
Camera Kids: Make Your Own Short Film Course Outline

Class 1

Storytelling Basics / Introduction To Narrative And Plot Structure

By deconstructing contemporary and popular cultural stories, we come to a core understanding of the basic building blocks of story. In particular we will define and discuss three key elements of a compelling story: (character, goal, and obstacle).

Students, either independently or in groups, come up with their own sample story outline, charting the elements of plot and structure. We introduce methods and begin the process of brainstorming, investigating the real stories that students may want to tell and how ideas would fit into structural guidelines.

Continued Work: Individuals and/or working groups will develop 3 ideas for their core story.

Class 2

From Idea to Concept

We discuss how the short film is not one long movie but in fact made up of a series of 'little' films stitched together. Students learn to identify the key components of a film, how to choose what to capture to inform the entire piece, and where these key scenes fit into the 3-Act Structure (set-up, challenge, and resolution).

We watch a short documentary and identify the elements as they fit into the 3-Act Structure. We spend time defining the key scenes for cogent stories. Students are introduced to plotting stories through basic story development and creating storyboards.

Continued Work: Students choose the film idea that best reflects a strong story structure and then plot the key scenes on storyboards.

Class 3

Introduction to the Camera

In reviewing the work so far, we share storyboards and discuss pitfalls in terms of character and story. We address individual projects with open feedback and group problem-solving. Moving forward, students will learn the building blocks of the visual grammar of film - the core camera angles as well as the English-language terminology for same.

We discuss the camera as representing the point of view of the audience, and how different shots can be woven together to make one 'scene'. Students learn the basic functions of the camera and practice several types of shots typically used in filmmaking and come to understand the way these shots work to inform the viewer. In creating a process video using the camera only (no sound, no editing) students learn how to piece together shots into a scene that works and makes sense.

Continued Work: Students create their own process video outside of class.

Class 4

From Concept to Process - The Treatment

By looking at treatments we understand that films aren't just happened upon during the course of filming, but painstakingly crafted from the very first concept. Students learn that planning the filming process is essential, as is the ability to visualize their ideas in the form of a treatment.

We watch the short documentary, Born Sweet, and discuss what the treatment or shot list might have looked like. Using index cards, we dissect the film to recreate a treatment. (Act 1, 2, and 3 then key scenes). We will investigate the shots used in the film and break down key scenes into shots, recreating a shot list for that film.

Continued Work: Students identify the key scenes in their films and break them down into a shot list for production. Students will lock down their final idea and screenplay with workable locations in mind.

Class 5

Constructing Dreams and Composition

Using the award-winning student film Constructing Dreams (UAE) we will examine the idea of a 'poetic' documentary, but primarily investigate its effective use of composition. As a movie is a collection of images (not moving pictures) then every image ought to be composed well and intentionally. Not only that, but in a very short film it's important that every one of those images provides the audience with important information. There's no room (or time) for unnecessary shots.

Continued Work: This class will lead in to the weekend where the time will be spent filming the key scenes with supervision from the mentors.

Class 6

Organization and Planning, Planning, Planning...

In creating these video shorts, so much depends on organization and planning. It deserves to be mentioned again: so much depends on organization and planning. We will spend our time learning

how to create production schedules – things like shot lists and shooting schedules and call sheets to make sense of production.

Our work until this point has focused on the building blocks of the films – the shots that build the scenes, and how each scene defines and informs each of the 3 Acts of the story. Getting these building blocks to translate into shot lists and productions schedules is as essential to filmmaking as knowing how to turn on a camera, and will be referenced throughout the entire production phase.

Continued Work: Finalizing the production worksheets and complete a shooting schedule. Students will also begin or continue capturing the video for their shorts.

Class 7

Editing and The Importance Of Sound – Picking it, Using it and Copyright Implications.

Sound and Music is an essential part of any film, no matter how short. By investigating how sound, sound effects, and music contribute to the overall emotion and feeling of the film students will gain an understanding of the importance of the part of the story we can't see.

This provides a wonderful opportunity to learn editing as well. In the context of adding music to clips – original or otherwise – students gain a basic working knowledge and facility in editing.

Continued Work: Identifying and capturing/ingesting the sounds, sound effects and music that will appear alongside the images in their films and continue capturing video for their shorts.

Class 8

Editing, Editing, Editing (The Trailer)

With most of the key scenes and music captured for their shorts, students will need to edit these shots into scenes and acts. This provides a wonderful basis for learning how to edit. Editing is made easier through careful planning and organizing, as well as adopting a common-sense workflow that makes editing understandable and practical. Students will be introduced to 3-point editing and how it can be used to provide the basis for many of their editing needs at this stage.

Students will use this new skill to create 'trailers' or previews for their films.

Continued Work: Finalizing and presenting their previews or trailers for the class.

Classes 9 and 10

Individual Mentoring

In finalizing their shorts, students may have a variety of questions and needs that fall outside of this curriculum which is why we leave this time for students to work directly with the mentors in the completion of their films. So much of learning is doing, and so much of teaching is sharing. This time is reserved for students to work with the professionals – as professionals – to work side by side in their roles as directors, camera operators, editors and actors.

This is a hands-on work. On set, students will learn how to contribute to the success of the project, how each role plays its own distinct part, and that every role is equally important.

Continued Work: In the final class we will discuss practical ways students can initiate and continue to create new projects on their own. We will review the steps necessary in the creation and planning of new projects, and learn to find online resources that can help them continue to be successful.