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Making Movies for Environmental Communication

A practical Guide for Beginners

Community Creativity from School to Society
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Introduction

Filmmaking could seem difficult when you start, and many questions could come to mind: how to write a screenplay (always assuming to know what it means)? How to organize the setting? Or to design a good shot and set up the camera? And what about the editing? Which techniques and software should I use? When you think about making movies, you may imagine Hollywood's big productions, with tons of people working on every aspect of the film. However, as we will see, expensive equipment and a crew full of experts are not that important. Instead of asking yourself "what do I need to realize my ideal movie?", you should better ask "what film can I sustainably realize to communicate my thoughts, using the resources I can afford"? In other terms, what really matters is to have a good idea and a message to communicate, and the opportunity to transform them into a film, using the means at one's disposal. This handbook aims to help you to acquire the practical skills you need!

The process of filmmaking could be summarised in the following phases:

1) Have an idea and develop it into a story

What's the film about? What message do you want to convey through your film?

2) Realise a screenplay

How can a mere sequence of words be transformed into a coherent sequence of images and sound?

3) Organise the shooting

What, when, and where do you film? What devices, techniques, and how many people involved do you need?

4) Film the shots (audio and video tracks)

Make sure to have a clear idea of what to shoot and how (angles, light, camera positions, sounds, etc.), and do not leave the set/location until you have obtained all the shots you need.

5) Edit the material

Select and juxtapose the shots in a meaningful way in order to compose your film.

6) Share your film

Once the film is finished, release it online (blogs, social media, websites, etc.) or arrange screenings and distribution.

Let's start!

1 The cinematographic language and its value for environmental communication

1.1 One Grammar for Many Languages

What do a film, a TV series, and even a Tiktok video have in common? They all work following the rules of film language. Such audiovisual outputs use certain shared conventions for conveying meaning through particular techniques used in the screenplay, camera, and editing. Of course, each medium has its specificities: realizing a movie is different from realizing a video for Tiktok, Youtube, or making a TV series. Notwithstanding, all audiovisual media rely, more or less, on the same set of linguistic conventions, which are a modulation of the filmic language. Every film or video follows the same visual grammar, and what directors do is use that grammar to create a specific linguistic style through which to tell a story. So, if you know the basic grammar of this language, you could create your own videos and use them to tell a story, signify certain meanings, and communicate your point of view on a subject or theme.

Before coming to the practice of this language, a few general considerations on the specificities of the cinematographic language could be useful:

1) The audiovisual language tries to imitate the way humans perceive reality through their senses (vision and hearing). Since it has a low degree of conventionality, it is immediate, universal, and easily understandable by people from different cultures.
2) The audiovisual language constructs reality and it does not merely reflect it, and through a process of filmed and edited images it communicates a specific point of view.
3) The audiovisual language operates on a process of selection and a synthesis

of the narrative and visual materials. Both these operations are performed by the author/authors (director, screenwriter, cinematographer, etc.) who uses/use this grammar to convey a message.

4) The audiovisual language relies on a shared grammar, which is open to interpretations and linguistic choices.

These general considerations apply whether we are talking about a short movie (with a duration of up to 30 minutes) or a feature film (longer than 60 minutes).

In its long history, which started more than 120 years ago, the art and the practice of motion pictures have undergone stylistic and technological innovations that have shaped and complexified its language and poetics. It exists today in styles and forms that differ considerably from genre to genre and from mode to mode. Broadly speaking, we could divide film's modes into two main branches: A) the documentary mode and B) the fictional mode.

A) A **documentary** is a motion-picture, video, or TV programme intended to "document" reality. The documentary film-genre is not based on a fictional screenplay, but on actual sources like interviews and archive materials, with the purpose to inform – even educate, in the case of instructional documentaries – people on definite topics conveying culture, art, travels, and geography, social and political issues, history, naturalistic subjects, etc. While the documentary is traditionally opposed to fiction, acknowledging a presumed authentic, unfiltered perspective on reality, this polarity has recently been contested. Every documentary offers a specific "point of view" on a subject or a topic, that it is built on a close relationship between the filmed subjects and the filmmaker's perspective and communicative purposes.

B) Documentaries come in many forms, formats, and genres. According to American film theoretician Bill Nichols (2001), documentaries can be divided and grouped based on the peculiar traits and conventions they exhibit. Nichols identifies six "documentary modes" that, even in the case of overlap, may help us to distinguish among different technical forms and purposes:

Poetic mode: in this type of documentary there is little or no narrative content in favor of mood, tone, and association of images. The filmmaker's point of view is often expressed through editing that privileges figurative and/or thematic associations over continuity and intelligibility.

Es: *Olympia*, Leni Riefenstahl, 1938.

Expository mode: in this mode, the specific point of view of the author on a topic is directly expressed by a voice-over commenting on the footage to support or strengthen the film's argument. Es: *Bowling for Columbine*, Michael Moore, 2001.

Reflexive mode: the focus here is on the relationship between the filmmaker and the audience. Hence, the subject of this type of documentary is the process of documentary filmmaking itself and the filmmakers are often in front of the camera explaining what's going on.

Es: the documentary series *When Louis met*, Louis Theroux, 2000-2002.

Observational mode: adopting a fly-on-the-wall perspective, this type of documentary attempts to "observe" its subject without any form of interaction with it. It limits or even suppresses any narrative and stylistic devices like music, arrangements of interviews, and narrative materials.

Es: *Primary*, Robert Drew, 1960.

Performative mode: it deals with the personal involvement of the filmmaker in the filmed subject and focuses on their direct participation in the events narrated. The documentary, then, often displays intimate footage expressing the intimate bond between the documentarist and the subject. The purpose is to stress the construction of subjective truths that are meaningful for the author and their point of view.

Es: *Super size me*, Morgan Spurlock, 2004.

Participatory mode: similar to the performative mode, it entails the personal participation of the filmmaker, who interacts directly with the subject. Although the participatory mode engages the author in the story, it attempts to deliver objective truths. The footage, the interviews, and interactions between the subjects involved and the filmmaker are captured and organized to support the filmmaker's vision or uphold the film's goal.

Es: *Sicko*, Michael Moore, 2007.

C) A similar classification exists also when it comes to reflecting upon the **fictional** mode. At first, a useful distinction concerns the register of the text, that's to say the overall tone and style of a piece of work. On the one hand, we have **comedy**, which uses humor as a driving force, with characters and plots designed to make the audience laugh. On the other, we have **tragedy**, centered on some sort of human suffering

incarnated by the trials and tribulations of the main character, which eventually leads to a catharsis, even within the audience.

Things get trickier when we consider the notion of the **cinematographic genre**. While we as film fans already know about film genres, understanding "genre theory" can be quite complex.Taking the word at its definition, the genre is the term for any category of literature or other forms of art or entertainment based on some set of stylistic criteria. Although crossovers and combinations are very frequent, we can identify some macro-genres that can help us to distinguish some types of films from others:

- **Adventure**: the audience expects to feel emotions such as anxiety and curiosity, maybe to be in an exotic setting, and to participate in the adrenaline-fueled exploits of a fearless hero. This macro-genre has close ties to classic strife and struggle narratives. It includes *westerns*, *action movies*, *cape and swords*, *epic movies*, films about *super-heroes*, *fantasy films*, *sci-fi,* and *biopics*.

  When the adventure concerns frightening events, which arouse in the spectator's emotions like fear, disgust, and anxiety, we have **horror** movies.

- **Crime***:* focuses on crime as the central element of the plot. Crime narratives are centered on the presence of criminal events and the operations surrounding them, like criminal investigations, chasing, revealing the truth, etc., usually carried out by more or less institutional detectives. It includes *mystery movies*, *thrillers*, *detective films*, *noir*, *courtroom movies,* and *gangster films*.

- **Romance**: at the core of this macro-genre there are relational conflicts. These movies build their plots on sentimental troubles, generational conflicts, and social themes like friendship, love, the search for happiness, resilience against difficulties, affectivity, etc. It includes *rom-coms*, *musicals*, *melodramas*, *teen movies*, etc.

We have to keep in mind that these clear-cut definitions are operational tools: in reality, you can hybridize formats, conventions, and genres to create a movie that fits your vision!

In their capacity to reach broad audiences and convey meaning in a universal language, film and other audiovisual media command our attention disproportionally to any other medium of communication. Given this potential for broad access to various audiences, incorporating media production as a learning activity can play a pivotal role in innovative and transformational education, especially as an active learning tool for promoting sustainability.

> The image—cinematic, photographic, digital, or analog—is not only materially and economically inseparable from the biophysical environment, it is the environmental movement's primary pedagogical and propagandistic tool (Bozak, 2012, p. 3).

1.2 Bring the Film in the Classroom: Film as an Educational Tool

Education, as much as being a process through which new ideas are made available to students, must also be a tool that reflects their experiences of the world.In that respect, films and audiovisual materials do an excellent job. As beautifully synthesized by Samina Mishra

> Films can bring the world into the classroom. They can carry stories, voices, and images that in life may be far removed from us, both as documentary and fiction. Films are about inner lives and outer worlds. They help us reaffirm our own selfhood and feel connected to others, and show us the magic of discovering the unseen and the unheard (2018, p. 112).

Today's students are part of a visually educated generation, brought up surrounded by images and icons and they have developed a natural understanding of visual, and cinematographic language. On the one hand, the power of film as a pedagogical tool relies on its capacity to be a clear, entertaining means to deliver knowledge: students may not know what a close-up is or what it entails as a cinematographic practice, but they instinctively understand that it means "look closely, this is important!". On the other hand, the universality of the cinematographic language and its great potential as a pedagogical tool enable students and teachers to "speak the same language" and engage in active dialogues on many themes, including environmental concerns. Film language, as we will see, does have its own vocabulary and grammar, and its messages can be comprehended by everyone. At the same time, cinema as a subjective medium can also encourage forms of self-expression by students, who can use it to deliver personal thoughts and emotions.

How does it influence pedagogical practice? Quoting again Mishra,

> By bringing films into the classroom, teachers can work together with students to understand, appreciate and critique, thereby building on both learning and analysis. The subjective emphasis means that film works as a resource that equalises the relationship in the classroom and allows for a collaborative construction of knowledge. The teacher's point of view is no greater than that of the student's (ivi, p. 115).

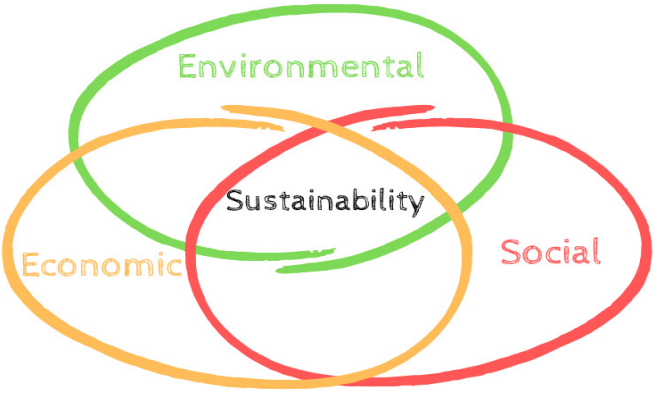
Considering film as a medium that helps students (as well as teachers) connect with society and apply theoretical and abstract notions to the real world means developing their skills to contribute to building an enhanced community. In both a teaching-by-learning and learning-by-doing fashion, **cinematic literacy can empower both students and teachers to play a constructive role in sustainable development** and, as a result, cultivate a more inspired conception of citizenship in the promotion of socio-environmental governance.

1.2.1 The Concept of Sustainable Development

With the advent of social media, recent years have seen a shift in media content emerging from younger generations, geared toward shaping public opinion and promoting sustainable lifestyles in response to largely human-caused environmental crises. However, even the sincerest efforts often "miss the mark" by being unprepared, sporadic, and disjointed attempts that lack the desired impact. Thus, in designing an effective module of transferable knowledge, we have consolidated past and present theories and practices in the form of two achievable strategic objectives: 1) education for sustainable development and 2) communication for sustainability in the context of the current discourse on sustainable development.

But what exactly do we mean by "**sustainable development**"? The Bruntland Commission Report, published in 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development (United Nations), described sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." In its preamble, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development pledges its strong commitment to eradicate poverty while healing and securing our planet by way of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (henceforth SDGs). However, while bold and ambitious as statements, the 17 established SDGs remain purposely unspecific and vague to include all populations and ensure their applications in all national settings. Over time, and through the lens of various disciplines, many model typologies used for the representation and study of sustainability have been proposed. The most widespread is the Triple Bottom Line model (TBL). Within this approach, sustainability is positioned at the intersection of three dimensions: economy, society, and environment.

In that regard, sustainability is a model for thinking about a future in which environmental, societal, and economic considerations are equalized in the pursuit of a better quality of life.



The combined and equal recognition of these three dimensions visually emphasizes that health, social equity, economic prosperity, and environmental preservation are not separate, competing, or symptomatic issues but rather systemic and interdependent.

1.2.2 Education for Sustainable Development

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is recognized as an integral element of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4 "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all"). Commonly regarded as "an integrative framework that has the potential to forge alliances between different adjectival educations" (Newig 2013), ESD facilitates learning by fulfilling a two-fold role: that of quality basic education and then the acquisition of knowledge on sustainable development. In an educational setting, this links to a concern with the development of human and environmental relations in the context of the three-pillar model:

- *Society*: An understanding of social institutions and their role in change and development, and democratic and participatory systems that allow for the expression of opinion, the selection of governments, the formation of consensus, and the resolution of disagreements.

- *Environment*: An awareness of the resources and fragility of the physical envi-

ronment and how humans impact it through their actions and decisions, and a commitment to incorporating environmental concerns into economic and social policies.

- *Economy*: A sensitivity to the limits and potential of economic growth and its impact on society and the environment, together with a commitment to assess individual and societal consumption levels with consideration for the environment and social justice.

Moreover, as part of a high-quality learning experience, the integration of ESD into a syllabus of education must model the values of sustainable development itself. According to the United Nations (2005), ESD ideally should aim to demonstrate the following features:

- Interdisciplinary and holistic: learning for sustainable development embedded in the whole curriculum, not as a separate subject.
- Values-driven: it is critical that the assumed norms – the shared values and principles underpinning sustainable development – are made explicit so that they can be examined, debated, tested, and applied.
- Critical thinking and problem solving: leading to confidence in addressing the dilemmas and challenges of sustainable development.
- Multi-method: word, art, drama, debate, experience - different pedagogies which model the processes. Teaching that is geared simply to passing on knowledge should be recast into an approach in which teachers and learners work together to acquire knowledge and play a role in shaping the environment of their educational institutions.
- Participatory decision-making: learners participate in decisions on how they are to learn.
- Applicability: the learning experiences offered are integrated in day to day personal and professional life.
- Locally relevant: addressing local as well as global issues, and using the language(s) that learners most commonly use. Concepts of sustainable development must be carefully expressed in other languages – languages and cultures say things differently, and each language has creative ways of expressing new concepts.

To this day, due to its lack of integration in institutionalized settings such as policy frameworks, curricula, and syllabi and the binding legal resolutions ensuring its application, ESD has been mainly implemented through the work of bottom-up initiatives, non-governmental organizations, and committed groups of individuals and organizations. Thus, from a practical standpoint, a campaign for sustainability must enlarge its sphere of cluster actors to include scientific forums, researchers, activist coalitions, environmental NGOs, but also

trade unions, social enterprises, fair trade, circular economy initiatives, and community interest companies. In other words, agents seeking to ensure a project or campaign will be scientifically credible (i.e., data, statistics), provide resources (i.e., fundraising), exchange information and ideas, and share best practices for impactful, fair, and sustainable communications. Such help will prove crucial in implementing elements of an environmentally sustainable education, regardless of its intracurricular or extracurricular integration into a syllabus.

Along with the theoretical approach offered by the "Education for Sustainable Development" framework, we need a more concrete and practical tool, a "**Communication for Sustainability**" that focuses on "impact through awareness-raising". Three primary factors explain the fundamental relevance of communication processes in sustainable development: firstly, communication is essential for ensuring ESD legitimacy. Secondly, issues evolving around sustainability and the environment are inherently characterized by high levels of complexity and uncertainty (Flint 2013). As such, the necessary contextual orientations can be elucidated further via means of communication. Thirdly, mass media communication is the primary source of information about sustainability issues that people have at their disposal.

Within communication for sustainability, various subfields have emerged, focusing on different aspects of sustainability. One of the most interesting of these subfields is **Environmental Communication**, where communication processes and media products are used strategically to support effective policymaking, public participation, and project implementation. Central to EC theory are the following key assumptions: 1) the ways we communicate about the environment impact our perceptions of the natural world as they reflect, but also construct, produce, and naturalize particular human relationships with the environment (Littlejohn and Foss, 2009). In turn, 2) a critical understanding of communication about the environment involves not only communication directly linked to environmental issues but also communication that is not explicitly related to the environment but nevertheless has an indirect impact on it, such as, i.e., neoliberal discourses in films and advertisements.

1.2.3 Narratives and Channels of Communication

Considering the many existing narratives pertinent to protecting the environment, a practical way to order such a discussion is to organize an analysis of environmental trajectories on a spectrum representing how humans relate to the natural world and how they value it.

In understanding our predisposed attitudes toward the environment and the ideas and motives that form the basis of those attitudes, Barton and Gagnon-Thompson (1994) emphasize a distinction between **ecocentric** and **anthropocentric** values. In simple terms, an ecocentric viewpoint values nature for its own sake, assuming that nature is worthy of protection for its intrinsic and inherent value. In contrast, an anthropocentric view posits that the environment ought to be protected due to its importance in maintaining or enhancing the quality of life for humans, essentially fulfilling a utilitarian role. In mapping these different points of view along a continuum spanning the ecocentric-anthropocentric spectrum, we can distinguish five further ideological paradigms:

1. *Unrestrained instrumentalism*: All natural resources are available solely for human use, and such use is not limited or restrained in any way.

2. *Conservationism*: the use of natural resources in a wise manner and for the greatest number of people. The value of nonhuman entities is utilitarian, meaning that they are valuable only as resources for human use.

3. *Preservationism*: preserving resources for human use and enjoyment in ways that transcend their mere instrumental value, such as their scientific, ecological, aesthetic, and religious significance.

4. *Ethics and Values-driven Ideologies*: Non-human entities have an inherent value beyond utilitarian, scientific, aesthetic, or religious worth. Co-existing as part of the same biotic community, humanity perceives itself more humbly and less hierarchically.

5. **Transformative ideologies**: Such ideologies strive to radically transform anthropocentric relations into more ecocentric ones by understanding the root causes of anti-environmental attitudes and behaviors. A logical step toward this direction would imply an immense revision of social institutions and an understanding of the impact of the power and dominance we hold over the natural world.

Having mapped the environmental status quo of your target audiences, along with which trajectories are feasible and desirable, the next step would necessitate selecting a strategic approach. Mefalopulos (2008) has neatly grouped some of the more common communication approaches geared towards developmental communication into eight modes:

- *Social marketing* is a form of marketing that applies marketing principles to social causes. Various health programs have been implemented using it, such as immunization campaigns, sanitation, and others.
- *Advocacy* is used at the national level to promote a specific agenda or issue. Often, it is intended to change or improve policy either by engaging policymakers directly or changing the calculus by winning public support.

- *Information dissemination and campaigns* are aimed at filling specific knowledge gaps.
- *Information, education, and communication (IEC)* is a broader set of strategies that aim to disseminate information and educate large audiences.
- *Education and training* is an approach used in programs requiring instructional design, which tends to be interactive and interpersonal in nature.
- *Institutional aims to improve an institution's internal capacities (through training, for example) and position and improve its image with external audiences.*
- *Community mobilization* implies a systematic approach to involving the community in the resolution of issues that affect their well-being.
- *Nondirective participatory communication* is based on dialog that seeks consensus on social change that is considered meaningful and relevant by all local stakeholders.

From the above, it is important to understand that each approach is intended to serve a different purpose. Although in practice they often overlap, the choice of the most appropriate strategy can steer subsequent steps, including message design, media selection (film, radio, TV, internet, and print), and other essential elements of a communication strategy.

1.3 Partecipatory Videos and Tips for an Activist Cinematic Practice

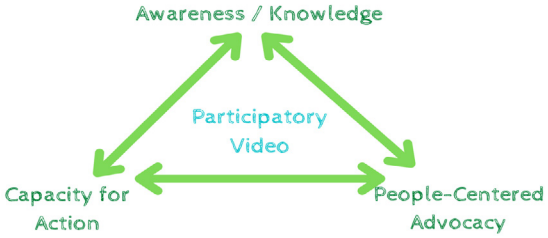
A good way to achieve these results, designing an effective environmental communication is through the production of **participatory videos**, which have become one of the most powerful tools for students to explore social, political, and theoretical issues and take collective action. A participatory video can be defined as the involvement of a group or a community in shaping and creating a video using a set of filmmaking techniques. Participatory videos can be a highly effective instrument to involve and mobilise people, helping them to shape in a concrete form their ideas and thoughts on many issues and themes based on local needs and (technical and technological) abilities.

Participatory video holds the potential to educate, persuade, and advocate in ways that can bring positive change. The theoretical framework of participatory videos (Plush 2013) involves three interconnected axes: a) *awareness and knowledge*: the participatory video process can be elaborate and reinforce the voices, thoughts, and opinions of the people involved in making the videos (the students and the teachers),

raising consciousness about environmental issues.

c) *capacity for action*: it entails not only a set of technical skills for creating movies, but also a long-term vision integrating the creation of videos, their design, and overall planning.

b) *people-centered advocacy*: the capacity of people to speak for themselves, using the cinematographic language as an understandable, highly communicative way to deliver their messages and ideas.



To operationalize and put the previous sections into practice, we will now approach them strategically, placing Communication of Sustainability and filmmaking in educational contexts.

Step 1. **Do Research**:

Identify your local goals, demands, and objectives in the context of ESD. A goal refers to a broad and long-term outcome, while an objective indicates the steps necessary to achieve that goal. Demands are the solutions you propose for the problems you identified during your research. All three should be identified in a way that is Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely: in a word, SMART!

Build further upon them by connecting your stories to a broader context that bridges the local with the global and links with the existing work of others invested in the same goals as you (civil society, the personal experience of the public, and others). In doing so, ensure that the process remains fruitfully participatory for all parties involved. Equally, consider those whose stories are missing from the debate: is there someone under-represented or neglected whose participation will benefit the project?

Identify the key audiences (i.e., policymakers; the general public) and the type of campaign accordingly (i.e., advocacy). Consider the environmental narrative behind your target's mindset and tailor your message accordingly.

Step 2. **Production**

See all the other relevant sections in this eBook.

Step 3. **Distribution**

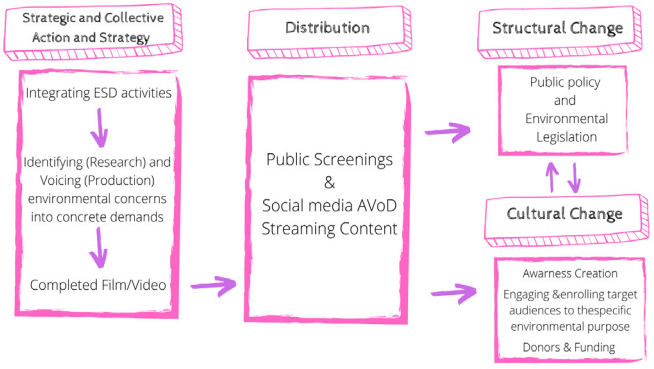
Consider the various forms of distribution beforehand when planning the final output:

- Social Media and AVoD (Advertised Video-on-Demand): Consider utilizing them to create awareness about your initiative and source crowdfunding, but do so in an appropriate manner. In general, social media posts (including films and videos) compete for our attention in a sea of other content, and an individual will spend a mere two seconds on average on any particular website or post before moving on to the next. Therefore, aim to keep it brief but impactful and remember to consistently engage with your audience, fostering a spirit of interaction between potential supporters.

- Festivals: even though a more formal and exclusive setting, film festivals remain essential to the green transition: whether in their capacity as community hubs to connect decidedly activist audiences, filmmakers, and organizations or as a means of sustainable platform of distribution, inspiring and challenging audiences through their agenda-setting.

Step 4. **Expected Impact**:

A strategically successful environmental communication campaign is contagious. It motivates and engages the wider public to become involved in the particular cause that is being communicated. For example, to take action and normalize a commitment to a new set of environmentally friendly practices (Oepen et al., 1999), which in turn will mobilize further the general public (cultural change) and ensure the compliance of policymakers with the message (structural change).



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2 Storytelling

2.1 Turn on the Lightbulb: the Importance of the Idea

When you think about the storytelling phase of a movie, in most cases, you'll probably imagine writing down a fully packed screenplay. As a matter of fact, however, the screenplay is the final output of a long process of rethink, rewriting, and refinement. In realizing a movie, much more time is spent in the conception, treatment phase, and storyboarding than in writing the actual script. The route that leads to a finished screenplay starts much earlier, from a smaller (but meaningful) spark: the **idea**.

This is particularly important when you want to make short films or videos for some social network (Tik Tok, Youtube, ecc.) instead of a feature-length film or a tv series. Short and feature films obviously differ in format, and precisely because of this, they function on a different logic. In a short film, by virtue of its brief duration, the viewer's attention is very focused, and each element will be of great importance. This has two major implications:

- on the one hand, you can use very few elements to evoke an entire story.

- on the other hand, you have to be very careful in designing each element because the viewer will tend to give it meaning.

Why does all of this concern the idea? Because while in a feature film or in tv series the idea could not be the whole point (as it represents a good dramaturgical promise and the **pitch** of the movie), in a short film the idea is everything, it embodies the strength of the entire film. If the idea is strong and precise, it will be more suitable for a short film. Whereas the strength is the plot, the depth or the transformation of a character, or the power of the narrative world, then maybe it will be more appropriate to give these elements more space, developing them into a feature film.

It is quite difficult to recognize the spark that generates an idea. It may not already have the form of a story but could be just an image (or a sequence of images), an atmosphere, a flavour, an impression, a situation, or a belief. As such, finding an idea out of nowhere can prove to be a very difficult task. Fortunately, as it is well known, nothing is created out of nothing, and the ideas for the movie you plan to realize are no exceptions. Indeed, ideas come from the stories around us:

- From the stories you live by yourselves.
- From the stories of the people around you.
- From stories you find in newspaper articles, on the internet, and on social networks.
- From stories you experience through books or other films.

Good ideas could come from anywhere and from anything. What is important about the idea is that it should resonate with you in some way, "striking a chord" inside you. Of course, identifying the "chord" of an idea can be a challenging task, but fortunately, you can consider some starting points. Some of them are more practical, such as your available budget (i.e. how much I can spend to produce my movie?) and the competencies required to realize the movie. Others are more immaterial and are concerned with the final purpose of the movie (education, entertainment, etc.) and the initial cues. Once such important parameters are considered, we can start to elaborate on ideas related to the purpose. At this stage, the writing process consists in ordering the ideas and reducing the chaos of different inputs and possibilities you might probably have in mind. There are many methods you can use to collect and order your ideas and you are free to combine them in a manner that works best for you.

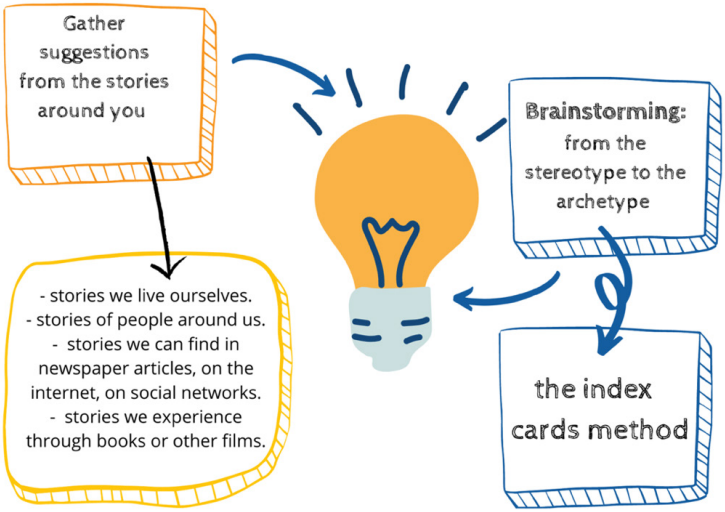
You can start by organizing a "**Brainstorming" session**. Usually, this is a group activity, but it could also be done by yourself alone. All you have to do is starting to reason upon all the mental associations connected to the idea: real-life experiences, fictional stories and, of course, **stereotypes** and commonplaces. Indeed, in conceiving an idea for a movie, you should always consider what others have said on the same topic. On that respect, narrative, thematic and socio-cultural clichés should not be avoided but evoked and sometimes used as a springboard to develop something new and original: stereotypes are useful starting points, although they never should be considered the final destination. Moreover, they could be useful as a way to unearth the **archetypes**, that is to say, universally valid human experiences that, incarnated into characters and events, make your movie able to speak to people from everywhere.

Once you have put together some ideas from the brainstorming, you can visualize and concretize your inputs using **the index cards method**.

Index cards, aka notecards, or flashcards, represent a colorful, fluid way to organize your thoughts and help your ideas emerge and connect with each other. The notes on any of the cards may be short or they may be more extensive and contain any kind of information about ideas, stories, scenes, characters, and so on. It doesn't matter if it seems chaotic: the whole writing process represents a way to pass from chaos (many ideas) to order (deciding on one story). Displaying the cards on a table or pinning them to a board and moving them around will help your mind establish associations more easily, thus clearing the path for building the screenplay and envisioning the film.

► Practical tip: you can use the index card method also in other phases of the writing process, not only to elaborate on the initial ideas. For example, you can use it when you need to put into sequence some scenes, or to flesh out your characters' identities.

After you have found some staples (for example a theme, a character, or a situation), the story starts to take shape.



2.2 Down the Rabbit Hole: Entering the Story-ness of a Film

Once the idea is settled down, the second step consists of transforming that idea into something more organized and detailed: a story. In this phase, we are like Alice, who, after seeing the White Rabbit (our initial idea), decides to follow him in his hole, entering into a wonderland that ends up in a screenplay. Bur first, we need to reflect on our half-baked idea and consider how to "cook" it in order to develop it into a story.

This phase can vary in duration, depending very much on the individual project. For a feature film or a television series, it can last months or even years. In short films, however, since the idea is usually more precise and concise, this stage could be shorter. In both cases, what matters is that we need to take out time to build a well-crafted story, a narrative that works and suits our communicative purposes.

Of course, building a convincing story is not that easy, mainly because we may not have a clear idea of what our story is about and what its constitutive elements should be. You could start by writing a logline, that's to say, a one-or two-sentence summation of the whole story you have decided to narrate. Then, you need to develop that narrative core, transforming it into a narrative structure. But how to transform your idea into a whole story, how to pass from a logline to a well-defined script? Well, it could be tricky. As Robert McKee (1997) has written, "the idea of the story is like the idea of music. We've heard tunes all our lives. We can dance and sing along. We think we understand music until we try to compose it and what comes out of the piano scares the cat". Fortunately, you can rely on some tips and formulas to create and manage the story. To be fair, you have to remember that all the suggestions, prescriptions, and procedures we find in screenwriting manuals (even this one!) are a posteriori models; recipes stemmed from analyzing many successful examples. The abstract rules and principles they contain, however, may work as a solid basis to build on the expertise you need to articulate your story and spin the tale. And possibly, in a well-crafted way, a story where all its units (characters, development, events, setting(s), narrative genre, and idea) melt together in a harmonious unity.

The first rule to creating the structure of your story is to identify the story events. Generally speaking, an event implies change (happened to/caused by someone or something). Story events are not trivial but significant changes. As stated by Mckee, "a STORY EVENT creates meaningful change in the life situation of a character" (1997, p.33), which concerns some values, that's to say universal qualities of human experiences (love, hate, rage, fear, etc.).

To achieve story events, you need to create a CONFLICT. Indeed, the second rule you

need to learn when transforming your idea into a beautifully told story is: "**conflict is everything**"! Conflict is the necessary (though not always sufficient) condition for having a story. It is not possible to have a story without conflict. The story event is produced by a conflict, which can occur at many levels:

Inner: the conflict is inside the character, between contradictory psychologic traits. In this case, the protagonist is also their own antagonist.

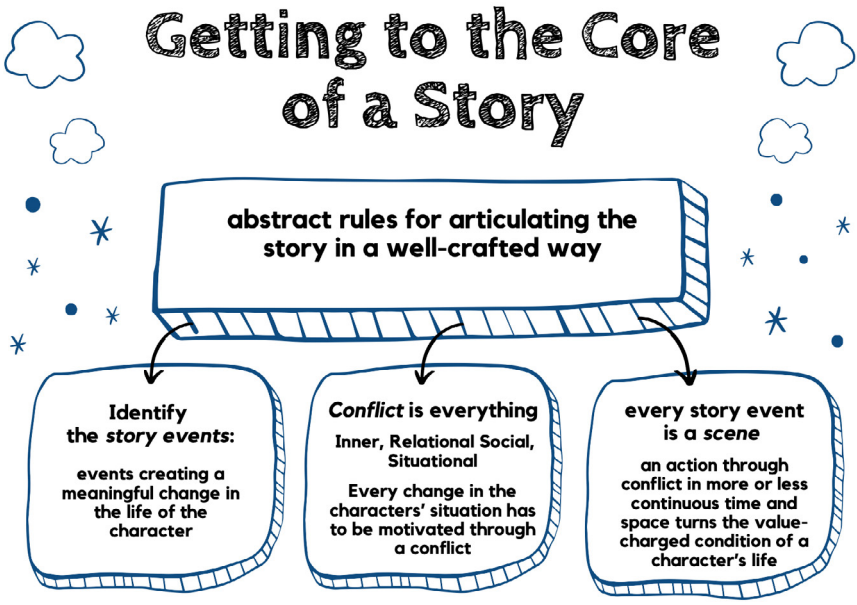
Relational: the classic conflict between the protagonist and one or more other characters. It is a commonplace and flexible type of conflict, forming the basis of love stories as well as detective stories or thrillers. In this case, conflict can also be an opposing character, the **antagonist**.

Social: the conflicts in which a character clashes with a larger system or a social, moral, and/or legal institution.

Situational: extreme situations where the conflict is a struggle for survival (i.e. all disaster films).

It is not important to classify the kind of conflict, but it is crucial that it is there. If your story seems weak, the reason may be that the conflict is not well-defined or even lacking. Every change in the characters' situation has to be motivated through a conflict, which is the momentum fueling the engine of your story.

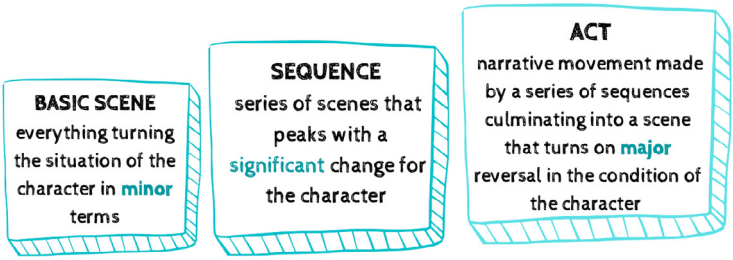
Every time you have a conflict that changes the situation of the characters and their values, you have a SCENE. The third rule for structuring our story says that **every story event is a scene**. We can define a scene as "an action through conflict in more or less continuous time and space that turns the value-charged condition of a character's life" (Mckee 1997, 36). If the condition of a character or his/her values are not changed from one scene to the other if nothing meaningful happened to that character, it is a nonevent, and then we could not have a scene. How can you identify a meaningful event? The simplest answer is: by the fact that you cannot move it. Random and unnecessary events are those that can be moved consistently from one point to another in the story. A good story is one in which events cannot be moved: every scene has a structural function.



The scene is the first unit in the design of your story. Every scene changes the situation of the character in some way. While some scenes produce minor or insignificant modifications, others have more power, and the change they bare has a greater impact on the story. A scene that introduces to the story a powerful change is the one that climaxes a sequence.

A SEQUENCE is a series of scenes that culminated with a significant change. It forms a distinct narrative unit, which is usually connected either by a unity of location or a unity of time. The sequences, put together, represent the steps of the journey the protagonist sets out toward the reaching of their object of value. This journey is the basic configuration of a story and is conventionally divided into three main parts or, to better say three acts.

An ACT is a narrative movement made by a series of sequences that culminate into a scene that turns on a major reversal in the condition of the characters and their values. The difference between a basic scene, a scene that apexes a sequence, and a scene cupping an act relies on the degree of impact that change has on the character (on his/her inner life, on his/her relationship with other characters, and the world, etc.)



2.2.1 The Three-Acts Structure

Since Aristotle, the conventional way to build a story is to structure three different moments. As Linda Seger beautifully synthetizes:

"Dramatic composition, almost from the beginning of the recorded drama, has tended toward the three-act structure. Whether it's a Greek tragedy, a five-act Shakespeare play, a four-act dramatic TV series, or a seven-act Movie-of-the-Week, we still see the basic three-act structure: beginning, middle, and end—or the setup of the story in Act One, the development of the story in Act Two, and then build to a climax and a resolution in Act Three" (2010, p. 62).

Put simply, the three-act structure consists of three phases: setup, development (sometimes called confrontation), and resolution. Each of them accomplishes a specific goal: the first one is meant to give the direction, the second one the momentum, and the last one the clarification.

The First Act corresponds to the SET UP. In this part, you have to create and explain the fundamental coordinates of the story: who's the protagonist? Who are the main characters? What's the context? Where is it located? When does it take place? What's the genre (comedy, drama, sci-fi, horror, action-adventure, thriller, or a combination of them)? In most films, the audience needs to see a few minutes of context before anything happens, so people have the opportunity to enter the story world and get oriented in it. Information is necessary for the audience to familiarise themselves with the story and its characters and their life before the point at which the story starts.

A good story, to be interesting from the beginning to the end, resorts to exciting and unforeseeable twists and TURNING POINTS. They:

- turn the action in new directions
- require decision and efforts by the main character
- raise the stakes
- raise the audience's attention

In a story, there are two turning points that must take place to keep the action moving and rising. One of these two points is collocated between the First and the Second Act, and it is called INCITING INCIDENT: it is an event that sets the main character or characters on their journey throughout the narrative. You need it to move from context to story and to put the narrative in motion. For example, in *The Lord of the Rings* (2001), Frodo finds the ring and leaves his home in the Shire to accomplish his mission (to throw the ring into Mount Doom): this is the triggering incident, the catalyst event that creates the main conflict and fuels the story.

The inciting incident introduces the audience to the Second Act, corresponding to the DEVELOPMENT. It begins once the character, after the inciting incident, cannot turn back, but must charge ahead to the 'confrontation' with challenges and obstacles, which increase as the story progresses. It represents the development of the story.

You can use the Second Act to:

- Explore side characters.

These figures are important to unveil flaws in your protagonist, show how he/she interacts with others, or just make things harder for the hero.

- Create More Problems.

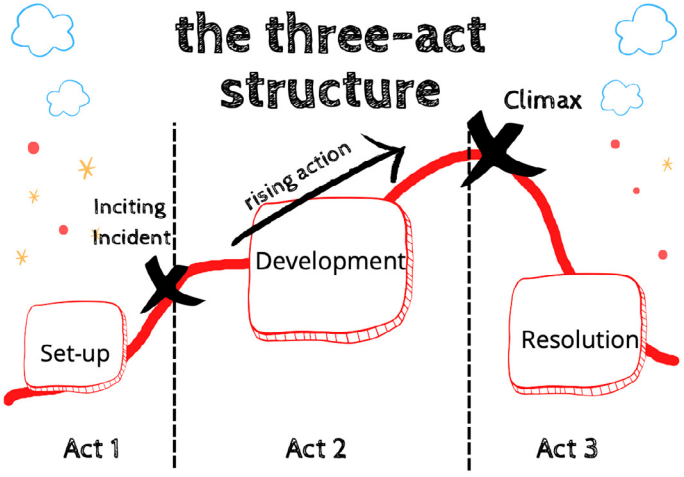
The main character has a goal to achieve and your mission, as a storyteller, is to make the hero's path towards his/her goal very hard. Then, in the second act, you need to add difficulties, obstacles, and conflicts to keep the main character from getting what he/she wants.

- Develop the character's internal struggle.

The protagonists' conflicts and complications on their journey should not only be physical or external but also psychological and emotional.

At the end of the Second Act, a second turning point changes the action once again, forcefully moving the story into the Third Act. Sometimes the second turning point is composed of (1) a dark moment, followed by (2) a reaction by the main character. This turning point not only pushes the story into a new direction but gives momentum to the

plot, speeding up the action and pushing the story toward its conclusion. Indeed, the Third Act entails the RESOLUTION of the story. In this act, there is the CLIMAX of the story, its big finish, and the moment of maximum emotional tension. The hero obtains their object of value, the villain is defied and (usually) defeated, and it's time to return home.



The Aristotelian structure is the most frequent narrative form for feature films, but things may be a little bit different if you are thinking of realizing a short film.

Short films often use the circular form. It is a simple structure, but it still gives order and unity. If it suits your story, use it.

Short films often use a mechanism based on the exact reversal of the situation. In this case, the conflict is played out mainly against the spectator. This is also a classic structure that can be used.

Many short films rely on the final twist. But be careful not to depend too much on the surprise effect. First of all, viewers, especially of short films, are very crafty, and they expect it. So, either the surprise effect is masterfully executed and causes a real shock, or make sure that the effectiveness of the short film does not lie only in the power of the final twist.

Short films are often seen, because of their short duration, as the realm of "everything is allowed", as if no real meaning or story is needed. This is not true, and you can create meaningful stories even in very short movies. To do so, you can count on some tips:

Set-up/pay-of: Preparation (set up) is useful in order to avoid casualties and events are perceived as "deus ex machina", that's to say plunged down from the sky directly by the will of the God-author. When you pick up and gather the information (pay off) you perceive there is an overall sense, due to the fact that the events were prepared with clues or premises.

Dramatic irony: it is a very interesting type of conflict, based on the fact that the spectator has information that at least one of the characters involved in the scene does not have. This ignorance leads not only to a situation of conflict that is dramaturgically useful but also to suspense, tragedy, pitifulness... Dramatic irony pleases the viewers because it puts them in a position of cognitive superiority over the characters, a position that is not possible in real life.

Suspense and plot twist: a plot twist is when there are two people sitting at a table talking and suddenly a bomb explodes. Rather, suspense is when we see two people sitting at a table talking and we know there is a bomb under the table. The advantage of suspense is tension, the advantage of the twist is surprise.

2.2.2 Putting Your Hero on the Journey

The three-act structure can also be seen from the point of view of the main character, the hero. The "character arc" has been described by Chis Vogler (relying on the work by Joseph Campbell) analyzing the typical narrative structure, common to all stories, which he calls "the hero's journey". In this journey, the archetype known as The Hero goes out, undertakes a mission, and, overcoming a decisive crisis, achieves great deeds and finally comes home changed. This journey is divided into twelve stages:

THE ORDINARY WORLD. (set up): the hero is set in his/her environment, which is in equilibrium.

THE CALL TO ADVENTURE. Something upsets the situation and destroys the equilibrium, either from external forces or from intimate, psychological dynamics rising up from deep within.

REFUSAL OF THE CALL. The hero feels the fear of the unknown and tries to turn away from the adventure. To be a hero, our protagonist must tend toward something and flees from something else: that is, to simplify, he/she has the desire (to reach something, to be someone, etc.) and the fear he/she would not be able to fulfill his/her wish. The plot has

the task of creating events that hinder or support his/her desire by pushing him/her to make choices that bring him/her closer to his "danger zone", which is the theme of the entire story.

MEETING WITH THE MENTOR. The hero met someone who helps him/her to overcome his fears and to start the journey

CROSSING THE THRESHOLD. At the end of Act One, the hero leaves the Ordinary World and enters a new territory or condition (an extra-ordinary/special world), with unexperienced rules and values.

TESTS, ALLIES, AND ENEMIES. In the Second Act, the hero is tested by some challenges (which can be also incarnated by enemies) and finds new friends/allays who will help him/her.

APPROACH. The action rises and the hero, with his/her newfound allies, prepares himself/herself for the major challenge with the antagonist.

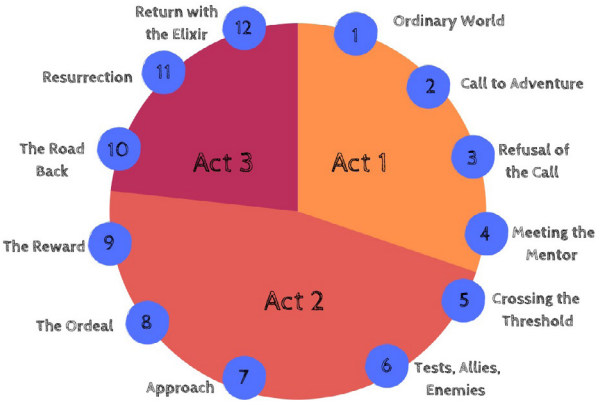
THE ORDEAL. The hero confronts the antagonist or faces their greatest fear. Out of the moment of death comes a new life.

THE REWARD. The hero takes possession of their object of value and celebrates with their friends.

THE ROAD BACK. About three-fourths of the way through the story, the hero has completed the adventure, leaving the extraordinary world, but the antagonist is not totally defeated and attacks again.

THE RESURRECTION. At the climax, the hero is harshly tested once more. There is another moment of death and rebirth, and the hero is finally fully transformed: he/she has overcome the fears and reached the object of desire. The polarities that altered the initial equilibrium of the ordinary world are resolved.

RETURN WITH THE ELIXIR. The hero, transformed and enriched, returns home or starts a new adventure.



2.3 Things are Looking Up: From the Story to the Script

Once you have the spine of your story (set the ambience, created your characters, placed the conflicts, shaped their "adventure", etc.), the next step in the creation of a screenplay is to fill in this barebone structure, making your story more convincing, true-to-life.

2.3.1 Research and Development

Your story will be based on something you know about, but writing and developing your story, you might find that questions emerge, and you need more information. Perhaps, you have characters set in a specific work environment (a hospital, a school, a court, etc.) and you need to know the rules operating in these workplaces; maybe, your characters have to cope with specific subjects (law, history, maths, etc.) and you realize that you don't know enough about it. It is quite important to do some research on the individual topics your story is dealing with because, otherwise, it runs the risk of being inconsistent. Every story has an inner logic that has to make sense. For example: if you're writing a story about a doctor and you don't know anything about anatomy, it would be better to do some research, because a doctor confusing the lung with the liver is not very much reliable, nor is your story!

You can do research in many ways:

- Library research: looking at books, articles, diaries, and newspapers, and consulting librarians for other resources. You can also use digital tools like Google, social media, website, or any other source that could help you to learn something more on the topics.

- Field research: going to a specific place and talking with people directly involved. For example, people who have lived through a particular historical event and can help you get the facts and memories.

Doing enough research and developing your story in order to foster its credibility have important consequences on the entire script because research determines the characters' vocabulary, and the way they relate to each other and with the story world. Remember: a consistent story world helps to organize your thoughts and to communicate your idea and point of view in a more effective way.

2.3.2 Telling a Story... Visually

In the process of crafting your script, you will have to consider that telling a story using the film language means combining images, sound, and words. Then, it is important to understand how to convey your idea through action and images and, at the same time, using dialogues.

A first, fundamental rule we have to keep in mind is to show, not tell!

Manicured, lavish descriptions of characters' emotional states, as well as of their thoughts, find little room in a movie. Inner states, opinions, planes, and reflections your characters make cannot be just written down on paper like in a novel, but they should be shown through the actions performed by the characters. Movie stories are first and foremost visual stories, and the inner world must be cinematically dramatized. That means everything has to be displayed by actors' movements and words, narrated through the images and the dialogue: every time you imagine your character thinking about something, you have to make him do something that expresses that feeling/thought. It could be a physical action, or it could be something he/she says to someone, even to himself/herself (using the voice-over technique).

For example, in your story, your character, Marc, is secretly in love with a classmate, Jenny, and every time they meet, especially when she smiles, he is embarrassed, behaves awkwardly, and ends up saying something inappropriate, making a fool of himself.

How can you tell this story visually? How can make the audience understand the situation, the feelings Marc has for Jenny, and his reactions when he sees her?

- By actions:

when Marc sees Jenny, he freezes, starts sweating, rocking on his heels, and turns red when she smiles at him.

- By dialogues:

Jenny is approaching, smiling at Marc and, with a dreamy expression on his face, he starts talking to himself saying: "oh my God, she's coming! She is so beautiful..I love the way she smiles. I hope to be able to say something doesn't sound completely stupid this time."

- By actions and dialogues:

Jenny is approaching and smiles at Marc. Marc freezes and starts sweating, rocking on his heels.

Jenny: Hi Marc, it's nice to see you! What's new?

Marc: Hi Jenny, do you know why the Egyptian crocodile won't' stop drinking?

Jenny (with a confused expression on her face): Ehm, no...

Marc: Because he is in denial.

Marc laughs embarrassedly and turns red.

► Practical Tips:

- When writing dialogues, think about how people really speak (if people speak in slang, use it).

- Avoid your characters appearing as they're giving a speech.

- Keep the dialogues natural. If they sound forced, unfamiliar and odd, then rewrite them.

2.3.3 Concretising Your Story: Towards the Writing of a Screenplay

Now you have an idea, a story with characters and conflicts, and a narrative structure. What's next?

The further step consists in concretizing all the materials into a screenplay. While everyone knows what a screenplay looks like – more or less - less attention is paid to the intermediate phases culminating into the screenplay.

The first phase is the **SUBJECT**.

The subject is a fairly generic term to define the written form that evokes and describes the idea, the heart of a film. For a short film, it can be a page, a page and a half, or even less than a page if you have been very good at focusing on the point of the film. For what concerns its design, it must evoke as much as possible the style, the tone, the effects, and the atmosphere of the whole film: if the film makes you laugh, the subject, as far as possible, must make you laugh too; if a plot twist has to surprise you in the film, you also have to be surprised when reading the subject.

The subject is usually written using the present tense, and as straightforward as possible: do not say "Let's see x that..." unless it is necessary to understand something related to the story and privilege a way to communicate the idea of the film without explaining it.

The three-act structure, or at least the fundamental turning points of the story must be underlined. It is not important to already detail the twists unless they are fundamental to understanding the overall functioning of the story. The most important thing is to highlight, as much as possible, the strength of the idea and the story you have in mind.

Here few tips to write a good subject:

- Simple concepts in a simple form.

- Keep the plot description and the entanglement as straight as possible.

- Keep the characters' descriptions reduced to a minimum.

- Avoid literary ornaments and intellectualistic references (these are not forbidden but must not take over).

- Summarise the content of the film and focus on its substance.

The second phase is called **TREATMENT**.

It is a detailed written description of the story and how your movie will tell it. In the treatment, you design the narrative material and the scene following the order of the **syuzhet** rather than the one of the **fabula** (i.e. if you think of putting the last scene at the beginning of the film, in this phase that scene should be put at the beginning of the film, while in the previous phase, the subject, it was at the end).

Then, using the treatment as a backbone, you can write a fully developed **SCREENPLAY**.

It is a service text, aimed at the making of the film, and that is how it should be thought of. It is not an artistic text in its own right and, while it might have aesthetic and narrative qualities, its main goal is to provide all the useful information for those who will actually have to make the film: the lines for the actors, the captions for the set designer and the costume designer, the information for all those involved in the production and who have to establish a budget and, of course, all the elements the director need to shoot the scenes. It must therefore be a very clear document, which in a few words should evoke both the atmosphere you want to suggest in the film, but also all the necessary technical information.

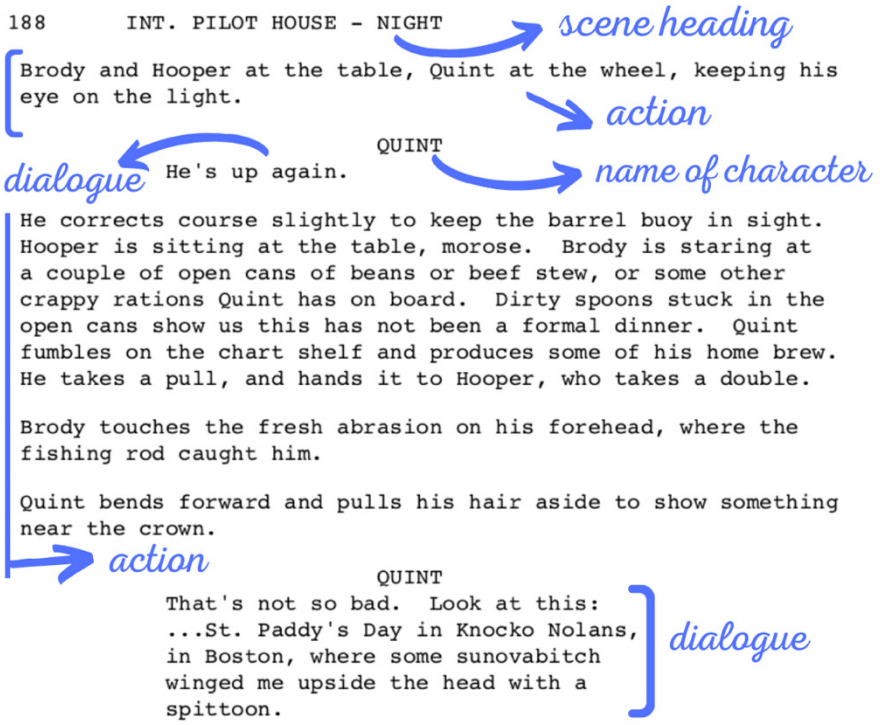
How to write a screenplay:

Remember to use to graphic design of the document to highlight:

Scene heading: where and when the scene takes place (indicate also information about light and set)

Action: take care to describe the action, who is doing what, when, where, and how.

Character: remember to indicate the name of the character before starting to write his/her lines (dialogue)



Now you have a screenplay, it's time to start planning the shooting!

Vocabulary

Antagonist: The Character(s) who opposes the protagonist and create narrative conflict by challenging, obstructing, or confronting the main character(s). The antagonist can take many forms, including an individual character, a force, a group of people, an institution or even a (dark) side of the protagonist's inner character.

Archetype: Refers to a general character, trait or configuration that embodies an example or a model with ideal features. It can be a figure, a representation or even a symbol. As a narrative device, the archetype is a returning motif throughout stories that represents universal pattern of human behavior.

Fabula: Equates to the thematic content of the story. It is the raw material of a story, presented in the sequence as the events are experienced in the fictional world.

Pitch: Term used in the film industry to indicate the act of explain in one sentence the basic idea of a movie.

Stereotype: Unsophisticated and fixed mental images of individuals and social groups based on the recurrence of some (often exaggerated) physical as well as psychological traits. Such conventionalized beliefs, anchored in everyday cultural knowledge, provide key points of reference for the narrative construction of fictional characters.

Syuzhet: Equates the chronological order of the events within the narrative. It is the story how it is organized, and how it is presented to the viewer. It affects the viewer's perception of cause and effect, his/her access to information and, consequently, his/her feeling of emotional states.

Voice over: Production technique consisting in a voice recorded for off-screen use. It is when the actor's thoughts are said aloud but the image is not of the actor's lips moving. It can be used when the invisible narrator speaks over the images or to express inner states of mind.

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3 Realizing your film

Up to this point, the scriptwriter was the "protagonist" of the work. From this point onwards, however, the director takes over as the person in charge of the shoot and the practical realization of the movie.

3.1 From Screenplay to Storyboard

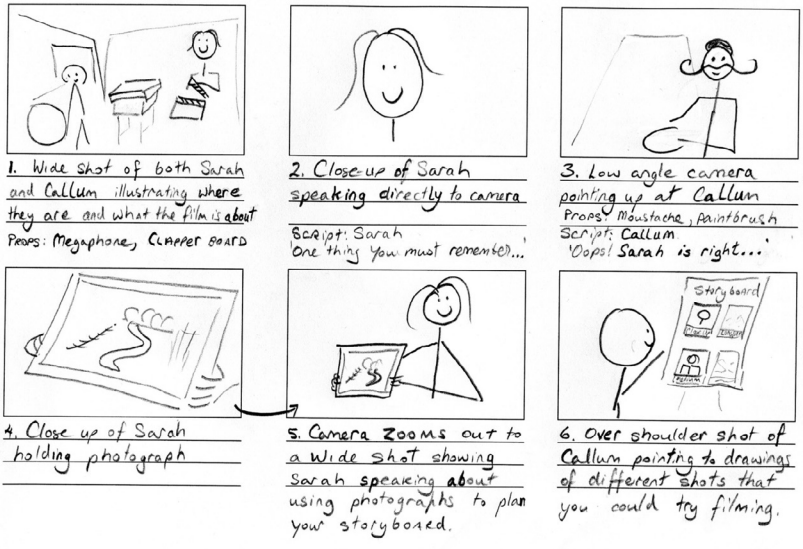
Once you have the screenplay, a good and practical idea is to "visualize" it, mapping it in your mind and then putting it "on paper." This operation produces a STORYBOARD. It is a shot-by-shot layout, displaying what the film will look like, in terms of images, scenes, and sequences, before moving on to actually shooting the scenes with the camera. Storyboards are tools to help the director think visually about the story, so they don't have to be impeccable and completed: even basic sketches can help you visualize your movie. You can use stick figures for the people, squares for houses, a circle for the sun, and road lines. The essential goal is not to produce an artistic masterpiece but a helpful tool that helps you get an idea of what each shot will look like.

To realize a storyboard, you need to decide what information is included in the shot, which actors will appear, what they will do, and how to shoot.

You can use this storyboard template:

Storyboard template
Planning the filming of the promotional film

Here's a practical example of a storyboard:



You can also use photos instead of drawings if you feel more comfortable.

Some directors plan every shot via a storyboard, where every picture represents precisely what they want each shot to look like. This is not an actual rule, but, as a general recommendation, we could say that the more complex the screenplay is, the more accurate the storyboard should be. This would help you be more performative once you organize and rationalize the shooting.

A storyboard means thinking about how you want the shots to appear before you arrive on the set the day of the shoot. Of course, you can always make changes, but having a clear idea of the work you will have to do with the camera will optimize your time.

3.2 It's Time to Get Your Hands Dirty: Setting Up the Stage

Once the storyboard is finalized, you must prepare the set and arrange the filming operations before actually starting the shooting. A proper set design will help you avoid common traps, and ensure your shoot goes as smoothly as possible.

There are a few keys to properly setting the stage:

1. Choosing a location

Depending on your project, you need to find a place (or more than one) that suits your needs. Once you have selected the set, check the place where you're planning to film in advance, possibly more than once. When you visit the locations ask yourself the following questions:

- Do you need permission to film there?
- Will you have to pay to film there?
- Can you shoot all the scenes in the same place?
- Do you think the light is right? Or will you need to bring reflectors?
- Will you have the permission to stay on the set for one day or more without interruptions?
- If you're planning to record live sound, will there be any disturbing sounds in the background?

2. Camera Location And Framing

Once you've got your location, you'll need to determine how best to set it up. Consider if you have power sources available, what lighting equipment you will need, the most suitable

backdrops, and the physical space you need for the camera movements or your choreography. Moreover, if you plan to film exterior shots, take care to have a plan B in case of bad weather!

You also have to determine the right angles, the best spots for placing the camera and testing it, and look for visual problems (reflective surfaces, distractions, flashes, etc.). The best way to do that is by positioning an object or a volunteer as a substitute on the spot where the actors will be (that's why you need a storyboard!).

3. Lighting design

When your camera is set, you then need to design your lighting setup accordingly. Remember to consider the mood of the scenes and to set up the lights consequently, as they can be used to create visual meaning. Light can be natural or artificial (or both), and you need to consider the colour, the temperature (the way to describe the light appearance provided by a light bulb), the placement of the actors, etc. The primary purpose is to illuminate the subject(s) and amplify the scene's overall mood.

4. Supports and props

In order to provide authenticity and context to the scenes, you need the right props and materials. They are fundamental to delivering the necessary visual cues helping orient the viewers and making your story more consistent from a visual point of view. For example, if you plan to film a story set in the XVII century, the actors cannot wear jeans and a t-shirt.

3.3. "Lights, Camera, Action!": Directing your Film

One of the most popular metaphors to describe the work of the director is that of the conductor. François Truffaut in *La nuit américaine* (1973) said that a director is someone who is constantly being asked questions, questions about everything. So, the first role of the director is to coordinate the different technical and artistic contributions, giving them a unitary and inevitably 'personal' direction. To be effective, the director uses his or her imagination to think about the story, how the story should be told and what the film should look like. It is the director who: helps shape the script (often with the writer), designs the storyboard, picks the crew and chooses the actors (figuring out who's the best to play each character), decides the shots for every scene, etc. Basically, the director oversees everything. Each director has their own method: some deal

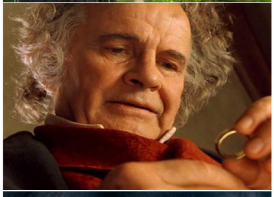
with the actors more than with the technical aspects, or vice versa. Both these aspects, however, are fundamental, and therefore we will examine them in detail.

Let's start with the technical stuff!

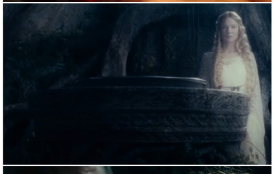
3.3.1 The Picture

When you're planning your images, take care to consider these factors:

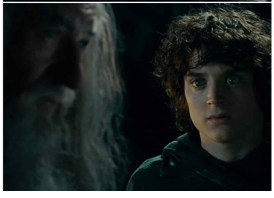
SHOT SIZE
How much of the scene is included in each image (see below)



POSITION/ ANGLE
Where to position the camera in relation to the subjects (see below)



COMPOSITION
How to arrange subjects/things inside the picture in relation to the background

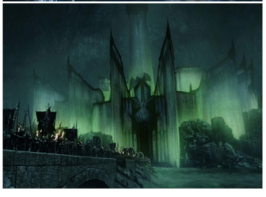


LIGHT
What's the light like and where it's come from

LENS
Decide what element(s) of the image should be in focus

EYELINE
Consider where the actor is looking at in relation to the sense of the scene

MOVEMENT
If the subjects are moving in the image, take care to plan how the camera will follow them



COLOUR
Colour can help you to tell your story and express your idea

The nnotion of light and **ILLUMINATION** deserves further consideration. The light source illuminating the scene can be placed in different positions according to what is filmed. Even this choice is not indifferent to the director's desired effect. For example, lighting that accentuates chiaroscuro effects is generally used to emphasize dramatic situations.

There are two major possibilities to insert the lights in the frame:

- light that illuminates without being seen (**neutral light**)

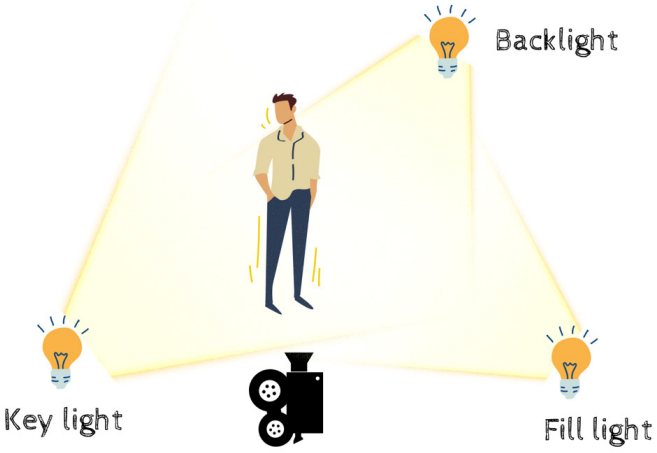
- light that does not just illuminate things but shows itself as a physical presence (**anti-naturalistic light**).

There is a standard rule you can follow to optimise and balance the illumination of the scene: **the three-point lighting rule**. According to this principle, you have to set up three light points:

- **Key light**: the primary light source for your scene. This light has the strongest intensity (although it must be somewhat diffuse) and is positioned at a 45-degree angle in front of the subject to avoid creating too many shadows.

- **Fill light**: it balances the shadows produced by the key light, exposing the details of a subject. For that reason, the fill light is typically positioned opposite of the key light and it is advisable that its brightness is not too intense (50 % of the key light).

- **Backlight**: itis the third and final light of your three-point setup. And it is used to avoid that the subject seems flat and loses dimensionality. To counterpose of this effect, you place a low-intensity light behind it.



Besides these general guidelines, there are other tips we can use to improve our image once we shoot.

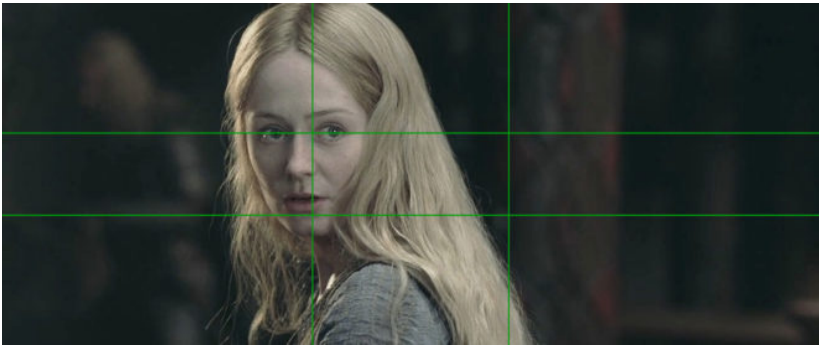
For example, when it comes to our **COMPOSITION**. The main goal is usually to catalyse the

viewer's perception and attention towards those parts of the image that are most desired.

Our eyes, usually, focus primarily on the geometric centre of the image:

Alternatively, you can follow the so-called "**Rule of thirds**":

Commonly used also in photography (and extending to cinematography), the rule of third entails a type of composition in which the image is ideally divided into thirds, both horizontally and vertically. The result is a grid composed of two horizontal and two vertical lines. The eye of the audience lands on points of focus at the intersection of these lines. Accordingly, a frame's main subject or subjects should occupy an intersection and continue along the horizontal or vertical line from it.



3.3.2. Framing and shots sizes

Deciding on framing means many things: where to place the camera (at what point, at what distance and height, at what angle and inclination), but also which lenses to use. The director discusses these aspects with the **cinematographer**, especially the choice of lenses and lighting.

A **frame** is a single image of film or video. Framing (a shot) entails designing the visual content of a series of frames as seen from a single point of view, i.e., a fixed camera.

There are different types or, to better say, **sizes of shots**, which differ from each other according to the figure's relationship with the setting. Learning this nomenclature is essential to make all the people participating in the project "speak the same language" and effectively communicate when it comes to realizing the shooting.

We can divide the shots into two main branches: A) shots indicating the subject size and B) shots indicating camera angle/placement.

A) shots indicating subject size:

Generally speaking, we can identify three main shot sizes: Long, Medium, and Close.

- Long shots show the subject from a distance, emphasising place and location,

- Medium shots put emphasize on the subject while showing some of the surrounding environment.

- Close shots disclose details of the subject, thus emphasizing the emotional states of a character

To be more precise:

EXTREME LONG SHOT

The focus is totally on the setting and the figures are small or even absent. This type of shot is particularly useful for establishing a scene (see Establishing Shot below). Characters don't necessarily have to be noticeable in this shot

LONG SHOT

The figure is frames head to foot. The character becomes more centered than in an Extreme Long Shot, but the frame still tends to be dominated by the setting.

FULL SHOT

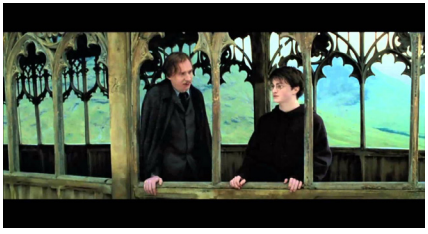
(also known as FULL BODY SHOT)

Character are from head to toes, with the subject filling the frame. The emphasis tends to be more on action and movement rather than the expression of character's emotions

MEDIUM LONG SHOT

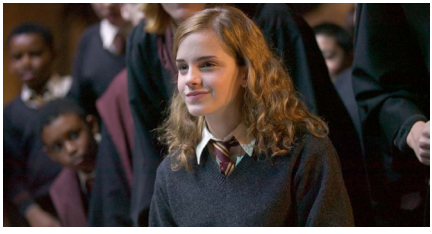
(also known as AMERICAN SHOT)

The frame includes three quarters of the body and shows subject from the knees up.



MEDIUM SHOT

Shows part of the subject in more detail. For a person, a medium shot typically frames them from hips to head.



MEDIUM CLOSE-UP

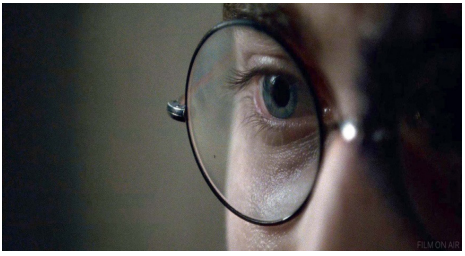
It generally frames the subject from chest or shoulder up.

CLOSE-UP

Fills the screen with part of the subject, usually a person's head/face. Framed this closely, the emotions and reactions of a character lead the scene

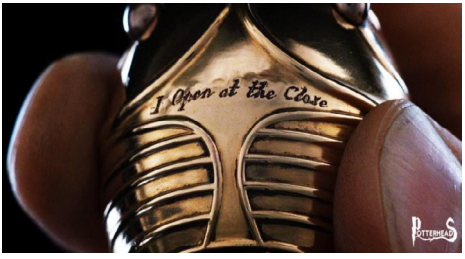
BIG CLOSE-UP (also known as CHOKER)

The frame includes just the main features of the face, usually from above the eyebrows to below the mouth



EXTREME CLOSE-UP

Emphasizes a small area or detail of the subject, such as the eye(s) or mouth.



DETAIL

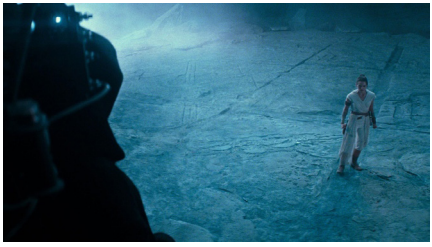
Frame focused on a detail of an object that has a particular significance of the comprehension of scene or the movie.

B) Shots indicating camera angles

In addition to the size of subject within the frame, shot types can also indicate where a camera is placed in relation to the subject, hence determining different points of view. About camera positions we can identify some shots:

EYE LEVEL SHOT

Shot taken with the camera approximately at human eye level, resulting in a neutral effect on the audience.



HIGH ANGLE SHOT

(also known as PLONGÉE)

Subject is framed from above. This can have the effect of making the subject seem vulnerable, weak, or scared.

LOW ANGLE SHOT

(also known as CONTRE-PLONGÉE)

Subject is framed from below eye level. This can have the effect of making the subject look dominant, heroic, or threatening.

DUTCH ANGLE SHOT

Shot in which the camera is set at an angle on its roll axis so that the horizon line is not plane. It is often used to express a disoriented or uneasy psychological state.

OVER-THE-SHOULDER SHOT

Subject is framed (in a medium close-up) from behind the shoulder of another character. The shoulder, neck, and/or back of the head of the subject facing away from the camera remains in frame. Interviews and dialogue scenes look more natural with this frame.

ESTABLISHING SHOT

One or more wide shots that inform the viewer of the place where the action will take place. The facial expressions of the characters (if present) are unreadable; the important thing is character's relationship with the surroundings.

POINT OF VIEW SHOT

Shot intended to simulate what a specific character in a scene is seeing. This puts the audience directly into the head of the character.

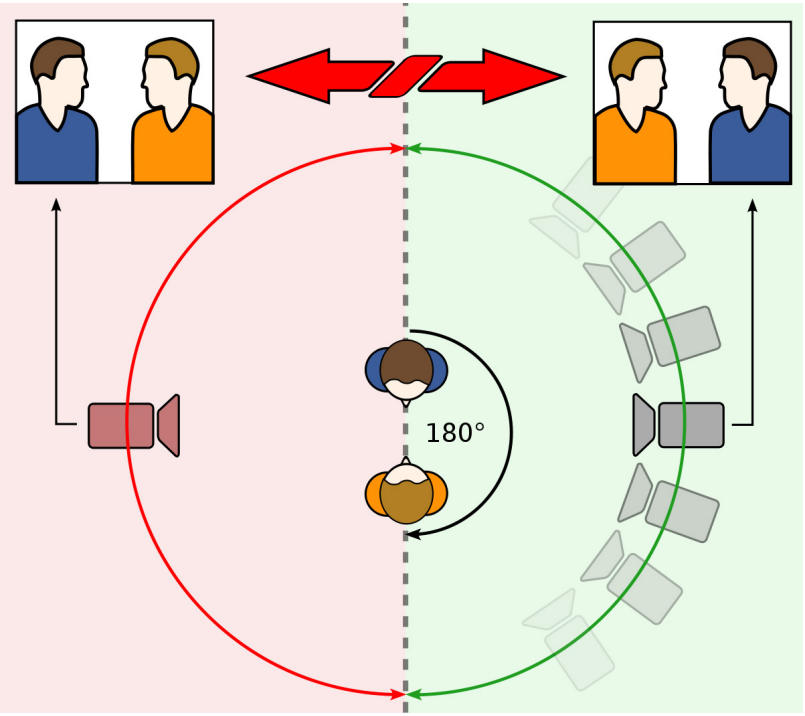
The director does not only decide on the cut of the shots and camera movements but also on where to place the camera. Contrary to what is often believed, a director's talent does not lie in creating the "strangest" (memorable??) shots, but in finding the "right" positions with respect to narrative development and the relationship between characters.

In order to orientate between two consecutive images, the viewer must have points of reference: *continuity* must therefore be ensured! In order to arrive at the montage with shots that can be connected, it is necessary to observe the **180° RULE**:

It is a basic rule regarding the on-screen spatial relationship between two characters or the interaction between characters and objects within a scene. According to Bordwell and Thompson, "the scene's action, a person walking, two people conversing, a car racing along a road is assumed to take place along a discernible, predictable line" (1990, 221).

The 180° rule states that the camera should be kept on one side of this lane, intended as an imaginary axis between two characters so that the first character is always framed right of the second character. So, when filming them, their positions remain consistent in relation to each other. The transition from one character to the character opposite is called **SHOT/REVERSE SHOT**. The reverse shot is not the shot that bypasses the line, but the one showing the space corresponding to that of the interlocutor (thus remaining on this side of the line).

This rule ensures the continuity of the film because if you to break this rule by moving the camera beyond the line, you could end up with both of the characters being on the same side of the screen, which is spatially confusing for an audience.



By combining master shots with shots/reverse shots during editing, the result will be a scene seen from various angles.

An alternative to using various angles to cover the action is to use a single point of view, using a camera positioned on a Steadicam. This method is commonly referred to as a **LONG TAKE**. It is a particularly long shot, without cuts or interruptions, which captures a scene as a whole. It is a shot that is envisioned to appear as a single, continuous take in the film's final edit.

Long takes are particularly appreciated by those directors who pursue realism (as real-time and film time correspond) and high qualitative levels in terms of cinematographic technique. Indeed, long takes entails a particularly difficult work, since you cannot count on editing and backup shots to correct your errors (an object out of place, unexpected events, a misspoken or badly told line, etc.)

3.3.3 Camera Movements

Camera movements are a specific code of the audiovisual language, which is specific to those practices involving moving images. A fundamental parameter of framing is therefore also constituted by the staticity or dynamism of the camera. Among camera movements, we distinguish three major types:

PAN: Generally, it is used to describe an environment, either external or internal, so that the viewer can get an overview of the whole. Consequently, panning is generally slow. Otherwise, it can fulfil a relational function to connect two frames without cutting.

TRACKING SHOT: it occurs whenever the camera is moved in the space (in each of the three spatial dimensions, side, front and up). The camera is collocated upon mobile support, like a trail or a car. The Tracking shot is an expressive, highly connotative way to communicate the director's point of view because it increases or decreases the importance of the framed elements. It is also very important to determine the relationship between the camera's movement and the scene's elements (for example, the tracking shot can serve to follow the character or the main element).

ZOOM: It is a way of simulating tracking (indeed, zoom is often called optical tracking) through the use of a variable focus lens, which allows effects of moving closer or further away (zoom in/zoom out) from the framed subject. Compared to the tracking shot which is realised physically by moving the camera, the zoom provides a deformation of the optics and therefore a different rendering perspective and sharpness of the image.

Unless your budget allows you to invest in sophisticated devices like dollys, drones, Steadicams, etc., you will probably use the camera by yourself, and in a handheld manner. To stabilize the image, you can use an easel, but you can also move the camera by yourself without the aid of tripods or other devices. This technique is called **HAND HELD CAMERA** and is particularly appreciated by those directors who value aesthetic notions such as the idea of instability of the visual and the imitation of non-professional formats.

3.3.4 Filming with phones

Nowadays, mobile phones consent you to shoot any kind of film with professional, high-quality results. There are, however, pros and cons to using a phone:

PROS

- You probably already own a phone, and you don't need to buy expensive professional cameras and equipment.
- People are already accustomed to using it to shoot videos and probably you already know/have used many of the filming functions and possibilities of your device.
- It is easy to carry a phone with you even if you plan to shoot in unusual places.
- You can rely also on economically affordable devices that might help you to shoot better quality images, like stabilisers, tripods, sets of lens attachments, etc. Moreover, with a phone, you can film smooth tracking shots.

CONS

- The camera is tiny and does not consent you all the effects provided by a professional camera, especially for what concerns shot types.
- The phone does not perform well in low light, so if you plan to shoot at night or in particular light conditions (sunrise or sunset), mobile phones might not fit your necessities.
- Audio is limited, so you'll need to get very close to the actors to record them in good quality or use a separate microphone. Moreover, you may not be able to monitor what you're recording, running the risk to leave the set, get home and find out you have wasted your time because the audio is bad.
- It's hard to hold steady when you shoot, so you have to consider buying stabilisers, cases or clamps.
- Even with pro camera apps, adjustments and manual controls are limited.

3.3.5 The Sound (even the one of silence)

Sound is an incredibly important part of a movie. It helps set a mood, to direct the attention of the audience quite specifically within the image Especially in environmental communication, to filming subjects connected with ideas about preserving nature, habitats,

and so on, sound must be particularly considered. Sound in cinema takes many forms, which can be summarised into three categories: speech, music and noise (sound effects).

To be more precise, however, you can detect:

DIALOGUE: Conversations and verbal communication between two or more characters It is one of the film's most important parts because it drives the storylines and plots.

AMBIENT or BACKGROUND SOUND: It is the inherent sound of the place or location you're shooting in. This sound is extremely important in maintaining consistency.

SOUND EFFECTS: Sounds that are generally not very easy to reproduce (like military sounds in a war scene, a crowd cheering at the stadium). You can rely on pre-recorded sound libraries to source these types of sounds, often for free and then add them to the image in post-production.

FOLEY: Some people have never heard about it, but it is a quite interesting type of sound. Named after Jack Foley, who pioneered the practice of pre-recording the audio of everyday sounds, this term indicates all the sounds we commonly heard in everyday life (footsteps, sounds of fabrics, objects and props), which are fundamental to providing consistency to the film. They are recorded apart (there are online libraries you can use) and added to the images in sync when the film is already recorded.

MUSIC: it is one of the most important elements of the film because it has a pivotal role in driving the tone of a scene or a sequence. Through the right choice of music, the director is able to emphasise emotional charges, the tone, and the overall atmosphere of a scene or sequence, or even to better describe a character and his/her narrative role.

The configuration of such sounds (in terms of volume, rhythm, etc.) transcends matters directly related to cinema. But when it comes to using sounds in a movie, you need to consider some other technicalities. Each sound may have a connection with the **diegesis** and with or may be completely disconnected from the narrative level. We could have:

- SOUND IN: diegetic sound; the source is framed ► a song passes on the radio and it's heard both by characters and the audience.
- SOUND OFF: diegetic sound whose source remains in the off-screen ► characters and

audience heard the sound of the sea and the cry of seagulls but none of them appears in the frame.

- SOUND OVER: non-diegetic or internal diegetic sound (a character hears it in his mind).

3.3.6 Directing the actors

The other fundamental task of the director is working with actors to determine how their characters should be performed, and how a particular scene should appear. The actors, of course, give their contribution, but the director is the person most responsible for the final result, even for the final acting decisions.

Directing an actor means giving them the coordinates so that they can discover the intention of what they have to do. The problem of the film actor is that he cannot perform in continuity, in front of an audience as in theatre. The risk is that the performance is chopped up into a myriad of lines and movements without any overall unity. The director's task is to guide the actor to maintain the coherence of the character, giving them psychological and emotional coordinates. The essential point is to get the actor to play their role as if they were the character, not just replicating his/her attitudes but living them as his/her own.

Treating an actor like a puppet replicating gestures and inflexions is the director's biggest mistake. You cannot teach an actor how to be on set, but you can create the conditions that allow them to feel that character within themselves. To achieve this, the director must help the actor find the key to the character's performance. Maybe it would be helpful to animate them, make them react, and work on how **they empathize with the characters they are portraying emotionally.**

A crucial element in the relationship between director and actors is the number of takes for the same shot. There are directors who rehearse a lot but then limit the number of takes in order to safeguard the "freshness of the acting". On the other hand, there are directors who prefer to accumulate takes in order to obtain a particular intensity from the actor through tension and fatigue. The choice is yours, but remember that, whatever is your directing style, actors must be guided!

Vocabulary

Diegesis: Broadly speaking, the diegesis is a whole narrative world. Any narrative includes a diegesis, but each kind of story will render this time-space continuum in different ways. In film theory, the term indicates the spatio-temporal world depicted in the film. Anything within that world (such as dialogue or the sounds used to establish a location) is termed **diegetic** whereas anything outside it (such as a voiceover, music that only the audience can ear, or a superimposed caption) is **extradiegetic**.

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4 Editing and post-production

Post-production is the phase that follows after the film's wrap in production and where the editing of the audio-visual materials begins.

4.1 Put the Material Together and Cut It Out!

Once you have shot all the scenes and have all the raw footage at your disposal, it is time to start editing. During this phase, the film is finally assembled: you have the chance to look at all the available shots and decide which takes to insert, which shots to trim or rule out, and the order in which you set side by side the frames to create the film you have in mind. During editing, you really see your film coming together. As such, the editor, working closely with the director, decides what shots to use, how to assemble them together and how long to hold the duration of each shot before cutting to the next one. Good editing, then, is about selecting shots and combining them to convey the director's vision.

4.1.1 Do You Like Puzzles? The Meaning Editing

A movie in its raw form is like a puzzle: you have individual shots, music, sound effects, and maybe some visual effects and then you have to combine all these elements to make a complete, coherent film. However, editing is more than just piecing together shots into scenes and sequences. Editing is not only a mechanical process, but it is an art; the art of selecting the best/or most significant shots from the footage recorded on location and collecting, merging them into a consistent film.

According to some theoreticians, editing represents the cinematic's language true specificity. Even those who do not go that far claim that editing is one of the most crucial parts of making a movie: you may not notice good editing (film editing is often referred to as the "invisible art") because you are immersed in the story, but you'll definitely perceive bad editing since the movie will result being confusing, boring and not interesting.

This is because throughout editing you can convey meaning, deliver messages and emotionally affect the audience! Film directors discovered the power of editing from the medium's very beginning. What they realized was that the screen image does not need to show a person from head to toe and that the shots can be taken at different locations over a period of time and then combined into a narrative whole. Moreover, they found out that splicing together two shots creates an emotional and cognitive effect in the viewer's mind.

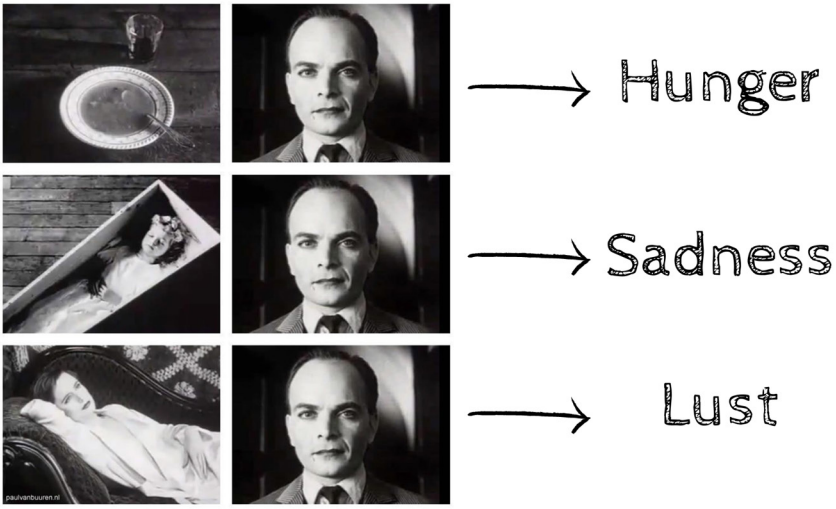
Especially for what concerns the emotional involvement of the audience, one of the most important theorisations is named "**the Kulešov Effect**".

The Kulešov Effect was a film experiment conducted by Soviet filmmaker Lev Kulešov in the 1910s and 1920s, who was interested in pushing boundaries and experimenting with creative editing techniques. Kulešov demonstrated how audiences derive more meaning from the interaction of two sequential shots (which is at the core of the editing process) from a single, isolated shot. The experiment also indicated that editing has a high impact on audiences both in terms of their emotional and intellectual involvement.

How does Kulešov achieve this result exactly?

While teaching at the Moscow Film School, he conducted an experiment to demonstrate how a viewer's interpretation of a character's facial expression can be influenced through its juxtaposition with a second image. He edited a close-up of an expressionless man (for which he used a still of the Tsarist silent film actor Ivan Mosjoukine), together with three alternate ending shots: a dead child in a coffin, a bowl of soup, and a woman lying on a sofa. Then, Kulešov showed the three edited films to three separate audiences and asked viewers to interpret what, in their opinion, Ivan Mosjoukine was thinking.

People who saw the image of the dead child said the man's expression indicated sadness. The audience who saw the man followed by the fame of the plate of soup interpreted the man's expression as hunger. And when paired with the image of the woman on the couch, audiences assumed the man experienced lust. In reality, the man's expression was identical in all three films, but way audiences interpreted that expression—like hunger, sadness or lust—depended entirely on the image that followed.



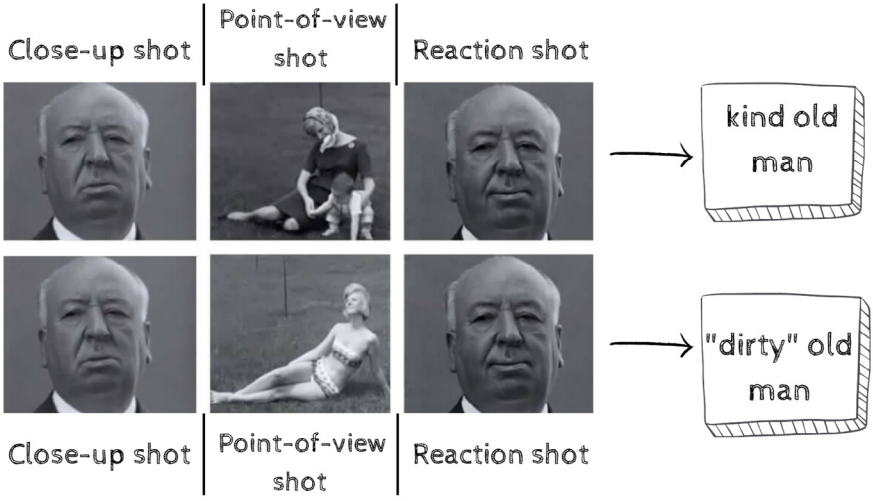
The experiment indicated to directors and film editors that shot length, movement, cuts, and juxtaposition are filmmaking techniques that can be used as linguistic devices to communicate something, a message, or a feeling to the audience.

Kulešov eventually concluded that a film story is better told by cutting and juxtaposing discrete pieces of film.

Years after Kulešov's first experiment, director **Alfred Hitchcock** took up and adapted it into his own theory about editing. In Hitchcock's vision, the core of the editing process relies on three shots:

1. Close-up shot
2. Point-of-view shot
3. Reaction shot (a shot which cuts away from the main scene in order to show the reaction of a character to it)

Hitchcock added the reaction shot to his fundamental "editing unit" to further clarify for the audience what the character thinks or feels about what they just saw.



How to practically use the "Kulešov effect" in a film? Well, this principle should be kept in mind during all production phases. For example, in the script, you should give your characters the chance to react to every important piece of dialogue and action. These reactions will be invaluable in the editing phase! Moreover, when you shoot, take care to use close-ups to focus on a single character's face to highlight their emotional reactions, which will help the audience to feel about and understand the on-screen action. All these elements culminate in the editing: having enough close-ups and reaction shots will give editors the possibility to cut together scenes in a way that leads viewers towards a specific feeling/emotional state.

What we have said about editing's capacity to arouse and orient specific emotional states in the audience is valid also from an intellectual point of view: editing can greatly impact the viewers and their understanding of the film and its massages. Editing, indeed, can be seen as a way to effectively communicate information, themes, thoughts and ideas on a subject WITHOUT WORDS.

In the same period, Kulešov was working on his experiment, his student, **Sergej Ėjzenštejn**, evolved his teacher's discovery and complexified his theory by saying that the essence and communicative power of film language rely on editing, intended as a collision between shot A ("thesis") and shot B ("antithesis") to create a completely new idea ("synthesis") in the mind of the viewer.

Using its instruments, editing has a pivotal role in the narrative, cognitive and dramatic construction of the whole film because:

- **Editing pinpoints the role of characters and objects**: characters' hierarchies, the relationship dynamics among them, but also the importance of some objects can be emphasized by editing techniques.

- **Editing enhances acting**: it allows the filmmaker to insert close-ups, reaction shots, eye relations between two or more actors, and gaps between the lines of dialogue to maximise the acting performance.

- **Editing designs the climax of a scene**: the use of a tense, in-crescendo montage of images, music and sound effects enhances the scene's suspense.

- **Editing boosts the director's stylistic choices as well as the message he wants to convey with the film**.

4.1.2 The making of Editing: Cuts and Transitions

When you edit your footage, you need to consider many different elements:

a) **Pacing**: the length of shots and scenes gives the entire film a pace – a feeling of moving fast or slow.

b) **Scene length**

c) **Order of shots and scenes**: by arranging your shots in a particular sequence, you can affect a scene's meaning. We can distinguish two main modes of ordering the scenes:

- *Linear editing*: implies that you assemble the filmed shots one after another in consecutive order.

- *Non-linear editing*: each shot and scene can be moved around in any order within your film. (for example, the opening scene can easily be moved to the end). Non-linear editing is easier, quicker, and allows you to be more imaginative than linear editing does.

d) **Cutting on the action**: most shots cut (or edit) better on the action.

e) **Matching shots**: you should join static shots with other static shots and moving shots next to other moving shots. Otherwise, the result might be jarring and disrupting (which, however, could be your intention from the beginning!)

f) **Showing simultaneous action**: you can cut back and forth between scenes happening at the same time.

g) **Choosing the best take** (or combining the best of several takes): the more takes you have, the more choices you have in the editing room. You can also combine parts of various takes to create the effect you want.

The most common editing technique to achieve all the mentioned goals is called **CUT**. Cuts are instantaneous transitions used to bring the audience from one image to the next one or one scene to the next. Cutting may change the scene, compress time, vary the point of view or even build up an image or idea.

There are many different types of cuts in the film. While some are more conceptual and others more narrative, they are all defined by direct merging between images.

CUT ON ACTION

Cutting from one shot to another while the subject is still in motion. It is a sudden change of shot from one viewpoint or location to another. Using a cut on action make the editing fluid and smooth.

CUT AWAY

It is the interruption of a continuously filmed action by inserting a view of something else. It interrupts the continuity of the scene giving the audience a new point of view.

MATCH CUT

Any transition, audio or visual, that uses elements from the previous scene to sinuously bring the viewer through to the next scene. It differs from regular cuts because it provides a thematic connection (subtext) between two separate events or concepts.

CROSS CUTTING

A cut from one line of action to another. The shots juxtaposed alternate two actions occurring at the same time but in different settings.

JUMP CUT

It occurs when the cut is within the same shot, usually a static one. The characters are showed in different positions and so it can be an effective film editing technique to portray a skip in time.

The final version of the edited movie is called the **final cut**. Parts of scenes, or even entire scenes, may be edited out (cut) if the director and/or the editor do not believe they are required to tell the story – or if the movie is longer than expected.

Along with cuts, editors can use visual effects called **TRANSITIONS** to move from one scene to another (they are not used very much for moving from one frame to the next).

FADE IN / FADE OUT

The scene appears gradually from silence or darkness and vice versa.

CROSS DISSOLVE

When you blend gradually one shot into another. It can represent the passing of time of the switch form two different situations/locations.

WIPE / IRIS

One shot replaces another by moving or "wiping" from one side of the frame to another. The wipe transition can be done from any direction and in various shapes. One of them in called "Iris" and it is achieved by growing or shrinking a circle wipe.

J-CUT / L-CUT

X

These are transitions where the audio either precedes or continues over from the subsequent scene. An L-cut includes audio from the first clip over the second clip, whereas a J-cut includes audio from the second clip over the first clip.

SPLIT SCREEN

The division of the screen into parts which can show the viewer several images at the same time (sometimes the same action from different perspectives).

4.2 Music and Sounds Editing

Up to this point, we have seen the post-production phase of the visual material, but of course, we have to take care of the audio materials as well. Audio post-production mainly consists of the input of separate audio tracks – containing dialogue, sound effects, songs, and musical score — into the computer and mixing them with special sound-mixing software. To be more precise, it entails, the synchronization of these sounds with moving pictures, their editing and levels adjustment. More than 80 % of the sound in a film is added after shooting and during post-production: dialogue, sound effects, music, and so on are quite often recorded separately and then mixed together to create a soundtrack that will be added to the visual track. Even if you have decided to record your audio in sync, you'll always have to add something (maybe music, a **leitmotif**, or sound effects) or, at least, adjust something, like audio levels. When editing your sounds, you have to remember that you can insert many levels of sounds simultaneously: you can add dialogues, music, and background sounds to the same scene by manipulating audio modulation effects.

The first concept you need to know in order to edit sound is called **audio dynamics**. This term describes the difference between the maximum and minimum volume of the track. If an audio passage goes from quiet to loud, it is said to have a high dynamic range, and in return, when a loud passage becomes quiet it is said to have a low dynamic range. Audio dynamics are used to ensure that passages of audio of different tracks have an appropriate dynamic range, blending well with each other and then contributing to the overall sense of the scene.

The layering of sound is composed of several elements: dialogue, sound effects, foley, music, voice-over narration (where present), environmental sounds, and songs/music within the scene. You must be sure that all these elements do not compete with each other. To do that, make sure to stay focused on the picture, reinforcing the sense of the scene and the cognitive as well as the emotional message it conveys. In that way, you can help the audience to stay focused on the story. To mix, balance and adjust the various levels of all these tracks you may use a **compressor**. Compression is commonly used to maintain a constant level by lowering the level when it is high and raising it when it is low. This is a very common tool, and it can be found in any editing software. It is especially useful when you have to mix music and dialogues.

As we have already seen, finding an appropriate **musical piece** is an important step in creating your movie, emphasising a scene, dramatizing a situation, and helping viewers get into a specific atmosphere. In post-production, you can add all the music you want. If you are on a tight budget, look out for public domain, royalty-free music, and/or Creative Commons music to use in your video content. Make sure to choose the most suitable music for your purpose and to place it (or parts of it) in the right place at the right time. Adjusting the volume levels of the music is pivotal when you have to mix music and dialogues. To better accomplish this task, you can "play" with editing tools like **transitions**: music can *fade in* or *fade out*, which means that sound fades, thanks to which audio becomes progressively louder or quieter at a definite point of the scene, according to the presence of dialogues. As a general rule, when there are dialogues, music serves as a sort of emotional "accompaniment" to what the actors are saying. This means that music volume should not overcome that of the dialogues.

Dialogues can be edited too. While the dialogue is the only sound from the actual filming that's been retained all the way to the film, it also needs enhancement. The keyword of editing dialogues is "seamless". Properly edited dialogues don't sound edited at all. They sound like the real person talking. So, when dialogues editing isn't seamless when you hear a click, or an odd jump in pitch, or strange pacing, it reminds you that what you're watching is not "real".

Moreover, in the post-production phase, you can also add **sound effects**, aka sounds that build layers of sound to create an immersive soundscape in line with the director's suggestions. Almost all the sound effects that accompany a film are added or reconstructed in post-production. You can find almost every conceivable sound effect in online libraries (many of which are free).

4.3 It's a Colourful Life! Colour Correction and Colour Grading

Once the editing (both the visual as well as the audio track) is over, the next step consists of all those additional processes aimed at finalising the video and perfecting it.

One of these is called **COLOUR CORRECTION**.

It is a technical process (realized by software) that entails the adjustment of colour, contrast, and exposure of film footage so that it appears natural and unprocessed (as the way the human eye experiences it in real life). Colour correction is used to harmonise and optimize the footage but it can also correct technical colour errors and can help in salvaging a wonderful scene that was penalized by bad lighting.

Another interesting tool is called **COLOUR GRADING** (also called **colour wash**).

It consists of giving an overall, specific look to the film through a process of colour alteration for aesthetic, communicative and artistic purposes. It is a process of "stylization" of the colour scheme (palette) of the footage, which emphasizes the visual tone and atmosphere of the movie, and characterizes it as more "cinematic".

An important difference between colour correction and colour grading is that while the former is carried out shot by shot, the latter covers the entire footage, or at least large parts of it, depending on the locations and the different moments in which the plot takes place.

Vocabulary

Leitmotif: a musical motif, a repeating melodic phrase in music that allows the filmmaker to communicate a marked characteristic of a story in an engaging way. It can signal a character, a setting, an emotion, a recurrence of events or a theme.

Think about the shark appearing in *Jaws*, any Darth Vader entering scene, the James Bond theme, and so on.

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5 Organising the Work

The next pages include some advice for concretising your project and working together with all the people involved in the production and post-production phases of the film.

To realise a film entails teamwork and a clear distinction of roles: every film needs a crew because one person alone just can't do everything.

5.1 Roles

Making a movie is a collective operation and entails collaborative work among many people. Each person involved in the making of the film has a specific role that allows all the operations (preproduction, production and post-production) to go on as smoothly as possible, and waste no time.

DIRECTION
Director - Assistant Director - Scriptwriter

PHOTOGRAPHY
Director of Photography - Camera Operator - Gaffer

AUDIO
Sound Engineer

PRODUCTION
Producer -Script Supervisor

EDITING
editor

COSTUME DEPARTMENT and SET DECORATION
Set Decorator - Prop Master - Costume Designer

Besides these central positions, of course, there are many other people and many other departments involved in film production. Just to name a few of them: **location scout** (who searches for all the locations in the script and finds the actual locations where the movie is shot), **casting director** (who suggests actors suitable for each role according to the script), **post-production coordinator** (who coordinates the achievement of the film, schedules the editing of images and sound elements), **make-up artist** (who knows how to work with different skin tones and make them look as desired even under difficult lighting conditions).

5.1.1 Creative Roles and Technical Roles

To be more precise, we can identify two branches of roles in a movie, the creative roles and the technical ones. It is a handy distinction but be careful not to take it too seriously: cinema is both an art and a technique, so technicians are a bit of an artist too and artists must be a bit of a technician!

Creative roles:

DIRECTOR

As stated by Bryan M. Stoller (2009) "a director has to be a multitalented multitasker. The director is captain of the ship, the leader of the pack, and is responsible for making all the creative elements come together".

The Director is responsible for everything that goes on while on set, he or she is the author and the artistic supervisor of the movie. The director has many tasks that he or she accomplishes working alongside many other production roles:

- Together with the screenwriter(s) directors contribute to realising the screenplay and transforming it into a storyboard.
- They choose and direct the actors.
- Together with the set and costume designer they decide the visual layout of the film.
- Together with the director of photography, they decide on the shots.
- Together with the editor, they decide on the editing.

Director is in charge of the film's consistency, and visual and stylistic identity. That's why they need to possess in-depth technical knowledge about filmmaking techniques and a strong understanding of each person's roles.

SCREENWRITER

They are writers who practice the craft of screenwriting. No specific education is required to be a screenwriter, just have good storytelling abilities, and a good mastery of the language and imagination.

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY, also called **CINEMATOGRAPHER**

They are responsible for the lighting of the film and help the director to set the cameras and to envision the film from script to screen. The cinematographer is one of the most important members of your team: in preparation, they carry out inspections and draw up a list of necessary technical materials; during the shoot, they light the scene, arrange the lights set and tell the operator which diaphragms to use; after editing, they follow colour correction.

The cinematographer is jointly responsible with the director for the final visual and stylistic rendering of the film, so he or she must possess both technical and aesthetic skills.

EDITOR

The film finds in editing its form, its rhythm, its style, and often its structure. Editors are responsible for making sure that each shot flows smoothly into the next one, as well as for the timing and pacing of your film. A film editor's work is at the same time creative, technical and collaborative.

The editor helps the director tell his or her story by assembling footage into a coherent whole, adding transitions, sound effects and music.

Their tasks include:

- Assembling shots into sequences.
- Reading scripts to help plan shots before filming begins.
- Shooting additional footage on set if necessary. The editor should be in line with the director but he or she is also able to intervene in the choices to be made, trying out alternative solutions.
- Watching dailies (footage shot on the previous day) to make sure the director got everything he or she needed

And, of course, you must consider the **ACTOR(S)**!

PRODUCER

A producer is responsible for putting the project together (and sometimes finding the financing). The producer is responsible for "assigning roles", hiring the crew and working with the director to hire the actors. The producer helps "produce" all the elements required to put the production together.

Among their tasks:

- Location scouting, and organization of the surveys on site.

- They realise the work plan and the production schedule (together with the assistant director)

- They are like Pulp Fiction's "Mr. Wolf" of the project: they solve problems on set!

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

They act as an intermediary between the director and the production and various departments such as set design, costumes, and make-up. They have a coordinating and organization role. Among their tasks we can count:

- Actor auditions.

- The creation of a working plan.

- Studies the shot plan with the director.

- Checks that the actors know their lines and rehearses with them before shooting scenes

- They are the contact person for any clarification and information.

SCRIPT SUPERVISOR

Their work is to be a guide for editing. They oversee the continuity of the film, including costumes, props, set decoration, and the actions of the actors during a scene. Basically, they take notes on every aspect of the film. The notes recorded by the script supervisor during the shooting of a scene are used to help the editor cut the scene. Among their tasks:

- Writing down the content of each shot.

- Transcribing the comments and the judgements by the director, dir. of photography and sound engineer on every single shot.

- Taking care of the continuity and the consistency of the film.

CAMERA (or SMARTPHONE) OPERATOR

The operator is responsible for framing shots under the supervision of the cinematographer and the director. Since the operator is in charge of practically carrying out the shooting on the set, he or she must possess technical as well as artistic skills in image composition. Indeed, they must have the ability to understand the type of movement of the camera in relation to the action, controlling the image in real-time (which requires good reflexes).

GAFFER

Your gaffer arranges the lighting on the set according to the directions of the director of photography

to make sure the mood and lighting of each scene work effectively. Often the gaffer is also an electrician

or has experience and knowledge of working with electricity and voltage.

SOUND ENGINEER

They are responsible for recording the sound of dialogues and all ambient sounds. Usually, they follow the action via headphones and check the cleanliness of the recording, that's to say that sounds are clear and comprehensible. If you're using directional microphones, take care to be close to the actors without entering the frame or causing shadows.

SET DECORATOR (and PROP MASTER)

The set decorator has the task of 'setting' the story written in the script, i.e. building suitable environments and providing the right furnishings around the characters. The set decorator can be also a prop master. Very few movies require no props, and it is the prop master who has to guarantee they're all available for use on set, work as they should and accomplish the director's (or cinematographer's) vision.

COSTUME DESIGNER

A costume designer takes care of the actors' image by creating or finding costumes for them according to the script and the director's instructions. The costume designer has to do research (the amount depends on the genre of film as well as the conception and creation of costumes) to ensure costumes are appropriate for the movie and do not jeopardize the consistency of the film.

5.1.2. To Each His Own

To decide what role you take or you distribute (maybe within the classroom), think about what you and your mates enjoy doing most. If someone likes putting things together and has a talent for resolving problems, then you'd probably have a great producer. If someone can envision things as they should be, and love working with people, then he or she can become a good director. If someone loves telling stories, is inspired and carves ideas out of nowhere, maybe will be able to write screenplays.

5.2. How to Create a Cinema Lab

To optimize the work, make sure to define a timeline and the steps of making a movie and develop a schedule. Take care to have enough time to realise your movie, from preparation to the final cut. For that reason, consider planning at least a two months schedule (more or less).

Week one: Preparation

- *Begin writing the screenplay and set up the project* ► Screenwriter(s), Producer.

Discuss the idea with the class, brainstorm and, once you have decided what you want to write about, start to write down your story and transform it into a screenplay (see chapter 2).

To pull all the strings together, write an outline of the screenplay. It should contain the main facts that will happen, the situations and how each character will evolve in each scene. Moreover, create character sketches for each character, in order to have clear in your mind each character's profile, and their IDs. This will help you to keep consistency all along with the movie.

- *Check and enhance the screenplay* ►Director

Discuss the design of scenes with the screenwriter(s) and make sure that the story will be told "visually". Start informing the crew members about their tasks and schedule the shooting

Week two: Pre-Production I

- *Rethink and re-write the script* ► Screenwriter(s), Director and Cinematographer.

Once you have a draft of the screenplay, distribute it to all those involved in the creation of the movie and collect comments, figuring out which suggestions you should consider using and integrating them into the final version of the screenplay.

- *Start involving the crew and set them in positions* ► Director, Assistant Director, Actors, Technical Crew, Producer.

The director holds auditions and picks the actors for the roles. Shortly after, the chosen actors participate in a "table reading" of the screenplay, where the actors take each character and read the screenplay and their lines out loud. This helps the director, writer(s), and the actors to imagine the final result, become acquainted with the characters, and create an emotional tension among the actors.

The reading table for Game of Thrones, season 1.

- *Start thinking about the shooting* ► Cinematographer and Editor

The cinematographer starts thinking about possible locations and lights arrangements, while the editor and the director begin considering possible shots and camera movements that will be useful in the editing phase.

Week three and four: Pre-production II

- *Concretising preparation* ▶ Director, Assistant Director, Cinematographer, Editor, Producer, Actors, technical crew.

The director works on the storyboard with the cinematographer and the editor to design the scenes and visualize them. Moreover, he conducts the table reading with the actors, who continue to work on their characters and memorize the lines. Once the screenplay is finalised and distributed, make some rehearsals with actors before starting shooting, discussing the "story" of each scene and unveiling the motivation of each character.

Set decorator(s), costume designer(s), makeup department and other technical operators start organizing and preparing their materials.

Before production, hold a final meeting with the entire cast, and crew to go over all the details. Is everyone in position and informed about their tasks?

Week five and six: Production

- *Set the location, organize and realise the shooting* ▶ Director, Assistant Director, Cinematographer,

Technical Crew, Script Supervisor, Producer, Actors.

The director works closely with the cinematographer, checking shots for each scene as designed in the storyboard. The director and the cinematographer place props as needed and shoot.

When the actors are in their places and the camera is ready, the director calls "Camera!", and then lets the cameraperson know it is time to start shooting.

Then, the director says "Action!", which is the signal for the actors to begin.

During the shooting, take care to watch very carefully what's going on and try to imagine the final result. Ask yourself: Is the scene working? Is it how it was planned? The actors are ok, or they should/could do better? If you're not sure about a scene, shoot another one: you can choose the one you prefer in the editing phase. Shoot as many takes as needed but remember you have limited time (and do not abuse the tolerance of the actors and the crew!)

When the scene is over and satisfies you, wait a few seconds and let the camera go on, then the director shout "Cut!". Only at that moment do people feel know they are free to talk to each other and move on and near the set.

Week seven and eight: editing and post-production

- *Edit the shots* ► Director, Cinematographer, Editor

Editing your film, and wrapping all the scenes together will take a lot of time and effort. Once you have all the shots, make sure to organize them by creating a list of all the raw footage, of all the shots with the corresponding number of where they appear. Be sure to mark the list with all the information and comments you need to recognize. It will help you to decide whether use it or not.

During these weeks, the director and the editor finish editing the movie, choose and add music and other sound effects and correct the images (colour correction). Then, once the film is wrapped, hold a screening of it.

When	What	Who
week 1	Preparation	Director, Screenwriter(s), Producer
week 2	Pre-production I	Screenwriter(s), Director, Assistant Director, Producer, Cinematographer, Editor, Actors, Technical Crew
week 3-4	Pre-production II	Director, Assistant Director, Producer, Cinematographer, Editor, Actors, Technical Crew
week 5-6	Production	Director, Assistant Director, Producer, Cinematographer, Script Supervisor, Technical Crew, Actors
week 7-8	Editing and Post-production	Director, Cinematographer, Editor

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