



# StudentFilmmakers



**A Plan for *Late Lunch***  
*By Hiro Narita, ASC*



**Breaking Down a Script**  
*By Mark Dobrescu, CSC*



**A Conversation with**  
*David Moxness, ASC, CSC*



**Mathew Price, CAS on the**  
*Art of Dialogue Recording*

# StudentFilmmakers

StudentFilmmakers Magazine [www.studentfilmmakers.com](http://www.studentfilmmakers.com)

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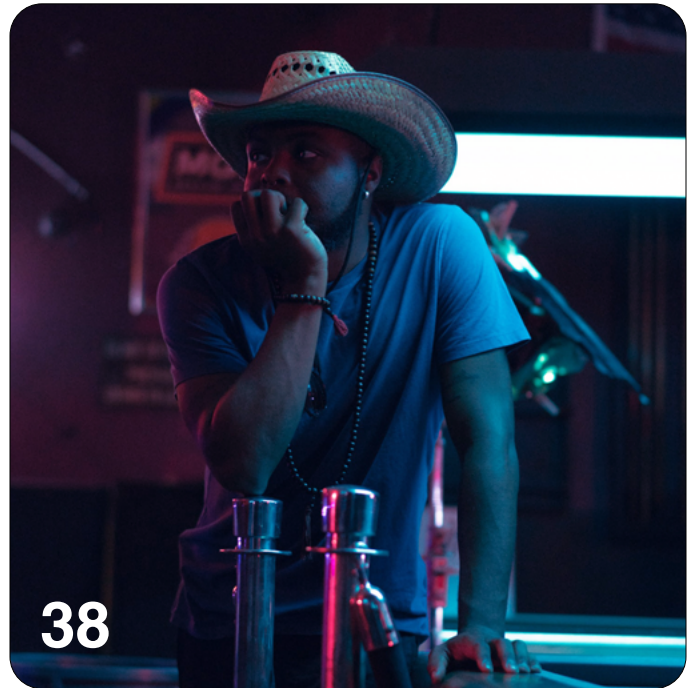
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*Kim Edward Welch*

# How to Direct an Opening Scene

By Kaine Levy



Watch “Farewell Waltz” opening scene at <https://youtu.be/tXynTuPjbM4>

The opening scene of a film is incredibly difficult to get right, yet one of the most important. As a filmmaker, your goal is to draw your audience into the world of your story, but the catch is that you only have a couple of minutes to do it.

Think about opening scenes that have gone down in history as being exemplary. Movies like “Inglourious Basterds”, “Touch of Evil”, and “Children of Men” spring to mind. What do they all have in common? They all establish a world in their normality, capture your attention with nail-biting suspense, then hit you with an inciting incident that completely throws the world on its head.

Now, if you’re exploring a genre such as romance or comedy, your film may not lend itself to a suspenseful opening scene, but it still needs to have TENSION. It’s important to make the distinction between suspense and tension. Suspense creates a feeling of anxiety whereas tension creates a

feeling of anticipation, and anticipation can exist in many different forms.

Let’s watch the opening scene from my short film, “Farewell Waltz”, a romantic drama set in the pre-WWII era. (Refer to lower left video link.)

After watching that, you may feel as if there wasn’t any suspense, and you’d be right... But there was tension; emotional and sexual. This tension exists clearly between the two main characters and is, therefore, felt by the viewer too.

So, why is this a successful opening scene? Well, in a short space of time, I am able to tell the viewer what world/era we are in, who the main characters are, what the story is going to be about, and what the obstacle is, all without uttering a single word of dialogue. These things combined should be enough to encourage a lover of romantic films to keep watching.

Let’s explore how I achieved this, then you can apply this level of thought to your own films.



## Selling the World

This is one of the most important things to establish early on. Your audience wants to know where they are, and what they can expect from your film.

In this case, it's evident that this is a period film thanks to the use of costume, hair and makeup, production design, and music. They all scream early 20th century. Neville Chamberlain's voiceover further helps to pinpoint where exactly we are in history, and we now know that this is a pre-war story. Prior to this scene, there is a brief introductory segment with some clever sound design where the music sounds vintage and poorly recorded, then later opens up into a

more modern-sounding orchestra. This sort of attention to detail is great because it not only serves the story, but also gives the audience a more cinematic experience.

## Establish the Main Characters and Story

Your characters, and the journey they go on, will be the reason any audience sits through your film. They need to be any combination of relatable, mysterious, fascinating, unusual, unpredictable, loveable, or despicable. A good character is made great by the right actor. They know how to maintain charisma on-screen and engage an audience.

In this case, I have established a love story between a poor black male (Charles) and a rich white female (Rose). It's the classic story of Romeo and Juliet with a racial twist and a WWII wrapper. There are so many things here for an audience member to latch onto, whether that's their experience with racism, class division, the taboo nature of mixed-race lovers, disapproving parents, or their love of history. Whatever it may be, the characters and the story will be relatable for many.

With just two shots and the right performances, you immediately understand that these two characters are falling for each other. You also think about the socioeconomic difficulties they face, which is reminded to you

## DIRECTING

by subtle mouth movements of the disapproving father.

So, in under two minutes, you now know that this is going to be the story of two young lovers from different racial backgrounds, and the struggles they face in a 1930's world. All of this achieved with no dialogue.

### So How Can You Do This?

Every great scene starts with a great script. If the script doesn't build the world or illicit strong emotions, then no amount of thought or clever directing will bring this out on set. So, step one is make sure your script is solid.

Next, you need to think bigger than the script (kind of contradictory right?). A script is just a blueprint for a crew. Yes, the story and characters need to be excellent, but as far as executing it is concerned, that's on you. You need to read between every line and think about how you can express these ideas cinematically. Let's use my opening scene as an example. In the script it says:

*"Feeling his gaze, Rose turns her head to look at him. They share a moment."*

Literally all it says is she looks at him and they share a moment... Now it's up to me to think about how she looks at him, what kind of moment they share, and how I can elicit a strong emotion from my audience.

Music obviously plays a huge role in this film - it's virtually its own character, but the key is that I knew this from pre-production so I could plan accordingly. Slow motion also helps

massively because it gives the idea that we're stopping this moment in time, and that nothing else matters to these characters. Then, of course, you have the most important thing - the performance. I rehearsed this scene very carefully with my actors, and the way I prepared them enabled them to deliver all of this subtext to you, the viewer, without uttering a single word. Always think about subtext, and the idea that something greater is always going on beneath the surface. The images you choose to show your audience are just a tool to divert their attention from the bigger things at stake in your story.

In summary, as a director you need to think about how you can use every tool at your disposal to create a successful scene. Every story has different requirements, and it's up to you to figure out how your story needs to be told. The only way to get good at this is through experience. The more scenes you direct and the more films you make, the better you will get. It really is that simple! There are no shortcuts.

I hope this gives you a solid starting point on how to direct an engaging opening scene. Remember, the opening scene is like your elevator pitch. If you don't grab your audience in the first few minutes, you will lose them. 🍷



# Pace<sup>2</sup> By David K. Irving

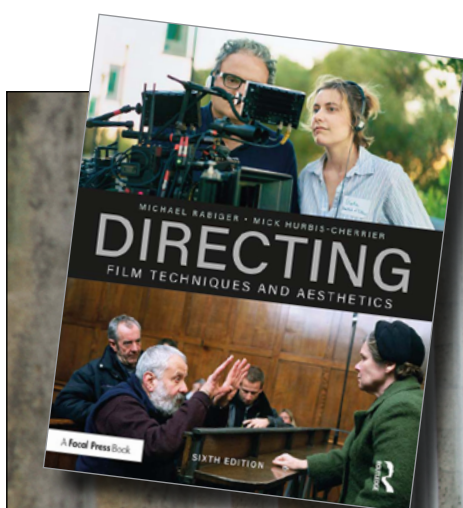
Pace is an important property particular to film. It has two meanings: the rhythms of the film as dictated by the screenplay, and the tempo of a day's work as set by the director. The success or failure of a project in many ways is dependent on this intangible quality. The pace of the film is built into the script, into each beat, each scene, and only when strung together is the rhythm of the whole appreciated. Therefore, the director, as the principal audience on set, determines, shapes and approves the pace of the scenes. To accomplish this, the director must know the script intimately and be able to approximate pace prior to production. This is particularly important as most films are shot out of sequence. To shoot Scene 95 on Day 3, and to have it build naturally upon Scene 94, which may be shot weeks later, requires a director to orchestrate the action to fit into a grand scheme. As William Shakespeare once said, "To climb steep hills requires slow pace at first." Even a roller coaster ride begins with the clickety-clack of the cars being pulled up to the highest point of the ride to make the first of many stomach-wrenching plunges.

The other definition of pace is that of the director's own inner mechanism. As the true audience of one on set, the director's inner clock is linked to that of the production and the screenplay. On a 50-Day shoot, the director should be at the same level of energy (to guarantee a consistent result) on Day 50 as he or she was on Day 1. Many first-time directors burn themselves out by Day 10 of a difficult shoot. This results in either their being replaced or producing less energetic and focused dailies in the latter part of the shoot.

Directors not only need to maintain their health during a shoot but their energy level as well. As the leader of the company, the director needs to inspire the cast and crew. Most of this inspiration comes from the director's energy. When it flags, so too does that of the company. Do whatever is necessary to maintain. Take naps. Eat wisely. Avoid drugs and alcohol. Drink plenty of water. Laugh. Remember the Tortoise and the Hare: *slow and steady wins the race*. Or as John Ford used to say, making a film is like a trip out west in the old days. The director looks forward to the journey, but after the thirst, bumpy wagons and desperados, you just want to get to your destination alive. 🐢



David K. Irving is currently an Associate Professor and former Chair of the Film and Television program at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. David has directed six feature films and dozens of documentaries. David is the co-author of the award winning textbook, "Producing and Directing the Short Film and Video."



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# A Conversation with David Moxness, ASC, CSC

Interview conducted by Johnny Lee Solis

**How does a project's genre influence your approach to lighting? You never seem to stay in one category, constantly moving from fantasy to action to drama to recreating world events.**

**David Moxness, ASC, CSC :** Regardless of genre, story comes first. My approach and goal is to complement and tell that story via the photography. Mood and feeling play a big factor. When lighting for a particular genre the type and style of lighting, hard/soft, warm/cool, naturalistic/avant-garde are all factors I consider. It is also important to track through the script any shifts, or specific consistencies, in lighting, color pallet and tone you wish to employ to ensure a consistent theme of style throughout. I've been very fortunate to explore different genres and enjoy doing so.

**When you work on a series that employs multiple directors during a season, is it difficult maintaining the signature look of the show? How do you navigate the influx of creativity from the various directors?**

**David Moxness, ASC, CSC :** That can be tricky at times. Comes down to good dialogue and collaboration. I never want to handcuff an incoming Director and inhibit their initial thoughts. It very well could be their vision is something we haven't yet discovered, or realized, is great for

our show. Having free, creative and thoughtful discussion is vital.

**What's important to you in terms of camerawork?**

**David Moxness, ASC, CSC :** For me it is very important the camera (movement/work, etc.) complements the narrative, enhances the story and doesn't become "about the camera". I also find shooting with prime lenses a much more disciplined form of filmmaking. Placing the camera, with a specific focal length of lens, in a certain place versus "finding an image size" from an arbitrary position.

**What are your Top 3 Lighting Tips for new generation filmmakers and storytellers?**

**David Moxness, ASC, CSC :**

**Tip #1: Faces.** So much emotion, character and storytelling will come from the actors, specifically their close up. Sometimes I feel lighting faces gets lost, yet it can be such a huge factor in storytelling. How best does the lighting portray that character - or characters - in a scene?

**Tip #2: Environment.** The lighting of the set/location needs to fit with the scene and story. Treat it like another character.





**Tip #3. Explore.** Technically, there really isn't a right way or wrong way. It's about what feels appropriate. Use examples from existing films and shows as influence, but don't be afraid to explore. Put your thumbprint on it! 🍷

Cinematographer **David Moxness, ASC, CSC** never shies away from the opportunity to experiment. In 2015, the Canadian Society of Cinematographers Awards honored him with the Masters' Award for his outstanding contribution to the art of cinematography.

Moxness is currently lensing Amazon's upcoming series *The Wheel of Time*. Shooting in Prague, the series is based on the fourteen volume, best-selling fantasy series of the same name from author Robert Jordan.



Recent television work includes the *Alive* pilot for CBS and director Uta Briesewitz; ABC's *Whiskey Cavalier* series; and the first two seasons of *Lethal Weapon* for Fox Studios. He also shot Jon Cassar's four-part miniseries *The Kennedys After Camelot*, a continuation of the hit series *The Kennedys*, for which he won a Leo award, a Gemini Award, and earned nominations for American Society of Cinematographers (ASC) and Primetime Emmy Awards. He collaborated again with Cassar on his thriller *When the Bough Breaks*.

To date, Moxness has received six Leo Award nominations, winning twice: nominated in 2007 and 2008 for *Smallville*, in 2009 for *Alien Trespass* and in 2010 for NBC/CTV series *The Listener*, culminating in his 2011 win for *Fringe* and 2012 win for *The Kennedys*. He also received

an ASC Award nomination for *Fringe* in 2013. Moxness also earned an ASC Award for his lensing of *Smallville* in 2007, alongside CSC Award nominations for both *Smallville* and *Kevin Hill*.

When asked to use the new 24p high definition video on Gene Roddenberry's TV series *Earth: Final Conflict* in 2001, Moxness compared notes with the team preparing to shoot George Lucas' new *Star Wars* feature and learned the system inside out. His work on the series earned him a Kodak Spectrum Award and a Gemini Award nomination for Best Cinematography.

Beginning his film and theatre studies at Brock University in Ontario, Moxness simultaneously worked as a production assistant at Alliance Atlantis Communications. Mentored for eleven years by renowned Canadian cinematographer Rene Ohashi, ASC, CSC, the team worked on productions including the Atlantis miniseries *Philip Marlowe Private Eye* and the feature *Where the Spirit Lives*.

Moxness resides in Bellingham, Washington and is represented by DDA.

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## A Plan for *Late Lunch*

By Hiro Narita, ASC

A triptych in film form, *Love is Love is Love* is written and directed by Eleanor Coppola. “Late Lunch” is one of three segments in the film, and it takes place mainly in a large dining room and an adjacent living room in a house in San Francisco. Ten women gather at a long dining table for lunch reminiscing about the recently departed mutual friend. The story ensues in one afternoon, and the conversation intersects over the table, then it spills over to the living room.



As expected, filming in a real location posed logistic and technical challenges. But it also presented an environment and a visual character, in a way a custom-built set could not provide. I welcomed it. To maintain a visual uniformity and continuity through eight days of filming was key, and I needed a lighting plan.

I called on Eric Blum, a gaffer familiar with my working method, which is, *prepare but improvise*, and I enlisted his idea for a logical scheme. At this city location, the sun's movement created variable interior ambience throughout the course of day. We had to block the sun hitting the southern windows at certain hours and simulate sunlight when it got dark or rained, not uncommon in spring in the city. To tackle this situation, Eric devised a flexible lighting setup which a small crew can manage every day as needed, and then, dismantle it at the end of each day for safety. Having to rely on the house electric power, we settled for small HMIs.

As for the interior, we hang banks of mixed daylight and tungsten Kino Flo's above the windows, out of frame, as auxiliary to the ambient light. Their intensity could be adjusted from the floor according to the luminance from the windows. These lights were pre-rigged during the preproduction to minimize down-time between setups and keep the actors' concentration intact when

filming began. As much as possible, I avoided placing lights on the floor so that the actors felt unrestrained, even if they are accustomed to a myriad of lights around them. LED panels and inky lights were positioned judiciously, and flags and nets – sometimes obstacles to the uninitiated but unsung necessities of lighting – were used for modeling light. Over the windows, production designer Barbara Munch hung laced curtains, helping the light diffuse while obscuring what is seen through; an effective treatment for both esthetic and lighting purposes. In the same vein, practical floor and desk lamps served their roles, making lighting adjustments swift when changing camera angles.

Ultimately, when all the shots are assembled and edited, my hope was to make them appear as if they were filmed in one afternoon.

Eleanor Coppola is a very accomplished filmmaker in both the narrative and documentary genres, also a talented cinematographer and artist. Before the filming began, she described "Late Lunch" as a narrative drama infused with the spirit of a real event; fluid, detailed images and wide, static compositions at the right moments attribute to emotional and visual rhythm. And for dramatic emphasis, she described some specific images for certain moments in the story. I imagined at that point, the camera should become an unobtrusive



## CINEMATOGRAPHY



observer, an invisible guest in this drama.

To add another eye on the set, to see and capture the story as it unfolded, I thought of a camera operator with a diverse experience in documentary. Dyanna Taylor, director and cinematographer, fit such background, and I asked her to join our team. The authenticity of the location set, unique characteristics and its limitations motivated us to explore camera angles otherwise veiled in the preconceived frame of mind.

Wherever the space allowed, we used camera sliders to imbue spontaneity to the composition or its adjustment while the cameras were still rolling.

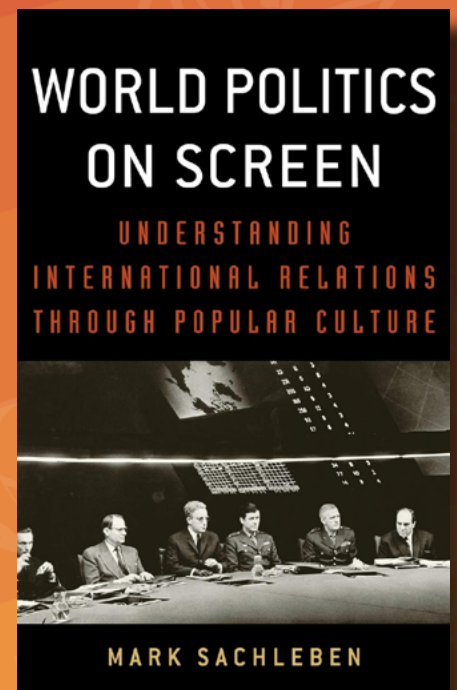
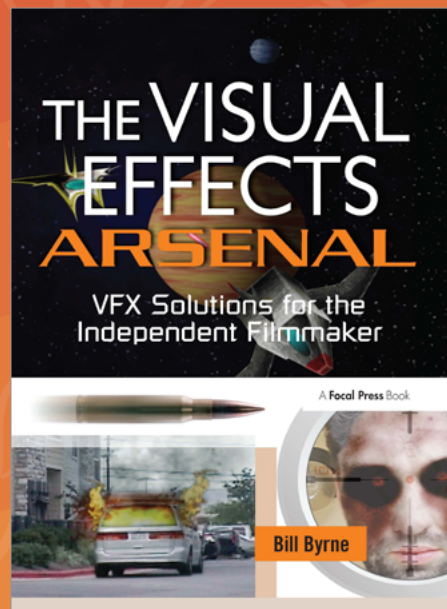
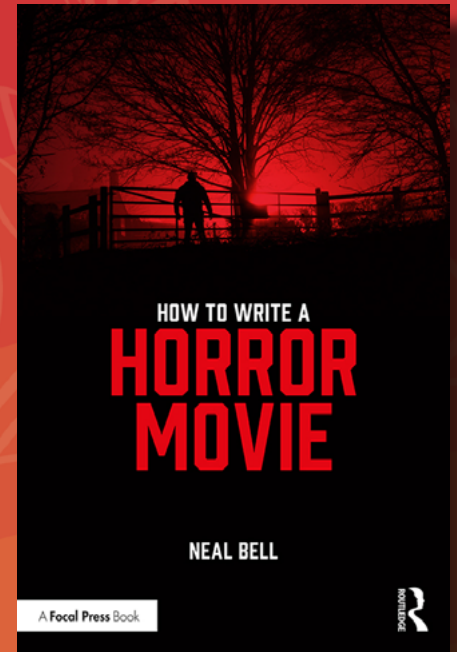
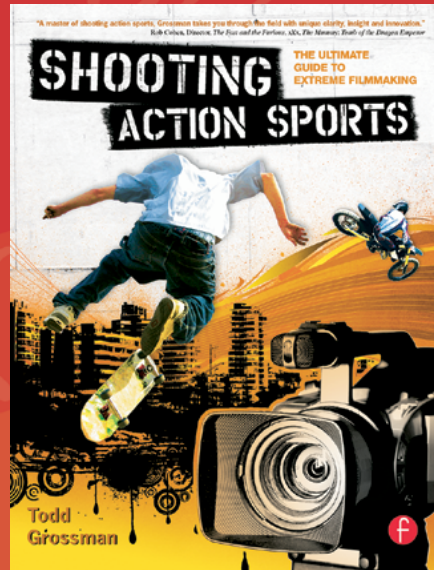
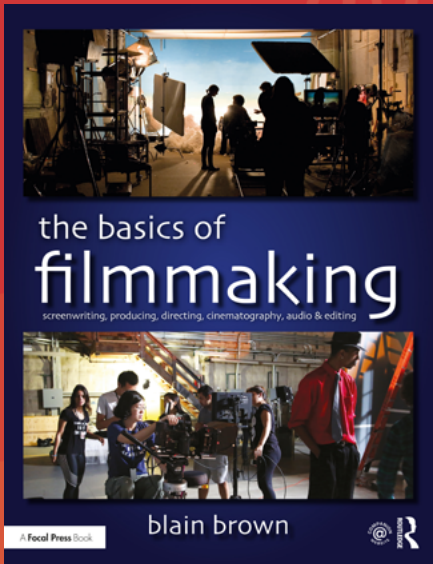
Zoetrope Studios provided two Sony FS7 with 4K resolution. Primarily, we relied on zoom lenses for expediency, but for a few specific shots we put to use 18mm and 180mm primes. 🍷

*Photographs by Kalman Muller.*



*Hiro Narita, ASC's filmography of over 73 titles ranging from feature films to episodic television series to documentaries includes "Never Cry Wolf," "Honey, I Shrunk the Kids," "The Rocketeer," "Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country," and "Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi." Narita has received Emmy award nominations for "Farewell to Manzanar," "Dirty Pictures," and "Half Past Autumn: The Life and Works of Gordon Parks."*

# Release Your Unlimited Creativity



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# The Art of Breaking Down a Script Is Essential for a DP

By Mark Dobrescu, CSC

You've just finished watching a great movie, and a discussion arises about the picture when the inevitable comment that, "the movie looked fantastic," comes up. After some quick research, you find out who shot it and find an article on how the DP lit the movie, which camera and lenses were used. However, before any frame is even shot, the DP has undertaken many steps to be ready.

An overlooked aspect of the DP's work is **the initial breakdown of the script**. Personally, I will read the script 4 to 5 times before I even attempt to start a breakdown. The first, and most important, question I will ask the producer is: *What is the budget, and how many days do I have to shoot the movie?* These are critical questions that dictate every aspect of a breakdown and the shooting of the movie. I will elaborate later on.

The first thing I do on my initial breakdown is go through each scene and count the number of shots I think would be needed to complete the scene. I do this even before I sit down creatively with the director. This exercise gives me a rudimentary idea on how long each scene may take to shoot.

Let's look at a small scene:

**INT. - DAY**

Kim, cutting some vegetables in the kitchen, hears a knock on her apartment door. She puts down her knife, wipes her hands and heads down the hall, and opens the door. A grungy, overweight man stands there for a couple seconds.

GRUNGY MAN

Oops, sorry I guess this is the wrong apartment.

KIM

(perplexed)  
That's okay.

**INT. - DAY**

Kim watches the grungy man walk down the hallway and slowly closes her door.

I will break down this short scene in the simplest way possible.

**Shot 1 - Master shot.**

**Shots 2,3 - Matching over the shoulder shots.**

**Shots 4,5 - Matching close ups.**

After I have completed the entire script in this way, I usually start working with the director on the tone of the movie. I then go back and re-look at all of the scenes, adjusting the shot list.

Looking at our scene again, the director wants a real dark tone to the movie, so this scene will need increased tension and a feeling of assumed danger.

**Shot 1 - Slow dolly into Kim.**

**Shot 2 - Kim's POV of door.**

**Shot 3,4 - Dolly or Steadicam with Kim walking towards door. Medium shot and close up.**

**Shot 5 - Dolly behind Kim as she walks toward the door.**

**Shot 6 - Kim's moving POV towards the door.**

**Shot 7 - Bird's eye angle looking down as Kim walks toward door.**

**Shot 8 - Low angle of feet.**

**Shot 9 - Close up of doorknob, dolly into it as Kim's hand enters.**

**Shot 10 - Medium shot of Kim opening the door.**

**Shot 11 - Extreme close up of Kim opening the door.**

**Shot 12 - Dolly into knife Kim left behind.**

**Shot 13,14 - Medium & close up shot of man on other side of door.**

**Shot 15 - Kim's POV of man walking away**

**Shot 16 - Kim slowly closes the door, shot from the hallway.**

**Shot 17 - Medium close dolly into Kim as she leans against the door.**



As you can see, the shot list grew to over three times the original number of shots. By this time, the director and I will start working the scenes out on our actual location figuring out the blocking of the actors and specific ways we want to shoot. I like to draw out rude blocking maps on my script and redo my shot list to accommodate the location and camera movement discussed. While on location, I figure out what type of camera and lenses I want to use.

My next pass of the script is directed to the lighting of each scene. *Where are my lights going to be? What is the source light of the scene? What type of lights do I need? What is the mood we are trying to achieve?*

My final pass on the script is going through each scene determining special equipment I may need. *Do I need special lenses, atmosphere, rain, multiple cameras, crane, remote head, etc.?*

My breakdown of the script is now complete, and I will start working with the first A.D. to make sure we have enough **time in each day** to shoot what we have planned out.



In conjunction with this, I will be informing the production manager on my equipment and personnel needs. The production manager will go over my request and inform me of the **budget** and what we can and cannot afford. This becomes a bit of a dance as I will barter for gear for certain scenes while adjusting other scenes to lose gear. After camera and lighting tests, I am finally ready to shoot.

The art of breaking down a script is essential for a DP. The DP has to know every aspect of the shoot: *lighting, movement, editing, time constraints and crewing*. The DP also interacts with every department including lighting, grip, make-up, transportation, wardrobe, effects, stunts and the art

department. No matter how prepared you are on set to shoot a scene, all of your work can be compromised when the lead actor says: *"My character wouldn't do that. I think we should..."* 🍷

**Mark Dobrescu, CSC**, graduated from film school at the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology in 1989. Upon his graduation, he was awarded The Academy of Motion Pictures top student cinematographer of the year and was hired by CTV in Regina Saskatchewan. Within a year, Mark became the senior cinematographer, travelling worldwide on numerous projects. After his tenure at CTV, he began shooting documentaries, commercials and sporting events for such clients as the National Film Board of Canada, British Airways, Pepsi Cola, The National Hockey League, the Winter Olympics and The Calgary Stampede. In 2000, Mark was granted full membership in The Canadian Society of Cinematographers. Since that time, he has concentrated his career on movies and television series working with directors such as Terry Gilliam, Roger Christianson and John Smith and actors Charlize Theron, Jeff Bridges, Ryan Reynolds, Nicolas Cage and Jamie Fox. His project list is extensive, shooting such classics as the critically acclaimed series, "Little Mosque on the Prairie," and the sci-fi thriller, "Stranded," starring Christian Slater. Mark shot three Escape formatted pictures in recent years which also included sections of each project filmed in virtual reality. Mark recently wrapped the mixed martial arts movie, "Cagefighter," starring Chuck Liddell and Gina Gershon.

[www.markdobrescusc.com](http://www.markdobrescusc.com)







**Michelle Acuna (Em) in  
Independent Western,  
“Bounty” (2009)**

*Bounty (2009)*, HVX100 with Red Rock Adapter. Chocolate Filter in front of lens. Lit with the sun and a bounce board about 50 feet from the actress, wearing dirt FX make up, to give an edge light on her left cheek. Colored by Allen Kelly at Filmlook Media & Post.

# Lighting Without Lights

By Jared Isham

One of the most common complaints or excuses I hear from filmmakers is that they don't have the right gear to make something. To be honest, I've made that excuse a few times and it is likely the easiest cop out for actually getting anything done. Fortunately for you, I'm not writing this to motivate you into taking initiative and telling you to just do the work. That kind of information is oftentimes pointless without any kind of solution presented. I want to give you practical tools that can help you achieve success when the lack of gear seems to be what stands in the way of you making a film.

My first assumption is that you, as a filmmaker, have a camera. Be it an Alexa, RED, URSA, Canon of any flavor, GoPro or even your cell phone, they all capture images that are viable quality for theatrical viewing. The next biggest thing on movie sets, though, is the lighting. Lighting can get expensive and cumbersome extremely quickly and with today's technology is also one of

the first things you could probably ditch when making a movie. Lighting is one of my favorite parts of cinematography, but the big set ups are not always conducive to indie or micro budgets, especially if you are bootstrapping your experimental indie film.

When an entire Grip & Electric package and crew are not feasible, the next best thing is to rely on the free rental that is hanging in the sky from dawn to dusk. I'm talking about how you can best leverage the use of natural light, or the sun, to make amazing images to help better tell your story.

A large part in maximizing your use of natural light is in where you choose to shoot. I would maybe suggest you rethink your strategy if you are choosing a location that is in a basement with no windows or no electricity. When you are wanting to light a scene, you need to have a source of light, so where you shoot is key. For the sake of ease, I am going to say that natural light encompasses two types

of light, one being actual natural light and the other typically classified as practical lighting or available light. Both are powerful tools that are relatively inexpensive, if not free.

When choosing your locations, the obvious things to look for are windows and electrical outlets or practical lighting. Bring your camera and take a few quick pictures to see how it looks. I will use an app called, "Sun Position, Sunrise and Sunset," by Stonekick, that lets you track the position of the sun over the course of the day. An often-overlooked location element to look for is the bounce. How does the light reflect around the room? What permanent fixtures in the location that have highly reflective surfaces and what parts of your location absorb light? How wide are the light sources? Are there any beams or shafts of light? You'll be able to use these to help "light" your scene. The same goes for practicals. How much light do the preexisting light fixtures produce? Adjust your blocking

and camera placements to maximize those location features.

Speaking of blocking, this is something that not only will maximize the use of what is available on set but also may create some genius directing that helps you to stand out as a filmmaker. A technique that I have gotten in the habit of doing when shooting on a tight schedule is to move the actors and not the camera. Move your actors to the light instead of attempting to get the light to get to your actors. This also goes for the camera. Move the actors before moving the camera. Be unique, get your coverage and save set-up time all without needing to move lights or your camera.

Shadows are not your enemy. When shooting with natural light, embrace the shadows, don't hide from them. A sure way to make your available light movie "not look" professional is to always have your actors washed out by staying out of the shadows and perfectly placed in the light without any dynamics. How often do you stand in perfect lighting when in conversation with someone? My thoughts are always

to look at the obstacles that stand in my way and see how I can use them to help me tell a better story.

The best part about filmmaking today is the technology we have at our disposal. Cameras today can see in the dark at the cost it would take to purchase, expose and develop about 30 mins of 35mm film. Don't let your lack of gear prevent you from making a film. Terrence Malik, in 2005, shot with natural light on 35mm film with his movie, *The New World*. Steven Soderberg shot his movie, *Unsane* in 2018, on an iPhone. Everything you need is either illuminating the world around you or currently in your pocket. Next time when that excuse arises in the back of your mind, instead of giving in to it, use the obstacles that are in front of you to tell your story. Who needs a 10K Light and light grid anyway, right? 🍷

*(Production stills photo courtesy of Stage Ham Entertainment.)*



**Jared Isham** is an independent filmmaker. His first feature film was the western "Bounty" that was distributed by Lionsgate on V.O.D. and his second film was the faith-based family film "Turn Around Jake" released by PureFlix Entertainment starring Michael Madsen and Jen Lilley. He is a partner and creative director at Stage Ham Entertainment, LLC., ([www.stageham.com](http://www.stageham.com)) a freelance T.V. & commercial editor and shares micro-budget Filmmaking tips and advice on his website [www.jaredisham.com](http://www.jaredisham.com).



**Scene at Pacific Plate Brewing Co. from Documentary Series, "Art of the Brew"**

*Art of the Brew* (2020) BMPCC 4K BRAW 8:1 UHD 35mm f2.3 ISO 400. Available light only, tinted glass doors providing sunlight. Light color grade applied in Premiere Pro.

**Bar Stool Scene at Pacific Plate Brewing Co. from "Art of the Brew"**

*Art of the Brew* (2020) BMPCC 4K BRAW 8:1 UHD 35mm f2.3 ISO 400. Available light only, tinted glass doors providing sunlight. Light color grade applied in Premiere Pro.

# Loren-Paul Caplin on Writing Film Dialogue

## Can you tell us a little bit about the evolution of film dialogue?

**Loren-Paul Caplin:** When we think about dialogue, we think about communication. Usually this entails two or more poles or terminals: the sender and the receiver. Sending connotes information, data, emotion, interest, and even physical material. Even though a terminal can be both a sender and receiver, when we think of two poles interacting, they are usually sentient and conscious entities. But it doesn't always have to be two conscious entities, or even a two-way communication. Isn't it possible to communicate with nature, with a tree, the ocean, the sky, or a teddy bear? One can communicate and emotionally connect with an inanimate object or a less conscious entity, like an animal in a one-way flow by just sending. So it seems, that of the two poles, *the sender* appears to take precedent, has greater agency, and can even act independently. Animals and humans send and seek information by way of sounds, language, body language, body sensors, and gestures. And most of this information has to do with survival, wants, and needs. This brings us to humans and word language, as opposed to body language and gestures. *Dialogue* comes from the Greek root *dia* ("through," "between," or "across") and *logue* ("discourse" or "speak"). The idea of speaking through, between, or across something parallels our basic biological entity communicating with and through its environment. This concept of communicating and being in communication with one's environment is at the heart of why we, as humans, talk. Dialogue is human communication expressly spoken in a scripted space. Spoken communication in its scripted version is dialogue. *Dialogue is how characters verbally engage with the world.*

## How important is it to be well-versed in different cultures (scripts that use the dialogue to tell stories from different parts of the world) and history (period pieces)?

**Loren-Paul Caplin:** Although authenticity is often a goal of good dialogue, believability and appropriateness are equally, if not often, more important. To achieve this requires that the writer immerse herself into the immediate culture/patois/



vernacular of her characters. It's not a documentary, it's not cinema verite, it is stylized/personalized reality.

## What is your creative process for writing dialogue?

**Loren-Paul Caplin:** Once the needs of the scene are understood — and this is huge — then it's about intuitively inhabiting my characters. It's about being the character, the storyteller and the audience simultaneously, not forgetting to entertain.

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

### Loren-Paul Caplin:

- (#1) Conflicts and tension are more dynamic than static conversation.** Strive to find or create tension within the dialogue. Aside from actual arguments, or being in the presence of potential violence, characters can toss up all sorts of obstacles in a conversation that causes tension, which are more fun and compelling to listen to. For example, if you ask your friend to hand you a glass of water and she says "no," the process of finding out why can open up all sorts of revealing possibilities. It can be as simple and benign as "because the last time I gave you a glass of water, you didn't drink it," or more seriously, "because I first need to get something off my chest." And this type of "tension-creating" interplay can transpire within your scene, even when it's about something else entirely.
- (#2) As real or authentic as your dialogue may or may not be, it's all performative.** Don't forget to hear it from the audience's point of view and entertain us.
- (#3) Genericism lies flat.** This is true not just for adjectives and adverbs, but also for nouns and any word that can be stated more uniquely. "I saw a green car and I felt bad" is quite generic. "I saw a hopped-up 1970 Pontiac GTO convertible and it made me wanna puke" is better. 🍷



*David B. Carren wrote and directed in Texas the film, "Waiting for Sandoval." The production utilized a cast and crew made up entirely of students from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley*

# How to Survive the Room

## Notes on Nightmare Notes

By David B. Carren

In *Next Level Screenwriting: Insights, Ideas and Inspiration for the Intermediate Screenwriter*, the advanced screenwriting book I wrote with David Landau, we devoted all of Chapter 12, *Rewriting, the Pain and the Gain*, to the harsh art of absorbing notes on your material. To quote from that chapter, "Usually the most difficult aspect of working in a professional situation is taking notes in the Room – the production office, staff area, or writing space where the creative principals will meet to discuss a particular project. Working the Room isn't limited to pitching an idea, getting a job, or having lunch with your boss; it's also about a creative continuum that almost always involves clawing through many, many notes on draft after draft."

To add to the anxiety, the Room may be packed with a dozen or more executives, producers, co-producers, executive producers, staff writers, and story editors, all offering contradictory or even nonsensical ideas: a creative Tower of Babel. But the worst situation is when you're dealing with people

whose notes are so dictatorial or arbitrary you can barely understand them, let alone incorporate them, into your work.

This occurred several times in the course of my career. During a brutal staff tenure on a show at Universal, I spent 12 hours a day in the producer's office, using its bathroom, having three meals brought in, while my boss strutted around the room, dictating story beats into a mini-recorder, shouting me down if I offered ideas. On another series at Paramount, the producer would issue notes on every line of every page of a script, down to eliminating conjunctives and correcting grammar, on scenes that had already been rewritten or cut. Even in animation there'd be madness. On one series, its star-producer-creator threw out an entire story – and it had been his idea!

But the worst was the tree house man. I knew I was in trouble when I met with my executive producer on a big budget network television series

to receive notes on the first draft of my episode and didn't understand a solitary word he was saying. As his thoughts and ideas tumbled and fumbled, connected and disconnected, I just assumed, as a young and inexperienced writer, I simply hadn't reached his elevated level of expertise.

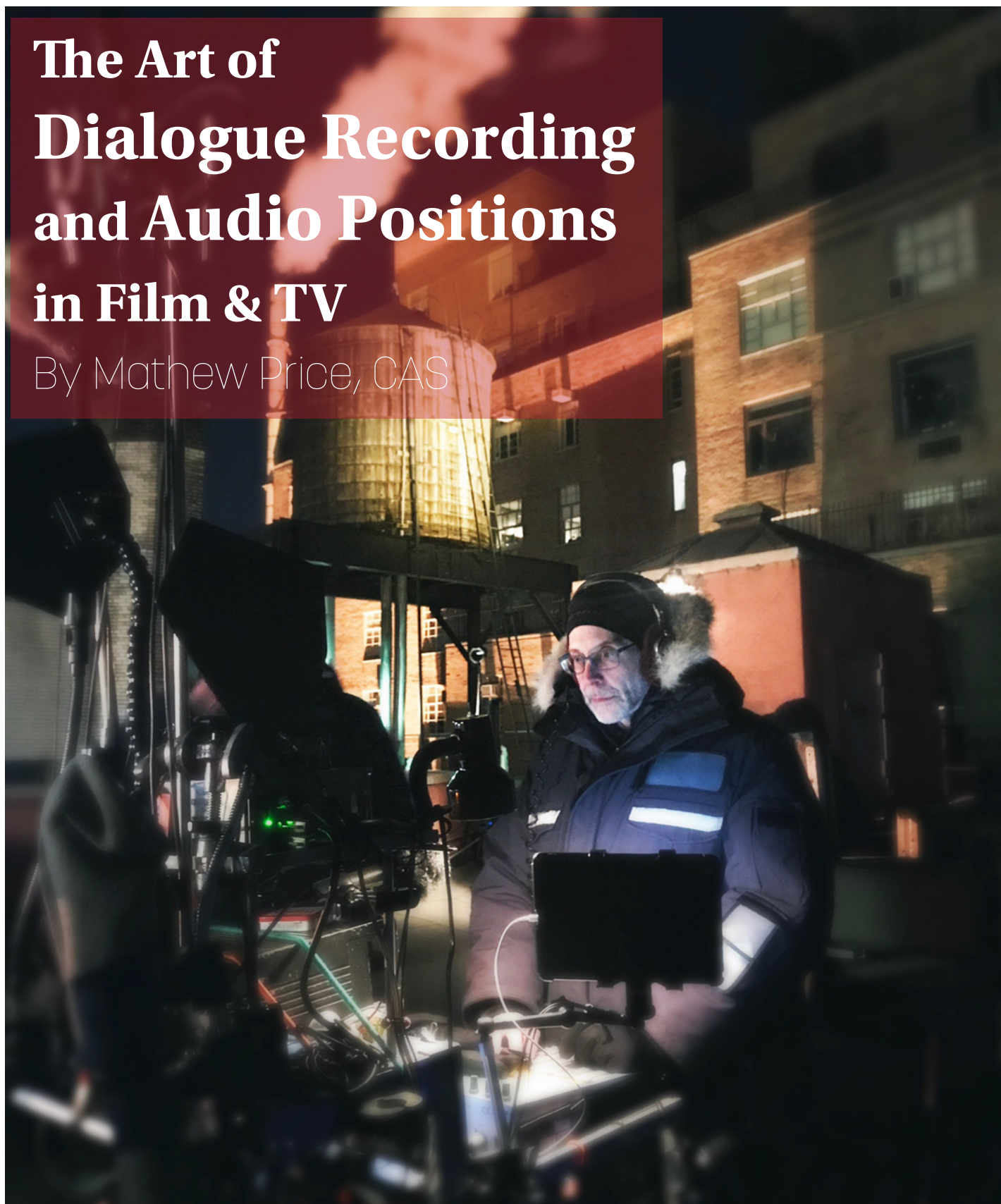
However, as I meandered down this increasingly unpredictable road, there were clues my self-assessment was incorrect. The first was when I'd call my producer-genius-boss's office and his secretary would answer, "the pig is not here." The second was, when the man finally did take my call, he appeared to mistake me for an individual named Mike who was tuning his Pantera GTS. But my Eureka moment occurred when, after I'd received no response on my second draft, and I called my producer-genius-boss's office once again, his secretary said, "the pig's not here, he's in rehab."

It turns out this guy was so high on cocaine his mind was literally sailing through the stratosphere. When he insisted on meeting with network executives in a tree house behind his mansion, they forced him into treatment, and he vanished for a few weeks. During that time, I met with the other producers on the show, got notes I could work with, and turned in my final draft. They shot the episode, and I'm still getting residuals on it. In fact, it's one of my best efforts and I even discuss it in my writing classes.

The point is, when you get notes, even if they are incoherent, misleading or simply insane, you don't quit. You persevere until they fire you, or they kill your script, or they cancel the show, or the world ends, which ever comes first. Stand your ground as best you can, offer your strongest effort, and never let them see you sweat. That's how you build a successful screenwriting career in the Room. 🐷

# The Art of Dialogue Recording and Audio Positions in Film & TV

By Mathew Price, CAS



“There are many, many nouns for the act of looking – a glance, a glimpse, a peep – but there’s no noun for the act of listening. In general, we don’t think primarily about sound. So, I have a different perspective on the world; I can construct soundscapes that have an effect on people, but they don’t know why. It’s a sort of subterfuge. When you photograph something it’s a direct appeal to their most conscious sense and so they know that they’re being affected by what they see. Sound kind of sneaks in the side door.”

- Walter Murch, Oscar-winning Sound Designer, Picture Editor



Now, see if this sounds familiar to you. Last weekend, my youngest daughter came to visit and after dinner, as usual, we sat down to watch a movie. She was adamant about watching something she was “really interested in,” so we turned on Netflix. A few minutes later, I looked over and saw that she was on her iPhone, which she would stay on *for almost the entire film*. She only looked up at the screen when something caught her ear, when she *heard* something interesting! I use this example as a reason why the experience of sound is so critically important to what we do as filmmakers.

It’s been said before, but it bears repeating. Your shots can be out of focus or manipulated in all kinds of visually disorienting ways, and the

audience will go along with you, but the minute someone goes – “*Huh? What did she say?*” – they have now been taken out of your (hopefully) immersive film experience. And, that’s where my role as a Production Sound Mixer comes in, on the front lines of the filmmaking process.

There are **three essential elements** that make up all of the sound you might hear in a film or TV show.

**Dialogue:** Either production tracks captured on set, ADR (Automated Dialogue Replacement), also known as looping, where the original dialogue is replaced either due to problems on set, often because of noisy locations, or because a director may want a different vocal performance from an



actor and “loop group,” where groups of actors record additional dialogue that may play off screen, or create background chatter, laughter, etc., to fill in background ambience.

**Music:** Pre-recorded source material, either a “live” performance or a piece that plays in a scene, for example, on a radio or TV, and original score composed for the show.

**Sound Effects (FX):** Live FX (what occurs during filming), edited FX from either field recordings or a sound FX library, and Foley (footsteps, jangling keys, etc.).

During filming, the Production Sound Mixer is the head of the location Sound Department, which includes the Boom Operator, hopefully a Sound Utility and maybe even a Music Playback Operator. Ultimately, I am responsible for mixing and recording all of the audio during filming, including any sound effects that may occur, and coordinating any music recorded live and/or played back on set.

For the most part, my priority is achieving a clean, clear and rich dialogue track, but don’t reduce that to just simply recording the actors’ words. What we are really doing is helping to

## SOUND

tell the story *by capturing the vocal part of an actor's performance*. I've always said there are two kinds of sound people – high school science nerds and frustrated musicians. Since I've always loved music, that works for me as a mixer because I approach recording the human voice as a musical instrument in its own right, with its own pitch, intensity, timbres and rhythms.

There are many possible paths ahead if you decide that sound is the place you want to be. On set, working in the Sound Dept. is different than working in any other. We're in the middle of it all, especially with our ears tuned to multiple places at once, yet we're also apart to some degree. Out of 100 or so crew members on set, there are only three of us that handle capturing the first step in what is arguably at least 50% of the cinematic experience.

For those of you who are hopefully considering working in sound, here's a very brief breakdown of various Production and Post-Production positions.

**Production (or Location) Sound Mixer:** Head of the on set sound dept., ultimately responsible for the overall quality of the production tracks; works

with the Boom Operator to decide choice and placement of microphones; gets hired directly by the director and producer, so having good relationships is important.

**Boom Operator:** The Mixer's point person on set and in the line of fire; responsible for handling the boom mic while staying out of the shot and avoiding throwing shadows on the talent or set; also may handle placement of radio mics on talent and, most importantly, communicates all necessary information to the mixer, who is often unable to be close to set.

**Utility/Cable Person:** (Often a P.A. or intern on low-budget/non-union sets.) Responsible for setting up and making sure the equipment is up and running at the beginning of each day and for wrapping it at the end; handles placement of radio mics on talent, runs cables to various parts of the set; provides wireless headphones to the director, script person and other people; often is called into action as a 2nd Boom Op.

**Music Playback Operator:** Usually works in ProTools and is responsible for any music that needs to be played on set, usually for a filmed performance. They will set up speakers and handle



wireless earbuds for actors to wear so they can lip sync to pre-recorded music without the music being played out loud in order to not contaminate any dialogue in a scene.

**Supervising Sound Editor:** Oversees the entire audio post-production process (may also be the Dialogue Editor); sits with the director and “spots” each reel for what may be needed in terms of replacement dialogue and added music and sound effects.

**Re-Recording Mixer:** Responsible for the final mix where all three elements (dialogue, music and effects) are wondrously and seamlessly woven together into the sonic fabric. Smooths out all the levels, equalizes different voices and FX, and minimizes or eliminates unwanted sounds from the soundtrack.

**Foley Artist:** Creates and records sound FX that are human-generated (footsteps, clothing rustle, key jangles, etc.) or too time consuming to edit in one at a time, done on a Foley stage in sync to the projected picture.

**Dialogue Editor:** Edits and smoothes the production dialogue tracks from location; splits apart the







different actors' dialogue so that the re-recording mixer can treat (control level, equalize) each track separate during the final mix; often finds and/or combines words or parts of words from many different takes in order for the dialogue to sound seamless.

**ADR (Looping) Editor/Mixer:** Prepares the dialogue that is to be replaced during Post-Production; edits the replacement dialogue and smoothes out the differences between the production track and the ADR track

so that the audience doesn't know that it's been replaced.

**Sound Effects Editor:** Responsible for finding or creating the appropriate FX for various scenes; maintains FX libraries; sometimes goes into the field to create and record original sound; manipulates (slows down, reverses, combines) found or original sound to create new sounds.

**Music Editor:** Responsible for editing music to fit into various length

shots and scenes; works with previously recorded material and original scores.

As with any position in the Film/TV world, in order to succeed you need: an excellent work ethic; an inordinate dedication to your craft; the desire to always learn and grow; and the ability to forge good working relationships, not only within your own department but with everyone else on set. This includes all of the various directors and producers you will cross paths with, and especially with our friends in Post-Production. Always try to see the big picture and provide them with all you can, doing your part in telling the story and adding your contribution to the soundscape of the show. 🍷

*Emmy winner for Sound Mixing (Amazon) Prime Video's hit comedy, "The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel," Mathew Price, CAS, has been a New York-based Production Sound Mixer for over 30 years and has mixed too many films and TV shows to count. He received an additional Emmy nomination and won a Cinema Audio Society (CAS) Award for his work on "Mrs. Maisel," as well as six Emmy nominations for the ground-breaking HBO series, "The Sopranos."*



*Sidney Wolinsky, ACE has a BA in English and American Literature from Brandeis University and an MA in Film from San Francisco State College. He has worked as an assistant editor for a number of years before getting his first editing job as additional editor on "Young Doctors in Love," Gary Marshall's first feature film. He was also an additional editor on "Terms of Endearment" whose editor, Richard Marks, Sidney had assisted for a number of years. Sidney cut mainly movies of the week before he worked on "The Sopranos." He has cut the pilots for a number of successful series: "Blue Bloods," "Sons of Anarchy," "Boardwalk Empire" (for which Sidney won an Emmy), "Ray Donovan" and "The Strain." Sidney received an Academy Award nomination for "The Shape of Water."*

# CGI and Rhythm

Sidney Wolinsky, ACE

## What was one of your most favorite scenes to edit and why?

**Sidney Wolinsky, ACE:** There is a scene in "The Shape of Water" in which Richard Jenkin's character tries to dissuade Sally Hawkins' character from rescuing the creature. Both actors gave outstanding performances – all the more so in that Sally Hawkins character spoke only in sign language. These performances, the staging, and the continuously moving camera made the scene come together effortlessly.

## What were some important things you learned while editing the film, "Greyhound"?

**Sidney Wolinsky, ACE:** "Greyhound" was shot entirely on sets – the interiors of the destroyer – or on a real WWII destroyer which had been turned into a museum ship moored in Baton Rouge Harbor. Working on "Greyhound," I learned that the possibilities of CGI are almost limitless. Visual effects turned the static museum ship into the destroyer Greyhound sailing the North Atlantic. Submarines, torpedoes, freighters, other escort ships, the sea, and the sky were all CGI creations. This is the first show I had worked on with such extensive use of visual effects, and it made the power of CGI very real to me.

## What were some of the most challenging problems solved while in post-production?

**Sidney Wolinsky, ACE:** The series ending scene in "The Sopranos." I knew how important this scene was and I knew it would end with a seemingly arbitrary cut to ten seconds of black. The scene takes place in a diner where Tony is meeting his family. There is very little dialogue. The Journey song, "Don't Stop Believing," is playing on the juke box. The scene is an intricate ballet: each of our main characters arrive separately; Meadow is having a tough time parking her car; other people come and go. The challenge was to keep the action minimal as it was,

moving; to make sure Tony, A.J., Carmela, and Meadow are each given an entrance; to sync up the action with certain lyrics of the song per instructions from David Chase; and to manage the movement of the anonymous patrons while ambiguously suggesting a sense of menace. All the time I needed to set up a rhythm that would ultimately be jarringly interrupted by the cut to black. Judging by the reaction to the scene it was successful if nothing else than proving my assistant, Rich Rossi right: he joked that people would think their TiVo had broken or their cable had gone out...

## If you could share your "Top 3 Film Editing Tips" for student filmmakers and aspiring film/video editors, what would they be?

### **Sidney Wolinsky, ACE: Study the script.**

Make sure you know and fully understand the script. You must understand the story, the characters, and the intentions of every scene. As an editor you are rewriting the script with pictures and sound. Your knowledge of the script will inform every editing decision you make.

**Trust your gut.** When you're first-cutting a scene from dailies you have to trust your instincts. You understand the script, the intention of the scene and what the director wants to get out of it. When you are looking at the scene with your director or producer and you are asked to explain your choices you need to own your editorial choices.

**Notes.** Make sure you understand the intention of the notes you get. During the editing process – director's cut, producer's cut, network or studio cut - a lot of people will be asking you to make changes. Their notes will range from very specific – trim that shot – to very broad – pace up that scene. Before you start, be sure you fully understand the intention of the note. Sometimes a note may have been given to solve a problem the note-giver perceives but the solution may involve more than the specific note. 🍷

# Forming Thematic and Visual Language in the Cutting Room

Pietro Scalia, ACE

## What was one of your most favorite scenes to edit and why?

**Pietro Scalia, ACE:** “Gladiator” Opening Battle sequence. From the first poetic image of a hand caressing the wheat, to the close-up of the hero Maximus (Russell Crowe) and throughout the 12-minute battle, this opening movement formed the thematic and visual language for the rest of the film. The richness of Ridley Scott’s visuals and his trust in me, gave me the freedom to play in a large sandbox that was creatively fulfilling and fun to realize.

## What was one of the most important things you learned while editing the science fiction survival film, “The Martian” (2015)?

**Pietro Scalia, ACE:** That the success of a film starts with a great script, perfect casting, sure handed direction, and a committed team of filmmakers. It was apparent to me that the similarities of a story about survival against all odds in a hostile environment, the overcoming of obstacles, finding solutions to problems, teamwork, sacrifice, courage and perseverance are qualities that I and I’m sure many of my filmmaker friends and collaborators can identify with. Success lies in the commitment and willingness to achieve a unified vision.

## What was one of the most challenging problems solved while in post-production?

**Pietro Scalia, ACE:** The restructuring of JFK from a 4 hours plus cut, that Oliver was happy with, to a 3 hours and 11 minutes final theatrical release, in less than two months. The pressure of the schedule was so intense that all post production crew worked in shifts and long hours while simultaneously coordinating complex logistics to insure that sound design, music scoring, lab work, color timing, opticals (VFX), ADR and mixing stages were continuously fed material while being constantly in a state of flux. Pure chaos and exhaustion. Just as the length of the film where we did not remove many scenes, instead we combined or layered them on top of each other. It was this pressure that crystallized the look and language of the film.

## If you could share your “Top 3 Film Editing Tips” for student filmmakers and aspiring film/video editors, what would they be?

**Pietro Scalia, ACE:**

**Tip #1. Character - Story - Structure.** Always start with character. Character determines story. Story shapes structure.

**Tip #2. Watch and listen.** Be open to what is real around you. Observe and listen to things that are unfiltered or pre-digested by global media. Be curious! Imagination leads to inspiration.

**Tip #3.** Most importantly, **have a clear point-of-view.** 🍷



*Scalia is a prolific and highly regarded editor whose work has been recognized with two Academy Awards® (“Black Hawk Down,” “JFK”), two BAFTA Awards (“Gladiator,” “JFK”), a Satellite Award (“American Gangster”), and ACE Eddies (“Black Hawk Down,” “JFK,” and “Gladiator”). For over twenty-five years, Scalia has been an integral collaborator on films from acclaimed directors such as Ridley Scott, Oliver Stone, Bernardo Bertolucci, Gus Van Sant, Rob Marshall and Sam Raimi. His films include “Good Will Hunting,” “Memoirs of a Geisha,” “Kick-Ass,” “The Amazing Spiderman” and “The Martian” to name but a few.*

# Balancing Humor and Story Needs in Post-Production

Richard Sanchez



## What was one of your most favorite scenes to edit and why?

**Richard Sanchez:** One of my favorite scenes that I've cut was from a film called, "Flock of Dudes." My editor and co-creator of Master the Workflow, Larry Jordan, was very generous in giving me scenes to cut and one of those scenes was a diner dialogue scene involving several great comedians. The challenge in the scene was balancing the humor versus the needs of the story. The director allowed the actors to improvise lines and the scene was incredibly funny. Heavily improvised scenes can introduce a world of problems, particularly in that you might get a joke in one setup and not in another, so cutting down for time can be difficult. As prevalent as that is, that wasn't so much my problem so much as the actors were so funny that I could have allowed the scene to be 30

minutes if I wanted it to, and the jokes were hysterical. Exercising the restraint to say, "This is funny, but do I need it, or do I want it?" Ultimately, I handed the scene off to Larry and he finished it, but it's still one of my favorite scenes I've edited, or rather edited an early version of.

## What was one of the most important things you learned while working as VFX editor on sci-fi comedy film, "Bill & Ted Face the Music" (2020)?

**Richard Sanchez:** Perhaps the biggest lesson I learned on "Bill & Ted" was the importance of branching out of built-in effects and taking advantage of third-party plugins. I used to be averse to using third-party effects plugins (Boris Continuum Complete, Sapphire, etc.) largely because oftentimes productions either don't want to pay for them, or they only pay for them on one system which can cause problems if renders go offline. As a result, I would always try to do all of my effects work with built-in Avid effects. Being strong with the built-in effects is a good safety net if your production denies you plugins, but avoiding those tools because of one theoretical circumstance could severely limit you in your work. Without Boris Continuum Complete, I would have struggled quite a bit with my post-viz work on "Bill & Ted."

## What was one of the most challenging problems solved while in post-production?

**Richard Sanchez:** I find that from show to show, we often use different

terminology even if we mean the same thing. We all bring a different experience to the table, and often somebody will say something that I might know by a different term. Further, it can be terrifying to admit that you don't know what somebody is talking about it. I was working with a very experienced VFX Producer, but I found at first there were a variety of terms that I was confused about, and I learned a valuable phrase that helped me get past that: "I think I know what you're talking about, but might know it by a different term. What do you mean by that?" Being able to put your ego aside for the sake of keeping the ship on course is far easier said than done, and I felt a great deal of pressure because I had such high hopes for the project. It may sound fairly trivial, but once we were all on the same page and communicating in a manner where we understood everybody at all times, the process became much smoother.

## If you could share your "Top 3 VFX Editing Tips" for student filmmakers and aspiring film/video editors, what would they be?

**Richard Sanchez:** My first bit of advice is, identify the one thing you want to do least and dive into it as fast and headfirst as you can. The example I use is Filemaker Pro. For years I heard of it, but it seemed so daunting to learn. Such a nebulous program, and so many tutorials are about business administration as opposed to post-production. However, once I dove in and decided to learn the program, I've found it has completely changed how I work, and I don't think I could manage most shows now without it.

Second bit of advice, branch out with your toolset. I used to avoid After Effects as much as I could with VFX work, the rationale being that I need to prepare shots for a vendor to work on, After Effects is slow, and if I have to render out of After Effects all the time, my editor might not have the full

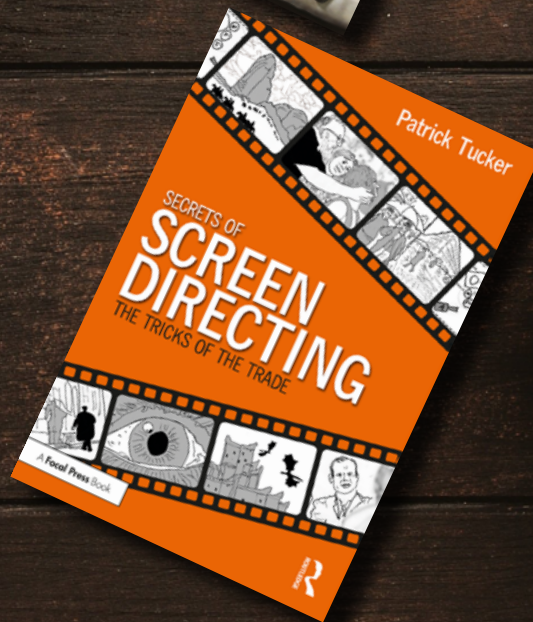
range of handles, and I'll be going back to After Effect all day to revise. I think there is some truth to that rationale, in that if you can do effects work in Avid, there are distinct advantages, for example, your editor can trim to their hearts content, and all it requires is a simple render, but there are some effects that are either going to be way too much work in Avid, or you have a preview and you need to get something a little more refined in After Effects. In a nutshell, there's a time and place for everything, the more tools you know, the more you can bring to the table.

Last bit of advice, avoid at all costs saying no. I found throughout the course of this film, I surprised myself a few times with shots that I thought would be too much for me to handle, but I tried to keep a mantra of, "Let's try it." Time management is also important, and it's important to acknowledge when something would pull you away from other tasks that might be important, but being the person who solves problems as opposed to being a problem, is how you want to be remembered. 🍀

*Richard discovered editing on a whim while studying theatre at UC Irvine. Combining his love for storytelling and technology made post-production a clear path that he's been pursuing ever since.*

*Starting out shooting and editing videos for GoTV, one of the earliest providers of mobile video, he worked his way into television starting in unscripted. Unscripted proved a valuable training grounds to work on his assistant editing skills before transitioning into scripted television and features.*

*Richard's filmography includes "UFO Hunters," "The Good Place," and "Naked." He is also known for his work on "Bill & Ted Face the Music," "Catch-22" and "I'm Dying Up Here."*



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# Visual Style in Documentary Filming

By John Klein

Documentaries are such a wild card in filmmaking from a visual perspective. You have to expect the unexpected every time you venture out, which means both coming prepared with all manner of possible gear, while also understanding that you might not use any of it and just roll with the smallest camera you've got! You'll wish for an Amira but realize that GoPro or even the smartphone in your pocket might be the only thing you can sneak in. You'll bring every LED light kit in the trunk but get cornered into an 8'x8' space for all your interviews. You'll frame up those perfect shots only to find yourself waiting for half an hour for something - anything - to happen in front of your lens. (The opening of Kirsten Johnson's 2016 film, *Cameraperson*, is a perfect look at that sensation.)

Because of the unpredictability of documentary filming, it's easy as a viewer to think that the crew simply stumbled across certain elements or didn't do any advance planning about how the film was going to look moment-to-moment or as a whole. Do documentary filmmakers really think about their color palette? Their composition style? You can't truly control the locations you're in or the events and sound bites you'll capture, so what's the point of thinking about things like frames within frames or texture or editing rhythm or all those cinematography and visual design terms you learned in film school?

Friends, it's even more important to think about those things.

Every documentary I've ever worked on has benefitted from those preliminary conversations about the style of the film. On *Strong Bodies Fight* (2010), which chronicled the Holy Cross missions in Bangladesh and the Bengal Bouts student boxing tournament at the University of Notre Dame donating funds to the missions, director Bill Donaruma and I discussed the films of Terrence Malick and films like *Raging Bull* to differentiate the feel of the two different locations. This guided everything from our b-roll strategies (lots of slow motion and shots of nature in Bangladesh versus whip zooms and fast shutter speeds in the boxing ring) to the flow of the edit later.

Likewise, each fundraising documentary we've produced for the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation has brought with it conversations between myself and director Cole Simon about color palette, whether footage should be handheld or on a gimbal, and even debates about what sort of interview setup makes the most sense: should subjects speak direct-to-camera or to an off-camera interviewer? How shallow should our depth of field be? How abstract can we get with our edits? In one such video, we went for a full *Requiem for a Dream*-esque flash cuts to visualize the sensation of constant barrages of medication. In another, we shot b-roll entirely in slow motion on a gimbal to give the feeling of empowering our subject through camera movement.

Without these kinds of conversations, it's easy to lose yourself in simply capturing whatever's in front of you, without necessarily thinking about how intimate or distant the camera should be or how this "scene" will cut together. I still shoot day-in-the-life documentaries as though I'm setting up for standard coverage: first the wide establishing shots, then progressively tighter coverage, then inserts and other elements. I'm always thinking about whether I'm following or leading the subject with the camera. And I'm always trying to anticipate the moves of my subject, in the event I can't ask them to do something again. It's rare to get second takes in documentary filmmaking!

To that end, those creative preparations are even more important, because they enable you to improvise while still thinking about the end goal and the emotion you want to evoke from your viewer later. Don't discount those conversations, any more than you would prepping for an interview or scouting a location or outlining the arc of your film. Your visual style may be what distinguishes your documentary from others. 🍷

View *Strong Bodies Fight* here: <https://vimeo.com/155033405>.

View the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation – Greater Illinois Chapter videos via their YouTube channel.



On *Strong Bodies Fight*, the look of the natural environment played into our Malick-esque cinematography plan. Photo by Mark Weber.

# How to Be a Good Team Player as an Actor on Smaller Projects

By Sara Sue Vallee



When beginning as an actor, you will often find yourself doing independent short films and indie feature films to build your portfolio and gather footage for your demo reel. Something I recently encountered working in independent productions is *the importance of teamwork*. Teamwork is crucial in this collaborative artistic industry, but especially so when it comes to low budget and no-budget productions and smaller projects.

If you agree to be part of a smaller project, you should always remain respectful with all creatives involved and give your best to help out in any way you can. You should communicate your thoughts and ideas with a desire to help tell the story and maintain a positive attitude to bring a fruitful energy on set. Your positive energy is what people will *remember* and therefore *think of you* for future projects. Beyond respect, there are some key elements to adopt as an actor when working in independent productions. These key elements include *listening, punctuality and asking for your frame*.

Let's begin with *listening*, which is the most important of them all. Listening means being attentive to the director's notes when he/she is speaking to you. You should always be fully present and ready to work when the crew is ready for you. That said, avoid being on your phone in

between takes and even at all when not necessary. Leave it in your bag, your messages can wait. Staying in the moment will help you prepare yourself mentally for the scene ahead. Our world is becoming increasingly filled with distractions and checking our emails and social media has become a habit, an unconscious mechanism. We must always work against that and other things that might serve as distractions so that we can stay focused and present, both on and off the set.

*Punctuality* is another key element to any successful set. I'm still amazed to see some actors behaving differently when it comes to independent productions as opposed to unionized projects. If your call time is 6AM, make sure to wake up early and be ready to step into the makeup chair when they need you. You don't want to delay the crew because of your personal preferences. Professionalism transpires in your actions and in order to attract bigger opportunities, you must first prove yourself in smaller ones. If you treat some work less importantly in comparison to others, people will remember that and won't refer you in the future. This is a small industry, so always remain professional no matter the size of the part you play. Everybody is working collaboratively to create a film, so immerse yourself fully in the story and bring your personal essence to it.

At last, another way to stay on top of your performance in smaller projects is to *ask the director of photography about your frame*. Knowing your frame (close-up, medium shot, wide shot) allows you to adjust your performance in consequence. If it's a wide shot, you have more room to use your entire body to tell the story with gestures, mannerisms, posture, etc. When it's a close-up, you must find stillness and canalize your energy; the eyes become the vector of this energy. The more you know about the technical aspects of filmmaking, the more tools you have to tell the story appropriately. However, you should not think of the technical aspects when performing because it will remove you from the present moment, but let it become second nature with time and practice. Don't force it, practice and enjoy the ride. 🍷

*Sara Sue Vallee is a bilingual actress working in both Film and Television. After graduation, she began her journey in independent productions; allowing her to shape a career in the film industry. She is also writing and producing her own content which allows her to understand the world behind the camera better. In her articles for The Student Filmmakers Magazine, Sara will explore the world of acting in an attempt to guide new actors and filmmakers.*

[www.sarasuevallee.com](http://www.sarasuevallee.com)



Photos taken during the Berlin Sci-fi Filmfest.

# How to Begin *Preparing* for Submitting Your Films to Film Festivals

By Anthony Straeger

Times have changed through the novel coronavirus pandemic. The cause and effect on filmmakers, film festivals and cinemas have been profound. But, creativity and the desire to keep producing have not. Festivals and filmmakers have had to evolve. The need to take into consideration the changing economics of the world and the constraints that we all must work under are clear. By being clever and prepared, success is always more likely.

Whether you have produced one or several films, the primary aim is to promote and market your production. There is no better way to achieve that than via submitting to and being accepted into film festivals. The trouble is, it is not an easy path to tread and with poor planning can become an expensive fail. From writing the script to the first day of pre-production - through the punishing production schedule to the final, final edit. It is time-consuming and requires

considerable effort. But if you succeed in making a good (or dare I say it, a *great*) film, you can look forward to being selected and even winning awards. Being accepted into film festivals is an independent filmmaker's dream come true. They represent the best way of gaining acclaim and recognition for your work.

There are three things you need for making a film and submitting your film:

- 1 - Preparation
- 2 - Preparation
- 3 - Preparation

And you should never treat film festivals as an afterthought. From the beginning, it is important to plan and estimate how much you can afford for submissions. This needs to include fees, travel expenses and festival miscellany. It should be included in your production budget from the beginning. Knowing the potential bills

that you might incur is helpful. How big they are likely to be during your festival run is hard to guess. But if you prepare a ballpark figure, you can make a more informed spending decision.

## Where do you start and what should you do?

Start by setting up a **Film Festival File** and add content to it from day one! It should include the following items.

**CONTACT DETAILS:** Accurate, up-to-date, and correct information.

**LINKS:** From the film website and director's website to all the associated social media webpages.

**SPECIFICATIONS:** Make a full list of credits. They should include genre, type of film, length, shooting format, etc.

**STILLS:** Add production stills, artwork and even storyboard content as you go. If you create a poster, make sure



that it looks clear and is eye-catching at 5cm. Also, check how it looks in black and white. You don't want your poster to get lost or look messy on a program, website, or publication. Also, you will need an up-to-date director's photograph.

**LOGLINE:** Work on creating a great logline (under 25 words). It always helps with gaining attention and is often used in program information.

**SYNOPSIS:** Add a short sharp synopsis of fewer than 150 words; this will make it more useable for festivals.

**DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT:** Don't forget to add a director's statement. It should include:

- The genesis of the project
- Why the project is important
- Why you are the only one who could have told this story
- Your cinematic inspiration and influences
- Production and Post-Production discoveries
- What happened during the process of making the film that shaped the film's final state
- Your hopes for the audience's response

By building the big picture you will have enough information to create a great Electronic Press Kit (EPK). Plus, you will have lots of useful content for social media. This subject is covered more in-depth in my book, "An Independent Filmmakers Guide to Preparing and Submitting to Film Festivals." The aim is to help you whether you have experience or not to give your film the best chance of success. 🍷

[www.submittingtofilmfestivals.com](http://www.submittingtofilmfestivals.com)  
[www.amazon.com/dp/B08DBYMSDX](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B08DBYMSDX)



*Behind-the-scenes of the independent feature film, "Call of the Hunter." The movie has a folklore/legend-based story. It follows the traditions of "Hammer House of Horror."*

# Nancy Wolff Discusses 'Copyright' in a Digital World

**What changes in copyright have you seen over the years as it pertains to filmmakers, content creators and the digital world?**

**Nancy Wolff:** The barriers to entry to become a filmmaker or a digital content creator has lowered as the accessibility of digital camera equipment has made it possible to create movies and digital imagery that was not possible in the time of analog film that was very expensive. All of us in some ways are both content creators and content consumers with so much content available at our fingertips. The easy access to content has blurred the lines between what is protected by copyright, what can be shared and what content requires permission before it can be used. Understanding the boundaries of copyright and when works must be licensed to avoid infringement and what can be used under copyright exceptions such as fair use. The doctrine of fair use, using works that serve the purpose of copyright has expanded based on the digital environment.

The digital environment has also made copyright infringing activity or piracy of works easier and more rampant, as digital works can be replicated and distributed at no cost or loss of integrity. This piracy interferes with creators' ability to lawfully license work and impacts on the ability of filmmakers and creators to earn a living. The process of policing the internet is an overwhelming job, even with some search technology available.



**What are some common misconceptions about copyright?**

**Nancy Wolff:** One common misconception is confusing publicly available works online with public domain, that means the work is out of copyright. Copyright protection begins at the moment a work is fixed, a video created, or an image snapped, and the duration is life of the creator plus 70 years for individual US creators. Because a work is published online or available digitally does not mean that it's available for anyone to use. The other misconception is that lack of copyright notice or attribution means you can use a work without permission. Attribution is not required under the Copyright Act and using a copyright symbol is no longer required to maintain copyright. Another misconception is that if you're not using to work for

profit that you don't need permission. The rights of a creator under copyright include the right to authorize reproduction, public displays, broadcast and distribution, among other rights. Consequently, the act of reproducing and displaying a work is an infringement whether you make money or not based on the use. Another is if you alter or modify a work that you don't need permission. Exclusive rights of a creator under copyright also includes the right to authorize derivative works. The line between transforming to work under fair use and creating an unauthorized derivative work can be confusing.

**What should filmmakers and content creators know about copyright?**

**Nancy Wolff:** All filmmakers and content creators to know some of the basics of Copyright, including the importance of registering to work as you cannot enforce your copyright if you are US author unless you have a registration to the work before you commence an action. The other benefit of registration is that you can seek damages other than actual damages, known as statutory damages which provides compensation for the use of your work if it's hard to value. Registration also allows you to seek attorney's fees which helps in resolving claims of infringement.

It's also important to know as a filmmaker that you need contracts with any freelancer who works with you on the film (directors, camera operators, editors, etc.) if you need to own all the rights for further distribution. Under the Copyright Act, if you are not an employee you own your work absent a writing signed by you. Written contracts from the beginning are very important.

Understanding the basics of fair use is also important. I often hear filmmaker say let's just "fair use it" to avoid licensing. For use is a limited

exception under copyright and it's not available only because licensing might be expensive or difficult. It does not replace using content for illustrative purpose that is typically licensed. The use must be transformative and not replace the original. In other words, the use must serve a different purpose or bring new meaning to the work.

**If you could share your Top 3 Copyright Tips for filmmakers and content creators, what would they be?**

**Nancy Wolff:**

- (#1.) Register your work before it is distributed.
- (#2.) If creating a film using third-party material, be sure to seek legal advice as to when you need permission and when you don't. Particularly with documentary films, you can obtain errors and omissions insurance that has a fair use rider that permits the use of unclear third-party material, if you have a qualified copyright lawyer review the film, for the availability of the fair use exception and prepare an opinion letter.
- (#3.) Avoid popular music that can be so time consuming or burdensome and either hire a composer to create original music or license music from music licensing services that provide all rights you need, including "synch" rights that cover the use of music combined with visual images. 🍷

## 2021 Festival Submissions

### Hot Docs Festival

Late Deadline: DEC 16

Extended deadline: Jan 7

\*Extended deadline is only available for feature-length films (66+ min) submitting as a world premiere

<https://www.hotdocs.ca/i/submit-a-film>

### The 47th annual Seattle International Film Festival

Submissions must be uploaded by January 8, 2021

<https://www.siff.net/festival/submissions#elevent>

### Tribeca Film Festival

Final Deadline: Jan 13, 2021

<https://tribecafilm.com/festival/submissions>

### Brooklyn Film Festival

Regular Deadline: January 27, 2021

<https://www.brooklynfilmfestival.org/submit>

### Wisconsin Film Festival Wisconsin's Own

Deadline: January 29, 2021.

<https://wifilmfest.org/submit/>

### La Guarimba International Film Festival

Amantea (CS), Italy

Regular Deadline: March 10th of 2021

Late Deadline: March 31st of 2021

OFFICIAL SELECTION ANNOUNCEMENT: May 26th of 2021

<https://www.lagarimba.com/submit/>

### 20TH ANNUAL New Hampshire Film Festival

Regular Deadline: June 15, 2021

Late Entry Deadline: July 15, 2021

<https://nhfilmfestival.com/2021-submissions/>

Please note that the schedule is subject to change due to the festivals' own policies. To confirm the program schedule, please contact the hosts.



Image by Francois Rossouw from Pixabay

## 2020 Student Academy Award Winner



# Kate Namowicz, on “Mime Your Manners”

“**Mime Your Manners**,” directed by Kate Namowicz and Skyler Porras, is an animated short film about an arrogant man who is given a taste of his own medicine when he’s transformed into a mime and in order to be freed must grow to be a better person. “Mime Your Manners” received the 2020 Student Academy Award in the Animation (Domestic Film Schools) Category at the 47th Student Academy Awards® competition.

**Can you tell us about the development and pre-production stages?**

**Kate Namowicz:** Our film took us a year and a half to make. A few months was spent on writing the story, designing the characters and environment, and storyboarding the film. A year was spent modeling, animating, and lighting all in the computer. Skyler and I did everything together in the animation pipeline.

**Can you describe your process and collaboration with film composer Corey Wallace?**

**Kate Namowicz:** We started talking with Corey Wallace because we liked his work on past Ringling College films and felt he would be a good fit for us. In our discussions, we expressed the feeling we wanted from the score, something similar to the French style of “Ratatouille” and charm of the “Good Omens” series. We let Corey watch the film and then collaborated on ideas. As this process continued, we knew Corey felt the film the same way we did, and that was important. In the end, Corey created for us a beautiful score that enhanced the film and helped evoke the right emotions through music. Exactly what a score should do!

**You also worked with voice actors. What was that collaboration like?**

**Kate Namowicz:** We found our voice talent Kieran Flitton, Mariah Proctor, and Robert Krolczyk on Voices.com. The process was similar to the score in that we let them watch the film and in this case provided them with samples



## ACADEMY AWARD WINNER

of the dialogue. To make a decision on who we would use, we wanted to see that they understood the characters, the emotion of the story, and could portray that with their voice. As with our composer, we also wanted them to have creative input around their specialty, and we collaborated as a team to get the final outcome.

### What are your Top 3 Animation Tips?

#### Kate Namowicz:

**Tip #1:** Don't be afraid to ask for help or advice for your shot. Animators love to help each other, and your shot will

improve significantly through others' experiences and input.

**Tip #2:** Know who your character is and what they are thinking, and you want to convey that without them having to speak.

**Tip #3:** Appeal! Always animate your character with appealing emotions and poses. 🍷

Kate's Website: [katenamo.com](http://katenamo.com)

Skyler's Website: [skylerporras.com](http://skylerporras.com)

*Produced at Ringling College of Art and Design*

#### Cast and Crew

Musical Score by Corey Wallace  
Sound Design by Bob Pepek  
Julian's Voice by Kieran Flitton  
Celeste's Voice by Mariah Proctor  
Jacques' Voice by Robert Krolczyk

*Special Thank You to Heather Thompson, Billy Merrit, George Cwirko-Godycki, and Aviv Mano.*





Darius Dawson on Directing  
***A RODEO FILM***

**What are some discussion topics you'd love to see people have after they watch, "A Rodeo Film"?**

**Darius Dawson:** For me, "A Rodeo Film" was about normalizing black voices, so I want you to talk about this film like you would any other film. I was fortunate enough to do this story set in this amazing world that I, myself, am still learning about, so hopefully people leave and want to learn more about the Bill Pickett Invitational, current black cowboys, or the history of black people in the American West. But most importantly, I want people to talk about the plot, the characters, the performances, the cinematography. Whether you liked it or not. Not liking it is fine too, but I want people to see these black people and hear this black voice and digest it like they would any other film.

**What was one of the most important things you learned while directing your short film, "A Rodeo Film"?**



**Darius Dawson:** The biggest thing that I learned from “A Rodeo Film”, and something I’m still continuing to learn, is that we have to humble ourselves before story. Story is greater than any filmmaker. The story will tell you what it wants and needs, and it’s up to us as directors to listen to it and find creative and elegant ways to communicate story. Hindsight is 20/20, and sometimes we do a film and look back and it’s like, ‘oh, I wasn’t listening to what the story wanted here.’ Sometimes we don’t learn what the story is truly about until we’re done with the film. As directors, we’re hired to be stewards and guardians of story, and for me, I want to continue to deepen that relationship. I think it’s a

lifetime thing. Every time we do a film, our understanding of story grows, and that was definitely the case for me and “A Rodeo Film”.

**What was one of the most challenging problems solved during each of these stages: pre-production, production, and post-production?**

**Darius Dawson:**

**Pre-production.** We wanted to put an actual man on an actual bull... in a student film. I have no idea how all of this was approved, but AFI allowed us to do it. Cool. Now, we just had to figure out how to do it. Lucky for us, my producer, Ryan Binse, had an obscure relationship to a rodeo right outside of

San Diego. That rodeo got us in contact with a stock contractor, and they agreed to let us film a bull ride after the rodeo was over. So, we were able to get all of the production value of a real rodeo, the lights, a little crowd, (as some people stuck around when they saw the big cameras), the bull fighters, everything. It was definitely a little bit of luck, but also just working with what we had and who we knew.

**Production.** Time and money. You could have two million dollars, and it would always be time and money. We had the added pressure of working with crowds at some points and live animals at others, so time became super crucial. There was actually a really funny



moment when we were filming the bull riding scene. We took so much time filming the bull rider, Chris Byrd, preparing to ride the bull for the final scene that the bull actually sat down in the bucking chute. They're typically pretty fired up in there, but because we were filming so much he kind of lost interest, so we had to get him riled back up so that the riding shoots would be exciting.

**Post - CG.** This is actually just another way of me saying *money*. We actually didn't have a ton of CG in this film. There's zero CG in any of the bull riding scenes, and all of the crowds were real since we shot b-roll at an actual all-black rodeo. However, when we did need CG, it was all about picking our battles. Most of the CG is us trying to fix something we screwed up or helping

out scenes that we shot day and needed to turn to night or something. Like most movies, there are some things we slipped in there hoping no one would notice.

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

**Darius Dawson:**

**Tip # 1. Empower your collaborators.** "A Rodeo Film" was truly a collaborative effort and any success that the film has enjoyed is truly due to the team that we brought together. The best idea always wins. The inclusion of the cross in my film was due to my Production Designer, Jessica Cole. We spent time at rodeos researching fashion and jewelry was definitely a

big takeaway for us. We incorporated it into the story, and it's also a part of the feature we're developing now. Trust and listen to your collaborators, and you'll always end up with something greater than what you could have imagined.

**Tip # 2.** This one comes from one of my professors at AFI, Rob Spera: "*Film is about seeing things happen on screen*". At the student level, you're working with small budgets, so you may not be able to have that huge battle scene you'd like, but what you can control is how characters physically occupy space. How does their movement and body language communicate subtext? Sitting two characters on a couch for a breakup scene and letting them have a conversation doesn't always





communicate subtext. Give them an action. Maybe in that breakup scene, one of the characters is washing the dishes. How the character washes those dishes gives the audience the subtext and access to that character's emotional state. Always have a physical concept for your scenes based on props, the location, wardrobe, any physical thing.

**Tip # 3. Always thank your crew and everyone you're working with.** From crafty to the producer to the grips. Everyone. Even if they've been difficult to work with, thank them. Individually and personally. I feel extremely lucky to be able to call myself a director; it's a true privilege. And it's all due to the people who have donated money, crewed on my films or offered words of advice. It doesn't cost anything to be kind to those around you. I think if we, as directors, practice this we will create an environment where everyone will feel appreciated and where everyone will excel and do their best work. 🍷

*Darius Dawson is an international director based in LA. He spent his childhood splitting his time between North Carolina and Chicago, where his family still resides. He received his BA from NCSU in Film Studies then went on to study at NYU's Grad Film program in Singapore where he concentrated in Cinematography. While living in Southeast Asia, he got the opportunity to lens commercials, music videos, branded content, and shorts in China, Japan, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Upon returning to the US, he continued to work as a cinematographer for clients such as Hershey, the NY Giants, and the US Coast Guard. Years in advertising finally lead him back to narrative. In 2017, Darius enrolled in the AFI Conservatory's Graduate Directing program. His thesis film, "A Rodeo Film", won the DGA Student Film Grand Prize award for directing in 2019. Most recently, he just finished directing for Peter and Bob Farrelly's new Quibi show, "The Now".*

[www.dariusdawsondirector.com](http://www.dariusdawsondirector.com)



João Dall'Stella on  
***Dia De Las Carpas***



**Can you tell us about what it was like directing your short film, “Día De Las Carpas”, and working with child actors? Can you share with us some of your insights working with children?**

**João Dall'Stella:** Directing “Dia De Las Carpas” was one of the most humbling, difficult, fun, and rewarding experiences I’ve had in my career. What we wanted to achieve with this film was very ambitious. We’ve had numerous locations, a big cast, visual effects, and many other challenges. However, that was part of the fun! Through a lot of planning, we achieved all we wanted. We had a cast of four kids, and they were incredibly talented little actors. They all already had a personality similar to the characters that they were playing so my task was to make that come across naturally on camera. We didn’t have much time to rehearse but during those, I wanted to make them learn their characters’ behaviors and relationships. One of the exercises we did is called, “Animal Work”, to give every kid an animal that represents their character, and they would act like one. Another exercise

was to give them words that would represent certain types of situations that they find themselves in the film such as mysterious, sad, or happy and ask for them to act how one should feel using those words. This was a fun way to approach their acting and break out their shell with each other.

**What was one of the most important things you learned while directing this film?**

**João Dall’Stella:** I never once doubted the tone that I wanted to achieve with the film. The mix of reality and the magical was something new that really interested me. It was important to follow my instincts when that was called for because for me your instincts are closer to your heart. Another lesson is to never give up in your film, whether it’s on pre-production or on editing, you can always find a solution for your struggles. We edited the film up until the last deadline, and that was crucial for its success.

**What was one of the most challenging problems solved during each of these stages: pre-production, production, and post-production?**

**João Dall’Stella:** This question is great because I can be very specific about what I remember!

**Pre-production:** Figuring out how we are going to make the giant carp and mermaid effects. After a lot of conversations with my cinematographer, Bethany Michalski, we opted for using real mermaid tails and asking a taxidermy company to build the giant fish so we could have more freedom when filming, and that was the most cost-effective way.

**Production:** In one of the scenes, a character is driving a pickup truck. However, we couldn’t afford a trailer to have the actor driving and acting at the same time. We found a way to cheat that by renting a pickup truck that is a three-seater in the front. That way, we were able to have someone else from





production to drive the car while the actors would sit on the middle seat, and we were able to cheat that he is driving through clever camera angles.

**Post-production:** The music is an essential part of the film. It took a while to find the right temp tracks, but once we found something, we were happy it became much easier to find the right composer.

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

**João Dall'Stella:**

**Tip #1. Do a short film version of the feature you want to make.** This has been crucial for my career, as all my feature projects relate to shorts that I've done. That way it's much easier for people to understand your vision.

**Tip #2. Plan 100% of the film but be open to achieve 70% on the day of the shooting.** You will figure out a lot of new stuff on the day, but you will still have the base of your vision on screen.

**Tip #3. If you have never done something, that is the reason to do**

**it!** The bigger the risk, the bigger the reward, and the bigger the learnings! 🍷

**João Dall'Stella** is a Brazilian writer and director based in Los Angeles. His AFI thesis film, "Dia De Las Carpas", won the DGA Student Grand Prize for Latino Directors and has been featured in prestigious showcases and festivals such as CAA Moebius, SAG-AFTRA Foundation and Oscar-qualifying film festivals. His short film, "Stalls", has also played in more than 35 LGBTQ+ Festivals worldwide. As a member of the Latin and gay community, he started making movies to create his own world where he celebrates them through his stories. Born in the town of Curitiba in Brazil, João holds a BFA in Business Administration from FGV-EAESP and an MFA in Directing from the American Film Institute. His latest screenplay, "Steam", is going to be part of the NALIP Media Market 2020.

[www.jooadallstella.com](http://www.jooadallstella.com)





# Mattias Holmgren

## Creative Director, Composer, Sound Designer

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

### CURRENT PROJECTS:

I am currently working mainly with educational content and building a creative YouTube Channel. In my videos and articles, I cover music production, software, hardware, ergonomics, and much more. All in an inspirational creative format. My goal is to inspire folks to get going in music and sound.

I run a media production company, Morningdew Media, since 2003. Previously I was writing music for games, film and commercials, but I've always had one foot deep rooted in tech, and I love to share what I've learned through the years.

I still do some occasional scoring and sound design projects. But my primary goal is to work on the educational videos and content for the community. My YouTube recently hit 10k subs, and it's growing rapidly so I am very happy my videos are reaching out and are well-received. I put a ton of effort into producing relevant content to the audience.

I do release epic post rock music under my name, Mattias Holmgren. And, also, some EDM / Future Bass / Melodic Dubstep tracks under the name, Gelhein.

### CREATIVE PROCESS:

Of course, I tend to begin most production work with some kind of brainstorming stage. Where I just flesh out basic ideas. The first thing that comes to mind. It's the same whether it's a musical project or a design project. It all begins with collecting reference and tossing up quick ideas.

For a specific film, the first step, after watching the film and talking with the director, can be creating sounds. Selecting a sound space. Recording weird tools or sources to use as core content for a song. Ok, I'm gonna go with Omnisphere for this one. Or, granular sounds for this one. Etc. Getting a palette for the project. As we select a color palette for a painting. It's the same.

### CHALLENGE & SOLUTION:

In game and film scoring, you are often asked to score very different genres, using region specific instruments etc. It can be a real challenge. Especially if it's a genre far from your *home*. I'm from Sweden, and I was once asked to score a South Korean film called, *Bag of Bones*, and some scenes were directed to have region specific instrumentation and

melodic phasing. Usually we composers might just think, oh, it's Asia region, let's bring the flutes, dizi, bawu, etc. and koto, and call it a day. But when the demand from the director is that it's region-specific, you have to be really alert and find out what's really going on in the instruments, harmony and melodic phasing from certain regions.

It's a life-long struggle as a composer, you learn new things in each project. Each project begins as a nightmare, but it's very rewarding when you learn these new tricks and skills.

### 3 PRODUCTION TIPS

1. **Kill your darlings.** Don't add too much sounds / instruments to your arrangements. It's so easy to go overboard. Uninstall Vienna Ensemble Pro. Just kidding... But I did just that. And work with smaller instrument setups.
2. **Find your own sound.** Don't be afraid to create your own library of samples and sounds that you use in all your projects. As a trademark and also a way to force you into new territories. Hey, check out granular synthesis. Use your own voice.
3. **Space is also sound.** Leave space in your melodies. Make one strong motif, small variations go a long way. Repeating that key melody makes it stronger and more memorable.
4. **Use your voice,** to find a melody that works. Singable melodies tend to be more memorable.

<http://www.morningdewmedia.com>

<http://www.twitter.com/morningdewmedia>



# Job Michiel van Zuijlen

Director, Writer, Animator

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

### CURRENT PROJECTS:

I work as an independent animator. I am fortunate in the sense that I don't have to rely on it as a source of income, so I can pretty much do what I like, which are narrative animation films with an interesting storyline and hopefully a bit of humor.

My latest project is called, "Knock on Wood". It is based on an idea I came up with quite some time ago, and that I decided to work on as a new short project. In the story, a knocking is heard during a funeral. It comes from the coffin; the "deceased" is not dead! Other "risings" follow, until an unexpected solution is found to determine who's dead and who's alive.

I'm also working on a longer project, a science fiction story titled, "Khentopia: Time Rift". In this story, a catastrophe throws a progressive, peaceful world into a parallel universe and becomes militaristic and dictatorial. The protagonist and his allies have the task to reverse the situation.

### CREATIVE PROCESS:

After I have my story idea, I usually write a screenplay (except for projects a few minutes long). Even though the screenplay is for my own use, I still like to follow the established screenplay format. Already while writing the screenplay, I often design the locations. I don't storyboard, but I use my 3D animation

program to set up the environments. This is a way for me to keep inspired.

As I work alone, I can use an iterative approach like that, which would be hard to maintain in a team environment.

Next, I start to work on the details, scene by scene. For the initial dialog tracks I use text-to-speech (currently Google WaveNet). That way I can hear how the dialog works in the scene, and sometimes I make changes on the basis of that, which then feed back into the screenplay.

The software I use (Reallusion iClone and Character Creator) allows me to create characters based on an existing rig that can be modified. So, I don't have to model from scratch. The approach is very flexible.

The latest version of Character Creator has a plugin called Head Shot. It models a high-quality head based on a single photo. I use faces from <https://thispersondoesnotexist.com/>. These are AI-generated faces of non-existing people that look real. This avoids any licensing problems or other complaints.

I like to provide my environments with sufficient detail to make them look real. There are many talented developers that I use the products of. I may change the texturing to suit me, but I leave the modelling to others.

As a solo animator, you are responsible for everything. I have to worry about lighting, camera angles, and of course animation. I use

a combination of pre-made motion clips and keyframe animation to make my characters and props move.

The final step is rendering the scenes and then combining them in my video editor (Vegas Pro). This is also where the sound effects and music are added. I keep a separate Vegas project for each scene and then have a master project to combine the scenes.

### CHALLENGE & SOLUTION:

I can't really think of an epic moment in this regard, but for me a continuing challenge is getting the animation right. There are my own limitations as well as limitations in the software I use. The solution is often clever use of the camera. Don't show everything or have the camera look the other way to hide imperfections.

### 3 ANIMATION TIPS:

**1. Try to find your own style.** This may not be so easy if you work for a company, but as an independent you have a unique opportunity to do so. Some beginning users want to emulate Pixar movies, which is a daunting task. Animation does not have to have a specific look, which is what so great about it. I suggest checking out the animation collection of the National Film Board of Canada at <https://www.nfb.ca/animation/> for ideas.

**2. Don't make things too complicated.** Some beginners have ambitious plans for full-length movies with epic battles with thousands of warriors. Instead, start simple first. Although not aimed at 3D animation, a book with practical advice is Bill Plympton's *Make Toons That Sell – Without Selling Out*.

**3. Don't forget the audio.** Like the visuals, the audio should be of good quality. People can tolerate picture degradation as long as the audio is good. Bad audio makes everything bad. Then, make ample use of sound effects and music to add drama and excitement to your movie. It feels like cheating, but music will help set the mood of the film. But use it wisely. Don't use a track of your favorite band as a score. Music should be used sparsely and fit the scene. Avoid clichés such as excited choirs and triumphant trumpets...

<http://www.virtualrealist.com>

# Joseph Forte

## Digital Content & Video Creation

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

### CURRENT PROJECTS:

So, a little about my work and current projects. I run a creative agency called D-MAK Productions (<https://dmakproductions.com>) where we specialize in producing media for the corporate space. We just finished a high end set of marketing videos for Collins Aerospace which was a really fun shoot for a military equipment manufacturer where we had some real soldiers and a Humvee in a mock battle situation. We also just put together a behind the scenes video on how that production turned out - <https://youtu.be/IDpzliqcab8>. On the film front, my business partner is currently writing a book about his music festival experiences that we will be turning into a script for a film by year end.

### MEMORABLE PROJECT:

One of my most memorable projects was when we did a set of videos for healthcare technology company Cyracom. The spokesperson for the set of videos was Michael O'Neal of Grey's Anatomy fame. It was the first time we worked with a Hollywood actor, and he was just such a pleasure to work with. It really broke the fear and stigma of working with people with any sort of fame, as we realized they are just like everyone else and they want the finished outcome to turn out just as great as the production crew does.

### CHALLENGE & SOLUTION:

The most memorable production challenge and solution that I've experience BY FAR is when we worked on our first full-length documentary about mine and my business partners college fraternity experience called Alpha Class ([www.alphaclassmovie.com](http://www.alphaclassmovie.com)). The principle photography for the film was taken while we were both seniors in college at Arizona State University. At the time, we really didn't know what this film was going to turn into, so outside of the main fraternity brothers featured in the film, we really didn't have any signed releases from anyone else. As anyone who has ever produced a documentary knows, definitely NOT the thing to do. Years later when we were in post, we realized how many people were in the documentary that we didn't have releases for. I literally went through the film frame by frame and took a screen shot of

any individual's face who you could recognize that we didn't have a release from. I took those screen shots and shared them on Facebook to try to find all the people in the film to get signatures after the fact. Surprisingly, I was able to secure release forms from a vast majority of the people in the film, but anyone that watches the film will notice that there was a lot more where we didn't, as there's face blurs all over the place throughout the film. Biggest lesson from that is to make sure you get all documentary releases done BEFORE they show up on camera.



### 3 PRODUCTION TIPS:

If I could share 3 production tips, the first would definitely be to **start working in the production position you want to be in NOW!** I see way too many people that want to be a director or cinematographer take PA gigs because they feel like they need to “work their way up” to that end position. If you want to be a director, you should be DIRECTING! Don't wait on anyone else to get you what you want, because you can find yourself 20 years later in the same spot, still not doing what you want. The second production tip would be to **find others that compliment your skill set.** What makes our team so successful is that we complement each other really well. I am really strong with management and organization skills. So, I make a really great producer, however, when there's a problem that needs a creative solution, my business partner

has a stronger skillset in thinking outside the box. If you're a great cinematographer, find a great AC to collaborate with. If you're a great director, find a great actor or producer to work with. There's a reason why big-name directors in Hollywood typically use many of the same crew and talent in their movies (think Adam Sandler, Martin Scorsese, Judd Apatow). The 3rd tip is to **find a mentor in the production specialty you'd like to get into.** Most folks with some years under their belt are more than happy to share their experience with a newbie, and you can save yourself many pitfalls by

learning about what they are before you make them. This was probably the single biggest factor in our success, is finding great mentors that you can go to when you experience failure, but most importantly when you experience success!

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