

Walk and talk

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Walk and talk is a distinctive storytelling-technique used in film and television in which a number of characters have a conversation en route. The most basic form of *walk and talk* involves a walking character that is then joined by another character. On their way to their destinations, the two talk. Variations include interruptions from other characters and *walk and talk* relay races, in which new characters join the group and one of the original characters leaves the conversation, while the remaining characters continue the walking and talking.

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Purpose

The technique is frequently used as a means of emphasizing how busy the characters are. It suggests that there is so much to do and so little time to do it in that even traveling time must be used to serve additional functions. It also serves the purposes of smoothing transitions from one location to another and adding visual interest to what might otherwise be static "talking heads" sequences. All three *Law & Order* series have used the technique to this purpose occasionally, plus all three shows in the *CSI* franchise use this frequently. Moreover, it has been used as a prominent story-enhancer in numerous episodes of *The West Wing*, *The Bill*, *House M.D.*, *Ugly Betty*, and *ER*.

The *Walk and Talk* technique is also often used as a way of combining exposition with a visual introduction to major areas (and their locations in relation to one another) that will be used in a production. Examples of this can be seen in both film (the opening conversation between Mal and Simon in *Serenity*) and television (the similar conversation between Sinclair and Lyta in the pilot episode of *Babylon 5*, "The Gathering"). This use of the technique is regularly seen in opening scenes in the UK series *Hollyoaks* as a way of recapping current story lines and showing how the plot streams interrelate with the characters.

Use

An early use of the technique is in the British police procedural *The Bill*, but it was arguably popularised by Thomas Schlamme, who favored the technique in *Sports Night* when working with Aaron Sorkin. Schlamme adapted it from the typical wide-angle shot of that time to a closer tight-angle shot, usually only encompassing the subjects' upper torsos. Subsequently, Schlamme used this technique heavily in the NBC show *The West Wing*, and it remains a favorite of *West Wing* creator Aaron Sorkin, who continued its use in his show, *Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip*.

In both shows, Sorkin has at times mocked his own use of the technique in character dialogue. One example of this can be found in the *West Wing* first season episode "Five Votes Down", where Josh and Sam talk while meandering around the office before Sam asks, "Where are you going?" each man then claims to have been following the other. This gag is repeated in the episode "Mandatory Minimums" when Sam and Toby are walking to breakfast and pass the restaurant by an entire block

because they were "having a good conversation." Another mocking reference to the walk-and-talk occurs in "Debate Camp" during one of the flashback sequences to their first days in the White House. Josh and Sam are looking for a meeting in room West Wing 160 and agree to prepare for the meeting while searching for the room. Sam says to Josh, "We'd better get used to having meetings in the hall from now on." Josh later says that he is going to walk around some more and see if he can "get into a pickup meeting." In "Arctic Radar", Josh's assistant Donna tries to tell him something while hurrying along behind him on his way to a meeting; he reaches the door and tells her, "You've gotta go faster next time. I'm here already." On the *West Wing* special episode "Isaac and Ishmael", an episode shot over only two weeks and presented before the official season 3 premiere just weeks after the events of September 11, Sorkin remarked that the episode included "zero walking", unlike any other *West Wing* episode.

Origin

The *walk and talk* is adapted from an earlier literary device in which the characters achieve two purposes simultaneously by traveling towards an objective while exchanging information through dialogue, as in the story "The Adventure of the Engineer's Thumb", in which Sherlock Holmes, Doctor Watson and three other characters compare differing theories while traveling by train to the scene of an earlier crime. In film (far more so than in television), it has been recognized for decades ^[*citation needed*] that an ordinary dialogue scene—in which absolutely nothing is happening, other than people talking—can be made much more interesting visually if the characters are aboard a moving vehicle with some sort of changing background visible through the windows behind them. One example of this device is the "cuckoo clock" scene in *The Third Man*, in which Orson Welles and Joseph Cotten have a conversation aboard a moving Ferris wheel, and the end of their talk occurs at its starting point.

In Television

30 Rock has mentioned walk and talks on several occasions, one of which the characters walk and talk despite not actually walking to any desired place, to which they then realise. It also occurs in an episode of NCIS, when Michael Weatherly's character, Special Agent Tony DiNozzo, is approached by an extremely attractive woman from the Seattle Police Department applying for a job. He asks her, "Can you walk and talk?" She answers the question sarcastically, as they proceed to an interrogation room.

See also

- Steadicam
- Tracking shot

References

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