

MONTAGES: THREE EASY STYLES

A montage is often used when the writer wants to show passage of time through a series of quick scenes. Usually the character or characters in the scene are preparing for something in the future, such as Rocky working out in preparation for his big fight.

Rambo also comes to mind. Before heading off to kill hordes of bad guys he could always be seen strapping on his belt of bullets, sheathing his hunting knife, and tying his bandana around his head. Not a montage where much time passes, but a montage nonetheless.

Sometimes in Romantic Comedies, after a big breakup, a montage will be used as characters wander through the city, through parks, and along the beach, contemplating what they've lost.

Below are three acceptable montage styles. Using any of them will make it clear to the reader just when the montage begins and when it ends. Very important.

STYLE #1

The first style uses a single **scene heading** and calls out that what follows is a montage. Then **direction** paragraphs explain each individual scene:

VARIOUS LOCATIONS - MONTAGE

Mario and his trainer race one another on foot along the beach. Mario has a hard time keeping up, and runs out of gas before reaching the finish line, much to the dismay of Mario's wife.

Mario hits a small punching bag. His rhythm is off and he keeps having to start over.

Mario looks at himself in the mirror and sees the picture of his opponent on the wall behind him via the reflection.

Mario and his trainer run along the beach. Mario finishes the race, seconds behind the trainer.

Mario hits the same punching bag, this time with a little more success.

With straining effort, Mario completes a lift on the bench press, with his trainer screaming encouragement in his ear.

Mario easily manages a series of push-ups while his wife sits on his back.

Mario punches the small bag in perfect rhythm while his training looks on, smiling.

They race along the beach again, but this time Mario overtakes his trainer and beats him to the finish line. Mario's wife runs and jumps into his arms. The two of them fall into the foamy, white surf and kiss.

STYLE #2

The second style uses the same introductory **scene heading**, but then each scene is labeled in alphabetical order with its own **scene heading**. The scenes then, once again, have a **direction** paragraph explaining the on-screen action, indented this time.

VARIOUS LOCATIONS - MONTAGE

A) EXT. BEACH - DAY

Mario and his trainer race one another on foot along the beach. Mario has a hard time keeping up, and runs out of gas before reaching the finish line, much to the dismay of Mario's wife.

B) INT. GYM - DAY

Mario hits a small punching bag. His rhythm is off and he keeps having to start over.

C) INT. DRESSING ROOM - DAY

Mario looks at himself in the mirror and sees the picture of his opponent on the wall behind him via the reflection.

D) EXT. BEACH - DAY

Mario and his trainer run along the beach. Mario finishes the race, seconds behind the trainer.

E) INT. GYM - DAY

Mario hits the same punching bag, this time with a little more success.

F) INT. GYM - DAY

With straining effort, Mario completes a lift on the bench press, with his trainer screaming encouragement in his ear.

G) INT. GYM - DAY

Mario easily manages a series of push-ups while his wife sits on his back.

H) INT. GYM - DAY

Mario punches the small bag in perfect rhythm while his training looks on, smiling.

I) EXT. BEACH - DAY

They race along the beach again, but this time Mario overtakes his trainer and beats him to the finish line. Mario's wife runs and jumps into his arms. The two of them fall into the foamy, white surf and kiss.

STYLE #3

The last style worth mentioning is a sort of hybrid of both **Style #1** and **Style #2**. Here you once again have an overall **scene heading**, but this time it calls out whether the following montage will be interior, exterior, or both, and the time of day of the montage, which can also vary. This **scene heading** is followed by another that simply calls out the following as a montage, and is punctuated with a colon. Lastly we see the individual **direction** paragraphs, once again labeled chronologically, but this time using numbers rather than letters. Indention is used again.

INT./EXT. VARIOUS LOCATIONS - DAY

MONTAGE:

- 1) Mario and his trainer race one another on foot along the beach. Mario has a hard time keeping up, and runs out of gas before reaching the finish line, much to the dismay of Mario's wife.
- 2) Mario hits a small punching bag. His rhythm is off and he keeps having to start over.
- 3) Mario looks at himself in the mirror and sees the picture of his opponent on the wall behind him via the reflection.
- 4) Mario and his trainer run along the beach. Mario finishes the race, seconds behind the trainer.
- 5) Mario hits the same punching bag, this time with a little more success.
- 6) With straining effort, Mario completes a lift on the bench press, with his trainer screaming encouragement in his ear.
- 7) Mario easily manages a series of push-ups while his wife sits on his back.

- 8) Mario punches the small bag in perfect rhythm while his training looks on, smiling.
- 9) They race along the beach again, but this time Mario overtakes his trainer and beats him to the finish line. Mario's wife runs and jumps into his arms. The two of them fall into the foamy, white surf and kiss.

Although all the above are correct, I personally like to see people use **Style #2**. Yes, it is the most time consuming to write, but it is the only one of the three that allows the writer to call out specific locales and times of day. Not doing so could lead to a series of scenes that looks far different than what the writer originally intended.

You want to be careful not to overdue the use of montages. It becomes easy to use them in place of actually telling your story. A screenplay overpopulated with montages will seem unprofessional to a script reader. A single montage is fine. Two is pushing it. Three and your script makes its way to the trash heap.