more step before you can start filming: **Shotboards!**

### Storyboards + Shot lists = Shotboards!

So, what's a shotboard exactly? You've probably heard of **storyboards**. This is when you draw a simple picture to visualize your scene. It's also helpful to write some notes about the storyboard to make sure everyone understands what's happening in that scene. These notes are called **shot lists**.

To make things easier, let's combine the two and make **shotboards**.

Here's an example of a shotboard:



### Shotboard Tips:

- Make **1 shotboard for each Slug Line** (4-5 pictures & notes per scene).
- **Prioritize your shots**—what's most important to capture in a scene?
- Shooting on location? **Scout it out** before the shoot.
- Copy and **handout your shot boards to your "crew"** before the shoot.

Try it! Make a **shotboard** for a scene from your script.

Upload a **scene from your script** and a **shotboard** to **teens.denverlibrary.org** and claim your **Script Writing Badge!**

## YOU'RE DONE! TRY THESE ACTIVITIES TO FINE TUNE YOUR SKILLS:

**Reverse shotboarding:** Find a scene from your favorite movie on YouTube and draw each shot in the scene. Remember to write a couple of lines (**shot lists**) describing each shot.

**Watch this funny YouTube clip about different character types that often show up in movies:**  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yZxs\\_jGN7Pg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yZxs_jGN7Pg)