Understanding Play and Musical Script Formatting

Plays vs. Screenplays

A **play** is a story written to be performed live by actors on a stage in front of an audience, while a **screenplay** is written to be filmed by a camera for movies or television.

Because a movie camera can fly high into the air, cut across town in one second, or zoom close into an actor's eye, screenplays focus heavily on visual shots and changing locations. A stage play, by contrast, takes place entirely in a single room shared by actors and theatergoers. It depends far more on spoken dialogue, physical staging, and the live tension between performers.

Key Script Components

A written play is called a **script**. Because actors, directors, lighting designers, and musicians all use this single document to build the show, scripts follow a strict, easy-to-read layout:

- **Act and Scene Headings:** Large stories are divided into **Acts** (like major parts of a book), which are further split into **Scenes** (each time the story moves to a new location or time).
- **Setting Descriptions:** Short italicized paragraphs at the start of a scene describe what the stage looks like—such as furniture, time of day, and weather.
- **Dialogue:** Spoken lines make up most of the page. The character's name appears centered or on the left in **ALL CAPS**, followed directly by their spoken words.
- **Stage Directions:** Brief notes—usually in parentheses and italics—tell the actors where to walk, how to speak, or how to react.

How Musical Numbers Are Formatted

When a stage play includes songs, the script is often called a **libretto** (or "book"). Musical scripts have special formatting rules so performers know exactly when speech turns into melody:

- **ALL CAPS for Lyrics:** Spoken dialogue uses normal sentence capitalization, but sung lyrics are typically written in **ALL CAPITAL LETTERS**.
- **Verse and Rhyme Layout:** Instead of standard prose paragraphs, lyrics are broken into short, rhythmic lines that match the beat of the music.
- **Song Cues and Underscore:** Stage directions will clearly state when background music starts, when an orchestra plays an intro, or when music continues softly under spoken speech (often noted as *music continues under*).

Script Example: A Musical Scene (Spoken and Sung)

In the opening of *Into the Woods*, multiple fairy-tale characters share their deepest wishes. Notice how regular dialogue flows directly into capitalized, poetic song lyrics as the music takes over:

ACT I

SCENE 1

(The stage shows three small homes side by side: CINDERELLA'S kitchen,
the BAKER'S shop, and JACK'S cottage. Music begins softly underneath.)

BAKER
(Looking at the empty shelves)
Another day, and not a single customer.

BAKER'S WIFE
Someone will come. They always do.

(The orchestra swells with a bright tempo. The BAKER steps downstage.)

BAKER
I WISH WE HAD A CHILD.

BAKER'S WIFE
I WISH A CHILD AS WELL.

BAKER
(Singing, turning to his wife)
I WISH OUR HOUSE WAS FULL OF NOISE,
A LITTLE BOY WITH WOODEN TOYS.

BAKER'S WIFE
A LITTLE GIRL WITH GOLDEN HAIR,
AND LAUGHTER ON THE WOODEN STAIR.

(The music drops back down to a quiet pulse.)

BAKER
(Spoken, sighing)
Wishing won't make flour rise, and it won't put bread on the table.

BAKER'S WIFE
(Spoken, touching his shoulder)
No. But it reminds us why we work.

By switching between normal sentence casing and capitalized verse, the script gives everyone a clear roadmap: the actors know when to start singing, the orchestra knows when to follow the vocal line, and the director knows how the scene balances music and spoken drama.

5 Reading Check Questions - Add responses to Digital Portfolio entry for today.

1. **Format Identification:** Looking at the script, how can an actor tell the difference between lines they are supposed to speak normally and lines they are supposed to sing?
2. **Stage Direction Purpose:** What is the purpose of the text enclosed in parentheses, such as *(Looking at the empty shelves)* or *(Spoken, sighing)*?
3. **Medium Comparison:** What is one major difference between how a stage play tells a story and how a movie screenplay tells a story?
4. **Musical Cues:** In the example excerpt, what happens to the music right before the Baker sings *"I WISH OUR HOUSE WAS FULL OF NOISE"*?
5. **Structural Navigation:** Why are plays broken down into Acts and Scenes rather than regular book chapters?

Sources (links)

- **Stage Play Formatting Standards:**
  - Dramatists Guild Play & Musical Script Formatting Guidelines – Outlines industry standards for margins, act/scene headings, stage directions, and dialogue placement.
  - Dramatists Guild Script Formats Hub – Provides standard manuscript guidelines for playwrights and librettists.

- **Musical Libretto & Lyric Formatting:**
  - Academy for New Musical Theatre (NMI) Format Guidelines – Covers conventions for musical theater scripts (librettos), including capitalizing sung lyrics, indenting song sections, and managing underscoring cues.
  - How to Write a Libretto (Mostly Modern Projects) – Details text, lyric, and dialogue layout standards for staged musical works.

- **Play vs. Screenplay Conventions & Excerpt Reference:**
  - Music Theatre International (MTI) *Into the Woods* Production Hub – Licensing and script resources for James Lapine and Stephen Sondheim's stage musical libretto.
  - The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (Oscars.org) Screenwriting Resources – Standard rules for film screenplays (scene headings/sluglines, action lines, and camera-focused storytelling).

(Note: The dialogue and lyric verses used in the example were custom-written to demonstrate the visual layout and structure of a musical theater script in a simplified teaching format, rather than copying full copyrighted text from the original show.)

Into the Woods - Scenic Design & Script Analysis

*Figuring out **what** we need **and why** (not the how yet)*

Student Name: _____ Class Period: _____ Date: _____

Do the following BEFORE starting to fill out this worksheet:

1. Read through the entire document before beginning your work.
2. Add your answers or images in all highlighted sections.
3. Double click the word to start typing your response.

Digital Access Links: Accessible on CreativeSchmit.com

- Production Video Recording Link
- Full Theatrical Script (PDF) - **Make a copy to annotate digitally (e.g., using Read&Write) or take separate notes. - Make sure it's the script for the Musical and not the movie ;-)**

Instructions (Read Carefully)

Before starting set designs, analyze how physical scenery supports the story. You will evaluate how set choices solve staging challenges. **Note: You are not designing your final sculpture yet.**

Your tasks today:

1. **Observe** the production video.
2. **Investigate** the script text.
3. **Analyze** scenic solutions on stage.
4. **Document** all physical and spatial requirements, starting with the opening scene and continuing as time permits.

Complete every section thoroughly using: Focus on ORANGE responses First, then Complete the Teal ones as you have time. Goal is to complete as much as possible (everyone will get to different places by the end of class)

1. **Complete sentences**.
2. **Specific script evidence** (quotes, lines, or stage directions).
3. T**ime-stamped video observations.**

Part 1: Scenic Terminology Key

Review these terms before you begin. You will be expected to use this vocabulary throughout your responses on this worksheet.

- **Wagon:** A low, rolling platform on wheels/casters used to track heavy scenery on and off the stage deck.
- **Flat:** A lightweight rectangular timber wall frame faced with thin plywood ($\frac{1}{4}$" luan) or painted fabric.
- **Practical:** Any architectural set piece that actually functions (e.g., a door that opens and latches shut, a window that slides open, a stove with an opening door).
- **Grounding / Floor Contact:** Ensuring moving or swinging scenic pieces transfer their weight safely to the stage floor (using drop-legs, jacks, or wheels) so hinges do not tear out.
- **Sightlines:** The viewing angles from the audience; designers must make sure the audience cannot see backstage machinery, unpainted edges, or actors waiting offstage.
- **Atmospheric Perspective / Tonal Value:** Using value contrast (highlights, mid-tones, deep shadows, and outlines) to create the illusion of three-dimensional depth, weathering, and texture on flat surfaces.

Part 2 Prologue Analysis — The 3 Main Opening Dwellings

Navigate to the very beginning of the script ("Prologue: Into the Woods") and cue your video to the opening number (0:00 to ~15:00).

The stage is split across three simultaneous households: **Cinderella's Kitchen**, **Jack's Farmhouse & Barn**, and **The Baker's Cottage & Shopfront**. Fill out the staging analysis for **ALL THREE** structures below.

Structure 1: Cinderella's Kitchen & Hearth (Stage Left)

1. **Script-Critical "Must-Haves" (Functional Practicals & Blocking):**
   - What specific physical action does Cinderella perform with lentils/beans, and what set feature is required for this? Cite the script text or stage direction:
     - *Script Evidence / Stage Direction:*
       - *Responses*
     - *Physical Set Requirement:*
       - *Responses*
   - How do the Stepmother, Florinda, and Lucinda enter the space? Is there a door frame, an open entryway, or a curtain?
     - *Responses*
   - Does Cinderella or any other character sit, kneel, or rest on a surface? Describe the physical contact:
     - *Responses*
2. **Environmental Storytelling "Nice-to-Haves" (Visual Characterization):**
   - What surface details (soot stains, peeling plaster, stone texture, broken utensils) communicate Cinderella's low status in the household?
     - *Responses*
3. **Repurposing Potential for the Forest:**
   - If this unit's walls were folded backward or the entire piece was rotated on its wagon, what could this stone structure turn into for a later scene in the woods? (e.g., Mother's Grave, a rock outcropping, a forest spring):
     - *Responses*

Structure 2: Jack's Farmhouse & Barn Stall (Center Stage)

1. **Script-Critical "Must-Haves" (Functional Practicals & Blocking):**
   - What must the set provide to accommodate Milky-White the cow and Jack's milking actions?
     - *Script Evidence / Stage Direction:*
       - *Responses*
     - *Physical Set Requirement:*
       - *Responses*
   - How does Jack's Mother enter and exit, and where does she stand to address the outside path or call to Jack?
     - *Responses*
   - What props need to be handled, stored, or set down on this unit?
     - *Responses*
2. **Environmental Storytelling "Nice-to-Haves" (Visual Characterization):**
   - What visual textures (sagging rafters, worn thatch, cracked wood grain, empty troughs) show the family's extreme poverty?
     - *Responses*

3. **Repurposing Potential for the Forest:**
   - If the barn beams or side walls fold outward or unstack, what forest elements could those vertical and leaning wooden timbers become? (e.g., base of the beanstalk, a grove of dead trees):
     - *Responses*

Structure 3: The Baker's Cottage & Shopfront (Stage Right)

1. **Script-Critical "Must-Haves" (Functional Practicals & Blocking):**
   - What horizontal surface is required for baking dough, displaying pastries, and Little Red eating sweets?
     - *Script Evidence / Stage Direction:*
       - *Responses*
     - *Physical Set Requirement:*
       - *Responses*
   - What kind of door or entrance does this structure require to support both Little Red entering politely and the Witch bursting in suddenly?
     - *Responses*
   - Where can jars, tins, or sacks of flour/beans be placed or stored?
     - *Responses*
2. **Environmental Storytelling "Nice-to-Haves" (Visual Characterization):**
   - What decorative or structural details (hanging herbs, wood trim, pastry trays, warm plaster) communicate a working artisan home?
     - *Responses*
3. **Repurposing Potential for the Forest:**
   - When the Baker and his Wife leave for the forest, how could this structure fold, flip, or unstack into another location? (e.g., Granny's cottage bed, a dense briar patch)
     - *Responses*

Part 3: Summary aka Recap

Complete the chart below now that you've completed your analysis. These can be simple lists- keep short and direct.

Set Piece	Needs	Would help but not essential	Mood (aka the vibe it needs to project)	Repurposing ideas for later in the play
Cinderella's house				
Jack's house				
Baker's house				