

FOR A FEW DAYS MORE

by

April Rider

Note: This is what a normal title page should look like. For the Nicholl competition you should eliminate all instances of your name, address, phone number and e-mail. All that is needed is the title of the screenplay.

April Rider
555 George St NNW
Kaplan, ND 77777
999-999-9999

FADE IN:

INT. DRISKILL HOTEL SEMINAR ROOM DAY

JOE and APRIL burst through the doors into a clean, well-lit seminar room.

JOE
Are we in time?

APRIL
How could they start without us?
We're the main attraction.

Joe catches his breath as he leans against the podium at the front of the room.

JOE
(looking about
the room)
We are?

APRIL
Don't be a moron. You know we've
been invited to Austin to discuss
script format.

JOE
But why is the room empty?

April and Joe both look out across the room -- rows of empty chairs and nary a person in sight.

APRIL
Okay, okay, don't panic.

She takes three deep breaths. Then she looks at her watch and smiles.

APRIL
(continuing)
We're an hour early. . . . We
should rehearse.

JOE
Okay, you start. Margins?

APRIL
Left, 1.5 inches. Right, 1.0
inches. Top, 1.0 inches to the
body, 0.5 inches to the number.
Bottom, 0.5 to 1.5 inches,
depending on where the page break
comes.

JOE

Page break?

APRIL

Right above you. There are rules for breaking a page. Scene headers remain attached to description. A single line of dialogue is pushed to the following page. A long dialogue passage would be split -- but I'll get to that later.

JOE

What about fonts?

APRIL

Courier, 12 point, 10 pitch. Make sure it's a non-proportional version of Courier.

Joe's grimace suggests that he's deep in thought.

JOE

What about bold-face or italics? Or a Gothic font? I love to jazz up my scripts.

APRIL

No bold, no itals, no script fonts, no Gothic, no Helvetica, no Times Roman. Stick with Courier. That's the industry standard.

JOE

Oh, we're talking about industry standards?

Suddenly, Joe bolts from behind the podium and runs out into:

INT. DRISKILL HOTEL HALLWAY DAY

Joe glances up and down the hallway, then reaches back to open the door.

JOE

(calling)

April -- come on! There's no one here.

APRIL
 (walking through
 the door)
 Ah, a scene heading. Or a slug
 line, as I was taught in film
 school. Always CAPPED. What
 happens if we . . .

EXT. TEXAS CAPITOL BUILDING DAY

Joe pinches himself as he stands with April before the seat
 of Texas politics.

JOE
 How'd you do that?

APRIL
 There was a cut -- from the
 hallway to the capitol. What'd
 you want to do -- ride in a cab?

JOE
 Dialogue margins.

APRIL
 Left, 3.0 inches. Right, 2.5
 inches. Of course, you can cheat
 those a tad.

JOE
 So, you have about 3.0 inches for
 each line of your dialogue?

APRIL
 You've got it. Though you can
 go out another three or four
 spaces to the right and no one
 will hold it against you.

Joe jots down several notes on a 3 x 5 card, studies the
 card for a moment, then scribbles another note.

JOE
 (looking up)
 And the position of the
 character's name?

APRIL
 All CAPS, and tabbed to about 4.2
 inches. Some writers center all
 the characters' names.

(MORE)

APRIL (CONT'D)

Personally, I don't think it matters. The look of the script pages is slightly different in either case.

JOE

Hey, what happened?

APRIL

A page break appeared in the middle of my dialogue. You use MORE at the bottom of the page to show that the character's dialogue continues onto the next page. Then CONT'D next to the character to show that it has roots in the previous page.

JOE

But not everybody uses MOREs and CONT'Ds, do they?

INT. CAPITOL BUILDING DAY

Joe stares up into the dome. April examines the portraits of Texas governors on the nearby walls.

APRIL

Some writers just plan their page ends so as to avoid them.

JOE

(considering)

What about parentheticals?

APRIL

Start them about 0.5 inches to the left of the character name tab mark. In our case that would be at 3.7 inches.

JOE

And what are they for?

APRIL

For years, parentheticals were used to express emotion, the manner in which a character spoke her lines. Loudly, passionately, sadly, and so on. In recent years writers have often used them for brief bits of action.

JOE
 (going up a
 stairway)
 Something like this?

APRIL
 (following him)
 Exactly.

JOE
 How wide are parentheses?

APRIL
 Not very -- about 1.5 inches.
 And they should wrap to the
 following line when they extend
 beyond that point.
 (pointing up to
 the top of the
 page)
 If you place a parenthesis in
 the middle of a dialogue passage,
 it should remain distinct from
 the dialogue.

EXT. MISSISSIPPI RIVERBOAT NIGHT

A gambling boat rolls slowly along the mighty river. April
 and Joe wander about its upper deck.

JOE
 I have to ask -- what happened
 to CUT TO:s between scenes.

APRIL
 Many writers still use
 transitions such as CUT TO: and
 DISSOLVE TO: between scenes.

JOE
 Those would introduce a new scene
 header?

APRIL
 And typically a different time
 and/or place. But many writers
 have dispensed with such
 transitions, feeling that a new
 scene header signifies a cut
 without the need of any
 additional indicator.

Joe stares out at the river.

JOE

How did we reach the Mississippi
and when did the sun set?

APRIL

If you'd like . . .

EXT. AIRPLANE SUNSET

A jet liner cruises East across Texas.

INT. AIRPLANE SUNSET

A customized interior, replete with lounge chairs and sofas.
Joe and April sip margaritas.

JOE

Is this a flashback?

APRIL

Or it could be tomorrow. Or next
week.

TITLE OVER:

October 19, 1999

APRIL

(continuing)

You see, a few weeks have passed.

JOE

Okay, I didn't notice. But I
thought only DAY and NIGHT were
allowed on scene headers.

APRIL

Production managers would
certainly prefer it that way, but
many writers use headers as a
means of showing a particular
time of day, especially SUNRISE
and SUNSET.

JOE

So that's allowed?

APRIL

On writer's drafts, without a
doubt.

JOE

A writer's draft?

APRIL

Essentially, any draft that hasn't been paid for. Any draft to be sent to agents, studio execs, production companies, development people. Those are writer's drafts. And they all should be FIRST DRAFTS, no matter how many versions the writer has actually written.

JOE

You really think so?

APRIL

That's my recommendation.

INT. BLUE CAMARO DAY

April drives along Austin's Congress Avenue as Joe rides shotgun.

JOE

You speak any foreign languages?

APRIL

(in French)

Why do you ask?

JOE

What about action scenes?

SUDDENLY, A BLACK CADILLAC

whips around a corner, racing quickly towards them.

APRIL

punches the accelerator and --

THE BLUE CAMARO

leaps forward, leaving a trail of rubber. The Camaro takes a left, then a quick right to accelerate into --

A DARK ALLEY

The Camaro quickly reaches a dead end, just as --

THE BLACK CADILLAC

pulls into the alley, sealing it shut.

EXT. DRISKILL HOTEL DAY

April leads a dazed and confused Joe to the front door.

APRIL

That's one way to do an action scene. It's a variation on the Bill Goldman style that's used by many writers.

JOE

(coming to)

But other writers just use normal description and standard scene headers for action scenes, don't they?

APRIL

Many do.

INT. DRISKILL HOTEL ENTRANCE HALL - PHONE BOOTH DAY

A slightly less dazed Joe speaks on the phone.

JOE

I thought we were walking together.

APRIL (O.S.)

(filtered)

Well, we were, but I realized a phone call was needed.

JOE

You're filtered?

INTERCUT WITH:

EXT. STATE CAPITOL PHONE BOOTH DAY

With the dome looming large behind her, April speaks into the phone.

APRIL

Only when you hear my voice over the phone. Radio voices and phone calls often are filtered, though it's a convention that isn't used by everyone anymore.

JOE

Let's try something easy. What about page numbers?

APRIL

Number each and every page, though you can start with page two. The numbers should appear in the upper right hand corner, about 0.5 inches down and 0.75 inches from the right page edge. Those dimensions are not set in stone, but the numbers should always be placed in the upper right hand corner.

INT. DRISKILL HOTEL HALLWAY DAY

Joe walks slowly towards the seminar room.

JOE

You know, that pronouncement almost seemed godlike.

APRIL (V.O.)

If it were, I probably would have spoken in a voice over and not on the phone.

Joe searches the ceiling, trying to decide just where this disembodied voice is emanating from.

JOE

What's a V.O. used for?

APRIL (V.O.)

Oftentimes for narration, for a narrator's voice. In film noir the protagonists often filled the audience in on their thoughts or story details. Documentary films are filled with voice over.

INT. DRISKILL HOTEL SEMINAR ROOM DAY

Joe races past April to reach the podium first. April walks slowly past the still-empty chairs.

At the podium Joe gestures with his hands as if he were making a major political speech.

April sneaks up behind him and mimics his movements -- until he notices. Joe spins to confront her.

JOE

Why I ought'a . . .

APRIL

I was just demonstrating the way many writers break description into shorter paragraphs. I've seen blocks of description covering an entire page.

JOE

That makes for tough reading, doesn't it?

APRIL

I know studio readers who just skip long description and read only dialogue.

JOE

But there are pros who write scripts with extended descriptive passages.

APRIL

When you make a half-million or so per script, you can pretty much use any format you want.

Joe climbs atop the podium.

JOE

But when you're like me, you have to stick to format. Is that what you're trying to say?

APRIL

That's the story.

Joe jumps down from the podium and runs out the door just as conference ATTENDEES begin to enter.

APRIL

(continuing)

By the way, the first time you introduce a character in description, you CAP his name. And when you break dialogue with description, the standard is to place "continuing" within parentheses when a character chatters on and on.

April watches as a number of people sit down before her.

APRIL

(continuing)

Of course, many writers have dropped "continuing" from their repertoire. I mean, it's obvious that I'm still speaking, isn't it? And that I never stopped speaking.

JOE (O.S.)

(shouting from
beyond the door)

Hey, April, c'mon. There's a barbeque at the Governor's Mansion and a shuttle leaving in two minutes.

APRIL

(shouting)

We haven't mentioned master scenes.

A sheepish Joe enters, then glances about the room as he slowly approaches the podium.

JOE

That one I know. No CLOSE UPS, no WIDE SHOTS, no shots of any sort. Just scene headers, description and dialogue. And no scene numbers. Those are left to shooting scripts.

APRIL

Don't worry, I would never let you miss a meal.

FADE OUT:

THE END

Other items of some import:

BRADS -- (Acco brand) No. 6 round head fasteners / 1.5 inches. This length works well on most scripts. For a thin script, you might use 1.25 inch brad (#5). You do not want to go longer as 2+ inch brads are universally known as "killers" for their propensity to stab readers and other humans.

CARD STOCK -- stationery stores carry heavier paper known as card stock (perhaps because greeting cards are often this weight paper). Find a solid yet flexible weight for your script cover. The color is up to you, but always remember that several people will handle each copy of your script as it passes through a production company or agency. Will each of them appreciate your color choice? Does it matter? Probably not.

Do not place an admonition against copying your script on your script. If the first person who reads your script at a company likes it, rest assured that the script will be copied. At some companies all scripts are automatically copied.

For the same reason, do not permanently or semi-permanently bind your script. Good scripts need to be copied. Bad ones do not. What does that make a permanently bound one? Well, it could be a classic film script in someone's library. Otherwise . . .

How strictly must the script format on these eleven pages be followed?

Your screenplay should resemble these pages. Certainly, spacing and capitalization should generally be mimicked. Margins can vary slightly. Details of format can vary even more. For example, one space or three after EXT.? Space hyphen space or three spaces or space hyphen hyphen space between location and DAY? Sound effects CAPPED? (continuing) under a character name or (CONT'D) on the same line as the name or no (continuing) at all? To most people reading scripts in Hollywood, none of these format details matter. What about POV and INSERT shots? Same answer. Some writers use them routinely; others do not. No one will freak out if you do or don't (unless you get carried away).

On the other hand, double-spacing dialogue or writing it in all CAPS as in a TV sit-com script when you're writing a feature is not acceptable.