Writing a Script

ORIENTATION

Most scripts begin with a line telling the reader where the scene is set. They might use the abbreviations **(EXT.)** or **(INT.)** (exterior or interior, outside or inside) and describe the location. For an audio script, sound effects are often used to help set the scene in the listener’s mind as there is no visual to show them.

FX

This abbreviation stands for sound effects. Sound effect technicians (or ‘foley artists’) work in a studio to create sounds that mimic the tinkle of ice in a glass, a squeaky gate, footsteps etc.

DISTORT

If one of your characters is speaking on the phone, through a loudspeaker system or over the radio, it’s useful to distort their voice to remind the listener where the words are coming from.

MUSIC

If there’s a specific piece of music you want to use, label it to distinguish it from other sound effects. If the music will be talked over by the character, you could write ‘under’ or ‘V/O’ (voice-over) to indicate this.

OFF-STAGE

‘Off’ or ‘off-stage’ indicates the character is some distance away. In a theatre production, they would say this from offstage. In an audio recording, the voice actor might turn away from the microphone to make it sound as if they’re far away.

Setting the scene

It’s important to establish the setting of a play or film – when and where the events are taking place. If the viewer is confused about these details, they won’t be able to follow what’s going on. In a film, you can use visual clues – e.g. a beach umbrella, towels, beach ball, deck chair – to indicate that you’re at the beach. In an audio play, the setting needs to be established differently. You could have a character say: “well, here I am standing at the railway station” but people don’t talk like that, so it sounds false. Another option could be to have a narrator say “It’s 1946. Noon. The train station is busy and bustling”. A better way of establishing location is through sound effects. The sound of train doors slamming, engine noises, station announcements, etc, indicates to the audience, quickly and without words, that the scene is set in a train station.

Introduce your characters

Once the scene is set, establish who’s in it. If a new character enters a scene halfway through, make the other characters say something about them to introduce them to the audience and let them know they are there.

Directions

The line: “Oh no. What does he want now?” could be delivered a few different ways – you could say it with an irritated sigh, or in a tense and anxious voice. Because the line is ambiguous it needs a direction, so the actor knows how it should be spoken. However, you don’t need direction if it’s obvious how the character would feel.

NIGEL: (angrily) Jasper, I’m furious with you!

The direction ‘angrily’ is unnecessary since he says he is furious. BUT it doesn’t hurt to include directions anyway, for the actors’ benefit.

Writing for your actors

When writing your script, keep in mind who is going to deliver these lines (i.e. one of your classmates, not a professional actor). Make sure they are comfortable saying the line. Don’t give them impossible feats like saying two things at once, or difficult challenges like switching quickly between a Scottish and a Jamaican accent – unless you happen to know they are really good at accents and would love to show off this skill! One way to make sure everyone is happy with their lines is to have each character in your script write the lines they are going to say. A narrator can help to explain or paraphrase things that are too difficult to act out.