# 8. Creating Narrative and Other Short Films

## Overview

More kudos to you. You now have two film projects and a lot of film exercises in your experience bank account. You will now be moving up a level where you will have the opportunity to bring together all of what you have learned so far into a longer narrative film.

In the previous units you focused on how to make shorter films. In this unit and the next you will focus on creating longer forms where your film will be five to ten minutes in length. This might not seem long but the longer the film, the more you have to do to sustain interest and continually engage the audience. Mini-films (2-minutes and under) have less of this burden because an audience is not feeling like they are wasting a bigger chunk of their time if the film is not well done.

Narrative films, whether fiction or non-fiction, are popular because they tell stories. Even if you do not want to be a “Hollywood” filmmaker learning to tell film stories will aid you in your personal and professional development. Human beings are hard-wired for storytelling. It is a primary way we make sense of the world and pass our knowledge and cultural values and traditions to others. Those who control the narratives of a society have powerful influence and impact.

Before moving ahead, view this resource:

[Watch: *7 Things to Know About Making Short Films! : FRIDAY 101*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mYnsKATCrdw)

<https://www.youtube-nocookie.com/embed/mYnsKATCrdw>

### Topics

This unit is divided into the following topics:

1. Types of Short Films
2. Film Genres
3. The Logistics for the Final Project
4. Script and Story Development
5. Creating a Scriptment

### Learning Outcomes

When you have completed this unit, you will be able to:

* Describe the different types of short films
* Define film genre and why it is important
* Determine how to approach making a film script to shoot and edit.
* Create a shooting script

### Learning Activities

Here is a checklist of learning activities you will benefit from in completing this unit. You may find it useful for planning your work.

* Log in your journal what type of film you want to work on for your final film project and why.
* Review popular short film genres.
* Follow the steps in *Story Research* section of Chapter Eight and ask and answer the questions in the *What to Look for* section. View the video selected.
* Brainstorm and develop a core story idea to pitch to the class.
* Create a scriptment with your group.

--- Begin Note (w/ icon) ---

Working through course activities will help you to meet the learning outcomes and successfully complete your assessments.

--- End Note ---

### Assessment

**Course Journal**

After completing this unit, including the learning activities, you are asked to make sure you are doing journal entries and when appropriate to share your responses with your facilitator and classmates when you meet.

Also, log in your journal what you learned from the creating and filming of your In-Camera exercise. Log what you thought about the films of your peers and what you learned from the feedback from them and your instructor.

Be sure to make a note of what films stood out and who did them. You will consult this at the end of the course when the class determines: Best Overall Film. Most Imaginative Film, Best Story, Best Cinematography, Best Editing, etc.

--- Begin Note (w/ icon) ---

Please see the Assessment section in Moodle for assignment details as well as the grading criteria.

--- End Note ---

### Resources

Here are the resources you will need to complete this unit.

* Chapter Eight of the course text
* [7 Things to Know About Making Short Films! : FRIDAY 101](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mYnsKATCrdw)
* [What Is Genre and How Is It Determined?](https://milnepublishing.geneseo.edu/exploring-movie-construction-and-production/chapter/2-what-is-genre-and-how-is-it-determined/)
* [How to Write a Short Film](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wMqIQcTMlA0)
* [Writing 101: Basic Story Structure](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F7oi_V7JXCg)
* [Poetics by Aristotle, translated by S. H. Butcher, The Internet Classics Archive](http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/poetics.mb.txt)
* [Outlines, Treatments, and Scriptments, Oh My! by Ken Miyamoto](https://screencraft.org/2018/02/27/outlines-treatments-and-scriptments-oh-my/)
* Other resources will be available online and in the course text.

## 8.1 Types of Short Films

There are three main types of short films that we can do for the project ahead:

* Classical Narrative
* Documentary
* Experimental, *Avant-Garde*, and Surreal Cinema

Most of you will probably choose the classical narrative, but you are free to do the other two with the caveat that experimental/*avant-garde* films are far more challenging than they might appear.

As a transferable skill, like in many industries and businesses, smart filmmakers look for a market before they commit too much time and money to a film project. Others of course rely on their intuition and passion. Either way, it is wise to see what those who distribute or stream and screen short films, such as festivals and competitions, look for in making their choices. Their criteria can you vet the quality of your story and its execution. See Film Shortage’s [What Type Of Short Films Do We Prefer?](https://filmshortage.com/what-we-like/)

## 8.2 Film Genres

The main films genres include:

* Drama
* Comedy
* Romance
* Action
* Thriller
* Horror
* Gangster
* Crime
* Adventure
* Westerns
* Sci-Fi
* Fantasy
* Historical
* Epic
* War
* Bio Pics (biographies)

Knowing your film genre is important because it embodies narrative patterns and expectations audiences have, and if these are not fulfilled you will lessen your impact on those watching your film. Put another way, comedies need to be funny, horror films need to induce fear, romantic films need to inspire us to love, etc. Commercially, if these basic requirements are not met it can result in financial disaster and loss of reputation. At your level it will mean your film is not as effective as it could be.

Knowing your genre will also help you develop your story and script in this and the following unit.

### 8.2.1 Activity: Planning your Final Film Project

--- Begin Learning Activity ---

Log in your journal what type of film you want to work on for your final film project and why.

Next, view this list of loglines (short one line descriptions of a film story) in various genres: [Popular Short film genres.](https://www.slideshare.net/BigBadBoobyLady/popular-short-film-genres)

Which genre appeals to you most? Why? Log this reflection and start to brainstorm genre-based story concepts.

To improve your grasp of genre consult this resource:

[What Is Genre and How Is It Determined?](https://milnepublishing.geneseo.edu/exploring-movie-construction-and-production/chapter/2-what-is-genre-and-how-is-it-determined/)

--- End Learning Activity ---

## 8.3 Logistics for the Final Film Project

This last film is a major project and will account for a lot of your grade given that it will reveal what you learned during this course. In light of this, you will need to create a strong story and the “blueprint” or script for filming it.

To save time so that you can put more of your energy into making the film, you will not have to develop a full screenplay (hence the scriptment section below) for the final project, but you are strongly encouraged to do so.

However, this does not mean you do not have to pitch a core story concept (a basic story, its genre, and hook or unique angle) to the class. Everyone will be required to do this so that you can gain more experience with your creativity and your pitching skills.

Once you have created a story concept that inspires you, pitch it to the class to see if other classmates want to join you in your project and to get feedback on it. Once you have your team in place you will then follow the process for creating a shooting script for pre-production and production.

### 8.3.1 Activity: Story Research

--- Begin Learning Activity ---

In the next activity, you’ll be asked to brainstorm and develop a core story idea to pitch to the class.

To help you do this, follow the steps in Story Research Section of Chapter Eight and ask and answer the questions in the What to Look for Section. This should prime your creative pump for the next topic. Also view this helpful resource:

[Watch: *How to Write a Short Film*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wMqIQcTMlA0)

<https://www.youtube-nocookie.com/embed/wMqIQcTMlA0>

--- End Learning Activity ---

## 8.4 Script and Story Development

Our goal in this unit is to find and create a strong story to film. As we have seen, brainstorming is a great method to help do this.

Once you have created a story concept that inspires you pitch it to the class to see if other classmates want to join you in your project.

Once you have your team in place you will then follow the process for creating a shooting script for pre-production and production.

### 8.4.1 Activity: Brainstorm and Prepare Your Pitch

--- Begin Learning Activity ---

Brainstorm either alone or with a partner and come up with a story concept to pitch to the class. The goal of this activity is to do find a compelling story and to pitch it in a way that will attract the teammates you will need to make your longer film.

***Helpful Hint:*** Sometimes a title for your film can lend lots of inspiration. Professional screenwriters and Hollywood spend a lot of time finding the right title that captures the spirit of the film and can aid in marketing. Think *Rebel Without A Cause, Slum Dog Millionaire, Vertigo, Dumb and Dumber, The Haunting, Groundhog Day, When Harry Met Sally*.

To prepare for your pitch make sure you: - Know your genre. The story above could be a comedy, a drama, thriller, or a horror film. Which genre you decide will determine the following. - Establish your main characters. - Establish the main conflict. - Escalate the conflict. - Create some of the obstacles that will have to be overcome. - Have a clear beginning, middle, and end. - Know what crew members you will need and what they will do, e.g., a screenwriter, producer, cinematographer, editor, etc.

Make sure the story is compressed, a la Aristotle’s *Poetics*, with a limited number of characters, locations, and action.

***Helpful Hint:*** Most of the short films that won or where nominated for the Academy Award for Best Live Action Short Film follow Aristotle’s idea of great drama and comedy: a few characters and locations and action that takes place over a brief amount of time. For a list of nominees and winners see: [Academy Award for Best Live Action Short Film](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academy_Award_for_Best_Live_Action_Short_Film).

Also be prepared to explain what crew members you will need and what they need to do.

Make your pitch to your classmates and then see who wants to join which team.

If your project is not chosen, that is, no one wants to work on it with you, you can still do it but know that it will be a lot of work.

#### 8.4.1.1 Guidelines for Pitching a Film Project

**Purpose of a Pitch:** To get people to work on your project, commission your project, fund your project, help with your project, distribute your project, etc. Pitches also help you to clarity what you want to do and why.

**Steps to a Good Pitch**

1. If you can, open with a teaser or dramatic statement or question.
2. Meet and greet your audience—minimum chitchat, professionals are busy, busy people.
3. Dress appropriately—relative to the audience and the project. Artists dress “artsy”; corporate people dress with business attire.
4. Project the proper persona (your personality and character)—knowledgeable, credible, trustworthy, smart, clever, etc.
5. Explain your qualifications, background, and why you are competent and the right person to do the project. If you do not have a demo reel then sell people with your passion, e.g., WHIPLASH filmmaker.
6. Give the title of the film/project—titles shape perception and expectations.
7. State the Genre—comedy, drama, documentary, etc. This also shapes perceptions and expectations. The basic concept of a comedy should make us laugh or at lease smile.
8. Give the Unique Angle or Hook of your project—what makes it stand out as something different and catchy/edgy/clever, etc. E.g., SHOE IN LOVE, a romantic comedy from the POV of a pair of cowboy boots and stilettos falling in love with each other. The special angle concept is to use foot ware as the main characters and the execution hook is to shoot POVs at foot level or from the shin down.
9. Briefly state the logline or basic concept: a one or two sentence description of the core story. E.g., a young, bored dirt farmer gets a message that he has to help rescue a faraway princes and save the universe. STAR WARS.
10. Project synopsis—succinctly tell the beginning/middle/end of your story or if a documentary the main message of your doc.
11. Summarize your end goal: to wow my audience with extraordinary nature photography or to make my audience laugh, cry, fall in love, etc.
12. Explain what you need—cast, crew, funding, etc.
13. Ask for Questions—also be open to criticism and constructive comments and feedback.
14. Gratitude—be thankful and gracious even if your project is not received well or as anticipated. Burning bridges is wrongheaded. Pitching can be a training ground for how to deal with rejection.

*Examples of Types of Montage Projects to Pitch*

The goal of your Montage Short assignment (see the syllabus) will be to explore how to make an effective montage-based film that uses picture and sound editing to convey meaning, emotion, story and/or mood.

For this project, you can:

* Create a music video where you take a song and create images that express the mood, feeling, meaning, etc. of the song.
* Find a poem, fairy tale, or passage from the Bible and “visualize” and enhance it with music and sound effects.
* Create a chase scene—someone steals something and is on the run and using music and sound effects to enhance the excitement and dynamism.
* Create a love or horror or thriller story —use can use dialogue but there must be an edited montage—a series of edited shots that convey the mood, meaning etc.
* Etc.

--- End Learning Activity ---

## 8.5 Creating a Scriptment

Our goal in this Unit is to find and create a strong story to film to shoot and edit so that it shines with excellence. The following steps will help you prepare a shooting script that will make pre-production, production, and post-production flow better.

* Create a step outline.
* Create a scriptment.

Your scriptment should be written in a way that someone who reads it should be able to visualize and hear your film.

### 8.5.1 Activity: Creating a Scriptment

--- Begin Learning Activity ---

For an overview of scriptments, consult this resource: [Outlines, Treatments, and Scriptments, Oh My!](https://screencraft.org/blog/outlines-treatments-and-scriptments-oh-my/) by Ken Miyamoto.

As you do other drafts (good writing involves a lot of re-writing) to improve your story and polish your script so that everything is clear, it is helpful to ask the following questions. (These questions are designed for a fiction narrative film, though some of them can help vet your documentary or experimental film.) You might not have answers to all of them but you should for most of them. Again the emphasis in on helping you to be clear about your project.

* Do I have the right genre?
* Do I have a hook or is there something unique and fascinating about my story? It’s special angle.
* Is the story clear? A solid beginng, middle, and end?
* Do I focus on only a few characters and limited locations?
* Are my action and conflict unified and focused?
* Does my main character have a goal?
* Is there an antagonist who or which wants to thwart that goal? (Remember, weather or a dog can be an antagonist.)
* Are their stakes or consequences for not obtaining the goal?
* Are there interesting obstacles to obtaining the goal?
* Do I have a set-up of the main character, problem, goal, and antagonist?
* Do I have some unexpected and unpredictable twists and turns in the middle section of my story?
* Is there a main conflict or battle that determines whether the main character gets his or her goal?
* Do I have a satisfying ending? (Remember not all endings have to be happy or closed. Open-ended endings are not resolved and make the audience guess, debate, and discuss what happened or might happen after).

Once you have your team and have developed the scriptment for your story, you can begin pre-production to get everything in place to film your project: e.g., cast, locations, props, gear, shooting schedule, etc.

--- End Learning Activity ---

## Summary

In this unit, you learned about:

* Types of short films
* Film Genres
* The Logistics for the Final Project
* Script and Story Development
* Creating A Scriptment

--- Begin Checking Your Learning ---

Before you move on to the next unit, you may want to check to make sure that you are able to:

* Describe the different types of short films
* Define film genre and why it is important
* Determine how to approach making a film script to shoot and edit.
* Create a shooting script.

--- End Checking Your Learning ---