

# Screenwriting For TV Commercials & Video Ads: A Beginner's Guide

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## **About The Author**

I started watching Television and movies at the age of 10. I remember the first movie that left me speechless which was Jurassic Park. I found the dinosaurs so real and scary that I left the theatre in the middle of the movie. Later on I thought what is it, that makes these movies so real?!"

Having developed a fascination for movies over the years, I started thinking of every scene in a movie, in a way I would have written it. After reading Hollywood screenplays of movies like "Indiana Jones: Raiders of the Lost Ark", LA Confidential, Insomnia, A Few Good Men and many more, I tried writing a script. As I could not finish it off in time for submitting to some major screenwriting awards, I shifted my attention to writing TV Commercials.

Having written over 40 TV Commercial scripts, I thought of writing a guide on this specific topic

I'm an engineer. I have a day job as a marketer. I'm also a digital marketing consultant. I write and have a deep passion for films. I absolutely love the excitement that goes into making a film, TV series or a Commercial.

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You can follow me on [LinkedIn](#).

## **Introduction to the Book**

My eagerness for learning the art of script writing for any form of film has brought me to this day, on which I could share my process of learning screenwriting.

This book includes images of scripts that I have learnt from, in my initial days, and also images of scripts I have written. I have written this book in a simple language and you might have to go over to the image and text, back and forth for better understanding. Without images, I felt it would be difficult to explain.

Right from the basic concept of a Script to the process of writing for commercials has been included.

At the end of this Ebook, you'll also find links to books written by some famous TV commercial writers and screenwriters, which I have found very useful in my career and growth as a writer.

## **What is a Script or a Screenplay?**

When talking about Scripts and Screenplays, it would be best to know the dictionary meaning of both these words and the difference between them.

In the literary world a **"Script"** is a written text of a play, film, broadcast or speech. It has a broader meaning and has a variety of methodologies used for formatting. The indentations and font styles differ in many ways from that of a screenplay. A script can be anything from a just text document for a voice over to a whole movie typed out in detail.

A **"Screenplay"** is the text for a film, which includes the words to be spoken by the actors and instructions for the camera. It also includes director's notes, instructions to the actors in addition to the story line. It's a script with many additions to it. A screenplay has a specific format which is followed worldwide. It is for movies and television.

So, a screenplay is always a script however, a script will not always be a screenplay. But it's up to the writers, to call it a script or a screenplay. Many prefer the word script for commercials or advertisements & screenplay for movies.

A TV Commercial script is also known as a **"Spec"**. Right then, let's head on and get to know more about TV Commercial Scripts.

## **Necessity of Writing Scripts Before Filming**

Anyone who's making videos for a couple of years now, knows how confusing the process gets as the shoot goes ahead. "Is this really the dialog for this scene?" This is how it starts at the location. "I think we decided to omit this one. I can't really remember. Oh I wish I had written it down somewhere". And it ends in frustration and nothing in hand.

Now everyone does not have an exact idea of how to write a script for videos, so they develop their own format for it. For example,

- A car is seen parking itself outside a Furniture store.**
- A couple get out of the car and walk towards the entrance.**
- The salesman greets them with a broad smile. "Good Morning Mr & Mrs Johnson. Please do come in".**
- The couple enter and the salesman closes the glass door.**
- Appropriate Camera movement for the specific Shots.**

The person may even write it like this below:

- Camera angle on a Car getting parked outside a furniture store. A couple get out of the car and walked towards the store.**
- Camera on the salesman who greets them with a broad smile. "Good Morning Mr & Mrs Johnson. Please do come in".**
- The salesman closes the door behind the couple.**

There are more ways in which the writer will right this. However, will it be enough information during the actual shoot? Where should the camera be focused when the salesman is talking? Definitely on the salesman. But does the writer also want the couple in the frame when he greets them?. This has to be specified without much information about it or else the script will become lengthy.

It might be understandable if the shoot is among a group of friends or not by professionals. But as the shoot gets more complex, it is better to have a format where one glance at the script will let a director understand the theme behind the commercial.

Making a commercial is a team game. It involves various people with different skills. So here are other some important reasons to write scripts before filming.

1. **Makes writing easier:** You will be put your thoughts on paper very clearly and imagine each scene before even shooting the video. This further helps when you edit the different takes.
2. **Equipment Set-up:** The production team will know beforehand where the camera needs to be for a particular scene. Whether it is a close-up or a long shot down the road, the team will have the made set up as the director arrives. If the video has an aerial shot of a football, and the script mentions the words "Aerial Shot", then the production team has to be ready with a drone camera to take that shot.
3. **Safety Measures:** If the script demands the actors and cameras to be under water for some shots, the producer and director will be able to arrange paramedics at the set for emergency purposes. The actors are well be prepared mentally before reaching the location. This is understood if the script is well written with all these camera angles.
4. **Budget Allocation:** When a script goes to a producer, the first thing that comes to his mind is the money that will be required to make the commercial. If the script does not have locations and camera angles, the producer won't get an idea of the total cost involved in shooting it. Remember, he also has to pay the cast involved in it and also decide the budget for the shoot.
5. **Editing:** The different takes go to the editor, along with the script. It's easier for the editor to put together various shots if the script is in front of him. After seeing various takes of the same scene, a script makes it easier to select a perfect shot out of them and add effects to it further.
6. **Output Product:** A well planned out story is always easy to grasp. Similarly a properly formatted script helps remove the obstacles involved in filming and smoothes the overall process. Ultimately everyone's a happy soul if the shoot goes well. They head home with eagerness to see the Commercial on TV or on the internet. It's personally satisfying experience for the writer as well.

However, as I said earlier there is an official format for writing TV commercials, and it is followed worldwide. From a 15-second commercial to a 5-minute product launch Advertisement, it's all scripted right down in detail. So, let's dive deeper to the basics of scripting a commercial.

## Four Important Points Before Starting to Write

The words in the advertisement along with camera work are what attracts an audience and compels them to buy it. However, to write such an ad you also need to know what the product is and who it is meant for.

So, here are 4 important points to consider before you start writing an advertisement.

1. Goal of the Ad
2. Target Audience
3. Budget
4. Tag line

So, let's dive into these points one by one.

- 1. Goal of the Ad:** There can be two main goals for airing a commercial on TV.

First goal: The Ad can just be aired to let people know that there is this product or service out there, and get people excited about it. Get them talking. For example, an Ad on conservation of nature has to be a bit emotional. However, if it is a dull script, no one will care to watch it further than 10 seconds. This will deviate from your goal which is forest conservation.

Second goal: The Ad can urge the audience to take an action such as go to the website or a physical store and buy the product, or at least enquire about it. For example, a commercial about a cellphone has to end in a way that people will flock to enquire about it.

- 2. Target Audience:** Who is going to see and buy the product on air plays a vital role in revenue conversion. If the product meant for kids or adults will decide what kind of dialogs should be written in the script. If the Ad is written for diapers then the audience will be young moms. If the Ad is about sport shoes, then it will be for people mostly aged 16 – 50. If it is a brand manufacturing all types of shoes then it'll have a vast audience and a different marketing strategy. Researching about competitors will be an added advantage before writing.
- 3. Budget:** There is a chance that a magnificent script will be rejected because the production cost is too high. As a writer, the cost of making the commercial is of utmost importance while penning the script. The location of the scenes in the script, different camera angles from a

helicopter or a fast car being blown up can cast a hole in the pocket of a producer. Remember, a new concept always has a risk of failure. Large companies might decide to divide the same budget allocated and make 4 more commercials out of it. It is always better to learn to write considering a lower cost of production. It might be difficult to write it this way, but always possible.

- 4. Tag line:** "Just do it". I bet Nike came to your mind in a second. "Have a break Have a Kit Kat". I don't need to tell you which brand this is. Once you hear them on TV along with the music and narration, the product is sold and you remember it for life. That is why; so many corporations pay thousands of dollars on writers for a simple but catchy line. The commercial absolutely cannot end without it. And if it does then it's just a video not a commercial.

The tagline should convey what the product or service really offers. Most writers tend to focus on the product rather than the brand. Taglines or slogans should be written thinking about the numerous similar products a small company might launch later on over the years. It might take days to write it. Let it be. But it has to be perfect.

Understanding the product or service and slowly revolving the words around it is the best way to wrap it up completely, and present it to the audience.

## **An Example Of a TV Commercial Script**

The necessity of writing scripts before filming & the 4 most important steps before starting to write are quite clear in our minds now. Coming to the point of actually jotting down our imagination on paper is and trying to fit in on screen without a second more or less is definitely not an easy task even for a seasoned writer in the industry. However, following a defined format makes it easier to imagine and start writing every scene.

Let's take look at it by observing at the screenshot below of the famous Coke Commercial Script of the 70's directed by Ron Winderman with the famous footballer Joe Greene.

## COKE TV COMMERCIAL SCRIPT

Shooting Location: Football Field Tunnel

Director(s): Ron Winderman

Actor(s): Joe Greene, Kid, Background fans

Editor(s): Sally Theis

VIDEO	AUDIO
Camera up on grim Greene, limping slowly down tunnel from field toward locker room; words "Mean Joe Greene" superimposed on picture. Because he is alone, game must still be going on with Greene out of it, due to injury.	
Cut to kid (white, about age nine) standing in tunnel, bottle of Coke in hand.	Kid [sound on film (SOF)]: Mr. Greene! Mr. Greene!
Cut to Greene, scowling.	Greene [SOF]: Yeah?
Cut to kid.	Kid [SOF]: You need some help?
Cut to Greene.	Greene [SOF]: Uh-uh.
Cut to kid.	Kid [SOF]: I just want you to know: I think--you're the greatest.

You can click the link to see the commercial on YouTube here: <https://www.Youtube.com/watch?v=xffOCZYX6F8>

As you can see at the top, the shooting location is mentioned along with the Director's name and the Cast involved. The usual script length is 1 page for a 60-second commercial.

There are two columns, Left & Right. The Left always has Video and the Right always has Audio. The Video Column has various angles of the camera and a description on how the scene is going to be, the position of the actors and the background. In the script the words "Mean Joe Greene" are meant to be imposed on the screen when Joe is limping on screen. However, they have not added those words in the Ad.

The camera then moves on to the kid, describing his age, location and a coke in hand. This is to show the director what to focus on, while shooting. The age is described deliberately so as to let the casting director understand that they need a boy not in his teens and not too small either. Otherwise, "a kid" can be any boy aged 5 to 15.



Exactly opposite to the words in this scene, in the Audio Column we can see the dialog the Kid is saying. The Audio column only contains the dialogs, and music in the background. To show dialogs we write SOF (Sound on Film). There are also other terms but we'll dwell into that later.

From the above screen shot we can clearly understand the emotional state of the actors in play. Joe is frustrated & the Kid who's desperately trying to cheer him up and wants to share his feelings for his icon.

Now let's look further in the screenshot of the rest of the script.

Cut to Greene, grimacing.	Greene [SOF]: Yeah, sure.
Cut to kid, offering bottle.	Kid [SOF]: Want my Coke? It's Okay. You can have it.
Cut to Greene, sighing, He takes it, drinks, greedily.	Greene [SOF]: Okay. Thanks.
Cut to kid, who hesitates, waiting for autograph or sign of recognition from his hero.	As music swells under dialogue, lyric is heard: A Coke and a smile/makes me feel good/makes me feel nice.
Finally kid turns to leave, reluctantly.	Kid [SOF]: See <u>ya</u> , Joe.
Cut to Greene, suddenly animated and smiling.	Greene [SOF]: Hey kid!
Greene grabs his game jersey and tosses it.	Greene [SOF]: Catch.
Cut to kid, beaming, catching shirt.	Kid [SOF]: Wow! Thanks, Mean Joe!
Supers fill screen: "Have a Coke and a Smile" (centered) "Coke Adds Life" (in right corner)	Music Swells.

In the first line in this screenshot, Joe's pain in his leg is clearly described by the word 'grimace'. Usually minimum sentences are used to describe the emotions of actors. This is so that the director understands that the length is going to be more or less 30 seconds.

As the Kid offers the Coke, Joe drinks it in one go while the Kid is waiting for his autograph. Now, at the same time you can hear music playing while he's drinking the Coke. All this while the writer has imagined this scenario and also made it simple for the director to understand what exactly the writer's vision is here.

Joe is quite energized from the drink and back to hi Mean Joe self, hands him his own jersey.

Supers are the superimposed text in TV Commercials. In this case, words.

The words "Have a coke and a Smile" and "Coke Adds Life" filling the screen were Cokes taglines in the 70's. Here, Coke has clearly touched the sentiments of consumers by illustrating that Coke cheers you up in the saddest of days.

**Conclusion:**

This commercial completely shows us the importance of depicting the relation between a tagline or a slogan, with the actual product.

It is a perfect example of scriptwriting and direction, without any high end graphics which Coke easily could have afforded at the time.

This commercial started the trend of signing sports stars as ambassadors for various brands.

## Writing A TV Commercial

As we have already seen an example of a TV commercial script to give you an idea of it, let's dive into the details of the format, and learn how to put your imagination on paper.

Here below is a screenshot of the format without any text:

### TV COMMERCIAL SCRIPT

**TITLE :**  
**LENGTH :**  
**WRITER :**

VIDEO	AUDIO

**Font:** The font to be used is 'Courier New'. Font Size is '12'. These are not mandatory for a TV commercial script, as they are for a Movie Screenplay. You can use Calibri size 12 or Arial size 12 or Verdana size 11.

**Title:** It should contain the name of the product.

**Length:** The length of the Commercial has to be mentioned. It is generally 1 minute for a page of script. However, it can be 30 seconds or 45 seconds.

**Writer:** The writer of the script has to put his/her name in this tab.

In the screenshot of the Coke commercial script in the previous chapter, there were Director's names and the location. That is not a necessity, as the location might change depending on the budget.

**Margins:** The Margins should be one inch from the edge of each page. You can extend the script to a few more lines to the next page.

**Camera Shots:** Dialogs for performers are written in lower and uppercase letters. This helps actors and other readers to distinguish between the dialogs and camera angles quickly.

**Columns:** There are two columns Video on the left and Audio on the right. They have a dividing line in the middle for aligning the columns.

**Video & Audio Column:** Each shot should be described in this column. It is generally a practice to capitalize words used for camera angles in the video column and sound effects in the Audio column. Camera movements like CLOSE UP, CUT TO, and ZOOM etc. have to be explained clearly. Visual effects like FIRE, RAIN, and LIGHTNING etc. make it easier for the crew and director to understand the script.

In the Audio column, there are Characters, Dialogs, Sound effects and Music. The sound, dialogs etc. should be aligned along with the description of the shots and camera movements.

The dialogs spoken can be represented by the words SFX which is Sound Effects or SOF which is Sound on Film. SFX or SOF should be in parentheses or brackets.

Capitalization of text apart from Dialogue is not always mandatory. There are many examples of scripts where writers have not written such shots in the capital letters. However, it is essential while writing a Movie script.

For example, if the camera is on a guy named Jack, who's talking to a lady. It can be written as:

'CLOSE UP: Jack talking to a lady' or

'CLOSE UP on Jack talking to a lady.'

'Close up: Jack talking to a lady.'

Instead you can also use CUT TO, ZOOM IN.

**Spacing:** The description of the next shot should be on the next line below after a spacing of 1 line.

The basics of writing a TV Commercial are covered, with an example in the previous chapter. Now, let us move over to one more example of a script I have written.

Here is the screenshot of a "Mobile Phone Commercial".

### TV COMMERCIAL SCRIPT

TITLE: "Brand Name" Mobile phone Commercial

LENGTH: 30 Seconds

WRITER: Sarang Padhye

VIDEO	AUDIO
CAMERA ZOOMS IN on an 8 year old boy opening a small box.	[SFX] Country music.
CUT TO boy as he takes out a mobile phone.	Boy: Wow!
CUT TO a girl practicing a traditional Indian dance form. CLOSE UP of her teacher stopping the music on a mobile.	[SFX] Indian classical music. Teacher (in admiration): Excellent!
CUT TO a baby crying in his father's arms. CLOSE UP on father.	[SFX] Baby crying. Father: Hey! Look who's here.
Baby's POV: The screen of a mobile phone. Baby's mother on screen showing a teddy.	[SFX] The teddy squeaking.
CUT TO the baby, smiling.	[SFX] Baby giggling.

**Font:** The font I have used here is Verdana size 11.

**Title:** I have deliberately edited the name of the product here. You can write the name in the "Brand Name" section.

**Length:** The length of the commercial will be 30 seconds after editing.

**Writer:** I have put my name "Sarang Padhye" in this tab.

**Margins:** They are 1 inch from each page however it's not possible to show it here.

**Camera Shots:** The names of the shots are capitalized. This will clearly help in understanding & differentiating between camera movements and descriptions of shots.

**Video & Audio Column:** The camera angles in the video column & dialogs in the Audio column are clearly aligned with the respective scenes.

**Spacing:** The spacing between two shots is of one line.

Here is the remaining part of the script below:

CUT AWAY to a family gathering inside a house. CAMERA CLOSES IN on a large cake. An elderly couple behind it.	[SFX] Soft Music
CUT TO a woman, taking a picture with a mobile phone.	Woman: Smile! [SFX] Clicking sound.
CAMERA BACKS AWAY to the whole family.	A chorus: Happy Anniversary!
CUT BACK to the 8 year old boy looking at the mobile phone in his hand.	[SFX] Country music.
Boy's POV (of the phone): His father waving back at him through the plane's window.	[SFX] Country music.
CUT AWAY to "(The Brand name & logo)". The words "Bringing Happiness to life" appear on screen.	V.O (female): "(Brand name)". "Bringing Happiness to life".
FADE OUT.	

In this script, there are just 5 dialogs including the chorus by the family. The whole TV commercial is based on different locations, camera movements, different characters and their perception of using a mobile phone. Using soft music in the background & perfect editing it becomes a wonderful yet simple TV commercial.

The script gives you the importance of the product in daily life, the phone's various features. Happiness is what the product eventually gives you. That's why I also included the line "Bringing happiness to life".

**Conclusion:**

This brings us to the end the topic on writing TV Commercials.

Having covered all the aspects of Script Writing for Commercials we have come to the end of this book.

The book isn't over yet though!

In the next chapter, I have covered some awesome Screenwriting tools that you will find interesting. So, let's head on.

## **Screenwriting Software Tools**

Now that you have understood how to write a script, we'll dwell into the vast world of programs and applications used to write these scripts. Because that is where it actually starts, right?

Over the last 15 years there have been over 40 screenwriting software tools made for writing movie scripts. Now you might think is it necessary to write it by using a tool? Trust me it makes a HUGE difference!

Of course you can write a TV Spec in word however, I'd recommend using a software to get the understanding of camera angles that go into. The reason is if you wanted to write a script for a movies you'd be totally blank on the writing the correct angle of a particular shot. This might confuse a director and your chances of landing a script in the hands of one will be gone down the drain believe me.

Here are 5 of my favourite Paid ones below:

### **1. Celtx: \$20**

This is the first software I have used when I started writing 8 years ago. And guess why I chose it?..Yeah because it was free to download. Well now it is on cloud and it is built by the same people who built Mozilla Firefox.

It now costs around \$20. Still it is way cheaper than Final Draft and can be used by amateur writers as it very much user friendly.

You can get it here on [www.celtx.com](http://www.celtx.com)

### **2. Final Draft: starting at \$169.99**

This is not for the faint hearted. But if you are pro and serious about making a career in screen writing and want to be the next Aaron Sorkin of Hollywood, this is the only one I would gravely recommend. It exports PDFs. It has a free 30 day trial too.

It is the "Big Daddy" of screen writing and used by the best in the movie industry.

Get it here: [www.finaldraft.com](http://www.finaldraft.com)

### **3. Movie Magic Screenwriting: starting at \$124.95**

Another software tool used by the biggies in the industry to make Magic (pun intended) happen on screen is this Movie Magic Screenwriting. It can be compared to Final Draft on many levels. It also exports PDFs.

Get it here: [www.screenplay.com](http://www.screenplay.com)

### **4. Writer Duet: Free**

It's just a basic writing software however it's free for the first three scripts. Even though I haven't tried this I would recommend trying it out if you don't know the much about scriptwriting.

You can get it here: [www.writerduet.com](http://www.writerduet.com)

### **5. Fade In: Free Demo**

It has a fully functional demo version for download. I haven't tried either however for upcoming writers to understand the basics of writing, I would recommend trying it out.

Get it here: [www.fadeinpro.com](http://www.fadeinpro.com)

Most of these software tools do have Apps for Android and Mac OS, however, I prefer writing on my laptop for the ease of typing and days old practice when Apps were a just for gaming!

I haven't included more details in these reviews above, as you can try these out to decide which tool suites you best. All the info is available on their website and forums.

Now that you have understood the ways of writing scripts, let's head on to the next and the last most IMPORTANT topic which is: "**Copyright ©**"

## **Registering a Copyright for a Script**

Writers have every right to their work from the day they finish their scripts. This is what every writer feels isn't it? And it is absolutely write (I mean right). However, they have the rights legally, only if they have registered a copyright for that particular script, book, or a poem.

So in order to see that your script or a book isn't stolen, you have to register for a Copyright ©. Even if it is stolen in spite of it being registered, then you can very well sue the concerned person for Copyright infringement.

Now, what is a Copyright © exactly? And how to register for it?

"A copyright © protects original works of authorship, including scripts and screenplays. "

Remember that Copyrights do not protect the original idea of a TV Commercial, TV script or a movie screenplay.

You can get a Copyright in the [US Electronic Copyright Office](#) online or in print. Online registration will cost you quite less.

Now that you have understood it, make sure your work is protected before you submit anything to anyone or on any website.

## **Some Famous Books on Screenwriting**

We have come to the last part of the book, which is some of the best resources out there for learning screenwriting. You can search for books on screenwriting on Amazon and you will get a more than 5000 results. So here are 4 of my favourite books for screenwriting. I have found these very useful.



1. [Screenplay Format Made \(Stupidly\) Easy \(Screenwriting Made \(Stupidly\) Easy\)](#)

This book is written by [Michael Rogan](#). He has numerous books on screenwriting, which are available in both Paperback and Kindle format.

2. [The Anatomy of Story: 22 Steps to Becoming a Master Storyteller](#)

Written by [John Truby](#), a successful story consultant in Hollywood, whose students have written award-winning films such as Sleepless in Seattle.

3. [How To Write A Good Advertisement: A Short Course In Copywriting](#)

This book is written by Victor O Schwab, who has over 40 years of experience is writing advertisements. I have found this book absolutely amazing. I definitely recommend it.

4. [The Screenwriter's Bible, 6th Edition: A Complete Guide to Writing, Formatting, and Selling Your Script \(Expanded & Updated\) 6th Edition, Kindle Edition](#)

This famous book is written by David Trottier. It is the updated version of the book first "The Screenwriter's Bible".

If you want to read scripts of famous movies, you can download them free from [IMSDB\(Internet Movie Script Database\)](#).

It the most useful resource I have found till date for learning to write all kinds of Camera angles and actual story telling.

Writing for YouTube video advertisements and TV commercials is the same thing. You can also check out YouTube, for channels on script writing. I would recommend [Nick Nimmin](#) who has tons of videos on this topic.

You can also check out the channel [Fast Screenplay](#).

So, this makes it the end of the book and I hope you have understood my guide for writing scripts for TV commercials and you can definitely contact me on my email [sarangpadhye@gmail.com](mailto:sarangpadhye@gmail.com) for any questions. Here are my Instagram and LinkedIn profile links again.

Instagram account link: [ebookmarketer](#)

Twitter profile: [Sarang writes](#)

Thanks for reading till the end. I really appreciate your patience!

There is just a small request from me. If you enjoyed this book can you **consider leaving a review?**

**Reviews** really help authors as they help customers decide whether or not to buy the book or not.

## **Disclaimer**

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