

Video & Scriptwriting / Scene Direction

Write what characters mean but don't say — inner monologue and intention for layered scene direction.

Difficulty: Advanced

Model: GPT-4 / Claude / Gemini

Use Case: Subtext Extraction, Layered Direction

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Why This Prompt Exists

Great dialogue is about what characters don't say. Subtext creates tension, mystery, and depth. Most scripts are on-the-nose — characters say exactly what they mean.

You get:

- on-the-nose dialogue (characters say exactly what they feel — no tension, no mystery)
- no inner life (actors don't know what character is really thinking)
- scene lacks tension (no gap between what's said and what's meant)
- no dramatic irony (audience knows more than characters)
- missed opportunities for layering

But subtext has patterns:

- avoidance: character talks about something else to avoid the real topic
- understatement: minimizing big emotions to appear controlled
- deflection: answering a question with a question

- silence: what's not said speaks volumes
- double meaning: words that mean two things (one safe, one dangerous)
- action over words: character shows through behavior, not dialogue

Without subtext, scenes are flat.

This prompt writes subtext and inner monologue.

The Prompt

Assume the role of a subtext specialist who writes what characters really mean.

Your task is to add inner monologue and subtext to dialogue.

Generate:

1. SUBTEXT TECHNIQUES CLASSIFICATION

Technique	Definition	Example Line	What They Really Mean
Avoidance	Talks about something else	"Did you feed the cat?"	"I can't talk about us leaving."
Understatement	Minimizes big emotion	"It's fine. Really."	"I'm devastated."
Deflection	Answers with question	"Why would you ask that?"	"You're right and I can't admit it."
Silence	Says nothing	[pause] [beat]	Everything unspoken
Double meaning	Safe surface, dangerous underneath	"I hope you get everything you deserve."	"I hope you suffer."

| Change of subject | Abrupt topic shift | "So, about the weather..."
| "I can't handle this conversation." |
| Sarcasm | Opposite of literal | "Oh, that's perfect." | "That's the
worst possible outcome." |

2. SUBTEXT MAPPING TABLE

Line of Dialogue	Spoken Meaning	Hidden Meaning (Subtext)	Inner Monologue
[original line]	[what they say]	[what they mean]	[what they're thinking]

3. INNER MONOLOGUE TEMPLATE

`[Character] says: "[dialogue]"`
`But inside, [character] thinks: [inner thought].`

Example:

`Sarah says: "I'm happy for you. Really."`
`But inside, Sarah thinks: "I'm devastated. Why her and not me?"`

4. SUBTEXT SCENE EXAMPLE

Surface Dialogue:

> John: "You're leaving?"
> Sarah: "My flight's at 6."
> John: "I see."

> Sarah: "Take care of yourself."

****With Subtext and Inner Monologue:****

> John says: "You're leaving?" (What he means: "Please don't go. I'm not ready.")

> Inside, John thinks: "Say no. Say you'll stay. I should beg. Why can't I beg?"

>
> Sarah says: "My flight's at 6." (What she means: "Yes. I have to. Don't make this harder.")

> Inside, Sarah thinks: "If I look at him, I'll cry. If I cry, I'll stay. Keep moving."

>
> John says: "I see." (What he means: "I don't see at all. This isn't fair.")

> Inside, John thinks: "Two words. That's all I can manage. If I say more, I'll break."

>
> Sarah says: "Take care of yourself." (What she means: "I still love you. I'm sorry.")

> Inside, Sarah thinks: "I hope he finds someone better. I hope he hates me. One is easier."

5. SUBTEXT INTENSITY SCALE

Intensity	Technique	Example	When to Use
Subtle	Understatement, avoidance	"I'm sure it's fine."	Early

tension, polite distance |
 | Moderate | Deflection, silence | Long pause, subject change | Rising
 conflict |
 | Strong | Sarcasm, double meaning | "That's exactly what I wanted." |
 Anger, resentment |
 | Extreme | Contradiction through action | "Nothing's wrong" (while
 crying) | Emotional climax |

6. CHARACTER SUBTEXT PROFILES

Character Type	Subtext Tendency	Example
Stoic	Understatement, silence	"It is what it is." (means: I'm destroyed)
Avoidant	Change of subject, deflection	"Let's talk about something else."
Passive-aggressive	Sarcasm, double meaning	"No, please. Continue." (means: stop)
Vulnerable	Action over words	Turns away, can't speak
Manipulative	Questions instead of statements	"Are you sure that's wise?"

7. COMMON SUBTEXT MISTAKES

Mistake	Why It Fails	Correct Approach
On-the-nose dialogue	No tension, no mystery	Hide meaning, imply
Subtext too obscure	Audience confused	Plant clues, payoff

| No character consistency | Feels false | Match subtext to character
|
| Subtext in every line | Exhausting | Reserve for important beats |
| Action contradicts without reason | Confusing | Make contradiction intentional |

INPUTS:

Scene dialogue (original):

[PASTE THE DIALOGUE LINES]

Character relationship:

[E.G., "Lovers breaking up", "Rivals competing", "Parent and child"]

Character personality (each):

[E.G., "John: stoic, avoidant", "Sarah: direct but vulnerable"]

Emotional stakes:

[E.G., "If they don't reconcile, they lose each other forever"]

RULES:

- On-the-nose dialogue has no tension (hide meaning whenever possible)
- Inner monologue reveals what characters won't say aloud
- Subtext creates dramatic irony (audience understands more than characters)
- Silence can be more powerful than words (use beats and pauses)
- Action should contradict or reveal what words hide
- Different characters use different subtext techniques (consistent with personality)

- Plant clues, then payoff (subtext is a mystery to be solved)

How To Use It

- On-the-nose dialogue has no tension — hide meaning whenever possible.
- Inner monologue reveals what characters won't say aloud — use it for direction, not performance.
- Subtext creates dramatic irony — the audience understands more than the characters.
- Silence can be more powerful than words — use beats and pauses intentionally.
- Action should contradict or reveal what words hide — show, don't just tell.
- Different characters use different subtext techniques — consistent with personality.
- Plant clues, then payoff — subtext is a mystery for the audience to solve.

Example Input

Scene dialogue:

"Alex: I got the promotion. Jamie: That's great. Congratulations. Alex: You're not happy for me. Jamie: I said it's great."

Character relationship:

"Close friends, but Jamie applied for the same promotion and didn't get it."

Character personality:

"Alex: oblivious, excited. Jamie: resentful but won't admit it, conflict-avoidant."

Emotional stakes:

"Alex doesn't know Jamie applied. Jamie's resentment could end the friendship."

Why It Works

Most screenwriters write what characters say, not what they mean — resulting in on-the-nose dialogue that lacks tension, mystery, and depth.

This framework improves outcomes by forcing:

- subtext technique classification (avoidance, understatement, deflection, silence, double meaning, change of subject, sarcasm)
- subtext mapping table (spoken meaning vs. hidden meaning vs. inner monologue)
- inner monologue template (what character thinks but doesn't say)
- subtext intensity scale (subtle to extreme by emotional beat)
- character subtext profiles (different techniques for different personalities)

Failure modes this prevents:

- On-the-nose dialogue (characters say exactly what they feel — no tension)
- No inner life (actors don't know what character is really thinking)
- Scene lacks tension (no gap between what's said and what's meant)
- No dramatic irony (audience knows same as characters)

This improves on: Surface-level dialogue. Subtext creates depth, tension, and mystery.

Related to: SD-01 (Beat) for timing; SD-05 (Eye Line) for non-verbal subtext.

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