

HOW TO FORMAT SCREENPLAYS

Presented by

Grant Boman Harvey

**TITLE: "TITLE CARD SHOWING YOU HOW TO FORMAT TITLE CARDS."**

INT. HOUSE - DAY

The above is a heading. **INT** refers to the location being interior, while **EXT** refers to an exterior location. Meanwhile, this paragraph is the **action line** and is where you would describe what the house looks like.

If you want a character to enter the scene, you would write it like this:

**JOHN WAYNE** (70s) America's favorite movie cowboy, enters the room with his gun drawn.

Notice how John Wayne's name is in all caps? That's because that's the first time we've seen him in the story.

John Wayne looks around the house. Finding a bar stool, he comes over and sits next to THE READER (YOU).

JOHN WAYNE

This is how you format my **character name** when I'm speaking **dialogue**. Since this is a made up version of 2019 John Wayne, I'm not going to say anything offensive or unbecoming of the movie legend I am today. Lucky you!

John Wayne WINKS at the camera. Naturally, You pour him a drink, even though this isn't a bar, nor is it your house.

CRASH. You hear a **SOUND**, indicating that it should be capitalized. This is a stylistic choice, but one I prefer to help editors, sound designers, and readers like you realize something important is happening.

JOHN WAYNE (CONT'D)

Just a raccoon getting into the trash again. You know raccoons have opposable thumbs? Sooner or later they're going to be able to be quite the gunfighters themselves.

You think about this, and how it might be a good example of **NARRATIVE FORESHADOWING**, but also how that's not a lesson for this article.

Wait - you can't (*shouldn't*) write **thoughts** of the characters into the script. Think of the words on a script only as what can be **HEARD or SEEN ON SCREEN**.

BOOM! The door bursts open. John Wayne spins around.

JOHN WAYNE (CONT'D)  
 (sarcastic)  
 Oh, lovely. Just who I wanted to  
 see!

JOHN'S POV: a SHORT GUNSLINGER stands silhouette in the door  
 frame.

*(You can sometimes write perspective into the story, but do  
 so sparingly! It may also be important to put a note like  
 this to the reader in the scene description - but sparingly!)*

SHORT GUNSLINGER  
 (high-pitch squeaky voice)  
 Your time has come, Wayne.

The Short Gunslinger walks into the light - it's A RACCOON!

RACCOON GUNSLINGER (CONT'D)  
 I'm speaking again, indicated by  
 the **CONT'D** next to my character  
 name.  
 (then)  
 I'm also speaking again, broken up  
 by another parenthetical. You can  
 do this sometimes.

RIIIING. It's the PHONE on the wall.

JOHN WAYNE  
 (into phone)  
 What is it? I'm in the middle of  
 something-

VOICE (O.S.)  
 (from phone)  
 This is what it looks like when you  
 need to write two characters having  
 a phone conversation. O.S. stands  
 for off-screen, but you can also...

CUT TO:

EXT. DUMPSTER OUTSIDE HOUSE - SAME (INTERCUT)

Another RACCOON holds a CELLPHONE to his ear.

RACCOON ON PHONE  
 (into phone)  
 ...cut to another location to  
 introduce the other character!

CLOSE ON: The PHONE as John Wayne SMASHES it back against the wall. He turns to face his furry foe.

JOHN WAYNE

There ain't enough room in this house for the both of us, Raccoon.

The Raccoon SPITS. The LOGIE FLIES ACROSS THE ROOM.

RACCOON GUNSLINGER

Guess it was nice knowing ya'!

John's FINGER hovers over THE TRIGGER.

JOHN WAYNE

Wish I could say the same.

John FIRES. Raccoon ducks. Raccoon FIRES.

John LEAPS over the bar. FIRES BLIND.

Raccoon UNLOADS. A FLURRY OF STEEL paints the marble counter.

CLICK. Raccoon is out of bullets.

John jumps. Flies across the room at Raccoon. PUNCHES the gun out of his paw.

They grapple. It's a furry fist fight. John gets the upper hand, picking the Raccoon up by the scruff.

With a whip of the hand, he HURLS the fur-ball OUT THE SLIDING GLASS DOOR WITH A CRASH.

John stands tall. Victorious grin.

FADE TO BLACK.