

FTI
Television scriptwriting
diploma

WEEK 5

SCENES!

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- Scenes and sequences
- Screen Directions
- Some obSCENE advice.
- The Scene Breakdown.
- Writing Visually (separate lecture)
- Production Parameters (separate lecture)

Scenes and Sequences

- In film our STORY unfolds through the twists and turns of the plot as portrayed in the various SCENES of the film.
- The story is composed of the various sequences of scenes in it that are linked together to combine as the total story, which is structured into its beginning, middle and end.
- A scene is a unit of action in one location be it INT, EXT, INT/EXT or EXT/INT or set in either DAY or NIGHT.
- A sequence is a run of scenes, or a run of action in one scene, that unfolds a particular section of the story or plot.

1. Scenes

- Scenes are unified around desire, action, conflict and change
- The major components are Turning Points, Set-ups/Pay-offs, Emotional Dynamics and Choice.
- You are writing to cause an emotion, not simply describe it.
- A turning point is centred in the choice a character makes under pressure to take one action or another in the pursuit of a goal.

a. Text & Subtext

- Text is the sensory surface of the piece. What we see, what we hear, what people say and do.
- Subtext is the life under the surface - thoughts and feelings both known and unknown, hidden by behaviour.
- You must describe the surface and also create the inner world of desire, action and reaction.
- *Nothing is what it seems "If the scene is about what it is about, you're in deep shit."*
- Actors create from the inside out...the surface from the inner life.

b. Scene Analysis

- Define the conflict: who wants what and what opposes them?
- Note the opening value at stake and note it's charge, positive or negative.
- Break the scene into beats: an exchange of action/reaction in character behaviour both outwardly and inwardly.
- Note the closing value of the scene and compare it with the opening value.
- Survey the beats and locate the turning point. Locate the moment when the major gap opens between the expectation and result.

2. Sequences

- A sequence is a longer or larger unit of action with more impact than the scene.
- It is usually a combination of scenes that unfold to reveal a section of the story which jigsaws with the rest of the plot, as much as a scene is a section of the sequence.
- there are two core things to consider:
 - the composition of the sequence and
 - the transition between and within sequences.

a. Composition

- The ordering and linking of scenes
- Based on a series of principles:
 - Unity and Variety
 - Pacing
 - Rhythm and Tempo
 - Social and Personal Progression

i) Unity and Variety

Unity

- a story needs to be unified
- this means a causal connection between the inciting incident and the climax
- JAWS: because the shark killed a swimmer, the sheriff had to kill the shark.

Variety

- unity can become boring and repetitious. We don't want every scene to sound like the one previous.
- Look for the possibilities of variety of tone and approach
- Shakespeare mixes high tragedy with low comedy

ii) Pacing

- A constant level of tension, or gradually increasing becomes wearing and flat.
- The alternation between tension and relaxation allows you to build a story with a more engaging shape
- use challenge, tension, danger, fear etc., against relaxation, harmony, peace
- the variations in intensity allow you to build to a stronger climax

iii) Rhythm and Tempo

Rhythm

- Rhythm is set by the length of scenes. How long do we stay in the same place.
- Look for variations in the length of scenes and possible patterns in these variations.

Tempo

- Tempo is the level of activity within a scene via dialogue, action or a combination of these.
- Lovers pillow talk is low tempo; an argument is high tempo
- building towards a climax requires accelerated pace, shorter scenes and higher activity.

iv) Social & Personal Progression

Social Progression

- Widen the impact of character actions into society
- this means starting small but gradually allowing the actions of characters to ramify outwards into the world around them
- often implied rather than shown in short films
- this means that the problem 'grows' to have ramifications beyond itself.

Personal Progression

- If you can't go wide socially, then go deep personally to progress the story
- Drive the actions deeply into the intimate relationships and inner lives of the characters.
- As the story progresses you go deeper into the emotional, psychological, physical and moral life of the character

b) Transitions

- Hinge transitions on something in common between scenes or counter-pointed between them.
 - Character trait: bratty child/childish adult; awkward protagonist/elegant antagonist
 - An Action: chatter/silence
 - An object: desert/rainforest
 - A word: a repeated phrase from scene to scene; compliment/curse
 - Light quality: dawn/sunset; bright/dark,
 - A sound: waves/breathing;
 - An idea: child's birth/overture; painter's empty canvas/old man dying

Screen Directions

- They describe the action happening in the scene. i.e.: what we will see and only what we will see!
- We can't see thoughts; we can't tell the reader or the audience what we want them to think
- Use plain concise English.
- Read the articles on writing action from Cyber Film School on Thisone's4u2.

Some last minute scene advice

- Come in late
- Get out early
- No “how’s your father?” introductions
- Know why you are writing the scene
- Get on with the business immediately.

The scene breakdown

- This is the script written as screen directions only (no dialogue)
- It's the engine room of the writing.
- Use index card to get to it.
- Divide your treatment or storyline into the various scenes you will require
- Then note on the card what is to happen
- Write the screen directions up tightly for each scene (noting "they argue" etc)

Keep on eye on the sequence

- Know the big picture of the scene
- List the smaller pics you have to use to show the story.
- Work out the sequence of events that will flow as a consequence.
- Let's look at The Indians at Ten Sleep Canyon...