GENERATOR
Production: Scriptwriting and Storyboards

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SCRIPTWRITING AND STORYBOARDS

WRITING A TREATMENT

'Treatments' are written by filmmakers to pitch their ideas to film producers or financers so they can receive approval or funding to proceed with writing their screenplay. A treatment should 'sell' an idea to a potential studio or to television network producers.

Consider the following points when beginning to write your treatment:

- Condense the entire story into one page of highly descriptive, visual ideas.
- Detail the events, locations, characters and story developments as they will unfold on screen.
- Write in the present tense from the third-person perspective.
- Avoid discussing production details such as camera directions.

Draw on your narrative planning ideas to help you write your treatment. The overall mood and tone of the story should be conveyed through the use of highly visual nouns, verbs and adjectives. To engage and excite the reader (your potential producer or financer), the treatment should be lively and dramatic in the way it communicates your ideas.

THE SCREENPLAY

Once you have composed your treatment, begin writing your screenplay. This is your chance to flesh out and bring to life the ideas you brainstormed in your initial narrative planning material and described in your treatment. Visualise how your written ideas can be communicated through moving images and sounds during the production stage. Remember, film is a visual and aural medium: ensure that your screenplay captures what you want your audience to see and hear.

Screenwriters use a series of screenplay conventions to effectively communicate their ideas to the cast and crew of a production in an established and universally understood format. There are many screenplays available online that can help you to familiarise yourself with scriptwriting terminology, formats and guidelines prior to writing your film or television script.

Screenwriting tips and production considerations

- Break the story up into scenes, and ensure each scene has some sort of action to move the story along. This will provide greater room for narrative intensity and audience engagement.
- Make sure the script tells the story visually. The on-screen actions, events and atmosphere are just as important as the dialogue between the characters. Write about what the audience will hear as well as see.
- Develop the conflict in one main incident. If the film is less than 5 minutes, one type of conflict may be sufficient, otherwise it may be more complex.
- When scripting dialogue, know what you want your characters to say and why they are saying it. Consider alternatives to dialogue such as voiceover, actions or gestures to convey emotions or ideas more profoundly.

- Clichés are not realistic. Avoid writing dialogue that is melodramatic or overly emotional. Think about how a subtext to the story can allow the audience to actively understand the story rather than just being told what is happening.
- If writing dialogue is too challenging, how might alternative or experimental visual techniques help convey your intended message?
- Use the minimum number of characters and locations it takes to tell the story. Keep it simple. Some of the best films produced have adopted this minimalist approach with great success.
- Proofread your script: check for grammar and spelling errors.
- Test the script on friends and family. If the story grabs and excites them, it is likely that you are heading in the right direction. Reading the script aloud can highlight areas that may need polishing or more work.
- Write a script that gives your actors something to interpret, engage with and play with!

Screenwriting conventions and definitions

Page numbers
Place in the top right-hand corner.

Margins
Use standard margins of 2.5 cm at the top, bottom and right (for bound scripts, leave a 3.9 cm margin on the left-hand side).

Font
Use 12-point Courier.

Scenes
Screenplays are broken up into scenes, and each scene should comprise an event or action that takes places in a specific location.

Slugline
The 'slugline' or scene heading (set in capitals) indicates the time of day and location of the action. For example:

```
          LISA'S BEDROOM. DAY.
```

or

```
          INT. JASON'S CAR. NIGHT.
```

If more information is needed by the production crew, indicate this in the slugline.

Action lines
Actor direction and action lines are written in present tense and appear directly after the slugline. Characters' names are capitalised when first introduced. The directions contain detailed descriptions of the characters' actions and events that take place in the scene. They explain to the reader (your cast and crew) what is happening. For example:

```
          JASON turns to face LISA who is sobbing.
          Jason slowly but gently wipes the tears
                streaming down Lisa's face.
```

Character cues

The character cue is the name of the character who speaks next. It is capitalised, indented 5.4 cm from the left and centred directly above their speech.

Dialogue

Dialogue is what the character says. This is often the hardest part of scriptwriting: realism is imperative. Dialogue should be indented 3.4 cm from the left and the right.

Dialogue direction

Dialogue direction is used to indicate how a character speaks. It appears in brackets below the character cue. For example:

```
                    JASON
                 (screams)
         Why are you crying?
```

Voiceover (VO)

A voiceover is heard when a character speaks but is not necessarily in the scene at the time. To indicate voiceover, write `(VO)` to the right of the character's name – for example, `LISA (VO)`.

Off Screen (OS)

When a character is part of a scene but not seen on-screen at the time, write `(OS)` to the right of the character's name.

Camera directions

Camera directions are used in a shooting script.

Beat

The word 'beat' is used to indicate a pause in a character's speech or dialogue, meaning that the actor is required to pause before they deliver their next line. For example:

```
                     LISA
                   (beat)
          I've had enough of this!
```

Flashbacks or flash-forwards

Flashbacks or flash-forwards in time can be indicated in the slugline. For example:

```
         INT. CLASSROOM. DAY. FLASHBACK
```

In a screenplay you can expand on the descriptions of locations, characters, actions and – more importantly – dialogue. Furthermore, the screenplay may include camera and stage directions to provide greater information and support to the cast and crew when filming begins. However, remember that visual concepts will be developed further during the storyboarding stage.

THE SHOOTING SCRIPT

Once the screenplay is completed, it is time to construct a shooting script. This document outlines and communicates your visual ideas for each scene. The shooting script should work alongside and complement the screenplay, providing detailed descriptions of all the visual elements that will shape your story. For small production teams, the shooting script

will communicate to the entire production crew where and when to use selected camera shots, movements and angles for each scene in the film.

As the creator of the film, it is important to have a clear understanding of where and when to use appropriate production techniques. Carefully analyse your screenplay when preparing your shooting script and identify how your ideas will best be conveyed by different production styles. Explore a range of aesthetic possibilities when interpreting your screenplay. A realist approach dictates that the techniques you use will create the illusion of reality, and this includes shooting for continuity. When planning shot transitions, ensure that the action and actors' movements between shots are smooth, continuous and logical. The audience should be unaware of cuts between individual shots. However, an alternative approach to production techniques may result in a more experimental work. Explore ways to manipulate sounds and images by interrupting the flow of on-screen action – for example, the continuous flow of action from shot to shot may be disrupted in some way that reflects your particular style and techniques.

Shooting scripts are laid out in the format of a table in which scenes are broken up according to the action in the scene. The shooting script includes detailed descriptions of shot types, visual content and sound to be captured for each aspect of the scene. Remember to indicate lighting directions and transitions between each shot. The shooting script and storyboard should use abbreviated directorial terms to specify camera placement and movement.

Shooting script tips

- Have a clear understanding of the visual direction of your production and the techniques that will best match that direction.
- Use shot and scene numbers.
- Indicate camera distance, angles and movements throughout the script.
- Give estimated shot durations.
- Provide details of diegetic and non-diegetic sound.
- Describe the on-screen action.
- Indicate lighting techniques.

CAMERA TECHNIQUES AND SHOT TYPES

Filmmakers use a variety of shots, angles and camera movements to visually tell their story. Some of the common shot types are described below.

Framing

Close-up (CU) — A close-up shows an actor's face, allowing the audience to judge the character's reaction to what is happening. A close-up may also focus on a significant object.

Point-of-view shot (POV) — A point-of-view shot is where the camera shares the character's point of view and appears to be looking through his or her eyes.

Extreme close-up (ECU) Extreme close-up shots are used for dramatic emphasis and can reveal intense emotion or other important details.

Mid shot (MS) Mid shots show the actors from the waist up and are most commonly used for showing action and dialogue.

Reverse shot (RS) A reverse shot is filmed from the corresponding or opposite point of view of the previous shot – for example, cutting between two characters talking to each other or cutting to the subject of a point-of-view shot.

Wide shot (LS) Wide shots (also known as long shots) show the whole person or the whole feature object as part of the landscape. The opening shot is often a wide shot, and this may be called an establishing shot as it establishes the location and often the time and mood of the scene.

Camera angle

High camera angle (HCA) The camera is positioned on an angle above the action, looking down.

Low camera angle (LCA) The camera is positioned on an angle from below the action, looking up.

Eye level (EL) The camera is at the same height as the action.

Camera movement

Zoom The shot zooms in to show a detail or zooms out to reveal more of the scene.

Pan The camera moves from one side of the action to another, following the action or showing the audience more of the scene.

Tilt The camera tilts up or down.

Sound

Sound effect (SFX) The inclusion of a particular sound effect – either diegetic (heard by the characters) or non-diegetic (not heard by the characters, often used for dramatic impact).

Voiceover (VO) The voice of a character (or narrator) narrating the events or expressing a perspective about the on-screen action.

Voice off-screen (OS) The voice of a character who is part of the scene but not seen on-screen at the time.

CREATING THE STORYBOARD

The storyboard and shooting script are both important production tools that help to visually represent your production ideas and communicate them to your crew. It can be difficult to visualise how your scene will look with a shooting script alone. It is recommended that you select and storyboard key scenes from the screenplay that may require a higher degree of planning or those that feature complex visual production techniques to ensure the successful execution of these scenes.

A storyboard is a visual representation of events as they are to be seen through the camera lens. The storyboard is informed by the script and uses rough drawings – like a comic strip – to plan the shots for each scene. This is your chance to plan the composition and framing of the shots for your production. Storyboards can be used for both animation and live action productions. The drawings can be simple, but each scene should be worked through until the planned sequence of events runs smoothly. Each sketch should fill the frame in exactly the same way the shot will fill the screen in the finished film. This ensures that you have clearly visualised how each shot will look.

Storyboarding tips

When storyboarding, think about answering the following questions:

- What do you need to show? What can the audience assume without needing to see it?
- What shots do you want to use? Where are long shots, close-ups and other types of framing required?
- What camera angles will best complement your script?
- Where will the actors be? Which direction will they come on and off or move around in the shot?
- What sort of light suits the story best?

STORYBOARD GENERATOR

To explore storyboarding concepts further, go to the Storyboard Generator: http://generator.acmi.net.au/storyboard. Choose a script and create a storyboard. Build your own storyboard using background location photographs.

Save and share your storyboard video with friends. To be able to save your storyboard you will need first to register with Generator.