

Film like the pros



This workshop was prepared by me in the context of a camp (Steven feature film - the secret of the red thread) of Bibellesebund. It covers the topic of film from the basic idea to the production and post-production

Of course it would be an illusion to think that after this workshop "filming like the pros" the most professional films would come out. Professionals work in a completely different league and use very expensive equipment. This gives them possibilities that we don't have in this way. But it is about some basic things you should pay attention to and which make a film a bit more professional.

The Pre-Production

Pre-production can well be called the "planning phase". This phase should not be underestimated. The more invested in planning, the fewer surprises will arise in the production phase.

The idea

At the very beginning there is always the idea. Without an idea, it makes no sense at all to want to produce a film. It is about developing a good story and this story requires an idea. But how does a good story stand out? Here are some criteria for it:

- The story must contain a clear intention
- Thrilling turning points should be included
- The message of the story should be clearly stated

The following questions should be able to be answered:

- What is the plot of the story?
- What characters appear in the story? What makes them tick? What is the relationship between each of the characters?
- How does the film begin and end?
- What is the message of the film?
- What is the arc of suspense?
- What are the dramatic turning points in the film (also called plot points)?

Once these questions have been answered, a short summary (synopsis) of the story should be written.

Screenplay

A screenplay is written from the results of the first planning phase. A good screenplay is written in a very strict structure. It consists of the following components.

The Scene

First, a scene heading is created. The following questions must be answered in the process:

- Will the scene be shot INSIDE or OUTSIDE?
- WHERE does the scene take place?
- WHEN does the scene take place (e.g. DAY, NIGHT)?

A scene heading can look like this:

INSIDE - BATHROOM - EVENING

Whenever something changes, for example shooting first INSIDE and then OUTSIDE, changing location or time of day, a new scene must be created.

The plot

First of all, an action is expected. Something is happening in the scene. This description should be kept short and concise. Important details that should be shown in the movie must be in the plot, of course. All details must be relevant to the story.

If a person appears in the story for the first time, they are written in CAPITAL LETTERS.

Example:

MONIKA looks in the mirror. She is exhausted. Tears are running down her cheek. Her MOTHER comes through the door.

Dialogue

Dialogue should be kept short. Long dialogue can come across as long-winded. In the screenplay, dialogue is structured as follows:

- First comes the speaker in CAPITAL LETTERS
- On the next line, the way it is spoken is in parentheses. This part can usually be omitted if it is clear from the sentence and dialogue
- Finally, after that is the dialogue in normal writing and without quotes or endings.

Dialogue is indented from the left in the script.

Example:

MOM(worried)What's wrong with you? Can I help you?

Directing and camera instructions

Direction and camera directions don't really belong in the script. However, if a particular shoot should require a particular shot, then it can sometimes be useful to note this. The following abbreviations are used for this purpose:

- T = Wide
- N = Close
- CU = Close up
- POV = Point of view

Scene transitions are also not scripted. However

- FADE IN
- FADE OUT

for the beginning of the film, for the end of the film, or the start of the scene and the end of the scene have become established.

Storyboard

A storyboard is another way to plan the film. This is where the individual scenes are outlined. This provides an overview of the individual scenes and the flow of the film.

The production

The camera

The choice of the "right" camera is usually not an easy choice. There are almost countless options and each camera has its advantages and disadvantages. The most important criterion in the choice, is of course the cost. While some camcorders and DSLR models can be had for as little as a few hundred francs, larger cameras can be well into the thousands or even tens of thousands of francs or more.

Here are some camera types and their advantages and disadvantages:

Digital Single Lens Reflex (DSLR)

are actually designed to take photographs. But they are also being used more and more in film productions.

The sound recording

For the sound recording either microphones that are built into the camera are used or external microphones. As with cameras, there are big differences in quality.

Spoken text is often recorded with a directional microphone. In order to get close to the speaker even with these microphones, sound fishing rods are used. Other options include small microphones that are plugged into the speaker.

The **atmo** (that is, the background noise) should also be recorded on the spot. This is where microphones are used that bring a greater dynamic range from their characteristics.

It can be a help to record and analyze only the sound of the environment for one or more minutes. This helps to detect noise before the actual production.

Stabilization systems

Tripods belong to the basic equipment of every camera man. Especially in the telephoto range should not be dispensed with. With tripods it depends very much on the use, how they are used. Expensive tripods can be very robust and have a load capacity of several KG. Very crucial is the tripod head. It should be paid attention to the fact that the pans (horizontal and vertical) go smoothly. Especially with cheap tripods, this is often the biggest shortcoming.

For moving shots, systems like the **Steadycam** or **Glidecam** are used. There are systems that are handheld and make camera work easier. However, a system that is worn over the hips and shoulders is essential, especially for longer shoots or with appropriately heavy cameras.

Various shot sizes

A film thrives on different shot sizes. Through these settings we achieve something in the viewer. Therefore, with each shot size, we should ask why. So, why do I decide to use this particular shot. Here are a few settings and what they aim at:

The **total** gives the viewer an overview of the scene. It shows the protagonists in the environment in which they are moving. An extreme form of the long shot is called a **supertotal**. These are shot at very wide angles and in this shot the actors look extremely small. The landscape is the focus here.

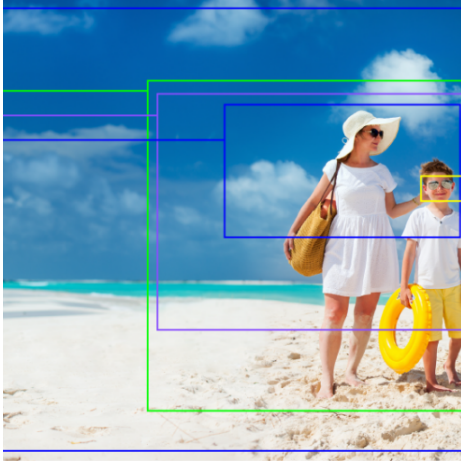
In the **supertotal**, the protagonists are now shown at full life size. It takes the viewer more into the action. It's all about the action in the plot.

A special setting size is called "**American**". In this, actors are shown up to about their knees.

In the **Near** setting size, gestures can be shown well. The **Near** setting, on the other hand, is centrally about facial expressions.

In the **detail shot**, the focus is on a particular detail, such as the boy's sunglasses or the contents of the woman's bag.

In the film, different shot sizes are used alternately. This creates tension. Below is an image that illustrates these different shot sizes



The perspectives

In addition to the setting sizes, different perspectives are also used. It depends on the angle at which the camera is pointed at the object.

The normal case is the **normal perspective**. It is shot at "eye level". This perspective is common for interviews, for example.

The normal perspective is shot at "eye level"

With the **low angle**, the camera is pointed at the scene from below. This can express a certain dominance or superiority. But the opposite is also possible, for example when people in the large hall of an airport look at the scoreboard and it appears excessively large. An extreme form of under-view is the so-called **frog perspective**.

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With the **overhead view**, the camera is pointed at the scene from above. It can express helplessness, loneliness. But also an overview is possible from this perspective, for example to show a battlefield. The extreme form here is the so-called **bird's-eye view**

The post-production (post-production)

The video editing

The video editing can be a very complex thing. First you need a software with which you can cut the clips created (eg Adobe Premiere, Final Cut Pro X, Magix Video Deluxe, Vegas, etc.). Especially with larger projects, order is very important. If you have created a script, you can assign the films to the scenes when importing. But there are also other ways to do it. Start with a rough cut and refine it later. In professional editing, the most common cut is the hard cut. Use dissolves only very sparingly.

The dubbing

When dubbing, the first thing we do is to make sure that the voiceovers are mixed in a good proportion to the atmos. Sound designers make a new master track from these two parts. Then the background music and the sound effects are mixed on it. A lot can be done with music. The music sets the tone. Look at an action movie without music. The movie loses all its impact. The music adds to the suspense and conveys emotion.

Effects and animations

Effects and animations are cool, but usually also very complex to realize. The simplest are so-called keyframe animations, where an object (video, graphic, etc.) in the timeline is changed in size, position, rotation, etc. via two points.

Image credits

- Title image: René Graf
- Introduction sizes: Fotolia