

Student Filmmakers



When On-Location is
At-Home

Sound Design and VR

Scriptwriting for Film,
Television and New Media

Why You Should Not
Postpone Your
College Education

Shooting Action Sports **FOLLOW CAM**

with Todd Matthew Grossman

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Legendary Cinematographer
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Blake Barnett

StudentFilmmakers

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Kim Edward Welch

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Film Directing Insights from **Greg Takoudes**

Enjoy the Process of Filmmaking

What was one of the most important things you learned while working on set?

Greg Takoudes: Simply, to remember to have fun. This may seem like a superficial lesson, but it's of enormous importance. There's so much pressure when you make a movie – there's never enough time, or resources. Money is at stake, which is stressful. Everyone expects so much, and you want to deliver a film to make everyone proud. That kind of pressure can be debilitating.

But I remember once when I was working on the set of *Titanic*. I was a

Production Assistant, and I had the less-than-glamorous job of driving electrical cables many hours through the desert, in the middle of the night, to one of the sets. When I got there, sleep-deprived and exhausted, I saw – coming out of the desert – an enormous replica of the Titanic rising out of the desert. The ship was set at a 90-degree angle, like a skyscraper, in its final sinking stage (spoiler alert, sorry!). With powerful lights shining all over, and dozens of people toiling around its base, I was in awe. It was the most fun, exciting thing I could possibly see at that moment. And it reminded me to enjoy the process of filmmaking,

because it is otherwise incredibly hard, and in order to stay motivated to want to go to work the next day, in order to want to keep pushing yourself and others, you have to soak in those moments when it's fun. You have to feel that what you're doing is worth the time and effort.

Also, when you're having fun, it's contagious. On the first feature I directed, *Up With Me*, I was shooting a romantic scene in a park with the two leads. There was some kind of magic in the air that evening, and we all felt loose and happy, and it made the performances better, the filmmaking better. It's one of the favorite scenes

■ Get the Absolute Best Work Out of Everyone

that I've directed, and in part, I attribute that to how happy we were making it. When tensions develop on set, and frustrations mount, having fun – and remembering to enjoy the experience – is the best salve to getting everyone back on track and focused.

What was the most challenging problem solved on set?

Greg Takoudes: How to get the absolute best work out of everyone. Film sets can be crowded places – lots of people, all doing their own jobs, stuck in their own bubbles. And even when the set is not crowded – like on smaller budgeted films – the filmmaking process can tend to move extremely fast because, on smaller

budgets, you have to shoot so much material each day.

So, the challenge is how to get the most out of people when you're in the middle of a spinning circus of activity. Getting the best requires developing relationships with the cast and crew individually, spending time listening to them, engaging with them, motivating them, having fun with them – but it seems like there's no time to do this! And unfortunately, if a director doesn't engage or motivate, then to the crew and cast, this movie becomes "just another job" to them, and you don't wind up getting the best of them.

In part, this challenge is solved by the director simply being aware of others' feelings and thoughts. To spend even

a few extra seconds really making eye contact and listening, so everyone feels seen and heard. There are people who are very good at this – at being completely present and engaged when they talk to someone, even for a short conversation, and it just lifts the morale tremendously. This, in turn, makes the cast and crew work harder because now they're emotionally engaged with the film – now, the film belongs to them too, and not just the director.

This challenge is also solved by allowing sufficient time for pre-production, so that the director is able to sit down with folks and have a coffee, get to know each other, and discuss the material, and life. To create a sense of comradery and even family, before production begins.

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DIRECTING

The film will ultimately be better when it is the product of not just the director's ideas, but the director's ideas in conjunction with the best ideas and most amount of energy supplied by a motivated and excited cast and crew.

What are some common mistakes new directors should avoid?

Greg Takoudes: I think a lot of new directors have an image in their heads of what a director is, or how a director behaves, and they feel insecure about not being that thing. The truth is, directors are usually not field generals. They don't know everything. It's okay, as a new director, to ask for help. You don't have to have all the answers. But try not to let the lack of answers make you feel insecure, or like you have to pretend. Asking for help from cast and crew actually opens the door to collaboration – to bring others into the process of trying to find the best way to stage a scene. It's okay to ask an actor, '*What do you think we should do here?*' Or to ask the DP, '*Where would you put the camera to make the most dramatic impact?*'

This doesn't show that you're not knowledgeable, or that you don't have a vision. It shows you're authentic and honest and want to create the best film for – and with – everyone.

I'll add just one more thing: I have found that many new directors have troubles telling people what to do. They sometimes feel that they're bossing people around, or acting like they know more than others. Directors need to direct. So, let your direction come from a true place: you're the director because you have a vision for how to tell this story. Don't be dissuaded from that vision by being shy or insecure. You're not bossing people around by telling them what to do, you're explaining your vision to them by directing them. You're expressing yourself. It's a positive thing to direct people. It's the process of putting into



words and actions the vision inside your head.

If you could share your *Top 3 Film Directing Tips* for students and aspiring filmmakers, what would they be?

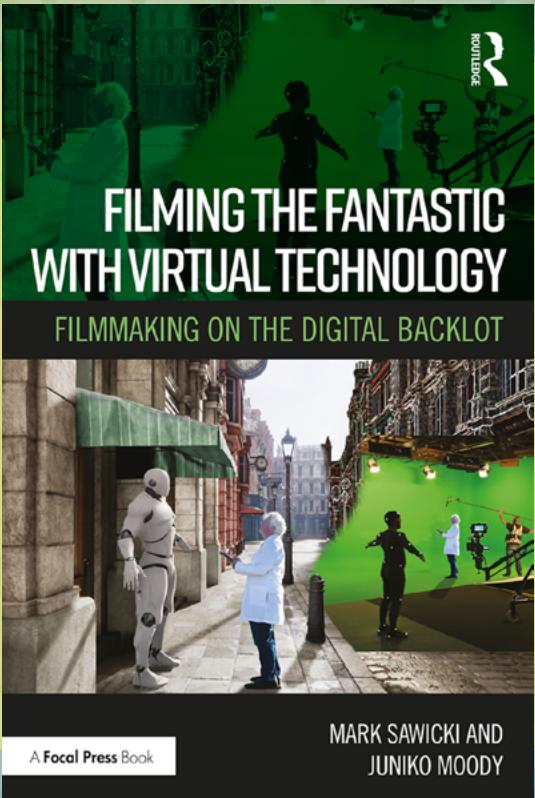
Greg Takoudes:

#1: Make a lot of movies. Short movies, clips, scenes, anything. Look at the Safdie brothers and how many countless short films – some even just a few seconds long – that they cranked out for years before jumping into a feature. Even if the actors are your roommates or family members, even if it's shot and edited on your phone, and even (and especially) if it's not a good film. Keep making them. Develop your eye by doing.

#2: Watch a lot of movies – but just as importantly, expose yourself to more influences than just film. Read novels, listen to music, study paintings, listen to old radio plays. The deeper your well of creative and aesthetic influences, from all forms of art and expression, the more ideas you'll have on set for how to stage, frame, and conceive your own movie.

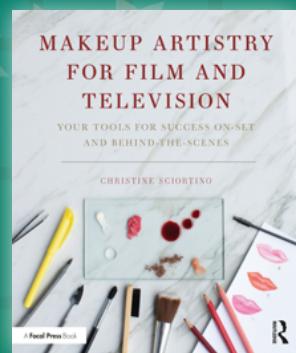
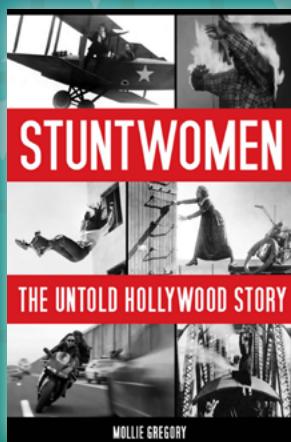
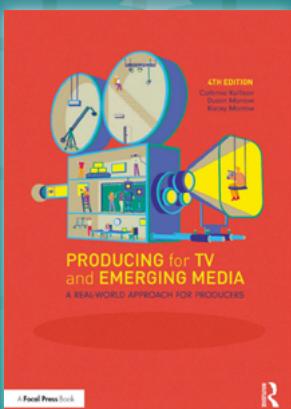
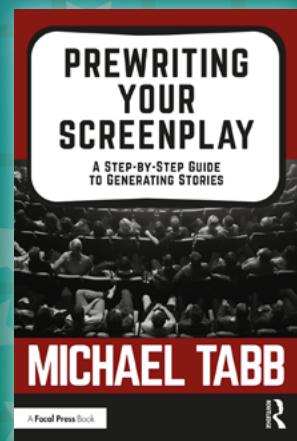
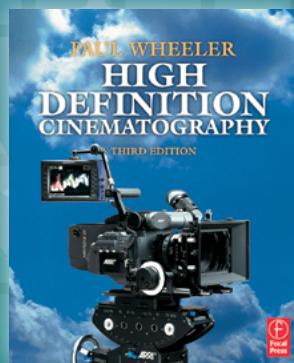
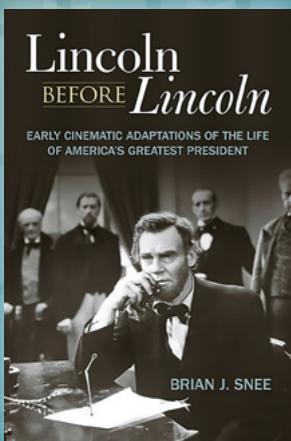
#3: Find collaborators and conspirators. Find creatives – actors, DPs, anyone – who compliment you, who bring out the best in you, who push you forward artistically. Help them on their films and projects in order to learn from them, and then ask them to help you on yours. Movies are made by groups of collaborators who trust and know each other well. Find those artistic soulmates, develop your inner circle of collaborators, and make lots of work together. You'll all grow and get much better by doing it this way.

Greg Takoudes is a Director, Producer, Writer, and Adjunct Professor of Film Studies at The New School, New York. His feature film, "*Up With Me*", distributed by IFC Films, premiered at South by Southwest, where it won the Special Jury Award, and has played at film festivals in America and Europe. His debut novel, "*When We Wuz Famous*", was published in 2013, and he previously worked for Ron Howard and Brian Grazer as a member of the creative team at Imagine Entertainment. For more information, visit www.takoudes.com.



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When On-Location is At-Home

Dawnja Burris

Assistant Professor, Associate Dean

School of Media Studies, The New School

Making a short film without being able to be on location, without a crew and physically distanced from subjects is exactly what many students experienced this past Spring semester when their classes were moved online at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Films that had been carefully planned: budgeted, scouted, cast and crewed were halted as access to places, people and things was abruptly not possible. This dilemma is on track to persist into the coming Fall semester, as well. Equipment options also remain a primary consideration since many students will not have access to their university equipment centers and will need to rely on the devices they have on hand or can afford to purchase or rent.

So, what to do when the normal equipment, crew, subjects and on-site options are severely limited? Using what is on hand and producing within one's immediate available spaces, films can still be created. A DIY approach and attitude is needed, which, actually, should always be the case in filmmaking since being persistent and adaptable so often results in achievements that may not follow the book. Certain genres and approaches will be more immediately achievable than others and those that are actor and dialog driven will require more ingenuity and experimentation, but I anticipate that boundaries will be broken as filmmakers confront the challenges faced by the current societal limitations.

Several traditions and methods continue to underlie production techniques that can be accomplished solo and provide strategies that I expect will continue to flourish and morph. While students can work independently and film in their immediate surroundings and local areas, there is also much more reliance on shared, found and stock footage acquisition as well as screen recordings of interviews conducted via video chat. There are also other creative options for dialog set-up and recording that could potentially also be done via a conference app like the now ubiquitous Zoom to include a director that discusses the scene with the actors then logs off the session during the performance/record, resuming communication via a phone call during the takes. Improvisation and creativity are key, and the tactics explored during these times are likely to set new precedents for filmmaking.

Documentary and experimental work finds immediate resonance through the first-person narrative mode (with or without audio) with visuals that present scenes of the past, present and future by way of POV shots that are filmed without a crew. Such films draw from the observational and self-referential modes in both technique and tone. The preponderance of recent short poetic works seen on social media composed of shots of the emptied streets and public spaces during quarantine and lockdown periods provide example of this, (such as this one by television producer @akfasso).

There are many subjects that can be approached in the diaristic or confessional film style in which the filmmaker may utilize themselves as on and offscreen character and/or narrator while employing a majority of the planning and execution required for scripting, shot planning, and recording.

The locations, depending on the needs of the film, can be either the reasonably and safely accessed outdoor and public areas and/or the time-honored apartment or bedroom "studio" set. The confines of one's living space can serve very well for techniques that require a set up that requires a static environment, and though most home spaces will not be the size of a film stage there are options for working on small scale "sets" within them. Utilizing the technique of stop frame or stop motion animation can be a viable approach for some projects, whereby objects - or subjects - are filmed in various positions for a minimal number of frames which are then sequenced together to produce an animated effect. Formally, this technique precedes film and became prominent in the 1960's with films like *Clash of the Titans* and *Jason and the Argonauts* by Ray Harryhausen. The "creature effects" and commentary on the effect and its process is elaborately remade in Michael Shanks' 2019 short film *Rebooted*.

While this film did involve high end production techniques and required more extensive locations and crew, the set top work of stop motion artist dina Amin produces short works using



Educator's Perspective

a variety of materials and easily obtainable cameras, apps and software (<https://www.dinaaamin.com/thingsido>). Additionally, she sources many of her music tracks through Creative Commons (<https://creativecommons.org/about/program-areas/arts-culture/arts-culture-resources/legalmusicforvideos/>), which is a tact every student filmmaker can take to avoid legal issues with copyrighted music.

Another tradition that provides a rich opportunity for "on location at home" filmmaking is that which relies upon found footage, sourced from one's own previously shot material, digital archives, streaming services and the internet at large. Found footage has long been a staple for both documentary and experimental filmmaking. Re-photography techniques also abound as printed photographs and other printed matter serve as imagery for filmed story sequences. Combined with narration, the single or successive imagery reproduced on film provides integral content for many film

projects. Use of historical – and often news – footage has traditionally conveyed a truth value and been associated with straight documentary (both in photography and film), while more experimental results can be achieved by working in a collage method that juxtaposes image and sound or overlaid text. This method associates with Surrealism and is echoed in the filmic art installation by Christian Marclay, *The Clock*, (2010), a 24 hour film composed of a montage of shots sourced from film and television featuring clocks, sequenced and synced to a 24 hour period and therefore functioning as a clock itself.

Additional to these applications, the use – or rather creation – of fake found footage has secured a place in a series of horror and science fiction films, (beginning with *The Blair Witch Project* in 1999,) which have plots premised on supposed located film or video footage that reveals a violent or paranormal happening that must be investigated. Besides being associated with these genres, there are many other interpretations that could be made with created "found" footage.

In-camera editing is another technique that may be utilized out of necessity or for stylistic effect, whereby each shot is set and recorded precisely in terms of duration and start and stop of any action. While this is very likely unnecessary since most smart phones have accessible video editing apps and affordable or school-provided editing software is also prevalent, this technique may be an artistic choice while also providing the experience of having to exert careful management of the production process since this involves very little margin of error. Experimentation, remember? It's good – necessary even – for the learning process. Interestingly, many of the cinematic and quick cut sequences being produced via TikTok are providing an example of this, and I'm curious to see more use of it. I'm not referring to the popular dance and practical joke enactments but examples that entail carefully arranged scenic and costume design, shot framing/movement and subject actions that result in defacto ultra short films. An example I am finding particularly interesting is one that associates with #darkacademia. History student, Laura Piszczatowska, began with single image work on Tumbler and Instagram ([geminnorum: instagram.com/geminnorum/](https://www.instagram.com/geminnorum/)) and is now producing highly stylized video work on TikTok (@un_charlatan: [tiktok.com/@un_charlatan](https://www.tiktok.com/@un_charlatan)). The composition and settings within her frames, along with the camera movements and duration of the cuts mimic in camera editing and follow many of the tenets of cinematic process and style.

Collaborative or participatory techniques whereby more than one filmmaker contributes footage for a project, provide another highly viable option for thematic projects that require input from multiple locations. These types of



EDUCATOR'S PERSPECTIVE



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www.dawnjaburris.com

films have long relied upon footage being acquired from diverse settings and can be coordinated among fellow students, colleagues or sourced through a call for collaboration. The YouTube *Life in a Day* project (<https://lifeinaday.youtube>), directed by Kevin Macdonald and produced by Ridley Scott, is a current example that can be emulated on a smaller scale, accomplished in a semester and be based upon a pressing social, political, even philosophical or personal concern.

Finally, the creative use of the multi-block screen that Zoom and other video conferencing apps entail can be utilized in unintended ways to produce recorded takes and scenes. The simultaneous recording of several to many “screens” reminds of the 2000 film by Mike Figgis, *Timecode*, which uses the split screen technique to present interrelated stories among the film’s characters.

Four screens persist throughout the 90-minute duration of the film (which was shot on digital video, a departure at the time from 35mm film) and each take is 93 minutes each, no cuts. While this film utilized editing to arrange the four screens together, the content for each screen was shot in real time. With the capabilities of multiscreen video conferencing, this can now be done in real time and already made split screen without editing. The options are many and may be applied not only to real time performance works, but perhaps successfully utilized as a way to coordinate actors in separate locations to then perform a series of takes for later editing. When Jimmy Fallon and The Roots performed *Stuck in the Middle* via Zoom in late March, I noticed the possibilities for subjects to interact in ways that could result in dialog scenes. (I’m thinking of two rather than four or nine!)

With pre-planning, rehearsal and test recording, actors could “interact” with each other through their screen placement, their individual settings

could be dressed to appear as a common location and though the apparatus of the split screen would be predominant, with good directing and performance, this could be overlooked, accepted as a current normal transgression of limitations.

Several of these methods are evidenced in a recently created online archive produced by a colleague, professor and filmmaker Lana Lin, and students at my university department, The School of Media Studies at The New School in NYC. *Unprecedented Media* (www.unprecedentedmedia.com) features (at the time of this writing) 35 short works produced under our current extraordinary circumstances, with concentration on the lived experience during them. Undaunted, these and countless other student filmmakers pursued the craft of storytelling by relying on the tools, places and people they safely and readily had access to.

With “the quarantine film” now becoming something of a genre – for both students and the industry – a look at some of the traditions underling solo production techniques are providing new “takes” on these strategies. Confined to a variety of domestic spaces with limited contact and outside access, our attentions are very much centered on the essentials in our lives and on what is missing. If we are working, the process is one of change, either due to a transition to remote screen and telephone-based labor or in a mode that is highly mobile and exposed to the public. These experiences can be as inspiring as they may be daunting and the drive to create – which always involves experimentation – not only allows for reference to established methodologies but an opportunity to expand upon and even transcend them.

Camera Operators and Team Effort

David E. Elkins, SOC



What was one of your most favorite or memorable scenes to shoot and why?

David E. Elkins, SOC: My favorite was not as a camera operator but when I was first working as a First Assistant Cameraman. It was on the critically acclaimed, award-winning television series, "The Wonder Years". So many episodes reminded me of my youth since I was approximately the same age as the characters were in the 60's and 70's when the show took place. I had the good fortune to pull focus on 26 episodes which were truly my "Wonder Years".

Apart from focus pulling what else is required from a First Assistant Cameraman? What are some of the most important skills every First Assistant Cameraman needs to succeed?

David E. Elkins, SOC: In general, I believe that the most important job of the 1st AC is to make the DP look

good. Keep quiet, do the job and don't make waves. Specifically, the 1st AC keeps the shot in focus during the take. They must carefully watch the rehearsals, maintain the camera equipment, oversee the general operation of the camera department and be available for anything the cinematographer needs at any time. A good 1st assistant does the job without anybody knowing that they are doing it – they are invisible. Keeping your eyes and ears open at all times and anticipating what the DP is going to ask for before they ask is a sign of a good First AC.

What was one of the most important things you learned on set?

David E. Elkins, SOC: Stay within your own department, don't act like a know-it-all, and pay attention at all times.

If you could share 3 Quick Tips for Camera Operators, what would they be?

David E. Elkins, SOC:

Tip #1: Watch rehearsals.

Tip #2: Listen to the DP and Director.

Tip #3: Practice your craft as much as possible.

David E. Elkins, S.O.C. , has over 30 years of professional experience as a Camera Operator and First Assistant Cameraman, working on feature films, television series, commercials, music videos, educational films, industrial films, and much more. He has also taught classes and workshops on both the East and West Coasts of the United States. He has been an active member of the International Cinematographers Guild Local 600 since 1989 and the Society of Camera Operators since 1992.

www.davidelkins.com

■ **Keep quiet, do the job and don't make waves**



Paul Wheeler, BSC. Self-portrait.

Legendary Cinematographer Embraces HD **Paul Wheeler, BSC**

What changes in HD have you seen over the years?

Paul Wheeler, BSC: The most significant change was two that came more or less simultaneously. When solid state storage came in replacing tape and the three-chip configuration was replaced by single chip sensors. The larger single chip sensors enabled a whole raft of conventional motion picture lenses to be used and encouraged established lens makers to build lens sets especially for HD.

Higher and higher pixel counts, and larger and larger chips have been fascinating developments to watch.

What was one of the most challenging things you learnt on set?

Paul Wheeler, BSC: To trust my eyes and the monitor. Suddenly we were not using exposure meters and ringing the laboratory at 7:30am in the morning to see if yesterday's "snaps" had come out as expected. We were lighting and composing in "real time". Some DoP's found this difficult to get used to especially as the Director could criticise the image on the monitor, it took away the mystique. I found it exhilarating, more like painting where you load your brush and make a mark immediately. This is the main reason I took to HD very happily and quickly.

What was the most challenging problem solved on set?

Paul Wheeler, BSC: It was actually a problem I solved for a friend who was shooting in stereo HD. He had supplied his own set of lenses and the cameras had come from a supplier who was on set to look after them. My friend rang me to say the two images were not matching and his camera supplier was blaming the lenses, and he thought it was the cameras, what could he do. I had no idea but said I would ring him back if I thought of something. Intriguing! In ten minutes, I had the solution, set the camera with the suspect lenses up on a locked off shot

- the problem should be there - it was, then swap the lenses over from one camera to the other. If the problem traveled across the stereo image, it was the lenses. If it stayed in place with the two images, it was the camera. Five minutes later my delighted friend rang me back to say the fault did not travel, so it had to be the cameras!



Paul Wheeler, BSC hand-holding the Panavised Sony 900.

Could you share your *Top 3 Tips* related to working with HD formats, processes and workflows?

Paul Wheeler, BSC:

Tip # 1. Get rid of your DIT. Switch off your waveform monitor. Learn the correct way to set up a monitor, and then, trust it. If you light *by eye* to a properly set up monitor, I can almost guarantee that your images will become more original, much more like you visualised them and much more artistic.

Wheeler's first law states that if it looks right, it is right. Trust me, it works.

Tip # 2. Crewing. Get the best camera operator and focus puller you possibly can, they are your right arm. I know it's unfashionable to use camera operators, and producers see them as an unnecessary expense, *but* if you have a lot of lighting to do, having a camera operator will improve your lighting immensely as it frees you for your main job. And, don't keep telling your operator what to do. If you have chosen the right one, all you should need to do is brief them at the beginning of each scene, and let them get on with it, you hired them, after all. I know in America, the DP tends to rule over the camera operator all the time, but this

is not how I like to work, and I think it inefficient and rather insulting to the operator.

When I was at the BBC, we used to get 14 days to shoot half-an-hours Drama, and we were very busy. The power that be decided that 12 days should be enough. I was the first cameraman this was put to, I said I would happily try it if my assistant could operate the camera and we got an extra junior camera assistant. In those days, the BBC were very anti using operators. In the end, I prevailed, and we brought the show in half a day under the permitted 12. Point proven!

Tip # 3. Protect your data. It's very easy, particularly on a multi-camera shoot to overwrite a memory card. Often the camera cards are taken to a download station, transcribed to two hard drives, wiped and sent back to the camera crews. Daft idea, I know! If the producers insist on this way of working in conjunction with the download technician, I insist on a longish table with a box on one end clearly labelled IN, and another at the extreme other end labelled OUT. With any kind of luck, you will now avoid an overwrite.

Never, ever put a card with data on it back in the camera. If the director insists on playback, I always refused to continue to record on that tape and put a new one in. It still worries me when playing back from a solid state card, but it seems to be safe enough.

Paul Wheeler, BSC, FBKS GBCT was trained at the BBC rising to become a Senior Drama Film Cameraman. Paul shot one of the first BBC Drama Series to be photographed using the then new Digi Beta cameras, by which time he was freelance. He is a renowned cinematographer/director of photography and trainer, he has been Head of Cinematography at National Film & Television School and still runs courses on Digital Cinematography there. He has also been Head of Cinematography on the Royal College of Arts MA course. Paul was invited to become an associate of Panavision in order to help them introduce the Panavised version of Sony's HDW 900f camera which meant he joined the HD movement 3 days before the first Panavision camera arrived in Europe. Despite all this he is still very much a working cinematographer. He has been twice nominated by BAFTA for a Best Cinematography award and also twice been the winner of the INDIE award for Best Digital Cinematography.

<http://www.paulwheelerbsc.com>



Alan Steinheimer on Evolving with LED Lighting

What are your thoughts on the LED lighting movement?

Alan Steinheimer: In the beginning LEDs for filmmaking were subpar, typically with a green tint. In my mind the ARRI SkyPanel was the big breakthrough; a whole line of LED lights with a higher CRI, no green tint, RGBW control, and on-going improvements in the software with yearly updates. In the space of 6 years I went from using zero LEDs to shoots that are typically 80% LED now. Some filmmaker purists, mainly DPs, had a hard time accepting the LEDs. Similar to the CD revolution in music a little something (color fidelity?) was lost along the way but younger crews embraced LEDs, and with the continuing evolution of wireless DMX control that is such a natural fit for LEDs, there has been no turning back.

Filmmaking has always been a combination of art and commerce. I think the debate over the color rendering of LEDs has been eclipsed by the powerful attributes of RGBW

and wireless control. We are still in the early stages of the wireless part, and I find there are problems with virtually all the dimming software I have used. At times I have wanted to pull my hair out, such as an incident two weeks ago where I opened up my iPad at the start of my work day, and the DMX software refused to open... I lost all the pre-programmed info, had to quickly download the software again, and re-program the entire set while setting up and giving the DP some lighting to look at. Despite these hiccups I am committed to working with LEDs and the wireless DMX. The creative potential is just too great to wait for some perfect version of all the components.

What big changes do you see in lighting?

Alan Steinheimer: LEDs have wrought other changes in production such as decreased power consumption. Now you have the potential to run an ARRI S360 SkyPanel off a 2000w suitcase generator for an exterior shoot that in the past would

The smaller the crews, the greater the creative potential.

have required a much larger generator. In offices I no longer worry much about tapping into power with the low draw of LEDs.

It does feel like crews are a bit smaller and have to move faster. Fortunately, the technology is constantly improving and allowing for that to happen. Certainly, faster camera ISOs and improved contrast compression has made my job a lot easier. I don't have to gel windows with ND nearly as much nowadays.

It also feels like the average production level in terms of quality is continually rising, so even though crew size is averaging down the final production quality is getting better and better.

What was one of the most important things you learned on set?

Alan Steinheimer: Collaborating with your crew is what makes filmmaking so fun and powerful, and yet it takes time to learn to work cooperatively. Technical knowledge is nearly useless if you can't work with others. In an ideal

world filmmaking is like a continual adult education class where you are constantly learning and improving your craft and team skills.

If you could share your Top 3 Lighting Tips for aspiring filmmakers, what would they be?

Alan Steinheimer: At the risk of repeating myself, **listening and collaborating are possibly the two most important concepts** that aren't typically stressed in filmmaking education. We live in a cowboy culture of everyman for himself and auteur theory where a director is given god-like status. In actual process on a film set it takes an entire village to make a good film of any length. Learning how to give and take, actively listen and process are traits that can improve almost any filmmaking.

To make it a troika I suppose you could add in **master your craft**. Nowadays that could mean learning the DMX wireless software, or learning how to trouble-shoot HMI problems. Of

course, we all harbor ambitions, but make sure you do your homework to back up your qualifications. PAs that say they can grip and then can't properly set a C-stand with a flag don't earn another shot at gripping for a year or two. Balance your ambition with a realistic understanding of your technical prowess.

Alan Steinheimer has 30 plus years of filmmaking experience, with 25 years of lighting as a gaffer and lighting director in the San Francisco Bay Area. His resume includes feature films such as "The Darwin Awards," documentary and corporate work, commercials, and music videos such as Britney Spears' "Oops, I Did it Again." He appears regularly as a guest expert in the "Meet the Gaffer" series on YouTube.

Alan Steinheimer has written an easy to read book about learning to light for video: "Shaping Light for Video in the Age of LEDs: A Practical Guide to the Art, Craft, and Business of Lighting."

<http://www.steinheimer.com>



Luke Seerveld ("Meet the Gaffer" YouTube creator) and Alan Steinheimer look at the new ARRI Orbiter at ARRI HQ.



Alan Steinheimer and best boy Ernie Kunze on set.



Followcam Hovertrax TVC.
Photo by Cory Miller.



Shooting Arri Alexa Mini with Ultra Wide – Glendale skatepark.
Photo by Cory Miller.

Shooting Action Sports with Todd Matthew Grossman

What technologies have driven change in action sports Film/TV production over the years?

Todd Matthew Grossman: While the most significant changes have been born out of image quality and the ability to move the camera in ways never imagined, some core action sport filmmakers still pride themselves on using older technology that mirrors skateboarding's original voice. Let's break it down.

Skateboarding videos really found their voice in the early 90's with the advent of the first gen 3-chip digital camera, the legendary Sony VX-1000. At the time, nearly all action sport filmmakers used it with a Century Optics MK1 ultra-wide fisheye; aptly called the 'death lens.' That lens, coupled with the crispness of the VX-1000's image, gamut/color range, and top handle for underslinging the camera when follow cam shooting, made for such a memorable look that

some skateboard filmmakers still use it today.

New tech has exploded so rapidly you'll now even see follow cam angles shot from drones (like the DJI Mavic series), or selfie stick 360 cams giving you impossible perspectives (like the GoPro Max and Insta360 series), and of course a growing list of full frame mirrorless cameras like the Sony A7s and just announced Canon EOS R5 (a camera that shoots 8k raw and up to 120 frames per second in 4k!). Advancements in these cameras have allowed for incredibly creative angles, eye catching slow motion, and unparalleled image quality.

Finally, the most significant advancement has been the rapid reduction in size of 3-axis stabilized gimbals, like the DJI Ronin series. These gimbals have replaced the handheld shake of the past with buttery smooth, Hollywood worthy, Steadicam ... for a fraction of what it used to cost! Now you can 'fly' a full frame camera with high-end glass and create polished cinematic shots by yourself.

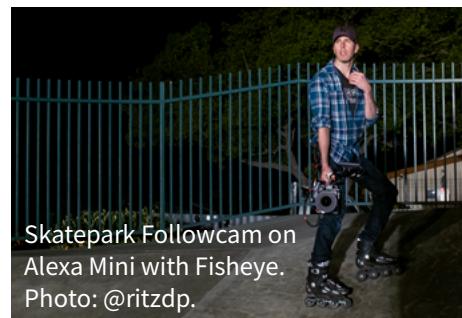
A bonus mention definitely goes out to the advancing technology for in-camera digital stabilization on devices like the Go Pro and latest gen smart

phones. Within a gen or two they should be phenomenal.

In the coming years we're going to see processors advance so fast that cameras will record all focal planes 'in focus' and at all apertures at once; giving you the ability to adjust exposure and 'pull focus' in post. We're already beginning to see live compositing and in camera motion tracking trickling down to prosumer models! All of this equates to more tools for content creators to become ever more inventive and visual storytellers.

When filming extreme sports, what are some do's and don'ts when it comes to positioning yourself and shooting in extreme terrains?

Todd Matthew Grossman: You'll get the most incredible shots if you know the sport and athlete well enough to know exactly what they're going to do and where they'll end up. In the early days of the X-Games, I was the first ever live followcam operator for skateboarding, inline skating, and BMX park. The primary reason was the athletes knew me, and they both trusted that I would be in the right place to get the shot, while also not being where they were headed.

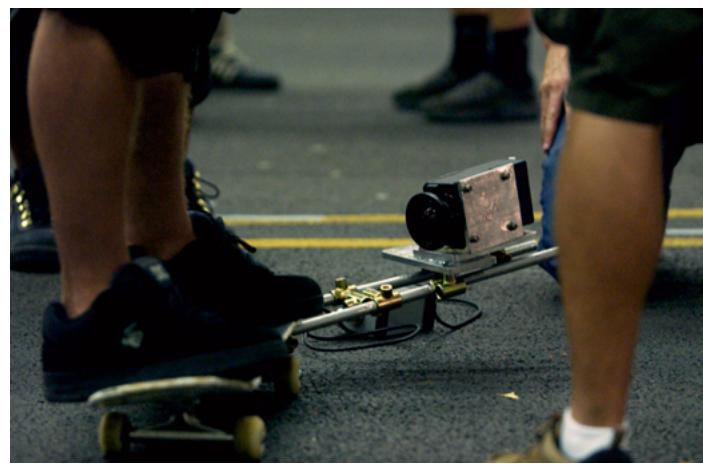


Skatepark Followcam on Alexa Mini with Fisheye.
Photo: @ritzdp.

Once you have that down, you can focus on things like your personal style, more compelling angles, and which gear best suits your sport or subject. For example, one common mistake I see a lot of are high angles when athletes are riding vert, or dirt bikes are blasting off huge kickers. Typically, you'd want to showcase what's most impressive about the trick you're filming. So, if someone is going twelve feet out on a vert ramp – being low, accentuates the scale of it. Likewise, if you're filming a dirt bike jumping sand dunes, you might want to counter it with a low flying drone to maximize the move, while still showing height. That said, keep in mind that's it's not always about a moving camera, sometimes a static pause can bring you an impactful moment. Let the trick speak for itself.



Improv skate dolly – Oren Peli feature.
Photo: @thekatiemustard.



Nissan Skater filmed at the 2nd Street Tunnel, LA.

ACTION SPORTS CAM

Sometimes we all just need to chase a 2,000cc American V Twin around with a camera to brighten our day.



The Making of Arch Motorcycles Shoots



Chase cam for Arch Motorcycles – Willow Springs Raceway.
Photo @bluerockcreative

Over the past few years, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to shoot and direct some moto spots with Gard Hollinger and Keanu Reeves of Arch Motorcycles. For these projects we'd search for mountain roads with ample switchbacks, so the bikes could carve turns then race past tall pines in the straightaways. The diversity of shots brought dramatic pause to the more driving moments. All shot with drones, handheld cameras, and high-speed follow cam (using vehicle and motorcycle mounted gimbals). And of course, shooting motorcycles and automotive (especially drifting), it's even more important to know where to be and what your talent is planning to do.

If you can learn the sport, know your gear, and identify the best places to be ... you'll walk away with the most compelling content possible.

What was one of the most important things you learned on set?

Todd Matthew Grossman: When it comes to filming sports and motion, the most important thing has always been storytelling. Some might say story doesn't always apply to sports, but even on the simplest level, a skater grinding down a handrail has a definitive beginning, middle, and end. So I'd challenge you to ask yourself what's the story you're trying to tell? On the extreme end, it could be a narrative action sports film like Jonah Hill's coming-of-age skateboard flick, "Mid 90's"; in which the story required an authentic look and feel to a very specific era, or perhaps you're just shooting a montage of action sports moments; in which case you might want the camera moving fast, with over the top angles

to emphasize the tricks. Regardless, always think of your camera as an extension of the story that you, or the trick, are wanting to tell.

One unique example was a recent project I helped launch during the pandemic. A former X-Game friend's family owned a famous dance studio called The Space TV, and wanted to build a streaming content platform with some of the top online dance classes, music videos and more. We saw that the majority of existing content in this realm is filmed static, on a tri-pod, yet the choreographers and talent are always moving. Thus the 'story' dictated motion. So we set up a single mirrorless camera on a handheld gimbal so that a lone operator could 'flow' with the talent. This accentuated the movement and breathed dynamic life into all the video shots.

If you could share 3 Best Practices for Action Sports Filmmakers, what would they be?

Making the one day branded action short.
This was a really fun shoot with some awesome creatives.
@malakai_music @trebleprodigy



ACTION SPORTS CAM



Todd Matthew Grossman: The first and most important would be something I learned in my film school days at USC. Several professors put a strong emphasis on **understanding what's come before us and how it has affected viewers and/or society**. Even in action sports, having a strong sense of what others have done, or are doing, can be both freeing and inspiring. We can learn from legends in the business on all levels, including the athletes.

With that said, I can't overstate the importance of **finding your own voice**. It's one thing to learn from the past, but you have to **balance that with your own style and what you feel passionate about**. The most compelling content is always an even mix of something audiences haven't seen before, coupled with a unique perspective.... **your** unique perspective.

Finally, I'd point to **the importance of practice**. Like action sports themselves, you get better with repetition and practice. As your equipment slowly

becomes an invisible extension of your arms, you start to focus in on the athletes, watch the approaching and receding environments, and find yourself instinctually in the right place.

Just as the athletes you're filming might take five, ten, or a hundred tries to land a trick, one of the most important keys to action sports filmmaking, is to film as much as you can, and constantly review that footage, so you can learn from it. Was the camera in the right place? Did you capture the trick in its best light? Is the athlete you were filming as stoked with the shot as you are?

Asking yourself all of these questions and more will lead to even better footage as you grow and evolve as an action sport filmmaker. So take your time, find your voice, and share your incredible content with the world.

With a highly unique background in both Hollywood blockbuster/studio filmmaking and the more raw, authentic realm of action sports, Todd Matthew Grossman merges dynamic visuals with compelling stories to create cinematic and digital content with an edge. Recently, Todd partnered with Keanu Reeves to create ongoing content for the Arch Motorcycle Company. With a multi-year span of broadcast commercials, digital web spots, social media clips, and a short form documentary, he's also produced and developed original content for filmmaker David Leitch of 87North (DIR: "Deadpool 2," "Fast & Furious Presents: Hobbs & Shaw"), as well produced hundreds of spots in action shorts, music videos, indie films, and even feature film reshoots for box office hits "John Wick" starring Keanu Reeves, "Parker" starring Jason Statham and Jennifer Lopez, and others.

Todd Matthew Grossman: tgfilms.com
Instagram: [instagram.com/tgfilms](https://www.instagram.com/tgfilms)



Jim Owens on TV Sports Production in the New Age

How have you seen television sports production technologies and workflows change and evolve over the years?

Jim Owens: The transformation of how sports production technologies have changed in recent years has occurred in a rapid-fire succession. When I first started in the '80s, we were using multi-million dollar trucks. Today, production software is available for a fraction of that cost. The changes in the last couple of years have forced all of us to rethink how we create television. While the story process is still the same, the technology has radically changed.

What are your thoughts on new cloud workflows for television sports production in the new digital age?

Jim Owens: I think that the entire industry is headed that direction... quickly. With so much of it occurring during the pandemic, many people who thought that they would never like

REMs or IP production have realized that there are creative new options and are open to the changes.

What was one of the most important things you learned on set?

Jim Owens: I think that the most biggest things I've learned while working on sets is the importance of communication. Good communication between the crew members solves a lot of problems. It is also essential to build relationships.

If you could share 3 'Television Sports Production' best practices, what would they be?

Jim Owens:

#1. The more you prepare before the production, the better you will be ready to handle the issues that arise.

#2. As a director or producer, take care of your crew. Show them respect. You can have the best equipment in

the world, but if your crew is off, you may not have a great show.

#3. Give everyone a chance to provide input. Give your crew a voice.

Jim Owens has worked and taught in the video and television industry for over 30 years. His international television work has included fourteen Olympic broadcasts and has taken him to over thirty countries. He is the author of the "Video Production Handbook," "Television Production," and "Television Sports Production" and has had over thirty articles published in television and broadcast magazines in the United States and Europe. Owens is Dean of the School of Communication Arts at Asbury University in Wilmore, Kentucky, where he has taught since 1981.



Jim Owens produces a video segment about the Indianapolis 500 race for "Sports Illustrated."



Jim Owens teaches a TV Sports Production workshop in Beijing.



What was one of the most important things you learned on set in regards to location sound?

Michael Tierno: Getting great sound happens when location sound recording is given as much regards as cinematography. Perhaps the challenge in getting filmmakers to realize that sound is important stems from the fact that there is less of an individualistic stamp of how location sound recording is done, as compared to the way a DP might give a very distinct look to a film. But, nevertheless, great location sound can make the difference between a good or bad film. Period. In *Turn Back Night*, (the film that the book, "Location and Postproduction Sound for Low-Budget Filmmakers", is based on), the location recordings came out so rich and full of information, it will make for a finished film where you can experience the actor's performance which resides largely in their voices. An actor's voice is more than 50% of their

total instrument in film; if you don't capture it in its full range, the audience won't experience the performance as well as it can be experienced. Good sound helps understanding the dialogue, and it also helps to feel the reality of the scene you're trying to communicate.

I also learned that a sound team will need the following:

1. "Sides" (script pages) for the day's shoot before beginning.
2. Let sound make the shooting environment more sound friendly. (Turn off refrigerators and air conditioners, close windows to shut traffic noise. Let them watch and practice booming during rehearsal, wait for traffic noise and/or airplanes to pass, etc.)
3. You can have your sound recordist create the file naming structure, time code, etc. The book goes into this.

4. If possible do some location scouting with them so they can listen to the locations and know what awaits them in terms of sound difficulties.

From a technical aspect, good location sound recording will have a strong "signal to noise ratio" of dialogue over any other sounds on the track like ambient noise, etc. This signal to noise ratio provides room to work with in postproduction. Good location sound means dialogue is "on-axis" and evenly as far as booming technique. Again, none of this needs to be expensive to achieve, but you have to know the basic principles to get good sound and you can do it on any film you make.

What was one of the most challenging problems solved on set in regards to location sound?

Michael Tierno: The hardest part for me is I work very fast, and sometimes, a location recordist might want to slow down and tell me things about an



actor's voice being low or mumbling, etc. In my case, we moved fast, so the recordist had to work at a faster than normal pace. The other thing is dealing with the sometimes-harsh environment sound recordists create. We were shooting in a heat wave in a small NYC apartment. Every take, the sound mixer turned off the AC and closed the windows. We were all dying in there, but it was worth it. The sound came out great.

What should student filmmakers and startup filmmakers know about location sound and post-production sound?

Michael Tierno: You don't need a big budget (or any budget) to get great sound in your movies if you have some sense of what you are going for when you record and post sound for film. You can learn from what the higher budget filmmakers have at their disposal and use their tools and craft in a scaled down, very effective way. The important thing to achieving great sound isn't expensive gear or a world class sound crew (though these things help), but it's more important you understand the **concepts** professionals are deploying on big budget films and replicate them.

For example, anyone on any shoot can turn the refrigerator and AC off and close the windows. That's not a budget issue. But many student filmmakers don't do this. Any filmmaker on any sized film can make sure shoes clomping on the ground don't interfere with dialogue on the track. But the main thing I believe students need to learn is that every single camera set up with sound, including every take should be treated with special individual care. You wouldn't just make one standard setting for cinematography and for every set up, correct? For every set up, there is new camera focusing, different lenses, exposure, framing, blocking, etc. Sound



recording should be treated with the same care and specific attention. It's **not a passive activity**. Just "hearing" the sound or being able to make out the dialogue in the headphones isn't enough. Your ears can process on the fly wonderfully; however, the machines you will be working with in post aren't as great as your ears. You have to learn what good, strong, clean signal recorded evenly on axis sounds like. It's not hard to learn, but it's not intuitive.

If you could share your Top 3 Audio Tips for aspiring filmmakers, what would they be?

Michael Tierno:

#1: Location sound recording is not a passive activity. Every set up requires individual attention and focus and tweaking and practice. Have the goals of clean, even, on axis dialogue recorded with strong signal to noise ratio without dialogue being ruined by extraneous noise either from the boom, walking, rustling, traffic, or anything else. Try to emulate sound you'd record in an isolation booth as much as possible.

#2: Post-production sound is a whole other post-production process, just like picture editing. I see too many students work like dogs to get their film edited, and the day before a screening they turn to sound. Give sound a protracted period in post-production to get it right. At least half as much time as you give picture editing.

#3: And learn how to organize for the sound production and post-production process; it's essential.

Michael Tierno is a former Miramax Story analyst and an independent writer/director/editor of feature films. He is author of the best-selling book, "Aristotle's Poetics for Screenwriters" and has made four feature films including "Turn Back Night," a sci-fi comedy. He is Associate Professor of Film Production at East Carolina University.

An actor's voice is more than 50% of their total instrument in film.

Audiovisual Colocation

Michael Filimowicz on Sound Design and VR



Can you tell us a little bit about the evolution of sound design for VR and 360 filmmaking?

Michael Filimowicz: For 360 video, there's the kind that you would play on a head mounted display (i.e. 'goggles'), but there's also immersive spaces like you find with micro theater spaces such as the Igloo Vision system, where, say, 5 projectors create an immersive space and the screen is a cylinder you're standing inside of.

With the former, virtual audio tends to rely on head related transfer functions (HRTFs) which emulate the delay times of sounds reaching each ear at different parts of the wavefront's phase. The problem with these algorithms is that everyone's head is a different size and shape, and so you can get front/back confusions, or sounds feel like they're inside your head. There are newer active headphone designs which take measurements of the listener's head and try to customize the noise cancellation and virtual audio effects so that the response is more tuned to each listener's head dimensions.

With the latter cylindrical micro theater 360 video spaces, there still tends to be a 5.1 surround sound approach where the speakers will be ringed around the screen and actually you can see the speakers which are usually placed high up toward the top. The spatial mapping effect isn't that great in these kinds of systems, as sounds tend to feel 'smeared' across too large an area and so the sound/image associations are pretty weak.

My own research is based on trying to address these kinds of limitations by vibrating the screen and using software to place the sounds where the objects and events are in the displayed content. I call this 'audiovisual colocation' and I have a Udemy course where I teach people how they can build their own collocative displays in a kind of DIY manner.

Much of the sound design for 360 will be similar to regular films (e.g. diegetic vs non-diegetic sound, or on-screen vs. off-screen sound, etc.), only you have much more emphasis on attending to the spatial audio aspects and localizing sound in space becomes trickier and more a component of the overall aesthetic.

Is there an industry standard when it comes to capturing panoramic three-dimensional sound - like specific outdoor and studio microphones, recording devices and software?

Michael Filimowicz: Surround comes in many channel 'flavors,' e.g. 5.1, 7.1, even 22.2! That's a Japanese standard for ultra-high definition television. But classically, in film 'stereo' means basically 4 channel audio, with the idea of a listener in the center. Thus, you find surround sound field recording equipment with capsule designs that capture 4 channels of the sound field around the mic. Since dialogue is usually panned center, a surround ambience recording might place the ambient audio in front left, front right, rear left, and rear right channels. So, just go with any of the 4 channel mic designs, which are sometimes

something like two stereo mics at angles to each other but where you can get 4 individual audio tracks from the same mic.

I use a Soundfield SPS200 4 channel microphone with a 4 channel Edirol field recorder. There are a lot of smaller recorders though where the mic and recorder are integrated into a small package, e.g. the Zoom H2N has 5 different mics inside its mic mesh and it can record 4 channel surround sound in a palm sized unit.

For software, any modern DAW can do surround sound without a problem. For music I use FL Studio and for video mixing I use the Fairlight side of Davinci Resolve. I do more music these days but of course I used ProTools for, like, almost 20 years before I just got tired of Avid changing their licensing and subscription model constantly. Good riddance to my iLok USB dongle!

How is VR changing the film industry?

Michael Filimowicz: I think people are still generally trying to figure out what to do with it. The film industry is based on cramming hundreds of people into rows of seats in a theater. But VR is based on giving individuals a large spatial footprint to themselves for exploring a virtual space. VR runs completely counter to film's business model and economic scene. Studios have done things like have VR booths in theater lobbies that give a kind of added experience to movie going, but it's really not scalable and thus you can't make serious money on that if it doesn't scale.

I think you have to look at the home viewing space for where VR and filmmaking can really synergize, but that would mean you should be able to plug your head mounted display into a smart tv (or a streaming box, for instance I stream via an Apple TV), and Netflix, HBO or Amazon Prime or what have you would have to stream

VR content to your living room and that hasn't happened yet.

But, if we're going to have VR filmmaking 'for the masses' it will have to be for homes and streaming boxes because it doesn't make any sense in theaters. There are other kinds of VR spaces, like VR Arcades and in Seoul, South Korea, there's even a whole mall of VR Arcades called VR Square, but that's more for multi-player gaming and not so much for film.

If you could share your Top 3 VR Tips for aspiring filmmakers, what would they be?

Michael Filimowicz:

1. **The headsets you might pick for games** aren't the same as for video, so do some research and pick one with the right resolution specs for video. The models are constantly changing so ask people who really know the ins and outs of headsets for their advice. The Pico Goblin G24k is a great budget choice, up the price scale would be something like the Vive Pro Eye.
2. **Same with cameras**, the GoPro Max or Insta 360 have great quality, but a lot depends on your budget.
3. **Most high-quality video NLEs** can do 360 post-production, e.g. Davinci Resolve or Premiere.

These 3 tips are more on the technical side, but I think probably the most important tip is to have a concept where 360 makes sense. Doing 360 just for the sake of it probably isn't a great idea. I would also recommend producing the same film BOTH for regular 2D and 360. Just like when you create mixes of a soundtrack that come in mono, stereo, 5.1 versions, or where there's a Music and Effects track etc., think about concepts where you can produce a VR immersive version AND regular screen-based version.

The reason for this is that VR is still very niche and there's just not a lot of audience there. You might get very disappointed at the very low numbers of eventual viewers. So, consider projects where you can still reach regular audiences with 2D and specialized audiences with your VR version, similar to how films produce IMAX versions for that specialized format. I wouldn't do VR-only films unless it's just a kind of calling card piece to show what you can do, OR if you have a paying client, e.g. in the corporate media space, maybe some large company will want a bespoke VR film and are willing to pay you for it. Right now the audience for VR film is too small so I'd suggest having a VR offering in tandem with a regular film format.

Michael Filimowicz, PhD, is Senior Lecturer in the School of Interactive Arts and Technology (SIAT) at Simon Fraser University and co-editor of The Soundtrack journal. He develops new forms of general-purpose multimodal and audiovisual display technology, exploring novel product lines across different application contexts including gaming, immersive exhibitions, control rooms, telepresence and simulation-based training. He has published across disciplines in journals such as Organised Sound, Arts and Humanities in Higher Education, Leonardo, Sound Effects, Parsons Journal for Information Mapping and Semiotica. His art has been exhibited internationally at venues such as SIGGRAPH, Re-New, Design Shanghai, ARTECH, Les Instants Vidéo, IDEAS, Kinsey Institute and Art Currents, and published in monographs such as Spotlight: 20 Years of the Biel/Bienne Festival of Photography, Reframing Photography and Infinite Instances. His personal website is <http://filimowi.cz>.

Documentary Filmmaking

Courtney Hermann on

Keeping Cool when the Stakes are High



What was one of the most important things you learned filming on location?

Courtney Hermann: For me, filming on location is intense, demanding, and uncomfortable—for many reasons. Documentary filmmaking is an extractive process where we enter into the lives of others to take their stories, even as we collaborate with participants to do so. This alone should inspire some anxiety! Add to that the pressure of wrangling the technology, staying alert to opportunities for compelling content, divining the needs of participants and the needs of the crew, etc., etc., etc. I've learned that to manage this, I have to be on high alert on the inside, but

appear calm on the outside since documentary production is not about inflicting my experience of the transaction on anyone—it's about the people whose stories I am tasked with interpreting.

What was one of the most challenging problems solved?

Courtney Hermann: Production is synonymous with problem-solving so it's hard for me to latch onto a single anecdote. I think I'm making it sound like filmmaking is not fun! And maybe it's not "fun" per se. But it's immensely rewarding to put yourself in a high stakes environment – not a dangerous situation, rather, a consequential one – where you know you'll need to juggle all kinds of facts on the ground to arrive at a set of materials you can shape into a story that reveals some truth, large or small, about what it's like to be a person here on planet Earth. And then there are these moments of wonderment on production where you look around and say, *"How did I get here—to this place, with these people, at this moment?"* And the answer is, *"Documentary brought me here!"* And gratitude abounds. My more direct answer to this question is that all challenging problems are best solved with the input and help of a trusted and beloved crew. So, to prepare for the vexing and ubiquitous problems of production, find one or two partners who will do battle with you against the forces that conspire to interfere with the storytelling process.

What should documentary filmmaking students know about getting permissions?

Courtney Hermann: It is best practice to seek written permissions to record people and use locations. Public places – public streets, sidewalks, and public property – are fair game

for recording, but you can't necessarily plop a tripod down in a public thoroughfare and start recording since you may be blocking vehicle or pedestrian traffic or interfering with an adjacent business. If you are recording in a city, you can check with the mayor's office or local film office to get a permit. Refer to the project forms at the *Directing the Documentary, 7e* resource page where you can find templates for personal release, crowd release, and location release forms: <https://routledgetextbooks.com/textbooks/9780367235574/resources.php>. In terms of repurposing existing intellectual property, my highest recommendation to students is to consult the Center for Media and Social Impact's fantastic guide to fair use in documentary: http://archive.cmsimpact.org/sites/default/files/fair_use_final.pdf. When it comes to music, don't use copyrighted music without permissions. Instead, source from a free or low cost royalty-free music site or collaborate with a musician to create an original score.

If you could share your Top 3 Tips for Aspiring Documentary Filmmakers, what would they be?

Courtney Hermann:

Tip #1. Be brave.

Tip #2. Be humble.

Tip #3. Be relentless in production and post-production. That means recording as much high-quality content as you can. No documentary filmmaker has ever said, "*I have waaaaay too much great footage to work with.*" And, editing the piece with such rigor that the viewer cannot detect your enormous efforts to serve their needs and the needs of the story.

Courtney Hermann is an Assistant Professor of Film at Portland State University, an award-winning independent documentary filmmaker, and a non-fiction media producer. Courtney's work is distributed by Public Broadcasting Service and its affiliates, through educational film catalogues, at film festivals, and through impact distribution to community partners.



“

Pick up a camera. Shoot something. No matter how small, no matter how cheesy, no matter whether your friends and your sister star in it. Put your name on it as director. Now you're a director. Everything after that you're just negotiating your budget and your fee.

- James Cameron



”

Adapting to Your Environment and Subject with **Michael Rabiger**



What are the most important skills a documentary filmmaker must possess?

Michael Rabiger:

The ability to:

- Reject stereotyped approaches to your subject until you find one original.
- Aim to make a visual film that needs no interviews or narration.
- Listen, think, and change course when needed.
- Use a camera like a mobile intelligence.
- Empathize your way into other people's reality.
- When editing, assemble all your action material first, bring words to it sparingly and later.
- Show cuts to trial audiences and listen closely to what they liked and disliked.

What was one of the most important things you learned filming on location?

Michael Rabiger:

- See what the location says about the people who live there, and film it engagingly.

- Make the location particular and interesting, as if it were a character and not just a backdrop.
- Bring alternative equipment, particularly mics, in case you have to change strategies.

What was the most challenging problem solved?

Michael Rabiger: I didn't know where my film subjects came from until I hit upon the idea of artistic identity, something everyone already has, hidden inside. You have to search for it and define it. It isn't fixed but finding the one you currently have will help you greatly. I made 21 films without realizing they had a common denominator that came from the marks left on me by my history!

If you could share your Top 3 Tips for aspiring documentary filmmakers, what would they be?

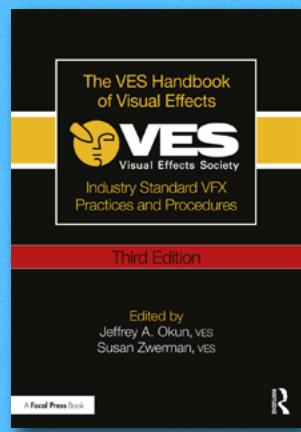
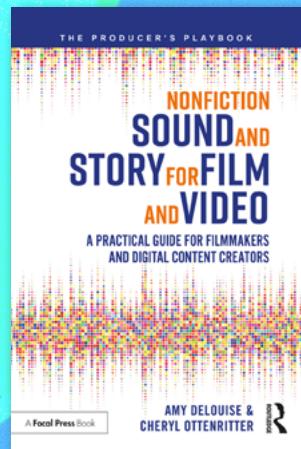
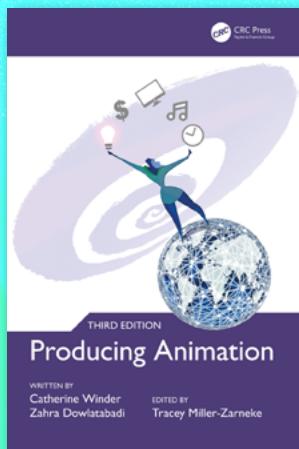
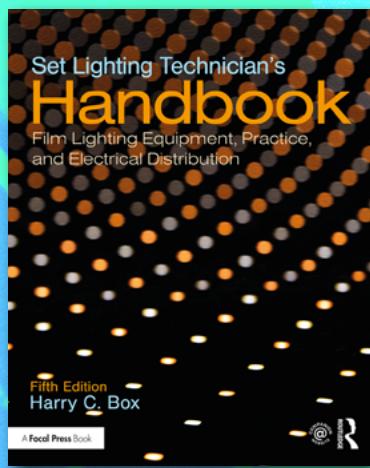
Michael Rabiger:

Tip #1: Find your artistic identity (see in the book, *Directing the Documentary*), and develop subjects you are passionate about.

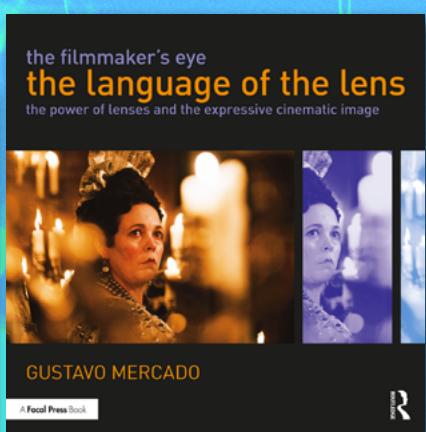
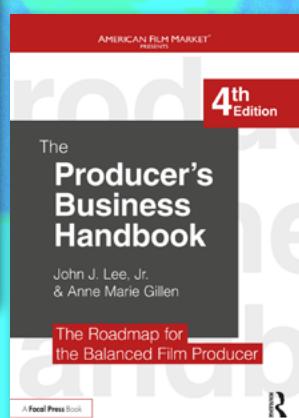
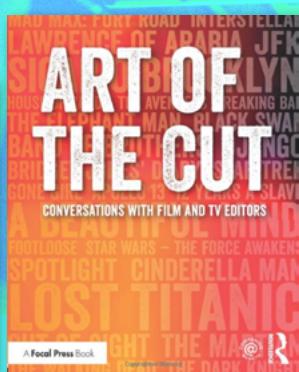
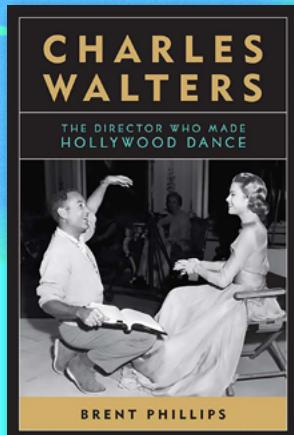
Tip #2: Find a form and approach that is specific to your subject and that serves it better than any other form.

Tip #3: It's better to do a short, narrowly framed subject deeply and well, than a broadly defined topic superficially.

Michael Rabiger began in the cutting rooms of England's Pinewood and Shepperton Studios, became an editor and BBC director of documentaries, and then specialized for many years in the US as a production and aesthetics educator. At Columbia College Chicago he was co-founder, then chair of the Film/Video Department and founded the Michael Rabiger Center for Documentary. He has directed or edited more than 35 films, was a founding faculty member and then Chair of the Film/Video Department at Columbia College Chicago, and has given workshops in many countries, designed and led a multinational European documentary workshop for CILECT, won the International Documentary Association's Scholarship and Preservation Award, and was also awarded the Genius/Career Achievement Award by the Chicago International Documentary Festival.



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Christine Sciortino

on True Diversity and Communication in the Heat of Battle On-Set

What are some of the most important skills every makeup artist needs to succeed?

Christine Sciortino: Every makeup artist must be able to work with every single skin tone, age, and gender identity. There are no excuses here. We live in a diverse world and more and more, the film industry is striving to tell the stories of the entire human condition. I see a lot of young makeup artists who are amazing and putting makeup on themselves. But when a performer gets into their chair who is from a different background or age than them, they can't find the right

foundation shade, the most appropriate skincare products, the most flattering eyebrow shape. It's unfortunate - not only for the look of the final product, but for the comfort of the actor. My general advice is to practice on as many people as you possibly can - from ages 5 to 95 if you can. However, you can still expand your techniques during the era of social distancing. I suggest watching YouTube videos and reading magazine articles aimed at people from different demographics than you and taking notes. You may also try grabbing a magazine, or even your phone or tablet, and flipping through the photos within and trying to study and identify

the skin tones and undertones. Even if your language isn't scientific you might practice describing them like, "This person's skin is a reddish-tan, that's kinda purple-y brown around the eyes," or, "This person's skin is a yellow-y brown with some darker brown spots around the edges of the face." These aren't descriptions you need to share with others - they are just ways for you to mentally process what you're seeing and start to train your eye. Another way to practice is to mix skin tones on paper, using paint, colored pencil, or oil pastels. Once you get the hang of this, and can paint at least 20 different skin tones, you can start painting full-face makeup looks for practice! I also go deep into the shade-matching process (finding the right foundations), special considerations for aging skin, as well as all the techniques below in my book, *Makeup Artistry for Film and Television*.

Grooming facial hair - to work in film and television, beauty makeup skills are not enough. I see a lot of makeup artists who have perfected glam looks but struggle with "no-makeup" makeup and especially with grooming. Grooming essentially means shaving and shaping naturally-growing facial hair. You will do tons of grooming in film and TV and it is crucial to be well-versed in creating and maintaining facial hair looks. I suggest classes or even online classes. Try looking at barber colleges or cosmetology schools that may offer these. Purchase a quality set of grooming tools - at minimum including trimmers, shavers, an ear/nose-hair trimmer, barbershop combs, as well as facial hair products such as beard oil and mustache wax plus, aftershave solutions and treatment for ingrown hairs. Again, try to practice on as many people as possible until you feel these skills become natural.

Nails - Like facial hair, nails are considered part of the Makeup Department's responsibilities in film and television. Knowing how to do a simple manicure (even one just

to clean up, without nail polish) is imperative, and you must know how to do so quickly. If you enjoy nails and get good with them, you may find yourself designing outrageous fake nails for certain characters - I love to do this type of nail art and it can be a fun way to bring specific characters to life!

Tattoo Covers - Many performers have tattoos which can pose several problems - they may not be character-appropriate or time-period appropriate, or they may not have "clearance." This means that the production does not have permission from the tattoo artist to use the tattoo image (the artist's intellectual property) on-screen. It's possible you could find yourself needing to cover tattoos every day on set, and you need to do so using professional products. Some companies boast one-step coverage creams, but these tend to be less effective for film and TV work. HD cameras may still pick up the undertones of tattoos, especially those done with black ink, so you really need to color-correct and work in several layers. Additionally, these creams are likely to smudge during a long day of shooting, which means they can damage wardrobe and mess with

continuity. Learning to cover tattoos using a step-by-step color-correction process and using professional products can take time and patience, but it is worth it.

What was one of the most important things you learned on set?

Christine Sciortino: You will learn something new on set every day, but if I could sum it up into one lesson, it would be: **be prepared.** And by prepared, I mean over-prepared.

Most often, makeup artists report to Basecamp at the top of the day and prep the actors there. Once the actors have been through "the works," meaning Hair, Makeup, and Wardrobe, the actors travel to set and at least one makeup artist goes with them. That means you will need to bring everything necessary to maintain that actor's look throughout the day up to set with you, *and* any personal items you will need. You need to make sure that you are comfortable, protected, and nourished on set - especially on location.

If the forecast calls for sun all day, it might be wise to pack rain gear anyway. If you're expecting rain all day, you'll still want to bring sunscreen in case the

sun comes out for 30 minutes and is beating down threatening sunburn on your actors. The supplies you are on the fence about bringing with you, will be supplies you wish you had.

While working on *Come As You Are*, which premiered last year at SXSW, I knew we would be shooting in the woods on a humid summer night. I brought every type of insect protection I could get my hands on - essential oils, heavy duty chemical-based bug sprays, etc. I had Afterbite in my kit but... not nearly enough. And I was working with an assistant who I did not provide Afterbite for! No one could have anticipated how many mosquitos would be out there and how aggressive they would be! One of our actors got a mosquito bite right in the middle of his forehead, just before his closeup, and by that point in the night, I had run out of Afterbite. There was nothing we could do which was an awful feeling.

Similarly, on the first day of working on *Proven Innocent* (FOX), I recall being in the trailer in the morning and having my nose hair trimmers in my hand. I felt confident that I had done enough grooming work on my character - a detective - and so after tons of deliberation, I decided not to bring them. Of course, I had *tons* of other equipment and supplies - his actor bag filled with products, plus my large set-bag of "just in case" products and tools. But, as soon as I got up to set, they were lighting for this character's coverage and one tiny nose hair had escaped me and was catching the light in such a way that it looked like a little speck of glitter highlighting his nose. Luckily, I had some small eyebrow scissors in my set bag and was able to correct the problem before shooting, but having the nose-hair trimmers would have been faster and easier.

You will always need more of something than you think you will. If nothing else, you should at least



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MAKEUP

have products to improvise with. I've learned to expect the unexpected.

What was the most challenging problem solved on set?

Christine Sciortino: I'm not sure I have a most challenging problem because I have worked in some fairly extreme situations - especially where weather was involved. I think the biggest lesson is to own from your mistakes and learn from them. This sort of goes back to the previous question where I talked about preparation. A lot of times, the challenges we encounter on set have to do with not being prepared for a certain situation. I remember a time I was working on a film and we had not anticipated adding a shot at the end of the day and I had to apply a small prosthetic while on set. We didn't have time to take the actor back to the trailer before the sun went down. I did my best, but we were fighting the light, so as the sun went down and the temperature began to drop, the silicone I was using wasn't setting properly. We did attempt the shot but the prosthetic was sliding off and that, combined with the fact that it had gotten too dark outside to match to color of the previous shots. We wound up having to re-do the shot the next day. In this situation, I look at my own communication with the AD and wonder where I could have been more clear about my needs for timing, temperature, and light to create this effect. Communication on set is just like sticking up for ourselves, communicating effectively, and learning to set boundaries in our outside lives. That said, sometimes you communicate as much as possible ahead of time, and the AD, Director, or Production Team may still change things last minute. In that case, you learn to stay level-headed and flexible.

Especially when working as Department Heads, there are so many details to think about, and every once in a while, things might slip through the



cracks, or you might be afraid to ask a question you need to ask. I remember a stunt performer showed up to set once with a full sleeve of tattoos and was doubling an actress who was wearing a tank top and had no tattoos. The stunt coordinator had originally sent in a photo of the double wearing long-sleeves, and I took this at face value and didn't ask about tattoos. I wound up covering the sleeve as fast as possible, but we wound up stalling production a full hour. I think that was one of the few times I cried on set. After the actress was done of course!

I've since learned to ask every possible question I can think of. Many of these instances were earlier in my career, and I've since learned from my mistakes. You will also make mistakes! You will encounter unexpected circumstances that you could not have predicted. It's normal. I think as long as you keep an attitude of humility and learn from these situations, you're on the right track.

If you could share your Top 3 Tips for aspiring makeup artists and visual storytellers, what would they be?

Christine Sciortino:

(#1) Respect everyone. As unfortunate as it is, you live in a world where sexual harassment, and bullying based on race, gender identity

and sexual preference still run rampant. By changing the culture one day at a time, we can end these problems. Don't laugh at the joke. Don't touch or compliment another person if it's not in your job description. You may think you are being nice, but nice and respectful are actually different things. Most people in the industry just want to come to work, contribute to the vision of the team, and be valued for their work. That should be the focus. In addition to respecting crew members, makeup artists are in a unique position in the way that they create the "looks" of the characters. That means, you have to respect both the actor in your chair - their skin, their product preferences, their secrets they might divulge to you during the makeup process - and the character they are portraying. You may be telling the story of a person who comes from a different ethnic background, identifies with a different gender identity, and practices a different religion than you. You still have to design a makeup look for *them* that will tell *their* story in the most authentic, graceful, respectful way.

(#2) Do your research. This goes hand in hand with the previous point. To tell peoples' stories, the most respectful way to tell them is with accuracy. Research is also incredibly important for period work, of course. It can be really distracting to the audience when they see someone who doesn't fit the time period, although they may not be able to pinpoint why.

(#3) Take care of yourself. I can't emphasize this one enough. This film industry can be very stressful, physically grueling, and sometimes status-driven and competitive. *You* are the best asset you have to ensure a long,

creative, and thriving career, so it is taking care of your body, mind, and spirit that will ensure that career is sustainable. Not only do I suggest caring for your health through a nutritious diet, a type of exercise you enjoy, and adequate rest, I strongly suggest prioritizing your mental health and your emotional and spiritual well-being. I talk about this more in *Makeup Artistry for Film and Television* because it's so important to me. There are so many different methods out there for maintaining well-being and for connecting with your inner world. Find what resonates for you and keep up with those practices and build a healthy community and support system. Learn how to say no when you need to - whether that's regarding work or outside of work. You are precious, your artistry is precious. Make sure you treat yourself that way.

Christine Sciortino is a Chicago-based makeup artist and visual storyteller with recent projects including "Come As You Are," "Captive State," "Proven Innocent" (Fox), and "Fargo" (FX). As a member of the IATSE Local #476 Studio Mechanics Union, she designed and leads the local's first Sexual Harassment training program, making our film sets safer spaces. She also created and instructs the Cinema Makeup curriculum in the school of Cinema + Television Arts at Columbia College Chicago where she has the joy of educating the next generation of filmmakers.

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Editor **Steve Hullfish** on the Importance of Constant Practice and Letting Go of Ego

What industry changes have you seen over the years in regards to film and video editing?

Steve Hullfish: Well, I've been editing since long before the advent of non-linear editing systems, like Avid, so the biggest change is just non-linear. Beyond that, it's the massive increase in speed and storage capacity that have allowed non-linear systems to evolve from strictly "off-line" quality to being able to actually edit with 2K and 4K resolution natively.

What was one of the most important things you learned editing a show?

Steve Hullfish: For me, it's about setting aside ego enough to be open to possibilities and to have the patience to allow the edit to evolve through the entire process. Also, to be open to how much an edit or show can be manipulated beyond the basic intent for which the material was created. The script and even the director's initial vision is malleable.

What are some common mistakes new editors should avoid?

Steve Hullfish: Similar to my comment above, they need to set their ego aside. Ego about ANY suggestion is deadly. The editor is a collaborative job. You must have things to offer, but you also have to be open to suggestions and notes. Being a good collaborator is often more valued by the people around you than pure "talent." Your career will be made more by the people that want to work with you again than by any perception of "talent."

Don't get too locked in to a single NLE. Each NLE has its strengths and weaknesses. Limiting your NLE choice limits your career.

Don't get too locked in to a specific methodology or approach. Don't get too locked in to a specific solution for an editing solution. Don't let yourself get paralyzed by indecision or not knowing how to get started. Do SOMETHING to get started. For me, one simple step leads to another and the next thing I know, I'm on a roll and don't want to stop.

I had a great conversation with Sven Pape of "This Guy Edits" and a lot of that advice is relevant:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Evhv5adVqMo&t=341s>

If you could share your Top 3 Editing Tips for filmmakers and video makers, what would they be?

Steve Hullfish: First, you need a lot of "reps." You need the time in the editor's chair or with the camera. You need to be telling stories ALL the time. The best way to get better is just to do the work. Figure out something you can shoot or edit. Nobody would consider going out on stage as a dancer or violinist or onto the field in the NFL or NBA without years of practice, the same is true for telling pictures through film. You've seen the kinds of movies and TV shows that have inspired your desire to be in the business. But to get to that level just doesn't happen. You have to practice a LOT. The best way to get good at anything is to fail and learn from your mistakes. You need to have the confidence and patience to make a

LOT of mistakes without losing heart in your abilities.

Second, you need to watch a lot of movies and TV and try to deconstruct the decisions that were made and why something was cut the way it was. How and why are they cutting something as common as a dialogue scene. Why does a dialogue scene in this movie look different from a similar conversation in another story? Or why is one dialogue scene cut differently than another dialogue scene in the same film? Almost every moment in a film is covered by multiple set-ups or camera angles, so why did they choose the exact camera angle and "size" of shot for a specific moment in the story? When do they use close-ups? When are they on a 2-shot?

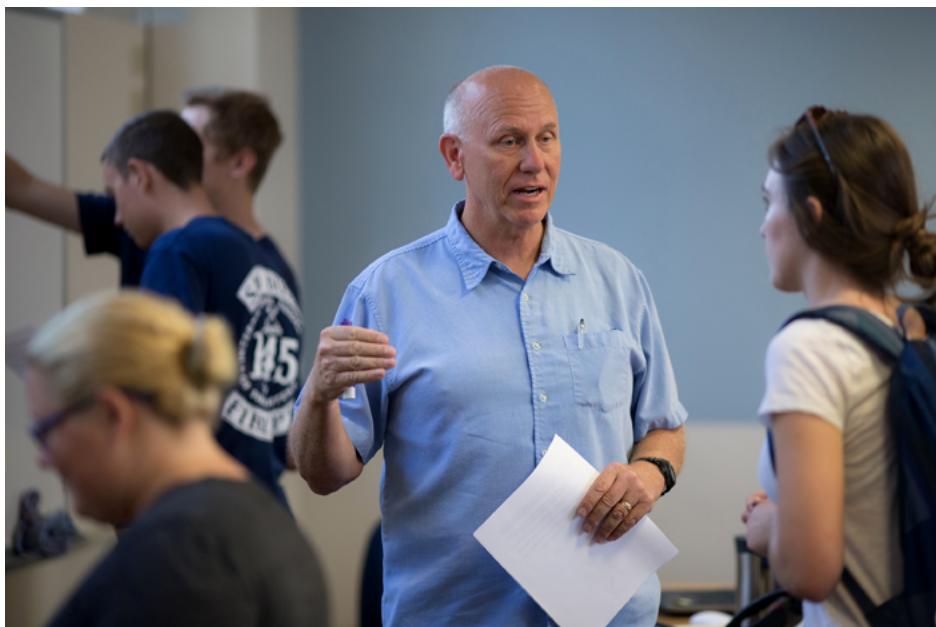
Third, do not get wrapped up in technique. Everything should be in service to the story. Think of how your edit choices affect the audience's perception of the story and the characters in the story. Pace and edit speed need to be in service to the story. Which person you're "on" in a conversation needs to be in service to the story. Should you be on the speaker or the listener? That depends on what that decision has to say about the story and the perception of the characters. How quickly you cut to the answer to a question or to the response to a statement says a lot about the characters and the story. Is the response hesitant because they're contemplative or worried about saying the wrong thing? Is it abrupt and impatient? Or is it fast because the

character is super-smart? Do you leave in "shoe-leather" (walking or driving from one place to another) because you need to give the audience time to think or feel or anticipate? Or do you cut it out to move the story along faster?

Steve Hullfish is a feature film and TV editor with credits including "Courageous," "War Room," "Champion" and the theatrically-released feature documentary, "Clinton Inc." Hullfish is the author of the books, "Art of the Cut," "The Art and Technique of Digital Color Correction," "Avid Uncut," and "Avid Xpress Pro Editing Workshop." Hullfish also trains editors and colorists around the world.



Being a good collaborator is often more valued by the people around you than pure "talent."



Scriptwriting for Film, Television and New Media with **Alan C. Hueth**

"Early on in my TV and film production career, I was a 'one-man band'—a common phrase describing one who was doing it all. I quickly discovered that the most important component of my projects was the script, and a bad script leads to a bad project. But over time (and getting a master's degree in scriptwriting), I discovered that great TV and film scripts of all kinds are based on two basic fundamental components that were identified/created in the 4th century B.C.: pathos and the elements of drama. With that in mind, here are my tips for all those interested in becoming a script writer for film and television."

~ Alan C. Hueth

What are the most challenging aspects of crafting screenplays?

Alan C. Hueth:

- Knowing and creating the “triune nature” of the main characters — *THE* foundation for the most important component of great screenplays: *conflict*.
- Knowing and remembering that screenwriting (film and TV) is all about eliciting emotion (“pathos”) in the audience. And the vehicle for achieving that is the six elements of drama: *character, plot, diction/dialogue, theme/thought, melody/music/sound FX, spectacle-setting visual FX*, etc.
- Taking the time to write a logline, synopsis, and a treatment or step-outline ...all of these things invite self- and other- feedback and correction about the characters and story *BEFORE* writing the first draft of a script.
- Not making the words in your script your “babies” – where you protect them like a lioness protects her cub. Get a “thick skin” because your work will be critiqued, and there will be rewriting....be ready to accept positive feedback (criticism) of your work from people who are a lot smarter than you and have the wherewithal to pay you for writing the script and/or are willing to turn your script into a real film.

What are some common mistakes new screenwriters should avoid?

Alan C. Hueth:

- *NOT DOING* those “challenging aspects”/activities (above).
- *NOT LEARNING* how to write other scripts for TV (e.g., documentaries, commercials/PSA's, news, corporate media, etc.) and/or short films. It's

highly likely that it might take a while to get that first feature-length screenplay contract and \$++. This other stuff can put bread and butter on the table. By the way, my book will prep you to write all of these other scripts too!

What was one of the most important things you learned while working on a script?

Alan C. Hueth: Early on I learned about how much I didn't know about screenwriting. I saw it as entertainment...but it's much more than that. Screenwriters are really in the "transportation business." Successful screenwriters understand that their job is to take us (the viewers) on wonderful, believable journeys that move us and change us viewers. They take us to times, places, and worlds that transcend the boundaries of space, time, and matter. They take us into issues and controversial topics that challenge us and make us think, grow, and change. And they take us inside the lives and minds of characters to the point where we vicariously (emotionally and intellectually) experience the lives and perspectives of the characters.

If you could share your *Top 3 Screenwriting Tips* for aspiring filmmakers and storytellers, what would they be?

Alan C. Hueth

#1: Prepare. If you're in school, take as many writing and creative-writing-related courses as possible...and do well in them. If you're not in school, read as many great stories as you can. Read the classics and books that have become films.

#2: Become a Student of Screenwriting. A "student of screenwriting" is viewing as many outstanding and not-so-outstanding

films and TV shows as possible. But don't just mindlessly watch. Watch with a critical sense of how and why it worked and/or didn't work. And be sure to acquire and read as many film and TV scripts as possible. The book includes all kinds of award-winning films and TV shows, links to scripts, etc.

#3: Get your work produced and show that your work stands out from others. Most people who need screenwriters will want to see your past work(s) — something that has been produced before they hire you. And if it's a good project, be sure to enter it into a film/television festival.

If your work gets into a festival, it stands out from other films/TV shows. And if you win an award at a festival, that gives you even a better shot to get your foot in the door. Finally, it's very important to make sure that you don't violate any legal and ethical laws and guidelines in your script.

There are many more tips about "all-things screenwriting" that my students have successfully practiced in Chapters 15 and 16 of my book.



Alan C. Hueth is Professor of Communication at Point Loma Nazarene University. He has worked as a consultant, writer, producer, director, editor, and/or shooter on over 300 contract, cablecast, and broadcast programs. His portfolio includes corporate videos, documentaries, news, sports production, interview shows, and short films. He is also the winner of two Telly's, a Broadcast Education Association award, and several cable television awards.



Prewriting Your Screenplay with **Michael Tabb**

Can you share with us your thoughts on the importance for screenwriters to “prewrite” their screenplays and the benefits of prewriting?

Michael Tabb: First and foremost, every writer has to find his or her own writing method that works best for him or her. So, regardless of how anyone tells writers there is a specific method or formula writers should follow is incorrect. I have a method that works great for me and is endorsed by some of the best and most successful screenwriters in the business. I have written for Universal, Disney, producers at Warner Brothers, and I still say any writer has to do what works for his or her brain and gets creativity sizzling. There is no magic bullet, only techniques and great ideas for how to unlock the door to your imagination.

Some writers are not planners and like to fly by the seat of their pants. They just start writing on a page and see where it takes them. I've actually seen it work for some writers, but that is extremely rare. They have an amazing gift, and I wish

I had it, too. I am not a fly by the seat of my pants writer. For most writers, that's a huge mistake because it does not yield a cohesive script. It turns out meandering with a lot of beats that read like setups that are never paid off, and though it can be unpredictable, it turns out reading sloppy with a lack of clarity. It's just a series of turns that feel like a disjointed exploration of a character, idea, or theme. Those scripts have their place, but rarely in mainstream cinema, which can be refreshing.

Meanwhile, in my experience, for the majority of quality writers I know, *prewriting* is an essential part of our process. It helps writers drill down into tone and genre, flesh out characters, plots, provide a strong escalating structure, and leads to strong setups and payoffs. It takes away the fear writers have of the blank page.

A young writer is usually driven to write because he or she cannot keep a story idea locked up in his or her head anymore. By the time the writer stops procrastinating on that first story, the

young writer has thought it through so much that he or she cannot hold back the flow of ideas any longer. The floodgates open because the writer did a lot of the prewriting in his or her head. The new writer already pictured the structure, how it should end, what it's about, and what character the story is going to follow. But think about this... that first idea was a lifetime in the making. The writer lets it fester, build, and expand sometimes for months and years before deciding to actually commit it to words on a page. The more professional a writer becomes, the less time the writer has to turn out quality content because the writer needs the next paycheck. We have bills, and we'd rather pay them through writing than some other type of job, leaving us with depleted energy and time to develop the work.

The WGA (screenwriter union) minimums say we have only 4 weeks to turn in the first draft of a 90- to 120-page script and two weeks for a full-fledge rewrite (which is sometimes

a page-one do over). That's a serious ticking clock. I, and the working professionals I know personally, love having a method that we can use every time, built with a series of steps I know will yield a very competent and well-developed story on a super tight deadline. Something with a strong statement about the world, a character arc that proves it, the perfect genre for the premise, characters designed to serve very specific purposes, and a structure any reader can identify as something with a strong and captivating and escalating beginning, middle, and ending.

Prewriting also saves the writer an absurd amount of time in the rewriting process, and gives shape and clarity. Prewriting sets the writer up to attack the script with all the major "big picture" components figured out so he or she can attack the story from a place of fun and security, because there is a plan. The pre-writer knows the story makes sense before he or she starts. The writer is not getting stuck and walking away from the computer between every scene because he or she doesn't know what happens next or have an idea for exactly how to execute it best. There's far less stress involved, and this makes the writing of the first draft infinitely more fun. Ironically, prewriting and planning is liberating, not constricting. The writer frees him- or herself of fear and worry of "will it find its way" and just allows the story to fly. Once a writer knows where he or she is going, the writer can have more fun exploring the beats that will get the writer and the writer's characters where they need to go.

Remember, just because a writer prewrites a plan does not mean that writer has to stick with it if he or she thinks of a great new thing along the way. The writer can always detour on a whim, take more scenic and off-the-trail paths to see how and where that might lead. A plan is just a plan, and it's not etched in stone. It should not

limit a writer's ability to explore new ideas as they bloom.

What was one of the most important things you learned while working on a screenplay?

Michael Tabb: My brain is exploding with things I could mention here. The biggest is that almost all script notes can be helpful, even if the specific suggestion is not worth adhering. When readers have a problem with a scene, really consider what they say (especially if you gave the script to more than one reader and more than one reader marked that scene with an issue). Whether or not the reader is correct about what isn't working, the point is that something isn't clicking. Think outside the box of their suggestions. They are missing something that you meant to convey that should have made the scene work, and it didn't do the trick. So, ask yourself if there's a way to make the scene do what you wanted in a better way. Every note is an opportunity to put a moment in the script under the microscope and see if there's a way to improve it. We call this *looking through the note to see what's under it*.

A young writer is usually driven to write because he or she cannot keep a story idea locked up in his or her head anymore.

A filmmaker has finished his or her screenplay – what do they do now?

Michael Tabb: Rewrite it. Hone it. Don't sully your reputation sending out a script that doesn't make readers shout, "Damn, this writer is good," whether or not they like the story. Spec sales are rare, but what great specs do is get the writer considered for OWAs (open writing assignments) on different stories the producers do want to produce. I do three major rewrite

passes: **(1) a big picture edit** (genre, character consistency, structure), **(2) scene-by-scene edit** (making sure each scene flows seamlessly from one to the next, is necessary, and strong as hell), and **(3) line-by-line edit** (keeping action written in active tense, brushing up dialogue, and finding anything I can cut out to keep the story trucking along at a great clip).

If you could share your Top 3 Screenwriting Tips for aspiring filmmakers and storytellers, what would they be?

Michael Tabb:

1: Here is a huge gap in content availability created by Covid. *What are you waiting for? Make your own project!* Equipment is more accessible than ever. You have a better chance at getting picked up now that there are more content outlets than ever in the history of the medium. That said, it must be fantastic as possible. Nobody wants his or her name on a bad film. So, surround yourself with people far more talented (ego-less) craftsmen than you and learn from them every day. Put in the time, make it great, and if your film never gets picked up, you just paid for the best and most powerful film school a filmmaker can have – real experience.

2: Write for you and what you have learned that resonates powerfully within you. Trends change and writers cannot write to today's trends because they are passed by the time the script is ready. So, write smart, write now, right now. Write something that matters based on what you see going on around you that needs correcting. That makes it timely. What you may lack in craftsmanship may shine through in heart.

3: Honestly, I have to say, read my book. It has hundreds of story

SCRIPTWRITING

creation tips in it stemming from every great teacher and writer I've known, over twelve years of WGA writing experience, all wrapped into a single set of building blocks. I make a pittance on the publication of it. I specifically wrote it for the same reason I co-created the WGA's Mentor Program. I wanted to share all I know and help the next generation to become better writers. This first book is my love letter to the state of story crafting and screenwriting, and making sense of how it is constructed when done well. It was the only way I knew I could share all I've learned and understand about my craft long after I'm dead. I truly hope it helps you find your way.

Michael B. Tabb is a film festival Best Screenplay award winner for "Misfits Christmas," Nicholl Fellowship semifinalist for "The Casanovas," author of "Prewriting Your Screenplay" for Routledge (America's #1 textbook publisher), decade-long WGA current and active member, and co-creator of the WGA's Mentor Program. He's agile enough to write horror for **Universal Studios**, family for **Disney Feature Animation**, and a period war epic for a production company at **Warner Brothers** to name just a few. He's also written for Intrepid Pictures, the Canton Company; producers Paul Schiff, Sean Daniel, and Lawrence Bender; directors Thor Freudenthal and Mike Newell; comic book icon Stan Lee; and actor Dustin Hoffman.

Tabb attended the three top schools for filmmaking in America: USC, NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, and UCLA's School of Theater, Film & Television's Professional Program in Screenwriting. His many professional endorsements can be found on the main and book page of his website: www.MichaelTabbWGA.com. With a passion for giving back, Tabb serves on the WGA Writer's Education Committee, and he co-created the WGA's Mentor Program. He has lectured at writers conferences from coast to coast and in classrooms at Florida State University, UCLA, and USC, having tested his story-development theories as a film school Program Director and a multiple award-winning MFA screenwriting professor at various universities.



Zoomology Excellence in 5 Steps

How to 'Zoom' to the Head of the Class

Bart Weiss

As we begin Summer Semester 2020, *the universe and the university* have been communicating through Zoom and its brethren since the COVID-19 situation and social distancing started in March 2020. We have all been on Zoom, and some of you may have used Zoom to make a documentary. (*By the way, make sure you get the setting correct for that*). As a film student, you should work to make the Zoom experience work for you. So, here are five steps to impress your film teacher with your Zoomology excellence.

1. Get good sound. Just like you don't want bad sound in your video, you can do much better in Zoom if you have better sound. There are a few options here. The easiest is to use some headphones like the ones that came with your mobile device. The mic will be closer to your mouth, and the way Zoom works, it will process your audio better. The next step up would be to get an external mic, and it doesn't even have to be a great one. You will need a USB or digital mic which will easily plug into your computer. If you have them, try a better analogue mic with an XLR cable and analogue/digital converter. The thing is if the audio sounds better, people will listen to what you are saying just a bit more.

2. Think about the lighting. Remember you are a film student, and this is an opportunity to impress your teachers. Using just a table lamp near the computer can give you a nice key light. Some LED desk lights can let

you adjust the color temperature and brightness. If you are using a virtual background you might want to have another lamp as a backlight to give you a clean key. But for the extra pizzazz, you can add some color gel to the lamp for effect.

3. Let your background tell the teacher and the class something. Remember, you are a storyteller.

If you don't use a virtual background, think about what you can put behind you that can be expressive. If you go with the virtual background, really go for it. Look for images that project the image you want to project. Maybe it is a scene from a rare film, or something that relates to the subject of the class for the day. But if you do something creative, you need to keep being creative, or it will get stale. Another approach with the virtual background could be to visually express how you are feeling. As a creative person, use this as a challenge, and it will pay off.

4. Use an external camera instead of the camera that comes on your computer. Usually even your iPhone or Smart Phone will look better, but if you have a good DSLR or cinema camera with a nice lens, the image you project will be great.

5. What are you wearing? You don't need go all out but think of how you would dress a character in your film. Think about what your character could be wearing or how you can be wearing it.



As a film student, you are learning how to control the image. Zoom is another creative outlet and another way to show off your cinematic skills.

Bart Weiss is an award-winning filmmaker, educator and director/ founder of the Dallas VideoFest and produces "Frame of Mind" on KERA TV. He was President of AIVF and was a video columnist for *The Dallas Morning News*, and *United Features Syndicate*. Bart received an MFA in Film Directing from Columbia University.
www.videofest.org

COVID-19 and Why You Should Not Postpone Your College Education

Fred Ginsburg, CAS, Ph. D.

The first semester of having to teach online is over. It was a unique experience both for faculty as well as students. Some were able to handle it fairly well; we are a profession of technically adept filmmakers, after all.

But with the high probability of the Fall 2020 semester also being primarily online, and maybe even the following Spring 2021 (depends on when we see pharmacologic solutions), many students are having second thoughts about continuing their education. They are thinking, "Is it worth it? Maybe this is the time to take a semester or two off?"

Initially, the thought of taking a long sabbatical makes sense. Learning online is not the most effective means to learn filmmaking. After all, the production of films involves a lot of hands-on and close social activity. Only the act of scriptwriting is a solitary vocation.

However, as much as most of us Production Faculty want to reassure ourselves that the hands-on components of what we teach is state-of-the-art and irreplaceable – the realistic fact is that we only cover the tip of the iceberg.

Most of what we teach involves mindset and understanding the basic principles of our technical crafts (cinematography, editing, audio, etc.). It is not so much about the specific equipment, but what to do with said equipment in order to communicate.

This semester made me realize that most of what I had to share with my students was an understanding

of how and why we do what we do on the set. I recalled the first thing that I concluded after leaving college with a freshly printed diploma and transcript. Working with seasoned professionals in Hollywood taught me more (technically) in several weeks than I had learned over four years on campus! The equipment and technology were way beyond the amateur levels provided by our film department.

However, my overall understanding of aesthetics and production flow was equal, if not sometimes superior to that of the veteran crew around me. So, my education was successful in terms of teaching me the big picture. I knew the principles of lighting, just not the nicknames of all the Mole-Richardson lights nor how to thread up a 35mm ARRI. I understood what was necessary to record on set, just not how to operate the fancy mixing panels and other gear.

The point that I am making is that most of what you will ultimately derive from a college degree in film/video/media does not rely solely on hands-on experience. It comes from learning the underlying thought processes, goals, and mindset of a professional. It goes hand in hand with learning the fundamental concepts of filmmaking,

including the aesthetics, art, and business aspects.

It is about being pointed in the right direction, so that you know what you need to continue mastering on your own. What instructional videos to watch on the internet, what software is essential, and the industry standards. Seminars and workshops sponsored by guilds and manufacturers. User groups.

Practical Considerations Against Postponing College

By continuing to attend online, you keep your mind sharp and progress through your degree program. Sure, you will miss out a lot of the hands-on experience, but as I have learned in my many years of life on this planet: most of the hands-on training that you get at the majority of even the elite film programs does not equate to the levels that we operate at in the industry.

Your degree in film is not respected for what a college may or may not prepare you for in terms of hardware proficiency. That is a skillset that you can rapidly acquire with but a few weeks of workshops and seminars. On your own, or through post-curricular events sponsored by your college department.

For example, the department in which I teach has had numerous discussions regarding conducting special sessions as soon as it is deemed safe to do so, with many instructors even volunteering their own time and resources to make these happen.





(When you leave Hollywood in order to teach, it certainly is not for the money!)

As a student, keep in mind that many of your classes are outside of the production realm. Writers learn much from understanding psychology, sociology, and history. Producers and freelancers should master accounting, contract law, and other business-related subjects.

If you do decide to take time off, what do you plan on doing with it?

Internships, during a pandemic, are scarce – and rarely involve any hands-on due to social distancing.

Earn money while you are no longer in college? Doing what? The economy is barely hiring right now, unless you want to be a delivery driver. Retail establishments are more concerned about hiring *back* some of the people that they had to lay off. There is no great rush to bring in a bunch of high school grads (who did not complete college yet) and offer them enticing positions.

But let's pretend that money is not the issue. You could travel the world and experience a diversity of cultures. Or maybe not, on account of this virus thing.

Having spent six months or a year sitting around in a mask and bored like hell – you decide that you are ready to return to campus...

Although the colleges may be eager for you to re-enroll, they cannot guarantee your spot in the film program. Your original “class” of film students has progressed in their academic hierarchy and are now in the more advanced courses of the curriculum. You can no longer team up with your old friends on projects.

You now have to compete, not only with all of the new students entering (or progressing) in your program, but also with all of the returning “time off-ers”.

COVID-19 has forced budget cuts at all of the colleges. Courses may not have been cut, but it is unlikely that the number of courses/sections will be increased. Departments have limited production equipment, edit bays, computer labs, screening rooms, soundstages, control rooms, large classrooms, and other physical facilities.

So even if the academic administrators approved opening up additional sections of some courses and were willing to pay the instructors, there still may not be enough resources to support that many new students in the program.

Learn what you can, while you can...

Going back to college after months away can be particularly challenging from a mental standpoint. Think about how hard it is to get back into an academic routine after just a summer break!

It will be even harder after a semester or two away!

And the film industry will not welcome you without a college degree. But they will not be as concerned about your lack of hands-on set experience compared to what they may think of your lack of a focused college degree in the field.

Trust me. Once things settle down in terms of the virus, there will be lots of opportunities to get up to speed with the latest gadgets. Even with 40 years professional experience and a holder of three degrees in filmmaking (B.A., M.A., Ph.D.), I still have to strive to keep up with all of the technological advancements raining down on our industry every year. Workshops and seminars abound.

But that decision to postpone the completion of your college degree could cost you dearly. A year of “life experience” will not equate too much in the way of practical experience. But it could easily cost you your spot in an elite film program.

Is it really worth losing a year, just because you may not get as much hands-on production experience as you will in the first few weeks after you graduate?

Fred Ginsburg, CAS, Ph.D., is a highly experienced and award winning professional sound mixer whose decades of work includes features, episodic TV series, national TV commercials, corporate, and government. He is a member of the Cinema Audio Society and the University Film & Video Association. Fred holds doctorate, graduate, and undergraduate degrees in filmmaking; has published more than 200 technical articles along with a textbook, instruction manuals, and hosts an educational website. Fred instructs location recording and post-production sound at Calif State University Northridge.



Dustin Morrow Shares Producing Insights

What are the most important skills every aspiring producer should learn?

Dustin Morrow: The most important skill for any producer is the ability to communicate clearly. You are overseeing so many different types of practitioners, and you must collaborate with them in such a multitude of ways, that you are constantly having to shift the way you communicate with your team. You have to understand what each collaborator needs from you and be ready and able to provide that.

What was one of the most important things you learned on set?

Dustin Morrow: The most important thing I have learned from more than 25 years of working on sets is that preproduction will make that process

as easy or difficult as you want to make it. Often, if you have a problem on a set, it's too late to solve it. Thorough preproduction anticipates challenges on the set and solves those challenges before you even get to the set. Plan, plan, plan, and then plan some more.

What was the most challenging problem solved on set?

Dustin Morrow: Because I do thorough preproduction, I luckily have not run into too many enormous problems on my sets. Time management (that is, production schedule) and budget restrictions will always be the biggest hurdles on most of my projects.

If you could share your Top 3 Tips for aspiring producers, what would they be?

Dustin Morrow: Not to keep belaboring the same point, but **engage in as thorough a preproduction process as is possible.**

Be responsible to your cast, your crew, and to the subject of your production. Media production

is a powerful art and form of mass communication, and to quote Spiderman's uncle: with great power comes great responsibility.

And to the degree that you can, **try to tell important stories, about human beings**, that matter to the world and make the world a better place.



Dustin Morrow is a filmmaker, author, programmer and tenured professor of Film at Portland State University. He has also taught at Temple University and the University of Iowa and was an editor and director of short-form projects and series television in Los Angeles, working with such clients as MTV, Fox Sports, and the Discovery Channel.

Blake Barnett

Project Manager

<https://networking.studentfilmmakers.com/profile/videoproduction>

Current Projects:

We mostly produce commercial and corporate video type projects. As you can imagine work is pretty slow at the moment and not business as usual. Therefore, we have been focusing more on live streaming and social media solutions for our clients. As we speak, we have crews live streaming a few high school graduation ceremonies. This is one of the wins for what can be accomplished via live streaming, and we look forward to doing more of these in the future. We also had a Zoom meeting yesterday for a virtual airshow. The sky is literally the limit to what you can do!

Most Favorite Scene to Shoot Thus Far:

On one of our first larger scale commercial projects we shot a scene for Xgliders where we closed down a street in San Francisco. It was a lot of fun to have our talent on these skateboard-like devices, plus we all learned how to use them. Every now and then, you'll still see someone in our office cruising by on them.

Challenge & Solution:

Our biggest challenge has always been with crew. It's not an easy task to have the right team on set in multiple States. We struggled with this for years in trying to maintain a spreadsheet of all our stellar crew resources. A few years ago, we organized and digitized our spreadsheet and made it open to the public (shoots.video) to use as a resource as well.

Production Tips:

- 1. Contingencies.** Always have a backup plan because even the best plans don't always work out like you think they will.
- 2. Proactivity.** Anticipate problems and solutions to resolve them before they happen. This also goes for learning your craft. You're never done and always working on improving.
- 3. Punctuality.** This is both with call times and deliverables. When the call time is 8am, and you arrive at 8am you are late. You should always arrive early. Then for deliverables, it's always good to under promise and over deliver. Give yourself a cushion for life's unknowns.
- 4. Ego.** We all have one and can be the biggest threat of them all since we're very passionate about our work. Be humble my friends!

<https://blaremedia.net/take-testimonial-videos/>

<https://www.shoots.video/>



Collin Brazie

Director of Photography

<https://networking.studentfilmmakers.com/profile/cbrazie>



Current Projects:

As a director of photography, I have been shooting narrative, documentary and branded/commercial projects for

the last 10 years or so. Most recently, I finished shooting two feature films, "Come Find Me," and "Foxhole" - both of which we are in the process of color timing. They are both independent, narrative features that were shot in and around NY/NYC and in the desert of CA. We shot both projects with ARRI Digital Cinema cameras, utilizing a handful of different lenses, ranging from Cooke spherical and anamorphic lenses to Elite anamorphics and Zeiss Ultra Primes. The projects were extremely different as one was shot on real locations all around NYC/Brooklyn while the other was shot upstate on a make-shift sound stage.

Outside of shooting, I'm currently in pre-production for another film to be produced by Closing Time Productions,

my production company that I share with filmmaker Nick Corporon.

Memorable Scene:

For one of the scenes in "Foxhole", we were able to shoot at sunrise out in some salt flats in CA. The colors and scenery were incredible. It made waking up at 4am worth it.

Challenge & Solution:

For one particular shot, we needed to achieve a 360-degree rotation of the camera inside a humvee, so it would have been impossible for an operator in such a confined space to pull off the shot (especially without a remote head). My keygrip helped us rig an arm off the camera that went out the top of the humvee so that we could rotate the camera without anyone being in the vehicle. There were lighting cues and live ammo (blanks) being fired as well - it ended up working quite well!

3 Tips for Aspiring Filmmakers:

- # 1 **Be nice to everyone.**
- # 2 **Never run on set.** It will make you look like you forgot something or screwed up.
- # 3 **Filmmaking is always a compromise.** Fight for the aspects that are important to the story.



<http://www.collinbrazie.com/>



David Collins

Multi-Instrumentalist, Composer, and Arranger

<https://networking.studentfilmmakers.com/profile/davidcollins>

Current Projects:

My music focuses on contrast, color, and texture.

I am currently working on an instrumental album to be released Nov. 5th under my name. The songs are a reflection of Memphis and the relationship between civilization and nature. Things like flowers growing between cracks in the sidewalk.

Aside from that I also have a Patreon page where I upload a lot of music. Currently, I am collecting videos of light and shadows to put with some avant-garde music based on the same idea.

You can find my Patreon by going to [Patreon.com/DavidCollins](https://www.patreon.com/DavidCollins).

Process for Scoring a Project:

I really hope to get more experience on this in the near future, but the couple films I've done have been vastly different. I think for me the key is to capture first impressions and then go back to tweak them. This might be playing a scratch track with guitar or humming melodies in a mic and making commentary.

Challenge & Solution:

I recently entered the Indie Film Music Contest and rescored *Poulette's*

Chair. The short film has a couple of parts that look like the rhythms in the music should match the rhythms on the screen. To get the placing right I recorded with a click and broke the piece into two songs.

I played guitar in the house band last year for an indie film called, *Space Submarine Commander*. There's a scene where the ship has a rough landing. I figured out that if I tap the strings with a slide in my right hand while moving over and away from the pickups, there's a very messed up sounding pitch thing that happens but you can still play cohesive (enough) sounding chords in your left hand.

3 Film Scoring Tips:

Look for and notice what it is about the music in films with a really good score. I think for me they are creating a cohesive sound, setting a mood, using color.

- **Creating a cohesive sound.**

This could be using similar instrumentation, using themes, or a similar style.

- **Setting a mood.** Interpret the aesthetic and enhance it.

- **Using color.** Pretty broad, but paying attention to light, emotions, contrast of scenes.

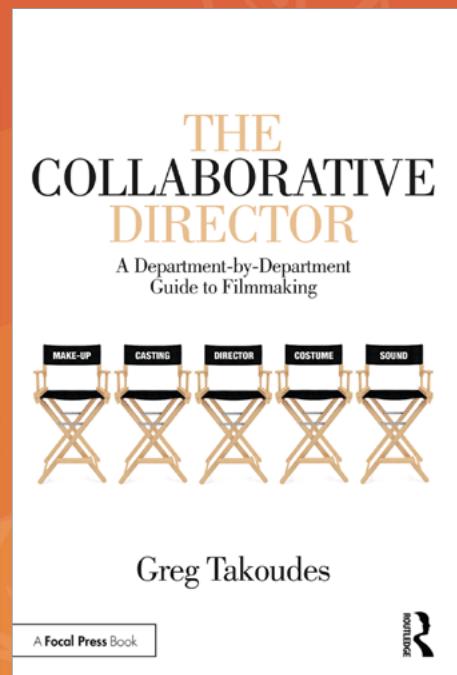
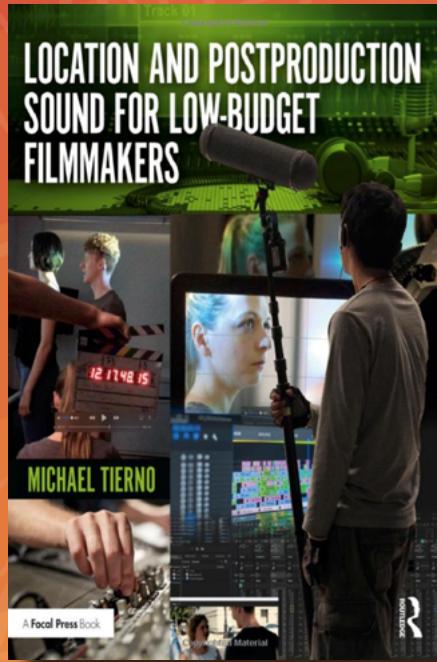
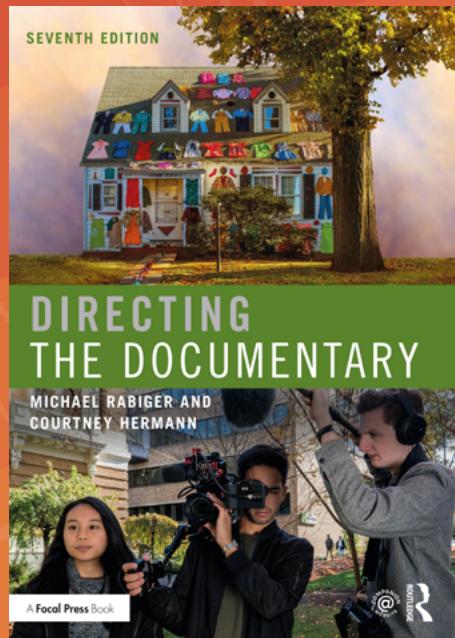
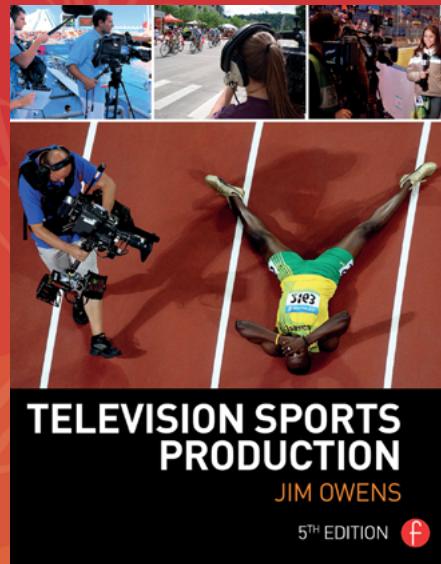
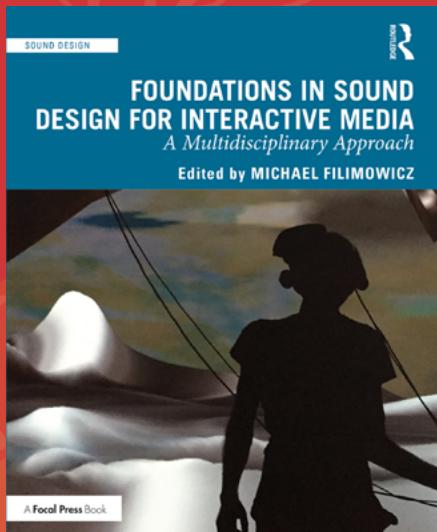
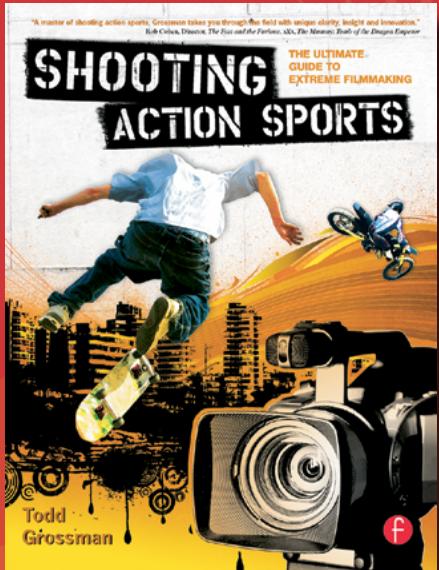
<http://www.patreon.com/Davidcollins>

“ Knowing is not enough; We must apply.
Willing is not enough; We must do. **”**

—Bruce Lee



Release Your Unlimited Creativity



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