

A Filmmaker's Guide to Script Breakdowns

LEARN HOW TO BREAK DOWN A SCREENPLAY

INCLUDES OVER 20 FILM EXAMPLES

CAST

COSTUMES

EXTRAS

MAKEUP

STUNTS

PROPS

VEHICLES





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A Filmmaker's Guide to Script Breakdowns

LEARN HOW TO BREAK DOWN A SCREENPLAY

Edited by AJ Unitas & Arnon Z. Shorr

StudioBinder on Script Breakdowns

Some helpful thoughts about production management from the team at StudioBinder.

Our software enables filmmakers, production companies, creative agencies and studios to better project manage their shoots; from contact management, to generating personalized call sheets, to crafting storyboards and shot lists, to shooting schedules and script breakdowns.
www.studiobinder.com

We also regularly share our thoughts on production management, filmmaking, and the business of content creation. studiobinder.com/blog

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CHAPTER 1

What's a Script Breakdown?

Whether you're dealing with *Moonlight* or *Batman V. Superman*, every movie starts with a screenplay.

Full of "INT."s and "EXT."s and WORDS IN ALL CAPS, screenplays offer the production staff critical information about the needs of production. From casting to props to visual effects, every department will use data from the script.

Extracting and organizing all of this data from a screenplay can be a daunting challenge. There are just so many details per page, and there can be so many different ways to categorize and organize them!

But how do you do it?

Enter the **script breakdown** -- a scene-by-scene organizational document with categorized lists of all that you need for each scene of your film. The breakdown is called a “breakdown” because it breaks down your project into its smallest component parts. Once you have those lists, you know what elements you’ll need for your entire production.



Or click [here](#) to for a brief overview of the process

Crafting these documents, however, is a process of decryption—screenplays are written in a kind of industry-standard code. They are meant to have a dramatic flow and convey basic information, but they don’t necessarily tell you what to do with that information.

For that, you need to apply your understanding of the production process, and of your team's vision, to properly extract and categorize the information that your screenplay contains.

In this Ebook, we'll define what each script element is, outline the process of marking (or "tagging") scenes to create a script breakdown, and touch on budgeting a breakdown.

So pull out your scripts, turn on your computer, and get comfy.

BUT BEFORE WE BEGIN

Read your script from beginning to end. Don't mark anything yet - just take in the story. *You only have one first impression of the story*, so give yourself a chance to experience it.

And this isn't just a nice thing to do. The more familiar you are with the story, the better you'll understand the production requirements of your film.

Your breakdown, at the end of the day, is nothing more than a group of lists that comprise your film's production requirements. Tagging a screenplay is the process of identifying and marking where props, characters, special equipment appear on the page.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves.

CHAPTER 2

Defining Production Elements

Before we can dive into breakdowns and [shooting schedules](#), we need to first familiarize ourselves with production elements.

An element is an object, person, or process that you need in order to shoot a specific scene.

Props, picture vehicles, actors, and stunts are all elements. Pieces of production equipment are not elements, unless they are specific to certain scenes (so, your A-Camera isn't an element, but the Go-Pro you're using for the action scene is).

Sometimes, elements are explicitly identified in a screenplay, but often, you need to apply your knowledge of production and your familiarity with the script in order to note all the elements in a scene.

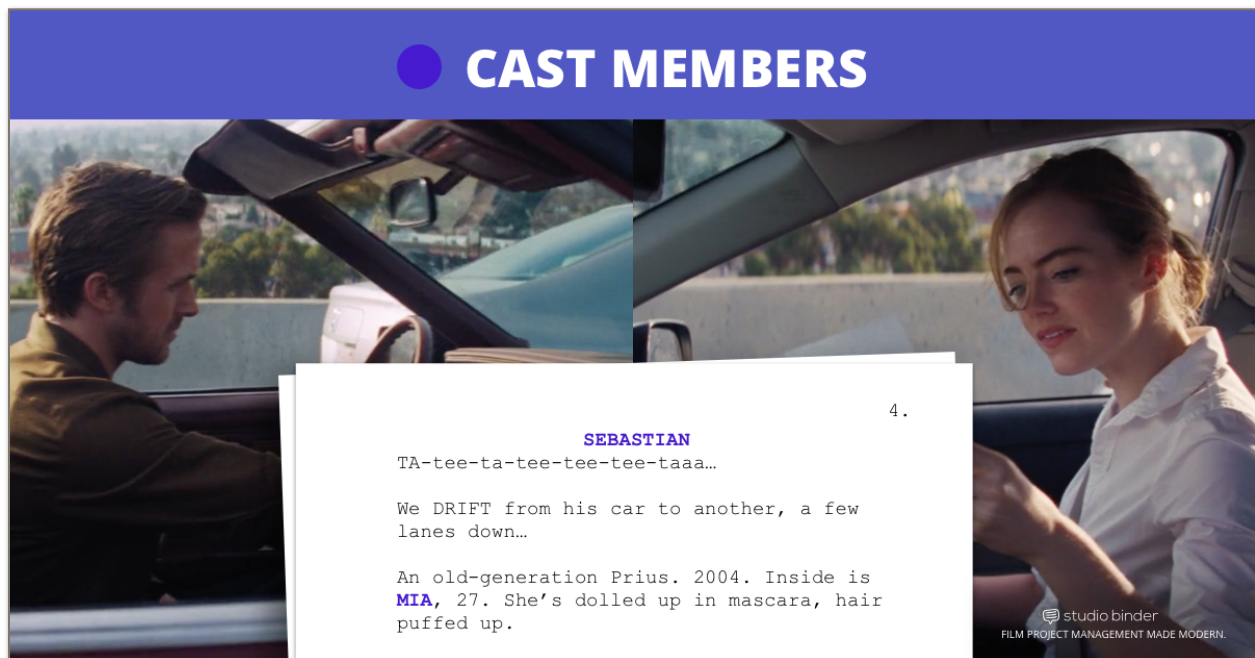
We know this can get a little confusing, so we'll go through the entire script breakdown sheet, category-by-category, to help figure out what goes where.

CAST MEMBERS

Jonah Hill. Mark Wahlberg. Cate Freakin' Blanchett.

When you break down your script, one of the first elements you list is **Cast Members**. These are the characters in your script that speak at some point during the movie.

Their first appearance in a screenplay is denoted in ALL CAPS usually with a brief description.



La La Land (2016)

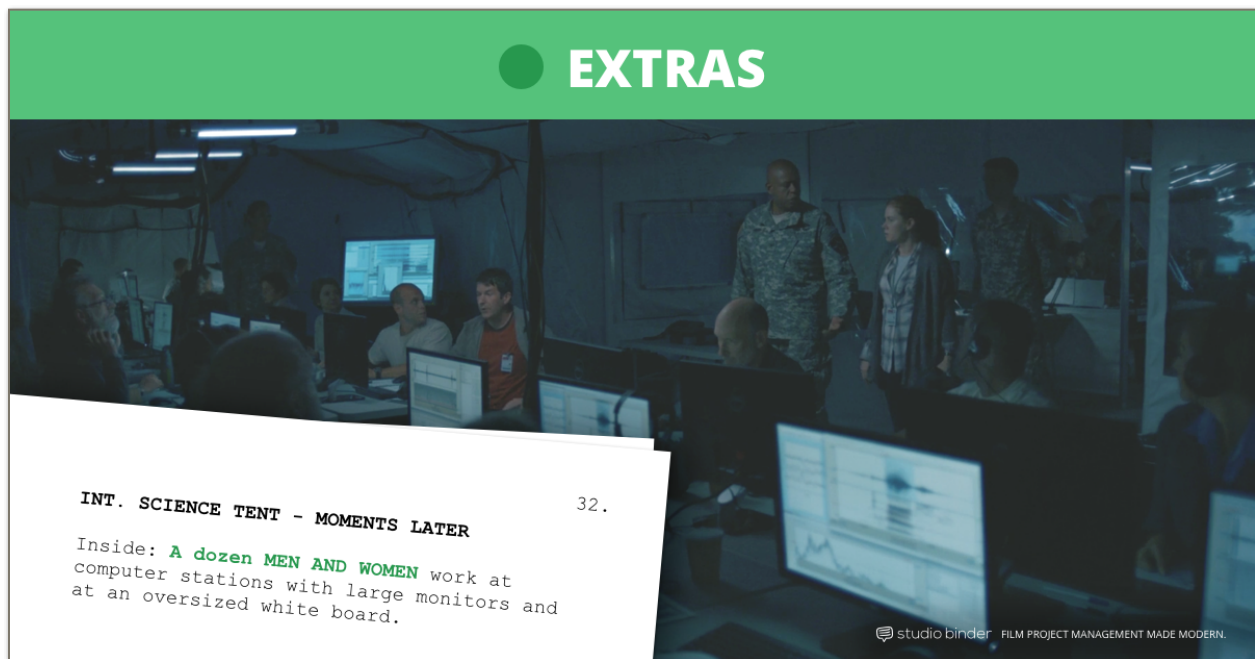
Sometimes characters who don't speak are cast members as well. They usually appear in many scenes and play an important role in the plot.

A perfect example of this is [Silent Bob](#) from many of Kevin Smith's films. Silent Bob may not speak, but he's still an important character in his scenes.

EXTRAS

Characters who don't speak in the entire film are usually **Extras**.

Extras can be divided into subcategories, such as *Atmosphere*, which refers to people who simply fill a space (like a crowd in a subway station), and *Featured Extras*, characters who interact within a scene,



Arrival (2016)

but who don't have any real importance to the story (like the cashier in a grocery scene).

Featured extras are usually identified not by name, but by the function or role that they play ("Police Officer" or "Panhandler").

Use your discretion to determine if a featured extra is important enough to the story to be categorized in the "Cast Member" category.

PROPS

The **Props** category may seem like the most overwhelming part of your script breakdown, but not every small object in a scene is a prop.

Here's the general rule: If a character interacts with an object, that object is a prop, otherwise it's something else.



The Force Awakens (2015)

But like all good rules, this one has exceptions. If a character interacts with part of the set, is it a prop or is it set dressing?

Here's a simple checklist to help figure it out:

- Is the object part of the set?
 - If NO, it's a prop.
 - If YES, then...
 - Is the object being handled in a usual manner?
 - If NO, it's a prop.
 - If it is being handled in the usual manner, then it's set dressing.

This distinction may sound complicated, but is easily cleared up with a real life example from a short film about a pirate I wrote and directed.

In one scene, a pirate captain hears a noise outside his cabin and pulls aside the curtains to look out the window.

The curtains are part of the set, so we must ask if they're being handled in the usual manner. There's nothing unusual about pulling aside the curtains, so, in this scene, the curtains are not a prop, they're set dressing.



The curtains from [The Pirate Captain Tolendano \(2017\)](#)

But what if the pirate captain tears the curtain off the wall in fit of rage? At that point, the curtains are no longer being handled in a usual manner - they are props.

But there's a kicker.

Unless the curtains that are ripped off the window are different than the curtains that will appear on that window at other times in the film, those curtains are ALWAYS props, even in the [breakdown sheets](#) for scenes where they simply hang there looking pretty.

SET DRESSING

Set Dressing is the stuff that fills out the set.

When your script describes a room, that room is full of Set Dressing, from the decorations to the furniture to the light fixtures. As we discussed above (with “props”), if your characters interact with the set dressing in a room, it’s still set dressing, unless the interaction is unusual.



Last Man on Earth (2015)

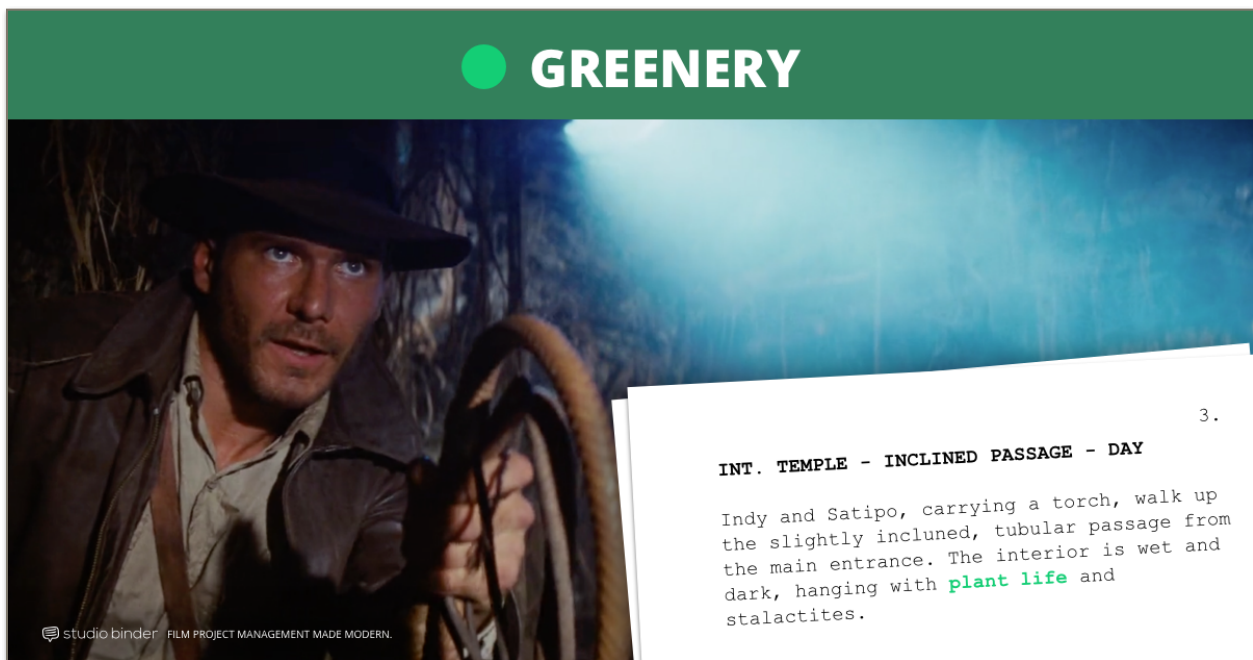
If someone opens a drawer in a desk, the desk and drawer are still set dressing. But if the drawer falls on the floor, it's a prop.

GREENERY

Greenery isn't just a specific type of Set Dressing.

Greenery is the category for all of the potted plants, shrubs, small trees and jungle vines that might grace your set.

These may seem like they're just set dressing, but they get their own category because - sometimes - these are actual plants that require a different level of care and maintenance. Once again, if a character interacts with a plant in an unusual way, that plant becomes a prop.

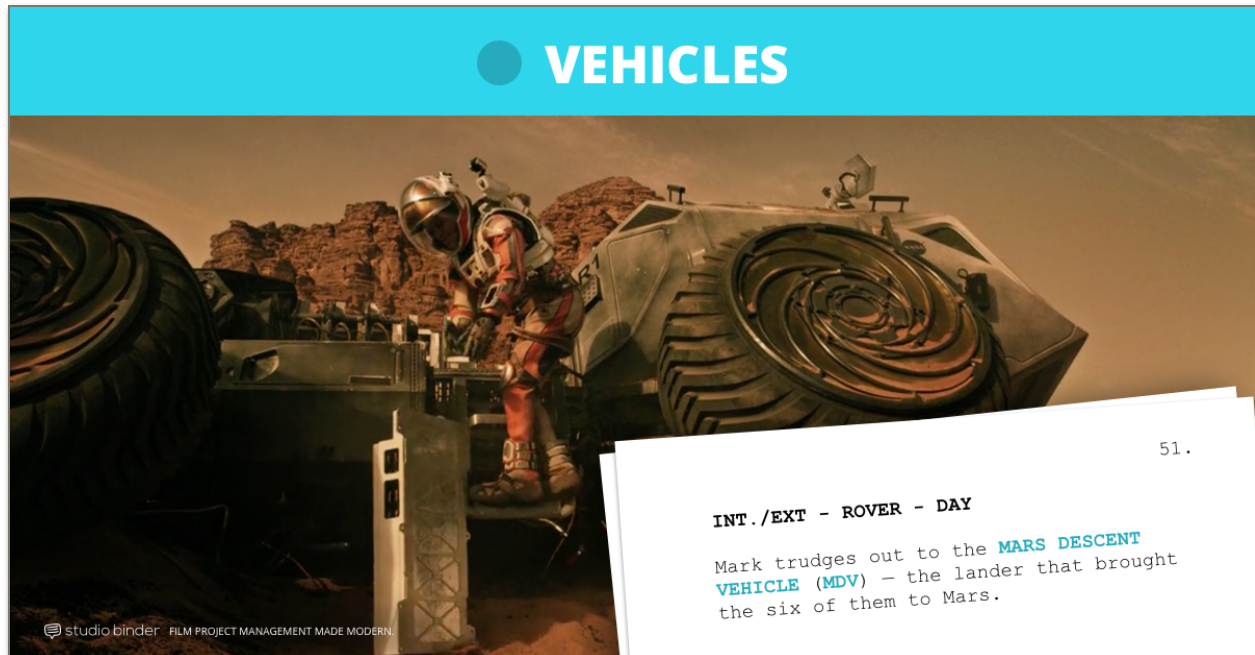


Raiders of The Lost Ark (1981)

VEHICLES

As a general rule, the **Vehicles** category only includes picture vehicles, not production ones, like golf carts you drive on the lot.

Picture vehicles can include cars, trucks, motorcycles, boats, or any large object that could transport characters or objects *within* a scene. Roller skates, skateboards and other such small transportation devices are not vehicles.



The Martian (2015)

There's a 'gray area' when it comes to slightly larger objects such as electric scooters or bicycles. Exercise discretion when determining whether such elements are vehicles or props.

When it comes to very large vehicles, such as ocean liners or planes, you should treat them as a filming locations. The exception, of course, is if it's being operated.

As always this is best illustrated with an on set example. Let's say I'm breaking down a script for a pirate film that takes place entirely on a pirate ship. How do I categorize the ship?



The Pirate Captain Tolendano (2017)

In this case, we're bringing production to the ship, and we're simply shooting onboard while the ship remains docked. We're not operating the ship, nor are we causing it to move anywhere. We're treating it as a location, so in my script breakdown example, I do not list the pirate ship as a vehicle element.

If, however, the film included a naval battle that featured the ship in open water, we'd have to cause the ship to move, and it would move

under orders from our production - in that case, it would be a vehicle element, and should be listed.

COSTUMES

For each story day in your script, your characters are (presumably!) wearing **Costumes**.

In big productions that span many script days, this can become very challenging to track and organize.

The best line producers and 1st ADs develop a system for labeling each of your wardrobe elements to keep track of them all.



Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency (2016)

Take Jurassic Park, for example. When Alan Grant enters the scene, you could add each individual element that makes up his wardrobe (fedora, denim shirt, cargo shorts) or you could bundle it as “Alan Grant - Day 1 - Outfit 1.

You can trust your costumer to keep track of which individual pieces of clothing correspond to each outfit combination.

But as always, there are exceptions to this:

- If a specific piece of clothing is unusual or hard to find, it may be useful to list it separately in the breakdown, as it may be important information for budgeting or even scheduling.
- If a piece of clothing is supposed to get ruined (maybe someone spills coffee during the scene?) it may be beneficial to list multiples of that piece of clothing as separate items in the breakdown.

Using an element-naming system such as this in breakdown software, like [StudioBinder](#), makes keeping track of costumes a breeze. Even if there's not a reference to costumes, you can [manually add an element to each scene](#).

MAKE-UP

The **Make-Up** category is really just for unusual makeup (prosthetics, wounds, blood, things that come up only for some scenes and not for others). It's also a good place to note unusual character makeup.

If you're working on a film with a heavy makeup load, consider naming makeup elements strategically to keep the list organized, like we did above for costumes.



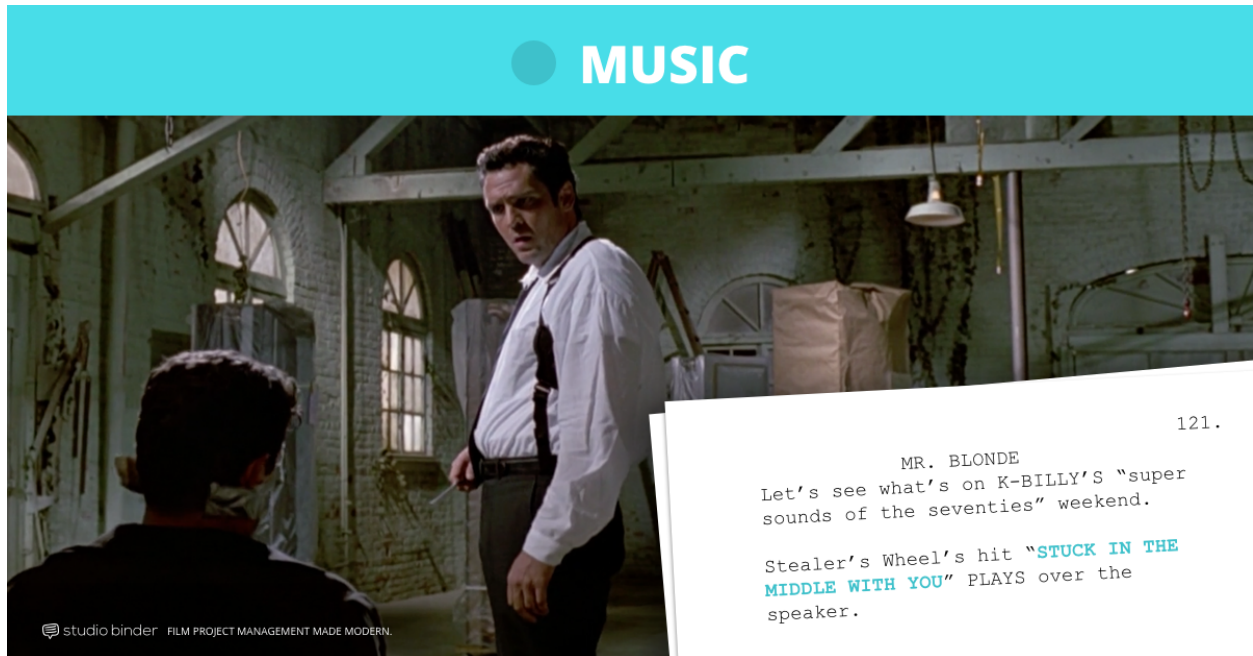
The Dark Knight (2008)

MUSIC

Music is not Soundtrack.

If you have a scene in your film where characters listen to Music, it's often helpful to have that music available on-set for the actors to hear.

This becomes even more important in movie musicals or music videos, where actors need to perform with playback of the song they're performing.



Reservoir Dogs (1992)

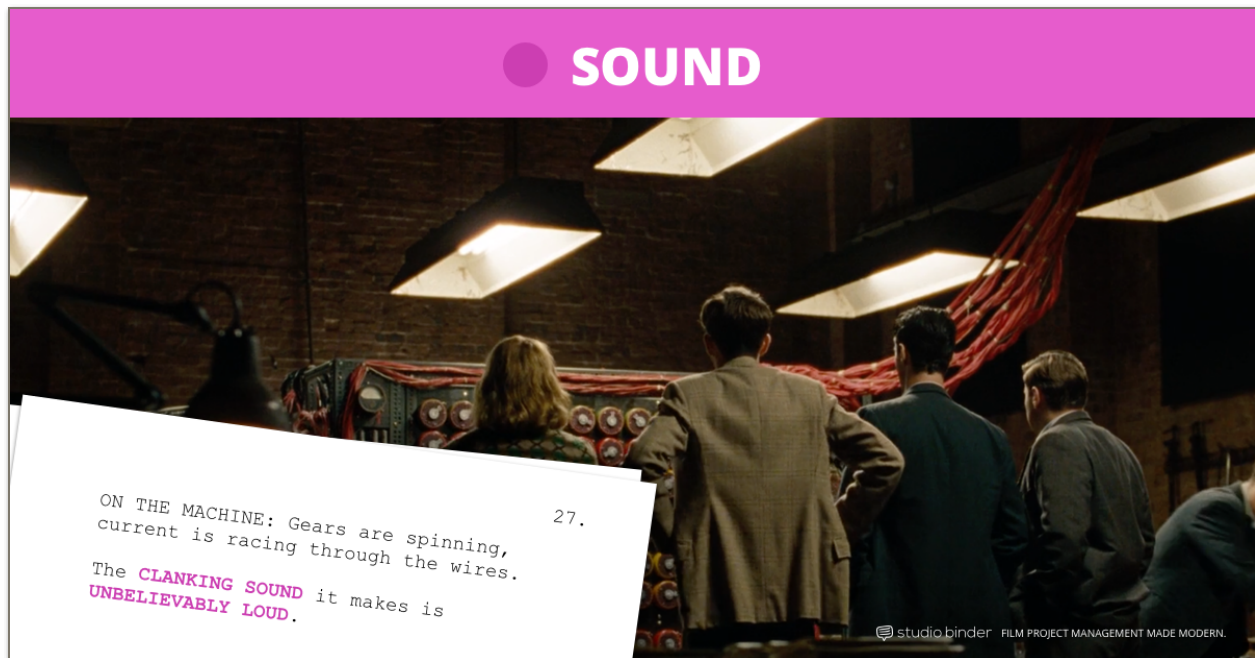
SOUND

In this category, you can list any unusual **Sound** recording or playback equipment that the production might need for the scene that you're currently breaking down.

Unusual sound recording equipment might include special microphones or wireless transmission devices that you need in specific circumstances. It might also mean additional sound equipment

beyond your production's day-to-day kit, for scenes involving a large number of simultaneous speaking parts.

Sound playback equipment might be necessary for things like music playback in a music video or musical scene.



The Imitation Game (2014)

CHAPTER 3

Defining “Process” Elements

So far, we’ve covered elements that can more or less be consolidated to a single item or person. Now we turn to what we’re calling “process elements”, or elements that are more complex than just an item, person, or small kit.

The elements that we’re calling “process elements” are elements that require a complex array of sub-elements.

For example, having a horse on-set requires not just the horse, but also the horse’s trailer, the trainer, perhaps animal handler assistants, food for the horse, and perhaps half a dozen other resources.

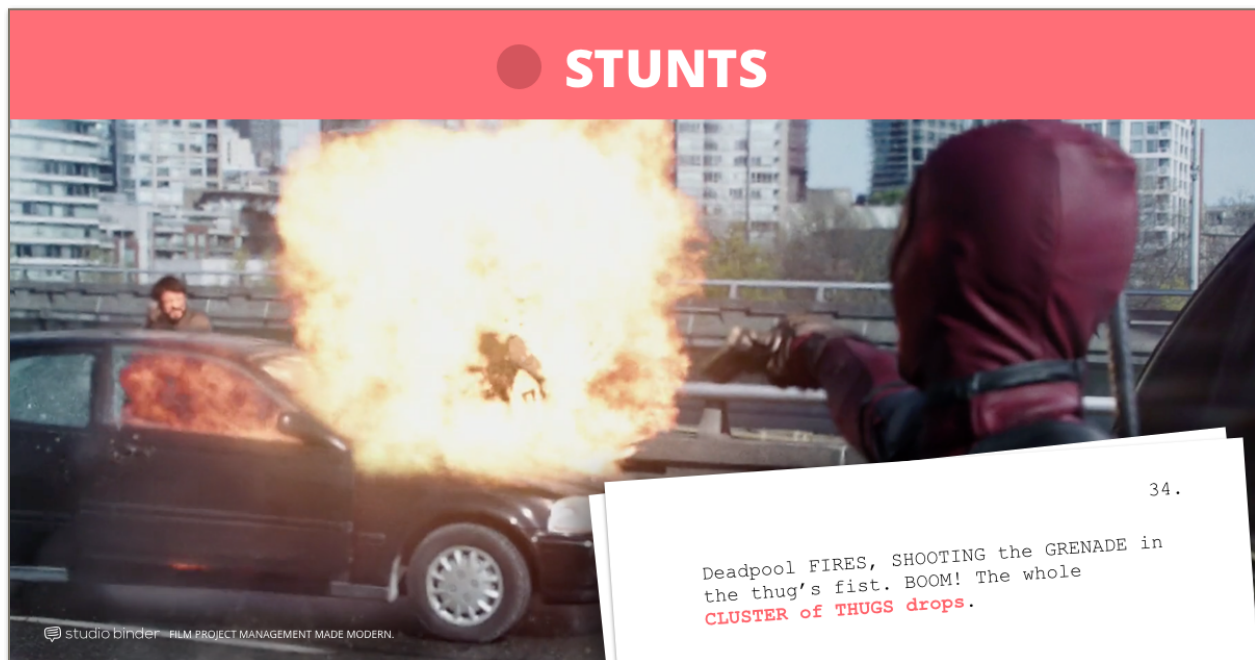
Rather than listing all of these separately, you can simply list them as “horse” in the breakdown sheet under the “animals” category.

“Process elements” is not an industry-standard term, and in truth, all elements take a small army to get on screen.

But think of these elements as the more niche elements that would come into play, depending on your screenplay's genre.

STUNTS

While a **Stunt** is neither an object or a person, it still gets listed on your [script breakdown sheet](#). Stunts require extra equipment and personnel, and as a result, are process elements.



Deadpool (2016)

As is the case with most process elements, there are two approaches to breaking down stunts.

1. Mark each stunt (“hero gets thrown through a window!”) as one element. Leave it up to your stunt coordinator to make sure all the required sub-elements arrive on set.
2. Break down each sub-element of the stunt (stunt double, breakaway window, crash pad, etc).

We recommend the first option, as long as your stunt coordinator is organized and stays on top of the stunt’s unique logistics, to minimize clutter on your final breakdown sheet.

SPECIAL EFFECTS (SFX)

Much like stunts, **Special Effects** are process elements. Instead of listing all of the different components that go into a special effect shot, you can simply list the effect as an element, and trust your special effects supervisor to know what the effect requires.

Special effects are effects that are achieved on-set, rather than during post-production. Weather effects such as rain, wind, flooding, or snow typically fall under the “special effects” category, as do certain pyrotechnics and explosions.

Squib hits are special effects, too.



Titanic (1997)

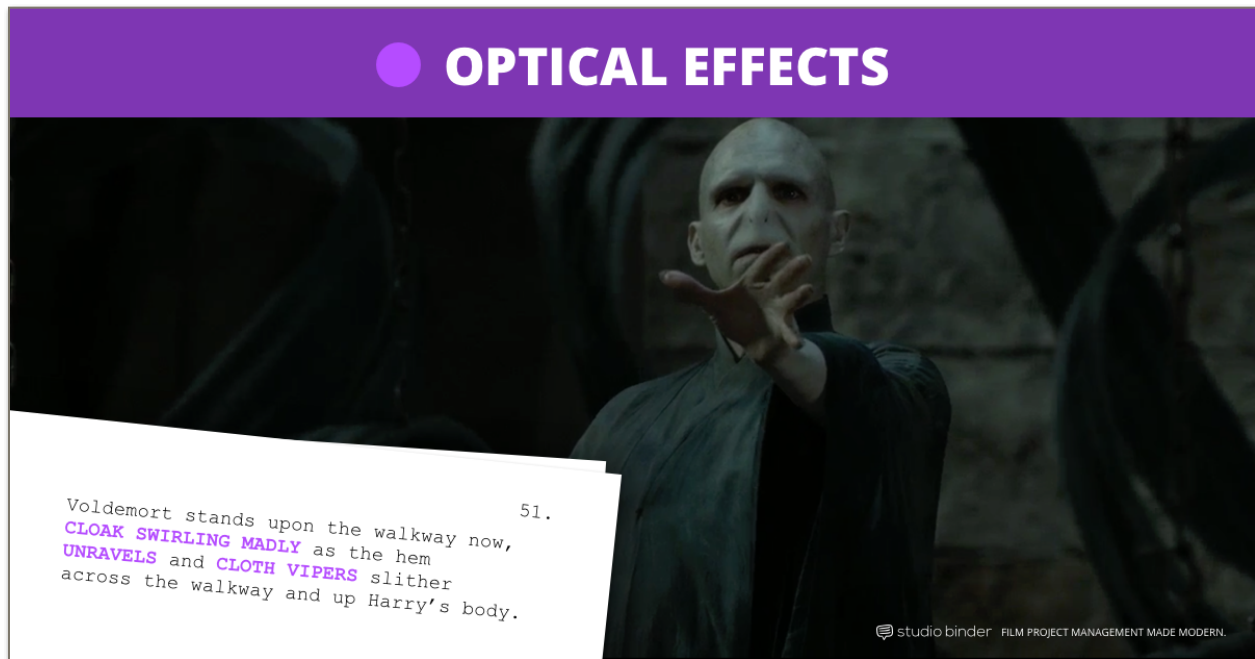
VISUAL EFFECTS (VFX)

Sometimes referred to as “optical effects,” this is where you list any **VFX** requirements for the scene. Green screens are probably the most common element in this category these days.

If you have a good VFX coordinator, you can treat this category as a process category, and list the entire effect as a process element rather than listing out each individual piece of equipment.

With the rise of computer graphics, it can be tricky to determine the difference between a stunt, special effects, visual effects, and mechanical effects. As you break down your script, stay in communication with your department heads, either via phone or

through dedicated software, like StudioBinder, where they can message you, review breakdowns, and even breakdown scenes themselves.

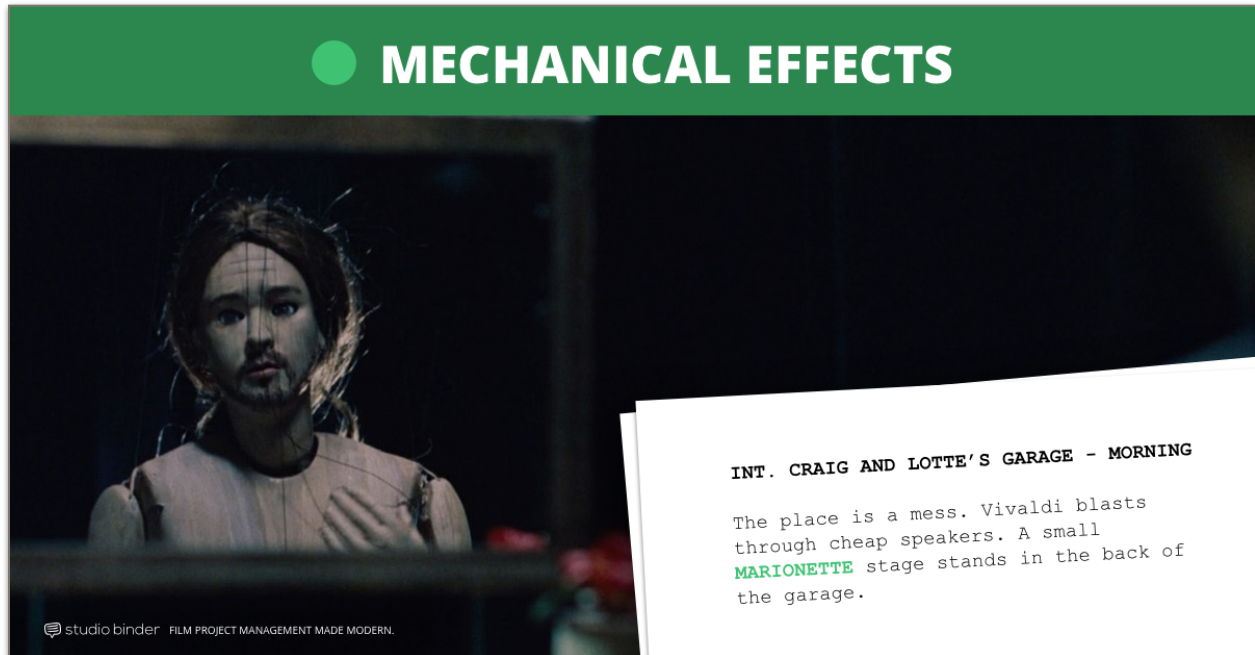


Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 2 (2012)

MECHANICAL EFFECTS

The **Mechanical Effects** category is where your animatronics go. Shooting a scene with a giant, practical T-Rex puppet? This is where to list it!

If you're shooting a scene in an elevator set, and the set is built on a rocker so the elevator looks like it's moving back and forth, that rocker is a mechanical effect, too.



Being John Malkovich (1999)

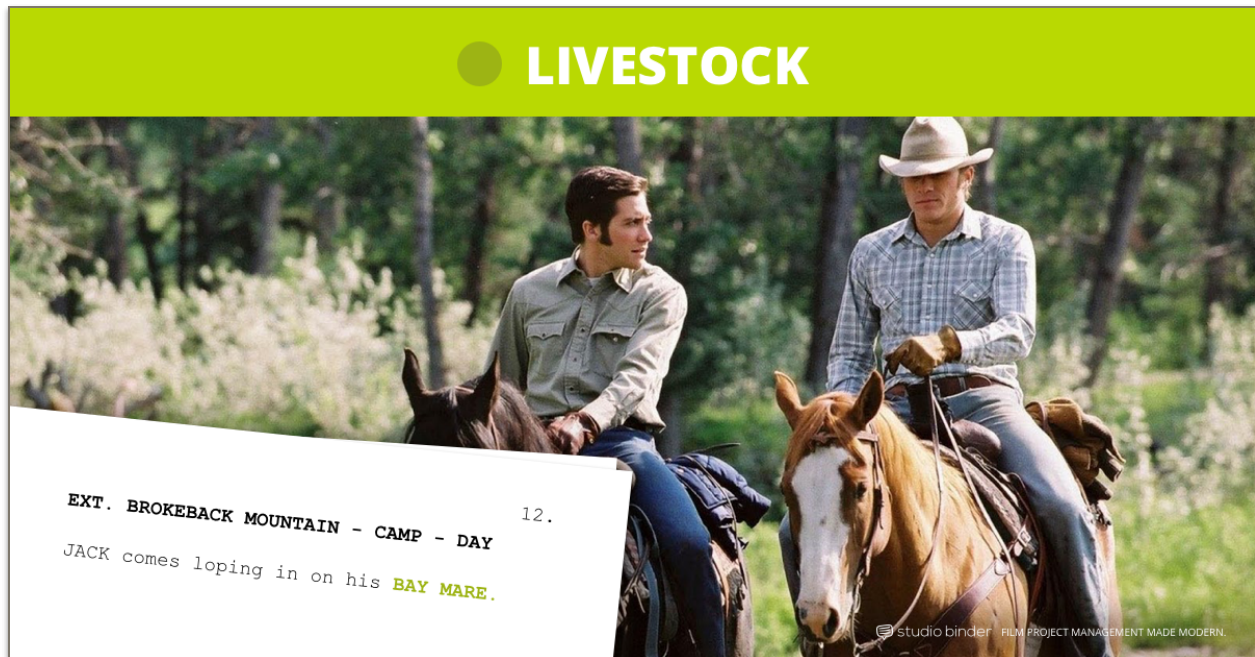
LIVESTOCK

Livestock are big animals.

In this category, you list big animals - the sorts of animals that might require their own vehicle to transport to and from

set. Horses, cows, sheep and goats fall into this category.

The livestock category is a category of process elements because large animals always come with a complex array of personnel, equipment and supplies.



Brokeback Mountain (2005)

Having live animals on set will impact both your insurance and budget, as the position requires an Animal Trainer, which often costs around \$600-\$1000/day, not including the cost of the animal.

Your breakdown software software not list “Livestock” as a separate category? Some software bundles “Livestock” in with “Vehicles”, since large animals usually require their own specialized transportation to get to set. [StudioBinder](#) not only comes preloaded with both tags, but also allows you to create your own production element categories.

ANIMAL HANDLERS

Animal Handlers bring the small animals to set.

Dogs, cats, other small creatures that could be brought to set in a crate get listed in the Animal Handlers category because, typically, they are brought to set by their handlers.



Marley & Me (2008)

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT

Special Equipment is production equipment that isn't part of your film's typical production package.

At last, we've come to the place where you can note the camera crane, or the dolly that your director really wants to use!

List any of the unusual equipment required to achieve the director's vision.



Avatar (2009)

If your production is renting a grip/lighting package that comes with a dozen standard lights, you don't need to list them here for every scene.

But if one scene in your script calls for an 18k to flood the sidewalk from 30 feet in the air, you'll want to note that here.

Since this is a process element, you could either simply list it as "18k", or break it down into sub-elements (18k light, generator, stingers, condor, etc.).

Camera vehicles such as dollies or camera-toting ATVs get listed here, too.

SECURITY

You may find that you need **Security** on set if you're using certain expensive props (huge stacks of real money, for example). In such cases, the need for security comes directly from the script (the script calls for an expensive element which triggers the security need). Note the script element that will require security in this section of your breakdown sheet.



Breaking Bad (2008-2013)

You may also need security if you're shooting at a location where you need to keep non-production people off your set. Here, the need for security is not being triggered by a script element, so it should not be listed in the breakdown sheet.

Here's the rule of thumb for security elements:

- If you need security to protect a script element from your cast or crew, note security in your breakdown sheet for the scene where the element appears.
- If you need security to protect your cast and crew from the public, or to protect equipment or a location from the public, it's certainly important, but doesn't go into any individual scene's breakdown sheet.

ADDITIONAL LABOR, MISCELLANEOUS, & NOTES

The **Additional Labor** category gives you an opportunity to list any unusual personnel that you might need on set. Perhaps you'll need a medical advisor when you shoot the surgery scene, or an historical consultant for a scene that needs to be historically accurate. This section is for miscellaneous personnel who don't fit anywhere else.

If you get to the end of your [script breakdown](#), and there are a few stray elements left that you're not sure how to categorize, you can stick them here, in the **Miscellaneous** category. It's unlikely that you'll need this category for anything, but it's there in case the unexpected arises.

Finally, the **Notes** category. This isn't really a breakdown category so much as an opportunity for production to leave little reminders about production details or ideas.

Remember, breakdown sheets are organizational resources that multiple department heads across your entire production will reference throughout [entire pre-production process and beyond](#). The notes section is a great way to make sure everyone is on the same page about the tone or texture of any given scene.

That said, you can really use this section however you'd like!

CHAPTER 4

How to Break Down Your Script

Now that we've defined in detail what your potential elements are, how do you convert that into a scene breakdown sheet?

In this chapter, we're going to explore the process of marking up (or **tagging**) a script to generate breakdown reports. Along the way, we'll also review the quirky terminology that's unique to script breakdowns.

Maybe we're biased, but we highly suggest you use production management software when breaking down your script. Not only will it save you time, but I'll keep track of much more data than you can in your head.

As is the case with StudioBinder's cloud-based software, you can also [invite people to collaborate and comment on your breakdown](#). This can be useful if you assign element categories to production heads.

You can have the costume designer break down costume elements, and the cinematographer break down special equipment requirements.

For the sake of clarity and eye candy, we default to StudioBinder for our screenshots, but you should be able to apply what you learn to your own scheduling process, regardless of what tools you use.

1. AUDIT THE SCREENPLAY

Screenplays aren't just "blueprints" for a movie. They're actually computer code teeming with valuable metadata to make scheduling more efficient. When you import a screenplay into your production management software such as [Movie Magic Scheduling](#) or [StudioBinder](#), the program parses the embedded data within the screenplay and extracts information from it...***as long as the script is formatted correctly!***

Most screenwriters aren't producers, and neglect to properly format their screenplay before handing it off for scheduling. As a result, it often falls on you to [make sure the script is formatted correctly](#). This is called *Auditing the Screenplay*.

Here's what you should check for and fix before importing:

Sluglines: Most of the data your software needs is located in the sluglines, or scene headings, of your script. These need to be consistent throughout the script, or your software will not handle them correctly. Make sure that every scene and every location change has a slugline. Some writers get lazy about structure when action traverses multiple locations, opting instead to create a *flow* for the reader.

INT/EXT: Every scene takes place either inside (INT) or outside (EXT). Pick one. Some scenes aren't so obvious, so writers employ "I/E" or "INT/EXT". It's rare that these are necessary – you might find that "EXT" suffices in most cases. In the event that there's a scene where an interior/exterior designation is necessary, check your software to determine which format convention the software recognizes. Some software recognizes "I/E" while others require "EXT/INT," while others can't recognize either.

PRO TIP: "INT/EXT. CAR" is a common slugline, but really, from a production standpoint, it's EXT, unless the car is in a garage!

Sets: If you have a slugline that states "INT. JOHN'S LIVING ROOM - DAY" and a later scene in the same location that's slugged "INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY", your software will treat these as *two separate sets*. Go through the script and make sure

that any time a set appears in a slugline, it's written consistently, with no variation at all.

Day or Night: Writers love to use expressive day parts in their sluglines. “- DAWN” or “- DUSK” or “- MIDNIGHT” or “- SAME” are common. From a scheduling standpoint, very few of these expressive day parts super useful, and they tend to clutter your schedule. Some older scheduling software does not support these variations so you may need to replace them with either “DAY” or “NIGHT”.

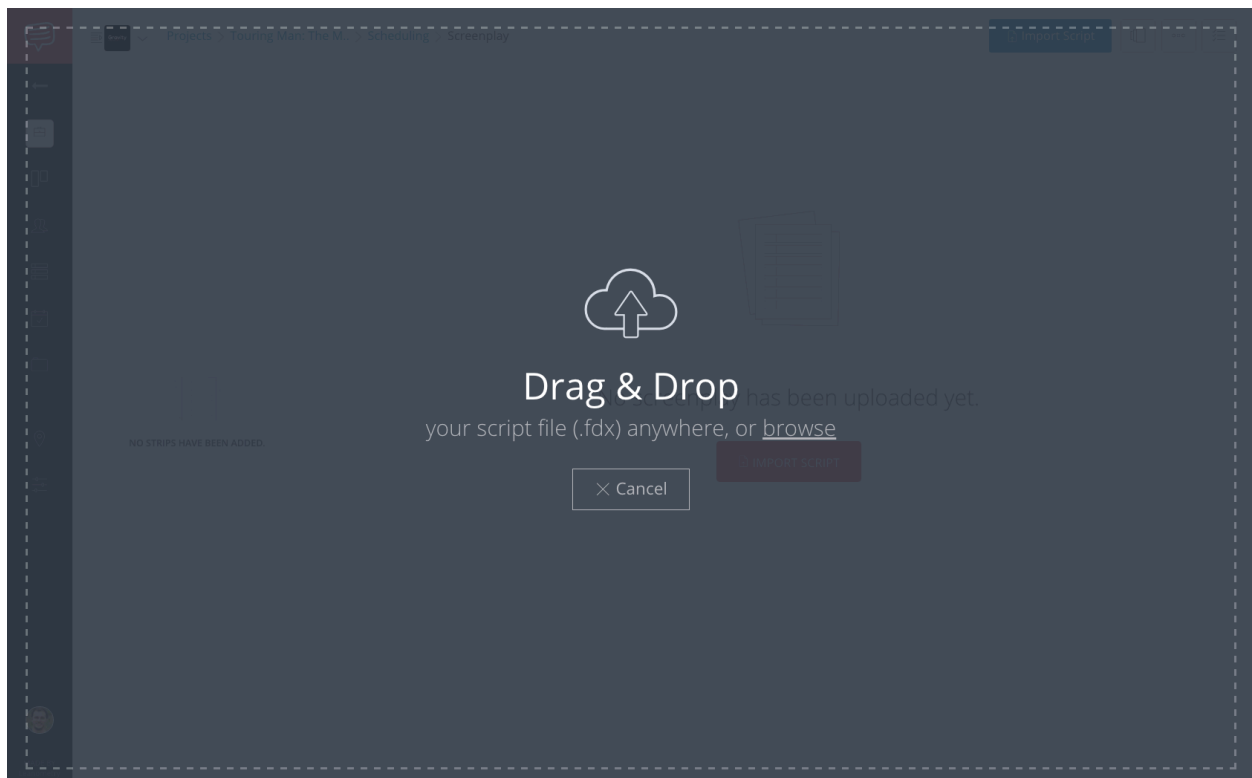
Character Names: Another part of the screenplay “code” that your software relies on is the character names before each block of dialog. These, too, need to be consistent. If JOHN SMITH says a few lines early in the film, and the same character's lines are labeled simply “JOHN” later in the film, your software will treat these as *two separate characters!* This is fine in the action blocks, but when character headings (the character name before a block of dialog), their names need to be consistent or the you'll end up with duplicate characters upon import. If you're using software like Final Draft to audit your screenplay, you can generate various reports such as a *character list* or a *location list*. It's a great way to identify issues and make the changes to ensure consistent formatting.

WORKING IN 1/8S

Professional film productions divide their pages into eight, 1 inch parts. This measurement is used to estimate the screen time and shooting time for a scene. Most film breakdown software will count up how many 1/8s of a page your screenplay is, to give you the estimate. If you're breaking down your script by hand, however, pull out a ruler and Sharpie for this step.

2. IMPORT THE SCREENPLAY

After your shooting script has been formatted correctly, it's time to import it into your breakdown software of choice. In [StudioBinder](#), uploading your script is as simple as dragging and dropping.

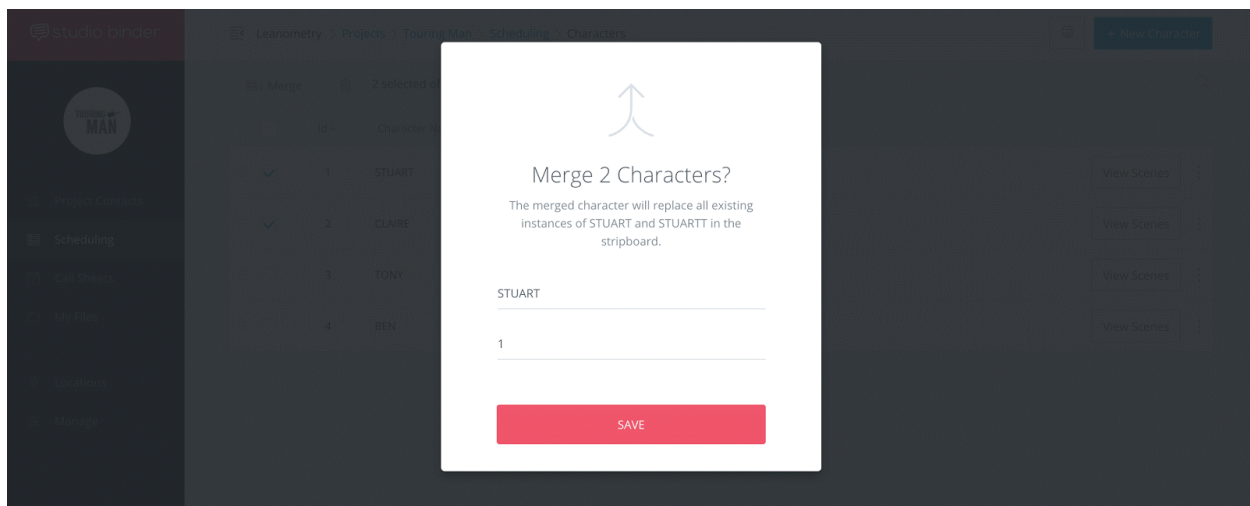


While the industry standard format for screenplays is [Final Draft](#) (.fdx). If you're working within another format, however, StudioBinder will prompt you to convert your file.

If the shooting script has formatting errors (e.g. some instances of characters or location names have typos), they'll come in as duplicate characters and locations.

Even if you formatted the script correctly, it's worthwhile to double-check that there are no duplicates or formatting issues.

If you catch the mistake early enough, it's best to return to the screenplay to correct the issue at the source. But if you've already put a lot of work into your breakdowns and schedule, some scheduling software allows you to “merge” duplicate characters or sets.



Merging duplicate characters in [StudioBinder](#)

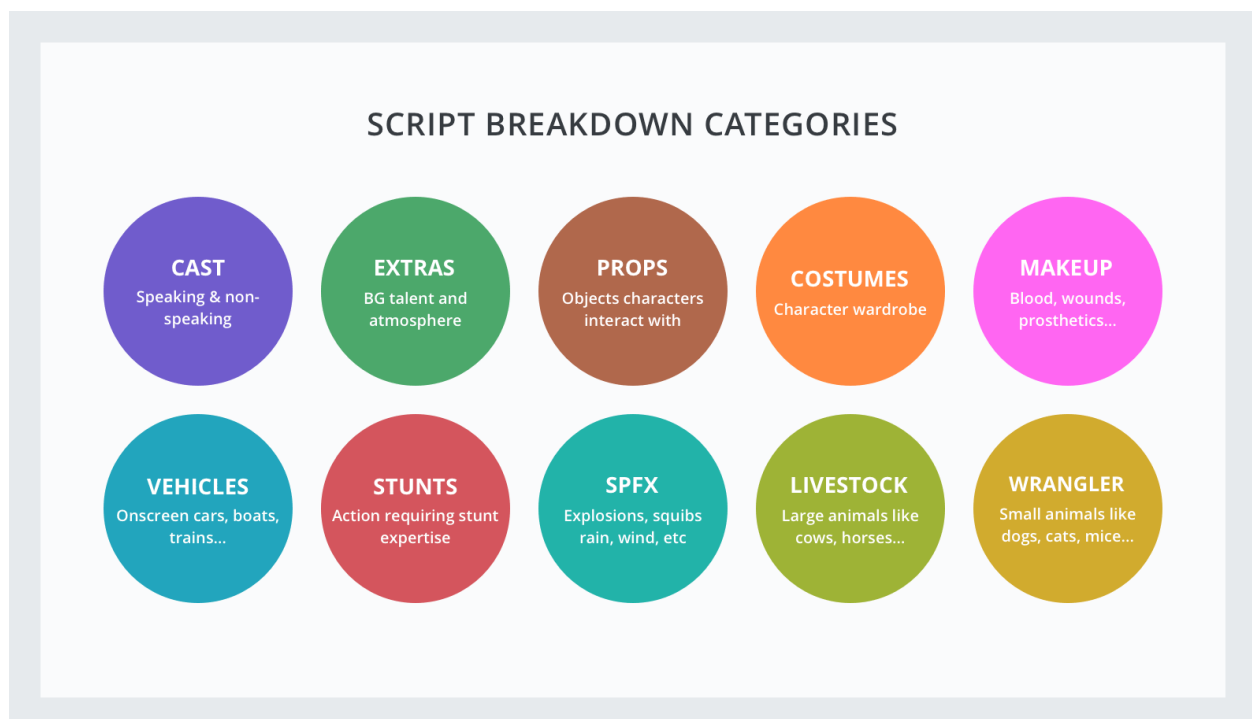
3. TAG YOUR ELEMENTS

At long last, it's time to put our element knowledge to use! Able to identify an Extra or a Mechanical Effect, we now have to go through each page of the script, tagging each element carefully (and tediously).

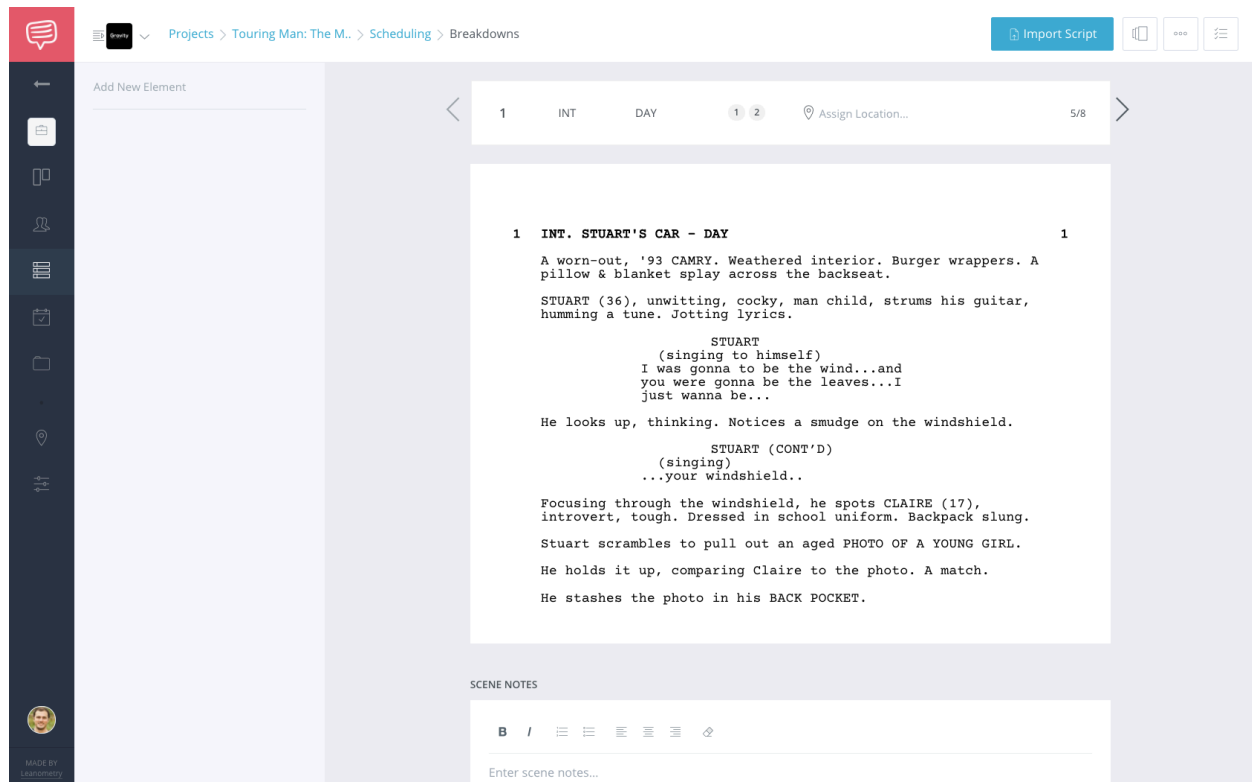
By marking a script we identify all the elements in a scene so they can be included in the script breakdown sheet, shooting schedule, and then prepped prior to production.

If you're doing this lo-fi on a physical script, it's common to use multiple highlighters and pens to identify specific element types. If you're marking the script using software, [Movie Magic Scheduling](#), [Final Draft Tagger](#), and [StudioBinder](#) all support element tagging.

You can find “typical” script breakdown colors below. If you're using custom script breakdown colors, include a color legend with your script breakdown sheets.



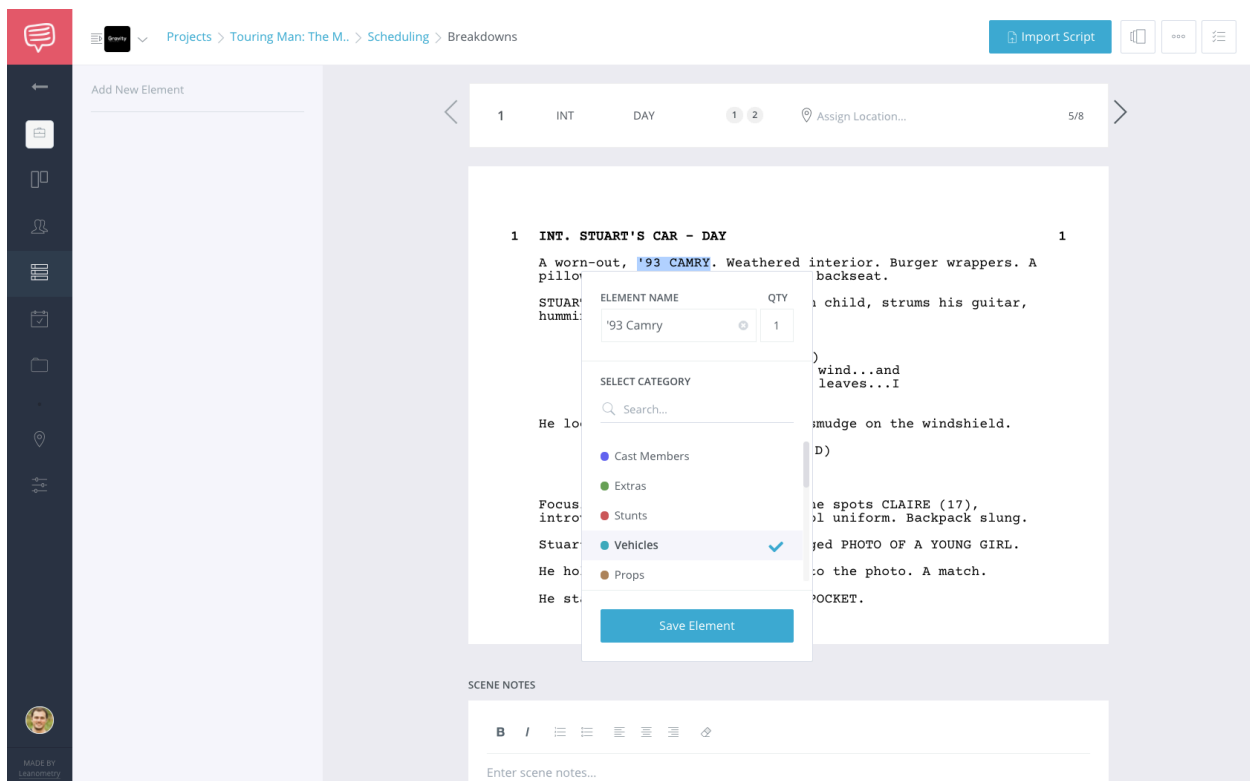
If you're ditching highlighters for the twenty first century, tagging takes place entirely on the computer. In StudioBinder, easily preview your script on your desktop or iPad.



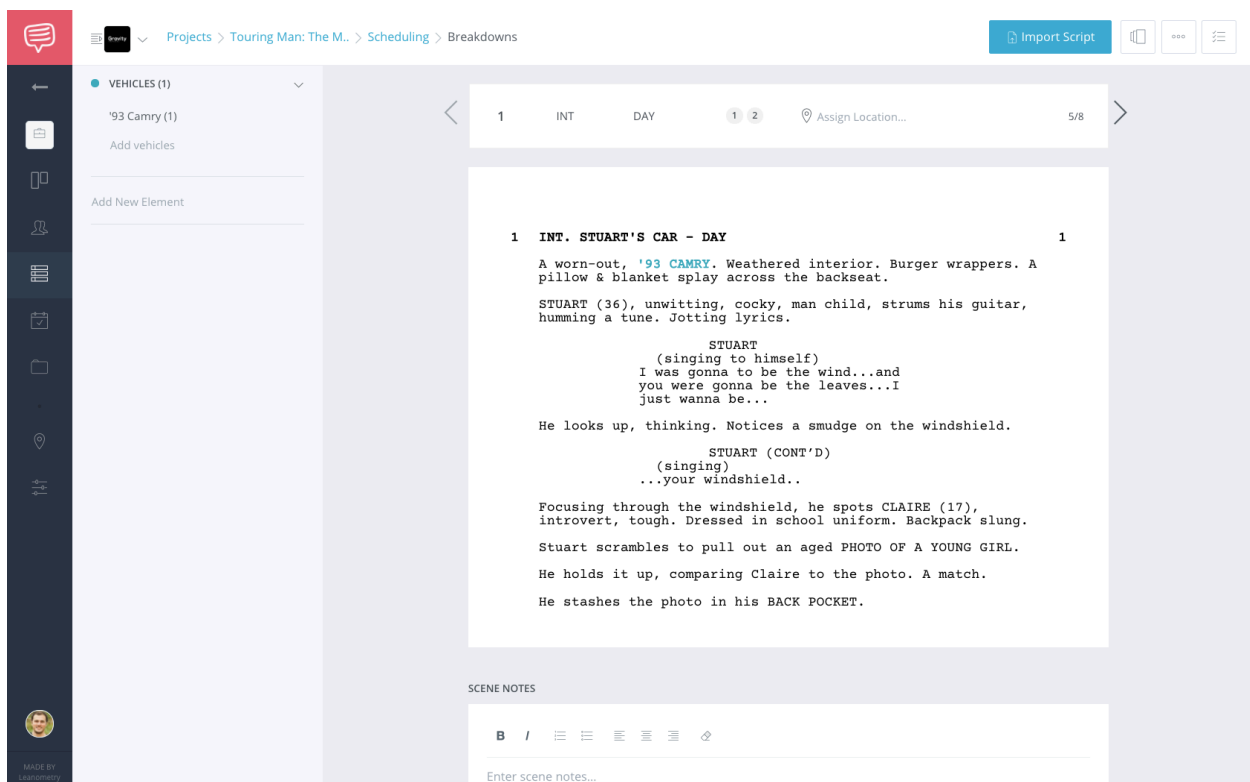
A preview of your script in [StudioBinder](#)

On top of your scene (from left to right) you'll find: The Scene Number; INT or EXT (Interior or Exterior); Time of Day; Characters in Scene (represented as Cast ID numbers); and Total Page Count (counted in 1/8ths).

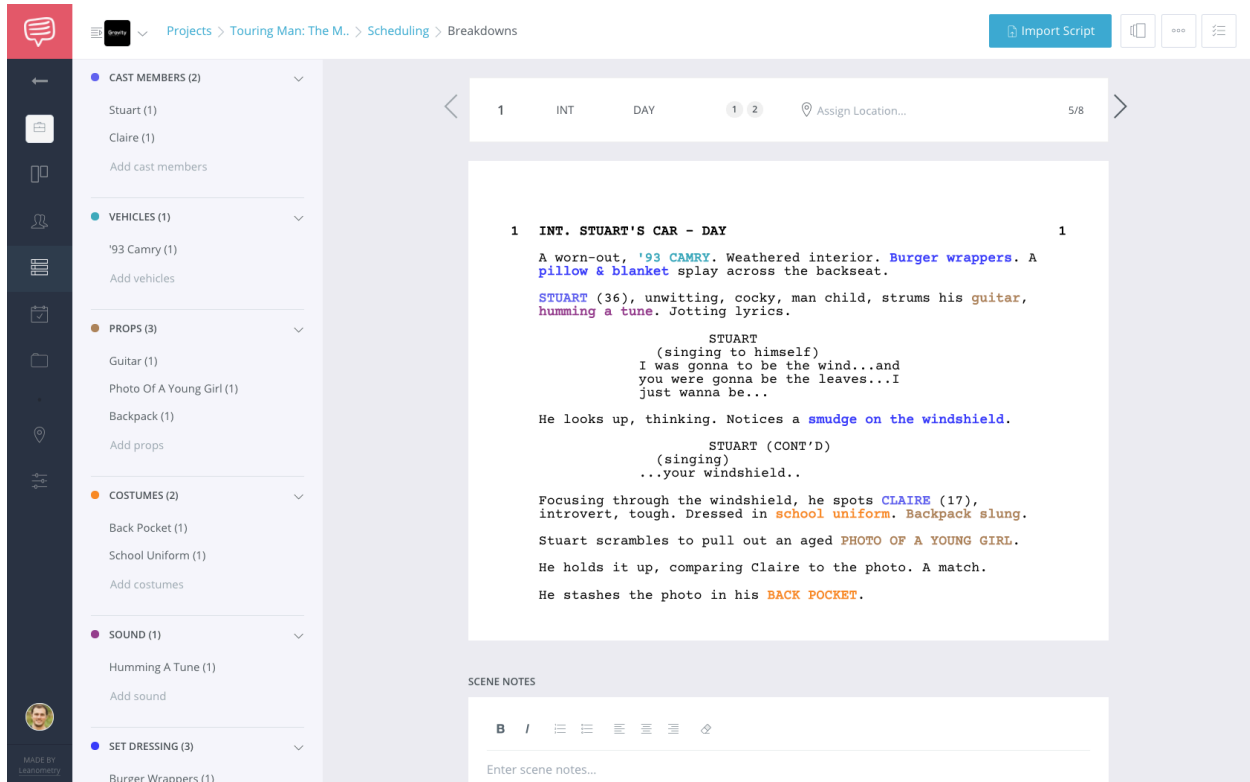
From here on out, it's a game of tag. Simply highlight a word in your screenplay (let's say **'93 CAMRY**), scroll through the options, and click the correct category (**Vehicles** in this case).



Once you click “Save Element,” your element will change color to reflect its category. The left pane will automatically list your element under its category as well for the scene.



After deftly tagging all the elements in a scene, your script can look pretty colorful.



A fully marked-up scene in StudioBinder

As you can see each element corresponds to its categories' color and is labeled on the side. If you're doing this by hand, you'd have to highlight each element and *then* write it on a separate document as you go. With software, you only have to tag an element in a scene once, as the data is stored and sorted.

To finish breaking down your script, you'll have to complete this process for every last scene. Fun right?

PRO TIP: Most software will automatically tag Cast Members if you they have dialogue in a scene. You can toggle this on and off in [StudioBinder](#).

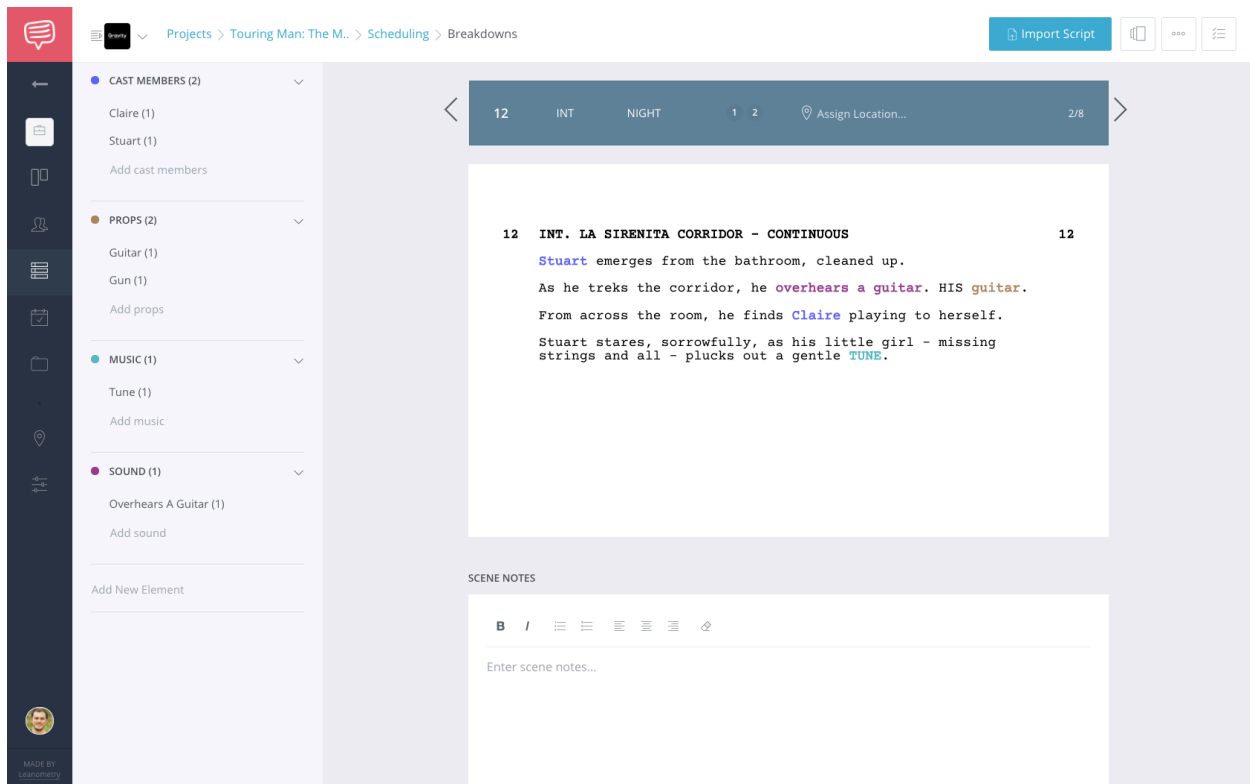
4. WATCH OUT FOR “HIDDEN” ELEMENTS

As you tag your elements, remember that some elements might not be explicitly mentioned in the script. If a character was holding a gun in the previous scene, and he just entered a room, the new scene likely won't mention that he's still holding the gun - it's obvious if we simply read the script! But we need to note it in the breakdown nonetheless.

Remember, your production might shoot the first scene on one day, and the second scene on a different day - if the elements necessary for that second scene aren't listed in the breakdown, they might be forgotten entirely by the time production rolls around!

To add a such an element, simply go to the left-hand pane and physically add the element (here **gun**) under Props.

Once you've saved it, the new element (“gun”) will appear under its proper category. When you generate your report (more on that later), gun will appear under props for this scene.



The prop gun is catalogued on the left pane, even though it's not in the screenplay

You may also encounter situations where a word in the script refers to multiple elements. A World War II film might describe a scene as follows:

Stuart drives through a sprawling military camp.

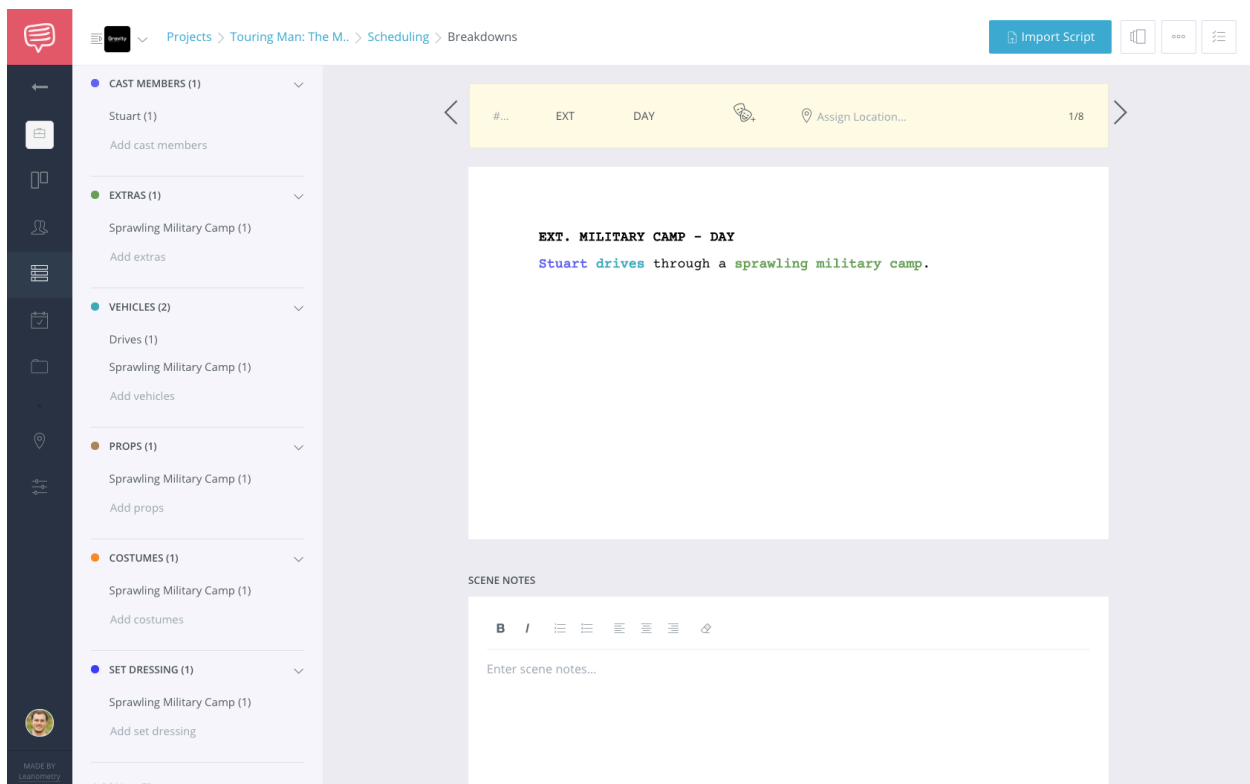
If that's all the description you're getting, you'll tag JOHNNY as a Cast Member, Johnny's Costumes for the scene. You'll certainly note the word "drives" as a some sort of Vehicle. The words "military camp," however, entail many "hidden" elements.

If you have a military camp, there's a good chance you need soldier Extras and their associated Costumes. Are any of them carrying weapons? That's Props. Are there any military Jeeps? Vehicles. American Flags? Set dressing.

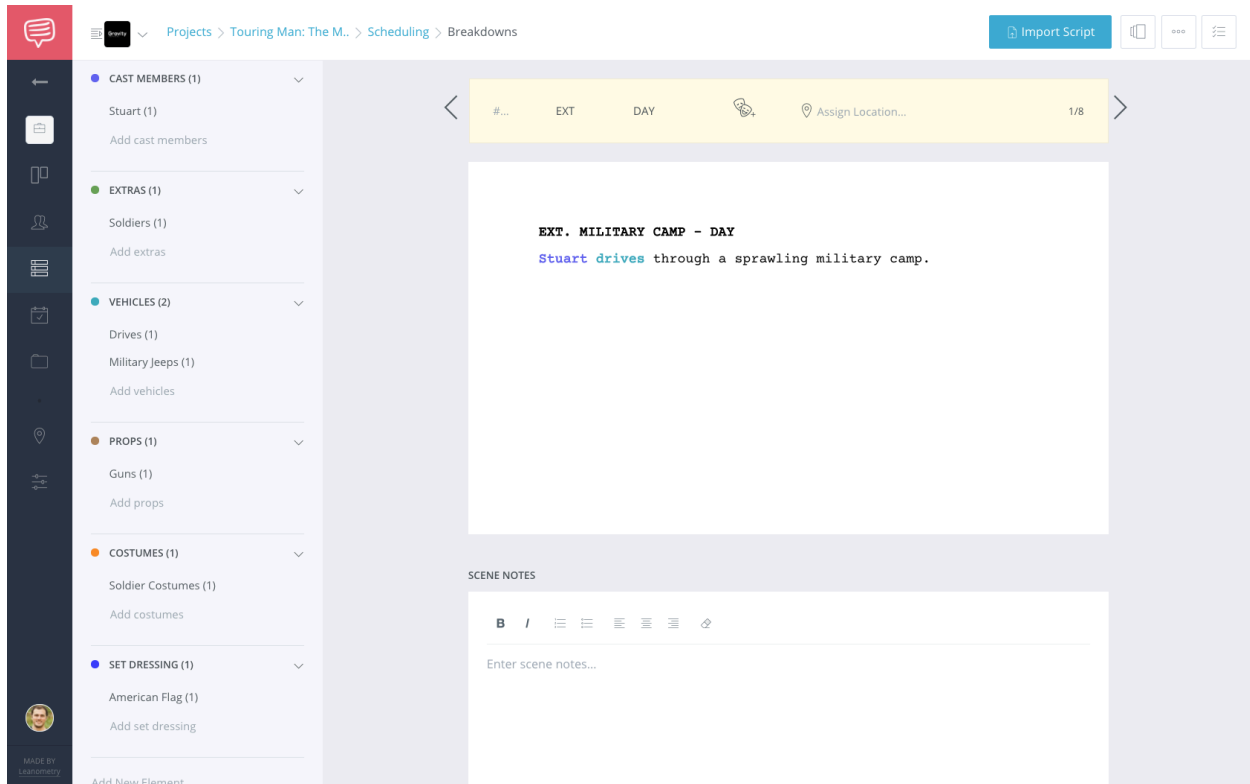
These specifics aren't mentioned in the scene, which is why you need to apply your understanding of both the story and of production in order to complete your breakdown effectively and comprehensively.

In [StudioBinder](#), you can easily tag the words “military camp” as several elements, alerting each department to its responsibilities.

Simply enter them manually on the left hand pane. The words in the script will change to color to the first category you place them in, but will be listed nonetheless.



If categorizing the words “military base” is too broad for your production, you can alternatively enter each element on the side as well, as pictured below.



You can manually enter hidden elements for any scene in [StudioBinder](#)

Depending on your project, you may want to create more tailored element categories and colors. For example, if you are shooting a horror film, you may want to define all the elements related to prosthetics.

If you are shooting a western, you may need to add categories for horses and weapons. Just make sure to define the custom category and color in a legend.

PRO TIP: Please note, not all software can handle script changes smoothly. You'll do yourself and your whole production a favor if you only break down a LOCKED script, rather than a work-in-progress. As new drafts of the script come out, some software retains the items you've already tagged, like [StudioBinder](#).

5. GENERATE YOUR REPORTS

You did it. You marked up your entire script, carefully reading between the lines not to miss a single element. Are we done yet?

Actually, yes.

Provided that you've used breakdown software, you can now automatically generate the reports you'll need to send off to your production team.

If you did it by hand...well, let's just say, grab some caffeine. While you marked up each scene and wrote down the corresponding elements, it's now on you to manually sift through your giant list only to write up more lists.

While no two production companies are alike, the most popular breakdown reports (which can easily be generated in [StudioBinder](#)) are as follows:

SHOOTING SCHEDULE

The most common report you'll want to generate is your **Shooting Schedule**. Once you've established what days you're shooting, this auto-generated list tells what you need for each shooting day.

The screenshot displays the StudioBinder Shooting Schedule report. The interface is divided into three main sections:

- Left Sidebar:** A vertical list of scenes. Scene 1 is highlighted in yellow, indicating it is the current scene being viewed. Other scenes include INT. STUART'S CAR - DAY, EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY, INT. MUSIC CLUB - NIGHT, EXT. LA SIRENITA - NIGHT, INT. LA SIRENITA CORRIDOR - NIGHT, INT. LA SIRENITA BATHROOM - NIGHT, INT. LA SIRENITA - NIGHT, INT. SKIPPS BAR - NIGHT, INT. STUART'S CAR - NIGHT, INT. STUART'S CAR - DUSK, INT. BEN'S OFFICE - NIGHT, INT. SKIPPS BAR - NIGHT, INT. SKIPPS STAGE - NIGHT, and INT. SKIPPS KITCHEN - NIGHT.
- Main Panel (DAY 1 OF 2):**
 - Scene 1: INT. STUART'S CAR - DAY**
 - Description: A worn-out, '93 CAMRY. Weathered interior. Burger wrappers. A pil...
 - Location: Encino Street • Los Angeles, CA 91406, USA
 - SCENE NOTES:** We'll have to find a photo of a young girl and bring extra copies to set
 - CAST MEMBERS (2):** Stuart, Claire
 - VEHICLES (1):** Stuart's Car
 - PROPS (3):** Note Paper For Lyrics, Backpack, Photo Of A Young Girl
 - COSTUMES (2):** School Uniform, Back Pocket
 - SET DRESSING (4):** Smudge On The Windshield, Blanket, Pillow, Burger Wrappers
 - SECURITY (1):** Guitar
 - Scene 2: EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY**
 - Description: Stuart hops out of his car in a hurry.
 - Location: Encino Street • Los Angeles, CA 91406, USA
- Right Panel:** Gravity Agency, 604 Arizona Ave, Santa Monica, CA 90401, USA

A shooting schedule report in [StudioBinder](#)

For instance, if you're shooting scenes 1, 2, 14, and 13 on one day, the Shooting Schedule report would tell you exactly what Cast Members, Vehicles, Props, and so on you'd need for that shoot day by scene. This gives you ample time to figure out what parts of production need to be on set and prepare.

It's important to note that you need to create a shooting schedule before you can generate this report. To learn how to create shooting

schedules, be sure to check our first Ebook in the series, [A Filmmaker's Guide to Shooting Schedules](#).

Some of your shoot days will have duplicated elements. For instance, if two scenes feature the same Cast Members, you'd have them listed twice on your report. Luckily, some film softwares like StudioBinder can eliminate these duplicates when creating your reports.

BREAKDOWN SUMMARY

Also called a [Breakdown Sheet](#), your **Breakdown Summary** collates each scene's elements into one document. Think of it as the Shooting Schedule report *with the scenes out of order*.

The screenshot shows the StudioBinder Breakdown Summary interface. On the left is a sidebar with a list of 14 scenes, each with a color-coded background. The main area displays the details for 'Scene 1: INT. STUART'S CAR - DAY'. It includes a script reference, location, and a list of elements categorized by color: Cast Members (2), Props (3), Set Dressing (4), Vehicles (1), Costumes (2), and Security (1).

Breakdown Summary

Script TAGGED - Touring Man Draft 4.5 - 8.24.fdx
Created Wed, Apr 12, 2017 @ 12:26pm
18 Scenes - 11 5/8 pages

Scene 1

INT. STUART'S CAR - DAY
A worn-out, '93 CAMRY. Weathered interior. Burger wrappers. A pil...
Location: Encino Street • Los Angeles, CA 91406, USA

SCENE NOTES
We'll have to find a photo of a young girl and bring extra copies to set

- CAST MEMBERS (2)**
Stuart
Claire
- PROPS (3)**
Note Paper For Lyrics
Backpack
Photo Of A Young Girl
- SET DRESSING (4)**
Smudge On The Windshield
Blanket
Pillow
Burger Wrappers
- VEHICLES (1)**
Stuart's Car
- COSTUMES (2)**
School Uniform
Back Pocket
- SECURITY (1)**
Guitar

Scene 2

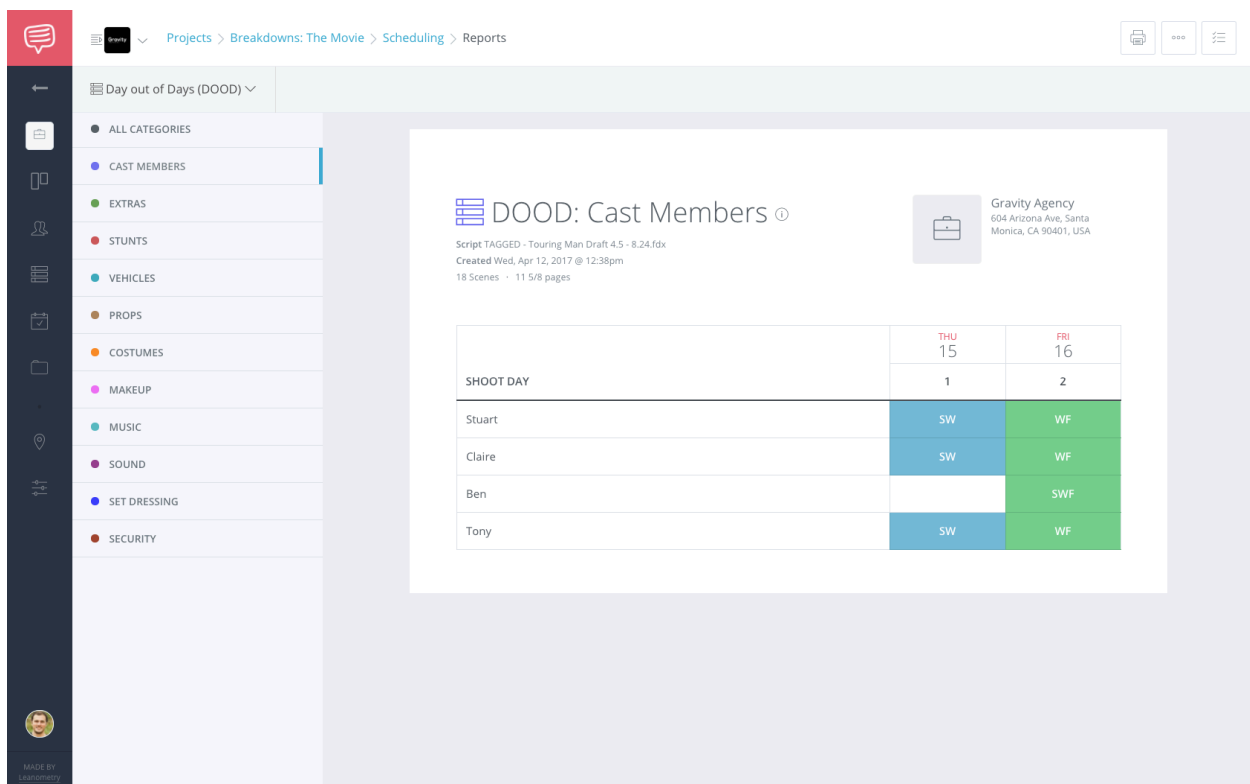
EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY
Stuart hoos out of his car in a hurrv.

What a breakdown summary looks like in [StudioBinder](#)

Traditionally, productions generate Scene Breakdowns by filling out a paper form for each scene with a box for each Category. However, because not every element appears in each scene, this resulted in lots of wasted paper and mostly empty breakdowns.

DAY OUT OF DAYS (DOOD)

The Day out of Days (or “DOOD”) is a chart that marks your elements’ work days. Most typically used to track Cast Members, this report provides a visual overview of each element’s schedule.



DOOD report in [StudioBinder](#) showing what days each Cast Member is scheduled

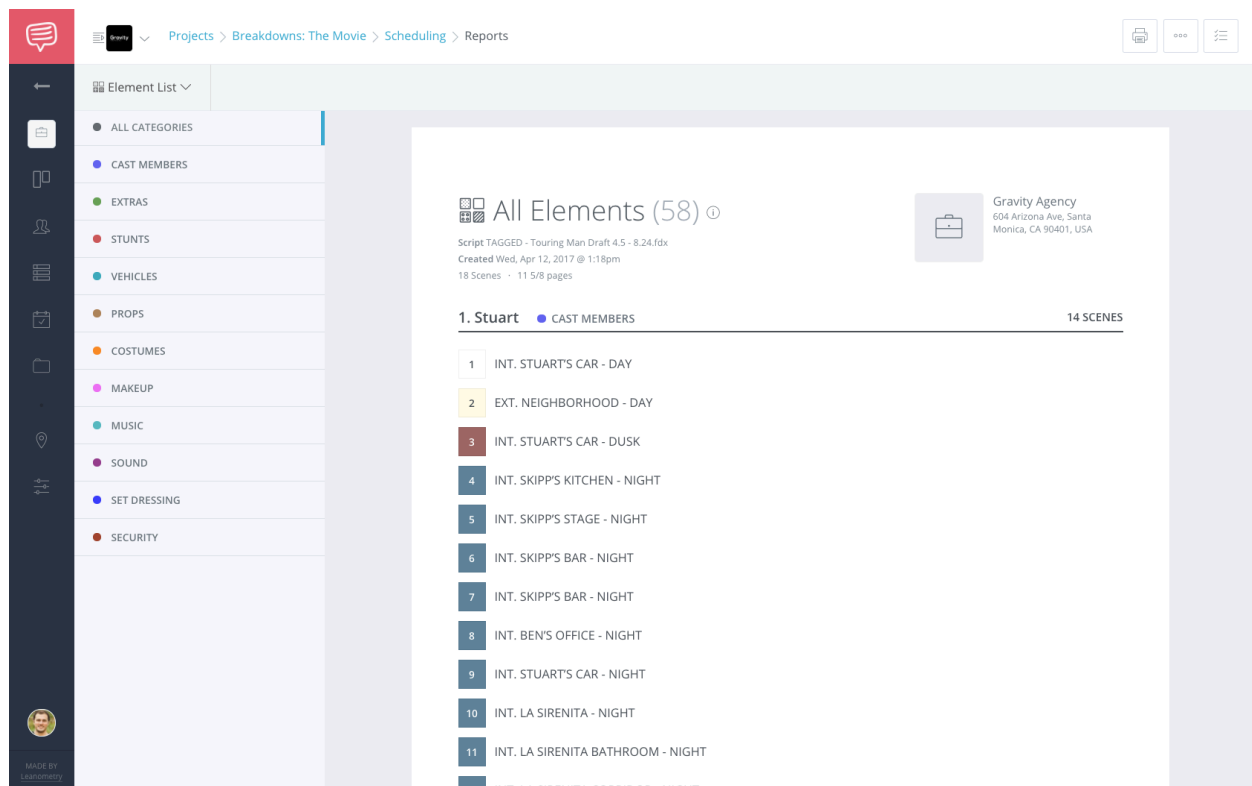
Most production management software, like StudioBinder, can generate a DOOD from your [stripboard after completing your breakdown](#).

For each element, the chart indicates the day that element Starts Work (SW), each Work day (W), and the day the element's Work Finishes (WF). In some cases, an element works just one day, so that's marked SWF for "Start-Work-Finish."

Sometimes, you'll schedule a few days when an element doesn't need to appear. For those days, the DOOD tends to show an "H" for "Hold." Bear in mind that a "Hold" day is generally a paid day! An element who's on hold is typically not permitted to take other jobs or go home from a remote location. Most low-budget/independent projects should not use Hold days, but should instead "Drop" the element from the schedule on days when the element isn't needed. In the DOOD, this is indicated with WD for "Work-Drop" on the actor's last day of work before a drop, and PW for "Pickup-Work" on the actor's next day of work after the drop.

ELEMENTS LIST

Your Elements List (or Index) catalogues every element that features in your film, with each scene it appears under its heading.



What an Element List looks like in [StudioBinder](#)

Think of your Element List as your element bible. You can easily filter your list by specific Category on the left-hand pane, as pictured above.

If someone asks you what all the Props in the film are or what are all of the stunts, the Element List is your go-to guide. To answer these questions, you'd simply pull up your Elements List, filter to the Category you need, and send it off.

UNIQUE DAILY ELEMENTS

You're shooting five scenes in one day. Two of them feature the same guitar. While your Shooting Schedule breakdown tells lists the guitar

twice under each scene heading, the Unique Daily Elements report only lists the element once.

While you can easily filter to specific Category, as with all reports, the Unique Daily Elements report serves as a checklist to make sure everything is assembled on set.

The screenshot displays the StudioBinder interface for a 'Daily All Elements' report. The top navigation bar shows the project path: Projects > Breakdowns: The Movie > Scheduling > Reports. The sidebar on the left lists various categories: ALL CATEGORIES, CAST MEMBERS, EXTRAS, STUNTS, VEHICLES, PROPS, COSTUMES, MAKEUP, MUSIC, SOUND, SET DRESSING, and SECURITY. The main content area is titled 'Daily All Elements' and includes metadata: 'Script TAGGED - Touring Man Draft 4.5 - 8.24.fdx', 'Created Wed, Apr 12, 2017 @ 1:26pm', and '18 Scenes · 11 5/8 pages'. A contact card for 'Gravity Agency' is also visible. The report is for 'DAY 1 OF 2 · THU, JUN 15, 2017' and lists the following elements:

CAST MEMBERS (3)	PROPS (17)	MAKEUP (2)
Stuart	Note Paper For Lyrics	Weathered Face
Claire	Backpack	Blood
Tony	Photo Of A Young Girl	
	Guitar	MUSIC (4)
	Bloody Tissue	Claire's Tune.
	Paper Towel Dispenser	Claire's Song
	Paper Towel	Plays "windshield"
	Comb	"peripherique"
	Claire's Photo	
	Tissue	SOUND (1)
	Broken String	Thwanngg
	Mexican Food	
	Knife, Fork, Spoon, Etc (2)	SET DRESSING (7)
	Drink	Smudge On The Windshield
	Tony Falls Into C	Blanket
	DJ Equipment	Pillow
	Whiskey	Burger Wrappers
		Humble, Spotlit Stage
	COSTUMES (2)	Dingy Bathroom
	School Uniform	Filthy Puddle
	Back Pocket	

Additional categories and their elements:

- EXTRAS (5)**: Club Patrons, College Aged Drunks, Old Man, Busboy, Line Cook
- STUNTS (5)**: Bashes, They Collide, Stuart Jumps Tony, Tony Falls Into Claire, Storms Tony.
- VEHICLES (1)**: Stuart's Car

What an Unique Daily Element List looks like in [StudioBinder](#)

CHAPTER 5

Budgeting Your Breakdown

Now that you've successfully broken down your script into breakdown sheets, a Day out of Days, and more, it's time to budget your breakdown.

Learning proper budgeting skills takes years of industry know-ho, but the principles needed to begin to budget a script breakdown are constant.

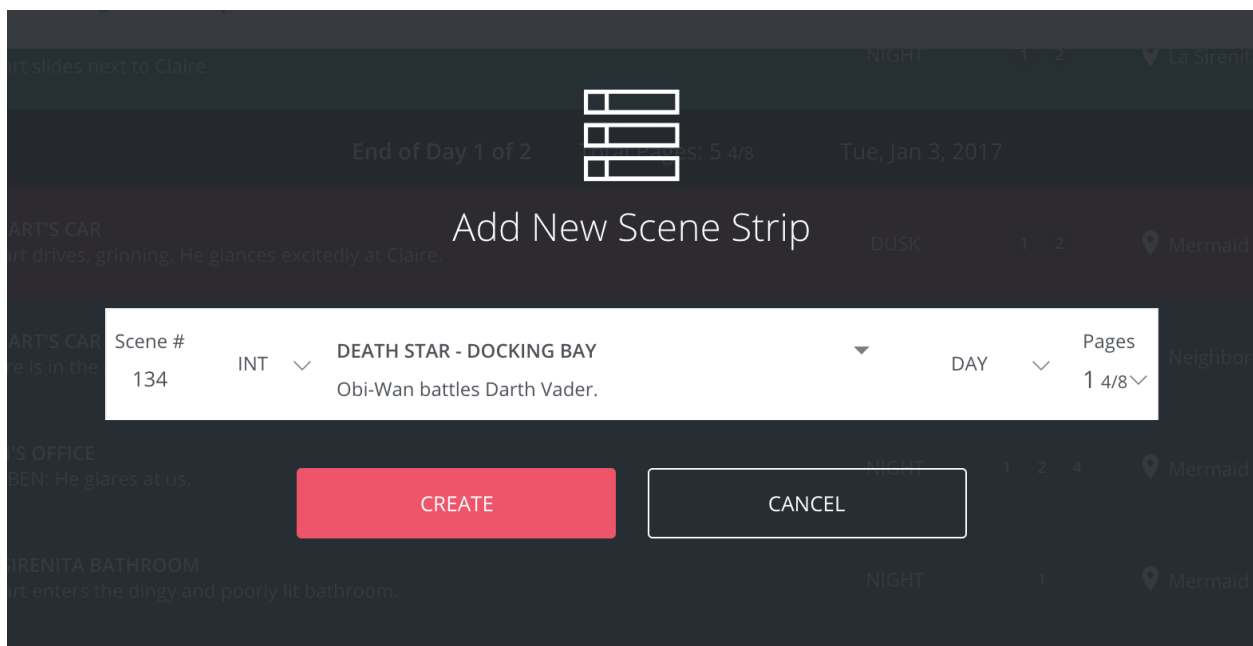
1. BREAK YOUR SCRIPT INTO PAGES PER DAY

The first step of formulating a film production budget is deciding how many pages you plan to shoot for each scheduled production day.

While there's no set number of pages to shoot per day, it typically breaks down to this:

Major Hollywood films typically shoot about one page per day. Well-funded indie films often shoot about four to five pages per day. Low and micro-budget films may shoot eight or more pages per day.

As you start the process of film budgeting, determine how many pages you'll shoot per day. For shooting schedules, the standard Hollywood procedure is splitting your script in 1/8s.



StudioBinder organizes your script into 1/8s for you

2. PLAN FOR DIFFICULT SCENES

Dialogue is typically easy to shoot. Effects-heavy sequences are not.

For each difficult sequence, examine page length. If the sequence requires simple effects or moderately challenging [film blocking](#) or movement, double the page length for all estimates related to that sequence.

If the sequence requires many effects or very complex blocking or movement, quadruple the page length in each scene breakdown.

Complex sequences are often written in different ways. One writer may simply say, “Frederick transforms into a wolf,” while another may describe each stage of that transformation in great detail for pages. Adjust your estimate accordingly. When there is little detail, treat the sequence as longer than the page count. When there is extremely great detail, treat the scene breakdown as shorter than the page count. A script breakdown sheet doesn’t always account for this.

3. BUDGET YOUR FILM FOR ACTORS

Every film needs a leading woman (and occasionally a man). Cast Members are one of the first elements you categorize on your [script breakdown sheet](#).

Once you’ve broken down your script, look at each cast member’s featured scenes, and bundle them together. Each character will have a count from your script breakdown.

Based on your shoots pages per day, calculate how many days each cast member will be needed. Because actors won't likely work full days in front of the camera for every day they work, multiply this number by a correction factor of 1.5 or even 2.



George Clooney reportedly cost \$20 million for his work on [Money Monster \(2016\)](#)

If you're using a [film production budget template](#), record this expected number of days on set for each actor and then calculate salary.

EXAMPLE

If actor “X” is being paid \$1000/day, has a total of 12 script pages on your script breakdown, and your shoot is planned for 4 pages per day,

the line item for this actor would be: 12 pages / 4 pages per day = 3 days * \$1000/day * 2x correction factor = \$6000.

And voila, you're one step closer to finishing your preliminary film budget.

4. DON'T FORGET FILM BUDGETING FOR YOUR EXTRAS

Count background actor days by doing a count of where they're featured on your script breakdown sheet ([template](#)), with each strip multiplied by the number of actors.

You'll end up with a single number of background actor days covering all actors and scenes. On your budget template, multiply this by the day rate for background.

So, if you need 30 actors for a 1 page scene, that will equal 30 background actor days.

To do this in [StudioBinder](#), click on "Elements" go to "Extras" and click "View Scenes."

PRO TIP: If your script totals 150 background actor days on your script breakdown template and your background actors are paid \$100/day, multiply 150 by \$100 for a line-item total of \$15,000.

5. FILM BUDGETING FOR STUNTS AND SPECIAL EFFECTS

Check your scene breakdowns for stunts and special effects, marked in your script breakdown software's colors of choice.

As with most production tips, there is no simple, quick formula for stunts and effects.

For each, try to estimate materials and personnel costs. Does the picture require stunt doubles, special effects teams or stunt coordinators? Do they require second unit camera teams?

Getting an estimate on these facts is hard, but using a film industry networking site like [ProductionBeast](#), you can directly reach to veterans in the field and get their take. It's free to create an account.

The screenshot shows the ProductionBeast website interface. At the top, the navigation bar includes the ProductionBeast logo (a red heart icon and the text 'studio binder company'), links for 'Find Jobs', 'People', 'Vendors', 'My Company', and 'My Profile', and a 'Post a Job' button with a bell icon and a user profile icon.

The main profile header for Shant Kiraz is displayed. It includes a circular profile picture of a man with dark hair, the name 'SHANT KIRAZ @ PRODUCTIONBEAST', the title 'Director of Photography • Still Photographer', the location 'Santa Monica, CA', and a bio: 'Shant Kiraz is a cinematographer and a professional photographer that specializes in commercial, editorial, and portrait photography.' A 'PREMIUM' badge is visible below the profile picture.

Below the header, there are four tabs: 'CREDITS' (selected), 'SUMMARY', 'RESUME', and 'PORTFOLIO'. The 'CREDITS' tab is active, showing a sidebar on the left and a main content area on the right.

The sidebar on the left contains three sections:

- AVAILABLE SOON**: A calendar icon and text stating 'Available starting 09/30/17. I'm available as a DP on any commercials, music videos, and corporate.'
- CONNECTIONS (7)**: A network diagram showing connections to other users, with a 'Show all connections' link.
- CONTACT DETAILS**: A contact card with a phone icon.

The main content area on the right shows:

- YOU HAVE 7 CONNECTIONS**: A large number '7' and a search bar with the placeholder text 'Search for a project to add a new credit'. A '+ Create new project' button is also present.
- FEATURED CREDITS**: A section titled '2017 (1)' featuring a credit for '2017 Mercedes-Benz E-class & C-class • Digital Cinema Producer Branded/Industrial (2016 - 2017)' with a blue '2ME' badge.
- 2016 (1)**: A section for the year 2016, currently empty.

6. BUDGETING FOR VEHICLES AND ANIMALS

Look for the marks on your scene breakdown for vehicles and animals. It's easy to spot on our [Unique Elements Report](#).

Like stunts, these elements will require special estimates for appropriate crew, rental, insurance, etc.

We suggest budgeting for these production elements early on in your process. However, this very much depends on the film you're working on.

If you're working on *Marley & Me*, animal costs would play a greater role in your film budget estimate than say *Speed Racer*, where vehicle costs matter more.

Script breakdown software can give you the information you need, but at the end of the day, you still have to weigh each element accordingly to your individual production needs.

7. HOW TO BUDGET CREW SALARIES

You don't need a full breakdown to estimate crew salaries.

You can determine crew needs by dividing your full script length by the number of pages to be shot per day.

For instance, if your script comes in around 90 pages and you're shooting 5 pages per day, that means you'll need your crew for 18 days.

Simply list all crew and multiply their salaries by the number of production days. Some crew may be paid a flat rate, which you should note on your [rolodex of vendors](#) when hiring.

Your crew breakdown will typically include directors, producers, camera team, sound team, gaffing and electric, art department, craft services, hair and makeup, wardrobe, transportation, location management, property management, etc.

You can find a full list of all the crew positions in [ProductionBeast](#).

PRO TIP: If you have team managers or department heads in place, check with them for estimates of personnel needs and materials costs. As good as your film budget breakdown is, it can't replace the experience of your department heads.

8. KNOW YOUR PRODUCTION SCOPE

Consider the following script breakdown example:

“Scene 23b calls for two cast members, the crew, and an antique pistol.”

On an indie short film budget, most of the money may go towards finding a rare antique pistol, where as a bigger budget film's greatest expense would probably be two Hollywood leads.

A film budget breakdown should fit your movie like a glove. If anything, the script breakdown example above shows how different productions use the same elements, but weigh them accordingly.

It's simple when you think about it.

A short film budget is vastly different from a Kung Fu action film budget. A horror film probably budgets more money for makeup than a family comedy does.

Even without your production completely planned out, it's still possible to present a detailed and accurate film production budget estimate. It's just a matter of transforming the code of your script breakdown sheet into [a great film budget template](#), where you can weight your elements accordingly.

CHAPTER 6

What Comes Next?

Your script looks like a rainbow. If you're doing this by hand, you reek of highlighter. You've generated your various reports and sent them to your heads of production. But what comes next?

As pre-production assembles the various elements you've identified, now the fun of production scheduling begins. The next Ebook in our series, [*A Filmmaker's Guide to Shooting Schedules*](#), covers that process quite nicely. Not to mention, it's also free.

At the end of the day, your breakdown software can only organize the data in the most efficient way possible. However, it's up to you to carefully identify and categorize all the elements in your shooting script.

So make sure you surround yourself with great people and get to work! Production is a team sport.

MORE RESOURCES

Now that you've finished reading this guide, don't stop here! You've reviewed the principles of script breakdowns, and learned what it takes to turn a shooting script into the various reports you need. Your download of this Ebook comes with the image samples for easy viewing and printing.

If you're craving more resources on filmmaking, film theory, and production how-to's, visit the [StudioBinder Blog](#).

On the other hand, if you desire more long-form content, check out our other free Ebook, *[How to Use Color in Film: 50+ Examples of Movie Color Palettes](#)*.

ABOUT STUDIOBINDER

[StudioBinder](#) is a modern, all-in-one production management service that will help you better manage production contacts, create shooting schedules, generate script breakdowns, craft storyboards, create shot lists, spin off call sheets, and more.

Did we mention it's free to get started?

GET STARTED FOR FREE

