

## Screenplay First Week

### 1. What is a screenplay

Without conflict, we have no action; without action, we have no character; without character, we have no story; without story, we have no screenplay.

### 2. The three acts

### 3. Screenplay form

### 4. Set up your characters/ introduce the dramatic premise and the dramatic situation/create obstacles to overcome/resolve the story

James Joyce: Writing is like climbing a mountain. When you're scaling a mountain, all you can see is the rock directly in front of you and the rock directly behind you. You can't see where you're going or where you've come from.

Beginning	Middle	End
Act I	Act II	Act III
Set up	Confrontation	Resolution
Plot Point 1		Plot Point 2

## “The Run”

FADE IN:

*“first time around”*

EXT. BANKS LAKE, WASHINGTON—JUST BEFORE DAWN

A SERIES OF ANGLES

A few hours before dawn. Some stars and a full moon are pinned to the early-morning sky.

BANKS LAKE is a long sleeve of water nestled against the concrete walls of the Grand Coulee Dam. The water reflects the shimmering reflection of the moon. All is quiet. Peaceful. Hold.

Then, we HEAR the high-pitched ROAR of a truck. And, we:

CUT TO,

HEADLIGHT-MOVING

A pickup truck moved INTO FRAME, PULL BACK to reveal the truck hauling a large trailer, the puzzling-shaped cargo covered with a tarpaulin. It could be anything—a piece of modern sculpture, a missile, a space capsule. As a matter of fact, it’s all three.

A CARAVAN

of seven vehicles winds its way slowly along the tree-lined highway. A pickup truck and station wagon lead the group. Another station wagon is followed by a truck and trailer. Bringing up the rear are two large camper trailers and a tool van. They bear the insignia “Saga Men’s Cologne.”

INT. LEAD STATION WAGON

Three people are in the wagon. The radio plays softly, a Country & Western tune.

STRUT BOWMAN drives, a lean and expressive Texan who happens to be the best sheet-metal man and mechanical wizard west of the Mississippi.

RYAN WILLS sits next to the window staring moodily into the predawn darkness. Strong-willed and stubborn, he is considered by many to be a flamboyant boat designer, a crackpot genius, or a daredevil race driver. All three are true.

(2)

ROGER DALTON sits in the backseat. A quiet man, he wears glasses and looks like the rocket systems analyst he is.

#### THE VEHICLES

wind their way along the wood-lined highway heading toward the Grand Coulee Dam and the sleeve of water known as Banks Lake. (Formerly, it was known as Franklin D. Roosevelt Lake.)

#### EXT. BANKS LAKE—DAWN

The sky lightens as the caravan moves to the far side, the vehicles looking like a column of fireflies parading before the dawn.

#### THE BOATHOUSE AREA

The cars pull in and park. The lead truck pulls to a stop and a few CREW MEMBERS jump out. Others follow and the activity begins.

A long Quonset hut has been erected near the water. The BOATHOUSE, as it's known, houses the work area and is complete with work benches, lights, and tool area. The two campers park nearby.

#### A FEW CREWMEN

jump out and begin unloading various equipment, taking it into the work

area.

#### THE STATION WAGON

Strut parks the wagon; Ryan is the first out, followed by Roger. Ryan walks into the boathouse.

#### A TV CONTROL. VAN

From *Sports World*, as well as some local Seattle sportscasters, begin setting up their equipment.

#### THE OFFICIALS AND TIMERS

all with the initials FIA emblazoned on their shirts, set up electronic timing devices, timing boards, digital consoles, and floating timing buoys. Video images from the TV Control Monitor are assembled into a montage of activity. The “feel” of this sequence should begin slowly, like someone waking up, then gradually guild into a rhythm of a tense and exciting rocket-launch sequence.

(3)

#### INT. CAMPER LIVING QUARTERS—JUST AFTER DAWN

Ryan puts on his asbestos racing suit and Strut helps him lace it up. He steps into his cover suit, the name “Saga Men’s Cologne” clearly seen. Strut fixes something on the suit, and the two men exchange a glance.

Over this, we HEAR the voice of the:

#### TV ANNOUNCER (VO)

This is Ryan Wills. Most of you already know the story—one of the most innovative racing designers of high-speed water vehicles, Wills, the son of wealthy industrialist Timothy Wills, was approached by Saga Men’s Cologne to build a racing boat that would break the Water Speed Record, currently 286 miles an hour, held by Leigh Taylor. Ryan did that and more: He designed and built

the world's first rocket boat—that's right, rocket boat—  
revolutionary in concept and design—

## THE BOATHOUSE

Moving out of the boathouse, mounted on two specially constructed mounts, is the rocket boat, "Prototype I," a gleaming, missile-like boat that looks like a Delta-winged aircraft. It is beautifully designed, a piece of sculpture. The crew members guide the boat onto the launching track, disappearing into the water. Over this, the TV announcer continues.

TV ANNOUNCER (VO, contd.)

Just how fast it will go is unknown—some people claim it won't even work! But Wills says this boat can easily break the 400-mile—  
an-hour barrier. But the sponsor, Saga Cologne, couldn't get anyone to drive this amazing rocket boat—it's too radical, too unsafe. That's when Ryan, the former hydroplane racer, stepped in and said, "I'll do it!"

## INT. TV CONTROL VAN BOOTH

we SEE a bank of TV monitor screens. MOVE IN to a screen where the TV ANNOUNCER is interviewing Ryan Wills at a press conference.

RYAN (on TV screen)

I built this boat, piece by piece—I know it like the back of my hand. If I thought there was the slightest chance of failure, or that I might possibly hurt myself, or kill myself—if I didn't think it was completely safe, I wouldn't do it! Somebody's got to do it so it might as well be me! I mean, that's what this life's all about, isn't it? Taking risks?

TV ANNOUNCER (on screen)

Aren't you nervous, scared?

RYAN (on screen)

Of course—but I'm confident I can do the job. If I wasn't, I wouldn't be here. It's my choice. I'm ready to set a new Water

Speed Record and live long enough to give you a chance to interview me after I do it!

He laughs.

OLIVIA

Ryan's wife, stands nervously on the sidelines, biting her lip. She's scared and she shows it.

EXT. TV CONTROL VAN—EARLY MORNING

The TV ANNOUNCER from Ryan's interview stands near the Control Van, the lake in b.g.

TV ANNOUNCER

Several years ago, Ryan Wills was a highly successful hydroplane racer. He gave it up after an accident put him in the hospital—some of you remember that—

FLASHBACK—BANKS LAKE, WASHINGTON—DAY

Ryan's hydroplane flips over and over and over until it lands bottom up. Ryan is thrown free and floats motionless in the water.

BACK TO PRESENT—THE START AREA

A finger-like dock stretches into the water. A tow-boat is tied to it.

(5)

PROTOTYPE I

sits on top of the water, being fueled, two oxygen tanks connected with long polyesthylene tubing disappear into the engine. Roger supervises the fueling.

RYAN

Ryan steps out of the camper and walks toward the rocket boat. Strut is with him.

TV ANNOUNCER (VO)

So, here we are—at Banks Lake in eastern Washington, right next to the Grand Coulee Dam—where Ryan Wills will attempt to be the first man in history to set a Water Speed Record in a rocket boat.

AT THE START SITE

Ryan walks down the dock and steps into the boat.

AT TIMING CONTROL

A series of digital timing mechanisms race wildly, end at zero across the board.

INT. TV CONTROL BOARD IN VAN

The DIRECTOR sits in front of the TV Monitor Console and prepares for the TV broadcast. Eight screens are banked in front of him, each with a different image: crew, finish line, lake, timing buoys, crowd, etc. One screen follows Ryan as he prepare for the run.

TV ANNOUNCER (VO)

Working with Ryan are his two coworkers—Strut Bowman, the mechanical engineer—

STRUT

in the tow-boat, walkie-talkie in hand, watching Ryan carefully.

TV ANNOUNCER (VO)

--and Roger Dalton, a rocket systems analyst, one of the lead scientists from the Jet Propulsion Lab, and formerly on the team of the Galileo mission.

ROGER

Checking fuel gauges and other details. Everything's ready.

(6)

RYAN

is buckled into the cockpit. Strut is in the tow-boat, nearly.

INT. ROCKET TOAT COCKPIT

Ryan checks the three gauges on the control panel in front of him. He flicks a toggle switch marked "fuel flow"; a needle jumps into position and holds. He clicks another toggle switch, marked "water flow," and another needle is activated. A red button switch lights up and we see the word "armed." Ryan puts his hand on the steering wheel, positions one finger next to the "eject" button.

RYAN

He checks the gauges, takes a few deep breaths. He's ready.

TV ANNOUNDER (VO)

Ryan appears ready—

A SERIES OF ANGLES

of the countdown. Crews, timers, and spectators quiet down; electronic devices hold at zero; the TV camera crew is focused on Prototype I, poised like a bird on the edge of flight.

STRUT

watches Ryan, waits for him to give the "thumbs-up" signal.

RYAN

All we see are eyes peering out of a crash helmet. Concentration high, intention high.

#### THE TIMING COMPLEX

The timers wait, all eyes riveted on the timing mechanisms and the boat on the lake.

#### THE LAKE

is quiet, the metric-mile course marked out with three timing buoys.

#### AT THE FINISH LINE—JACK’S POV

Roger and two crewmen stand looking down course, watching the dot that is the boat.

#### THE TV CREW

waits, the air heavy with tense anticipation.

(7)

#### RYAN’S POV

He stares down course, the “armed” button clearly seen in foreground.

#### STRUT

checks and double-checks final details. Ryan’s ready. He checks the timers—they’re ready. It’s a “go.” He gives “thumbs-up” to Ryan and waits for Ryan’s signal.

#### RYAN

returns “thumbs-up.”

STRUT

talks into the walkie-talkie.

STRUT

Timing sequence ready—  
(he begins his countdown)  
5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 0—

THE TIMING BUOY

flashes three lights sequentially, red, yellow, then green.

RYAN

flips the “on” switch and succently

THE ROCKET BOAT

explodes into motion, the finger-like flame searing the surface of the wter as it leaps forward.

THE BOAT

literally flies toward the end of the lake like a missile, hovering several inches above the water as the hydrofoil tines skim along the water at over 300 ml/hr.

THIS INTERCUT

with Strut, Olivia, the timers, Roger at the finish line, the TV Monitor screens in the TV control van.

RYAN’S POV

The periphery landscape is distorted, flattened as the world plunges into silence and high-speed visual images.

## THE BOAT

streaks by as the

## DIGITAL NUMBERS

of the timing mechanisms race toward infinity.

## VARIOUS ANGLES

as the boat hurtles toward the finish line. Crew, timers, spectators watch in breathless wonder.

## RYAN

holds on to the steering wheel when suddenly we see his hand twitch slightly as the boat vibrates.

## TV ANNOUNCER (VO)

It's a solid run—

## THE TIMING CONSOLE

The digital numbers spin at a dizzying speed.

## RYAN'S POV

The boat SHIMMIES, builds into a pronounced vibration jarring the entire landscape view. Something is terribly wrong.

## FROM THE SHORE

We see the rooster tail becoming irregular and choppy.

## STRUT AND OLIVIA

watch the boat shaking violently.

## A SERIES OF QUICK CUTS

intercut between spectators and boat. Prototype I veers off course, Ryan frozen at the wheel.

### TV ANNOUNCER (VO)

Wait a minute-something's not—something's wrong—the boat's shaking—

### PROTOTYPE I

lists to one side.

### RYAN

pushes the eject button.

### TV ANNOUNCER (VO)

*(hysterical)*

Ryan can't hold it! He's crashing—Ryan's crashing—on, my God—

### THE COCKPIT

ejects, arches high into the air, the parachute trailing behind it.

### THE CAPSULE

heads toward the water.

### STRUT, THE CREW, TIMERS, OLIVIA

watch horrified, disbelieving.

### THE BOAT

tips over, smashes into the water, careens out of control, then cartwheels over and over again, until it disintegrates before our very eyes.

TV ANNOUNCER (VO)

Ryan's ejected—wait a minute—the chute's not opening—oh, Lord, what has happened here today. . .

VARIOUS ANGLES

as the parachute attached to the capsule fails to open. Ryan, encased in the plastic cockpit, hits the water at over 300 ml/hr.

The capsule bounces and skips across the water like a stone on a pond. We can only guess what's happening to Ryan inside. The capsule speeds more than a mile before it finally comes to a stop.

Silence. The world seems frozen in time. And then:

Ambulance SIRENS shatter the silence, and all hell breaks loose as people move toward the lifeless figure of Ryan Willis floating helplessly in the water. Hold, then;

CUT TO: