

# Scriptwriting for the Eyes & Ears

Would Leonardo DaVinci have excelled if he could only draw with crayons? The quality of art improves when the artist has the right tools. To voiceover artists, scripts are tools.

In addition to content, a script's style and format can greatly affect its effectiveness. A well-written script is not just enjoyable to hear but effortless to read.

The following information shows you how to provide the best tools to voiceover artists.

## Format

For any copy to be read aloud, use only one side of standard size paper with wide margins --e.g.: one inch on top, three inches at the bottom, one inch on the left and at least two inches on the right. These smaller columns help announcers scan ahead without losing their place.

Margins also make it easy to hold pages quietly while maintaining consistent vocal quality. The mouth won't tilt too far away from the microphone.

Double-space all copy. Do not right justify. As you can see in this paragraph, it creates deceptive spacing and, therefore, unnatural breaks in the flow of reading.

Use upper and lower case and at least a 14-point typeface with serif. List the title and writer at the top of the first page.

Number each succeeding page, with an abbreviated title. Indicate the end of the script with "# # #" or "--30--".

On the bottom of all other pages, skip a line and center the word "MORE" in all caps. Never split words, sentences or paragraphs from one page to the next. Circle everything that is NOT to be read aloud such as notes or directions.

This format will help whoever is voicing your writing. Announcers may mark scripts for pauses or emphasis. The goal is to help them explore nuance and recreate meanings rather than prove they can wrestle with difficult copy.

## Abbreviations

Avoid abbreviations unless you want them read as abbreviations. Exceptions include titles (Dr. Mr. Mrs.) and commonly recognized cities (St. Louis, St. Paul).

Only abbreviate names of organizations and agencies commonly referred to in this form, such as F-B-I, Y-M-C-A, or N-double A-C-P. Always use hyphens between letters to be read as letters. When the letters can be read as words (NATO, SCORE, NASA), leave out the hyphens.

Spell out unusual abbreviations when you use them for the first time. For example, the Federal Trade Commission can later be called the FTC.

Only abbreviate United States when using it as an adjective.

When in doubt, spell it out.

## Pronunciation

Give phonetic spellings, in parentheses, after questionable

words. For example, La Jolla (la-hoy'-uh).

## Punctuation

Since the listener cannot see punctuation, use it only to help the reader interpret the copy.

Generally, restrict punctuation to commas, periods, question marks, quotation marks, and dots and dashes.

Dashes (--) or dots (. . .) are used to indicate longer pauses or parenthetical matter.

Hyphens are used when words, letters or numbers need to be spelled out.

## Pronouns

Make sure pronouns agree with their antecedent in both gender and number. Groups, organizations and companies are singular, and therefore take the singular form of verbs and pronouns. Make sure the listener can clearly understand to what or to whom the pronoun refers. When used as a preposition, the word "that" is very weak and should be eliminated wherever possible. Rephrase the sentence to convey the message more strongly.

## Numbers

Write numbers so they do not confuse the reader or the listener. Write out one through nine. Except for eleven, use figures for 10 through 999. For numbers above 999, use a combination of numbers and spelling to avoid strings of potentially confusing numbers. Examples: 987,098 should be written 987-thousand and -98;

11,000 should be written eleven thousand. Write "one thousand" rather than "a thousand." "A" can sound like "eight."

Use figures for ages, dates, and addresses.

Write out fractions: one-half, one-fourth, etc.

Write out percent, dollars and cents rather than using symbols. For example: \$2.49 is written two dollars and 49 cents. 100% is written one hundred percent.

When using a decimal point, spell it out. For example: two point nine percent.

Round off numbers. Use *just over*, *about*, *close to*, etc.

Avoid long lists of numbers or numbers too large to be meaningful.

## Quotations

The listener can't see quotation marks, so the announcer must indicate direct quotes through inflection. Avoid this problem by re-phrasing direct quotes into indirect statements. Break up lengthy quotes by inserting such phrases as *he went on to say*, *she said*, *he continued*, etc.

## Style

Begin with the end in mind. What do you want the audience to think, feel or do after they get your message? Everybody wants to know, "What's in it for me?" Connect with the audience and provide logical and emotional benefits. We learn and store concepts and ideas as mental images, so create vivid word pictures and illustrate with stories.

When writing for video or TV, let the pictures tell the story. Don't say "blah, blah" when all you need to say is "blah." Use the active voice rather than the passive voice. For example: "John threw the ball." versus "The ball was thrown by John." Do the action rather than have the action done. Keep it simple and straightforward.

Use figures of speech for a sense of poetry, music, and rhythm in your writing. Try adding alliteration, assonance, repetition, rhyme, and meter. Effective communication is a treat for the senses.

Practice scriptwriting for the eyes and ears. Your script is a work of art; with the right tools it will be delivered as a masterpiece.

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