

A Quick Guide to Writing Radio Scripts

Of course, *all* scripts need a good plot, with plenty of emotion, and believable characters; but there are some *extra* things that are necessary in radio scripts.

It's all about the sound

How you set the scene will allow your audience to feel immersed in the action. If it's a farm, how do they know this? If it's a woodland, how are you going to describe it in the script? Although a sound engineer will add these effects to the finished production, the script needs to give a signal as to what will be heard. This is especially important when you change locations from one scene to the next.

Also, be careful of what you write in the directions. To write "Sammy sees the light come on and worries about getting caught" is problematic, because how can you translate this into sounds/ words?

Thoughts have to be spoken

Unless you are writing an internal monologue for a character (where we might hear their thoughts directly), you will have to make sure the character states what they're thinking. Or maybe someone else states it; or their motivation is clear in the actions they're taking. For example, a character might be heard crying, but it's not until they explain *why* that we will know what the problem is – we can't see their face, or the reaction of other people. In a scene actors will, of course, be able to give your words a lot of meaning, but to help readers of the script know this, make sure you include enough instruction in your descriptions.

Also, you can't use any 'significant looks' between characters (or even a character looking at an object), in the same way you can in film/ TV/ theatre. For example, if your hero sees the baddie holding a gun, how can you let the listener become aware of this too? If two lovers finally realise they can't be apart, how can you show this without relying on the image of them falling into each other's arms?

Characters need to speak, or listeners will forget they're there

It's usually okay when there are only 2 voices talking to each other in a scene, but once there are 3 or 4, you need to even out their lines. If we don't hear from one of the characters for a while, they effectively disappear. So, when they suddenly say something, it's a bit of a surprise for the listener.

Always think about making it easy for the listener to picture what's going on. If you find it hard to share out the lines, ask yourself whether one or more of the characters need to be in the scene at all.

Formatting for radio scripts.

The best way to get used to writing a radio script format, is to head over to the **BBC Writersroom resources page**. You can see templates for all different types of formatting, and can also read examples of radio shows that have been broadcast. The version below is one example...

Scene numbers - **CAPITALS**, left justified from a central indent

Sound effects – **CAPITALS**, left justified from a central indent

Character names – CAPITALS:

Dialogue starts on the same line as the character name, after a tab (or two) space, in normal sentence case.

Descriptions within dialogue - (CAPITALS)

SCENE 1

SOUNDS OF CAR MECHANICS AT WORK.

AN ENGINE IS BEING REVVED BEYOND SAFE LIMITS.

DAN: Be careful!

MORE REVVING.

DAN: (SHOUTS) Hey you! I said be careful!

SUDDEN SILENCE.

GREG: What's up, mate? You said you wanted this heap of junk back at four. It ain't ready.

DAN: She's a classic car. Not some souped-up racer. She needs respect. This company was *much* more reliable when Mr Collins was running it.

GREG: (STERN) Well, he ain't now, is he? This is how I do things round here. If you don't like it, you can leave. What'll it be?

THE NOISY WORK RESUMES.