# 9. Making Your Short Film

## Overview

In this unit we culminate this course as you make your final film project and bring together all you have learned so far. Congratulations. Your hard work is paying off.

Here you will get the other skills needed to make an excellent short film as you take your scriptment from the last unit and shoot and edit it.

These skills will focus on exploring how to use film coverage to create meaning, emotions, and moods.

Many of the items and techniques addressed here have been covered in the previous units. Go back to them if you need a refresher. But there are important new elements that you will learn. The important thing is not to get lost in the detail but to maintain the big picture perspective, namely, communicating what you want to say in a creative and excellent way.

Let’s dig in.

### Topics

This unit is divided into the following topics:

1. The Syntax of Film
2. The Importance and Types of Camera Coverage
3. Continuity
4. Storyboarding
5. Shot Lists
6. Casting
7. Other Types of Short Films
8. Sound Recording
9. The Final Steps
10. Guidelines for Doing and Evaluating the Final Film Project

### Learning Outcomes

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

* Define film syntax and its key terms to describe your filmmaking process.
* Describe camera coverage and contrast the types of Coverage.
* Demonstrate How To Use Continuity.
* Create Storyboards and Shot Lists.
* Demonstrate Casting Skills.
* Apply L Cuts and J Cuts.
* Evaluate the final film project.

### 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.

* Study the next section of Chapter 9 and watch the videos related to it. The selected videos for this unit are extremely important for you to understand how to make your final project. Failure to study them could jeopardize your final project.
* Please log in your journal your key takeaways from the watched videos along with your responses to specific questions.
* Storyboard the scenes from your scriptment you plan to film.
* Review Unit 7 to refresh your knowledge about what is involved in the post-production process.
* Study the guidelines and the Evaluation Criteria closely for the final project. They will help you to do well.

--- 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.

Note that entries are expected after every unit. Your journal reflections are submitted at the end of the course as part of the Journal One: Personal Journal and self assessment.

**Final Film Project**

This final short film project will account for 40% of your grade.

--- 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 8 of course text: *Digital Filmmaking: A Beginner’s Guide to Mastering the Craft,* by Ned Vankevich (e-text)
* [How to Shoot a Scene! - Film Riot](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IK2IAEO-FUI)
* [Film Blocking Tutorial — Filmmaking Techniques for Directors: Ep3](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9AGaECt9j4g)
* [FilmSkills.com - Getting the right shots and coverage](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=okphB85lfjk)
* [What Is A Master Shot?](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cz3nBkIa9K0)
* [Watch: *Match on Action technique*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eou7A-e2e4I)
* [Watch: *Match Cuts in Film Editing*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=El28XrjtcMI)
* [Watch: *Screen Direction rule*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9XOn5uxdSJc)
* [Watch: *Screen direction*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RogoUz_pk4Y)
* [Watch: *Breaking Down the 180-Degree Rule*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HinUychY3sE)
* [Watch: *The 30 Degree Rule in Filmmaking | Kaicreative | Tips*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1K8EUc98VoQ)
* [Is a Storyboard and How Do You Make One for Your Video?](https://www.wyzowl.com/what-is-a-storyboard/What)
* [Basics of Creating a Shot List](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-rzJP_5L_yQ)
* [How to Cast an ACTOR for a Low Budget Film | The Film Look](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YpCkRPqsiJ4)
* [Auditioning Actors](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x0G6n346m90)
* [Watch: *SFX Secrets: The J Cut & The L Cut*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eyH-a964kAs)
* and [Video Editing Tips: J Cut vs L Cut](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fT5rRPMnka0)

## 9.1 The Syntax of Film

The first principle of this unit will focus on film syntax, where you take the grammar of film—the types of shots, shot sizes, shot angles and height, shot framing, subject angles, etc. and order them in a way that best communicates what you want to say. This is where higher-level creativity takes place.

Filmmaking is like a language where you use the elements of grammar to make sentences. In this case, your shots to make scenes and the meaning the scenes will covey. The cumulation of sentences lead to paragraphs – the film equivalent of sequences, and the cumulation of paragraphs leads to sections (acts in film) and the cumulation of sections leads to your essay (in this case, your final film). You get the metaphor.

### 9.1.1 Activity: Read, Watch and Reflect

--- Begin Learning Activity ---

Read and study the first section of Chapter 9: The Syntax of Film. Then, before moving on to the next topic in this unit, watch the following tutorials to re-enforce the big picture. Do not forget to log in your journal your best take-aways from them.

[Watch: *How to Shoot a Scene! - Film Riot*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IK2IAEO-FUI)

<https://www.youtube-nocookie.com/embed/IK2IAEO-FUI>

[Watch: *Film Blocking Tutorial — Filmmaking Techniques for Directors: Ep3*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9AGaECt9j4g)

<https://www.youtube-nocookie.com/embed/9AGaECt9j4g>

--- End Learning Activity ---

## 9.2 The Importance and Types of Camera Coverage

Exploring and understanding camera coverage is vital for those who want to create excellent films. Coverage refers to how a scene is captured. It involves how many shots are used and their type and kind to capture a scene in a film or video production. Coverage is thus the shot material an editor or post-production team will use to assemble the scenes and sequences of a movie. Having proper coverage is critical if a scene and a film is to make sense.

The are many questions that can guide you as you break down your film script to determine what coverage to use and how to shoot a scene. (Remember a scene can be one shot such as driving to the store, or a series of shots such as someone confronting a person to get information from him or her.) Take the time to study the **Questions for Discovering Coverage** section.

Coverage can be done well or poorly. Our goal is the former.

There are two main types of general coverage: **Master Shots and Mini-Masters**. Knowing why these are important and when to use them will help guide you to the more detailed coverage and shots you will employ as as you develop the action of a scene.

Filmmaking is not a “paint by numbers” art. If you follow formulas, most likely your film will be predicable and lack freshness. This is why understanding shot progression is important. Choosing the types of shots you will use and their order will form a large part of your visual creativity in your film.

### 9.2.1 Activity: Read and Watch

--- Begin Learning Activity ---

Study the next section of Chapter 9 “The Importance and Types of Camera Coverage”. Next, watch the video [Watch: *What Is A Master Shot?*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cz3nBkIa9K0)

<https://www.youtube-nocookie.com/embed/cz3nBkIa9K0>

**Questions to Consider**

* Explain the value of why this type of shot can be beneficial as the first shot you do when you start your coverage of a scene? What is the downside of relying too much on a master shot?

--- End Learning Activity ---

## 9.3 Continuity

Continuity, or the non-distracting and motivated and smooth flow of action, is another skill set essential to the filmmaker’s took kit. Some techniques you have already studied, but others are new and important.

The following are the major techniques of continuity that you must focus on:

* Matching Action
* Directional Continuity
* Eyeline Continuity
* 180-Degree Rule
* 30-Degree Rule

Each of these individually and as a group will help immensely in creating well-constructed, well-motivated, and audience-engaging films.

### 9.3.1 Activity: Read and Watch

--- Begin Learning Activity ---

Read the Continuity section of Chapter 9.

There are many resources that can help you to understand the various parts of continuity. It might seem like a lot but it will greatly benefit you if you view the following resources.

* [Watch: *Match on Action technique*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eou7A-e2e4I)

<https://www.youtube-nocookie.com/embed/eou7A-e2e4I>

* [Watch: *Match Cuts in Film Editing*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=El28XrjtcMI)

<https://www.youtube-nocookie.com/embed/El28XrjtcMI>

* [Watch: *Screen Direction rule*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9XOn5uxdSJc)

<https://www.youtube-nocookie.com/embed/9XOn5uxdSJc>

* [Watch: *Screen direction*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RogoUz_pk4Y)

<https://www.youtube-nocookie.com/embed/RogoUz_pk4Y>

* [Watch: *Breaking Down the 180-Degree Rule*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HinUychY3sE)

<https://www.youtube-nocookie.com/embed/HinUychY3sE>

* [Watch: *The 30 Degree Rule in Filmmaking | Kaicreative | Tips*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1K8EUc98VoQ)

<https://www.youtube-nocookie.com/embed/1K8EUc98VoQ>

Do you feel you have a stronger grasp of continuity and of each the techniques addressed? If not, review the videos of those parts you do not understand.

--- End Learning Activity ---

## 9.4 Storyboarding

By now you might feel overwhelmed with camera coverage and all that it takes to shoot your story and script well. Storyboarding and storyboards can help simplify the process and make it easier to visualize what you want to do and how to do it.

It will help your scene coverage if you storyboard your shots. They do not have to be elaborate. They can be simple stick figures such as this one that shows a long shot of someone pushing or struggling against something (the context of your story will determine this).

|  |
| --- |
| Figure 9.1: Graphic Stick Figure Pushing  A graphic stick figure pushing |

The important thing is not the quality but that your storyboards make sense to you and your crew so you will know how to approach a shot and why.

At the same time, do not become a slave to your storyboard. If you discover something better or get inspired on the film set, try the new thing. For safety, shoot it the storyboard way and then the new way and decide during post-production which one will work best.

## 9.5 Shot Lists

Once you have your scriptment describing all of the action and dialogue you will film and have storyboarded your film, you can now create a shot list which will help ensure you get all the shots needed for your coverage.

It is better if your whole production team gives feedback on the shot list. Ultimately, it is the director who will make the final choice but hearing what other team members feel can help cut down on mistakes.

Study the Shot List Example in Chapter Nine to see what you need to include.

### 9.5.1 Activity: Read and Watch

--- Begin Learning Activity ---

* Read about Shot Lists in Chapter 9.
* Watch the video [Watch: *Master the Art of Shot Lists: Boost Your Filmmaking Efficiency!*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-rzJP_5L_yQ)

<https://www.youtube-nocookie.com/embed/-rzJP_5L_yQ>

--- End Learning Activity ---

## 9.6 Casting

Once you have your locations, storyboards, shot list, and schedule you are ready to cast your show. Casting is often done earlier in larger professional productions because they need to lock in busy actors. For this scale of micro or no budget filmmaking having your shooting schedule and your storyboards and shot lists can show seasoned actors that you know what you are doing and can help you land them.

This pre-production process emphasized here will also help you to know if some special skills are needed for your actors. E.g., someone who can dance, sing, play guitar, is good at soccer, etc.

Having good actors is critical to having a good film. Follow the tips and guidelines in the chapter and work hard to find the best actors you can. It will pay off a lot.

### Activity: Read, View and Listen

--- Begin Learning Activity ---

Read the Casting section in Chapter 9.

Before auditioning and casting your film, watch the video [“How to Cast an ACTOR for a No Budget Film”](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YpCkRPqsiJ4) for a simple overview of a casting process

<https://www.youtube-nocookie.com/embed/YpCkRPqsiJ4?si=IbsICPDDO42pTPbK>

For practical tips for auditioning actors watch the video [Watch: *Auditioning Actors*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x0G6n346m90)

<https://www.youtube-nocookie.com/embed/x0G6n346m90>

For detailed information regarding how to work with actors and casting for low budget films listen to this podcast:[Watch: *How to Cast a No Budget Indie Film with Casting Director Veronika Lee (Backstage Magazine)*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-DwKilT0T34)

<https://www.youtube-nocookie.com/embed/-DwKilT0T34>

--- End Learning Activity ---

## 9.7 Other Types of Films

Some of you might want to do a documentary or an experimental film. Though this course centers on classical approaches to fictional narrative film, you are free to work on such projects. It is important that you pitch such projects ahead of time to your instructor to make sure it is doable within the confines of this course.

#### 9.7.0.1 Activity: Other Types of Film

--- Begin Learning Activity ---

See the section on Other Types of Film if you want to do a documentary or experimental film and view the resources for them.

--- End Learning Activity ---

## 9.8 Sound Recording

Audio can make or break a film, especially in no-budget and low-budget filmmaking. Proper sound recording and sound editing is a course unto itself and if you want to go into filmmaking professionally you should take at least one course in this.

Study the Sound Recording section in Chapter Nine and the suggested resources to help up get better quality sound for your project.

### 9.8.1 Activity: Read and Research

--- Begin Learning Activity ---

How to capture great sound for a film without the use of professionals and professional gear is a challenge. View the three resources for this in Chapter Nine and find tutorials and instruction essays on the web that are appropriate to your cell phone and DSLR.

--- End Learning Activity ---

## 9.9 The Final Steps

Bravo. Once you have reached this stage of this Unit and the previous one you should be well-equipped to produce and film your movie.

You will then have to edit it. This section adds some new techniques that can help elevate your film project to a higher level, namely Split Edits. If you can, add this to the editing of your film, as well as L cuts and J cuts. They will make your film flow better and be more engaging and enjoyable. It might also help win you an award in the course.

### 9.9.1 Activity: Review

--- Begin Learning Activity ---

Review Unit 7 to refresh yourself about what is involved in the post-production process. If possible, add Split Edits to elevate the quality and sophistication of your final film project.

--- End Learning Activity ---

## 9.10 Guidelines for Doing and Evaluating The Final Film Project

Continuity or the non-distracting and motivated and smooth flow of action is another skill set essential to the filmmaker’s took kit.

Study these resources and practice applying them in your edited scenes especially those with dialogue or where one scene transitions into another:

[Watch: *SFX Secrets: The J Cut & The L Cut*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eyH-a964kAs)

<https://www.youtube-nocookie.com/embed/eyH-a964kAs>

[Watch: *Video Editing Tips: J Cut vs L Cut*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fT5rRPMnka0)

<https://www.youtube-nocookie.com/embed/fT5rRPMnka0>

In addition, study the *Steps to Making an Excellent Short Film* section in the chapter. It is both a good recap and a good checklist to help ensure you have the elements need to make an excellent final film.

### 9.10.1 Activity: Final Project Guidelines

--- Begin Learning Activity ---

Please study the guidelines and the Evaluation Criteria closely for the final project. They will help you to do well. This criteria closely tracks that which was used to evaluate your montages so the process should be more comfortable for you now.

* Did the film make sense and work overall?
* Did the film meet genre expectations?
* Was the story interesting? Surprising, engaging, exciting?
* Did the actors perform well?
* Did the camera coverage work? If so, why? If not, why?
* Did the editing work? If so why? If not, why?
* What stood out in a good way?
* What needed improvement?
* What did you like best about the film?
* What did you like least?
* Other comments.

--- End Learning Activity ---

## Summary

In this unit, you learned about:

* The Syntax of Film
* The Importance and Types of Coverage
* Continuity
* Storyboarding and Shot Lists
* Casting
* Sound Recording
* Other Types of Short Films
* The Final Steps
* Guidelines for Doing and Evaluating the Final Film Project

--- 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:

* Define film syntax and its key terms to describe your filmmaking process.
* Describe Camera Coverage and Contrast The Types of Coverage.
* Demonstrate How To Use Continuity.
* Create Storyboards and Shot Lists.
* Demonstrate Casting Skills.
* Apply L Cuts and J Cuts.
* Evaluate the final film project.

--- End Checking Your Learning ---