



Learn Indie Filmmaking by Doing a Short Film

A step-by-step film course
By OLAF DE FLEUR





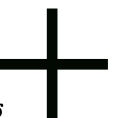
IDEA

CLASS PROJECT: SHORT FILM

In this class, you'll be doing a short film independently. The duration will be 1-3 minutes.

Your first lesson is to think about what idea you'd like to do for this course and write down everything you know about it. Brainstorm, using a tool of your preference, a pen, a pad, a computer, draw, or just close your eyes and visuale.

I recommend not taking too much time doing this procedure, because just like you will learn about all the other steps, we never want to invite overthinking, it can stand in the way of progress. It is here, that we start to put aside perfectionism, and you'll start to notice, that you always try to do things well without it.





BREAKDOWN

TASK

*What is the beginning, middle
& end of your idea?*

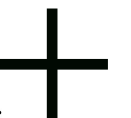
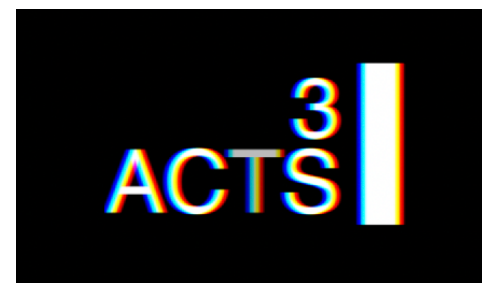
I'm sure you already have an idea in mind for this class.
Before we start analyzing your idea, let's do our first
round of demystifying visual storytelling.

What is a film in baby language?

Something takes place in a specific location, someone has a camera
and pushes record on that camera. Material is exported into an
editing software. Shots are placed next to each other and form a scene,
and the collection of scenes are perceived as a film. This seems
obvious, even naïve, but we have to be thorough in order for us to
demystify and understand each step of making a film.

Three Acts

Everything we do has three acts. Beginning, middle and end. All
macro and micro events and thoughts have this structure. When
you think about your idea, to help you towards the next step
(Outline), think about what three acts does your film have?





THEME

The most important thing about Theme is that you *keep* researching what the theme really is.

Theme always comes in the form of a question, and just by constantly thinking about the question/theme of your story - that alone will contribute greatly to its development. Over time this question will simplify and increase in quality.

TASK

What is the theme of your film?





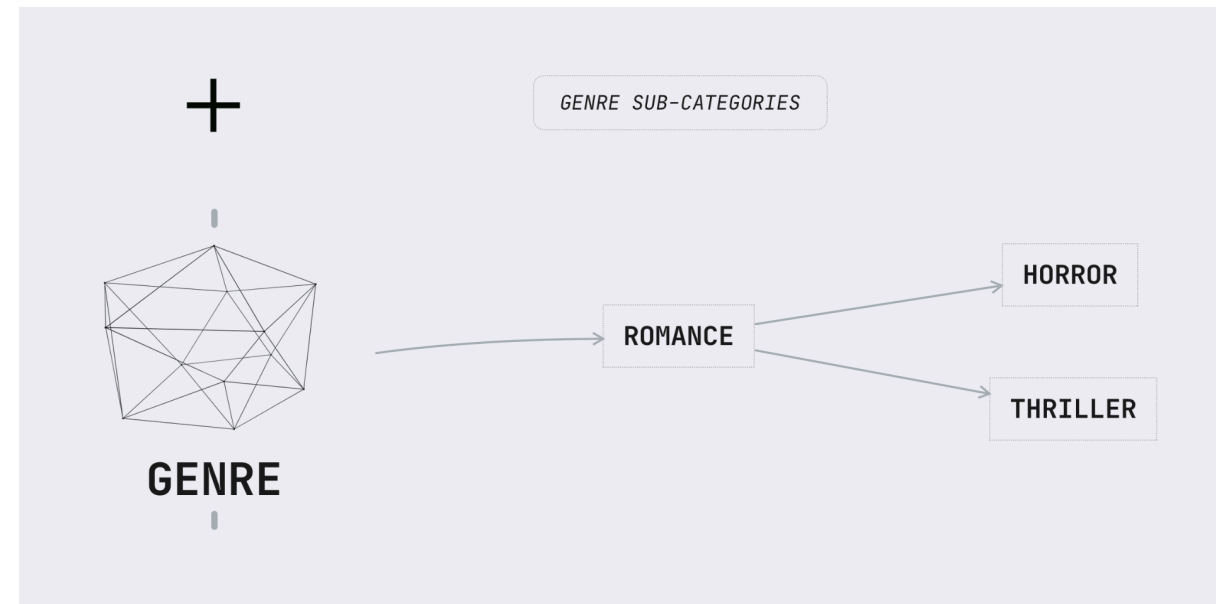
GENRE

TASK

What is the main genre of your film?

In this lesson, you will learn about the value of Genre and how it can help the audience to identify the world of your story, and by that leap into the world more quickly. An example of Genre is drama, thriller, horror, romance, etc. A documentary is a genre, even a social media story has become a genre.

"Why do I have to pick a genre?" - You don't have to, but you will always eventually end up in one or two genres, whether you like it or not. So it is better to decide beforehand. Genre also has subcategories. For example, a romance can be your main genre, but it might have a thriller element and even a dash of horror.





OUTLINE

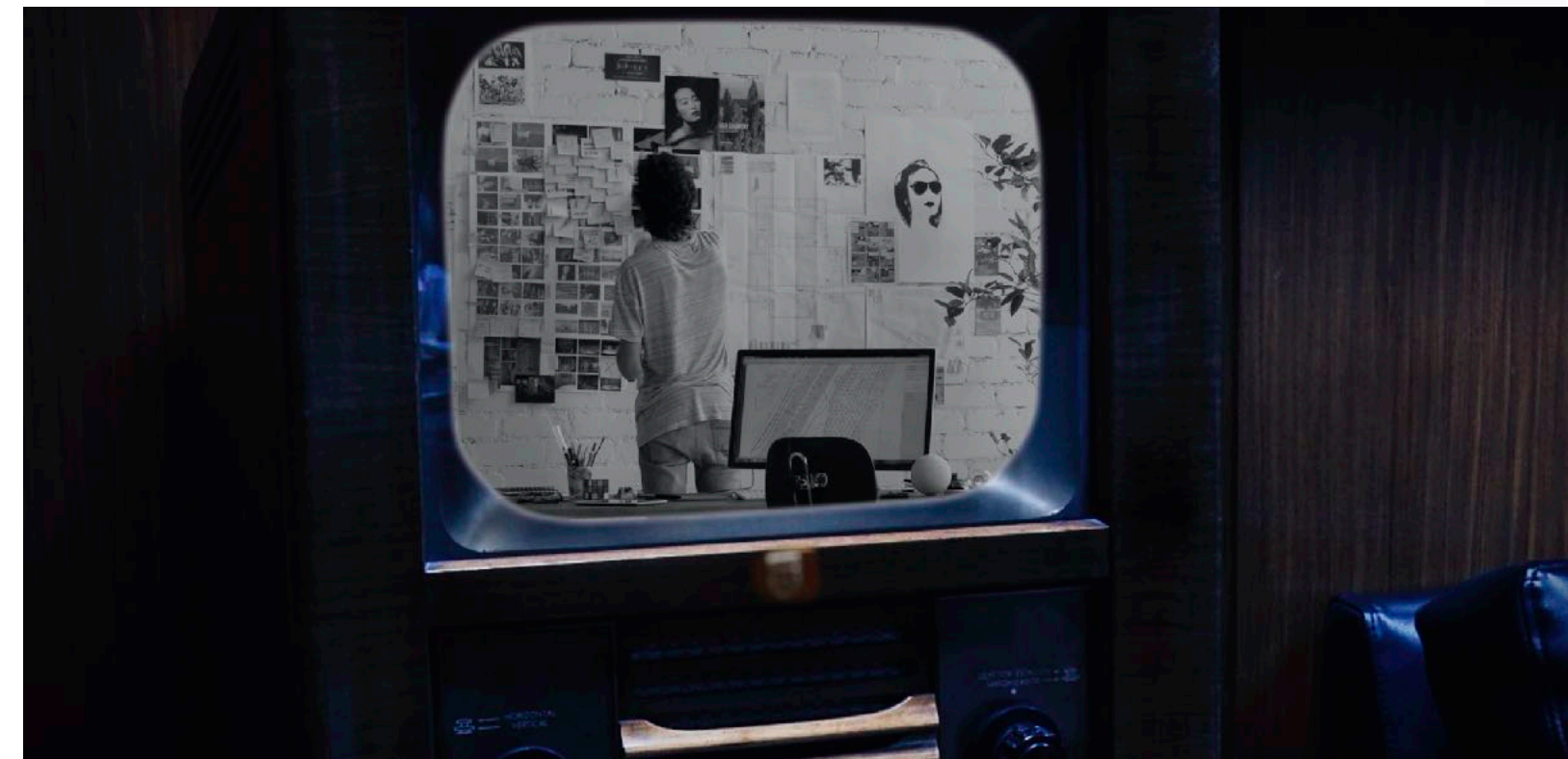
TASK

Do the first draft of your Outline

Wherein we discuss tools for your Outline, from headlines, bullet-points and paragraphs to tools like Change and Storyboard.

One of the key components of making the film is discovering something that you didn't expect. As creators, we love to be surprised. A common fear around writing a screenplay, even just writing the outline - is that we are afraid that we'll demystify the idea. The more you outline, the more you know about your story.

Trust that you'll move away and onwards from the outline when you feel the idea is ready for the next stage. It'll surprise you how much you'll discover when you actually start filming. Because when you start shooting, you are working with other people, you're working in a location, with all the X factors that come with executing your script, you can be sure that you'll discover something new. Writing your outline is not about demystifying anything, it is not about over dissecting and draining the life out of the idea. It will help you identify what you are excited about, it will help you identify the good, the bad, and the average.





SCREENPLAY & FORMAT

Your screenplay is the passport to your crew, the ticket towards collaboration. We all know how hard it is to explain an idea verbally. The screenplay is a rigid and stiff format, however, it remains the best tool to communicate your idea to others.

When you have completed your screenplay. Your next step is to get feedback on it. Have somebody read it over, preferably someone that is on your side and is not confrontational. In my experience, the type of potential collaborators who "tell it like it is" are not helpful at this stage.

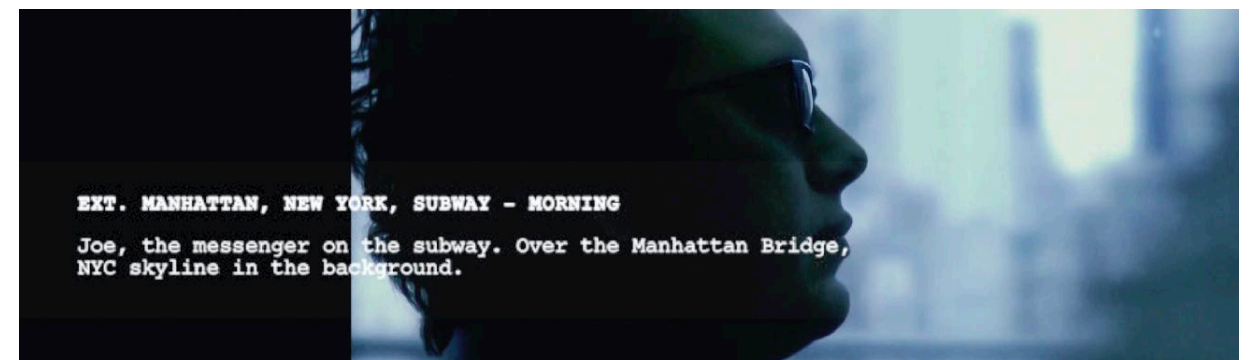
In this particular phase, you need support and encouragement, and through that, you will automatically analyze and strengthen your screenplay. There is no right and wrong here, that might sound like a bumper sticker line, but that really isn't, especially in this course, because we are focusing on getting to know the craft and how we function within it.

TIP

Dialogue: if there is a dialogue in your film, make sure that each character has a unique vocabulary, voice-tone, etc. Make sure they differ. This is fundamental and will help the audience to differentiate between characters more clearly.

TASK

*To prepare for your first draft, do a second draft of your Outline
Write down three examples for feelings and how you will convey them through physical expression in your character(s).*





PRODUCTION

Organizing a film shoot can be daunting because of the endless amount of details that you need to consider before-hand. The great news here is that we are doing a mini version, making this all very very doable.

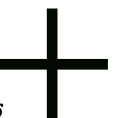
Now you have completed your script for your three-minute film, and you are ready for production. The next thing you do is you break down the screenplay, how many actors do you need, locations, items, wardrobe, and so on.

When you prepare for your film, a part of the training in this course, is to call random people and negotiate. When you do a film, this is your most important skill, to be able to communicate clearly to your team and negotiate with your environment.

TASK

Make the following lists for your production and take action to plan them before the film shoot:

1. Actors
2. Staff
3. Locations
4. Equipment
5. Dates of filming





PRODUCTION TIPS

If you have written a scene that you cannot execute in terms of resources (time/budget/equipment/team) - then I'd like you to look at the scene again, find its essence, what is the message of the scene, and figure out an alternative way to convey that message.

This is another big part of our training, learning to reform and adjust our story, honoring budgetary and time restrictions without losing the essence of the scene. If you run out of production time to film the scene, then you need to apply the same tool. If you have a scene that requires a character walking between rooms, but you do not have time to do all your camera setups, then you have to make sure that you've done plan B and C.

In this particular example, of a person walking between rooms in the scene, ideally, you wanted to shoot that scene in six camera setups. Think about how that scene could be shot in one shot? Could you shoot it handheld and follow the person between rooms? Could you have the scene take place off-camera and have the character pass the camera as they walked between the rooms?

Doing a film is a master-class in dealing with restrictions. These restrictions help you understand to pick your battles because you want to protect your resources. You do not want to overextend the courtesy of your team, your talent or the permissions on locations, and so on. Through experience you'll start to understand that your story is priority number two, protecting your resources is number one. No film justifies you straining yourself by spending too much money or becoming antagonistic towards your environment.



+ DIRECTING

Wherein we discuss tips on directing, working with actors, the value of a 'failsafe' shot and the importance of blocking a scene

You've written your script, you've planned for production, and you're ready to direct your film. Directing is one of these things, that are unique to each individual that takes it on. There are several rules of thumb that you can keep in mind when you direct. I'm going to list some of them out here, you can use the ones that apply to you.

WORKING WITH ACTORS

Listen to your actor, get to know them. The more you do the more you will be able to create rapport and before you know it they'll be ready to stand on their head for you. If you're not getting the performance you want, rule number one is do not "line read" for the actor, that is do not act out the scene as you see/hear it in your head. Acting is a discovery process, you and your actor are side-by-side, you might lead the way as the visionary, you can only point out the way but you can't grab their neck and drag them along with you, that defeats all-purpose and works against creativity.

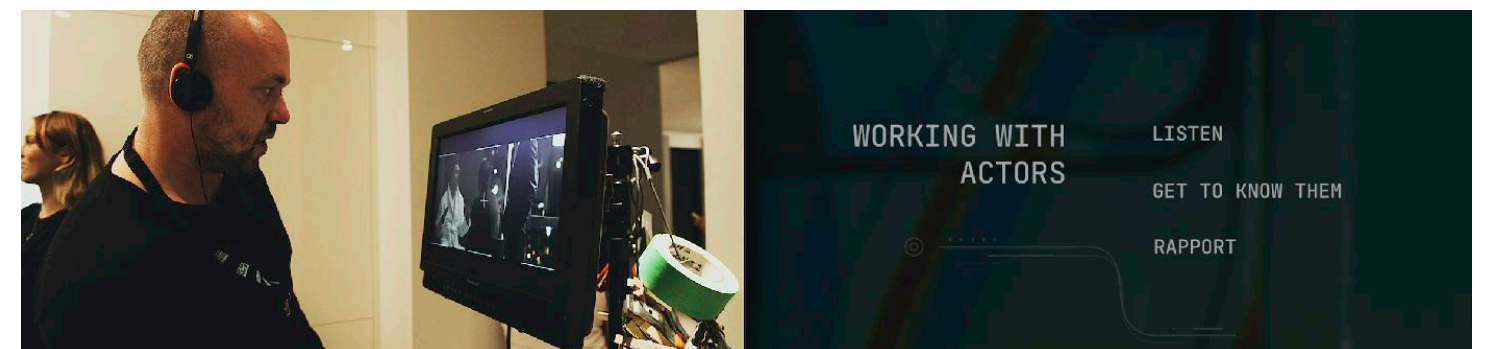
PROTECT THE PROCESS

You have set up a camera with the cinematographer, there is an actor in front of the camera, the actor has clear directions where he or she can move, they know their lines, and it's your job to say action and observe.

After each take, you can adjust the camera, the light, and discuss the performance of the actor. A good way to approach directing is that if something isn't working, it is only because you have not communicated properly what you want or that you're still discovering it. I'm not saying this so that you will feel at fault, I'm saying this because doing a film is a clumsy and accidental process, which is the essence of creativity. Your job is to parent the process to the best of your ability, and sometimes you just do mistakes or others to mistakes, as a team leader it's your job to get the process back on track.

CREATE REALITY, THEN FILM IT

The best tool I have used, when it comes to directing, is before the camera enters or any of the technical elements, is that I create a reality within the scene. When I feel that that particular reality is close to my intentions, the camera enters and documents it. I'm not saying this is the right way, but I am saying that the execution of a film is made of several processes. And the best tool is to figure out a way to do one thing at a time. The more you can differentiate between processes, the more clarity will come to you in terms of execution. It is almost like learning an instrument - you learn everything about one specific tone at a time. Doing a film is a metaphor for life, you're dealing with uncontrollable forces armed with endless ninja stars.





EDIT

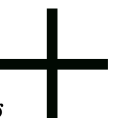
You've shot your film and you're now ready to start editing. Editing is where you re-use all the tools you've already used in Outline and Screenplay, on a visual level.

When you log (label) all your material, make sure to put a star next to all shots that give you a positive 'first impression' - Even though you've filmed the shot, seen it, written it - when you start editing you'll notice the context has changed. The power of first impressions is pivotal for your editing process. When you start to edit, these 'impressions' start to fade, so it's important to mark all of them in the first round of viewing your material. Many of these 'first impressions' will become the tent-poles that not only hold up your film but also your energy and endurance of this challenging phase.

Even though you might not be editing your films in the future, it'll benefit you to have a direct experience of the process. Insightful knowledge of editing will make you a better writer, director, and visionary. All the processes in making a film are important, but I'd put Editing a inch more equal than others. Editing can save a bad script, a disaster shoot, and in some cases, your creative soul.

TASK

Mark all your positive first impressions of your material





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