

## PROCESS OVERVIEW

### STAGE 1: UNDERSTANDING PLAYWRITING

It's easy to feel intimidated by the thought of writing a stage play. The rules! The formatting! The binding! Don't let the seemingly endless parade of playwriting elements scare you away from writing your first script. A familiarity with the basics of the craft is half the battle.

THE BOYS IN THE CAGE

A Play in Two Acts

by

Cast of Characters

<u>Donald Bradleyson:</u>	A man in his early 40s.
<u>Jill Bradleyson:</u>	A woman in her late 20s.
<u>Blaire McDaniel:</u>	A woman in her late 20s.
<u>Dermott McDaniel:</u>	A man in his late 20s; Blaire's husband.
<u>Barett McDaniel:</u>	Squirmy toddler; son of Blaire and Dermott McDaniel.
<u>Sandi Billings:</u>	Seasoned zoo volunteer.

Scene

Various locations around the Twin Cities.

Time

The present.

ACT 1

Scene 1

SETTING: We are in the basement of the BRADLEYSON home, a nice looking house in a residential area of the Twin Cities. The basement, however, hints at a more sinister story. The entire room is taken up by an oversize dog kennel of chain link construction - the kind of dog kennel you would find if you were to visit a police dog training facility. This kennel is the last thing you would expect to find in the basement of somebody's home. A large dilapidated couch, water dish and stacks of newspapers are the last things you'd expect to find inside a kennel, but there they are. The effect is unspeakably creepy.

AT RISE: DONALD BRADLEYSON is curled up in

**Title Page**  
Appears on its own page with the contact info for the writer.

**Cast of Characters**  
Lists out all the characters in the play with a brief description.

**Scene & Time**  
If there's room this appears on the Cast page

**Act & Scene Designations**  
Each new act & scene start with a description of the setting.

## WHAT IS A PLAYSRIPT?

In the most basic terms, a playscript is a 90-120 page document written in Courier 12pt font on 8 1/2" x 11" bright white three-hole punched paper. Wondering why Courier font is used? It's a timing issue. One formatted script page in Courier font equals roughly one minute of screen time. That's why the average page count of a playscript should come in between 90 and 120 pages. Comedies tend to be on the shorter side (90 pages, or 1 ½ hours) while Dramas run longer (120 pages, or 2 hours).

A playscript can be an original piece, or based on a true story or previously written piece, like a novel, or newspaper article. At its heart, a playscript is a blueprint for the stage it will one day become. Professionals on the set including the producer, director, set designer and actors all translate the playwright's vision using their individual talents. Since the creation of a play is ultimately a collaborative art, the playwright must be aware of each person's role and as such, the script should reflect the writer's knowledge.

For example, it's crucial to remember that a play is primarily a visual medium. As a playwright, you must show what's happening in a story, rather than tell. A 2-page inner monologue may work well for a novel, but it can be the kiss of death in a play, depending on its tone. The very nature of playwriting is based on how to show a story on a stage, and pivotal moments can be conveyed through something as simple as a look on an actor's face. Let's take a look at what a playscript's structure looks like.

## OVERALL FORMATTING

While playwriting formatting software frees you from having to learn the nitty-gritty of margins and indents, it's good to have a grasp of the general spacing standards.

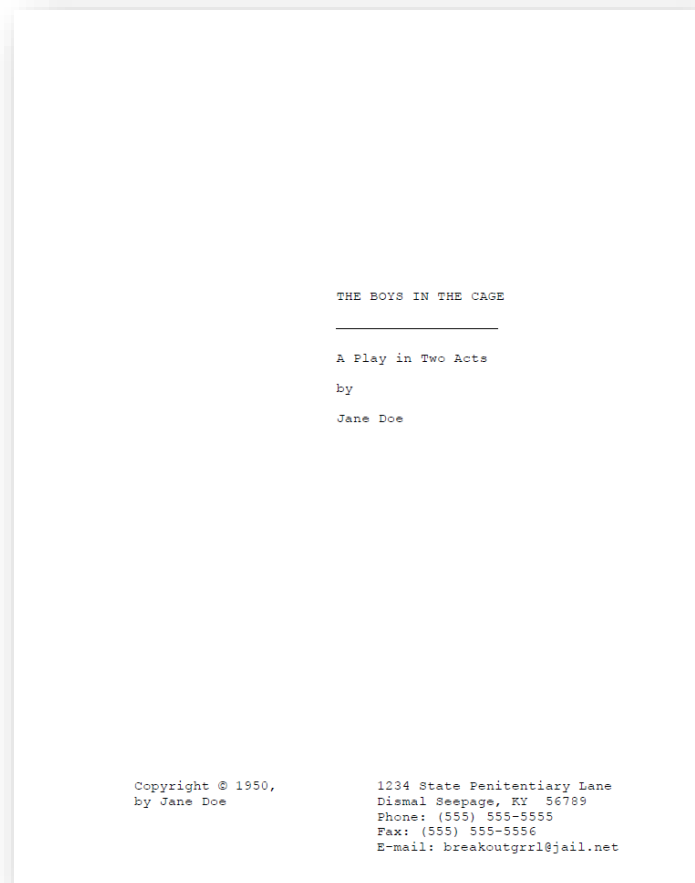
The top, bottom and right margins of a screenplay are 1". The left margin is 1.5". The extra half-inch of white space to the left of a script page allows for binding with brads or three hole punch, yet still imparts a feeling of vertical balance of the text on the page. The entire document should be single-spaced. It is always in Courier 12 point size.

## THE TITLE PAGE OF A PLAYSRIPT

This page contains exactly what it purports to have: the title, how many acts, the playwright's name as well as all the contact information. The play's title is printed in ALL CAPS (4 inches from the left) with an underscore the entire length of the title).

Underneath is the number of Acts with the byline and then the playwright's name.

Further down the page is the copyright registration and the address and contact information. The title page is not numbered.



**DRAMATIS PERSONAE PAGE (THE CAST OF CHARACTERS)**

The Dramatis Personae page comes directly after the title page. This page is not numbered with the top, right, and bottom margins at 1 inch, and the left margin at 1.5 inches. On the top of the page, the words “Cast of Characters” (note capitalization) are centered and underlined.

Two spaces below the “Cast of Characters” line, you’ll enter the first name in your list of the character names. The character names line up on the left margin, are underlined and followed by a colon. To the right of each character’s name, at a tab setting of your choice, comes a brief description of the character. Two spaces below the character description comes the name of the next character, in the left margin, underlined and followed by a colon... etc.

See the example of the Dramatis Personae page if you’re confused.

If there’s enough room, put the Scene and Time descriptions for the play somewhere below the character list (your choice). Center the word “Scene” -- capitalized— and underline it, and two spaces below it write the scene or place where your play takes place at the left margin. (Such as “A college dormitory overlooking a parking lot.”)

Two spaces below this, center the word “Time” -- capitalized-- and underline it. Two spaces below it write the scene or place where your play takes place at the left margin. (Such as “The present.”)

If there is no room for a description of Scene and Time on the Dramatis Personae page, put it on a separate page following this one.

<u>Cast of Characters</u>	
<u>Donald Bradleyson:</u>	A man in his early 40s.
<u>Jill Bradleyson:</u>	A woman in her late 20s.
<u>Blaire McDaniel:</u>	A woman in her late 20s.
<u>Dermott McDaniel:</u>	A man in his late 20s; Blaire’s husband.
<u>Barett McDaniel:</u>	Squirmly toddler; son of Blaire and Dermott McDaniel.
<u>Sandi Billings:</u>	Seasoned zoo volunteer.
<u>Scene</u>	
Various locations around the Twin Cities.	
<u>Time</u>	
The present.	

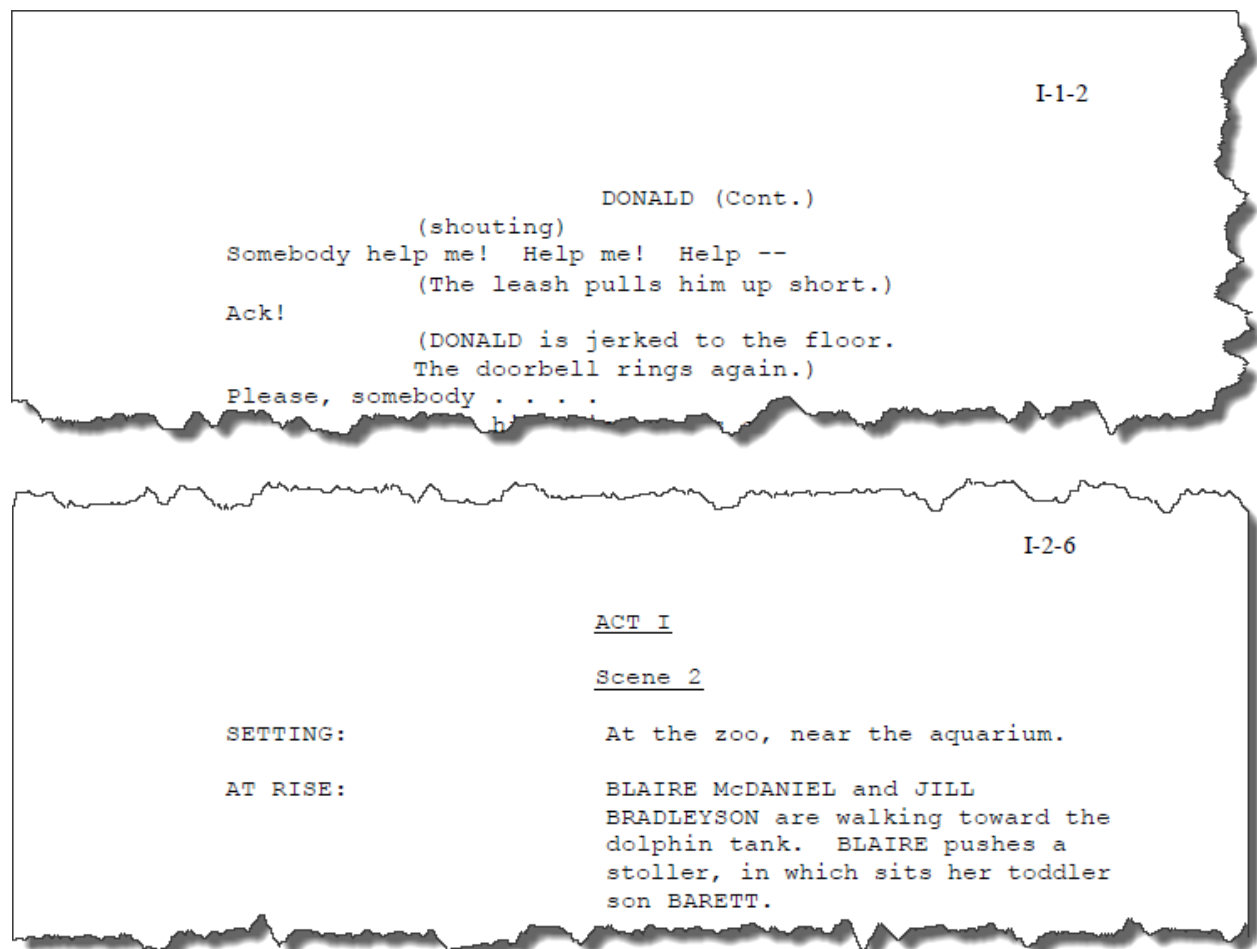
## MAIN TEXT PAGES

This main text pages have the top, right, and bottom margins at 1 inch, and the left margin at 1.5 inches. There are seven basic formatting elements that make up the text pages of a properly formatted playscript. These are Page Numbering, Act/Scene designations, the Setting description, Blackout/Curtain/End designations, Character Names, Dialogue, and Stage Directions. Let's take these element by element.

**Page Numbering:** Title page and Dramatis Personae pages are not numbered. The first page of the play is the page on which the first scene begins. Page numbers appear in the upper right hand corner of the page. (Use your "header" command in your word processor.) For a one act play, use Arabic numerals: 1, 2, 3, etc.

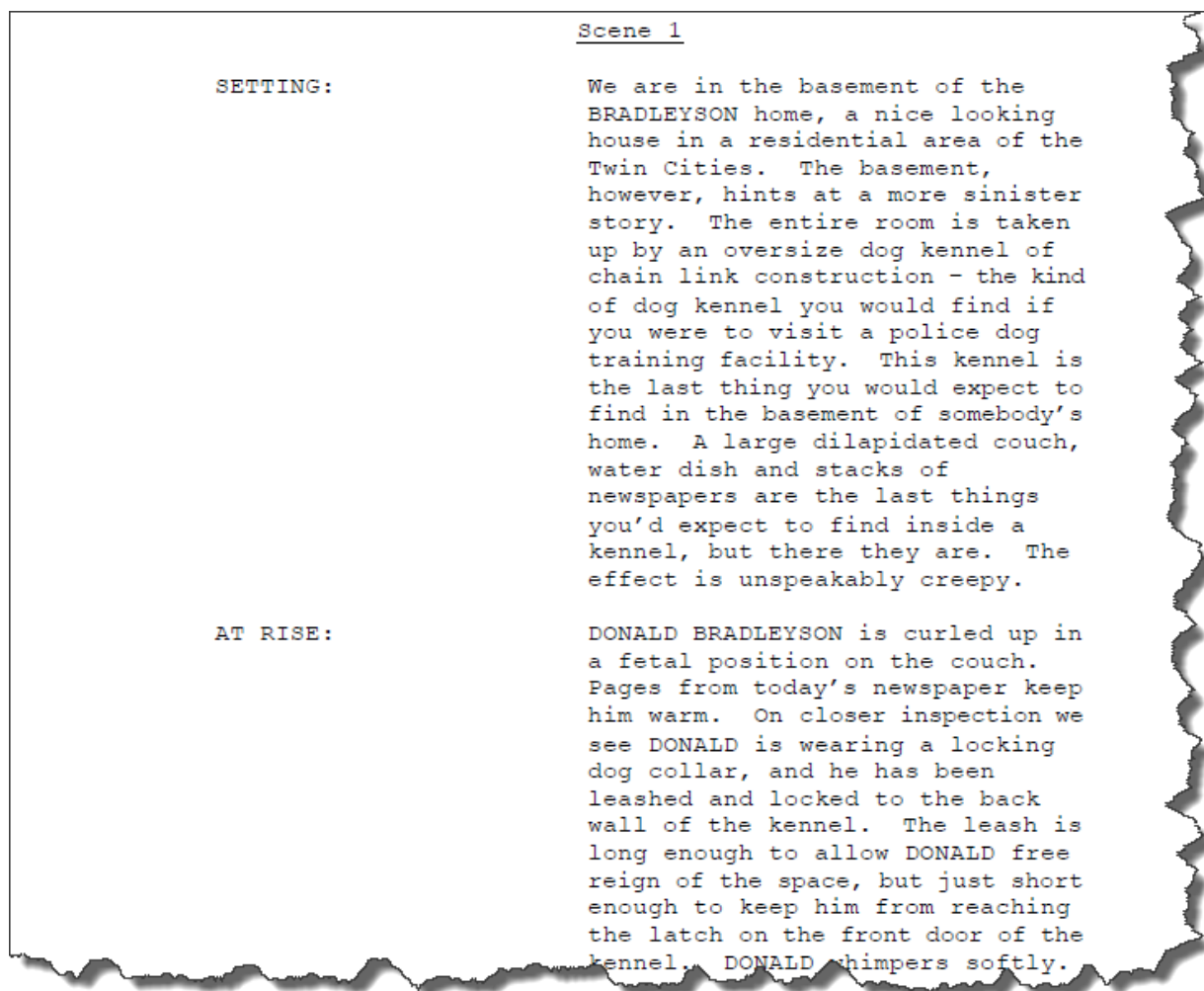
If the play contains more than one act, indicate the act number with a Roman numeral, followed by a dash, then the Arabic page number. This is better explained by example: for instance, these are how the first three pages in a play with more than one act (and without scene designations) would appear. I-1, I-2, 1-3, etc. If the acts in the play were also broken into separate scenes, an Arabic scene number would appear between the Roman numeral act number and Arabic page number. So Act Two, Scene Four, Page 85 would look like this: II-4-85

Page numbers are consecutive all the way through your script. In other words, you don't start over again with Arabic page numeral 1 at the beginning of a new act. If the first act ends on page I-7-55, the second act will begin with Act Two, Scene Eight, Page 56. (II-8-56)



**Act & Scene Designations:** Each new act and each new scene within an act start at the top margin of a new page. They are indented 4 inches from the left edge of the page. The act designation is typed in all caps, and is underscored. Double-spaced below this comes the scene designation, if your play is subdivided into scenes: this, too, is indented 4 inches from the left edge of the page. It is also underscored, but it is NOT in caps.

**Setting Descriptions:** Double-spaced below the ACT I and Scene 1 designations on the first page is the Setting Descriptions. It's best to just look at the example pages for this. The (all caps) word SETTING is at the left margin, followed by a colon. On the same line, 4 inches from the left edge of the page, a description of the set appears. Note that SETTING only refers to the way the stage setting appears. Double spaced below the SETTING description is the AT RISE description. The AT RISE is formatted the same as SETTING. The (all caps) words AT RISE are at the left margin, followed by a colon. On the same line, 4 inches from the left edge of the page, there is a description of the situation or activity that is taking place as the play begins.

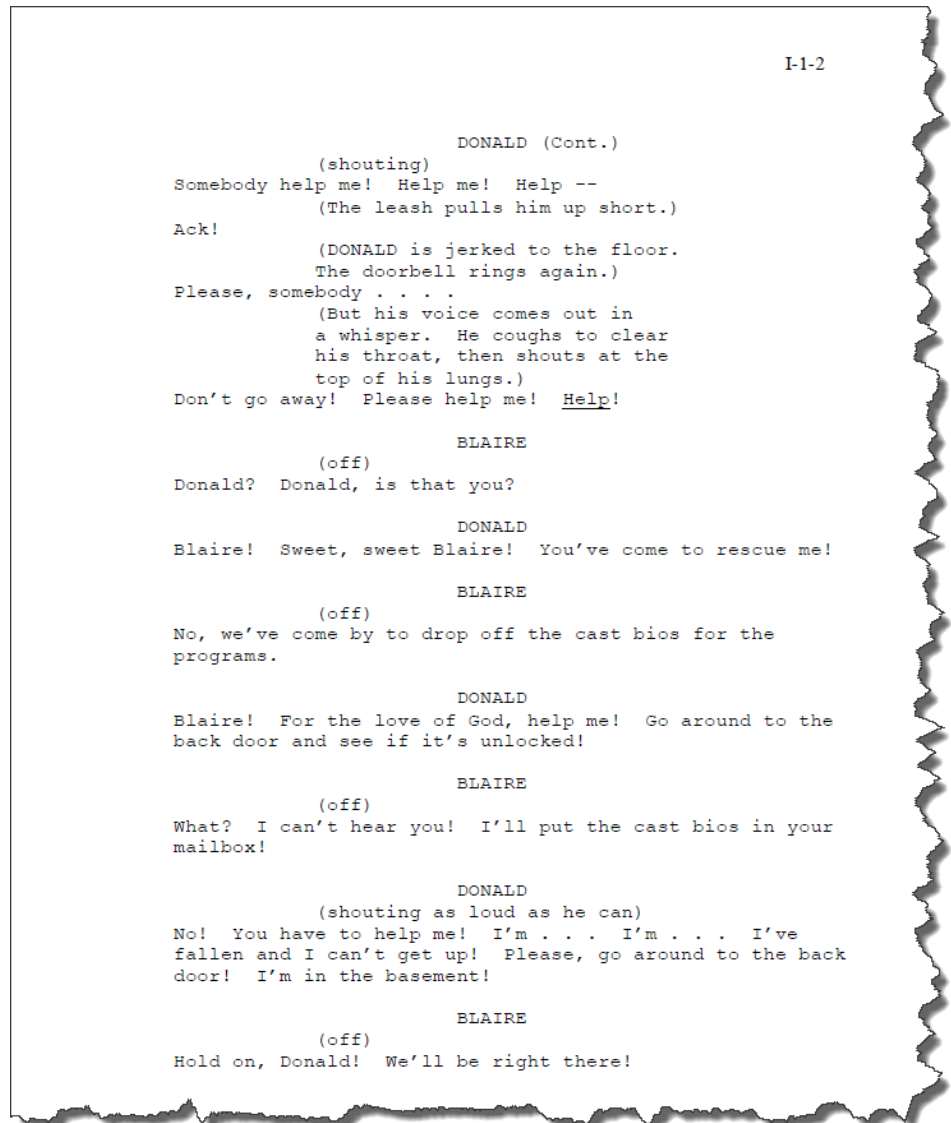


**Character Names:** These appear in all caps, indented 4 inches from the left edge of the page. Once the character name is typed, there is never a double space that follows... the next line after a character name is never blank. The next line after a character name is either dialogue or a brief stage direction if needed.

**Dialogue:** It's interesting to note that the dialogue is the only element of a playscript that will run all the way from the left margin to the right margin. See the example pages. Don't right justify the dialogue text. In fact, don't right-justify any element of your formatted script. Don't hyphenate words that are not spelled with a hyphen... move that word down to the next line.

**Stage Directions:** All stage directions appear in parentheses, 2.75 inches from the left edge of the page. Each line of stage directions on the page should not extend past approximately 2.5 inches before wrapping to the next line. Character names are always capitalized in stage directions.

Here's the golden rule about stage directions. If they take place within a character's dialogue, they are single spaced below the dialogue. Then the dialogue resumes, single spaced below the internal stage direction. If a stage direction takes place between one character's dialogue and another character's, then the stage direction is double spaced in its own separate area between the dialogue of the two characters. See the example pages for the formatting difference between "internal to a speech" stage directions and "external" stage directions.



**Curtain/Blackout/End Designations:** When a scene ends, the Blackout or Curtain designation is double spaced below the end of the scene, indented 4 inches from the left edge of the page. It is typed in all caps and appears in parentheses: (BLACKOUT), or (CURTAIN). Then, double space below this designation and use the same style to write (END OF SCENE) or (END OF ACT).

(BLAIRE giggles giddily.)

DERMOTT  
I mean it, Blaire, I'm counting to three! One!

BLAIRE  
(to DERMOTT)  
She says "control you distemper!"

(Uncontrollable giggling  
from BLAIRE.)

DERMOTT  
Two!

DONALD  
Oh, no. I spilled my water dish.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

**Simultaneous Dialogue:** When two characters speak at once, both character names and their dialogue are written on the same line. There's no hard rule about indentation here . . . the length of the speech(es) will determine how you format it.

DONALD                      BLAIRE  
For the love of God, help me!      What? I can't hear you!

[\*Source: The Standard Stage Play Format\*](#)