

# Page One: 'The Silence of the Lambs' (1991)

[Scott Myers](#)

Screenplay by Ted Tally, novel by Thomas Harris

FADE IN:

INT. FBI ACADEMY - QUANTICO, VIRGINIA - DAY

CLARICE STARLING approaches us briskly down a long corridor. Trim, very pretty, mid-20s. She wears a gray "FBI Academy" sweatshirt, an ID badge, a navy ball cap. There are grass stains on the knees of her khakis, grass and sweat stains on her shirt. She reaches a closed door, stops, a bit flushed.

A NAME PLATE

there reads "BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE / Special Agent Crawford."

CLARICE

pulls off her cap, then doesn't know where to put it. She takes a deep breath, knocks on the door. No response.

CUT TO:

INT. CRAWFORD'S OFFICE - DAY

Clarice opens the door, steps hesitantly inside. There is no one here. She looks around the office curiously, seeing it for the first time.

HER POV

A cramped and obsessively cluttered room. Case file materials - police and lab reports, manila folders, photos - are stacked mountainously high on the desk, the floor, the chairs. On the walls: maps, charts, and a screaming newspaper headline ("Buffalo Bill Claims 5th Victim," "FBI: Still No Leads on Buffalo Bill"). Most prominent of all is a row of five enlarged black & white photos - the faces of young women, taken from life.

CLARICE

steps further into the room, staring at

A BLACKBOARD

filled with feverishly scrawled notes: "Big women only... Skin-ning = Hunter? Trapper?... Lunar cycle? No."

CRAWFORD (O.S.)

Sterling, Clarice M. Good morning.

NEW ANGLE

as Clarice turns, sees JACK CRAWFORD, 46, who has slipped in behind her. He is haggard, haunted; his face is a road map of places we could not bear to visit. Between this master and

The movie version of the opening:

Someday when I have the time, I will do a scene-by-scene analysis of the movie version of the opening and how every moment conveys both the tone of the story and Clarice as an underdog in it. But today, let me address the [many comments on my Twitter feed](#) about the numerous misspellings on the first page of the script.

Yes, the screenwriter Ted Tally spelled several words wrong. This does NOT mean that we, as writers who have yet to win an Academy Award (like Tally), can forego a final spellcheck pass on our scripts before handing them in. There is a world of difference between a writer adapting a best-selling book for a green lit movie project with Jonathan Demme attached to direct, Jodi Foster and Anthony Hopkins attached to star with the production team breathing down the screenwriter's neck... and us.

As readers in my Twitter feed aptly pointed out, misspellings are distracting. They take us OUT of the story universe when one of our primary goals with a screenplay is to lure the reader INTO that time and space.

Moreover, misspelled words in a script convey a lack of professionalism on the part of an aspiring screenwriter. Perhaps a writer like Ted Tally can get away with it because it's the story which is the most important aspect of a script. And as anyone who has read the Thomas Harris novel, then Tally's script knows, he NAILED the adaptation.

Takeaway: Pro screenwriters sometimes misspell words. This does not give YOU a pass. Your script must excel in all ways, big and small... including your spelling.

Page One is a daily Go Into The Story series featuring the first page of notable movie scripts from the classic era to contemporary times. Comparing them is an excellent way to study a variety of writing styles and see how professional writers start a story.

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You may follow the daily conversation on Twitter as I cross-post there: @GoIntoTheStory.