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Is **Film School** in Your Future?

By Christina Hamlett

Years ago, I interviewed a prominent producer and asked him whether he thought a film school degree was essential to a successful career in the movie industry. His answer surprised me. "I can't say I learned anything in a classroom I didn't already know from grunt work on a tech crew, peppering screenwriters with questions and reading as many scripts as I could. What I *did* come away with was lasting and invaluable—my friendships with classmates who had the same dreams I did."

When you're planning to apply to film school, the good news is that the U.S. has some of the best in the world. The bad news is that competition for slots is extremely high. Unless you're entering this arena with a stellar referral or a recognizable family name, the first—and sometimes only—impression you can make is with the portfolio you submit with your application. Here are six tips to make yours stand out.

Tip # 1. If you're asked to submit only one video sample, make sure it's not only the best representation of your skill sets but that it also embraces diversity, inclusivity and originality. If your demo reel can showcase multiple projects, go for variety to demonstrate your flexibility and enthusiasm for multiple genres. Continuity, cutting and expert storytelling are what they're looking for here.

Tip # 2. Video samples should focus on projects you're especially proud of. Don't forget that these don't have to be limited to directorial and screenwriting expertise. The inclusion of credits for cinematography, lighting, sound, special effects, makeup, set design and costume design will all be in your favor as demonstration you want to master your craft inside and out.

Tip # 3. Link your demo reel to your website, social media, YouTube channels and online resume so that admissions directors know where to learn more about you. Just make sure all of these links are strictly professional and focused.

Tip # 4. Writing samples should include concept pieces (descriptions of new projects you want to try), dialogue scenes to show your expertise with spoken conversations, and non-dialogue scenes to support your awareness of the power of a visual medium.

Tip # 5. Don't forget a cover letter. This piece of your portfolio should be no more than three concise paragraphs which (1) introduce yourself, (2) define what you believe you can bring to the academic table, and (3) explain why you believe this institution is the best match for what you'd like to accomplish. Stay humble. Declaring that you are the next Spielberg is not going to get you any points.

Tip # 6. Don't stress about test scores or awards. While these can certainly be helpful, film schools place a greater emphasis on whether you possess the creative spark to thrive, survive and adapt to the mercurial nature of the entertainment business. ■

Former actress/director Christina Hamlett is an award-winning author whose credits to date include 44 books, 249 stage plays and squillions of articles and interviews. She is also a script consultant for stage and screen and a professional ghostwriter. Learn more at www.authorhamlett.com.

PUBLISHER'S DESK

We had somewhat of a false start in 2021. I thought we were getting past Covid with the vaccines, but it returned. With the new advancements in treatments, I hope to turn the corner in 2022 and have our in-person events and workshops once again.

I won't start any new year's resolutions this year other than living mindfully and with gratitude. For me, the New Year's celebration is about new beginnings, reflecting on the past, and further developing the things working for us. Over the year, we have gone through many changes, including economic changes, technology, cultural trends, and advancements in making movies.

I want to thank all those who read our magazine regularly, send us comments, continued discussions and support. We are fortunate to have some of the greatest filmmakers, writers, and educators in the world writing for the magazine. I want to thank our contributing writers and dedicated readers who shape the distinction we have today. I value you all, and many are pillars of the community.

Please join me in thanking the advertisers who kept us printing and helped us keep our heads above water. When the shutdowns happened in March of 2020, our advertisers helped keep the lights on, the servers serving, and the printer printing. Thank our workshop instructors, attendees, subscribers, and members of our network, forums, and magazine. Without you, we would not be here today.

Happy Holidays, Faith, Love, and Happiness to All.

Sincerely,
Kim Edward Welch

EDUCATION

DIRECTING

PRODUCTION

CINEMATOGRAPHY

Photo by Günther Schneider

StudentFilmmakers

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No Power, No Lights, Good Thinking!

By JC Cummings

I've found, as a Producer/Director, industry knowledge and, better yet, "thinking on my feet" are real attributes whether in pre-pro (pre-production), studio or location. Now that we're getting back into production with smaller crews and (always) smaller budgets, there may be challenges coming up where we're not ready to handle. Anyone in production is aware of the number of elements to oversee with a production and how to assemble the design for our shoots to achieve the goals can be daunting. Often we don't know the real defined 'speed bumps' until we walk a location to verify the challenges.

I was hired to produce and direct a Disney/Goodyear collaborative, 52-episode series production that needed some extra thought. The hand-picked crew and I went into a pre-pro meeting, going over details with location challenges. During the meeting our lighting crew chief noted: "We have no power at that location." On this episode, I had no funds in the budget to rent a Distro-Box (portable electrical distribution housing unit) or a portable generator. This was slated as full battery pack location shoot.

We quickly called for a walk-thru at the location. We entered the racetrack, which had a powerful energy to it as well as a great visual look. We looked around to find the best location to set cameras and stage gear within racetrack regulations. The 'white' crash walls, bright sunny location was going to be a problem even if we filtered down the brightness. It was obvious we didn't need lights, but we needed to find ways to 'add-tone' on the talent.

Other issues we were facing were the talent's dark wardrobe, her light complexion, red hair, and Chevy racecar she'd be standing near and driving was black. Thinking about the contrast with no lighting to balance out the look or hot spots on the talent, we had to come up with an easy fix with no substantial cost. We would need to get the proper balance without having to spend additional time in post.

As our team discussed different ways to achieve our goals without compromising the production and keeping within the rules of the track, the solution was very simple and bit old school, but it worked. The grips brought out reflectors or shiny

boards. With reflectors, we were able to create a nice golden glow around the talent and mounted other shiny boards and flags on C-Stands around the vehicle making a dull shot into a colorful production without bending any track rules.

Now that we're getting back to work, of course, following all new health requirements, we know that sometimes the simplest of ideas can make a great shoot, keeping the clients happy and making your recorded projects pop! For our young filmmakers and established crews, keep in mind it's not always the electronic gear that can help you make a great production. It might be a simple tool we sometimes forget that gets you the best results, and that's the *Reel Story*. ■

JC Cummings has become a sought-after Producer, Director, Showrunner and production logistics specialist in the film and television industries. Mr. Cummings continues to share his knowledge with over 40 years of "on set" production experience and storytelling as an independent producer. Beginning in radio for a short time, moving to film and broadcast TV, his career led him to acquire rights and later producing a successful nationally syndicated children's series. As success continued, Mr. Cummings was contracted to develop other television projects for broadcast networks and outside companies.

www.motionpicturecompany.com

Tamar on the set of "L'Ivresse," directed by Crystal Manich.

How To Direct and Communicate with Actors On-Set

By Tamar Kummel

Tamar Kummel.
Photo by Maverick Sean Photography.

I'm lucky enough to work both in front of the camera and behind it. As a director, it gives me a great sense of how to work with actors, and as an actor, it helps to understand all the crew's tasks.

My pet peeve is when directors have no ideas on how to talk with actors. Sometimes they don't even think to talk to the actors because they're so busy with the crew. But a good director is the ship's captain, and they know everything that's going on with everyone. The director has to have a central vision for everything. How the film/story will look, sound, what the pace will be, how the arc of a scene will go, and a million more things. If you're not good at juggling a bunch of things at once, or you don't enjoy it, directing is not for you.

Everyone in life, and on a set, want to be seen. They want to be appreciated. And they want to be respected. Every person is different, but we all have that basic need.

All that to say, *don't forget the actors!* You may be the only person in the room that knows exactly where this scene is in the film. You know the emotional level it has to hit. You know what the pacing should be. You know all the characters' arcs. These are all really important to have in your head. The inflection of what the actors are saying, and sometimes the exact words, are not nearly as important as understanding how this scene, this puzzle piece, fits into the rest of the film. And *that* is what you want to make sure your actors understand. They want to know that you have their back. They have room to play, to cry, to find new and exciting moments you didn't expect, and if it goes off the rails, you can bring them back.

You want to have a general idea of how the scene needs to go. But leave the details up to the actors. If they're not hitting emotional highs or lows, then take them aside (please not in front of the others) and discuss how the scene fits in so they can understand what they need to do. If they're missing jokes, you may have to explain them (hopefully, you've cast it brilliantly and that won't happen). If they're not hitting their marks, you have to tell them.

Every actor is different and comes at things from different ways. Some actors want to know the frame, the lens, the lighting, the sound levels. They come at things technically, and it will save you a lot of time on set and in the editing room knowing they gave the right level for the right frame and hit their mark every time. Some actors don't want to know any of that. They are totally living in the character, and they want to be left alone to just live the scene. Those actors should only

Tamar on set with actor David De Roos at Maine Media.

Tamar directs the film, "Garden Party" with actor Sean Michael Boozer and director Michael Starr as AD.

Tamar with actor Sean Michael Boozer in “Honeybear”.

be talked to if they’re doing something that really won’t work. Then you need to gently guide them a different way. And there’s every actor in between. It may also depend on the day. If your actors are doing a love scene then they may need extra care that day because they’re very vulnerable. Or you may be doing an action scene that is incredibly technical and precise and the actors need to make sure they hit every exact mark and almost nothing else matters. Your job is to discuss with each actor, ahead of time, how much information they need. And how they like to be directed.

To say it simply: *you must communicate*. Don’t treat actors like aliens. They’re people too. Each one unique. Give them the best and safest environment to do their best work, and you’ll never regret it.

And most important: feed everyone well. A really great meal goes a long way. ■

Tamar Kummel is an actress, writer, director, and producer in New York City and Los Angeles. She has a background in stand-up comedy, having produced several comedy shows in New York City. She’s also written and performed sketch comedy, a one person show, “Cultural Immersion”, and several plays and films. In 2011, she formed Captain Purple Productions LLC, a production company for films and more. She is also the author of the self-published book, “How to Run Auditions”. She wrote and directed the documentary film, “Fighting for Allergy-Free Food” (2020).
www.captainpurpleproductions.com

Every Set-Up is Precious

By David K. Irving

"Making a movie is like creating a mosaic. Each set up is a tile. You color it, shape it, polish it as best you can."

~Sidney Lumet from his book, "Making Movies"

According to Aristotle, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, or as modern philosophers state, a true gestalt is defined as an organized whole that is perceived as more than the sum of its parts. The analogy of the mosaic helps a director work in a zone that is both macro and micro. While on the one hand, she needs to be in the moment, shaping each shot, each performance, she must also have the capacity to stand back and determine how this one tile, this one shot, fits in with the picture as a whole.

A true gestalt is one in which all the little colorful tiles – each one meaning nothing on its own – are pieced together in such a way as to hide their individuality and instead, create a complete picture. The picture, then, becomes a work of art, but only if all the tiles do their job. How many times have you finished watching a great film only to realize that you were not paying attention to each shot, but to the impact of the whole picture? It doesn't happen often, but when it does, it's amazing.

George Orwell coined the term, *Doublethink*, in his dystopian novel, "1984." It is an ability suited to the craft of film directing, defined as the mental capacity to accept contrary thoughts at the same time. In film terms this means that the director, on set, while the camera is rolling, is both subjectively in the moment, feeling and encouraging the heat emanating from the actors, and at the same time objective...*Is this the right take to print? How will this one tile fit into the whole picture?*

Just as a director hangs a viewfinder around her neck, she should also implant a microscope and telescope inside her brain. ■

NYU Professor David K. Irving is the author of several textbooks, including, "The Fundamentals of Film Directing" and "Producing and Directing the Short Film and Video."

www.studentfilmmakersstore.com/products/producing-and-directing-the-short-film-and-video-5th-edition

Photo by Dan Gold

Important Audition Tips

By Peter John Ross

As aspiring moviemakers, we are always burdened with funding actors to appear in our movies. Where do these elusive beings live? How do we get them to be in our movies? How will we know if they are right for a role? The answer is simply auditions.

First things first. Do not hold auditions for a movie that you do not have the ability to make. In other words, if you are holding auditions before you have a crew and a budget, you are wasting everyone's time, even your own. If you do not have a guarantee to be able to shoot and finish the film, you should not be casting yet.

Set dates for your shoot before the auditions. Setting the shoot dates can let you know if certain actors are even available for those dates to begin with.

Let people know about the auditions. Many newspapers, especially the alternative, more arts-friendly papers, will post your audition notices for free. There are also message boards, posting boards, and Craigslist that provide one of the best outlets for letting people know about auditions. Also, a flyer or an email to acting teachers, or even the local talent agencies give an outlet for this. As long as you are up front about the amount being paid, even if it's $20.00 a day or nothing, this will make everything work better.

Give plenty of notice, and also, remind people a few days before. You may want to have more than one audition time to allow people with varying schedules the chance to audition.

Where? Public libraries have conference rooms anyone can use for free. Or you can do this at home, but for some people, that can be a turn off, but if it's all you've got, then use your home. Just make sure you have two rooms. One for the auditions, and one for people to wait. It's not fair if some people get to see how everyone else auditions and gets to talk to the director/producers, and it's not indicative of their raw ability.

Use a Sign-In Sheet. Include their name, phone number, email, and the time they arrived. It's always good to have everyone's contact info. Also, find out if they are SAG, AFTRA, or any other union. Have a column on the sign in sheet for "union or non-union". A union actor may not be able to work on your film, or they can get permission.

Film the auditions. Even with your phone. Getting people on camera and watching the footage of their performance is radically different than what you experienced in the room. Some people came across as dynamic in person, and it didn't translate on screen. Other times, an actor who seemed boring in person was giving a ton of subtle performance that only reviewing footage can reveal.

Headshots. If the more experienced actors come, they will have their own headshots. A Polaroid or digital camera will also be good to use for any new or aspiring actors that don't have headshots. Attach the pics to the release form/info sheet.

You will provide the actors with *SIDES*, meaning 1 to 2 pages of script

that will be used to test them for the character. So, give them something with depth and some meat, or give them something that at least epitomizes the character to you, the director. Allow actors some time to read and rehearse the sides.

You will also want all actors to sign a release that allows you to use their audition footage for anything you need as well. You may never know when you may have the next Zendaya audition, and you pass her up. These auditions also make great Bonus Features, even for us aspiring filmmakers. If an actor refuses to sign, that's okay, too. Still film their audition but know that you do not have the legal right to use that footage later.

Now it's time to actually **audition the actors**. It's best to have the actors come in one at a time, to that separate room mentioned before. **First, you'll want the actor to *SLATE* for the camera.** That is state their name, their age, the part they are reading for, and a phone number so you can get a hold of them or their agency if they are represented. If an actor is inexperienced, your first clue will be them asking what a slate means. Politely explain it to them and don't prejudge their talents based on that.

Tell the actor something about the character and the scene they are about to read. Then let them read it through without any direction. Sometimes an actor has great instincts but cannot take direction. Others have horrible instincts but take direction very well, and you can find a great performance by working together in the Director/Actor relationship.

After one read, don't deliver the lines yourself and tell them, "More like this..." (also called, *LINE READINGS*), but ask them to do it again with more of the particular emotion you want. Tell them *HOW* you want them to act, don't show them. This is also called, *DIRECTING*. This gives you a chance to see if their performance can change with direction.

Use a poker face. Even if the actor is doing horrendous, don't make the person feel bad. It can cause your reputation to be ruined, and it's incredibly rude. And even if an actor is perfect for a role, do not make any offers at the audition. Take your time, review the footage and be sure of it.

If there are two actors that could be right for a role, and even if you're fairly sure, try doing *CALL BACKS*. Call Backs are a second round of auditions. Bring the best actors back, have several of them read the sides together and see how they read with other actors.

After the Call Backs, that's when you **make offers for parts**. Verify their ability to work on the shoot dates. Be flexible, especially if you aren't paying. But also know that sometimes you won't get your first choice for a role, even though they auditioned and even did call backs. And sometimes you will even get through rehearsals and an actor will be a no-show. That's when you call your second, third, and sometimes, fourth choice. If you held professional auditions, it won't be a problem to attract good actors. ■

Peter John Ross is a filmmaker from Columbus, Ohio, who has been nominated for 4 regional Emmy awards, and has won numerous filmmaking awards for his film work. Currently, Ross is making a documentary series.
www.sonnyboo.com

Shooting the **Feature-Length Film** for the **Musical**, "An Old Family Recipe"

By William Donaruma

What do you do when you write an original musical production, cast it, rehearse it, but can't perform it? **You make a movie out of it.**

Veronica Mansour wrote a musical theatrical production, "An Old Family Recipe," with Matt Hawkins directing. It was cast and in rehearsals in late 2020, hoping for in-person performances by the following spring. We all know how things went during the pandemic months, so when they realized they couldn't sing with masks on, and no one could be in an indoor theatre seated together, how could it be

filmed to showcase all of the work put into this production? Even a full performance with no audience wasn't allowed in the venue because of protocols involving cast members especially when singing, so a documentation video wasn't feasible either.

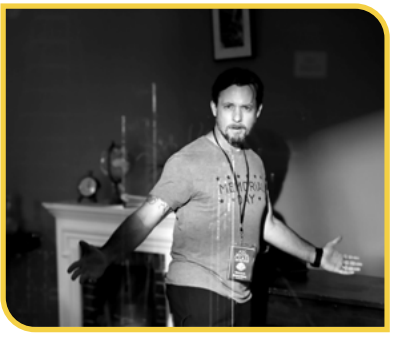
Matt then asked me about coming in and filming individual scenes and how we might approach that. I didn't want to simply document scenes from a single point of view, and Matt wanted to maintain the theatrical aesthetic of the performance. "Hamilton" was used as a potential model for when the camera was in the audience and when and how the camera came on stage with the actors. Our approach was to establish a set of rules as to where an audience perspective would be from and when the camera would break the fourth wall of theatre allowing the viewer to experience a moment not possible in a theatrical setting.

We then measured the distance and height of the first row and fifth row of the main theatre. Those positions were marked in front of each set on a black box theatre and stands were used at certain heights for each row to place a dolly track to move horizontally in front of each set. The camera would never move on a Y axis towards the set, since an audience member would never view a performance in that way. Moving side to side just positioned the POV in a seat in that row. An additional camera would pick up fixed shots from

what we would refer to as the box seats to the side, but never so close as being on the wing of the stage itself. These would be standard rules of engagement for the production along with a shot that might be from the balcony at a high position from a ladder. We would then look to break those rules during psychological "dream" scenes in a liminal space between the sets.

We also wanted to be able to see the sets side to side and avoid the floor and walls off sets, so shooting wide screen in a 2.40 aspect ratio was the best option, which also saved significant drive space since we were shooting on RED in both 8K on a Helium and 6K on a Komodo. First row was generally shot with a wider angle 18-35mm Sigma Cine lens and the fifth-row perspective was with a 50mm. There were a few times when our main character, Toni, falls into a moment of extreme anxiety and there were some time shifts that, again, wouldn't be possible in a normal, staged production. After a few conversations with Matt and trying a few things, we went with one take, handheld shots with some visual tricks for editing time shifts. There were also musical moments when we would see from behind sets and a climactic scene when we reveal all of the sets, and Toni's word, for the first time.

I also worked with lighting designer Kevin Dreyer, to augment the theatrical lighting for digital video and make some changes for composition using mounted lights behind



William is currently a Professor of the Practice in Filmmaking at the University of Notre Dame and also serves as Creative Director for the Office of Digital Learning. His courses involve narrative digital cinema production as well as visual research in anthropology stemming from his documentary work off the coast of Ireland and local barns in Indiana. He forged careers in academia, cinematography and directing winning awards for both teaching and filmmaking. His work includes a project in Thailand profiling the work of architect Ong-ard Satrabhandhu. More of his work and continuing adventures can be seen at williamdonaruma.com.

the set for color and balance. Filming in RED raw allowed me to bring down the walls in the background and really work with the color shifts that would happen based upon characters and emotions in any given scene.

All of this took place over the course of eleven days, with COVID protocols in place. Ventilation tests were done with running fans on the floor and masks were only off during performances. The cast was like a sports team, tested on a regular basis and playing together on a stage rather than a court in an arena. Filming began in early March and ran into April with private showings by mid-May. That's a feature length film shot and edited, to a certain degree, in about two months! The talent of the production team and cast really made this production possible and enjoyable and a new experience translating theatre to film. We now begin a film festival run while we continue tweaking the final cut. Veronica and Matt certainly cooked up a recipe for success that need to be seen and heard by a much larger audience. ■

Thinking Up

Mastering Composition from the Air

By Eddie Tapp

Take composition for instance, the one thing that will make a scene easy to look at with leading lines, element structure, rule of odds, light, storytelling and communicating a feeling and demanding that you look at a specific thing. Experience teaches us to just move over this far to get that diagonal line to create the element of excitement, see through a mystery or leading line. In a studio set we can bring in something to create eye flow, set the element structure for a visible feast or establish placements to balance the view.

Now that we include aerial compositions in some of our works which reveal the location or action, that brings us to the discipline of low altitude solutions such as drones or moving vehicles.

Drones are not very difficult to fly, as a matter of fact, they are really quite easy to fly especially because of the GPS connection, the fact that most

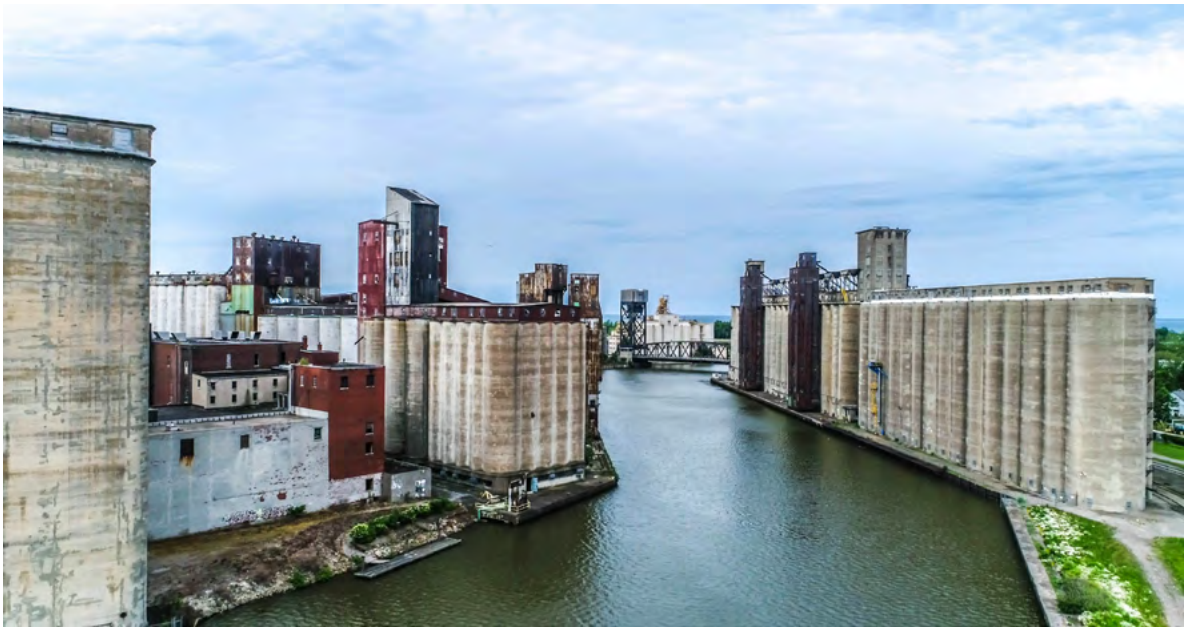
drones today have obstacle avoidance along with features that allow cool cinematic movements.

What isn't easy is learning to create cinematic movements within a compositional mind-set while flying a drone, and here are some of the reasons why. A remote-control pilot now has to pay close attention to the telemetry such as speed, altitude and then obstacles can take over thinking about composition while flying.

If you were the pilot/image-maker, think about keeping your eye on the composition while flying with the added awareness mentioned and you have new challenges. Or at least it takes time to become proficient at flying before it becomes comfortable for one to get back to mastering composition from the air, then it becomes second nature, and the fun begins.

Think cinematically, crane, dolly, panning, tracking, boom, reveal. A director, or DP might require such movements from layouts for certain scenes. Or you might create the vision yourself.

Take all of this to a two-person drone operation while one person is the pilot and the other is a camera/gimbal operator. Now we have the ability to achieve the composition easier, faster with complete focus as a camera/gimbal operator and movement with the drone.



Another two-person operation would be using a Russian Arm complete with a matte black Porsche or Mercedes racing down a speedway while creating cinematic imagery. This is personally one of my dreams, but I do live this through a close friend who does just that. Robert Starling of Starling Productions from Orlando has created Russian Arm car videos that are very exciting. Check out this BTS link, vimeo.com/manage/videos/518395220, and the resulting final link, vimeo.com/516369279.

Okay, you don't fly drones or have an interest to be a remote pilot or use a Russian Arm to create imaging. When the time comes where you are involved with a drone operation or moving vehicle, having a little insight allows for better communication verbally or visually. Experience is always the best teacher.

And, if you really want to fly drones for professional use, you must have a FAA Part 107 Remote Pilot Certification; this requires a written test to achieve. The website to find out more is faadronezone.faa.gov. The national air space has various classes of air space and safety is the most important aspect of drone operations. There are online study courses such as uavgroundschool.com where you can learn all the important aspects of flying in the national air space along with studying for the Part 107 written test.

It all comes down to vision, and this is where our tasks start. How you interpret a vision is something you should set as your objective. Use the best means you have to create and go for it. Just remember the three key elements that create exceptional imagery are *light, composition and exposure*. When creating your next project from the air, moving vehicle or from land, partner your composition with your light and make sure to keep thinking up. ■

Photo credits:

Eddie Tapp

Robert Starling

Karen Asplindh

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. www.eddietapp.com

It's a Marathon, Not a Sprint

By Shane Stanley

One of the most important relationships is that of the Director and Cinematographer. But how does it begin? Some are brought together by the powers that be, while others are lucky enough to encounter one another by accident. I've been fortunate to work with some greats, but that doesn't always equal harmony or success. In my opinion, the key to this union is the two can communicate without saying a word but also challenge one another to be great. Joel Layogan and I have known each other for over a decade. He started on our team as a gaffer, and one day, I turned to the monitor, noticed B-Cam was framed exceptionally better than usual without asking for adjustments and looked to see it was Joel holding the camera. At that moment, I knew the guy could shoot and started favoring his work to other operators. Over the years, Joel not only got familiar with how I worked (yes, that includes my many faults) but also saw where we could do better. Joel has earned his stripes. I met him shortly after he graduated film school and his resume in several departments is quite extensive *and* impressive. He always knew where he wanted to land in this industry and realized it would come from digging ditches and proving his worth – in every department he could.

Today, I consider it a huge blessing if Joel is available to us as he is now very much in demand. He just wrapped a $55M project and is on the short-list for many studios and networks. I mention this because it's his work ethic, commitment to excellence and willingness to get his hands dirty that has gotten him to where he is. Showing his worth by closing his mouth and getting the job done without worrying about day rate or his IMDB credit. Students, when you embark into the real world, remember to put your pride aside and seize every chance you can to show your stuff. The cream rises to the top, and hard work pays off. No one will give it to you, and when the opportunity presents itself, you better know your craft. Don't be afraid to work in and around the department you want to excel in

because someday that will be YOUR department, and you better know it better than anyone else on your team.

Until next time, keep shooting.■

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-Emmy Award-winning filmmaker spanning more than three decades. To order a copy of Shane's book and for his seminar schedule, please visit www.whatyoudontlearninfilmschool.com.

Why **Focal Lengths** Matter in **Cinematography**

By Snehal Patel

As a filmmaker, there is a lot to learn. It takes a lifetime of experience and education to continue creating compelling content. One of the most complicated topics to discuss about filmmaking is the photography. Cinematographers, who are in charge of delivering the photography, are always some mix of artist and technician. There are many topics to keep track of and lots of variables to control, which have to be done with good taste and deliver the artistic intent of the story.

One of the variables that Cinematographers control is lens choice. A subset of lens choice is determining which focal lengths are needed for a project. Prime lenses always come in sets of 3 to 15 focal lengths, or more. So, let's "focus" on prime lenses and focal length choice by answering some basic questions.

What are focal lengths?

Focal lengths, marked in millimeters (mm) are best categorized as magnification choices. Wider focal lengths like 12mm, 15mm, etc. have less magnification, and longer (or more telephoto) focal lengths like 135mm, 150mm, 200mm, etc., have more magnification. Each focal length in between has its own flavor.

Watch this YouTube video by ZEISS Cinematography which shows you how focal length magnification is designed to work.

https://youtu.be/tUII5ETlrgE

In this example, the camera position is fixed, and each subsequently longer focal length of Supreme Prime lens is bringing distant objects closer by magnifying them. Notice how the women standing by the car never distorts. Her features remain the same, no matter how close you magnify, because the camera is not being moved. The things that do change are the depth of field and the compression between background and foreground.

Now, in this next video example, the camera position is changing between each subsequent focal length change.

https://youtu.be/gCeev2Vn8Bw

Starting from a wide 18mm up close to the actress, we back off the camera position to move it further away from her as the focal lengths increase. This keeps her head the same size from top to bottom but definitely distorts her face. Since we are using a full frame sensor, the normal lens is going to be the 50mm at 7-12 feet distance. As you can see, she looks pretty realistic when the 50mm lens is used. That's probably how she looks in real life. All the other focal lengths manipulate her features. She's rounder-looking and more distorted when there is a wide-angle lens up close to her. She has flatter facial feathers in the longer focal lengths. And her face changes shape a bit with each focal length choice. Notice what happens to the foreground and background objects as well. Using the 18mm or 21mm lens, would make the garage look quite large and spacious, with plenty of room between vehicles. Using a long telephoto lens compresses the foreground and background, making the space feel crowded and smaller.

Which focal length should I use?

This is where the artistic choices come into play. Cinematographers that study and use a lot of lenses will start to form opinions as to how focal lengths should be used to further the story. Different situations call for different focal lengths because placement of the camera, framing,

and magnification all work hand in hand.

Let's take the example of a common scene – the interrogation of a suspect by a uniformed police officer. The room is small, with a table and one chair on either side and a bright spotlight from above. How can we show that the suspect is really a criminal who is in over her head? Let's start by choosing a higher angle looking slightly down so that our perspective is from above her. Then let's move in the camera up close to the actress and use a wide-angle lens. This will distort her face and make it look bulbous. This choice of magnification, along with a little makeup magic, we can make it look like she is really sweating under the pressure of the moment. Plus, her background will look imposing as you will see a lot of the room with the wide-angle lens, which can be bathed in darkness. Kind of like the darkness imposing on her.

Now let's switch camera angles to be on the officer. If we want him to look large and in charge, place the camera a bit below the eyeline, back up the camera position and use a longer focal length of lens for a medium close up. Maybe a 50mm or 85mm depending on the sensor size of the camera. This way, the officer looks very normal and realistic in terms of their facial features. There will be no distortion in the image, so their uniform will look perfect and straight. The lower angle of the camera will make him look taller and imposing, in contrast to the angle on the criminal. The depth of field will be pleasing and hide the background. Plus, the compression of the frame will eliminate the imposing darkness we created above.

This is just one example of how someone can make decisions about focal length, camera placement and framing. You can now think about what you would do for each scene in your film.

Do focal lengths change when using different sensor sizes?

No, they remain the same. A 50mm magnification, is a 50mm magnification, is a 50mm magnification. Magnifications don't change, but what changes is how much of the projected image is being captured. This is because all lenses project a round image onto the film plane, and different sensors see different rectangle crops of this projection.

See this image (*above) of a theoretical image circle from a CP.3 lens. Notice the soft white circle which represents the kind of circular image that comes out the back of the lens. Notice that different sensors, of various sizes, will see different rectangular cutouts of the circle. So, the difference between a Full Frame sensor and Super35 sensor is that the Super35 sensor is smaller and will see a smaller crop of the image circle. This does not change the magnification of the lens itself in any way. It just means that you will make different magnification choices to suit your story, based on the camera system used. Most cinematographers,

(continued from page 23)

for example, will end up using a longer focal length of lens on a full frame sensor to get the same "angle of view" as they would get on a smaller sensor.

See this last video example of how we recreate the same "angle of view" used in S35 with a full frame sensor and Supreme Prime lenses. Notice that when matching angle of view, you will get less depth of field because you have to use a longer focal length of lens on the larger sensor to get the same framing as before. So, it's not the sensor size that is determining the shallow depth of field, but the magnification choice itself.

https://youtu.be/IVd0U37WvXQ

Hope this helps! ■

Snehal Patel is a film and television professional with over two decades of experience creating content and adapting new technology. He started the first Canon Bootcamp in Los Angeles during the Canon 5D DSLR craze and has over twenty years of experience in cinema. Snehal has lived and worked in Chicago, Mumbai and Los Angeles as a freelance Producer & Director. He was a camera technical salesperson at ARRI, and currently is the Head of Cinema Sales at ZEISS. He represents the Americas for ZEISS and is proud to call Hollywood his home.

Immersive Audio on a Budget

By Fred Ginsburg, CAS, Ph.D.

Sometimes we are forced to settle for only two channels of audio in our software or in our presentation. Some academic versions of popular audio editing programs limit the user to only two master outputs, as opposed to the full priced versions that support 5.1, 7.1, or complete 360 immersive.

When editing with software that limits me to only two finalized tracks, my strategy has always been to only complete the audio editing up to the point of building stems or aux tracks, but not to the point of doing any sort of master mixdown. Save your project (with all linked media) as a work in progress, and then, plan on doing your final mix somewhere else, better equipped acoustically as well as with full versions of the software, including the latest noise reduction, FX plug-ins, and broadcast standards.

But even if I had access to the higher end software, I still would not attempt to finalize my mix in the home office. The size of the room, acoustics, and speaker quality are a far cry from an actual movie theater; nor do I have the years of specialized experience in mastering that the elite editors and re-recording mixers possess.

However, there are times and projects that do not warrant the Hollywood treatment. No one brags about them, but they often pay the bills.

Those projects do not play in dedicated movie theaters, but in conference center ballrooms, outdoor pavilions, and corporate board rooms. Screens are not 60 feet across, but more likely just several feet. Picture an 85-inch diagonal monitor, or a portable HD video projector on a typical portable roll-up screen.

What is the sound system during those presentations? We generally do not have quality decoders, a bank of amplifiers, and a ring of surround speakers. More likely, we are feeding a small video projector from a laptop – along with only two tracks of audio. The laptop in turn feeds a portable PA system, which is also most probably a stereo amp wired up to two or four outboard speakers on tripod stands!

So how to give the client a "big theater" immersive audio sense, using low budget A/V hardware?

The trick is to stop thinking horizontally and to start thinking and mixing vertically. Normal stereo is left to right. Stereo mics are made to provide left/right pickup. Pan controls on most portable mixing panels sweep left to right.

But when you are in the audience, staring at a relatively narrow screen that occupies only a fraction of your vision width – just how believable is a hard left or right sound? Probably more of a mental distraction than an enhancement of the viewing experience – considering that screen left and screen right are still pretty much centered in front of you.

Where is the viewer in terms of depth? We are looking through a spacial window. Objects are in front of us, but it is possible for them to travel to or from that window (rear to front or vice versa).

If we get used to a balanced left/right sound in front of us, and then it suddenly whooshes over and to the rear of us (or from the rear to forward) – it catches us unexpected. We think 3D or immersive.

Achieving this effect on a shoestring budget is remarkably simple. As you do your final mixdown at home, treat "left" as front, and "right" as rear. It might help to reposition your speakers in your edit bay.

When it comes time for the presentation, make sure that you have a minimum of four speakers to plug into your portable PA amp. Most of the field PA systems have enough jacks to feed at least four outboard speakers, if not more.

But do not place your speakers in the typical left/right arrangement on either side of the screen. Instead, place your LEFT speaker and AUX LEFT speaker flanking on both sides, near the front. Put your RIGHT and AUX RIGHT speakers at the back of the room, also on both sides.

Your audience will not hear left/right stereo, but they won't miss it either, because of the relative small screen size and narrow seating arrangements. They will be impressed and surprised by front/back panning!

And if you are using stereo mics during production, try orienting them front/back rather than left/right. You will end up with sounds that will amaze. ■

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.

1

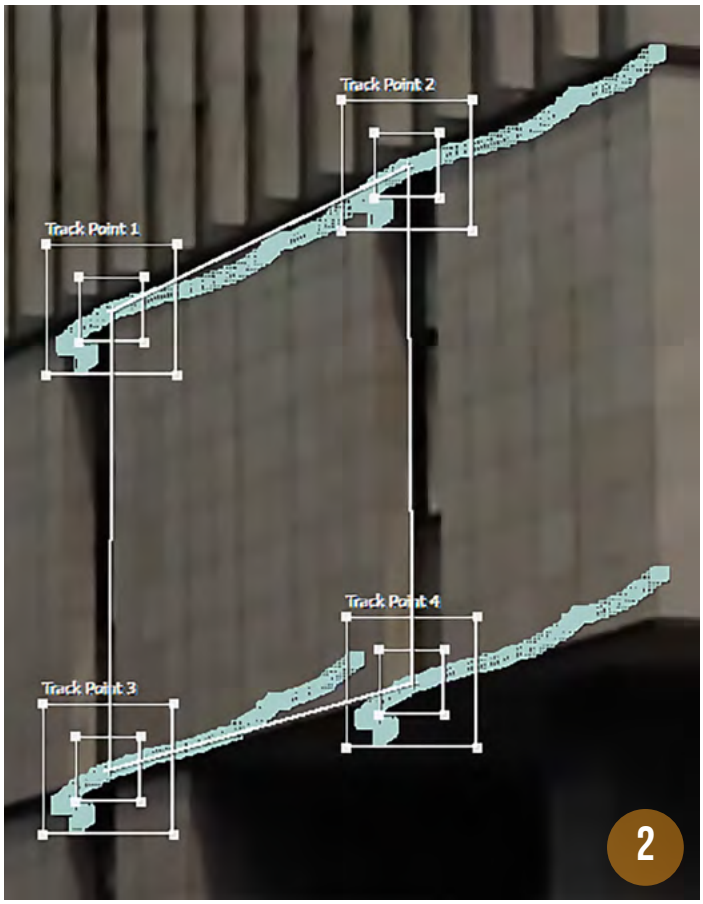
Motion Tracking Tips and Tricks

By Lee Lanier

Motion tracking is another one of those critical techniques within a VFX toolkit. As a term, *motion tracking* refers to the detection of motion within a clip and the application of that motion to a new layer, such as stock footage element, static artwork or text, a visual effects simulation, or a full 3D render created in another program. For example, in **Figure 1**, a Student Filmmakers banner is added to a building even though the camera is moving. The goal of motion tracking is to make it look as if the new layer was shot with the original camera and existed in the same real-world space.

Before you take on a motion tracking shot, it's good familiarize yourself with the common types of tracking:

(1) Transform Tracking: This motion tracking occurs in 2D. It's able to track the X (left/right) and Y (up/down) motion of a pattern over time. This type is



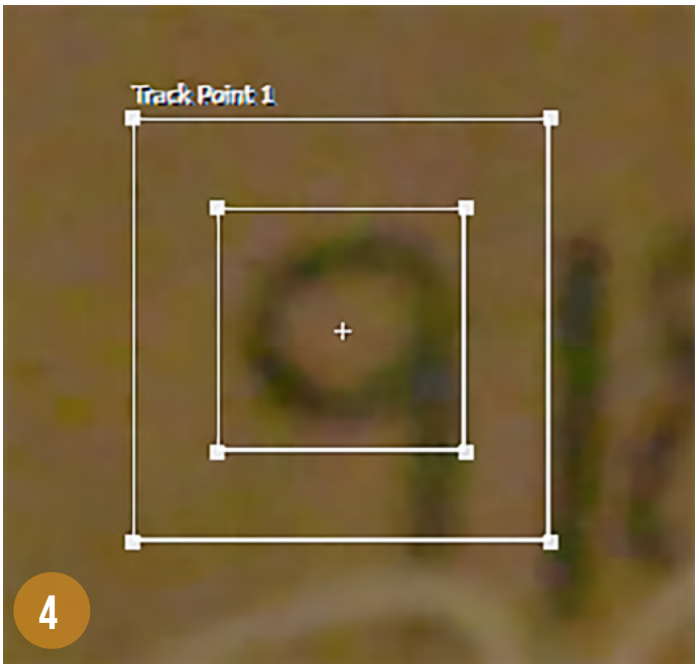
often called *matchmoving*. For example, if you want to add the moon to a sky of a shot where the camera has minimal movement (say a short pan, dolly, or handheld tilt), transform tracking is a good choice.

(2) Corner-pin Tracking: This tracking builds upon transform tracking by adding three more track points. This is shown in **Figure 2**, where the tracked motion paths for each point are also shown. This is ideal for tracking any rectangular pattern with distinct corners. The corners of the new layer are automatically distorted to line up with each track point.

(3) Stabilization: This tracking starts with transform tracking but inverts the result. You can use the inverted motion to remove the camera motion from the original footage. For example, if you have a hand-held shot with some minor motion, you can use stabilization to make the shot appear static.

(4) 3D Camera Tracking: This motion tracking is the most technically complex. It's designed to detect camera motion within a shot and reconstruct the camera's basic properties in 3D space. A 3D camera tracker automatically creates myriad tracking points (**Figure 3**), determines how they move relative to the camera, and extrapolates the point positions and camera position. At the end of the tracking process, you generate a 3D camera that moves via keyframed animation. You must use a program that supports 3D layers, as the new layer is placed in 3D space with the new camera.

(5) Planar Tracking: This tracks a planar pattern through space over time. Because the tracker is not concerned with corners or edges, but instead tracks the entire established pattern as if it were



fixed to a plane, it can accurately detect perspective and parallax changes. For example, you might us a planar tracker to track a store window as a camera moves by and then use the tracking data to distort a new sign to fit the window.

Transform tracking is the most common form of tracking.

As such, the approach to transform tracking is similar across a wide array or programs, including After Effects, Fusion, and Nuke. Hence, there are tracking tips and that universally apply:

(1) Transform trackers are dependent on tracking points. These appear like nested boxes. If you need to detect X/Y motion, you only need one. If you need to detect rotation and/or scale changes, you will need two points. Rotation occurs if the camera tilts. Scale changes occur if the camera dollies or zooms or if the tracked object moves closer of further from the camera.

(2) When you position a track point, look for patterns that do not leave the frame, are not occluded, and have high-contrast features. Track points generally have two regions: the inner box encompasses the *pattern region*, and the outer box encompasses the *search region* (**Figure 4**). The pattern region defines the set of pixels, or the pattern, that is tracked over time (that is, the program determines how the pattern moves through the frame). The search region is the area the program goes if it can't find the pattern for a particular frame (perhaps the camera is panning rapidly).

(3) Think about appropriate patterns to track. In general, you want to pick a pattern that is at the location where you want the new layer affixed. For example, if you want to add new poster artwork to a wall, track a pattern on the wall. If you want to add a new logo to the side of a truck as it drives by, track a portion of the truck body.

(4) If you track a pattern, and the tracking fails (which is not unusual), make adjustments and re-track. You can do this as many times as necessary. For example, scale the pattern and search regions to make them larger or smaller or even place the track points over brand new patterns. You can track forwards or backwards or even track from a middle frame in both directions. Each program will have additional options for refining the tracking. Check the program's help files for more specific information.

This is just a few tips and tricks for motion tracking. Don't be afraid to experiment with regions, patterns, and tracking directions. Tracking rarely works on the first pass and perseverance always pays off! ■

Lee Lanier has worked as a professional animator and VFX artist for over 25 years, having spent time at Walt Disney Studios and DreamWorks. He's also written a dozen books on the topic and has recorded video tutorials for various companies that have generated close to 1 million views. You can see his work at beezlebugbit.com and lee-lanier-paints.com.

Lee Lanier's books are available at www.studentfilmmakersstore.com/

The Power of **Relationships** in **Storytelling**

By Scott McConnell

Die Hard is one of the best and most popular action thriller films. *Die Hard* started a craze of setting action films of hostages locked in contained locations by some really bad guys. Set in a Los Angeles skyscraper, *Die Hard* was later copied by films set in a train, ship, and aeroplane, as just three examples. These copycat films were of varying quality but one misstep they (and even *Die Hard* sequels) often made was to not fully grasp another important part of the first *Die Hard* premise that made that film so dramatic. Yes, the key component of *Die Hard*'s premise is its location, but also important to its drama: ***the relationships***. What made *Die Hard* a smarter, deeper and a more dramatic film was the cleverness and high value stakes of its three main relationships.

The Lover

The most important relationship in *Die Hard* that adds emotional meaning to this action story is hero John McClane's relationship with his wife, Holly. Holly is the reason McClane flies to Los Angeles and is visiting the Nakatomi Plaza Christmas Eve. This tough New York cop is desperate to convince his wife to get their family back together. What's the worst thing that can happen to them? Holly, and dozens of her co-workers, are kidnapped by terrorists and threatened with execution. To have a chance at saving his marriage with the woman he still loves, McClane must now rescue her from the terrorists. McClane's personal goal to save his wife and marriage adds layers of empathy and poignancy for the audience to feel. This romantic motivation of McClane's makes this actioner also a love story and drama.

The Buddy

Another key relationship for McClane in *Die Hard* is with Al, the LA cop. Al is a man torn with a terrible personal problem we care about: he must overcome his own self-doubts and fears about a tragic mistake he made 11 years ago as a patrolman. As Al steps up his game as cop in the wrong place at the right time and comes to believe and support McClane, he struggles to overcome his self-doubt. We have all made mistakes and suffered self-doubt, so our hearts go out to Al as he supports McClane in his dire situation of fighting a gang of terrorists.

The Nemesis

The final key relationship that adds depth and cleverness to *Die Hard* is that between McClane and his nemesis, the elegant and vicious Hans Gruber. Stylishly played by Alan Rickman, Gruber has a personal feud with McClane as they play high stakes cat and mouse with each other (and Gruber's henchmen.) We watch intrigued by the intelligent and dangerous ploys these adversaries use against each other, knowing they will conflict unto death. And we enjoy their dialog during these games of death. If McClane can't outwit the cunning Gruber, Holly and the hostages are dead. Yes, *Die Hard* being set in a (then) new location with its own specific dramatic problems makes it a thrilling action story. But what separates *Die Hard* from so many of its imitators (and many other action films) is the quality of the relationships between its many characters. These relationships add soul to this action thriller. A lesson many writers, directors and producers today can learn from.■

Former LA producer, Scott McConnell is a script editor and story developer now based in Melbourne, Australia. Read more of his articles that reveal his script editing/developing premises. For help with your story, write to Scott at scottm100@gmail.com.

Setting Vacation Hooks

By Sherri Sheridan

What types of places do you love watching in shows and movies? How does the location color everything about the story? What ways can you choose local settings that audiences love to watch?

I love beaches, pools and surfing, so any movie that has oceans in the backgrounds are an easy watch for me. Even if the story is weak, I will watch these shows just to hang out in the backgrounds. One of my favorite shows right now is Animal Kingdom, since it takes place in Oceanside California, and all the main characters surf. Almost every scene in this show has the ocean in the background or a pool. This becomes the visual style of the film. Houses have jaw dropping ocean views in the background as the characters talk in the foreground. Pool parties become a colorful life study in the modern Southern California surfer crime genre.

The new HBO show "White Lotus" takes place in Maui on Wailea beach, where most people would love to hang out several times a year on vacation. The show itself is not my favorite, but I watch it just to feel like I am on a very expensive beach trip for an hour. See how that works? The show is being carried by the location, not the acting, camera shots, script or special effects. People just want to feel like they are somewhere relaxing for a moment. Especially now, during COVID travel restrictions, these show are even more popular.

How do we feel watching this T-Rex on the beach? Happy because we are at the beach.

How do you feel about the T-Rex in this gritty city scene? Not as fun to watch! The T-Rex even seems more menacing, even though it is the same beast, just because of the background.

How do we feel about this T-Rex in a desert setting? Notice how the character is the same in each setting but by changing the background, the whole mood in each shot changes. Suddenly, it becomes a survival story just because of the desert. You start to worry where the creature will get water and what he is doing.

Why plan your films in boring or depressing locations right now?

People want to watch films that take them away from heavy topics.

They need a break visually.

If a vacation type setting makes you want to want a show how can you plan your film idea around one?

This favorite setting choice takes a bunch of pressure off all the other elements that may be lacking in student film.

You want to plan lots of slow perfect moment shots to let the audience really soak the place in with all five senses. Staring at the ocean waves and whales breaching. Watching the native Hawaiian light the volcano top torch and blow on the shell at the sunset ceremony. These types of atmospheric shots give anyone watching a shot of vacation oxytocin.

Maybe you do not live by the beach. What local settings look really good? Make a list of wow shot locations in your area and plan to shoot at those locations during twilight hour sunsets and sunrises.

Just having a nice background is half the battle in filmmaking sometimes. When you think about it strategically, the background takes up more screen real estate than the characters.

Keep in mind how important settings are to evoking emotions. The audience wants to feel like they are on vacation sometimes – so let them have it with each shot!■

Sherri Sheridan is a leading world expert in teaching story to digital filmmakers, animators, screenwriters and novelists. New book coming soon, "Filmmaking Script To Screen Step-By-Step," with an app. Other books include "Maya 2 Character Animation" (New Riders 1999), "Developing Digital Short Films" (New Riders / Peachpit / Pearson 2004) and "Writing A Great Script Fast" (2007). Sherri is the CEO and Creative Director at MindsEyeMedia.com and MyFlik.com in San Francisco.

www.mindseyemedia.com
www.myflik.com

Deputizing the Fight Coordinator Posse

Tips on Greatest Hits

By Kevin Inouye

Hey, you, behind the camera or editing suite! Congratulations, you're now part of the stunt team.

No, you won't be set on fire, fall, or fight, but as with all departments, our work is only as good as what the audience sees...

Which means camera and editing have the power to ruin fight scenes...

Or not.

Lining Up Shots

Most head hits, or strikes with non-padded props, are what we call "non-contact hits". Weapon (fist, foot, etc.) and target never make contact, but need to appear to overlap on screen briefly. We want to see weapon traveling towards target, a moment of supposed impact, and then, an appropriate reaction.

When this illusion fails, it's usually either angle or timing that's off. Since timing reactions is also angle-specific, both have everything to do with camera location. Good stunt performers sell shots to camera almost every time, but elements like multi-cam setups, drone shots, or other complications mean your team needs to know what angle to sell each hit to, and the operator needs to hit those marks. Have half-speed camera rehearsals, and check how it's looking. Often coordinators provide pre-viz, which can inform choice of shots, but if you want a different perspective than they rehearsed, you must inform stunt performers so they can adjust. It should go without saying, but directors, watch the monitor, not the set.

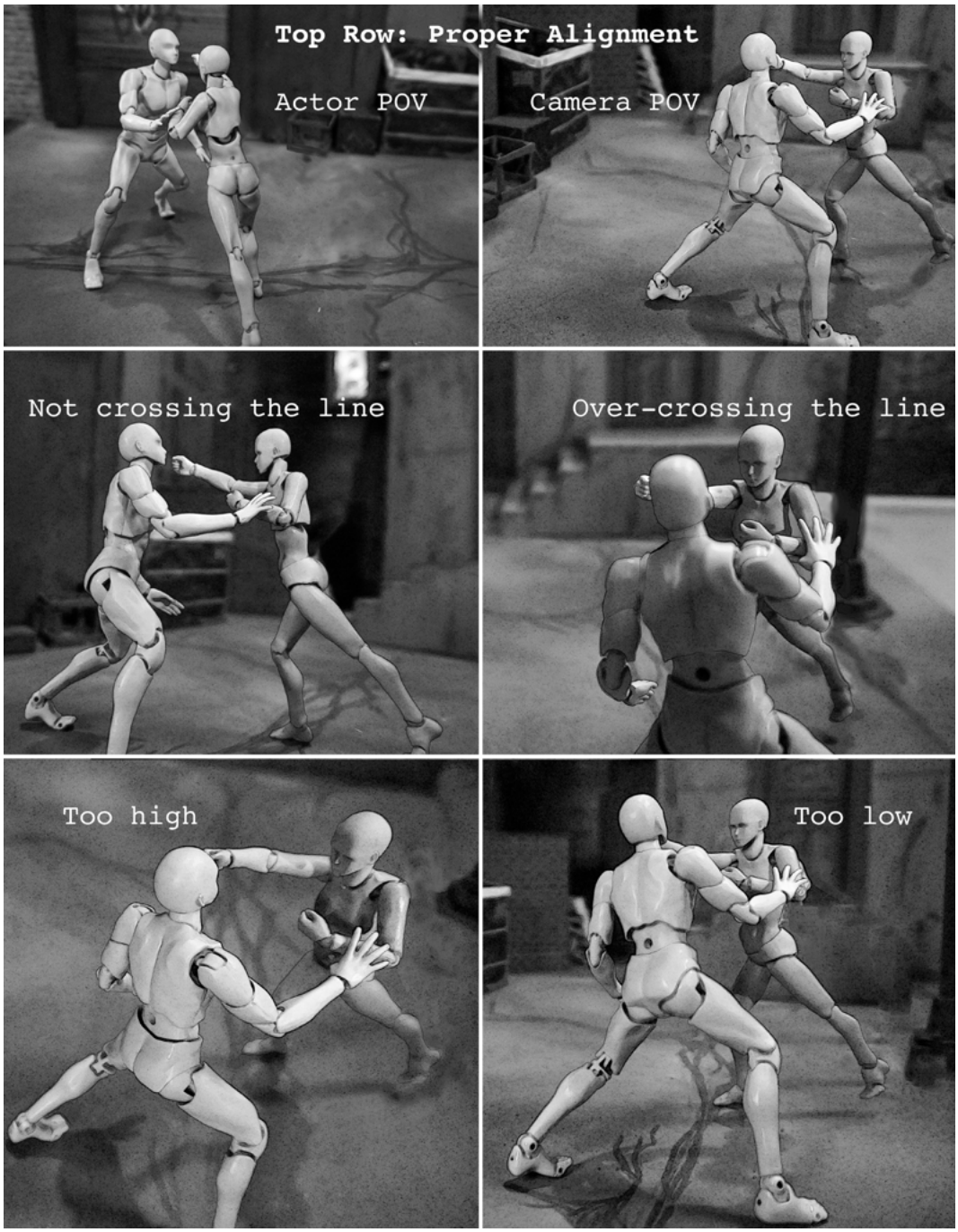
Ideally, coordinators watch a monitor and know when shots need to be redone, but student filmmakers or indie filmmakers running micro-budget sets may not have a video village, or people who know what to look for. There's no way camera operators can focus simultaneously on framing, focus, light, acting, continuity, and when hits are selling, so have designated crew on monitor who know what they're doing, or review footage before moving on to check specifically for whether hits sold. Editors, you may be sent takes with 'misses' in them. Please don't use those bits!

These adjustments also apply to the illusion of near misses, blocked attacks, and offline elements (like a spear or gun aimed just to the side) still looking legitimate. Low angles and jib shots are cool, but they can also make it look like out-of-distance attacks are aimed way off target if performers don't adjust. There's no way to make the same non-contact attack look right both OTS and from a low angle without adjustment, so pick one per take.

Timing

Action places specific demands on rhythm and pacing. Humans have innate understanding of physics (we'd be injured frequently otherwise!) so playback speed can only be tweaked slightly before it becomes an obvious stylistic departure from reality... probably 10% at most. That said, selective dropping of frames right at or after the moment of impact can make hits look harder.

Cuts can be used to adjust timing, but these work best on matching motion, so overlapping shots is

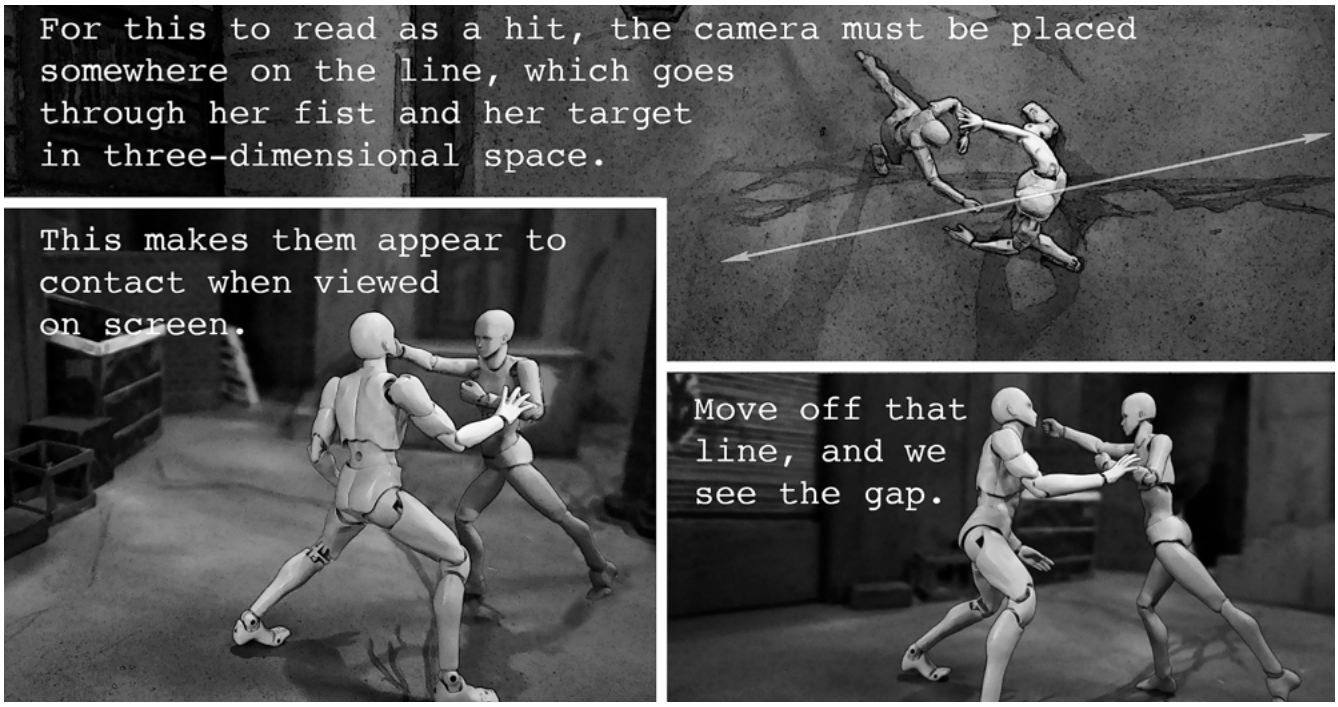


important. To cut mid-punch, shoot the whole punch at the end of one setup and again when beginning the next, so you can splice them almost like hidden cuts in whip-pans. This makes the 180 rule essential if you want audiences to be able to follow action!

Yes, you can cover for bad technique by cutting at the moment of impact, but audiences are savvy, and if you do that much, we'll know it's compensating for on-set failures.

Framing

Fights are high energy, so we want to fill the frame with motion. A punch traveling across the entire screen moves faster than the identical punch going halfway across it. That said, fights



can move quickly and jerkily, so sometimes it's expedient to shoot wider than you want, if you have sufficient resolution, and crop to frame the shot better in post.

On the other hand, we also want to be able to understand what's happening with characters' bodies, and medium or tight shots rob viewers of the chance to know what's happening with stance or other body language. They hide some of the physical dialogue. Save closeups for inserts, when we need to see something like wounds, glances, weapons, etc. "Cowboy" shots, mid-thigh to top of head, are a great default. Of course, technical considerations also factor in, like needing to frame out mats, pre-applied wounds for a reveal, or avoid foregrounding rubber prop weapons that won't look good in closeup.

There's plenty more to consider in terms of sympathetic camera motion, visual energy, design, etc., but my point is that creating action is always a team effort, so those of you running camera or editing, don't treat your job as just showing what the fight team did. Co-plan, co-create, and make everyone look better! ■

Kevin Inouye is a SAG-AFTRA stunt performer, a fight coordinator, and armorer/gun wrangler through Fight Designer, LLC. He's Assistant Professor of Movement, Acting, & Stage Combat at Case Western Reserve University, a Certified Teacher and Theatrical Firearms Instructor with the Society of American Fight Directors, a Certified Teacher with the National Michael Chekhov Association, and author of "The Theatrical Firearms Handbook." www.fightdesigner.com

www.studentfilmmakersstore.com/products/the-screen-combat-handbook

Becoming an **Experienced Filmmaker** Without Experience

By Jared Isham

On November 10, 1961, a book was published called, "Catch-22," wherein the phrase was coined. Unfortunately, film students or those starting out in their careers are faced with what many would call the "Catch 22." You need to have experience if you want to get hired, but in order to get experience, you need to be hired.

This predicament doesn't leave you much chance at landing that next gig, let alone paying off any educational debt you might have incurred. But it's all good - those veteran filmmakers don't have to worry about you as competition, and eventually, that will be you. You just need to figure out how to get that experience.

Okay, I'm not that sarcastic, but there is a way you can get that experience and land those jobs or even get a client that will pay you for your filmmaking abilities. You can become an experienced filmmaker without having any experience. There are two requirements for this to work, though. You need to have or have access to two things: *a camera* and *something to edit the footage on*.

I have seen a few situations where filmmakers are asked about their experience: Post-Production or Editing, Producing, Directing, Cinematography, or getting clients for your video business. I have done all of the above and at various levels in the industry and have found that the main reason people want to know your experience is that they want to know you can quickly and efficiently execute the tasks that are required. Now, let's get that experience in.

Paid work doesn't always mean you will learn something. The old tried and true method to break into the industry is the ladder method; you work your way up from the bottom. Starting as a coffee runner will give you exposure, but you need to have big productions close by to be able to start there. If you live in a small town or country without movies, TV shows, or commercials shooting close by, then you are out of luck. My favorite method is *by doing*. **Make your own opportunities.**

The two easiest ways to hone your craft, gain experience, and get the bonus of adding to your portfolio are making commercials and/or documentaries. Movies are great but cost a lot more and take a long time to execute, this will lengthen your experience quest. If you need experience pronto so you can start getting work, commercials and documentaries are the way to go.

Commercials: Start with product commercials. Choose a few of your favorite products, something you might have lying around, and make a commercial for that. If you want to become an editor, then you now have footage to edit to learn the software and add a line to your resume that says "spec." Cinematographers, same thing; you now have footage for your reel. If you are starting a video business, then you now have content for your portfolio.

Documentaries: Choose a location or a subject and start interviewing people to learn more about it. You will have to schedule interviews, which is producing. You'll have to craft a story, which is directing and editing. You'll have new content as a cinematographer. You'll have content for your portfolio that might land you a new client. This one worked for me. I turned a $500 unfinished documentary passion project into a $17K client project.

Don't wait for someone else to make opportunities for you. It is up to you to jump on the opportunities that are already sitting there waiting for you.■

Jared Isham is an independent filmmaker and creative strategist. He directed "Bounty" (2009, Lionsgate) and "Turn Around Jake" (2015, PureFlix Entertainment) starring Michael Madsen and Jen Lilley. He is the Co-Founder, CCO at Stage Ham Entertainment, LLC., which develops and produces independent entertainment for and "in association" with distribution partners.
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He also provides filmmaking resources and tutorials on his website.
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How to Start a **Video Production** Company

By Richard Tiland

One of the biggest desires of young filmmakers is to own a professional and successful video production company.

Their goal is to establish a media production company so they can make connections, expand their resources (camera, lighting, post suites, and sound gear), make money and develop professional relationships. Here is how you can set up your video production company.

Website and Identification

To integrate, you have to name your company. For this, you need to pick a very unique and good name. It is hard to name your video production company because you will realize that the majority of virtuous names are taken. You will find a name with little effort but be curious while naming.

After naming your company here comes the web URL. It is an essential part of the online setup of a company, and it should be thought about. Your website is the path your clients not only use to reach you but also evaluate you before hiring you. You to need to have a URL that is easy to remember.

Reel Work

Now you have a name, a website, and a bank account. How would you get work as a video production company?

You surely need some recognized work to show your clients on your website. A video production company without

any sample work will have a very hard time ranking on the list. The prime comfort you can provide your client is the assurance that the person they are hiring has done this type of project before.

One way to get this work done is to generate your resources with a group of friends. For example, it is common for a group of school friends to form a video production company. And each of them with only one piece of work and experience is considered fit for the professional task. Taken as a group they are more likely to have enough work to make a smooth presentation.

Define Your Specialized Niches

Different video production companies have mastered different niches. They may be versatile in their production, but they have some founding niches based on which they are known to clients. One thing which is important when building your production company is to identify and define your specialized niche properly. Believe it or not but most careers boom in one niche, and most video producers

continuously try to break out of their basic niche and enter another niche.

Start Finding Clients

After completion of all the above tasks, now the main question is, *where do you find clients?* You can find clients everywhere because the market is saturated with clients who want promotional videos. But the key is to stay in the game and keep responding to the clients as much as you can. You can also find clients on online stages. Moreover, participating in contests is a surprisingly useful way that leads you to your clients. ■

Richard Tiland is the President of New Evolution Video and dk3studios. "Since I was a kid, my passion has been media production. And through this passion, I've been able to develop meaningful work relationships and create masterful visuals with my clients. Now as a proud production business owner, I am fully committed to ensuring that you have the best experience possible within the video industry. Let's create."
He can be reached at richard@newevolutionvideo.com, (619) 365.5529.
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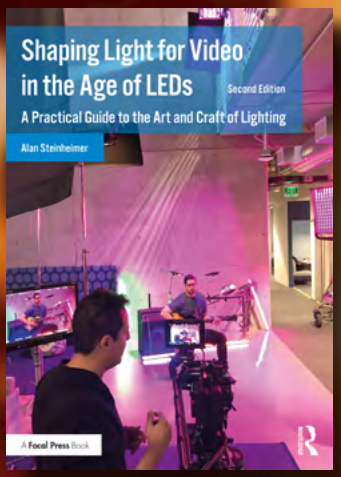

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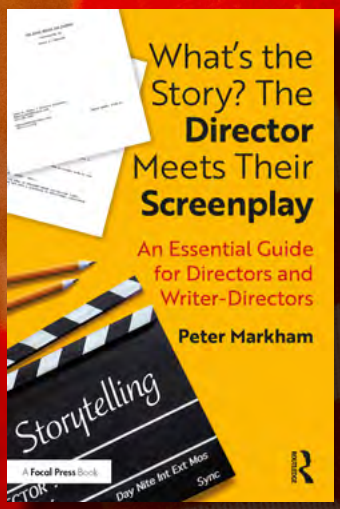

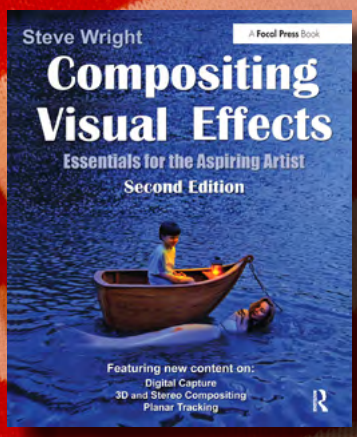

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Photo by Jill Wellington

You CAN Make a Movie with One Camera and a Small Group of Friends

By Bridget Barbara

How I brought my short film, "The Shadow," from idea to film festival

Making your first film can feel terrifying, or even impossible. But if you view the process as a learning experience, you can reframe any problems, mistakes, or failures that arise as the necessary trials and tribulations that bring you one step closer to eventually mastering it all. In the end, you'll be grateful to have a production under your belt, and a clearer view of how to proceed next time. (And you never know, your film may even win some awards!)

In this article, I will talk about how I brought my short film, "The Shadow" from idea to film festival. "The Shadow" was my first produced short film. It cost just under $1,000 to make, and my partner and I did everything from writing and directing, to cinematography, editing, graphics, sound design, scoring, and color correction. It was a two-person crew all the way through. We both had experience in TV production and post-production, but we also wanted to learn how to wear some different creative hats. (We watched many how-to tutorials throughout the process.) In the end, such a small crew enabled us to keep an intimate collaborative environment, as well as be a more appealing "production crew" to locations that didn't want a large group of people to keep an eye on. While a small crew may not be possible for most productions, it's important to realize that you really can make a movie with a camera and a small group of friends. Just be prepared to work hard.

Developing a Concept

I have a note in my phone where I frequently write down half-baked story ideas. It's great, because you always have your phone with you, and inspiration can strike at any moment. The idea for "The Shadow" came to me one day when I was watching a random YouTube video with a very sad song playing in the background.

The song, which I have now forgotten, was simple and slow, and it created visions in my head of a very sad girl. That was the seed of the idea: a girl, running away from something, clearly distressed.

From there, I tried to explore the feeling of loneliness, and manifestations of that. *What is it like to be by yourself and afraid? What does sadness and depression look like? What could they look like in the horror world?* I came up with the idea of a shadow always looming, and having to interact with it, deciding whether to give in or fight.

I set my short film in the nondescript past, partly because I love history, and partly because I wanted the story to be simple, without the distraction of technology. The focus was on the girl and the shadow – no cell phones to connect her with the outside world.

I chose to move forward with this idea, because as my first ever short film, it seemed actually doable with a limited budget. As a passion project, we wouldn't be paying ourselves. There would only be one actor needed (played by me), and the graphics required to create the shadow figure felt like something my partner, who had graphics experience, could tackle. All we'd need was gear, and a place to film. One of my closest friends is a hair and makeup artist, and another friend kindly volunteered to make a quick appearance in the bedroom scene as the innkeeper. We had all the pieces in place. This felt like the epitome of "use what you have."

Pre-Production

I spent some time researching to find locations that would work as a setting for "The Shadow." Finding a real historical place to film seemed like an impossibility, and I received a few rejections. But then, one outdoor museum in New Hampshire agreed to let us film there after hours. I believe that introducing yourself as an amateur filmmaker can create opportunity. People are often sympathetic and will not apply the same restrictions (and fees) that professional productions are required to abide by.

I purchased props and wardrobe primarily from thrift stores like Goodwill, and a couple of items online that I could find nowhere else.

I storyboarded most of the film ahead of time so that my partner and I were both on the same page about how the film should look. It was meant to be a basic outline, not set in stone. We knew that we would get inspiration from each location, and we'd do what felt right during the shoot. More important to us was the feel of the film. *Does it capture that quiet, that loneliness?*

Production

Most of the film is set at nighttime, so we chose to film on a Sony α7S II, which was known to perform well in low light, and which worked with our budget. The whole short film was shot in a single weekend. On Saturday, we filmed the woods and bedroom scenes. On Sunday, we filmed the exterior town and interior tavern scenes. We did this in order to minimize the duration of our gear rental.

Acting in scenes while also directing felt relatively simple, because I had a partner I trusted, and because we had laid the groundwork in pre-production. I'd set up a shot or angle, and my partner would get the shot, often contributing ideas or adjustments as filming went on. After we'd film a few takes, I'd watch playback on the monitor to make sure we were capturing what I wanted. For me,

a collaborative environment was crucial. It was a learning process for us both, and sometimes that learning came from listening to my partner's opinion or perspective.

The longest scene to film was the bedroom scene, because of the low-light setup and the tracking. We used gaffer tape to mark out tracking spots on the wall that we'd use later to key in the ominous figure. (I was acting with a white wall and some X marks.) At first we set up a dim light panel behind the bed to light the bedroom scene, but we realized that candles worked just fine by themselves, because the camera performed well in the low light. We had a real candle plus a few battery-powered ones to set the spooky mood. In post-production, we altered the faux candles to be the same hue as the real ones.

One interesting thing we learned was that footsteps are difficult to capture on a shoot. With the camera person walking in tandem with me in the woods scene and exterior town scene, the result was a jumble of footsteps on crunchy leaves and gravel. Because of this, we had to edit in footsteps in post-production.

Post-Production

For a streamlined story with only one camera and one actor, the first cut of the short film was a breeze. However, the grueling hours of work began when it was time to insert the entity (the "shadow") into the cut. The shadow figure was made by filming me in front of a green screen, then using Adobe After Effects to key out the green and turn the whole figure black.

Then we played around with opacity and blurring until we had what looked like a shadow. The smoke at the end of the film was created using a Video Copilot toolkit.

Many hours were spent digitally painting out light switches and wall outlets that we hadn't been able to hide while shooting. This was probably the most time-consuming part of post-production, but it was unavoidable.

The film was colored using DaVinci Resolve, and it was scored using Logic Pro.

Once we had what felt like a finished cut of the film, I showed it to my family, whose opinion I get on almost every creative work I do. Their response indicated to me that we had a finished product.

Submitting to Film Festivals

I submitted "The Shadow" to festivals using FilmFreeway. It was a very simple, straightforward process. Submitting your film to festivals can be a bit like applying to college; there are countless film festivals out there, and it can be difficult to choose which ones to try for.

Different festivals are known for different things, and you'll need to find which festivals best suit your specific goals. It's also helpful to come up with a list of festivals that cover your bases – ones you think you have a chance of getting selected for, and maybe a few "reach" festivals. (You never know!) The important takeaway is: **Don't be the one to say no to yourself.** And keep in mind: *submitting to film festivals costs money, so make sure you've factored this into your overall budget.*

Research is key here to come up with your festival strategy.

Overall, any first film will be a huge learning process for those involved. On "The Shadow," I learned more about what NOT to do than what to do. I acquired invaluable, hard-earned experience that will help me immensely the next time around. My biggest piece of advice for anyone who wants to create a film is: **Don't wait around for someone to give you an opportunity.** Get the ball rolling, start creating, and start learning from your mistakes and failures.

Make something, learn from it, and do it again. *And again. And again.* ■

Bridget Barbara's professional background includes 7+ years of experience in television production and post-production and 5+ years of experience in web content production. Since starting her first YouTube channel in 2015, Bridget has produced content in 15+ countries worldwide, presented at live speaking engagements, as well as been interviewed on live television and radio. Bridget's short film, "The Shadow," is the story of a woman who emerges from the woods and finds herself in a desolate town. The warm glow of a nearby window promises her refuge, but not all promises are kept. "The Shadow" was an official selection at FearNYC, the Independent Horror Movie Awards, and the Women in Horror Film Festival, and received a Best Actress Award at the Independent Horror Movie Awards.
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Your Brand and Getting a Job in Storytelling

By Amy DeLouise

Job-hunting is challenging in a virtual marketplace. You can't get that "vibe" from a personal interview and tour. And it can be hard to present yourself in 2D. So, what are the strategies for success? And where do you look for your first job in the industry? In this article, I'll share some tips on how to present your professional brand, and where to look for those great storytelling jobs.

Be Ready to Tell Your Story

Don't wait until your first job interview to start developing your story. You'll need to create a personal brand "kit" with the following elements.

- Elevator Pitch: Two to three floors (30 seconds). What's your "why"?
- Customized Pitch: How does your "why" connect to what this company needs?
- Resume: One page!
- Recommendations: At least three!
- Professional-Looking Headshot: Profile photo for your LinkedIn Page and job application portals.
- LinkedIn Profile: (video links are great)
- Instagram: (video stories and reels)
- YouTube Channel: (if your content is good)

#GALSNGEAR students shoot on NAB Show floor.

7 Key Traits of Successful Job Seekers

Fun fact: People don't just hire for specific job skills—those are trainable. They hire for those qualitative traits that make you successful, regardless of position. So, when putting together your resume or interviewing, be sure to amplify these traits:

1. BE ORGANIZED.
Know how to find it, or find it out, quickly.

2. BE ON TIME.
In our business, "early is on time and on time is late."

3. KNOW HOW TO ASK FOR HELP.
Timing is everything, so be situationally aware of when is a good time to ask. But you can't know everything, so keep learning by asking questions!

4. BECOME INVALUABLE.
Find that annoying new app/piece of gear/workflow software that everyone needs and become an expert in it.

5. BE A CONNECTOR.
When you learn something useful, share it with others. (Social media pots are a great way to establish your brand as an expert.) If you know someone that can be helpful to another person, introduce them.

6. LOSE THE ATTITUDE.
'Nuff said.

7. NETWORK.
Get to know everyone, regardless of your job position. Be generous and helpful to all. You never know where your next job will come from!

Amy DeLouise, Founder of #GALSNGEAR, brings students to the NAB Show.

Standing room only. #GALSNGEAR at NAB.

Industry Trends Affecting Jobs

The biggest industry trends that are continuing to affect the content and filmmaking industry are these:

(1.) Massive Amounts of Data/Multi-Platform Workflow.
(2.) Decentralized Workflow.

What does this mean for job-seekers? So, people with organizational skills RULE. And there are lots of new jobs in the DIT/workflow management space. See Netflix's new document outlining the roles and responsibilities of these jobs.

Reference link:
https://partnerhelp.netflixstudios.com/hc/en-us/articles/4403564611347-On-set-Digital-Imaging-and-Data-Management-Roles-Responsibilities

PA Jobs to Get Where You Are Going

The lowly Production Assistant is often looked down upon. Everyone wants to direct! But the reality is, PA jobs can help you network, learn the real-world lingo, train on gear or software, and connect to the department you're interested in. I got into the industry through the location department, as a PA on several movies and commercials. I then moved over to art department PA, where I got connected to some of the biggest directors in the industry, got great experience, and was able to move into producing and later directing. (If you want the whole story, see my recent blog post, "My Origin Story: My Path to Nonfiction Storytelling." *Reference link:* www.amydelouise.com/boards/origin-story-my-path-to-nonfiction-storytelling/)

Anyway, back to PA life, here are some of the roles to look for, based on your interests:

1. Location PA (scouting, research, permits, on set)
2. Art Department PA (research, script, sometimes on set)
3. Assistant at a grip/lighting rental co. (organizing gear and learning G&E packages, learn what you need to do to get into IATSE and have people recommend you, these companies also hire out G&E crews)
4. Camera rental house (camera gear, lenses, gimbals, etc.)
5. Production company assistant (script-to-screen)
6. Post House (editing, motion graphics)
7. Visual Effects House (animation, FX, previz)
8. Director/Producer's PA (pre-production, meetings, on set)
9. Casting Agent PA (organizing and running casting sessions)
10. Cinematographer's gopher (not a camera assistant—yet—but learning the cameras, rigs and lenses, which can lead to your first AC job)

Nontraditional Paths to Storytelling Jobs

Another way to get your foot in the door is through an Industry Association. These are the people who *know people* in the industry—the very people who can hire recent grads like you. Work for them. Volunteer for their

events. Just as an example, AMPAS (www.oscars.org), the folks who bring us the Oscars, has 450 employees. Other major industry associations include: SMPTE, NAB, WGA, SAG, AIS, VES, RIAA, WIF-LA. Many of these organizations have internships and entry level jobs just waiting for an enterprising person like you! Another non-traditional approach to the industry: manufacturers. From name-brands like Canon, Sony, Dolby and Adobe to smaller suppliers like Fox Fury Lighting and software companies such as Frame.io, the industry has literally tens of thousands of businesses that are involved in the creation of screen media. And don't forget, thousands of organizations need good storytellers, and have in-house video departments (as well as contractors). Look for jobs with "video," "editing," "camera," and "storytelling" in the keywords from organizations such as:

1. Nonprofits
2. Consulting Firms
3. Houses of Worship
4. Ad Agencies
5. Live and Hybrid Events Companies
6. Government Agencies
7. International NGO's
8. Corporations

Launching your career can be daunting. But there are so many avenues to creative storytelling jobs. Start by developing your brand as an industry professional, and get innovative about finding your way in. ■

Content creator, speaker and author Amy DeLouise is a leader in the field of short form digital storytelling and has garnered more than 40 creative excellence awards including Tellys, Peer, New York Festivals, Aurora, and CINE Golden Eagle. With more than 400 productions to her credit, Amy has also consulted with Fortune 500 companies including Federal Express, S&P Global and Microsoft on how to leverage their content assets and deliver powerful stories to target audiences. In addition to leading her production company DeLouise Enterprises LLC, Amy founded #GalsNGear (www.galsngear.tv), an initiative focused on building community and gender equity in the screen media and technical fields. Her book, "The Producer's Playbook: Real People on Camera" (Focal Press/Routledge) is being used in dozens of film and communications programs worldwide. Her new book with co-author Cheryl Ottenritter is "Nonfiction Sound & Story for Film and Video: A Practical Guide for Filmmakers."
www.amydelouise.com

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