

# Screenplay V Novel

A script is visual but a novel or a play can also be visual. Any decent piece of dramatic writing should compel one to visualise the actions of the characters, the setting where such actions happen, and so on. The fundamental difference lies in the screenplay's limitations. With a novel, the author can help us visualise something with all sort of abstract devices. Feelings are described to exhaustion. Memories are brought forth. The characters' inner turmoil is often more interesting than the action or dialogue.

Not so with a script. **All we have is action and dialogue** – happening as we read it. No feelings, no impressions of their surroundings, no memories, no past, only HERE and NOW.

Check these out:

## TASK 1

Read at the following extracts from 'The Bourne Identity'. Which one is from the script and which one is from the novel? Why?

### EXTRACT 1

The rays of the early sun broke through the mists of the eastern sky, lending glitter to the calm waters of the Mediterranean. The skipper of the small fishing boat, his eyes bloodshot, his hands marked with rope burns, sat on the stern gunnel smoking a Gauloise, grateful for the sight of the smooth sea. He glanced over at the open wheelhouse; his younger brother was easing the throttle forward to make better time, the single other crewman checking a net several feet away. They were laughing at something and that was good; there had been nothing to laugh about last night. Where had the storm come from? The weather reports from Marseilles had indicated nothing; if they had he would have stayed in the shelter of the coastline. He wanted to reach the fishing grounds eighty kilometers south of La Seyne-sur-Mer by daybreak, but not at the expense of costly repairs, and what repairs were not costly these days?

Or at the expense of his life, and there were moments last night when that was a distinct consideration.

"Tu es fatigué, hein, mon frère?" his brother shouted, grinning at him. "Va te coucher maintenant. Laissemoi faire."

"D'accord," the brother answered, throwing his cigarette over the side and sliding down to the deck on top of a net "A little sleep won't hurt."

It was good to have a brother at the wheel. A member of the family should always be the pilot on a family boat; the eyes were sharper. Even a brother who spoke with the smooth tongue of a literate man as opposed to his own coarse words. Crazy! One year at the university and his brother wished to start a compagnie. With a single boat that had seen better days many years ago. Crazy. What good did his books do last night? When his compagnie was about to capsize.

He closed his eyes, letting his hands soak in the rolling water on the deck. The salt of the sea would be good for the rope burns. Burns received while lashing equipment that did not care to stay put in the storm.

“Look! Over there!” It was his brother; apparently sleep was to be denied by sharp family eyes.

“What is it?” he yelled.

“Port bow! There’s a man in the water! He’s holding on to something! A piece of debris, a plank of some sort.”

The skipper took the wheel, angling the boat to the right of the figure in the water, cutting the engines to reduce the wake. The man looked as though the slightest motion would send him sliding off the fragment of wood he clung to; his hands were white, gripped around the edge like claws, but the rest of his body was limp—as limp as a man fully drowned, passed from this world.

“Loop the ropes!” yelled the skipper to his brother and the crewman. “Submerge them around his legs. Easy now! Move them up to his waist. Pull gently.”

“His hands won’t let go of the plank!”

“Reach down! Pry them up! It may be the death lock.”

“No. He’s alive ... but barely, I think. His lips move, but there’s no sound. His eyes also, though I doubt he sees us.”

“The hands are free!”

“Lift him up. Grab his shoulders and pull him over. Easy, now!”

“Mother of God, look at his head!” yelled the crewman. “It’s split open.”

“He must have crashed it against the plank in the storm,” said the brother.

“No,” disagreed the skipper, staring at the wound. “It’s a clean slice, razorlike. Caused by a bullet; he was shot.”

“You can’t be sure of that.”

“In more than one place,” added the skipper, his eyes roving over the body. “We’ll head for Ile de Port Noir; it’s the nearest island. There’s a doctor on the waterfront.”

“The Englishman?”

“He practices.”

“When he can,” said the skipper’s brother. “When the wine lets him. He has more success with his patients’ animals than with his patients.”

“It won’t matter. This will be a corpse by the time we get there. If by chance he lives, I’ll bill him for the extra petrol and whatever catch we miss. Get the kit; we’ll bind his head for all the good it will do.”

“Look!” cried the crewman. “Look at his eyes.”

“What about them?” asked the brother.

“A moment ago they were gray—as gray as steel cables. Now they’re blue!”

“The sun’s brighter,” said the skipper, shrugging. “Or it’s playing tricks with your own eyes. No matter, there’s no color in the grave.”

## EXTRACT 2

**DARKNESS. THE SOUND OF WIND AND SPRAY.**

**MUSIC. TITLES.**

**EXT. OCEAN - NIGHT**

The darkness is actually water. A SEARCHLIGHT arcs across heavy ocean swells. Half-a-dozen flashlights - weaker beams - racing along what we can see is the deck of an aging FISHING TRAWLER.

FISHERMEN struggling with a gaff -- something in the water --  
A HUMAN CORPSE.

**EXT. FISHING BOAT DECK - NIGHT**

THE BODY is sprawled there. The SAILORS all talk at once - three languages going - brave chatter to mask the presence of death.

SAILOR #1  
Jesus, look at him.

SAILOR #2  
What? Never saw a dead man before?

SAILOR #3  
Look!

SAILOR #3 nudges the body.

SAILOR #1  
Don't. Don't do that.

SAILOR #2  
He's dead, you think he cares?

SAILOR #1  
Have some respect. It's a -

SAILOR #1 stops just as -

THE BODY MOVES! - convulsing - coughing up sea water. The  
SAILORS, freaked, jump back, as -

THE MAN begins to breathe.

## TASK 2

Write the script scene for the following novel excerpt:

### Blackout by Chris Ryan

#### ONE

*Monday, June 1st. Morning.*

The smell drifted past Josh's nostrils. His senses twitched, coming slowly back to life as he struggled to regain consciousness. A faint musty smell mixing lavender with some kind of spice. I know it, thought Josh. I know that perfume. It's on the tip of my tongue.

*If only I could remember the name.*

For a moment, Josh struggled, annoyed with himself for not being able to dredge up the name from his memory. Sod it, he told himself finally. I never was any good at remembering perfumes.

Slowly, Josh tried to open his eyes. But the skin on his lids felt heavy and unyielding. He was starting to become aware of a pain, throbbing slowly yet still intense, starting at the side of his neck and running down deep into his spine. Another pain was rippling up from his calf. Then his left eye sprang open first, a flash of light flooding his senses as a fierce sun shone into his face. He closed the eye quickly, succumbed to another wave of pain, then opened it again.

A woman. A bright lock of red hair.

Josh closed the eye.

*Where the hell am I? What the fuck has happened to me?*

He tried the right eye this time. The same heavy sensation as the lids were reluctantly prised open, and the same blinding effect as sunlight overwhelmed the retina. He shut it hard, let a fresh wave of pain roll down from his neck into his back, then opened both eyes.

The woman was leaning over him.

She was in her late twenties, maybe just thirty, but no older. Her skin was tanned and freckly, and still moist and clear. Her eyes were bright blue, shaped like almonds, set above her nose and full red lips. But it was the hair that held Josh's attention. A thick red wave of curls, it tumbled playfully across him, growing away from the woman's face like a lion's mane.

He started to speak. The words started somewhere in his brain, then travelled down towards his throat. 'I . . . I . . .'  
' he started.

Suddenly Josh was aware o

f another terrible pain shooting through his neck. He stopped, choking on the rest of the sentence, unable to deliver it.

A finger came to rest on his lips, thin and elegant, and without any ring on it. 'Don't speak,' she said. 'You're hurt.'

'I . . . I . . . ' Josh started again.

'You're hurt,' she repeated, her tone firmer this time. 'I'll put you in the truck.'

It was too painful for Josh to speak. The jabbing in his neck was growing worse, and his leg was feeling numb: it was a pain that he knew he had felt before, although he couldn't now remember where. He started to turn on his shoulders. He was lying in a ditch of baked, cracked earth. Ahead of him he could see a thin strip of tarmac: a one lane road, nothing more. Behind it, a giant rock loomed, its pitted surface made of red and yellow stone, and beneath the rock flaked and chipped slices of the mountain lay in a jumbled heap. The air was dry and dusty, without even the murmur of a breeze to soften the fierce heat of the sun beating down on them.

Josh looked out across the bleak landscape. Somewhere in the distance, he could see some dust rising up from a ridge. The place was completely empty.

Where am I? he wondered.

He swivelled quickly, staring at the ditch into which he had fallen. A crimson stain had spread out into the sand.

Blood. My blood, Josh thought.

He started to run a hand across his body, making a rough reckoning of the extent of his wounds. He had been shot in the neck, he guessed: there was a gaping flesh wound, and the bullet must have missed his windpipe only narrowly. He was lucky to be alive. The calf of his left leg had taken a hit as well. A chunk of flesh the size of his index finger had been blown away: he could still see pulpy, messy fragments of the torn tissue lying in the dirt. At least a pint of blood, maybe two, had been spilled already.

*What in the name of Christ happened to me here?*

'Quick,' said the woman. 'You need treatment.'

Her hand was wrapping itself around Josh's wrist, taking his pulse. He could just see her lips moving as she silently counted out the beating of his heart. 'We need to get some drugs into you,' she said. 'Right away.'

Josh let her arms slip around his waist. She didn't have the strength to lift a man of his size but she could help him balance himself as he used the strength left in his legs to push himself upwards. He felt dizzy, and his vision was clouding up as he started to move his feet. The left leg, where the bullet had struck, was screaming with pain: every nerve seemed to have been set on fire, sending burning jabs of pain up through his body. His breathing was ragged and the loss of blood had sapped his energy, making it hard for him to hold onto consciousness for more than a few minutes straight. He was already suffering from palpitations and his lips were sweaty, enough to suggest that he'd maybe lost more than a couple of pints.

'Hold me,' he muttered, some blood spitting from his mouth as he pronounced the words.

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