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## ***PRE-PRODUCTION: (ALMOST) THE FINAL FRONTIER!***

### **INTRODUCTION: WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO**

Ok boys and girls, here's the brief guide to making your pre-production, as promised. As you know, this will need to be finished as a first draft BEFORE you come back to school, along with the pitch. This is all your first shot at this, remember, so while it needs to be complete, you WILL be able to improve upon it before final hand in. There's lots of advice and pictures to help you along the way with your work in your text book, but here's a few more handy hints and tips for completing the work to help you along the way.

First, here's what the exam board wants you to do:

#### **'Selling an Idea – Pitch and Pre-production (30 marks)**

These two linked pieces are designed to enable an understanding of the ways in which films are created and sold. **Students will have already completed their initial research and analysis focussing on a film that they have chosen**, the following two elements of the coursework gives them the chance to explore ideas for their own film. They should work on their own with a specific target audience in mind.

**Pitch (You've already had a go at this. Your final pitch will be worth 10 marks. Make sure this is complete BEFORE you do your pre-production)**

The first task is to create a pitch for their film in order to attract potential backers who may want to help fund and produce the film.

The sales pitch should be about **150 words long and should begin with a 'log line'**. Students must have an audience in mind for your film and have a clear idea of the places in which to show it when it's finished. The pitch needs to convey a lot of information in a short time.

Students should also be aware that investors will need to be provided with a brief outline of the story and an indication of its genre. They will also want to know what kind of audience it appeals to, if it's like any other films, and what stars may be best suited to the main roles.

**Pre-production (This bit's worth 20 marks, so PLEASE make sure you have a good look at the examples in the book before you start on it. And make sure you complete this AFTER you've done your pitch.)**

Once students have completed their sales pitches they will be able to choose **ONE** of the following pre-production options based on the film they have outlined in the pitch:

- ★ Write a **short script** for the opening scene for the film (approx. 500 words)
- ★ Create a **storyboard** of approximately 20 frames for a key sequence for the film
- ★ Produce digitally a design for **a front page and contents page** for a new film magazine, featuring the new film
- ★ Produce a **marketing campaign** for the film ( **at least four items**)'

(from WJEC Teacher's Guide : GCSE FILM STUDIES)

### WRITING A SCRIPT (500 words.)

Here's what a **script for a play** looks like:

Notice that the **scene number** is written at the top. A description of the **setting** is separate from the description of the **action**.

The **scene description** is centre and right, while the **action** is centred.

Notice that **names** are always in capital letters and centred (the same as in screenplays and film scripts.)

The **action** is in brackets, and separate from the **dialogue**, which is on the left side.

Notice the **action** is in capital letters, like the **character names**.

This is a **lighting direction**. You'll notice instead a transition when you're looking at a film script.

SCENE ONE.

DR. JUDITH BROWNE's consulting room in a New York Health Center. There is a main door to the reception area of the practice and a back door. It is a post-war building, with Victorian trimmings around the main door and the frames. This play goes further in describing the setting.

(A SILENCE.)

JUDITH

I have something to tell you.

ROBERT

But...

JUDITH

I love you.

(ROBERT takes a breath to speak but JUDITH stops him.)

ROBERT

Judith.

JUDITH

Oh, what you must think?

ROBERT

Come on, now.

JUDITH

It's true. I can't help it. I know you should never become involved with a patient.

ROBERT

Judith, I love you too.

(She looks at him her mouth open a little. For a moment she is lost.

A SILENCE.

FADE TO BLACK.

Here's what a **script for a film** looks like:

The scene begins with the scene number (sometimes written on both sides of the page) and the scene heading or slugline. This is an at-a-glance guide to the scene containing four pieces of information - scene number, interior or exterior, location, day, night or evening.

54. EXT. SEPTEMBER 1998. A BUSTLING STREET, THE HEART OF NEW DELHI. EARLY AFTERNOON. 54

M.L.S. A car makes its way slowly along the dirt-track road towards the camera, avoiding the potholes, cows, market traders and children crossing aimlessly. The scene is filled with colour and noise. MELISSA and CHRISTA are in the car. CHRISTA is driving. MELISSA has a piece of paper on her lap, and a photograph; she has seen the photograph before, but not the paper. The names on the back of the photograph match the names on the paper.

54a. INT. CHRISTA'S CAR 54a

CU, MELISSA leaning on the window, CHRISTA driving.

MELISSA  
You're going the wrong way.

CHRISTA  
(shaking her head)  
I'm not. We're not finished here.

CU, MELISSA.

MELISSA  
(angrily)  
I told you, I'm not going there. There's nothing left for us now. We know what he came for, he lied to us. Stop the car.

CU, CHRISTA.

CHRISTA  
(She points to what MELISSA is holding)  
I will not. He's our brother. Look.

CU, MELISSA, looking at the papers.

A brief description of the location.

The first time we see a character s/he is described: name (if known) age, appearance and, if necessary, physical description. Christa and Melissa are not so detailed because they have been introduced earlier in the script. Character names are always typed in capitals.

Notice there is a CU (close-up) direction at the start of the action. The scene relies heavily on close-ups, but you should try to use a variety of shot types in your sequence IF POSSIBLE.

If you want to emphasis the way a line is delivered, it appears centralised and in brackets before the dialogue. Keep these notes to a minimum.

Dialogue begins at the end of a very wide (approx. 2 inches) left-hand margin.

You should show when the camera changes shot. The simplest transition to use is a 'cut to', although you could use fades in and out, swirls and whirls, or swipes. Most film makers keep it simple.

We've already had a look at some scripts in class, but if you'd like to explore some more, have a look at [www.script-o-rama.com](http://www.script-o-rama.com), and go to the 'film scripts' section (you can find it in the table on the left of the home page.) You will notice that not all scripts are laid out quite in the same way or with all the features given here; script-writing isn't set in stone. Remember, it's very important that you remember you're writing a script for FILM, NOT for theatre.

Your writing should include include character(s), themes, settings and a significant narrative event, and while the examiner doesn't expect a professionally laid-out script, they will be expecting you to use basic cinematic elements such as

- ★ camera distance
- ★ angles and
- ★ direction.

Have a look at the example below. Notice that it contains VERY LITTLE DIALOGUE, which, considering you only have 500 words to play with:

1.EXT. 1963, LONDON - A RANDOM STREET. DAY.

1

Black and white with shifting colour glazed over the top - sometimes blue, then green, then purple, then pink. It's somewhere to go shopping - lots of fashionable, beautiful, young things rushing past. Traffic sounds and cars.

CUT TO:

CAMERA TRACKS ALONG THE STREET.

Shop fronts - Carnaby Street; closer on the beautiful young things and the shops they're passing by.

CUT TO:

SLOW MOTION.

Still the noise as background, horns beeping, a screech of wheels, shouting, a police whistle blowing.

ZOOM IN TO:

MEDIUM MID-LEVEL SHOT

A young woman. She moves slowly through the now too-fast moving crowd. She wears a beige coat, tied around a tiny waist, and one-strap court shoes. Still at a distance, we see and hear her walking. Small steps.

ZOOM IN TO:

CLOSE UP.

The young woman, ESTELLA, 20 years old. She is beautiful, petite, Asian, hair part-beehive, part falling down her back, long and dark. Huge eyes, heavily made up. Pale lips make her skin appear darker. She has a slightly vacant look about her as she stops, and smiles as she looks up to the right. 'Lucky Star' by Basement Jaxx starts playing in the background (soundtrack only). Not vacant - remembering. The camera pans 360 degrees around her, the colour stops on yellow.

The short section above is an example of an A Level A-grade opening sequence. It uses 221 words. There is no dialogue, but does give clear ideas about setting, character, a soundtrack and the kind of narrative we're about to see. Opening and ending sequences are often the easiest to write, and don't have to rely on dialogue as heavily as the bits in-between. You may find this to your advantage, as dialogue is probably the most difficult part of a scene to get absolutely right.

If you DO decide to write dialogue for your characters, however, it's a good idea to keep the following points in mind:

- ★ The impression the character creates (their appearance);
- ★ Their attitude (personality, temperament);
- ★ The world they inhabit (where and how they live).

Does your character's 'voice' match their... character? Can you 'hear' them speaking, or, when you read their dialogue, can you imagine them? If not, you need to rethink your dialogue.

Phil Parker, in *The Art and Science of Screenwriting*, provides some pointers on good dialogue in a screenplay:

1. It has a clear dramatic function (e.g. it moves the story forward, reveals character).
2. It relates to the visual aspect of the moment (it should relate in some way to what we see on screen).
3. It is character-specific (a well-established test of this is to cover up the names in a screenplay and see if it is still clear who is speaking).
4. It is economical (in a realistic sequence, dialogue should be short and to the point).
5. It reflects the style of the narrative (the way that every character speaks should 'fit' the world they inhabit and should add to the rhythm and pace of the script).
6. It delivers only what the action and visuals cannot - VERY IMPORTANT! IF IT CAN BE DONE WITH ACTION, DON'T USE DIALOGUE.
7. It is speech, not prose (it should convey real speech, even though it will always be more structured than when we just speak).

If you ARE going to write dialogue, think about these questions about your characters:

- ★ How do they talk?
- ★ Do they have any mannerisms or verbal tics?
- ★ How might they avoid saying what they want to say?
- ★ How might they try to imply particular meanings?
- ★ What do they do with their bodies?
- ★ Where are they? Can their conversations play 'against the grain' of the setting for dramatic effect?

AND THEN, FINALLY, when you have written the first draft of your scene consider the following:

- ★ Is it clear who the main character is?
- ★ What is the difference between the beginning of the scene and the end?
- ★ How has the condition of the main character changed by the end of the scene? Did they start powerful or happy and end up weak or sad? Or vice versa? If the condition of the main character does not change, what is the point of the scene?

That's about it as far as screenplays and film scripts are concerned for now. If you're really keen to know more, get hold of *Screenwriting for Dummies*, which isn't for dummies at all, but has a whole wealth of info about what to do if you're interested in furthering your career as a film writer.