

The Script

What is a Script?

A script is the ultimate blueprint, the map of how we plan to lead our audience through the story. A well-planned script creates the best results. The script should be prepared and visualized to offer the crew, the on-camera actors or interviewees, and all of the participants a clear grasp of what we want the video to accomplish. It does this by giving not only lines to the actors, but directions to their characters and suggestions to the art and camera departments. The script will help communicate strategy, goals and objectives along with the story to all of the production team. The script is invaluable throughout all phases from pre-production through post-production; when planning shots, rehearsing talent and camera moves, setting up and executing production, and editing the final video tape.

What is in a Script?

Your script is the story, the heart of your film. The most important elements of a story are the plot, characters and environment or setting. The plot reflects how the story is told — how it develops from the beginning to the middle to the end. Characters are either actors in the story or real-life people who will receive our attention in the documentary. The environments, or locations, are selected to offer the most effective settings for unfolding the idea, theme, and plot.

The classic Hollywood narrative can be divided into three sections:

- Act I
The Set Up (the inciting incident)
- Act II
The Development (cause/effect relationships which move towards a crisis and climax that must occur)
- Act III
The Resolution (make it believable)

It introduces us to a protagonist who is then set up with a conflict. We follow this character through the story — which can take place during a single day or over the course of a lifetime, through their moments of joy and sorrow, triumph and defeat. The final reflection or completion of the story is as s/he comes to some resolution with the experiences that they have had thus far. The stronger the story, the better the film. This means creating an individualistic memorable character, one with the idiosyncrasies

and personal quirks, giving them life and making them believable as real people making their own choices and mistakes.

Audiences like to have their emotions aroused by films. When planning your movie, remember that tension and suspense are really important in engaging your audience and can be created using a number of different techniques. By withholding information or offering insufficient or ambiguous information, for example, tension can be added. The audience may be shown information that the character does not know, adding expectation and anticipation to the scene. Camera angles, music, special effects or sound effects used at just the right moment can have a huge impact. Consider how to stimulate the viewer by adding the unexpected into the picture.

Most screenwriters write best about what they truly know, what they have lived. However, a great writer can research all the facts of the story — names, dates, backgrounds, places, events, reactions, perceptions — and weave this research in to a formidable story if they are passionate enough to begin living it and breathing life in to it in the form of a script. The more detail the writer can provide, the easier it will be for the actors to embody their roles, to become their characters.

How the Script will be Used

Each department of a film production crew and the cast use the script in different ways. As a director, a great script is going to carry the project a long way towards achieving your vision, because of its clarity and its ability to communicate to the crew and cast. The actors highlight their lines and memorize them to prepare for their roles.

The camera department uses the script to create shot lists and storyboards for their shooting. They also check for any special equipment needs — wide angle lens or cranes, for example — which they would have to rent. They will often shoot tests to determine the film stock and filters that will be required to achieve the desired look.

The art department notes the look and feel of the script and begins to collect the necessary props and colors suggested by the script and requested by the director.

The assistant director breaks down the script in terms of locations and travel time, to be able to create an efficient shooting schedule, so that if there are two scenes in the script in the same location, regardless of the story or how they relate to it, they will always be shot in the same day. It is easier to change someone's costume, than come back and re-set up a crew at a location.

Remember however, the script is a working document, open to change, and meant as a tool to accomplish the final project. While it is the original source and foundation for the project, it is not the finished piece; it is the means to an end. The film or video is your goal.