

Preparing to Write

Before you even start to write your script, you need to be clear about your ideas and the characters involved in your story. Once you have done this, you should be ready to move on to the next stage and do a pitch of your ideas.

Arranging your Ideas

Go through and work out answers to the topics below as a way of setting out the first outlines/ideas for your movie.

- Subject

What is the subject? (Sum up in one word if possible.) What is your attitude towards your subject?

- Purpose

What do you want to achieve? Is your film presenting an argument, instructional, abstract, experimental or about an entertaining narrative?

- Audience

Who will watch the video?

- Tone

What tone of voice will you adopt? What is your attitude towards your audience? What is your attitude towards your subject?

- Theme

A distinction between themes and things: if you want to make things — i.e. guns — a main focus of your story, make sure you have an attitude towards them.

Knowing Your Characters

It is vital in a drama to know all the fundamental facts about your characters even when they will never be shown on screen because it is these small salient details that define their personalities, which lie at the root of all their actions, and ultimately, for your purposes, that make them real believable human beings. In a documentary, the more research you do on your subjects, the more interesting your interviews will be because you will be able to delve deeper into their lives and they will trust you more and give you more in return. See if you can create a map of the relationships between your characters, so that you know it is about them that you want to incorporate into your film.

Some questions that are typical of the information you will need to know to be able to answer questions about your subjects in either a documentary or a drama are: Where were they born? What were the economic and political conditions of their childhood? What is their family structure? Only child - one of ten kids? Grew up on a farm? Dad worked in a factory? Raised by their grandmother? Healthy childhood? Constantly on the move? School? Important people in the life of that person? Key moments in their life? Greatest fears, joys and sorrows...? How (and why) did they get to the moment that we will be meeting them (on screen) and what can they tell us from that perspective?

Pitching

- What is a Pitch?

A pitch is a clear and succinct verbal presentation of your concept. When someone asks you what you're working on, this is the moment to pitch. It should be short and dazzling because you are using it to put together the resources to create your project. In a traditional, and more formal, pitch you use it to get funding for your project. In an informal group or classroom context, you use it to clarify the project to the group and receive suggestions from them. A strong pitch will usually convince people to work with you and your most important resource is a great collaborative team, so practice pitching. It is an art form in itself.

- What is in a Pitch?

First get a few sentences down on paper to get the ball rolling. As you practice this 30 second pitch, it will become easier and better and the concept will flesh out along with your understanding. It should include answers to the following questions:

What *Genre* is it?

Comedy, horror, issue-based documentary, experimental. Narrative-driven, Character-driven, Image-driven?

What is your story *about*?

Not the details (i.e. the camera movement) but the *big themes* — revenge, fear, love, beauty.

Who are the *main characters/protagonists*?

Where's the *audience* for your film?

Who will want to watch the film and what will their expectations be? Is your project going to work with this audience?

What is the most *interesting* and *totally original* thing about your project?

Try and write a few sentences that fill in the following blanks:

This (insert length) minute (insert genre) explores/witnesses/celebrates (insert what the story is about). Set in (insert location and time period if not the present day), this film follows (insert your main character with a brief description of him/her) as he/she (insert what happens to him/her in your story).

- The Benefits of Practicing

As you continue to practice your pitch, inevitably people will start offering you tips, suggestions, contacts etc. This is really useful. Maybe you will not use any of the suggestions in the final work, but maybe it will be the key to a whole new level for the project.

Write it ALL down. Keep track of people's names and suggestions; this is the beginning of your vital network to being a creative person. As you go through the process, you will gather more and more clarity on the shape and feel of the piece.

Over time, you will begin to understand how to re-work the pitch for the individual. Notice which elements of the project the person you are pitching to is most interested in and follow their lead. Learning these different forms of communicating will give you the ability to pitch to anyone and will also guarantee a much more diverse group of participants, facilitators and distributors of your work.