

Screenwriting and
the **ART OF WORD
CHOICE**

Haiku and Screenwriting Descriptions

- Study any kind of poetry for effective use of words
- Haiku – a Japanese type of poetry that means “cutting words;” spoken in three sets of words using 17 beats on three lines of 5-7-5 beats.

Example:

*An old silent pond...
A frog jumps into the pond,
splash! Silence again.*

by Basho (1644-1694)

Writing descriptions with personal style

- *“... it’s a tricky balance... Style (with a capital “S”) can’t supersede the screenwriting tenet of direct simplicity. It’s an interesting challenge, to introduce enough of your Style to create a personal voice, while avoiding the hyper-specificity of extraneous detail that slows down the real-time pace, and readers hate.”*

- ChipStreet.com/blog

Tricks of the Trade – Descriptions

- Vertical writing – leading the eye on the page
 - The others stare at him in alarm
Suddenly he makes a loud groaning.
Clutches the edge of table with his hands
Knuckles whiten.
- Isolate words for VIRTUAL Close-ups
 - A barren eyesore. Not a drop of crude pumped since the 80s. A brisk wind whistles through the holes of a surrounding chain link fence, as BENJAMIN FRANKLIN on a hundred bill hits the fence with a wet slap.

Screenplay examples: 30 Days of Night

Elongating shadows from the fleeting amber daylight. The residential side of Barrow. Homes are built on stilts to avoid the stresses of ice and critters in their foundations. All the homes have crawlspaces underneath, of varying sizes. FOUR HUSKIES ARE BARKING from behind the fence of the RIIS * residence -- sled dogs deeply unhappy about something -- A SHADOW passes across the screen -- the dogs follow the shadow angrily -- until suddenly there is a GLEAMING FLASH AND HISS OF A BLADE -- the SICKENING SLICE OF A KNIFE INTO FLESH, and the barks are replaced by horrifying WHINES OF PAIN.

- Steve Niles.

Screenplay examples: Schindler's List

IN BLACK AND WHITE:

TRAIN WHEELS grinding against track, slowing. FOLDING TABLE LEGS scissoring open. The LEVER of a train door being pulled. NAMES on lists on clipboards held by clerks moving alongside the tracks.

BEWILDERED RURAL FACES coming down off the passenger train. FORMS being set out on the folding tables. HANDS straightening pens and pencils and ink pads and stamps.

TYPEWRITER KEYS rapping a name onto a list. A FACE. KEYS typing another name. Another FACE.

A MAN is taken from one long line and led to the back of another. A HAND hammers a rubber stamp at a form. Tight on a FACE. KEYS type another NAME. Another FACE. Another NAME.

- Steven Zaillian

Screenplay examples: Bridesmaids

In slow motion, like a goddess, the gorgeous HELEN turns and looks right at Annie. Smiling. She's BEAUTIFUL. She walks toward them, wearing a much-too-fancy, floor-length GOWN. Everything about her is perfect. Annie swallows, straightens her plastic beads.

- Annie Mumolo & Kristen Wiig

Description References, Suggestions

- Thesaurus.com – A must while rewriting
- Other screenplays (my favs Steven Zaillian, Aaron Sorkin, Nancy Myers)
- Research locations, cultures, languages in person and/or through books, online