

First Screenplay Checklist

CELT X

Use this checklist before and during your first screenplay to make sure you have the basics in place.

Core Idea

- ☐ I know what my story is about.
- ☐ I can describe the idea in one or two sentences.
- ☐ I know what genre I'm writing.
- ☐ I know whether it is a short film, feature screenplay, or TV pilot.
- ☐ I know why this idea interests me.

Main Character

- ☐ I know who my protagonist is.
- ☐ I know what they want.
- ☐ I know what they are afraid of, avoiding, or misunderstanding.
- ☐ I know what makes them interesting to watch.
- ☐ I know how they might change by the end.

Main Conflict

- ☐ I know what problem disrupts the story.
- ☐ I know who or what stands in the protagonist's way.
- ☐ I know what happens if they fail.
- ☐ I know why the conflict matters emotionally.
- ☐ I know how the conflict gets harder as the story continues.

Beginning, Middle & End

- ☐ I know how the story begins.
- ☐ I know what pulls the protagonist into the main story.
- ☐ I know what major problem or turning point happens in the middle.
- ☐ I know what final choice or confrontation happens near the end.
- ☐ I know how the story finishes.

Your First Scene

- ☐ The first scene introduces something important.
- ☐ The scene has a clear location.
- ☐ At least one character wants something in the scene.
- ☐ Something changes, even slightly, by the end.
- ☐ The scene starts close to the interesting moment.

Basic Screenplay Format

- ☐ I am using screenwriting software or a screenplay template.
- ☐ My scene headings are clear.
- ☐ My action lines describe what can be seen or heard.
- ☐ My dialogue is formatted correctly.
- ☐ I am not overusing camera directions.
- ☐ I am writing mostly in present tense.
- ☐ I am keeping paragraphs short and readable.

Visual Storytelling

- ☐ I am showing emotions through action, behaviour, and dialogue.
- ☐ I am avoiding long internal explanations.
- ☐ I am using specific visual details where helpful.
- ☐ I am not describing things the audience could never know.
- ☐ Each scene gives actors something playable to do.

Dialogue Check

- ☐ My characters do not all sound exactly the same.
- ☐ The dialogue feels natural for the world of the story.
- ☐ Characters are not explaining things they already know.
- ☐ I have cut unnecessary greetings, small talk, and repeated information.
- ☐ Subtext is present where possible.

After the First Draft

- ☐ I will take a short break before rereading the draft.
- ☐ I will read the full script from beginning to end.
- ☐ I will make notes on story, character, structure, and dialogue.
- ☐ I will look for scenes that repeat information or slow the pace.
- ☐ I will ask for feedback from someone constructive.
- ☐ I will look for patterns in the feedback instead of reacting to every note individually.
- ☐ I will plan a rewrite before making major changes.

Final Check

- ☐ Is the protagonist clear?
- ☐ Is their goal clear?
- ☐ Is the conflict clear?
- ☐ Are the stakes clear?
- ☐ Does each scene serve a purpose?
- ☐ Does the story build toward an ending?
- ☐ Has the protagonist changed or learned something?
- ☐ Is the script formatted cleanly?
- ☐ Have I proofread for typos?
- ☐ Have I saved a backup copy?

Notes