

BELLS AND WHISTLES #3

IMPORTING FOUNTAIN TEXT

Going Back in History. In the early days of the internet, screenplay formatting online was a lot more primitive than it is now. We usually wrote screenplay text like this:

INT. MEDICAL OFFICE — RECEPTION — DAY

The office has a vaguely African theme, with wicker handicraft items, ebony-colored objects on the walls, and paintings and silhouettes of warriors and pregnant women.

A plaque inside the reception window says:

DR. OSWIN

The RECEPTIONIST looks at Hesper standing at the window.

RECEPTIONIST
(with no enthusiasm)
May I help you?

HESPER
I'm Hesper Grayson. I have an appointment with Dr. Oswin at four-thirty. I'm a new patient.

RECEPTIONIST
You say **new**? We don't accept new patients.

HESPER
But Mrs. Scalia called you. She said it was all arranged.

RECEPTIONIST
Oh, Mrs. Scalia ... yes, of course. At four-thirty.

The common practice was to type everything flush against the left margin (except for transitions, if we used them). Paired **asterisks** or paired *_underscores_* were markers for conveying emphasis.

Many writers use essentially the same technique today, with a few enhancements, for drafting screenplay text. The technique has become part of *Fountain style*.

What Is Fountain? Fountain is a simple but rich and useful markup method for preparing screenplay text in a text editor or a word processor. (You only rarely need to use any markup.) You type text as I did in my example, and then you import the text into a screenwriting application (or some other converter program) that supports the Fountain

format. For example, **Fade In** supports Fountain. When you import a Fountain file, **Fade In** converts it in a flash to normal screenplay format.

Creating Fountain Text. You can use any text editor or any word processor to create your text. Be aware, though, that some issues can arise from the type of text encoding that your text follows. (Damn, why can nothing ever be simple? Sigh.) However, all of this is easy to work with. You do not even have to understand it. Just do as I say in the following options. Then I will have some comments on them.

Reading each of the options will help you to understand the whole process. Ultimately you will import your Fountain file into **Fade In**, or you will perform a copy-and-paste of text. More about all of this in a moment.

Options

1. *Use a Text Editor*

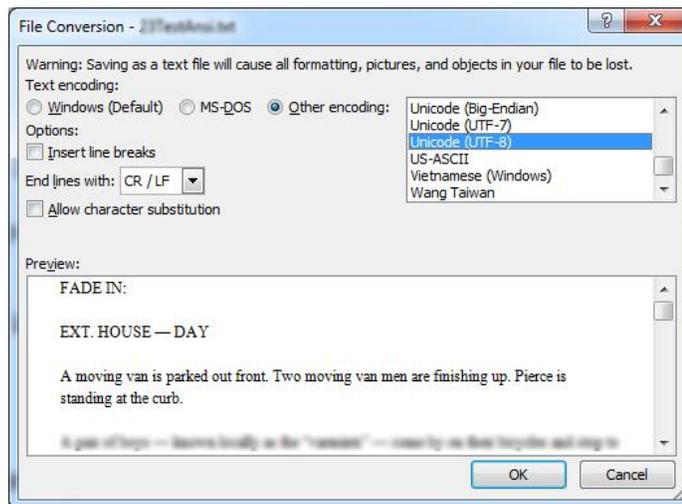
- Type your text in a text editor such as **Notepad**, **Notepad++**, **Notepad2**, or various other free editors that are available.
- **IMPORTANT:** Do not use any characters except those that have keys on your keyboard. That means no curly quotes or curly apostrophes. No em-dashes (just plain old typewriter-type hyphens). Why? Because use of only keyboard characters avoids problems with encoding.
- Save your work with a **.fountain** extension. It is really a text file, but use the **.fountain** extension anyway.

2. *Use a Text Editor and Select the Encoding*

- Type your text in a text editor such as **Notepad++** or **Notepad2**, or any editor that lets you select and change the text encoding. I know that this sounds scary, but it is very simple. By the way, you cannot use the Windows **Notepad** for this.
- You can insert curly quotes and em-dashes if you know how (by typing codes on the numeric keypad with NumLock on), and you can import or paste text with curly quotes and em-dashes.
- Your text should be Unicode. **Notepad++** and **Notepad2** tell you what encoding is in use. If you are using Windows, it is probably ANSI. Change the encoding from ANSI to Unicode (if it is not already Unicode). Select UTF-8 (a form of Unicode) if it is available. If you are using **Notepad2**, you do this under **File > Encoding > UTF-8**. You can do this at any time. The important thing is to save the file with that encoding. Save the file with a **.fountain** extension.

3. Type Your Text in a Word Processor.

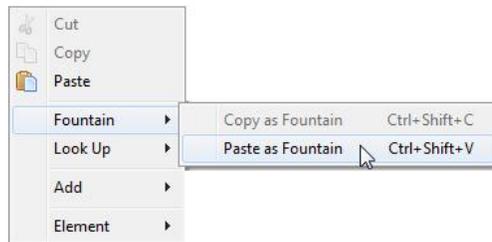
- This is the method that I prefer, because you can use all the features of a word processor. For example, Word and LibreOffice have what Word calls its “track changes” feature, which allows you to show deletions and changes as you work.
- I suppose you can use just about any modern word processing program. The key step is that you have to save your file as text, and specifically as some form of Unicode (e.g., UTF-8) if you have used any special characters like curly quotes and em-dashes. In Word, you save as text, and in the process Word asks you about the encoding that you want. In Word 2010 you choose **Other encoding** and then UTF-8.



- If you do not use any special characters like the curly quotes, then this option is just like Option 1, and you do not have to save as Unicode. **Caution:** Some word processors have their options set to produce curly quotes and em-dashes by default. That is usually helpful, and Fade In loves special characters — but if you have any of these special characters, you have to save as Unicode.

4. Perform a Copy-and-Paste

- In the tests that I have run, you can copy-and-paste text from a word processor or text editor with no regard to the ANSI/Unicode issue. When you paste the text into **Fade In**, the special characters work just fine.
- To paste Fountain into **Fade In**:
 1. Copy the Fountain text that you want.
 2. Right-click in **Fade In**. Select **Fountain > Paste as Fountain**.

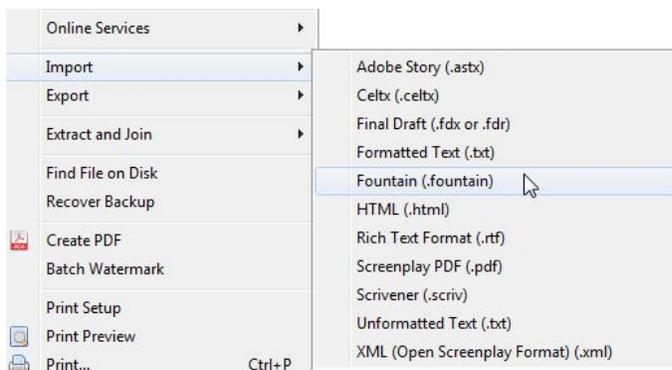


- I have had good luck with the copy-and-paste method. However, I think that it is better to import the Fountain file and to reserve the copy-and-paste method for bits and pieces of text.

Import a Fountain file

Importing a Fountain file into **Fade In** is really easy. You just have to make sure that you have saved it as Unicode text if you have used any special characters like “curly quotes” or em-dashes like this — a longer dash than a hyphen.

For the import, use **File > Import > Fountain**.



So what happens if you do not save your text as Unicode and then you import into **Fade In**? That is easy to answer. Your curly quotes and em-dashes are just left out entirely. You have an empty space where they are supposed to be, as in this scene heading, which had em-dashes in the original:

INT. MEDICAL OFFICE RECEPTION DAY

The Result After Importing

Fade In does a fantastic job of converting Fountain to screenplay format. I imported the example that I provided at the start of this article. It imported perfectly. Even the line that only had DR. OSWIN on it was correctly read as action (because a blank line followed DR. OSWIN). The markup form **new** was converted to italics.

Fade In can do even more remarkable things. For example, it handles dual dialogue — and I regard that as a real accomplishment. To tag something as dual dialogue you just put a

caret ^ after the name of the second speaker in the dual-dialogue exchange. Just watch this.

Hesper tentatively touches one of the big wooden snakes.

A door swings open. DR. OSWIN smiles broadly beneath an old-fashioned handlebar mustache.

DR. OSWIN
Hesper! Come in, my dear.

HESPER^
Oh, hello, Doctor.

He takes Hesper by the arm.

When this text is imported as Fountain, we see:

Hesper tentatively touches one of the big wooden snakes.

A door swings open. DR. OSWIN smiles broadly beneath an old-fashioned handlebar mustache.

DR. OSWIN	HESPER
Hesper! Come in, my dear.	Oh, hello, Doctor.

He takes Hesper by the arm.

That particular exchange of dialogue is not something where you really need dual dialogue, but I was just using it as an example.

FINAL DRAFT

Final Draft does not support Fountain directly. You can have some moderate success by importing a Fountain file as a text file (rename it to `.txt` first). However, **Final Draft** stumbles on some things. For example, Final Draft imported the line about the plaque that displays DR. OSWIN (which is action) as a character name, even though a blank line followed DR. OSWIN; then it interpreted the following action paragraph as dialogue for DR. OSWIN.

SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS

In general, you do not need to use any Fountain markup codes. But occasionally you need them (like the `*asterisk pair*` for italics). You can find a list of Fountain markup codes on the Fountain website:

<https://fountain.io/syntax#section-overview>

Title Pages. You can even create your title page with Fountain. It is simple, but you should

read the website for full details. Essentially you just type some keys (like Title), followed by a colon and a value. Multiple values are indented and placed on the next line. Here is an example. Multiple values, like those below **Contact**, are indented by at least three spaces or a tab. When you are through with the title page information, put a blank line into your text before you start your screenplay.

Title: THE SNAKE HOUSE
Credit: Written by
Author: Roland Stroud
Draft date: July 16, 2017
Contact:
 Email: rolandraystroud@gmail.com
 Telephone: 555-555-5555

FADE IN:

Etc.

Try writing in Fountain format and importing or pasting into **Fade In**. You will be impressed.

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