

Screenwriting — Workbook

This workbook turns the course into a finished sample and a submission-ready package. Work through one section per module, then complete the action plan to produce a formatted sample scene, an act-by-act outline, a logline, and a one-page pitch. Use the included templates to track beats, scenes, and your submission campaign.

Format, Tools, and the Reader's Eye

Set up professional tools and prove you can format a clean, fast-reading page.

Exercise: Format the Same Scene Three Ways

Pick a simple two-character moment, such as a confrontation in a kitchen. Write it three times: once with dense, novelistic action paragraphs, once with overused parentheticals and called shots, and once lean and professional with action under four lines. Compare how each reads and how much white space each leaves.

- Which version reads fastest, and what specifically slows the slow ones down?

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- Where did you accidentally describe interior thought a camera could not capture?

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- What did you cut from the lean version that you thought was essential?
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Worksheet: Title Page and Document Setup

Open your chosen software, set the document to Screenplay, and fill in the fields below to lock your title page and export settings before you draft.

Working title

Software chosen (Final Draft / WriterDuet / Fade In / Highland / other)

Format (Feature / Hour Drama Pilot / Half-Hour Comedy Pilot)

Target page count

Genre and two comparison titles

Contact line for bottom-left of title page

Export format (PDF confirmed)

Checklist: First Ten Pages Readiness

- [] Courier 12-point confirmed and margins set by software, not by hand
- [] Every scene heading uses INT. or EXT. plus location plus time of day
- [] All action is present tense and visual, with no we see or there is filler
- [] No action paragraph exceeds four lines
- [] Character names are capped on first appearance only
- [] Title page shows only title, Written by and name, and contact info
- [] Read three produced scripts in my genre before drafting

Story Structure and the Beat Sheet

Lock the spine of your story on cards before writing a single scene.

Exercise: Beat Out a Film You Know

Choose a film you have seen several times. Using the Save the Cat 15-beat list, identify each beat and the approximate minute or page where it falls. Then do the same for your own story idea so you can compare a working structure against your draft.

- Where do the inciting incident, midpoint, and all-is-lost fall in the film you chose?

• Which beats in your own story are still missing or vague?

• Does your second act turn arrive too early or too late relative to the targets?

Worksheet: Major Turning Points Map

Fill in your story's load-bearing structural beats with a one-line description and a target page for each. Leave a beat blank only if you genuinely have not solved it yet, then return to it.

Opening image and ordinary world

Inciting incident (target page)

First act turn / break into two (target page)

B story entry (target page)

Midpoint reversal (target page)

All is lost / second act turn (target page)

Climax

Final image

Worksheet: TV Engine and Act-Out Planner

Complete this only if you are writing a pilot. Define the series engine and the button that ends each act so the structure survives breaks and hooks the viewer back.

Series engine (why this can run 100 episodes)

Premise or typical-episode pilot, and why

Cold open / teaser concept

A story (this episode)

B story (this episode)

Act-out button for each act break

Checklist: Outline Locked Before Drafting

- Every Save the Cat or sequence beat is on its own index card
- All cards are laid out so the whole story is visible at once
- Inciting incident lands by roughly page 12
- Midpoint is a true reversal or revelation, not just a busy scene
- B story braids into the climax rather than vanishing
- Each act-out (if TV) ends on a reveal, reversal, or question

Scene Craft, Dialogue, and Character

Write scenes that turn and dialogue that hides its meaning.

Exercise: The Value-Shift Scene

Write one scene of two to three pages in which the point-of-view character enters at one emotional charge and exits at the opposite, for example from confident to humiliated. Enter the scene late and cut the instant the value flips. Then write the scene's job in a single sentence above it.

- What is the opening charge and the closing charge, and where exactly does it flip?

- What did you cut from the top and bottom of the scene by entering late and leaving early?

- Could the conflict be carried by subtext instead of anyone stating their feelings?

Exercise: Subtext and the Cover-Cue Test

Take a dialogue scene and rewrite it so no character states what they actually want; the surface conversation is about something mundane while the real subject runs underneath. Then cover the character cues and read it: if you cannot tell who is speaking, revise for distinct voices.

- What is the buried real subject of the conversation, and what mundane surface hides it?

- Which lines are still on-the-nose and need to be deflected or cut?

- What vocabulary, rhythm, or verbal tic now distinguishes each character?

Worksheet: Protagonist Want, Need, and Wound

Define the engine of your lead character so the plot and the arc pull on the same rope. Be specific and concrete, especially about the external goal and the past wound.

External want (one visual, concrete goal)

Internal need (the truth they resist)

Flaw or false belief

Past wound that planted the belief

Change arc or steadfast arc

Climax choice that proves the change

Checklist: Scene and Dialogue Pass

- Every scene has a one-sentence job and turns on a value change
- Scenes enter as close to the conflict as possible and cut on the turn
- Greetings and goodbyes are removed from dialogue
- Parentheticals are rare and never carry the line's meaning
- Each major character passes the cover-cue voice test
- Exposition is delivered during conflict or asked by someone who truly does not know

Revision, Pitching, and Breaking In

Polish the draft and build the package and plan that gets it read.

Exercise: Run the Five Passes

After leaving your draft alone for two weeks, run the five focused rewrite passes in order: structure, character, scene, dialogue, then line and format. Do not fix words until structure and character are solid. Log every problem you find by page in the revision tracker template.

- Which structural beat needed the most repair, and how did you fix it?

- Reading one character's scenes in isolation, where did their voice or arc break?

- At what point did your passes stop finding real problems and turn to mere preference?

Worksheet: Logline and One-Pager Builder

Draft your selling materials using the templates from the course. Write the logline several ways and test it on someone cold before locking it. Reveal the ending in the synopsis.

Logline (When [incident], a [flawed protagonist] must [goal] before [stakes])

Two comparison titles (X meets Y)

Tone or genre line

One-page synopsis including the ending

Why this story now

Why you are the writer for it

Worksheet: Verbal Pitch Outline

Lay out your five-to-ten-minute pitch as beats you can deliver conversationally, not a memorized recitation. Rehearse it aloud until the shape is automatic.

Hook line or question

Setup: protagonist, world, central irony

Engine: goal, antagonist, stakes

Arc: broad three acts including the ending

Close: tone, comps, and your passion

Checklist: Submission-Ready Package

- Draft locked after passes stopped finding structural problems
- Logline tested cold and immediately understood
- One-page synopsis written in present tense and reveals the ending
- Two strong, polished scripts exist before approaching reps
- Target list built of fellowships, contests, and the Black List
- Query email pairs a killer logline with a reason for contacting that specific person
- Script exported as PDF for every submission

Your Action Plan

1. Choose your format and software, set up the document, and read three produced scripts in your genre before drafting.
2. Write your story on index cards using the Save the Cat or sequence beats, and lay them out so you can see the whole movie.
3. Confirm the inciting incident, midpoint, and act turns land near their target pages, and fix the structure on cards first.
4. Define each major character's want, need, flaw, and wound, and decide on a change or steadfast arc.
5. Draft the script in scene units, entering late and exiting early, with every scene turning on a value change.
6. Set the draft aside for two weeks, then run the five rewrite passes in order, logging problems by page.
7. Write and cold-test your logline, then build a one-page synopsis that reveals the ending and names two comps.
8. Build and rehearse a five-to-ten-minute verbal pitch with a hook, setup, engine, arc, and close.
9. Identify target fellowships, contests, and a Black List hosting plan, and prepare query emails with strong loglines.
10. Start your next script immediately so reps and contests see a body of work, not a single submission.

