

# StudentFilmmakers



*Let the story stand out*

## CINEMATIC LIGHTING



**Daniel Villeneuve csc on  
Lighting Dark Scenes**



**Why Still Use a Light Meter?  
By David Appleby**



**Hollywood Bound  
By Scott Spears**

## PUBLISHER'S DESK



*Restrictions are being lifted across the country. It really feels good to see businesses opening and people returning in New York City. We are seeing some return to normalcy. Later this summer, we will be doing our workshops again in NYC. Be sure to stay tuned for updates on the upcoming schedule of hands-on, in-person classes covering all the stages of filmmaking. I thank our wonderful writers, networkers and filmmakers interviewed in this excellent issue of the magazine. I hope you will enjoy it and reach out to me with your comments.*

*Regards,  
Kim Edward Welch*



Jody Michelle Solis  
Associate Publisher and Editor



Maura Barbulescu  
Community Marketing Director

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# StudentFilmmakers

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**On the Cover:** Michael Wale csc films on location. Jonathan Tucker and Riann Steele in *Debris* (2021).

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*From the Tropic to the Arctic*

Interview conducted by Jody Michelle Solis

# How to Make a Shot List

By Michael Goi, ASC, ISC



The key part of my preparation as a Director is making a shot list, but for a lot of people, making a shot list is an activity that they are either afraid of or avoid. For me, making a shot list is the most fun process of directing an episode of a television show or a movie because there is no pressure at that moment. It is all about your imagination.

With the number of scripts I have to read every week, I was finding it difficult to retain the important information in individual sentences of the screenplays. The words I was reading were ceasing to have any meaning and would become just a jumble of words. I discovered that by immediately starting to make a shot list, it was forcing me to understand the story and the characters in much greater depth. Because I had to come up with shots to visualize what was in the script, it reinforced and reminded me what was important in every scene.

If I'm directing a television episode and I have the script the night before I start pre-production, I have a complete shot list for the entire episode the morning of the first day of prep. Many directors have asked me how I can come up with a shot list when I haven't yet seen any sets or locations. It's quite simple. The shot list is not about the physical reality of the locations or sets at the time you write the initial one. It's about the type and number of shots that you think you need in order to tell the story.

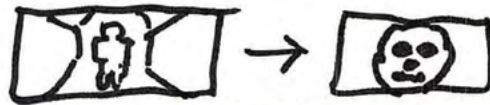
Being able to give a production a shot list very early in prep gives an advantage to the assistant director, who can then schedule with some certainty how much time is going to be needed to complete a scene because they will know that you are planning seven set ups instead of three. It also enables the different departments on the production to have an immediate understanding of what kinds of shots you

think you may do and what kind of resources may be needed to accomplish them.

I approach creating the shot list from the inside out, meaning I climb inside the head of the main character and think of ways to visually depict the world the way the character feels it is in that moment. For example, if there is a large, glamorous party, but the main character is in a state of turmoil about something else, I will not shoot a big shot of the party to show all the glamour and glitz. I will choose to shoot angles that show the audience how traumatized the main character is as he or she makes their way through the party. This is an important difference. When you do that, you are essentially making the audience feel the way the main character does. This increases the audience's sympathy and understanding of why the main character is acting the way he or she is. It is not catering to an objective view; it is making the scene completely subjective.

I've taken this approach on every project that I've directed. People often ask me where the images and the style of "American Horror Story" came from. It came from the characters. By climbing inside the heads of completely

**SCENE 1 – EXT HELEN’S HOUSE**

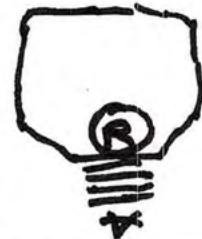


Out of focus image pushes in toward front door and comes into focus as a big CU of Ronald with staples in his head, looks to car



WS split diopter with Tesla in FG and Ronald on porch in BG

Low WS, overhead looking down at tent port with Tesla driving under



Low push in as tarp flows over car to Ronald in MS dialogue

**SCENE 2 – INT. HELEN’S HOUSE - BASEMENT**



ECU 96fps Slo-mo tip of soldering iron touching solder and sparking (match angle with next shot)

Overhead WS of Ronald working on box with other boxes

Low MS Ronald, push in to CU as he pulls staples from his head

Split diopter with CU box and solder in FG and full shot Erik

Split diopter ECU Father Maynard in FG and Erik in full shot BG



Elevated angle CU Erik

**SCENE 3 – INT. LEGARSKI HOUSE - KITCHEN**



Off angle full shot Merrilee entering (seen through arches), putting down bag

CU Merrilee

**SCENE 4 - INT. LEGARSKI HOUSE - STAIRWELL**

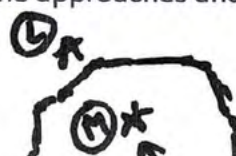


High WS looking down stairwell as Merrilee climbs

**SCENE 5 - INT. LEGARSKI HOUSE** [Download full version @](https://www.studentfilmmakers.com/PDF/Michael_Goi_Shot_List.pdf)

OTS push behind Merrilee as she approaches and opens storage room door, see cutout of Legarski

CU Merrilee





## DIRECTING

dysfunctional characters and visually depicting the world as they see it, I was showing the audience the frame of mind of unstable people. So, the initial shot list has nothing to do with the logistics of the sets and locations. It is entirely to do with what types of shots depict the frame of mind of the character. Once I scout locations and see the sets, I can adjust the shots if I need to, but those are normally minor adjustments.

When they are making their first shot lists, many people get into way too much detail. They describe every lens choice, every dolly push, every single thing they can think of in enormous detail. That approach will sabotage you when you're on set and cannot do exactly those shots. People are often surprised that my shot lists are very simple. The simplicity gives me flexibility to adapt to any situation that comes up. I have included an example of one of my shot lists here. You can see that it leaves room to be interpreted in different ways, but the intention of the shot and the number of shots I feel are necessary for the scene are still conveyed. The sometimes-indecipherable hieroglyphics and thumbnail drawings on my shot list are my reminders of compositional choices or camera placement after I had seen the locations.

If you have access to a script for a film you have not already worked on, practice making a shot list. Read the script and write down the shots you think you would do to tell that story. You will find the process gets quicker and quicker the more you do it, and your ability to remember vital pieces of the story puzzle becomes easier.

*Michael Goi, ASC, ISC, is a four-time Emmy-nominated television and motion picture director, writer and cinematographer. Among his credits are "American Horror Story", "Megan Is Missing", and "The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina." He is a three-time past president of the American Society of Cinematographers and co-chair of the Directors Guild of America's Diversity Task Force. Michael is the editor of the 10th edition of the American Cinematographer Manual.*



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directing  
for the screen  
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# Give Yourself an Exit Strategy

By Jared Isham

One thing that is frequently left out of the **camera work** discussion is *how it affects you in post-production*.

With filmmaking, having the ability to make decisions knowing how they will affect things down the road, will put you in a much better position when it comes to your finished product. This doesn't mean you need to know exactly how the movie will be edited before you start shooting. It does mean, however, that you know *different ways* you could potentially put the film together when going into production.

Let's take a look at a very simple camera technique that can save you big headaches when it comes to the edit.

The **static shot** - maybe *static* doesn't fully cover it, but it hopefully gets your head in the right place. Sometimes, you just have to **let your talent exit frame**.

The *urge* with a lot of beginners is to *follow the action*. It is a valid approach in making sure you get enough coverage of your scene to edit it together.

The key that is frequently left off the table is in **remembering that exits are also coverage**. The exit is more than just someone exiting a frame or leaving a scene. It is an edit point that, if not captured, limits what can be done in the post-production edit.



To understand the importance of this, let's hop on over to some editing rules that apply to what you captured on set.

*Cutting from something in the frame to that same something in the frame can feel jarring if the motion is not matched. If editing together two separate scenes, not having an exit of a character can make it feel like there is a section of the story missing. Cutting from something static to something in motion can be jarring. Letting a subject exit frame* allows you to cut to them in the frame in another shot in a new location more smoothly.

The thing with rules in filmmaking is that *it is not that they are right or wrong* but that *they produce different results*.

Knowing the results something might deliver helps you to be more intentional in your storytelling. By using the simple camera trick of letting your subjects exit frame, you are giving yourself options when you need it most.

Don't fear the exit, embrace it and give yourself an "exit strategy" in post.

**Jared Isham** ("Bounty", 2009; "Turn Around Jake", 2015) is an independent filmmaker and head of motion pictures at Stage Ham Entertainment. He also creates videos focused on helping filmmakers make better films on a micro-budget.  
[www.jaredisham.com](http://www.jaredisham.com)



# A Conversation with Michael Wale csc

by Jody Michelle Solis

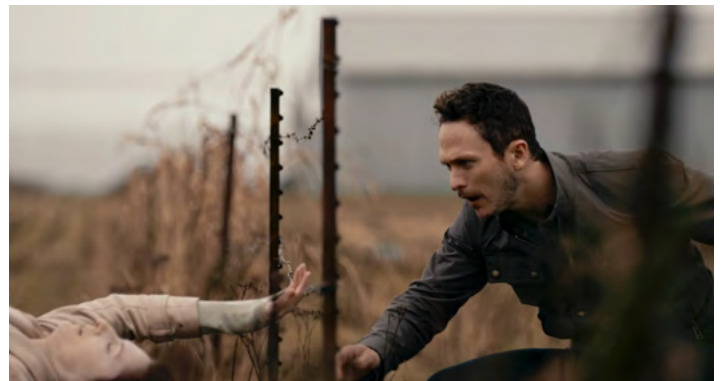
**Michael Wale csc** received a Leo Awards for Best Cinematography in a Dramatic Series for “Continuum”; an ASC Award nomination for Outstanding Achievement in Cinematography in a One Hour Episodic Television Series/Pilot for the Smallville episode, “Smallville: Shield”; a Leo Awards Nomination for Best Cinematography in a Dramatic Series for “Continuum” episode, “End Times”; and a Leo Awards Nomination for Best Cinematography in a Dramatic Series for “iZombie” episode, “Zombie Bro”.

*StudentFilmmakers* magazine talks with Michael Wale csc about his work on “Debris,” and how he films and lights for science fiction episodic television.

**The new sci-fi, alien drama series, “Debris,” has been compared to “The X-Files” and “Fringe,” and you’ve worked on all three shows. Can you tell us about “Debris,” the story and style, and the inspiration for the ‘look’ of the show? How do you achieve the look?**

**Michael Wale csc:** “The X-Files” and “Debris” were both excellent experiences. I joined “The X-Files” as a camera trainee in its first season, John Bartley, ASC, was the Director of Photography. On “Fringe,” I joined it in its fifth and final season as an alternating DP with David Geddes, ASC. Both shows were similar in that they dealt with the investigation of the unknown. I am pleased to hear “Debris” has been compared by some to these two shows.





In terms of inspiration for the 'look,' I took some of my guidance from the early work I witnessed on "X Files". As a trainee, I spent much of my time between slating and loading film watching John work. I remember watching a blocking, placing marks then observing how the grip and electric teams would start to light. John would then step on set, and to my surprise, he would be turning off lights. It was through experiences such as this that I learned 'lighting' is as much about taking light away as adding. Years later, as a DP, I was invited to work on "Fringe" where I met Executive Producer and Director Joel Wyman who later hired me to shoot his next series called, "Almost Human". Joel, then, asked me to join him on his next series, "Debris", which we just completed the first season..



In terms of inspiration for 'the look,' "Debris", it started with discussion with Joel about films, photographs and other visual references. In the early days of pre-production, we referenced the work of Bradford Young in "Arrival", Hoyte van Hoytema's "Interstellar" and Wally Pfister's "Inception". We talked about the work we had done together on "Fringe" and "Almost Human", as well as everyday observations. I remember Joel emailing me a shot he took on his phone while walking down the sidewalk of an orange bicycle against a grey wall as a visual reference for colour. Prior to shooting, I produced a "look book" of collected images; some from films, television, paintings and architecture. All visual references used to shape the look of the show.





“This was shot on location in the rain at the end of the day.”



How did I achieve the “look”? On a technical note, I shot with the Sony Venice camera set at 16:9 4K. Lenses used were the Leica Summilux Cine primes. I shot with a wide aperture to create a shallow depth of field. Working with Patrick Hogue, my DIT, we created a desaturated, slightly crushed LUT which I carried through to final timing. I had set a shooting guide for directors regarding the look such as camera movement, lens selection and angles. I also worked closely with Production Designers, Ross Dempster, for the pilot, and later, James Philpott, for the series.

In terms of shooting style, I, like most cinematographers, try to keep the camera on the dark side, that is on the shadow side of a set, looking towards the windows or if outside towards the sun, that is when there is sun in Vancouver. As I mentioned earlier, taking away light is as much about lighting as adding. I relied heavily on my Key Grip, John Westerlaken and my Gaffers, Todd Lapp and Trevor Taylor to help me as much as possible





## CINEMATOGRAPHY

"This was shot the following day, in the parking lot, in bright sun."



"This is how we did it! Camera and actors inside the tent, ND21 window...Success!"



in terms of light management. As I like to say, "There is no 'I' in 'Debris.'" We worked hard, and we worked well together. I am grateful for having such a wonderful crew.

**So far, what has been one of your most favourite science fiction scenes to film and light, and why? Can you describe the story and scene? What cameras did you shoot with, and how did you light it?**

**Michael Wale csc:** Wow, favourite science fiction scenes to film and light... I would look back at some of my work from "Almost Human". I enjoyed shooting that show as it was set slightly in the future. We created a new world, a look for that show that was truly science fiction. We did a scene in a night marketplace that was very reminiscent of "Blade Runner". We had wonderful sets designed by Ian Thomas which were beautiful to work in. I believe then I was shooting with the Arri Alexa.

Although not nearly as exciting, I had an interesting experience on "Debris" that on a technical level is one of my favourites. We were shooting a scene with men in space suits in a white tent near a corn field in the rain at the end of the day. We ran out of both time and daylight and shot the close-ups the following day. The challenge the next day was that we were back at the stage and had to shoot the coverage outside the production office. It was also now blazing hot, mid-day daylight. To further complicate the scene, the space suits were lit with internal LEDs which were unable to dim or brighten. So, the challenge was to shoot a dark, end of day close-up of a man in a space suit in bright sun in a parking lot.

With the extraordinary efforts of Best Boy, Devin Kaczmariski, a black tent was created with a 4' x 8' window of hard ND21, we then brought the space suited actors inside with the

## CINEMATOGRAPHY



camera facing the dark window. A Titan Tube was then mounted in the tent with a white teaser to replicate the original tent interior. Exposure was determined by little LED lights in the helmet from which the level of ND was selected for the window and the Titan Tube adjusted for reflection in the helmet's visor. We sprayed some water and rolled the camera. It was a bit of backwards engineering and trickery, however, it worked out. This was perhaps the most complicated shot in terms of technical matching; however, I was really pleased with the results. I think one would be hard pressed to notice the different locations in the cut scene.

A second achievement would have to be the night interior scene shot in a commercial greenhouse during the day. In this case a much bigger tent!

### What was one of the most important things you learned working on a sci-fi set?

**Michael Wale csc:** Less is more. Keep it simple. Keep it real. Let the story stand out as the most important aspect. Support the story.

### What are your top three tips for shooting and lighting science fiction?

**Michael Wale csc:**

**Tip #1:** Look at the story. I don't think there is "science fiction look".

**Tip #2:** I would say the same rules for science fiction would apply to a period piece or a contemporary drama. Think about what the lighting or look is doing to support the story. Lighting and look should complement not distract or compete with what is being told.

**Tips #3:** Come up with a deliberate plan, a technique or style, and do your best to maintain it.

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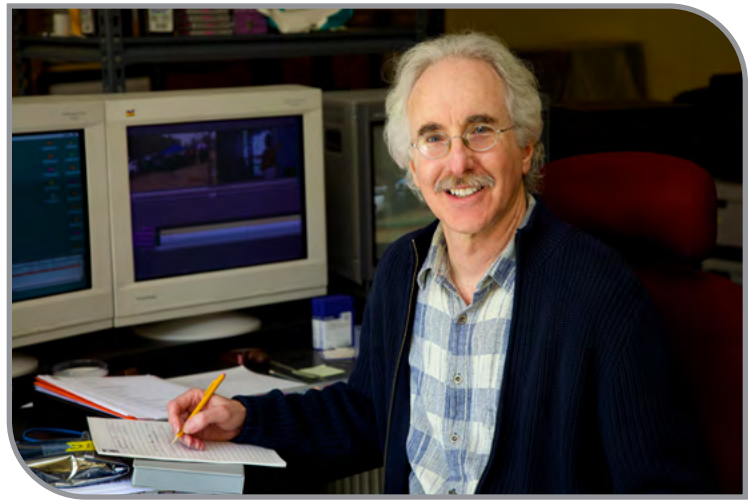




# Exposure

## *Why Still Use a Light Meter?*

By David Appleby



With digital cameras now equipped with waveform monitors, histograms and programmable zebras, *why do you need to use, or even know about, light meters?*

**A first answer** would be that all the built-in features you're using *are* light meters. **A second answer** is that for ease of use, precision, control and portability, nothing beats a good stand-alone meter. **And third**, if you understand metering, you'll be better able to decipher and employ the knowledge that the internal features provide.

To begin, you need to be familiar with the concept of “**dynamic range**” and how the two basic types of meters allow you to navigate within (and outside) that range to create the desired image.

### Dynamic Range

Every scene and every sensor that records a scene has a dynamic range – the difference between the darkest and lightest tones available or capable of being recorded, expressed in *f*-stops – each stop allowing twice or half the light as the next. Understand that the dynamic range of a sensor is fixed and narrower than the range that may exist in nature. The latest CMOS sensors might reach a dynamic range of 13 stops, but the human eye can perceive 20 stops (1,000,000:1) and the actual brightness range on a sunny day can exceed that. The job of the DP is to keep the dynamic range of the shot within what is capable of being captured by the

camera. This may mean directing more light into the darker areas, or blocking light from “hot” spots by flagging, using nets or employing ND filters to cut intensity.

*So, how do you know if something in your scene falls below or above the recordable range?* You might be able to get close reading the image on your LCD viewer, or bringing up a histogram or waveform, but for accuracy, there's no better way to control the brightness values in a scene than by employing a spot meter plus a gray card or incident meter.

### Meet Me in the Middle

No matter how wide or narrow the dynamic range of your camera, or how many stops difference there is from the darkest to the brightest area in a scene, both have one thing in common – *the middle*. We refer to this brightness value as **middle gray**, and it is always the same. A middle gray anything – face, costume or card – reflects 18% of the light that strikes it, placing it in the middle of any sensor's dynamic range. So, *proper exposure\** is one that places a middle gray card/object at the midpoint of a camera's range.



*Sekonic combination  
incident + 1° spot meter.*



*Incident meter.*

## CINEMATOGRAPHY

*\*Note: Proper exposure, as used here, is a technical definition. Creatively, you can expose a shot any way that gives you the desired result.*

### The Incident Meter

If you have an incident meter, place the white plastic globe in the light where the subject will be (the nice thing about this meter is that you don't need the subject to be present when taking your readings) facing it toward the key light. (NOTE: We are usually told to face the incident meter toward the camera, but this is only true when the subject is frontally lit.) After setting the ISO and shutter speed, the meter will give you an *f*-stop reading. Setting your lens to that aperture will ensure that anything middle gray will register in the center of your camera's dynamic range. Every other reflective value will fall where it normally does in relation to middle gray, i.e., one stop above, three below, etc. Exactly how far above or below middle gray something in your scene is, can be determined with a reflected meter.

If you don't have an incident meter, taking a reflected reading off a gray card placed in the scene will give you the same reading.

### The Reflected Meter

A reflected meter has only one function – to tell you how to represent the tonal value of whatever it is pointed at as middle gray... how to place that reflected value at the center

of your dynamic range. Knowing this, you now have a very precise way to evaluate exposure.

Once you've determined the "proper" stop to set your aperture using the incident reading or gray card, you can now use your reflected meter (preferably a spot meter that allows you to be very precise with what you're metering) to determine exactly how much brighter or darker something is than middle gray and thus, where it will fall within the visible range of your sensor.

### In the Zone

All the tonal values below and above middle gray can be broken down into zones, each being twice or half the brightness of the adjacent zone. So, each zone is exactly one stop (*f*-stop) brighter or darker than the next. If zone V is the middle, zone VI is a stop brighter (twice as bright), zone VII four times brighter, etc. **The Zones** chart (See *Chart 1*) shows a classic 10 zone range, with 0 being black, V being middle gray and X being pure white.

So, you've picked an *f*-stop that places a middle gray card at the center of your dynamic range (Zone V). Now you can use your **spot meter** to determine exactly what zone everything in your scene falls in, and then, adjust your lighting (not your aperture) accordingly.

For example: You've set your aperture to *f*-5.6 according to the reading you got from the gray card. Now you point your



*Photographer taking a reflected reading off a gray card.  
Photo: D. Goodman.*





Zones

X

IX

VIII

VII

VI

V

IV

III

II

I

A shot broken down into zones.

Photo by Stephen Leonardi. Follow Instagram @leo\_visions.

spot meter at the white shirt worn by an actor and get a reading of  $f-11$ . This indicates that the shirt is two stops hotter than the gray card, thus placing it in zone VII. If that's where you want it, fine. If you want to place it in another zone, add or subtract the light falling on it (or coming through it in the case of a window or other source).

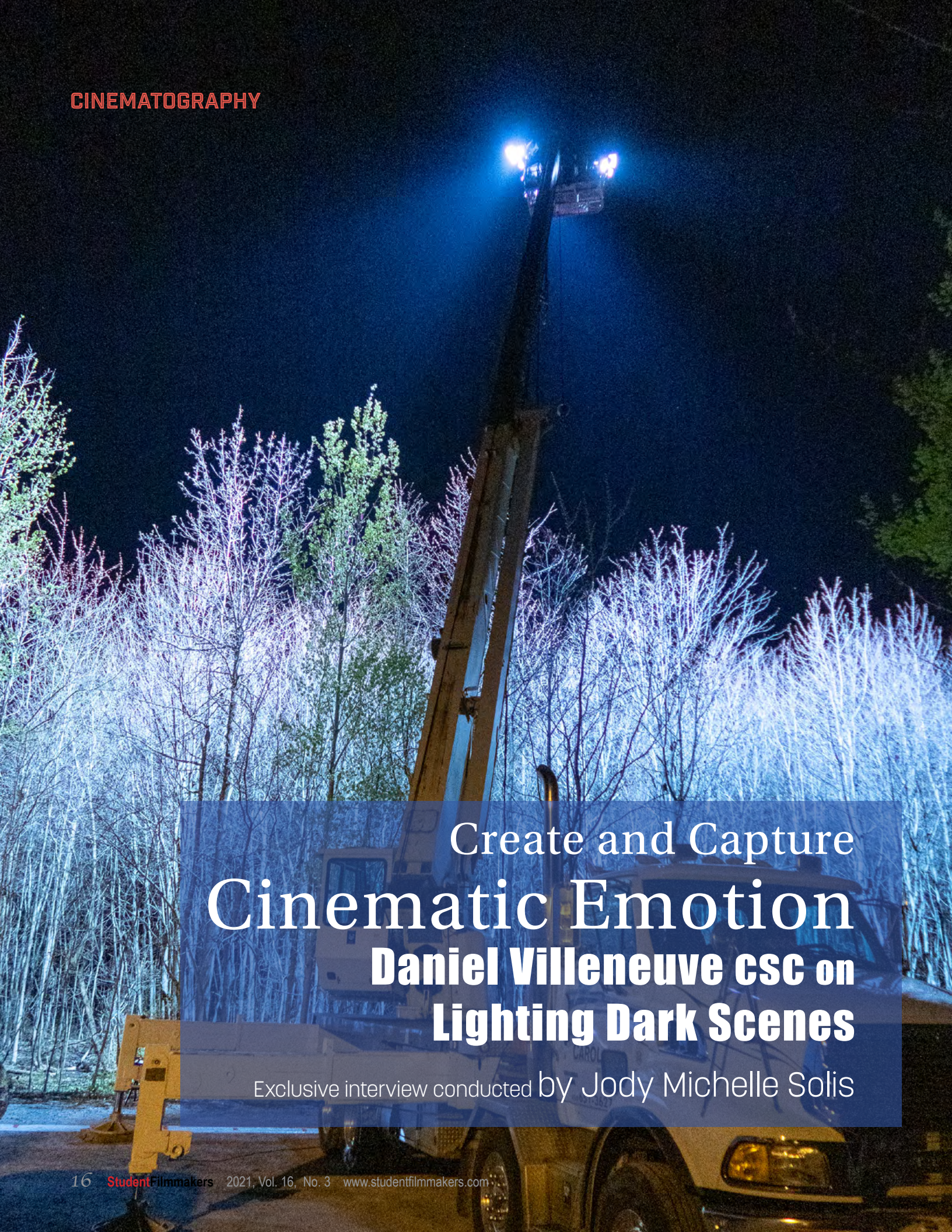
You can test the dynamic range of your camera by shooting a scene with a wide

range of light values using the aperture you read from the gray card or incident meter, measuring those values, then viewing the results on a properly set up monitor. Once you're confident of what you can capture above and below middle gray, you should be able to shoot a scene with no surprises during dailies.

*David Appleby is an award-winning documentary filmmaker and professor in the Department of Communication and Film at the University of Memphis. His films have aired nationally on PBS, ABC, A&E and Starz.*

[www.memphis.edu/communication/people/appleby.php](http://www.memphis.edu/communication/people/appleby.php)



A night scene featuring a crane-mounted light rig. The rig is positioned in the center, with its arm extending upwards and outwards, holding several bright lights. The lights illuminate a dense line of trees, creating a dramatic, high-contrast scene. The trees are silhouetted against the dark night sky, with some branches catching the light. The overall mood is cinematic and atmospheric.

Create and Capture  
**Cinematic Emotion**  
**Daniel Villeneuve CSC on**  
**Lighting Dark Scenes**

Exclusive interview conducted by Jody Michelle Solis



Daniel Villeneuve csc has been shooting for film and television for over 30 years. His craftsmanship being recognized two years running in both 2019 and 2020 with nominations at the Canadian Screen Awards for best photography, drama, for the television features, “Sleeper” and “Mean Queen”.

**What were your favourite scenes to light in “Sleeper” and “Mean Queen”, and can you tell us about your use of lighting, shadows, and colour for these scenes?**

**Daniel Villeneuve csc:** In “Sleeper”, possibly the most interesting scene to light was the one where a woman breaks into the couple’s house. She searches the darkened house with a flashlight as the main light source while the people who live there are about to come back home. It starts in the backyard, goes through the kitchen, up the stairs, the hallway, in a bedroom and back out the same way just in time as not to be caught...of course. Lights were strategically placed outside the location and gave some sense of exterior street light coming in the house, but most of the actual lighting for the scene is really from the prop flashlight, therefore, requiring some planning with the performer as to where to shine the light and where not to.

Fortunately, now with LED flashlights, we can get a good light output in a small device.

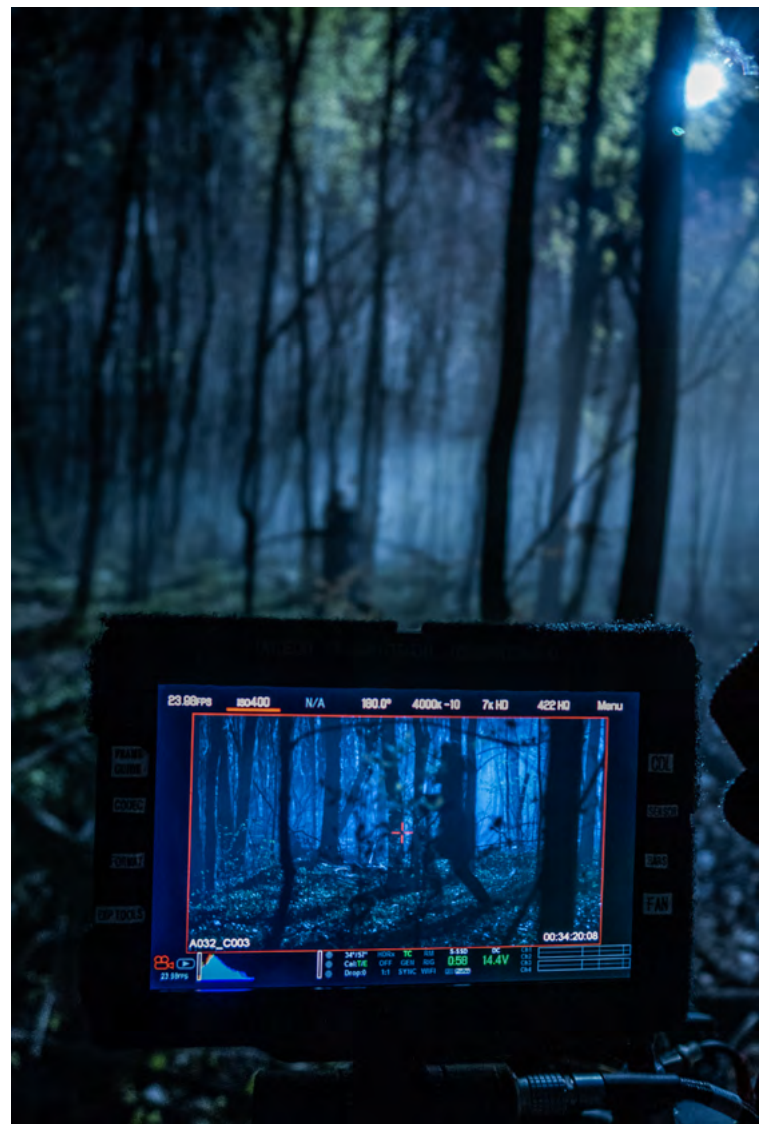
When simulating exterior street lights, it is becoming more and more of a question about what colour to have those lights. A few years ago, street lights were pretty much universally the very deep and gloomy yellow/green of sodium discharge lamps. But lately, and thankfully, more and more street lights are being upgraded to photographically more appropriate and more reliable energy saving LED sources. In “Sleeper”, we went with a mix of pseudo-sodium using gels because the actual street lights seen in some night exteriors were still sodium based, and clean tungsten, justifying that decision on the fact that there could be some mix of street light and some light from neighbouring houses. We also “attributed” a decorative yellow light source to one of the neighbours. The flashlight was pretty much daylight, casting a nice blue light.

I had asked for some smoke in the house so the light beam would show, but I think that when doing that, it is important to have the smoke level at a bare minimum so that its presence does not become questionable.

In “Mean Queen”, the most elaborate and challenging lighting set-up was for the night scenes in the forest. It evolves around a derelict shack in a remote area where someone is being held captive. Night scenes in a forest are the type of scenes that I find will require the most lighting efforts as trees and leaves will just gobble up whatever light that we try to put in there.

Fortunately, for us, we were shooting in very early spring, so the leaves were just coming out, and we did get a fairly good light level and coverage from our lights.

We had a fairly wide area where we elected to situate the action. We chose a location where, while looking as if deep into the wilderness, we were very close to the end of a dead-end street where we parked a large construction crane in which we put, if memory serves me well, three Arri M40 HMI fixtures and used them as our main giant “magic movie moon” light source. In coverage, in order to stay back lit as much as possible, we did a lot of what we call here, “French reverse”, where the actors are put against believable backgrounds that are not necessarily the ones they would have if shooting conventionally, using the motto that, “a tree, is a tree, is a tree”, moving the actors while the camera moves





just enough to get a different looking background, very convenient, but somewhat confusing for the crew. I take pictures to keep track. In that situation, moving our light source would have been impossible, and even if it were possible, very time consuming. It also becomes one of those instances when everyone is, more or less, magically back lit, but sometimes I just do not concern myself too much with that, going for looks over logic. Again, smoke was used to get more depth and this time, given the setting, it was a plausible thing.

**If you could share “3 Important Do’s” and “3 Important Don’ts” for lighting dark scenes, what would they be?**

**Daniel Villeneuve csc:**

**Do use adequate lighting within the means available.**

I think that with cameras getting more and more sensitive lately, I now shoot with a RED Gemini that can be set at 3200 ISO with

no noticeable adverse consequences on the look, there are some ‘individuals’ in the business who think that we magically do not have to light anymore, actually many have been making that wild and frivolous claim for several years now. While it is true that the very large, power-hungry lighting units from a few years ago can now be replaced with smaller more efficient ones, it is important to remember that we do not light scenes just to get illumination that yields proper exposure, we are using light to create a mood, to make statement, to bring the audience into the scene, and that endeavour goes way, way, beyond just getting an exposure level. So don’t get suckered into the lazy, “we don’t need lights anymore” approach. Even though a scene might be destined to be dark in the final on screen result, try within the available means to get a good amount of exposure that will be easily made darker in

post. This is easier and yields better looking results than trying to make underexposed scenes become brighter.

**Do strive to separate background and foreground with light and/or colour.**

Sensors or film need light to build an image. But on the other hand, I will never hesitate to let parts of a set go dark or to let an actor walk in a dark area, but I will then endeavour strongly to get a relatively bright background, so they stand out against it or, on a different tack, try to get some sort of back light or edge light. A dark, unlit actor walking against a dark, unlit background just yields dark on dark.

Also, keep in mind that in many production situations, the DP will not be the only one deciding on the final look. As much as we would like to evolve in this perfect creative bubble where directors always get final cut with no comments and DPs have the final say on the look, in many instances, producers, faced with many imperatives that they must juggle, will also have their say in the look, so getting more exposure than necessary gives one the leeway to make some allowances in colour timing to help meet those many imperatives.

**Do keep the ISO as low as practical.**

While it might also be tempting to get more exposure in night scenes by simply increasing the camera’s ISO setting, seems logical after all, keep in mind that in most modern cameras (RED, Alexa, Sony) that have a single native base ISO, usually 800, increasing the ISO will yield a brighter image, yes, but that is only done as meta data, information that tags along with the clip and tells the rendering software to increase brightness, the sensor just gets the same basic exposure or perhaps even less, and while the image does look brighter, shadow detail might get gradually somewhat compromised. So, when shooting night scenes, as much as it is possible, one should strive to counter intuitively reduce the camera’s ISO setting, hence making the image darker and by requiring a wider





aperture, protecting the details in the shadow areas better. The opposite should be considered when shooting in very bright settings where protecting highlights detail can be a priority. When sufficient lighting was available, I have often shot night scenes at very low ISO settings, knowing that while the images look dark and moody on the monitor, I have an extra stop or so of exposure “reserve” in my back pocket that can be called upon later in post, even if it is only to add some detail in just a portion of the image.

In a perfect world it takes some amount of light even to make darkness on screen. When it is not possible to light, documentary, run and gun, etc., I will then not hesitate to use the high sensitivity dual ISO on the newer extremely high-performance cameras available nowadays that have the dual base ISO ability. I have been shooting with RED for five years now and the past two with the Gemini which easily handles 3200 ISO, Sony and Panasonic also have dual ISO cameras that are outstanding performers. Once we get in this realm of high ISO, many night environments, especially in urban settings, will yield sufficient light for exposure, but let’s keep in mind that the DP can still have an influence on the outcome, even though there is no actual lighting involved, by choosing locations, camera position, framing and lenses wisely.

**Do not let actors’ eyes go completely lifeless in very dark close-ups.** One small and simple device that I find useful when shooting dark scenes is to have an eyelight. I find that even in dark faces, having the slightest glitter of light reflecting in the actors’ eyes adds a better perception of their performances. I use a very small array of bi-color LEDs about 1 inch by 5 inches velcroed on the mat box with a controller, also velcroed to one side and powered through the camera battery. In a pinch, I will use an iPhone. There are even apps for phones and tablets that let one dial in a colour and adjust brightness level very easily, and they can become a useful light source.

**Do not let the overall scene lighting make a prop flashlight look as if it is not required.** Another thing that I find important in night scenes where a flashlight is being used is to attempt as much as possible to make the flashlight by far the brightest light source in the shot, the scene should not look so bright that the audience questions why a flashlight is being used in the first place. Nowadays, just a single flashlight, in many instances, can do a lot of actual lighting.

**Do not adhere to any rules, experiment for yourself on your own projects, make mistakes and learn from them.** In the preceding topics, I might be trying to share a few of my “rules”, we must always remember that there are no rules, some might just be used as stepping off points to experiment, basic guidelines to explore further and further.

Always be ready to embrace the “happy accident”. Sometimes unforeseen circumstances can create magical visual situations, and they are often difficult, if not impossible, to replicate.

**You’ve recently shot several TV movie thrillers. Can you talk a little bit about cinematic emotion in thrillers? How do you create tension and suspense using shots, angles, and motivate camera movement? What are some examples?**

**Daniel Villeneuve csc:** In shooting crime thrillers, or any movie for that matter, one of the first things to consider is the perspective from which we wish to show the action. It will often be from the principal character’s perspective and one of the most powerful tools to control the viewer’s perspective, their perception of the action, aside from, obviously, camera placement, is lens choice. Not the actual lens brand of course, but focal lengths.

Lens choices should never be overlooked when telling a story with a camera. Different focal lengths will have a direct effect on the distance the audience feels from a character and how they will identify, or not, with their situation. A simple

## CINEMATOGRAPHY



example can be the same close-up shot on 40mm lens with the camera about 4 feet from the actor, or with a 100mm lens where the camera will be around 10 feet away. Both shots would have the actor roughly the same size in the frame, but with the 40mm, the background will be relatively in focus or at least with many details discernible, as an audience we will see the environment the character is in better and we will also feel, although for many it will be on a subconscious level, the close proximity of the camera, we will feel we are “with” the character. Using a 100mm does quite the opposite, the background will be very out of focus and the audience will feel the character is more isolated in his world. Both are good choices; I prefer to use the shorter lenses usually, but that is never cast in stone.

It is also important, in my opinion, to be consistent with lens choices and shot sizes throughout the film for a given situation while, perhaps, if appropriate, using different focal lengths strategically, according to the circumstances or character shown throughout the film to make subtle visual statements.

Even when shooting with a zoom lens, which is most of the time lately to reduce material handling on set due to the pandemic, I will still use it at mostly the same 3 or 4 lens settings in order to keep a consistent look. I find that I can shoot practically an entire film using 27mm, 40mm and 65mm. 18mm and 100mm will be used seldomly if I must due to locations constraints. But 90% of the time, it works with the three aforementioned focal lengths.

Camera height relative to the actors is also an important tool to create tension in a scene and change perspective, in most

cases, I think it should not be used too obviously. Often a little over or under the horizontal plane will go a long way in creating a mood.

### **You're currently in pre-production on a project. What projects do you have coming up on the horizon?**

**Daniel Villeneuve csc:** For the past two years, after shooting many dozens of crime thrillers for TV, I have found myself in the completely different world of romantic comedies (romcoms), where the plot usually revolves around girl meets boy, girl gradually likes boy, girl gets boy. It is a completely different game from crime thrillers visually and, in my opinion an even bigger challenge technically. While crime thrillers can be somewhat gritty and dirty looking, romcoms, of course, have to have a very “clean” look, but without going into the “let’s put lights everywhere” approach, at least not for me. So, I try to always maintain some dimension, some contrast to the light even though we still have to be in a fairly softly lit world where the cast looks their best. I did two romcoms in the second half of 2020 despite the COVID pandemic. I have already finished one in 2021 with one in pre-production right now and another one after that will take me all the way to early September. There is perhaps a feature at some point in the fall, but in a freelance world that is like light years away.

Video reference:  
[www.vimeo.com/547220568](https://www.vimeo.com/547220568)



# Light Emotion

By Eddie Tapp

Light is all around us. We use light, we feel light, we create light, we use light that is already created. Sometimes we assume light and sometimes abuse light. When light is at its epic moment, we appreciate light, sometimes with a raised eyebrow or smile and squint, or a deep feeling of awesomeness.

Technically, light is a series of values that create shape, shadow, specular and diffusion. It is directional, ambient and reflective, and in study, we become proficient using light.

## Nature of Light

Did you ever stop to notice the light, such as during a stellar sunset or sunrise when the sky becomes an amberish glow and everything seems to be solar pink all around? Or the cloud formation with the sun spreading spectacular colors after it has set behind the transitional horizon mixing in with twilight.

Have you ever noticed how magnificent someone looks during a candlelit dinner? The glow, ambience and even soft-focus appearance can be affectionate. The same person in a lunchroom with the florescent light creating deep shadows under the eyes and the emotion is quite different.

Light has an emotional quality by nature, and for those of us who use light by asset in imaging find that it becomes a great challenge to emulate.

### Why is that?

Light has its place with every perception or atmosphere. "Be the chip," I used to say, referring to the sensor or film in the camera. What is the range the "chip" can see compared to our visual perception? The answer to that is one of the greatest challenges to becoming proficient in seeing the light that we "see" and interpreting it as or knowing how the chip will see that light.

*How do we learn to see what the chip will see?*

The first challenge is the difference in **value and color**. Our eyes are so forgiving when our view changes from daylight to tungsten, our color checker seems to be the same to our eyes but not the chip. And to me, the most challenging is how much value our eyes see compared to the chip. Ansel Adams and Fred Archer formulated the **Zone System** which allows one to use a light meter to read the values of a scene. Perhaps you use, or have seen, a photographer using a red viewing filter to look at a scene, thus showing a closer proximity to the values that the chip will see. The long and short answer to this is experience and study, but experience is the greatest teacher.

## Natures of Light

It will always be with me after spending years seeing, studying and properly using light. Somehow I never noticed it until one day driving down the highway as the sun set, suddenly I noticed the light in a way I've never noticed, and it changed my life from that point. What was different was noticing the volume of the light itself. But even from there, it took me years to realize what I had suddenly noticed and now, no matter what, it's the volume of light that taught me to "see the light".

Consider for just a moment that **light is a volume of light waves** and has *direction and ambience*. Similarly, **water is a volume of matter** and has a *flow and stillness*. A rather abstract comparison but the real similarity is volume.

**Four natures of light.** If you are having any issues learning to "see the light", this may help you analyze what light quality has to offer. The **4 Natures of Light** are *specular highlight, diffused highlight, diffused shadow* and a *hard shadow* that I refer to as "me and my shadow". You will see at least three of these natures in every photograph.

**Three elements.** There are three elements that create exceptional



imaging. *Light, composition and exposure*. These are topographical elements that in harmony, create the mood, feeling, emotion with a story. Light has the greatest effect especially in conjunction with composition to reveal emotion.

**Another three elements** are within a mindset while creating an image, the *subject, light and background*. There it is again... *Light!* Now is when we use our greatest knowledge and experience to create. And this is when we can cross over to using our emotion to elevate our imagery.

What I mean to say is there is a time when we start to use our **deep-seated emotion** to create imagery from within. Learn "how to" and then forget about it. That was from my fashion photography instructor back in the day. Use what you feel inside and go with it. That is emotion.

*Considered one of the most influential photographers and digital imagers, Eddie Tapp, M.Photog., MEI, Cr., API, CPP, is known world-wide for his ability to create compelling images, as well as his ability to communicate understanding when teaching the techniques. Inducted into the Photoshop Hall of Fame, life member of the Professional Photographers of America, holding their highest degrees including the PPA Technology Impact Award.*

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# How to Create a Role in 3 Steps

By Sara Sue Vallee



Okay, so you've booked a role in a play, movie or TV series, and now it is time for you to build this unique character. Building an authentic character takes time, patience and dedication. One must be willing to delve into all phases of the process in order to bring the character to life.

## Step One: The Period of Study

To begin, one must get familiar with the text and the playwright or director's work in order to find the right angle when it will be time to step into performance. You can study the themes often explored in their work, define the genre, read or watch their previous work and take note of the key elements that come back repeatedly. It's easier to begin from a wider standpoint to then dive in more specifically afterwards. Slowly, you will narrow down your research and focus solely on the project at hand and your character's development. This means to read the text multiple times to target the major turning points of your character's storyline, the way they think, behave, react, talk, interact with other characters and what other characters say about them. It's also important to acknowledge any personal connection to specific moments in the text, as this will become a valuable tool in the process ahead.

## Step Two: The Period of Emotional Experience

Now that you've done a wide analysis of the play or script, it is time for you to build a strong emotional connection to the story and character. When I talk about emotional connection, I'm referring to the emotional chain one must build for each moment of the story. An emotional chain is like a music score, it is detailed, complex and varied. This is why an actor must dig into their personal experiences, knowledge and emotional background in order to bring as much truth and spiritual essence to the character. It is important to mention here that one must not impose themselves onto the character presented; but rather acknowledge the connection that

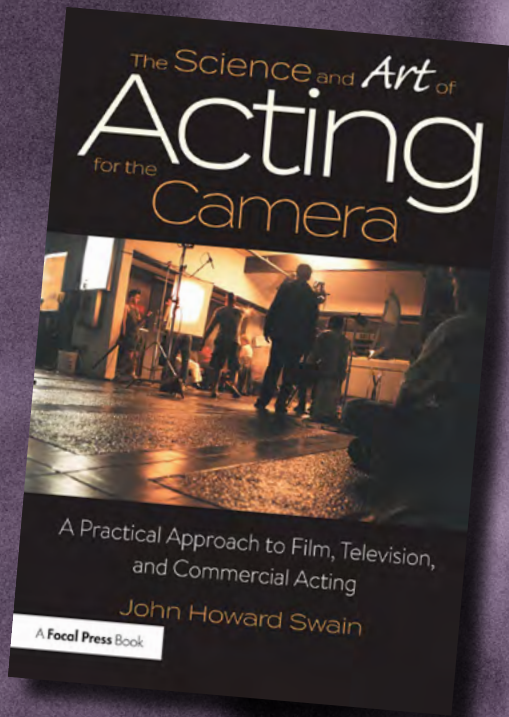
already exists and use it as a foundation to build upon. Your goal is to have meaningful images and thoughts that will become part of the character's internal life. A character must be created from the inside out. The more you establish strong and vivid images for each moment of the story, the more depth will transpire into your physicality afterwards.

## Step Three: The Period of Physical Embodiment

The last phase is all about bodily incarnation which includes the voice, the walk, gestures, mannerisms and behaviours. Of course, the physical embodiment always starts from an intellectual and imaginative place before integrating the physical sphere. This is a phase of exploration and experimentation. The actor must be willing to try things out based on his or her knowledge of the text and the character and adjust accordingly upon reception in the physical world. One must find balance between the emotional, intellectual and physical portrayal of his or her character in order to serve and tell the story truthfully. Your goal is to complement and present the story through your character's perspective without overpowering the project. You are a piece of the puzzle in this bigger picture, so remember that you must remain at the service of the story because the story always prevails, not a specific character alone.

*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 StudentFilmmakers magazine, Sara explores the world of acting in an attempt to guide new actors and filmmakers.*  
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# Is Your Script Ready for Its Close-Up?

By Christina Hamlett



Writing is—and has always been—a solitary craft. As such, it's hard sometimes to know if your latest script is a hit or a miss until someone else gets their eyes on it. Ideally that someone should be a professional who (1) is well-versed in the craft and (2) understands what makes a commercially viable film or TV show.

As a script consultant, I receive no shortage of emails which declare, “My mom really loved this,” or “My best friend says this is a movie he’d definitely go see.” While opinions can certainly be a barometer of how effectively you’ve told your story, family members and friends bring a bias to the equation which either inflates one’s expectations or crushes one’s enthusiasm. To really know if you’re on the right track, there may come a time when the feedback of an industry expert will be of benefit to you and your screenwriting career. Tapping the insights of someone who can provide guidance on how to fix trouble spots can make all the difference between a script that gets produced and one that languishes on a flash drive.

First and foremost, keep in mind the subjective nature of working with a script consultant. One of the caveats I always include in my coverage notes is that it’s ultimately up to the individual whether or not to incorporate my recommendations into subsequent drafts. It’s the writer’s story, not mine, and I respect any author’s passion to keep his/her own voice as much as possible.

At the same time, any criticism I render is based on the quality and originality of the work, not the personality or life experiences of the person who penned it. Just because a particular script doesn’t resonate with me personally (i.e., slasher, horror, science fiction), the next 10 people who read it might feel exactly the opposite.

## SCREENWRITER’S CHECKLIST

If you decide to get a professional evaluation of your work, the following things should be taken into consideration:

- What are your expectations of the critique? (i.e., an evaluation of your strengths and weaknesses, a referral to a studio or agent, a mentoring relationship.)
- What are the qualifications of the consultant who will be reviewing your script? What do others have to say about the quality of his/her work?
- What can you afford to spend on script coverage? Since fees range from less than \$100 to over \$1,000, it pays to shop around.
- What kind of timeframe is involved between submission and receipt of a critique? (Note: If you’re planning to enter the script into competition, allow at least four to six weeks in order to have the coverage done and address any recommended fixes.)
- Do you need the entire script reviewed or just a few scenes that you feel are cumbersome? Some consultants, such as myself, will do mini-appraisals that not only save you money but enable you to assess whether you could have a comfortable relationship.
- How well do handle criticism?
- Are there provisions in place for follow-up questions with the consultant after receipt of his/her critique of your script?
- Is the consultant amenable to second reads of the same material?



## MAKING A SMART IMPRESSION

In any given week I receive unsolicited submissions from aspiring screenwriters of all ages who not only attach their full scripts but ask if I can read their material for free. The answer? No. This is akin to telling a doctor you can't afford surgery so could he just remove your spleen at no charge on his day off. Be respectful. If you query a consultant, keep your pitch brief and request fee information.

Never boast that your idea is truly the next (fill in the blank). Over 60 percent of scripts I receive are knock-offs of award-winning films. Been there, done that. Snore. If you can't be original or serve up a fresh spin on classic literature, you're not trying hard enough.

Eschew informality and texting habits in your queries (i.e., "Hey, Stella! How R U?"). Do not insert emojis, copious exclamation points, or type in all caps. Aggressively proofread your email for typos. Nor should you ever reference who you think should play the lead roles (i.e., "If you like my script, can you get it to Brad Pitt for me?")

Have you entered your screenplay in any professional competitions? Even better, have you won any awards for it? Contests aren't only a great way to get feedback from judges but favorable outcomes always reflect well with script consultants.

A lot of newbies tell me their projects are "based on a true story," their thinking being that "real" life automatically translates to "reel" gold. It doesn't. If your memoir/personal adventures aren't relatable to a broad swath of the movie-watching public, it'll be a hard sell. Further, if this true epic is based on someone *else's* life, have you acquired the legal permissions to use it?

What do you do if the critique you receive is less glowing than what you were anticipating? For as many clients as I mentor who come away with a clearer understanding of what needs to be done in order to make their work stand up to scrutiny and tough competition, I have an equal number who take a defensive stance and spend more time arguing than learning. This is not a good strategy to embrace. Nor should you demand your money back if you're not happy with the advice. You're not paying someone to like what you've written; you're paying them to tell you what honestly works and what doesn't.

A case in point is that I once had a teen screenwriter who threatened to come to my house and set my hair on fire because I was critical of her first draft. She then followed up

with an email asking if I could give her Steven Spielberg's home phone number because she was certain he would appreciate her brilliance much more than I did.

Seriously. You can't make this stuff up.

Former actress/director **Christina Hamlett** is an award-winning author whose credits to date include 44 books, 243 plays, 5 optioned feature films and squillions of articles and interviews. She is also a script consultant for stage and screen (which means she stops a lot of bad ideas from coming to theatres near you) and a professional ghostwriter (which does not mean she talks to dead people). To learn more, visit

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



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# Building and Revealing Character

By Dave Trottier

*Simple but powerful tools for building fascinating characters and revealing their inner truth.*

I get Dr. Format questions flung at me every day it seems, and many of the questions have nothing to do with formatting. For example, here's one I get all the time: "Dave, how do I build my character?"

My one-word response? "Pressure." Character is revealed and developed by and through adversity. Actually, there's more to it than that.

## Is this real life, or am I in a movie?

*Both.*

Drama imitates real life. And in real life, we grow and develop by confronting opposition. Likewise, your character (and your audience) cannot experience joy or happiness without also experiencing sorrow or misery. Growth in this life and in the movies transpires because of **opposition**.

If I never go to the gym or pack out my groceries or walk around the block, then my muscles will atrophy. There must be opposition, and that opposition can be painful. Hey, no pain, no gain—right? Likewise, you've got to bloody your character's nose if you want him or her to grow, either positively or negatively.

In addition to opposition, another element must exist. It's essential in life as well as in drama.

To introduce it, let me first ask, does Michael in *The Godfather* grow or decline? He ascends to the position of godfather, but he declines morally in the process. And how does this ascension (positive growth) and decline (negative growth) take place? Opposition (adversity, obstacles, pressure) confronts Michael, and he must make decisions or choices. Therefore, for your character to grow either positively or negatively, he or she must have **free will**—the ability to make decisions.

In fact, **dramatic action** is when a character **willfully acts** against **opposition** where the outcome is important.

Years ago, I read a script about a woman who had an abusive husband. She complained for 90 pages, and then a neighbor rescued her. All the ingredients for growth and development were present:

*Adversity* was always present.

The woman had *free will* and the ability to make choices.

But there was *no action* against that opposition. She did nothing. The result? *No character growth*. And *no drama*. Although she had free will, she would not act. She lacked **the will to act**.

*So how do you build character?* Your character must have **(1)** the will to act



and **(2)** opposition. Oh, but there is a third element.

## Is the outcome important?

I remember watching a film with my wife. Halfway through, I said, "I don't care who lives or dies in this flick." The outcome was not important to me. The above-the-line artists (writers, director, actors, and producer) had failed to involve me emotionally with the characters and the story.

"Saving the world from destruction" may not be a strong enough outcome to involve your audience unless your audience can love, hate, or be fascinated by one or more of the characters.

Over the years as a script consultant, I've noticed a slight tendency in some sci-fi writers and action writers to overly emphasize plot, the cool world they created, the spaceships, the inventive weapons, the CGI action, and so on. In such cases, I simply ask them if they like *Star Trek*. "Yes, of course," is always their response.

Then, I ask them *why* they like it, and they will say (whether referring to the oldest or newest *Star Trek*) something like this: "Oh, because of Kirk, Bones, Spock, Uhura, and Scotty."

And I'll say, "Exactly."



Can that emotional involvement or identification with the character be negative? Yes. In *The Dark Knight*, I was as involved with the Joker as I was with Batman.

Now there are many elements that combine to involve an audience in a movie. We are only focusing on the fundamentals in this discussion. Those fundamentals revolve around building and revealing character. There must be (1) willful action, (2) against opposition, (3) where the outcome is important to the character and to the audience. That's true for drama and for comedy. Thus, characterization and character development are important.

**Is there a difference between characterization and character development?**

I stand on a street corner. Nearby, I see a drunk, a businesswoman, a young pastor, and a teenaged boy. Suddenly, a car with a family of four tries to stop and careens into another car. I see smoke, and maybe flames flickering from one of the engines. Now what do each of these characters do?

We don't know yet.

All we have done is **characterize** them—that is, define some outside, visual characteristics—but we don't know for sure what action each will take. What each person does will reveal

something about his or her **character**, and it will also develop his or her character.

Character is the inner truth, nature, personality, and viewpoint of your character. It includes his or her mental and moral qualities. Since character is something inside a person, it takes opposition to reveal it or give it expression through action, dialogue, and attitude.

All of these characters on my hypothetical street corner are confronted by opposition; and the outcome, at least to me, appears to be important. After all, there are injured people in those cars; we want them safe.



A man of personality can formulate ideals, but only a man of character can achieve them.

- Herbert Read

## SCREENWRITING

Let me put this another way. Each character in my little scene has some kind of personal goal, intention, desire, or need. In this hypothetical instance, the drunk wants to avoid being seen by the police. The businesswoman is late to a meeting. The pastor needs to buy some flowers. The teenaged boy intends to snatch the woman's briefcase.

The traffic accident creates an obstacle or opposition to these various goals, intentions, needs, and desires. Each character will now take an action that **reveals** something of his or her character, but which may also **build** or change character either positively or negatively.

It may be that the pastor high-tails it to the florist. The drunk and the young man run to the wrecked cars to help the passengers. The businesswoman calls the police on her smart phone while racing to her appointment. And me? Well, I sit down and take notes for my next screenplay.

The event creates opposition that elicits some kind of action or non-action. The characters all have the will to make choices. Not only does the opposition provide an opportunity to build character, it also reveals character. And when character changes, that's a **growth arc**.

Strangely, drama mirrors or imitates real life, even though it isn't real life. You are free to choose your actions, but you cannot choose the consequences of those actions.

### How can you guarantee your audience will get involved?

#### *Motivation.*

For example, why doesn't the drunk want to be seen? There's a warrant for his arrest, so he's **motivated**. If he helps the injured passengers in the wrecked cars, the police may find him, especially when they show up at the scene to investigate. Do you see the dramatic or comedic possibilities?

Why does the professional woman want to get to her meeting? A big sale and a possible promotion could result from that meeting. But will the traffic accident haunt her later?

Why does the pastor want to pick up those flowers? It's his wife's birthday, and she'll be home soon. He wants to surprise her because their relationship has weakened in recent months. He's motivated because he wants to save his marriage. What if he learns later that her sister was in one of those wrecked cars, or maybe even her?

Why does the teen want to steal the purse? He needs the money for drugs. He needs a fix now. What will happen to him if he turns his attention to the injured passengers? Will it be cold turkey? Will it be a desperate action to steal money

from the injured, maybe while saving them at the same time? Could this be a turning point for him?

A plot is a series of events, but those events must produce dramatic or comedic situations. What if the young man, instead of helping the injured, chases after the woman to steal her briefcase? Her presentation is in there. Our involvement in the characters' motivations helps us get involved with their actions.

### What if a character doesn't grow?

Butch Cassidy doesn't grow. The Sundance Kid doesn't grow. Their respective characters are revealed, however, through events (opposition) that reveal secrets or other aspects of their inner nature. For example, with the law closing in, they discover that they must jump off a cliff and into the river to escape. This is when Sundance reveals that he can't swim. (And it's where Butch retorts, "Hell, the fall will probably kill ya.") And in a later scene, Butch Cassidy reveals he has never killed a man.

In either case, do these guys learn something, overcome a flaw, or change their viewpoint of living a life of crime? *No*. But character is revealed. (And the great writing helps a lot, too.)

How about you?

As you know, you face opposition when you write your script and when you market it. One key is to make choices and take actions that will help you grow personally and professionally. Please accept my best wishes to you in those pursuits and *keep writing!*

*Dave Trotter*, author of seven books including, "The Screenwriter's Bible," has sold or optioned ten screenplays (three produced) and helped hundreds of writers sell their work and break into the biz. He is an award-winning teacher, in-demand script consultant, and friendly host of [www.keepwriting.com](http://www.keepwriting.com).

Portions of this article were taken from the new 7th edition of "The Screenwriter's Bible."



# 6 Important Things I've Learned as a Screenwriter

By Jim Strain

Here are six things I've learned over the years as a screenwriter.

## 1. PERSISTENCE IS PARAMOUNT

The patron saint of all screenwriters should be Wile E. Coyote. *Persistence is the most important element* in forging a career. "No" is the most common word used in this business, and it takes grit to survive the rejection until you finally get a "Yes." An actor friend helped me frame the challenge when I first came to Hollywood. He told me that his goal wasn't to get a part, but to get fifty auditions. Maybe then, he would get a part. I applied his approach to screenwriting. My goal at the outset was to fill a two-foot-long shelf with screenplays, and maybe one or two might open a door. Over the long haul, that method has served me well, and I continue to use shelf space, not sales, as my yardstick. It's truly a numbers game, and it's best to think of process as a marathon and not a sprint.

## 2. LUCK IS IMPORTANT

By luck, I mean *when preparation meets opportunity*. All you can control is preparation – **doing the writing**. When and where the opportunity arises is up to the fates, which is why productivity and persistence are your most valuable assets. Whatever happens to a script after it's finished is out of your control. Why some screenplays sell, and some do not – why some films are made, and others are not – is anyone's guess. The business is as capricious as the weather. You never know when or if lightning will strike, but you improve your chances with each additional screenplay you write.

## 3. PROCRASTINATION IS THE ENEMY

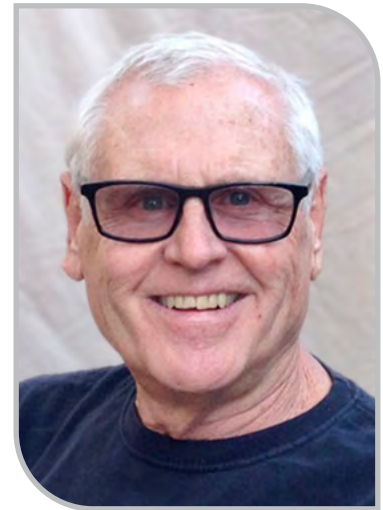
*Beware of excessive research and incubation*. If all you do is incubate, you can poach an idea to death. And too much research can be a sign of avoidance productivity. That's why deadlines are our friends. When I was house painting to make ends meet, I recall an applicable admonition: "Quit stirring and start painting."

## 4. THE FIRST DRAFT IS THE HARDEST

Some of my colleagues disagree, but first words on paper are always the toughest for me. Bless the writers whose words simply spill forth in a flood of inspiration, but I liken the process to digging ditches. Harlan Ellison referred to writing as "the holy chore." Sounds right to me. The trip from an idea to a tangible intellectual property is a hard road, but it's vital that you finish. You only learn what you need to know by *completing the work*. There's nothing to be gained from an unfinished manuscript.

## 5. EACH SCREENPLAY TEACHES YOU HOW TO WRITE THAT PARTICULAR SCREENPLAY

This is why screenwriting doesn't get any easier. Writing for me is like tangling with an interactive maze. While there may be structural similarities with other projects, there are no formulas or rigid templates to guide you. The journey through each maze is a process of discovery. What makes it doubly difficult is that the maze is malleable – *a living thing*. It is shaped and reshaped by your artistic choices and the



characters you bring to life. You are the architect but also the explorer. One way to make the journey more manageable is to know where you're ultimately headed. Most of our ideas suggest a beginning, but it is extremely helpful if you can determine the end of the story before you start writing, even if it changes as you proceed through the maze. Think of the ending as your exit light.

## 6. THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION YOU SHOULD ASK YOURSELF

How do you want the reader to *FEEL* at the end of the screenplay? Remember, film is ultimately an emotional experience.

*A veteran screenwriter, Jim Strain's feature credits include "Jumanji." His recently wrote three episodes of "Dolly Parton's Heartstrings" for Netflix, including "These Old Bones," which was nominated for an Emmy in the Outstanding Television Movie category. Jim is also a lecturer in UCLA's graduate screenwriting program and an instructor in the university's Professional Program.*



# In Search for a Common Language

By Oscar Jasso

There is a complex matter that both directors and composers often encounter while working together: **communication**. Finding the words to describe drama through music is not an easy task, and it's not uncommon for composers to find themselves at a loss as they try to decipher the director's ideas. Nor is it unusual for directors to sometimes experience difficulty in expressing what they would like to hear in a cue or throughout the entire film.

Filmmakers are often incredibly detail-oriented and fantastic storytellers. And they are so passionate in their work that we, as composers, want to be part of that world of storytelling. Now, the question is, *how can we make communication flow?*

I have found that director-composer partnerships are generally much more successful after working a few projects together, when a *common language* has begun to develop. Until then, we sometimes end up using words that can mean something to one person, but something very different to the other.

Meanwhile, composers can find it difficult to interpret a director's

suggestions or feedback. For example, a colleague once had a cue rejected, with the explanation being the music was not "yellow" enough. Then again, I can't imagine a scenario, whether I'd worked with that director before or not, where I'd actually have a clue as to how to interpret *that* into music.

Composers do need direction, and the simplest way to communicate is to talk about *story, feelings, emotions, and mood*. Let the composer interpret these things in the form of dramatic music. And as the story unfolds, so begins the thread of a common language.

Here are **Six Important Tips** that can help **directors** to more effectively communicate their ideas to composers.

- 1. Keep it simple.** Do not use overly-flowery language to describe the story or scene.
- 2. Try to focus on story, emotions, feelings, and mood.** This is something anybody can relate to.
- 3. Give the composer space to write.** We need time to write, record, and produce the music for your film.

- 4. Steer away from using music terminology,** which, when not used properly, can result in unnecessary confusion.
- 5. Use timecode** to target any passages of the music you have issues with or need to discuss.
- 6. Be as clear as possible** when describing how or what you want the music to be. Easier said than done! Alternatively, provide the composer with any references from TV or other films that you think would work similarly.

Here are **Six Important Tips** for **composers**.

- 1. Be as open-minded as possible.** Remember, this is the director's project, not yours.
- 2. Listen, listen, listen!** More than once have I or my colleagues been hired to take over for another composer who didn't listen to what the director wanted. *So, listen!*
- 3. Do not be afraid to ask questions!** Directors want to tell a story, and most would be happy to tell it again and again, and even bring up as many details as possible in the hopes of a great score.
- 4. Meet your deadlines.** Life happens. There will be situations in which something may happen that might get in the way of your work. Most of us do not allow this, and if we have to work with half a body in a cast, most likely, we will try to do so. Whatever it is, producers and directors are reasonable. Be honest. And if you feel you cannot meet your deadline, communicate with the director and keep them up to speed.
- 5. Avoid using musical terminology.**



**6. Never take anything personally.** Your music may be rejected sometimes. It happens.

No matter how complex the idea, it can most effectively be described with simplicity. Just like with any relationship in our lives, good communication is going to be the foundation of a successful production.

*Special thanks to my fellow composers* Marinho Nobre ([marinhonobre.com](http://marinhonobre.com)), Jimena Contreras ([jimenacontreras.com](http://jimenacontreras.com)), Luis Obregon ([imdb.com/name/nm2010483](http://imdb.com/name/nm2010483)), Sid De La Cruz ([imdb.com/name/nm5524958](http://imdb.com/name/nm5524958)), and Suad Lakisic Bushnaq ([suadbushnaq.com](http://suadbushnaq.com)) for sharing their experiences with me as I wrote this article.

*Oscar Jasso is a film composer based in Chicago. He began studying piano at a very early age and never lost interest in music since then. Native from Los Angeles, CA, but lived in Mexico for many years where he began his undergraduate studies in performance at Escuela Nacional de Musica, in Mexico City. He later returned to the US where he studied composition and film scoring in Chicago IL. His music has been performed in Mexico, China, and the United States. He has scored a variety of film productions, (including a production by the FBI), that have been featured in several film festivals around the world. He is also passionate about music technology.*

[www.oscarjasso.com](http://www.oscarjasso.com)  
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# Post Sound Workflow for Animation

By Justin Matley

Generally speaking, **post sound**, and **re-recording mixing** in particular, is the end of the line. The last leg of the conveyor belt. We come into play after the shots are perfected, the dialog recorded, the foley stomped, clattered, and jingled, and the music scored. Our job is to tie it all together with a bow. But, in animation, the folks who handle post sound come into play much, much earlier. In fact, we're right there at the beginning of production; shaping the visual arc in ways we never get to experience in live action pieces. In many ways, our role transitions to a production one.

I venture to say the most essential pieces of effective animation are: **the script** and **the talent**. It goes without saying these are always critical to the success of a piece of media, but the talent in particular have a unique role:

the effectiveness of their performance is solely reliant on **their voice**. No facial expressions, no gestures, no cleverly timed dance moves.

Once the script is settled, the first step in the audio process becomes casting the talent. I've been close to this process over the years, and working with agents and casting directors who have the right roster and connections are critical to getting actors that fit the desired spec (demographic, performance style, references, etc., of a potential role). After multiple men, women, girls, and boys are wrangled in for their short auditions, generally selected takes are assembled and presented to the client. These are picked by either the casting director or the client who attended the session, and reviewed by the wider team. It may take multiple

auditions and callbacks (when an actor is brought back to redo the lines) to acquire the perfect talent. But, when everyone agrees and the contracts are signed, we get to move into the first layer of audio production: **the record**.

Prior to the record, we often have a good sense of who or what the character is we are trying to create in our recording process. Sometimes, we have storyboards, animatics (early animation sequences), or character designs that help inform everyone as to the style and look of the piece. This could very well impact how an actor chooses to perform their part, which will finally start to breathe life into this static drawing.

**Once in the booth, the fun begins.** It's incumbent on the people in the control room: *audio engineers, producers, directors*, etc., both give enough information to the talent to put them into the character's imaginary body and environment, but not so much as to block their own creative intuition. Remember, they have been hired for their skills and instincts as an actor, not to pack Amazon boxes (no offense to the hardworking Amazon employees!). Each actor will work through their lines: sometimes in long swaths of uninterrupted dialog, sometimes in short spurts. This largely depends on the nature of the script, if they're reading with other talent in the booth, or how a particular actor prefers to operate. Regardless of the methodology, this process flicks the room's imagination into gear, and it's a delightful process of trial and error, experimentation and revelation.

**As the takes and selected performances are assembled**, the Jenga tower is built. Stacks of audio built upward and outward, some preferred lines, some alternates, but finally some sense of timing and flow. This assembly, or multiple assemblies over time, is sent to the animation team for a good disassembly. They will



work with these building blocks, roughly compiled by the audio engineer, and start to fine-shape the piece; syncing the visuals to the recorded audio and stitching the elements together with all of the other visual elements being designed by, oftentimes, many dozens of designers and artists.

All the while, **audio** isn't taking a proverbial months-long nap. Plenty is taking place. **Sound effects** are being assembled as more is shared with the ever-maturing visuals and **music** is being found or scored to shape the emotional and creative tone of the piece. This way, these sonic bones can be cut, stretched, and convened when the locked visuals come our way without having to start entirely from scratch. When visuals do settle into final edit form, the above referenced aural odyssey begins. While some visual folks like to use sound design in their process to aid in their work, all of the fine tuning comes once most of the visuals are complete. And in this case, the regular role of audio post-production kicks into gear.

This **audio post process** is highly dependent on the team. Some projects pass through a singular person, others through multiple teams tasked with handling their own department: *dialogue*, *sound effects* (both found and Foleyed), *music*, and *re-recording mix*. For the sake of conversation, let's focus

on a project that runs through one primary post mixer.

**I start this process like most any post audio workflow:** digging into the dialogue; finessing the edits and fades, adjusting levels, and fine-tuning plugin settings to accommodate the scenes. From here, we build out the backgrounds / ambiences, providing both a tool for creative shaping around dialogue and adding life and realism to the visuals. **Next, we weave in sound design from various sources.** These sounds, much of which are known as "hard effects", lend authenticity to movements, impacts, and any other specific, often momentary, noises that build out a scene. Sometimes these effects are natural, other times these are other non-diegetic sounds that are more abstract. Animation is ripe with these sounds: *whooshes*, *swooshes*, *clangs*, and *bangs* that do not sound as if they come so much from the natural world but help brighten or add humor to animation. **And finally, we finalize** our music edits and levels, molding the levels and sonic character in and out of dialogue; popping it out when it is featured, and pulling it underneath when it's supportive.

In the end, like in any post-production audio process, **our job is to support the visuals:** the *story*, the *theme*, the *characters*, and the overall tenor



of the piece. But animation is unique in that the palette is clear, filled by a team's imagination and collaboration. It's a highly creative process with complete control and limitless potential. And for us in post audio, it's a really special position to be in.

*Justin Matley is an award-winning Audio Engineer, Re-Recording Mixer, Sound Designer, and Music Director/Supervisor. After a decade at NYC's largest audio post-production studio, Sound Lounge, he went solo seven years ago, and currently works out of multiple studios in NYC and Connecticut. Justin works on a plethora of film, TV, radio, internet, music, and experiential projects for dozens of high-profile clients worldwide. An accomplished veteran of the broadcast, advertising, and film industries, Justin has thousands of projects under his belt, and has a reputation for being an excellent problem solver, team player, and creative executor. Justin is a husband and father of two girls. He loves the outdoors, skiing, politics, good tequila, and Boston sports teams.*

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



Justin working in his home studio.

# Temp Scores

## What They Are and How They Can Help

By Kristen Baum



**What is a temp score?** The term *temp score* is short for temporary score. It's a type of score that's often added before an edit is given to a composer. Why is it common practice to create temp scores for movies? Because it's a way to crack the creative code on what a director would like the music to accomplish for their project.

### How to Handle Temp Scores

So, you've just landed a job composing a feature film. When you get the cut, it has a temp score. What do you do? How do you handle temp music in a film?

The first thing to do is ask yourself a series of questions. Here are **10 Important Questions** to start with:

1. Is the music effective?
2. How is it working?
3. Why did the director pick this piece of music for this scene?
4. What aspect of the temp is working within each scene?
5. Is it the narrative part of the music?
6. Is it the melody?
7. What about the harmony?
8. The instrumental colors?
9. How about the rhythm?
10. Is it the tempo?

Of these elements, *which do you feel you will help you in creating your own score?*

Your goal will be to **make the score your own** and *still have the music communicate* what the director wants. These are the things to consider.

### When the Temp Isn't Working

What if you don't think a piece of temp score works at all but the director thinks it does? It's important to **open a dialogue with the director** to find out what they like about each piece of music. You might be surprised what the director tells you. You might learn that they just *kind of* like it or that it has always simply filled a spot because they couldn't find anything better. Or they've tried many different tracks only to find that nothing really works, that is, it doesn't satisfy what the director hopes to accomplish musically in that particular scene. If you don't have a conversation, you may never find out what the director really thinks about each temp cue. Explore this and above all, *keep the communication open* between you and your director.

### After the Director/Composer Conversation

**Always ask, "What if?"** What if the music did this? What if the music did that? What effect does it have on the scene? What if the scene doesn't need music? Or less music is more effective? Musically, there are many ways to approach each scene, so *understanding the scene for what the director wants it to say* is of the utmost importance. Evaluating the temp music with a sense of curiosity can give you deep insight into what the director might be thinking, which will help as you compose your score.

*Kristen Baum* is a Sundance Fellow and LA-based film composer. She works on a broad range of projects, frequently creating hybrid scores that incorporate computer-based sounds with live instruments.

<https://soundcloud.com/kristen-baum>

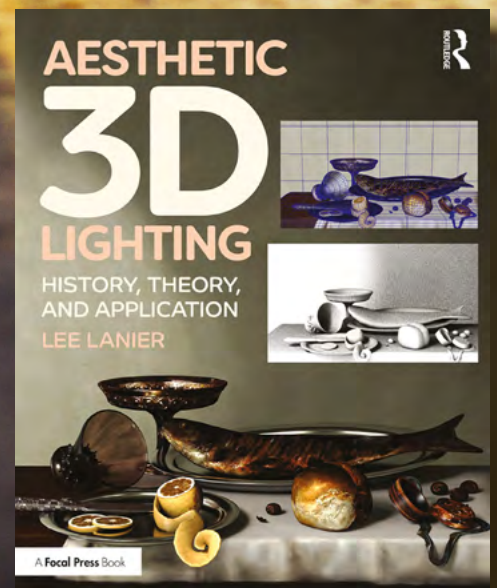
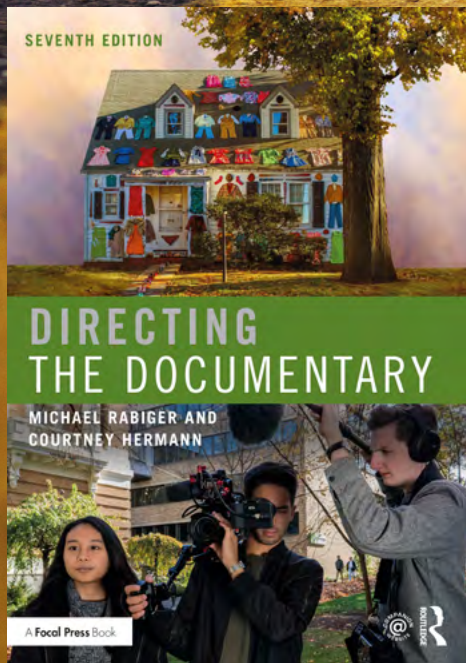
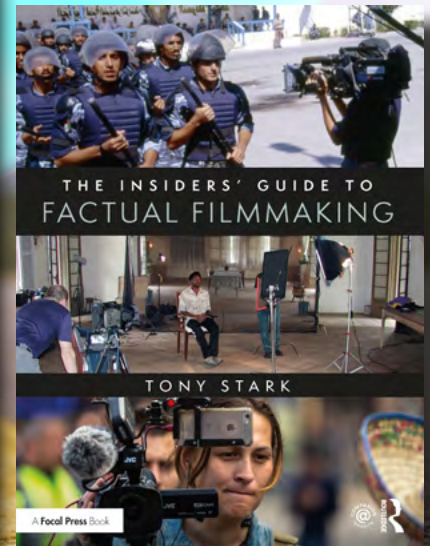
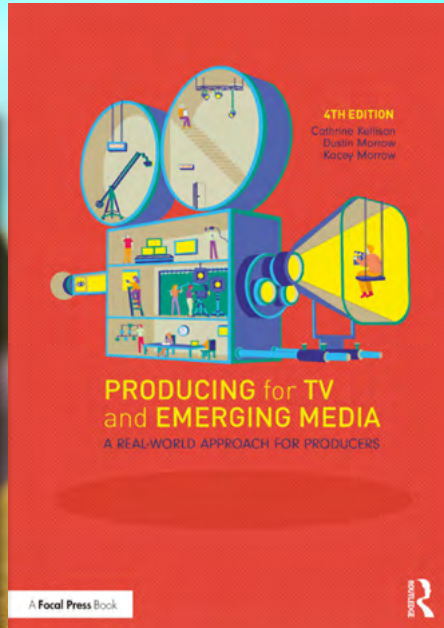
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# “The only failure is not to try.”

- George Clooney



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# Software for Podcasting

By Fred Ginsburg, CAS, Ph.D.

We often get asked about setting up to do **audio podcasts** on a tight budget from a home office or simple studio.

**The first thing we usually do is** to refer them to the great articles written by Bart Weiss and previously published here in *Student Filmmakers Magazine*. Coincidentally, Bart and I were classmates in the Film Department at Temple University, many years ago!

In his articles, Bart mentions a couple programs for audio recording and editing, and I agree with his choices.

My personal recommendations are: **Zencastr** software for acquisition, and **Audacity** for the editing (post-production). Both offer free software.

**Let's begin with the recording side.** If you are only going to do "in studio" monologues of yourself, or share your "studio" with one invited guest, you don't even need Zencastr. Audacity, which is free software, can easily handle live recording of one or two microphones directly into your computer.

Yes, you will need either a **single mic with USB output**, or a **USB-XLR microphone interface box** (a.k.a. a mic to USB adapter box, such as the PreSonus AudioBox USB96 that can handle one or two inputs). If your computer can support 1/8-inch stereo mic input, then just having the proper audio adapter cables could cover you. Check out the stuff made by Hosa.

**For more than two mics** in your studio, you would need a proper microphone interface box along with some sort of multi-mic mixing panel. But that is getting kind of complicated, and defeats the purpose of this article, which is about getting the job done easily and cheaply.

I find that it is difficult to find qualified guests willing to travel to the house or office to participate in "amateur" podcasts offering small and limited listener audiences. It is much easier to get their cooperation if they can just "**phone in remotely**". All that they would need would be a computer, a mic, and some headphones. Minimally, a set of smart phone earbuds with mic, plugged into their computer, will work very well.

**We don't want to use** an actual cellphone, or live stream VoIP (voice over internet) on account of interference, data

lag time, and dropouts. You all know how bad the audio can sometimes get when using Skype or Zoom!

Zencastr solves the voice over internet problem by **recording our guests remotely on their computers, and then uploading those files** at the conclusion of the session to the cloud and to us. The only effort to the guest is to wait several seconds after the interview, before exiting the browser.

In addition to the tutorials provided by Zencastr on their own site, there are lots of short videos on YouTube to teach you the program. *(I have included a couple links at the end of this article.)*

**Briefly, here is how Zencastr works.** You create an episode file (folder). Your mic records to its own track. Your guest is sent a link, which connects them to you. Their audio track shows up on a separate timeline, right under yours.

**You check your software/hardware settings** such as mic level; and walk your guest on how to check their settings at their end. It is pretty simple, don't worry.

**Start recording.** Always record several seconds of "**room tone**" at the beginning of the session, prior to your first question. (This will come in very useful during editing, in order to clean up your tracks in Audacity.)

Zencastr will allow both of you to **hear each other "live"**, via headphones. During the interview, you can **type "chat" notes** to your guest for prompting or direction.

On your computer screen, **you will see the waveforms** of your track and your guests' tracks as you record. Note that each participant is on their own individual track, even though you hear the "mix" live in your headphones.

**When the interview ends, and you stop recording,** Zencastr will automatically upload all of the guest files. As I mentioned previously, **you need to instruct your guests NOT to exit the program** until they see the confirmation message on their screen that the upload is completed. Audio files are relatively small, so this upload only takes a few moments.

The free version of Zencastr only records in **MP3**, not WAV. I find that for these "voice only" tracks, MP3 works just fine. **We are going to clean them and compress them in Audacity**, so MP3 doesn't lose any depth or fine detail in the dialogue track that we wouldn't be taking out anyway. It is not like recording music or film dialogue - where we are striving



to maintain as much depth, frequency, and reality as possible. This is **radio**. Monotone, evenly recorded voice.

If your pod hosting site requires **WAV files** for your finished project, then Audacity can build your podcast in WAV, using the MP3 files as sources.

The paid version of Zencastr is \$18 to \$20 per month and makes sense if you are doing this commercially/professionally. Unlike the free version, it gives you the choice of MP3 along with WAV. Note that the pro version still provides you an MP3 set of files along with the WAV files (if you select WAV as a format). The pro version allows you a greater number of guests, greater usage time, “live” sound effects drop-ins (they call it *soundboard*), and some semi-automated post-production.

But since we will be **using Audacity to actually build our podcast in post**, I do not see the value of being able to click on a button just to drop in a pre-recorded clip (onto its own timeline). Easy enough to do in editing! I have already discussed WAV, so the main advantage of the paid Zencastr version would be the larger number of guests, (*do you really use more than two simultaneous guests?*) and more than 8 hours per month usage time. (However, during the pandemic, Zencastr is offering unlimited guests and record time, so there you go!)

**After you have downloaded** all of the individual track files of yourself and your guests, **we need to build our podcast**. For that, you want to have some good audio editing/mixing software. Pro Tools is what professionals use in the movie and music industries, but it does cost a bit and requires a lot of learning. DaVinci Resolve is similar to Pro Tools but is free.

However, there is still a steep learning curve. Adobe and Apple also offer professional grade audio editing software.

Audacity is free and (relatively) simple to learn. A 15-minute YouTube tutorial will get you up to speed, and there are lots of them out there.

What you will be doing in Audacity (or the program of your choice) is to **create a project and set it** for the desired recording specs (file format) that you need, such as MP3, WAV 16 bit/44.1k, or WAV 24 bit/48k. Note that your original MP3 files can usually be imported/converted to WAV, but always do a quick test to make sure that you are happy with the results. Sometimes converting MP3 up to 24 bit/48k might be asking too much. If your podcast hosting site is willing to accept MP3 files, then keep it in that format.

**Import your individual tracks** into Audacity. They will be in sync until you begin editing. **Your first chore** is to *de-noise them* and *eliminate* some of the room tone or background ambiance.

**Remember those few seconds of room tone?** Select a few seconds of it. Go to the noise removal “effect” in Audacity and tell it to “learn” the noise. Then, go back, select the entire track, and use the noise removal module to clean the recording. **Repeat this two-step process** with each individual track. Remember that the room tone is different for each track, *so you need to sample each track’s room tone*.

Next step is to **normalize** them, again using the module under “effects”. That will adjust the peaks of your recordings for optimal volume.



## AUDIO



Use the **compress** module to smooth out low and high volume in order to get a consistency. Just use the default settings in compress. Maybe re-visit normalize one more time.

**Now you are ready to begin the actual editing of the tracks.** Trim off the room tone, cut out the mistakes, slide some sections to adjust pacing and overlaps. Add new tracks with sound effects, music, introductions, closings.

Because you are editing **audio only**, you have total freedom to move things around and get creative on your timelines. Not like video, where everything has to remain in perfect, timecode sync.

The internet is full of tutorials on how to use the tools in Audacity to edit and mix.

**Here are a couple of links to help you learn about the software:**

*How to Use Audacity 2021*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YUULn71\\_G74](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YUULn71_G74)

*Getting Started with Zencastr*

<https://support.zencastr.com/en/articles/5018317-getting-started-with-zencastr>

*Zencastr Review & Tutorial for Podcasting*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U\\_-J-9s-76Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U_-J-9s-76Y)

*Fred Ginsburg, CAS, Ph.D. is a highly experienced and award-winning professional sound mixer (retired) whose decades of work included features, episodic TV series, national TV commercials, corporate, and government. A member of the Cinema Audio Society and the University Film & Video Association, Fred holds doctorate, graduate, and undergraduate degrees in filmmaking; has published more than 250 technical articles along with textbooks, instruction manuals, and hosts an educational website. Fred, recently retired, is professor emeritus at California State University Northridge.*

## DaVinci Resolve Speed Editor



On Blackmagic Design's intro video for their Resolve 17 beta, when it came to showing off the Speed Editor, Grant Petty, the CEO of the company, did the demo. When the boss does the demo, you should pay attention.

The Speed Editor is a mini keyboard with a dial that makes working on the Cut Page, well, speedier.

Before they purchased DaVinci Resolve, Blackmagic Design was mostly known for its black boxes that connect this to that. With Resolve, they are now a hardware and software company. While they sell consoles for the Color Page, for Fairlight (their digital audio workstation), and the Editor Keyboard for Edit Page, this Speed Editor seems like it was conceived of when they designed the Cut Page (I could be wrong) in that the hardware and the software were meant for each other. While all the other consoles are costly, the Speed Editor is either free if you purchase the studio version (from Blackmagic Design) of Resolve (\$299) or \$299 if you buy it by itself.

The Speed Editor can connect through Bluetooth or USB. Since I never have enough free USB ports, I have been using the Bluetooth connection, which works fine. Also, not using a USB means there is one less cable in your way. You can check the battery level preferences/control panels.





# Speeding Up the Edit

By Bart Weiss



So, why have anything other than your QWERTY keyboard? We all know that keyboard shortcuts speed up any edit. But there is a difference between manipulating the chicklets of keyboard keys and finessing something made to work with the job you are doing. You can play a musical keyboard with your QWERTY keyboard in Garage Band, but it will not sound as good as attaching a Midi Keyboard that will respond to your fingers. Having a better tactile connection to the software will allow you to make more subtle changes in your editing.

Back in the bad old days of editing tape (sorry for old guy regression here), the tape machines had a big knob that makes it easy to move either quickly or scrubbing. While you can JKL it on a QWERTY keyboard, having a knob that can Jog/Shuttle/Scroll is far better.

The Speed Editor has a few sections. On the right is that big dial. You can grab it by the rubber ring on the outside or flicker your finger in the dimple for more control. Above it, you can choose between Shuttle, Jog and Scroll. Jog is more precise (it works well with the dimple). The Shuttle moves faster, and Scroll is a higher geared jog mode.

Most of the keys have two functions, a one-tap function, and a two-tap function. The buttons you use the most are the larger ones, In/Out, Source/Timeline, and Stop/Play.

What I found most useful and joyful was trimming in the timeline. Holding the Trim In or Trim Out while holding the dimple on the knob makes it easy to find that perfect spot.

One of my other favorite parts of the Speed Editor is how it helps you look for footage. When in the Media Pool on the Cut Page, you can quickly scroll through all your footage at once.

Another nice touch is how you can just raise the audio level by hitting the audio level button and adjusting the dial. Again, adjusting with a knob gives you more control. Like the other adjustments, Slip (Source or Destination), Slide Roll and Ripple Delete allow you to work faster and more accurately. If you need to rearrange your shots a bit, you can move a clip by double-clicking the Split button (Blade Tool) and dragging the dial to where you want that shot, nice!

When using multiple cameras (which so many people do nowadays), you can use the Sync Bin, and holding the camera number in the numbers keypad you want to switch to, you can adjust how much you want to put on the upper track by adjusting the knob. It sounds complicated, but it isn't, and it is an excellent way to switch cameras on an interview.

In a world of everything plastic and breakable, this is solid and heavy; it will

not break easily. There are some buttons on this that I will not use, like selecting a different transition, but perhaps looking for that right title look would be good.

Getting the Speed Editor is a no brainer if you are thinking of getting Resolve Studio, but if you already have Studio, getting this is dependent on if you are using the Cut Page. Some people believe the Cut Page is only for people who need to edit fast, like YouTubers. But all of us need to move quickly, and there are many reasons why the Cut Page is an excellent place to make your first cut and more. If you have this on your desk, you will use it, and when you use it, you will like it.

You will edit quicker and be happier. How many things can do that?

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



# Hollywood Bound

## *Start Networking Before Heading West*

By Scott Spears

For many of us into filmmaking, who weren't lucky enough to be born in Southern California, the dream is to move to Los Angeles someday. It could be years or months away, but if you really want to break into the Hollywood film business, you have to make that move. This is a big logistical operation for you, and it should be planned out. One of the major factors that will ensure this major move is successful is **who you know out there**. Ninety percent of the work I have ever gotten in film and video production has come from being referred by a friend or work associate. Filmmaking is a very personal business, and the more people who you know and trust you, the more chances you have of making it in the biz. That is why **you should be networking** well before you make the move.

The first thing you have to ask yourself: *Who do I know in LA?* For many that may be nobody or just a very small handful of people. You have to step back and assess people you know who may know somebody working in the film industry. **If you're in film school**, there's a good chance that there are people who have made the move before you. It could be somebody ahead in school who graduated before you, or it could be an alumni who was years before your time. Many film schools keep an alumni database (so they can hit these people up to be donors), bring them back to speak to film classes, or ask them to help students making the move to Hollywood. Touch bases with the head of the film program, and they may be able to steer you toward this list of former film students. This can be a valuable resource. Use it wisely.



**If you did not go to film school**, you may be able to find these people through the cast and crew of films you have made locally who made the jump or people who worked with them in your area. If people will make an introduction via email or a phone call for you, that could go a long way to gaining some kind of access.

**What do you do with the contact?** I can understand where you will be nervous about talking to somebody who's in Hollywood, but it could be an essential thing to making a successful leap into the biz.

Networking is the life blood of working in filmmaking no matter where you live and work and in LA is how you survive. Remember, years ago, they were in the same place you are now. If you contact these people, be patient and persistent. It may take several attempts to line up an actual call. If you get no response after several tries, move on.

When you do actually talk to these people, **be respectful of their time**.

**Come up with a short, thirty-second** to one-minute pitch about yourself and why you want to come to Hollywood and what you want to do there. Understand that you are starting at the bottom of the ladder; and explain to them that you are willing to work your way up. You will not be directing, writing, or shooting a major motion picture through this contact. You will be copying scripts, fetching doughnuts and maybe driving minor stars around if, (and that's a big "if"), you can make inroads through this call. Do some research on this person and find out what they have worked on or what they are working on currently. Everybody likes to talk about themselves so it will feed their ego some.

In the end, they may not be able to help you directly, but they may be able to steer you towards somebody who can. See, they will be using their network. Maybe someday, you will do the same.

**Another method is to plan a trip** to Los Angeles and try to set up face-to-face meetings. Offer to take these fine people to lunch. Some will have the time, and some will not. Plan for at least four days to a week of trying this. While you're there, you can scout out places to live.

**Internships can be a great way** to get your foot in the door. Use your film school's resources to find these or find them yourself, and then, get the school to help set up the internship through an independent study or similar program.

My move to Hollywood was a bit out of the norm, but it was through my film school contacts. A director friend of mine who was living in LA, referred me to shoot a sci-fi film in the desert outside of LA. He let me sleep on his couch for the duration of the shoot. Then later that year, his roommate (also a film school alumni) got me a thirty-minute short film that he co-wrote. In the same year, the first director friend landed an action feature, and again, I spent a month on his couch while shooting this film. All in all, I spent close to three months on that couch. By the end of that time, I have built a small network of people, and before I made the permanent move, I had another feature lined up.

One guy who worked on my student films landed a chance to work on a TV movie being shot in Ohio. The production got far enough along to do some location scouting, and he was asked to come along because he knew the area. In the end, sadly, the financing fell apart, and the film never happened, but he did make some good inroads with the LA-based crew so that he was able to use this networking opportunity to make his move west and have some work lined up. He now grips on major motion pictures and sometimes for Clint Eastwood. (*Way to go, Jim!*)

**Another option is going to film festivals** where you can meet other filmmakers, some from LA and some thinking about making the leap. You can network with them.

All of these methods can work but there is no guaranteed path. **Each and every person's journey will be different.** The key to making it in filmmaking is networking no matter where you or if you stay where you are. Just like learning f-stops, acting techniques or any other skill, networking should be a muscle you develop. You cannot be shy. Get your name out there and rub some elbows, otherwise, nobody knows you're out there.

*Scott Spears is an Emmy Award winning cinematographer with over 31 feature films to his credits. He teaches screenwriting and film production at Ohio State University.*

Filmmaking is a very personal business, and the more people who you know and trust you, the more chances you have of making it in the biz.

# What Storyboard Artists Need to Know

By Giuseppe Cristiano

**Sketches or scribbles.** That’s how producers sometimes refer to storyboards. To me, it already indicates a way to minimize the importance of the job. Of course, a producer must contain cost, and in their book, this is where they can easily limit the “damage”.

But, as a matter of fact, the production needs to explain the idea to a client for a TV commercial, and they can’t do it without a storyboard. And, not just with scribbles and sketches. They need the board to be *as clear as possible*.



Fortunately, when we are discussing a **shooting board** (for commercials but mainly for feature films) the style can be rough, it’s a tool between professionals knowing what they are doing, and they are all people involved in the production. In fact, in movies, there is no need to continuously review the board with a client. It’s a process that involves mainly the production team, rarely the producer, but that happens when the director must convince them on giving more days for filming.

I always mention producers, even in my classes, but in reality, I work with directors and DoPs. The producers are never sitting with us on the job, and they are never aware of the work we do but, the producer is the first person I have contact with on a project. At times, I have to negotiate with them about jobs I have no idea of what they entail, and yet, I am asked when I could deliver and what’s the fee. Fortunately, about the fee, there are some standard solutions and formulas if you will: one would *charge by frame, by hour, or by day*, etc. But about timing, it’s a whole other story.

Until I agree on the job, sometimes I won’t be getting any script or material to make a proper evaluation. So, I must be vague to not promise too much and too soon.

**But what is important for a director** in order to select the right candidate for the job?

First of all, it is obvious that **a solid knowledge of filmmaking and technique is essential**. During meeting, the language of film is used heavily, and because there is no time for explanation, one must know well the subject matter. It is not just regarding cameras, lenses, movements, etc., but also, one needs to be up-to-date with what’s popular on TV and in the cinema. *What are the trends?* But also, *what are the classics?*

And on top of that, **one must understand screenwriting**, that is, because we are not reading the script, we are *analyzing it* by breaking it up into sections, and the **pre-visualization** we are doing is in fact the editing of the picture already.

The artist must be quick in understanding the *direction* and *description* and super-quick in *rendering those visions* into sketches. Believe me, it is not always easy, because even



the director at this point hasn't gotten a clear idea where to go with the story.

It's not the quality of the work in terms of details or drawing, there is almost never time for fine drawing, but it's the **essence of the scene**, the draft of a composition and the hint of the blocking of the characters is more than enough information for the director to work on. Therefore, the artist must be quick also in learning about the **director's style**.

Finally, the **availability**. Once the job starts, the artist should be there when needed. It's unfortunate but professional. Some jobs penetrate your life in the most insidious ways because some people seem to not have any limit

to what is humanly possible, or they simply don't care. It's a characteristic that the professional artist knows how to battle with.

It's not always the case but **be ready on working nights** to make the quota.

Last, **the more the artist is passionate about the job, the better**. I am telling you this because to consider storyboarding as just a job, in the long run, it will tire you down.

*Giuseppe Cristiano is an Italian illustrator and storyboard artist who has worked all over the world for more than twenty years. With his storyboards, he has participated at the music video*

*productions for Radiohead, Madonna, Roxette and many others with pioneering directors like Jonas Åkerlund and Johan Renck. He has worked with prestigious DoPs like Hoyte Van Hoytema (director of photography for Insterstellar, Her, The Fighter); he worked on the TV series CSI: NY and Six Feet Under and videogames such as Cyberpunk 2077, Mad Max and The Walking Dead. He has published ten manuals in English, Chinese, French, German, Italian and Swedish, some of which are still being used in universities and film schools worldwide. He holds masterclasses and workshops throughout Europe and the US.*



# Getting Through Post *Post Haste*

By Shane Stanley



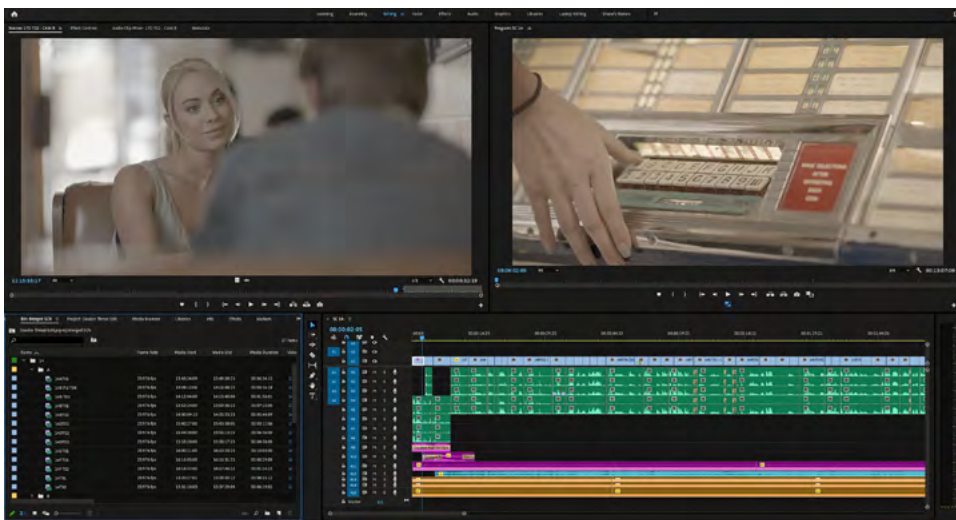
One thing I've learned in my thirty-plus years as a filmmaker is to hope for the best, prepare for the worst, and expect the unexpected, and nothing can be truer when it comes to post-production. A problem a lot of filmmakers run in to is not only appropriately budgeting finances for post but planning accordingly when it comes to time, and time is our most valuable asset. George Lucas coined the phrase, "Films aren't finished, they're abandoned," and man was he right. You either run out of time, money, or both. Below are some tips I try to live by whenever possible to see the time part of the equation doesn't bite us in the keester.

**Start collaborating with your composer** as soon as possible. Send the script before you shoot and have discussions early about what you're looking for. If you can, **have an editor**

**start assembling your dailies** as you shoot. *This does two things:* it alerts production of any technical problems or bad habits with slating or dead pixels in the cameras and can give you peace of mind when things are hunky-dory. It also allows a film to be close to "assembled" shortly after you wrap filming. Once assembled, **share the rough cut with that composer**, and even though you'll be fine-tuning your edit for a while, your maestro will be in sync with your project and not starting from scratch months later once you've locked picture. I strongly suggest you **start working with a colorist** as soon as you have an assembly edit so they can start setting LUTS for each scene, so again, once you're finished, it's a much quicker process to get the final color temperatures and touchups where they'll need to be. The same can apply to your **VFX team**.

One thing so many filmmakers wait too long to do is involve their **re-recording mixer or sound house** early. This is crucial so they can budget the time and manpower it will take to get everything done and not shock you at the eleventh hour explaining the film will require tons of ADR, SFX, foley, and dialogue editing which can take a lot of time to complete. In a perfect world your *coloring, VFX, scoring, and mixing* can all be done around the same time so you're not waiting unnecessarily for these elements to come in seemingly endless gaps.

*Shane Stanley, filmmaker and author of the popular new book, "What You Don't Learn in Film School" is a lifelong entertainment industry insider, who has worked in every aspect of the business, covering a multitude of movies, television shows and other successful projects. At 49 years old, Stanley has been a steady earner in film and television since he was in diapers with a career that started in front of the camera at 9 months old and grew into a life of a multi-E Emmy Award-winning filmmaker spanning more than three decades. To order a copy of Shane's book and for his seminar schedule, please visit [whatyoudontlearninfilmschool.com](http://whatyoudontlearninfilmschool.com).*







## Community Spotlight

# Doug Tschirhart

*Producer, Director, Editor*

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

### CURRENT PROJECTS:

I consider myself a Producer, but I have been an AD, Director, Editor, and have worked probably every job in the film industry. Currently, I run a production company, Scatter Brothers Productions, that produces about 80% commercial/industrial videos and 20% creative and narrative projects. During COVID-19 my team has pivoted to more post-production, but we have been very lucky to still have work. We are finding a lot of businesses want to get messages out or share what they are doing to stay open or get customers to still shop or dine with them. On top of this, my Producing partner and I have optioned a script for a thriller/horror film that is currently in the process of getting funding. We hope to be able to shoot it in late 2020 or early 2021.

### PRODUCTION PROCESS:

My production process really depends on the project. And a lot of that has gone out the window with COVID-19. Typically, for a commercial project, it all begins with what we call discovery, in which we find out everything we can about the company or client we are working with. This allows us to help them come up with a concept for the commercial. We find that a lot of clients don't necessarily know what they want it to look like, they may just have keywords or taglines. From there we work with them on a script and go into pre-production. Every production is different, some are small crews of a couple of people - Director, DP, audio, PA - and sometimes we have a large crew that allows for grips and additional help. Once the video is shot, an assistant editor will put together an assembly. I have a background in editing, so I'll usually take over post and tighten up the cut and polish it. Our creative projects, music videos, short films, features, etc. have a similar process, but usually take more time and people to execute.

### CHALLENGE & SOLUTION:

There's a ton - I always say that being a Producer is basically just putting out fires and finding to solutions to problems. One that I always think about was on a film I was producing, the script required an Aquarium. We reached out to the local aquarium and they set a meeting with us. When we got to the meeting, the director of the aquarium didn't even sit down and told us "no" - we couldn't shoot there. I've been declined a location before - but never in person or that quickly. We had to scramble to find a place. We had to think outside the box. Our options were to either build one (not really feasible with our budget) or find a new location. Luckily I found a small children's museum that had an "aquarium" - basically a big fish tank. It wasn't the original vision, but in the end it became one of the best scenes in the film!

### 3 PRODUCTION TIPS:

My first tip is always a big one for me, as much as filmmaking and production are a creative field, ***I always suggest learning the business side.*** We spend a lot of time selling our services, our business and ourselves. It's not fun, but it's how you will continue to work and allow you to make the projects you want to make. Another tip would be to ***just keep going.*** There will be times when you want to give up or find another job, and people will tell you to, but just keep going. The last thing, which is really important, if you are shooting outside on a hot, sunny day, ***WEAR SUNSCREEN!*** Trust me...

<http://scatterbrothers.com/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/DougWT>  
<https://www.youtube.com/dougtschirhart>

*"Dance Like No One is Watching," Central Park, New York City.  
Photo by Liz Guarracino.*



## Liz Guarracino, Winner of the 2021 Winter Photo Contest: From the Tropic to the Arctic

Interview conducted by Jody Michelle Solis

*Liz Guarracino is the 1st Place Winner of the 2021 Winter Photo Contest: From the Tropic to the Arctic, hosted by StudentFilmmakers.com. The contest judges, Roy H. Wagner, ASC and M. David Mullen, ASC, were impressed by her black-and-white photograph, "Dance Like No One is Watching," shot in Central Park, New York City.*

### What is the story behind your winning photograph?

**Liz Guarracino:** I was walking to the train from my temp job. Normally, I'd be walking into Central Park from the South side and past the ponds heading west. But it was *freezing!* So, '*not today*'. I stuck to the side of the buildings across the street, enjoying the warmth of the heat lamps that hung under the hotels and residences of Central Park South. As I almost got to the train, I noticed a girl walking into the park. As I rushed to get my iPhone and DxO ONE out of my pocket, removed my gloves, plugged the DxO into the iPhone, and looked at my screen, the girl lifted her arms and went to turn her body. I snapped the photo and left. I had already been taking pictures on the walk, so the DxO was running out of juice. It was amazing that it had enough to grab the image.

### Can you tell us about your background in photography and filmmaking?

**Liz Guarracino:** Back in 2009, I was living in Denver, and I met Mark Sink, photographer and co-founder of the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver and my photo guru and friend. He opened my world to the Denver photo scene. Within months, I was entering open calls, and my *Ice Photography* started getting noticed. It led to exhibitions at Denver International Airport, The Denver Library, the State Capitol, Edge Gallery and Hinterland Gallery. And all because someone said, "*Do it.*"

The exhibitions for my *Ice Photography* continued when I moved back to New York. I've been in two shows curated by D. Dominick Lombardi and have done a few shows with artist Erika Horowitz. Right before the pandemic, I was in a group show at One Art Space in Tribeca. Me and my photo/business partner, Joseph Ralph Fraia, who is editor-in-chief of *Livein Magazine*, were ready to show our first curated exhibit at Salmagundi Club which was cancelled because of COVID.



My film experience began on the short film, *Danni*, by Diane Reilly. I served as the Set Photographer, and you can see the film and the poster, which features one of my photos, on Amazon Prime and Vimeo. I served as Set Photographer on *Control*, a short film by John Moran in post-production. During COVID, when things started up again, and there were guidelines put in place to start filming again, friend, actor and director Aoife Williamson shot her short, *Work*, which is in post-production, and I served as Set Photographer on that as well. I have shot theatre photos of her acting for the Poor Mouth Theatre Company in the Bronx at An Beal Bocht, as well as other plays put on by these fabulous folks!

**What projects are you working on now?**

**Liz Guarracino:** During the lockdown, I started painting and creating art more than I had been in the last few years which was therapeutic. I also have done a lot of work on a film by Robert Kollar in pre-production called, *Stealing Broomtails*. My poster design can be seen in March and April's current issues of *Montana Horses* magazine. I am also maintaining [although slightly slacking on] my *fineartamerica* site ([fineartamerica.com/profiles/liz-guarracino](http://fineartamerica.com/profiles/liz-guarracino)), and I have a few photo projects I'm putting together for possible future exhibitions or for more open calls/contests.

**Can you tell us about your film projects?**

**Liz Guarracino:** My film trilogy has been in its development since about 2013 when I birthed the idea. During a bout of unemployment, I typed out the screenplay on an iPhone with a broken screen. I copyrighted it, and then, I had no idea what was next. I started telling people about it on the film sets I worked on, and the response to it was always positive and enthusiastic. Over the last few years, through sheer stubborn obsession and will, it's starting to get its forward momentum. I've put together a team of people, Diane and Tom Bradshaw of Bradshaw Law, P.C Entertainment Law, who is repping me. Vanessa Futrell Hartman, Literary/



*Liz receives 1st Place prizes, the ZEISS Loxia 2/50mm Lens, and Davis & Sanford ProVista 100 2-Stage Aluminum Tripod with 100mm Bowl from TIFFEN. A very special thank you to ZEISS and TIFFEN.*

Creative Artist Agent who is helping me in a number of ways. John Moran, who was an actor on *Danni*, and the writer and director of *Control*. And a cinematographer who is interested in the project. And a few others who don't know it yet, but should the movie get funding, they'll be involved one way or the other. I don't have a lot of experience in filmmaking, so I hope to do the Camera B work to start sharpening skills. And with this new Zeiss lens [contest prize], I can't see anything stopping me.

**Do you have advice for photographers who may be considering participation in future photo contests with StudentFilmmakers?**

**Liz Guarracino:** *Do it!* Enter as many things as you can. Don't be afraid to be critiqued, it will only make you better. Don't second guess yourself. If people tell you it's amazing, enter it. If they tell you it sucks, but you love it, *enter it!* Don't be scared of the *what if*.

I am still navigating the *StudentFilmmakers* forums, and I'm starting to talk to more people and really, *StudentFilmmakers.com* is like a MasterClass after MasterClass of information. We are all students of life, so keep learning.

I have spent half a lifetime second-guessing, worrying if my game is what it is, not doing things because I was intimidated, and it was such time wasted. We are all a little insecure. But if you do things with a conscious effort, you can do anything. It may take a really long time to get noticed, or you could score an opportunity early on not seen by many. Either way, patience and passion and the love for what you do will eventually pay off. Also, enter your photos in contests and open calls that interest you.

**If you could share some encouraging words for new filmmakers, photographers, and storytellers around the world, what would you share with them now?**

**Liz Guarracino:** Don't ever let anyone tell you that you can't do something. *Just do it now.* No matter your age, income level, disability, location, equipment - just find a way to enjoy it, and make it your own.

I would like to thank *StudentFilmmakers.com*, Maura, Kim, Jody, Roy H. Wagner, ASC, and M. David Mullen, ASC for choosing my photo. I am so honored and so grateful. All the photographers who placed, I am in awe of being in your company. And, also, thanks to my family for always being so supportive.

[lizguarracino.carbonmade.com](http://lizguarracino.carbonmade.com)  
 IG @ *LittleGunsLiz*  
 FB @ *Liz Guarracino* and @ *Liz Guarracino Photography, LLC*

Use coupon code **NHZZJD** to get **25% off any item** on Liz's site, [fineartamerica.com/profiles/liz-guarracino](http://fineartamerica.com/profiles/liz-guarracino)



# The road to success is always under construction.

- Arnold Palmer



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