

Basics: **Description Dos and Don'ts**

4 types:

Action

Character

Sound

Setting

Purpose of a setting description:

- Create a feeling, help people visualize it
- Set up action and characters so those descriptions will flow
- Direct the camera without telling the Director what to do
- Help other do their jobs
 - Prompts, set designer, casting, AD, sound dept., etc.

General rules of thumb:

- Lean, mean & clean
 - Lean= 1-2 lines per paragraph (on average), 4 lines max
 - Mean= *Ruthlessly* poignant
 - Clean= Separate paragraph for each beat
- Describe only what you can see and hear (this creates feeling)
- Present tense
- Less is more
 - Fewest words possible
 - Give hints or notions to make the reader visualize
- Where to put them
 - Slugline-**Setting**-People in scene- Action- Dialogue
 - When something new needs to be seen

Do

- Describe ONLY what you can see (and hear) AND is VITAL to the scene
 - Pan the room, state what's there and is needed
 - CAP camera focus: Broken LETTER OPENER
 - World's Great MOM MUG
- If something is ordinary or simple, then say it that way
 - An ordinary Dentist office
- First time in a place MUST be described
 - Future visits only say what's new or go straight to action
- Use adjectives or specific nouns to set the feeling
 - Boat vs. Yacht vs. Dingy or Sleazy Apartment vs. Modern Flat
- Explain what needs to be explained
 - If it cannot be assumed, explain it
 - If it can be assumed, then simplify it to one or two words

Don't

- Ramble or use more words than is needed (not a novel)
- Re-describe same rooms (add value only)
- Describe feelings, thoughts or anything you can't see
- Mention anything that is not plot important or character revealing
- Let your descriptions overpower your story

Sound & FX

- Adds flavor, helps reduce words
- The phone rings vs. RING RING (ring tones)
- FX and SFX establish terminology early

What's wrong with this description?

The kitchen table was neatly arranged with forks, spoons and knives but the napkins are thrown hap-hazardly.

Crystal champagne glasses are edged with gold leaf. The setting sun glows outside the window. The light picks up on the knife and makes it sparkle.

(This was on page 1)

Rewrite Challenge

Look at every description and remove as many words as possible.

Look at every scene as ask yourself what you would write if there was no dialogue at all in that scene.