



## **SAMPLE SCRIPT**

Written by [Author Name](#)

119 pages + title page

submitted: [date/time \(ET\)](#)

WRITER'S LOGLINE: [Logline](#)

Writer's native language: [English \(AmE\)](#)

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**Proofreader:** [Tammy Gross](#)

**Reading completed:** [date/time \(ET\)](#)

## **PROOF-EDITING: format, grammar, spelling, punctuation, syntax**

In my shorthand:

- "sb" = "should be"
- "OTN" = "on the nose"; lacking subtext; too obvious
  
- "AmE" = "American English" - the American standard for grammar/spelling as expected in Hollywood
- "BrE" = "British English" - the European standard for English grammar/spelling
  
- "Hollywood" refers to any *decision maker* who may look at your script, be it indie or actual Hollywood (or BBC, etc.): producers, agents, managers, directors, actors, etc.

### **FYI about my mark-ups in FINAL DRAFT:**



**Do not return to your original file to make further edits. The MARKED-UP file is now your new MASTER FILE.**

#### **REVISIONS MADE:**

- all pages with "ProofMySpec.com" revisions have asterisks (\*) in the right margin
- **red** = revisions made (some only show up with the asterisk, e.g., removal of added spaces, hyphens, letters, etc.)
- **light blue** = needs rewrite for clarity, continuity, etc.
- **highlight** = needs text reformatting or other attention
- ADD missing info where there is **[[ red ]]** - easy to find by searching for double brackets **[[**
- Make sure that ScriptNotes are visible: VIEW > SCRIPTNOTES so you can see embedded notes/recommendations.

Just double click every icon  (or ). To search for scriptnotes, just search for a single left bracket [. To see a full list of all scriptnotes: TOOLS > REPORTS > SCRIPTNOTE REPORT

#### **AFTER YOU PERUSE, TWEAK & APPROVE FINAL REVISIONS:**

- **Remove revision marks:** SELECT ALL: PRODUCTION > CLEAR REVISED
- **Turn off Revision mode:** PRODUCTION > uncheck Revision Mode
- **Turn all text back to black:** SELECT ALL: FORMAT > COLOR > BLACK
- If you would like to remove scriptnotes, click each icon ( or ) & hit the delete key (there is no universal way to remove all that I currently know of). They will never print with the script, so they don't have to be removed.
- **Ensure you have proper settings:** <http://www.reelwriterscontest.com/finaldraft-support.html>
- **Save a clean file**, unmarked, revision-free file: FILE > SAVE AS PDF (ensures proper format & prints title page)

**NOTE:** because I edit in the latest version of Final Draft, some minor issues may result as it reverts to earlier versions.

## FIRST IMPRESSION AT A GLANCE:

**Logline** – good, but long

**General format** – OK, a few issues

**Whitespace** – poor – much too dense

**Page count** – inaccurate due to whitespace issues

## AUTHOR'S STYLE SHEET & PREFERENCES:

As patterns develop unique to your style & text, they are listed here to be sure that **consistency** is kept throughout. Variances are (or sb) corrected to conform.

**sentence spacing = 1 space** after full-stop punctuation (. ! ? )

Recommended: **search/replace all double spaces to single space** to eliminate inconsistencies.

•In **Final Draft**: EDIT > FIND > REPLACE > type 2 spaces in the “find what” field; then type 1 space in the “replace with” field > REPLACE ALL (repeat until there are no more replacements made)

**Character age**: separated by commas: JEN, 21,

**Ellipsis** = no spaces (...)

**double dash for interruptions** = no spaces (--) – TIP: use nonbreaking dashes

**Smart quotes** – “quote” (includes ‘ & ’)

**Preferred spellings** (where common alternate spellings exist):

**okay**

**alright**

**makeup** (cosmetics)

**backpack**

**grey**

**back seat**

**rearview**

**cell phone**

**website**

**internet**

**goodbye**

**pick-up** (truck)

**t-shirt**

**till** (until)

**anyways**

**toward, backward, forward, upward, afterward, etc.**

**Cast List** – names that are confusing (sound/look too much alike):

LISA / LIZ

**Recommended** – change character names to be more unique from each other

## FORMATTING:

All recommendations are based on current SPEC trends in Hollywood. Whenever in doubt, the basic formatting guidelines in Dave Trottier's "Screenwriter's Bible" are always a safe bet.

*Keep it narrative, using the streamlined "language of screenplay" with standard format. Even in shooting drafts, it's important to keep it flowing with as little technical intrusion as possible until the script is green-lit and in production. Presumably, investors and talent will be pitched this script, and too much noise makes it very difficult to get a sense of story.*

The following is a list of the formatting & proofing notes that correlate to **changes made in the file** or **changes recommended** to be changed by you. Many can be corrected in software setting or with a search/replace function:

### CREATE/PRINT TITLE PAGE:

•In **Final Draft**: DOCUMENT > TITLE PAGE

**Title page elements:** *Title by Author + contact info* (nothing else)

- CONTACT INFO should always include personal email (Address / Phone optional)
- Do not include web links to production companies or their domain-based emails (it raises the question: if you have a production company, why are you pitching to Hollywood?)
- Do not include the word "written" before "by"
- Do not include WGA & copyright info
- Do not repeat your name with contact info
- Do not include revision/draft info/date

**Fade In:** – The first thing in any SPEC screenplay sb: "FADE IN:"

Typically, Hollywood readers first look at the first page (looking for FADE IN), then the last page (looking for FADE OUT or THE END and page count), then flip/scroll through for margins (to make sure it is properly formatted and laid out).

**Page numbers** – upper right starting p.2 (no page number on 1<sup>st</sup> page) / .5" from top edge

**Technical overkill:** Even in shooting drafts, it's important to keep it flowing with as little technical intrusion as possible. Presumably, investors and talent will be pitched this script, and too much noise makes it very difficult to get a sense of story.

**triple line spacing** – nearly every triple line space sb just double. The triple space is a software default meant for shooting scripts – in specs it fragments the flow and lengthens the page count.

•In **Final Draft**: FORMAT > ELEMENTS > SCENE HEADING > PARAGRAPH (make sure there is only 1 space before & after, instead of the default 2)

**CREDITS** – no mention of credits should ever appear in a spec. Not the writer's job. This usually applies to TV as well unless a creative storyline blend is intended for each episode (e.g. the face of the next victim in the opening credits for PERSON OF INTEREST).

**(CONT'D)** in character slugs: – remove all from spec scripts (except where dialogue hits a page break):

•In **Final Draft**: DOCUMENT > MORES AND CONTINUEDS > uncheck everything *except* Bottom of Page & Top of Next Page in DIALOGUE BREAKS

**SCENE HEADING TIMES** – DAY, NIGHT, SAME or CONTINUOUS – nothing else  
(No: MORNING, DUSK, EVENING, SUNSET, MOMENTS LATER, LATER, etc.)

Indicate times with description/action or dialogue IF it's important to story.

*This is more distracting to readers than spec writers seem to understand these days. Just because other writers do it, don't distract the reader with amateurish made-up rules that force the reader to register irregular words where their eye is trained to see only the normal DAY or NIGHT*

**SAME vs. CONTINUOUS vs. DAY/NIGHT:**

- SAME is used if the action is at a new location with different characters at the same time as or immediately following the previous scene.
- If even one second has passed, it is a new time of DAY or NIGHT.
- CONTINUOUS means no time passes between scenes as characters move through different sublocations of one larger master location (or a scene returns from a flashback or insert).

**SPECIFIC HEADING LOCATIONS** – **start big & go small** using hyphens to separate (avoid using prepositions &/or commas that place the larger location last):

EXT. HOTEL IN TOKYO – DAY

sb

EXT. TOKYO – HOTEL – DAY

**Avoid ARTICLES & PREPOSITIONS in scene headings** – eliminate extraneous words such as the, a, of, in, etc.:

EXT. THE OPEN SEA IN NORWAY – DAY

sb

EXT. NORWAY – OPEN SEA – DAY

**Action follows scene heading:** Always. Dialogue should not be the first thing in any scene. If a sequence contains scenes going back & forth, it still needs a “re-set” every time we return to the previous location to continue an ongoing scene. The first thing after every scene heading should show what we SEE & HEAR. If nothing is changing from the last exit from the scene...why is it a movie? A movie is not just dialogue. Think cinematically.

**Find/replace all [[who/what]] throughout**

... vs. -- (**ellipsis vs. double dash**) – Use ellipses (...) for unfinished or trailing thoughts, or for pauses (instead of “beat”). Use double dash (--) for cut-offs & interruptions (thus eliminating the need to say “She interrupts him” in description).

**A single dash at the end of a line has no meaning – it's a hyphen.**

**written text** – quotation marks sb inserted around any text the audience READS on screen. This includes SUPERS, signs, text screens, inserts of written documents, etc.

**Novelization** – if it can't be seen or heard, it doesn't belong (or must be rewritten to be shown/heard on screen).

## **IN DIALOGUE:**

When deciding to break conventions keep in mind:

- 1) *leaves no question as to how it's pronounced*
- 2) *keeps the text honest to the "one minute per page" rule*

- **Punctuate INITIALISMS:** *TV = T.V., OK = O.K. or Okay, FBI = F.B.I., etc.*
- **ACRONYMS in dialogue** sb spelled as pronounced in ALL CAPS: VISA, AFTRA, INTERPOL. If there is a choice, spell/punctuate as the character is meant to pronounce it: ASAP or A.S.A.P., AWOL or A.W.O.L., etc. (It sometimes makes a difference for who the character is & is always more interesting if different characters use different pronunciations.)
- Use **dashes when characters spell out words:** R-O-L-A-I-D-S
- **Spell out ABBREVIATIONS** as it is spoken: *St. = Saint or Street, vs. = versus, etc. = et cetera*

"Inc." is often said "Incorporated" out loud, so write it as the character would say it.

The only abbreviations **not spelled out** are **Mr., Ms. and Mrs.** (You can get away with Dr., but it's not recommended.)

- **Spell out SYMBOLS when spoken aloud:** / = slash, % = percent, \$ = dollar(s)
- **Spell out NUMBERS** however you want the actor to say it: 23 = twenty-three; \$10,000 = ten grand or ten thousand bucks or ten thousand dollars; 911 = nine-one-one or nine-eleven
- Do **NOT** spell out **YEARS through 2009:** 1982 = 1982
- **Spell out YEARS 2010 & later:** 2012 = twenty twelve or two thousand twelve or two thousand and twelve (however you want the actor to say it)
- Writer's choice re: abbreviated **decades** = the '80s or the eighties (latter is preferred)

## **IN NARRATIVE:**

Keep narrative brief, succinct, **visually flowing.**

- Digitize **numbers over ten** (digitize ALL ages)
- Use symbols (% , \$ , etc.)
- do *not* punctuate commonly used initialisms & acronyms

Don't spell out things that are commonly abbreviated in some way.

*Samples:* five \$20 bills, 5-year-old, .38 special, 23rd Psalm, 99% full, 55 mph, ID, FBI, DC, etc.

NOTE: rules are opposite for dialogue where things sb spelled out as pronounced.

**ALL CAPS in narrative** – all caps SOUNDS and OBJECTS is an obsolete, old-school technique intended only for shooting drafts in its day. In specs, ALL CAPS sb for something truly important that requires special attention. Otherwise, nothing feels important because too many things are ALL CAPS, so just let us see & hear normally without the distraction of ALL CAPS.

**White space (breaking up action paragraphs):** keep the eye moving DOWN – not across  
Dense paragraphs are an instant turnoff to any reader.

- ¶ no more than 3–4 lines of text
- ¶ no more than 3 images/sentences per paragraph
- ¶ if the POV changes or a different character enters the action there sb a paragraph break
- ¶ new shots/angles require a paragraph break

Don't bury important information where a reader's skimming eye will almost certainly miss it.

**Minor character capitalization:** In narrative, unnamed characters with descriptions are only capitalized if the description is used as a name (like a Proper Noun) - in other words, don't use articles (the, a) if capitalization is preferred because that would be like saying "the Rebecca":  
the trucker **or** Trucker - **not** the Trucker  
her mother **or** Mother - **not** her Mother

**We / You** – Every address to the reader stops the story & jolts "us" out of the story. It also changes POV from 3<sup>rd</sup> person to 2<sup>nd</sup> person.

## PROOFREADING/EDITING:

While traditional literary rules can be bent or broken in screenplays, there are still the basics that should be followed for clarity and easy reading. Most recommendations are based on CMS (Chicago Manual of Style) while spellings are mostly confirmed by dictionary.com:

### overused words/phrases to consider replacing:

**howl** (15 instances)

**“start to” phrases:** In screenplays, people DO things right now. Unless they are interrupted, “starts to” or “begins to” are very annoying phrases to readers, esp. if overused.

**Find/replace most of the 57 instances throughout**

**Comma placement** in direct address is important for clarity:

Don't shoot, John. = John, please don't shoot me.

Don't shoot John. = Don't shoot the person named John.

Don't, shoot John. = Don't shoot me, shoot John instead.

Also, commas save lives...

Let's eat, Grandma. = family genre

Let's eat Grandma. = horror genre

**Descriptive phrases set apart by a comma must be closed by a comma:**

The general, 40, tall, strong and steeped in Roman dignity, rides his horse...

It appears most are not properly closed throughout.

**Hyphenate words strung together as an adjective before a noun** (i.e. an over-the-top personality), but do not hyphenate obvious adverbial phrases (i.e. an overly protective mother).

Skin-sensitive people... = people with sensitive skin

Skin sensitive people. = horror story

When ambiguous whether the modifying adverb applies to the adjective or the noun, use hyphens as appropriate:

Ex.1: A “light-green suitcase” is pale in color / A “light green suitcase” is not heavy

Ex.2: A “small-business owner” runs a small business / A “small business owner” is short in stature

**phonetic dialogue** – excessive alternate spellings **NOT** recommended. It slows the read to have to translate.

- Dialogue should follow basic literary rules.
- **Word choice** is far more important than phonetics to establish a character's speaking nuances.
- Establish a lisp, accent or dialect **in description**, then let the actor bring it to life:

Hattie speaks in her thick “Mammy” drawl.

**• There are standard alternate spellings for many/most words & contractions:**

livin' = living (all “ing” words should either be spelled out or have an apostrophe in place of the missing “g”)

wanna = want to (*not* want a)

Whaddya = what do you

gotta = got to (*not* got a)

'em = them – it is a separate word, not a contraction (remember to use a right ' apostrophe)



**Interjections** – avoid confusing made-up phonetics where standard spellings exist:

um

hmm

ah

shh

huh

ow

aw

ugh

nah = no

uh-huh = yes

mm-hmm = yes

uh-uh = no

mm-mm = no

eh

whew

oh (surprise)

ooh (amazement)

phew

yea = an antiquated not-often used form of “indeed”

yeah = yes

ya = slang for You

yah = spur a horse forward

yay = hooray

**plural numbers** – 20s, 30s, 1940s, the '50s, Boeing 787s, etc. (not 20's, 30's, 1940's, '50's etc.)

Same rule applies to acronyms and initialisms as long as meaning is clear: IDs, EMTs, etc.

If you're dotting i's and crossing t's, that's another matter where the apostrophe makes it clear.

**NO comma before** as / while / until – a comma disrupts the flow of the sentence.

There is *no* comma when it refers to time:

She washes the dishes as he dries them.

She washes the dishes while he dries them.

She washes the dishes until he takes over the task.

There *is* a comma when used instead of “because” to start a compound phrase:

She washes the dishes, as he is unable to do it with his broken arm.

“. sb .” – In AmE, quotations go around the period & comma.

**Basic rule for AmE QUOTATIONS & PUNCTUATION:**

INSIDE: Commas go “inside,” as do “periods.”

OUTSIDE: “semicolons”; “colons”: “asterisks”\* “dashes of all sorts”-- (– or —) (unless it's part of the quote, “such as when dialogue is cut off--”)

IN or OUT: “Most times, in go the questions and exclamations!” or Shall I put such marks outside for a “clause” or “phrase”? “Yes!” “Really?” The answer is “yes.”

**Find/replace all**

The different BrE rules do not apply to Hollywood scripts.

**possessive plurals** – no “s” after apostrophe (e.g. girls', claims', fishes', Joneses')

3 dots in an **ellipsis** (...)

**dad vs. Dad (& grandma, etc.)** – when someone refers to a relative like it's their name or speaks directly to them, it's a Proper Noun & sb capitalized. When used with "my" it's a noun:

What did Dad tell you?

My dad told me so.

Hey, Dad, what did you tell her?

(This does NOT apply to pet names such as "honey" or "darling.")

Hey, sweetie, what did you tell her?

What did the jerkface tell you?

### **Capitalization of official titles vs. functional titles:**

President Lincoln

the president

basically, if used with an article (the, a, an) it is a functional title & should not be capitalized

**Forms of address for titles & rank** – unless it is part of an official title (e.g. Sir Paul McCartney), most forms of address are lowercase:

Yes, general! (rank only)

Yes, General Patton! (full title)

Yes, sir! (to a superior)

Yes, Sir Paul. (to a knight)

Yes, Sire. (to a king - that is his entire title/name to his subjects with a heightened respect)

Yes, Your Majesty.

Yes, Your Honor. (to a judge)

Yes, ma'am.

Yes, Madam President.

Yes, m'lady.

Yes, my lord.

Yes, Lord. (to Jesus)

Yes, lord. (to a nobleman)

**'Single' quotation marks** – AmE uses full "quotation" marks for all types of quotes.

**Find/replace all**

**"and then"** = redundant phrase - annoying to most readers when prolific. Usually a new sentence will suffice, or just plain "and"

Their eyes lock and then Carla steps forward.

sb

Their eyes lock. Carla steps forward.

**24 occurrences throughout. Reduce or eliminate.**

**-ing words (is / are) = passive action** – every verb phrase ending in "ing" is passive. Use the active verb...

Instead of He is fighting use He fights. Instead of They are seated use They sit.

**Find/rephrase as many as possible**

Minimize **pronouns** in narrative – him / her / he / she / it / they – use the character name even if no one else in the scene; it makes the read much smoother for the reader. Also ensures clarity. AND it keeps an actor interested to see his/her character name as often as possible.

cause **sb** 'cause when used instead of "because"

cuz **CAN** be used instead of "cousin"

*sample: It's a lost cause, cuz, 'cause I'm already on the causeway.*

ya'll **sb** y'all

woa **sb** whoa

**OK:** woulda, shoulda, coulda **OR:** Would've, should've, could've

**but NOT:** would a, should a, could a

**but NOT:** would of, should of, could of

**rifle vs. riffle** (verb)

rifle = search or ransack

riffle = shuffle through

*sample: While he riffled through a stack of books she rifled the rest of the room to find the ruby.*

**lie vs. lay** – people lie while they lay objects – otherwise, lay is a past tense, rarely used in a present tense narration.

She lies down.

She lays the gun down.

**draw vs. drawer**

draw = verb

drawer = noun

*sample: She draws open the drawer.*

**lightning vs. lightening**

lightning = as in thunder &...

lightening = as in a hair color product

*sample: The lightning is lightening the dark sky.*

**its vs. it's**

its = possessive of it

it's = contraction of "it is" or "it has"

*sample: It's time for its arrival, but it's been delayed.*

**they're vs. their vs. there**

*sample: They're waiting for their friend there.*

**you're vs. your**

*sample: Your Yorky is in Yorkshire, but you're lost in days of yore.*

**lead vs. led**

lead = present tense

led = past tense

*sample: The leader led them to the lead pencils.*

**peak vs. peek**

peak = summit

peek = peer/look

*sample: She peeked over the peak with piqued curiosity.*

**everyday vs. every day**

everyday = adjective

every day = phrase

*sample: The everyday problem is something I deal with every day.*

**than vs. then**

than = comparison

then = time

*sample: The bruise appeared more black than blue, then turned purple.*

**blonde vs. blond** (adj. or noun)

blonde = feminine

blond = masculine (use when applying to more than one gender)

*sample: A blonde bombshell approached the nerdy blond. (A girl approached a guy, both blond.)*

**11-year-old** (n. or adj.) vs. **11 years old** (phrase)

*sample: The 11-year-old runs, but her 11-year-old legs can't keep up. She is small for 11 years old.*

**Nod vs. shake**

nod = yes

shake = no

*sample: They shake their heads, disappointed, then nod when ice cream is offered.*

**breathe vs. breath**

breathe = verb

breath = noun

*sample: Breathe deeply...deep breaths.*

**further vs. farther**

further = internal progress

farther = external distance

*sample: I won't say anything further on the matter if you'll walk a little farther with me.*

**loose vs. lose**

loose = free

lose = misplace

*sample: Keep the noose loose, or you'll lose.*

**awhile vs. a while**

awhile = adverb

a while = noun

*sample: Stay for a while to wile away the hours, and I'll return awhile later.*

## **TIPS FOR REDUCING PAGE COUNT:**

NOTE: **MARGIN CHEATS** are *not* the answer.

- Professional readers (whether paid by the page or not) DO catch these things and don't like the deceit (purposeful or not) or the look of scrunched text or narrow margins.
- Better to fix the text so that it fits the format than to manipulate the layout and risk ticking off a Hollywood reader.
- Also, it skews the truth of the page: 1 page = 1 minute.

### **Simple universal fixes:**

**Change to double line spacing between scenes** instead of triple – nearly every triple line space sb just double. The triple space is a software default meant for shooting scripts – in specs it fragments the flow and lengthens the page count.

- In **Final Draft**: FORMAT > ELEMENTS > SCENE HEADING > PARAGRAPH (make sure there is only 1 space before & after, instead of the default 2)

**Find/replace all double spaces between sentences** (purposeful or accidental) to single space:

- In **Final Draft**: EDIT > FIND > REPLACE > type 2 spaces in the “find what” field; then type 1 space in the “replace with” field > REPLACE ALL (repeat until there are no more replacements made)

**Change dialogue/action breaks** to NOT break at sentences:

- In **Final Draft**: DOCUMENT > PAGE LAYOUT > OPTIONS > uncheck BREAK DIALOGUE...

### **Basic manual format changes:**

**Eliminate all extra spaces at the end of element paragraphs** (in some programs this can be done with a find/replace function, in others it must be done manually by visually finding each by viewing the document's hidden text:

- In **Final Draft**: VIEW > INVISIBLES > manually remove each space that proceeds a paragraph mark (¶)

**remove all transitions:** CUT TO: & DISSOLVE

note: most are unnecessary in spec scripts anyhow

**Use single-line MONTAGE/FLASHBACK/DREAM** technique where possible:

Use a parenthetical at the end of the scene heading rather than a separate line:

INT. HOUSE – NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

When the flashback ends, just state it in the next scene's heading:

EXT. PARK – DAY (BACK TO PRESENT)

## **Basic rewrites that reduce text density:**

**HINT:** The more reductions in text you can make in the **first 10 pages**, the more likely it will affect the final page count as removing one line on page 10 can reduce 2 pages while removing a line on page 100 will have very little effect.

**FIRST: Eliminate any scenes** that do not move the story forward. For a spec, this screenplay is simply too long. If there are any really cool scenes that are there for entertainment but do not add to the story...**delete**.

**Delete as many as possible throughout**

**Create Whitespace with fewer words:** Throughout, the description in the pages is much too dense & much too detailed. See p.1 as a sample of how to create whitespace while reducing the number of words.

**Eliminate as many parentheticals as possible.** Most parentheticals are unnecessary or could be handled in the previous action paragraph without using up a distracting line of the page. **See p.6 for example of removing 3 of 4 parentheticals.**

**Remove/replace every (beat) or (pause)** – If a pause is necessary use an ellipsis (...). Let the actors figure out their own beats and don't waste the line space.

**Remove music cues or credits.** That is the production team's job, not the writer's.

**Eliminate “start to” / “begin to” phrases:**

He starts to pack his suitcase.

**sb:**

He packs his suitcase.

**Find/replace most of the 57 instances throughout**

**change all** in the background **to** in the b.g.

**Remove character ages in introductions for MINOR characters** (esp. if they're non-speaking characters, but also for characters where age is not important):

GENERIC CHARACTER (40s) charges the door like a bull.

**sb:**

Generic Character charges the door like a bull.

**Find/remove all**

**Rephrase character age introductions:**

CHARACTER NAME is 35 years old and stands six feet. He charges the door like a bull.

**sb:**

CHARACTER NAME (35, 6' tall) charges the door like a bull.

**Find/replace most of the 57 instances throughout** (first few are marked in blue)

**Eliminate as many commas as possible (where grammar appropriate):**

- **don't** use the Oxford comma (this, that, and those) – this is a style choice
- **don't** place a comma before “too” and other tag words – this is a style choice
- **DO** use a comma in forms of address in dialogue: Don't shoot, John.

**Use active verbs** rather than passive. This not only improves the reading experience, but it almost always shortens the text by eliminating “is” and “are” and the tedious “-ing” phrases:  
Instead of He is fighting use He fights. Instead of They are seated use They sit.  
**Find/rephrase as many as possible after p.1**

**Use compound word forms** whenever grammatically possible:  
seatbelt, handwritten, overworked, etc.

**Eliminate redundancy** from headings to description to dialogue. If it’s made clear in one or the other, no need to waste reader time & page space by reiterating what we already see/hear:

EXT. BAR - NIGHT

John enters a bar.

INSERT SIGN: “Rosie’s Bar”

We already know where he’s going & can “see” the sign in the heading when rewritten to:

EXT. ROSIE’S BAR - NIGHT

John enters.

**If someone is SHOWN on his phone**, there is no need for a parenthetical restating it. And we surmise that the next V.O. dialogue is who he’s talking to unless told otherwise.

**Stylistically abbreviate description** wherever possible:

Waves crash against the rocky shore under the stormy, gray clouds.

can be reduced to:

Rough surf. Gray skies.

It’s not as poetic, but very effective in setting mood & keeping the reader’s eyes moving downward.

**Digitize numbers in description:**

five one-hundred-dollar bills can be changed to 5 \$100 bills

**Remove all novelization.** If it can’t be seen/heard on screen, it should not be on the page.

A GROUNDSKEEPER rakes fall leaves into a small pile. We sense he knows every inch of the place, been taking care of it for most of his seventy years.

sb

AN OLD GROUNDSKEEPER rakes fall leaves into a small pile.

**Summarize exterior locations.** Don’t let it read like a travelogue:

EXT. DALMATIA - DAY

Dalmatia is a region on the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea. It is a mostly coastal region characterized by its coves, secluded beaches and inlets.

sb

EXT. DALMATIA - DAY

A beautiful coastline of coves, secluded beaches and inlets.

**Minimize flowery descriptions.** If some of the more verbose descriptions can be summed up in one phrase that will work wonders for the reader’s experience & reduce page count:

The crowded room is filled with smoke and ragtime music. The bartenders can barely keep up with the demand for liquor. Flapper girls attend to patrons in pin-striped suits.

can be diminished to:

A busy Roaring Twenties speakeasy.

**LAST: WIDOWS & ORPHANS:** Once everything else is edited, visually find & rephrase all paragraphs/dialogue blocks where a single word is left on its own line.