

MAKE IT YOUR STORY

WRITING

IN THIS GUIDE

THE IDEA

You won't get very far without one of these.

THE HERO

How do you take your idea and make it work for a film?

THE STRUCTURE

To be a story, you'll need a beginning, a middle, and an end.

OUTLINE

Get your story out on paper.

SCRIPT

Put your story in a format that everyone can use to make your film happen.



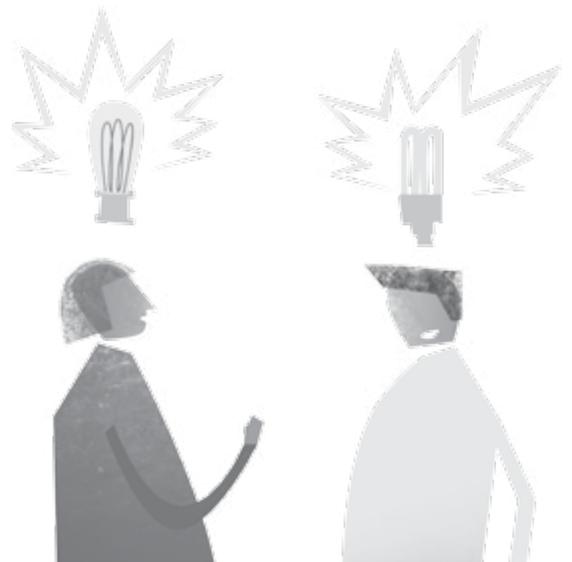
THE IDEA

To build a story, you need an idea. The best way to come up with ideas is to collaborate. Find some people you get along with and start throwing around ideas. It's your film, it can be whatever you want. You could make a love story set in a bank. Or you could make a zombie sock puppet invasion.

The idea phase is a chance to explore pretty much anything - so don't get negative about any ideas

put forward. Let your imaginations run wild for a bit, and let the best idea win, no matter where it comes from.

Eventually you'll need to settle on one idea. It's tempting to try and cram a whole bunch of different ideas into one film, but it's important to pick one thing and run with that. Your leftover ideas aren't wasted, you can keep those for another film.



THE HERO

To make a story, you need a hero. We call the main character in a story the protagonist. The protagonist is the one that drives the story forward. Based on your story idea, who is the protagonist? Finding them is the first step. But you haven't got a story yet.

A PROTAGONIST MUST:

01. have a goal
02. have an obstacle stopping them from reaching the goal
03. put themselves at risk to achieve the goal

Protagonist: the hero or lead character of the story.

Antagonist: the villain or adversary of the hero.



That's how you get an audience engaged. People love to watch characters work to achieve their goals, but it's only exciting if they might fail miserably.

For example, in *Pirates of the Caribbean*, Captain Jack Sparrow desperately wants his ship - the *Black Pearl*. Everything he does - whether it's breaking out of prison, stealing another ship, or bargaining with his enemy - is part of an attempt to get it back, and at every point he's putting himself at risk.

But it's not just adventure movies - every story needs a goal, obstacle, and risk. For example, you might have a love story about Jenna and Tom. Jenna wants Tom (goal), but Tom doesn't notice her because she's shy (obstacle). To get Tom's attention, Jenna's going to sing at a school concert, despite never having sung in front of anyone before (risk).

It could be as simple as a dog wanting to get a treat without getting into trouble. Can he reach the biscuit (goal) up on the kitchen bench (obstacle) without his owner seeing him and putting him outside (risk)?



Think of your favourite movie. Who is the protagonist? What do they want? What's stopping them?

Now, imagine if we never found out if Luke Skywalker faced Darth Vader, or whether or not Frodo finally managed to cast the One Ring into the fires of Mordor. We'd be pretty annoyed. By the end of your story, the protagonist must succeed or fail.

As the storyteller, it's up to you which happens.

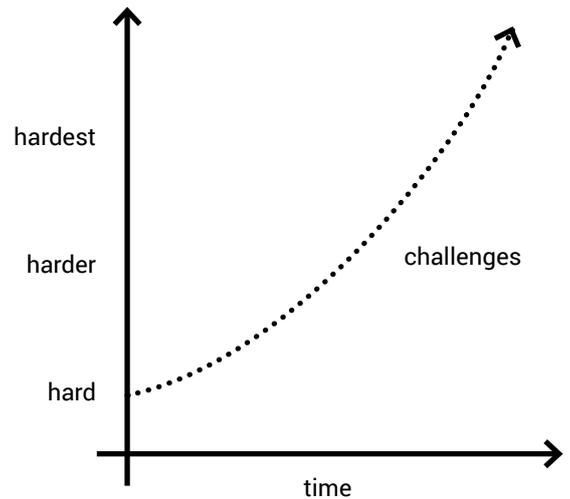
THE STRUCTURE

Every story needs a beginning, a middle, and an end.

In the beginning, you need to quickly set up your protagonist, their goal, and the obstacle. You'll lose your audience if they don't understand why they're watching your film.

In the middle, your protagonist will put themselves at risk to achieve the goal. But the obstacle will only get bigger, or the risk far worse. That's called **escalation**. You should always make sure things in your story get harder for your characters, not easier.

At the end, your protagonist will either achieve their goal, or fail. How it ends is up to you, but you **must** finish what you started at the beginning of the film. Don't let another character suddenly enter and save the day. Your protagonist is the one the audience is paying attention to - if you make someone else the hero, you'll just annoy them.



OUTLINE

By now you'll have a protagonist with their goal, and you'll know the beginning, middle and end of your story. Doing an **outline** helps you make sure your whole story is there. You can write this as point form - just list off the things that happen in your story. Or, you could write it like you would a normal written story. It can be as simple or as detailed as you like. The point is just to get your story out on paper, to use as a basis for your script.

SCRIPT

When your outline is finished, one thing remains: the script itself.

The script will be used by everyone else involved in the production as the blueprint for the film. The director will choose the shots based on the scenes and action you write. The actors will play their characters based on your descriptions and choices of dialogue.

It can be extremely detailed or quite simple, as long as the story and character is on the page.

When you write your script, you need to think visually. Your audience won't get to see the script, so only write things they'll see in the film. Don't write descriptions about what your characters are thinking, come up with ways of showing what they're thinking. For example, instead of saying a character misses their dog, you can have them look at a picture of their dog and sigh.

Writing your film in the established script format will help you see roughly how long your film will be.

1 SCRIPTED PAGE IS APPROXIMATELY 1 MINUTE OF SCREEN TIME.

Using this as a guide will help you keep your film to the time limit.

Here is an outline of a magnificent story. As you read it, see if you can identify the protagonist, the goal, the obstacle, and where the protagonist puts themselves at risk.

Kate grasped the sword, but could not pull it from the stone. "C'mon" she said, pleadingly as another drag-lephant (like a dragon crossed with an elephant) readied to charge at her.

With no where to run, Kate continued to battle with the imprisoned blade but the stubborn sword would not budge. The Drag-lephant charged and Kate made a final attempt at wrenching the sword free, but with the beast mere metres away she held out the palm of her hand. "Stop!" Kate demanded. The Drag-lephant dug it's talon crested hooves into the sand and came to a grinding halt. Calmly, Kate said "Look, I would really like to do battle with you but I can't get this sword out of this dumb stone, can we do this another time?"

The beast was stunned, it exhaled smoke and ash from its large nostrils, turned and walked away.

Kate bolted upright in her bed, it was all a dream. Her alarm clock was sounding, it was morning and time to get ready for school.

THE END

Now, here is a scripted version of that exact scene, you can use this example as a basic map if you choose to script your outline before shooting.

Short for exterior, EXT. if outside location / INT. if inside location

1

Where is the scene? A Kitchen? Park?

EXT. DESERT - DAY

What time is it? Day or night?

Action: this describes everything the camera must see in your story. Notice how action is always in present, not past, tense.

KATE, a small fifteen year old girl, stands before the sword in the stone. Her hands grasp the sword's hilt.

A DRAG-LAPHENT, a cross between a dragon and a elephant, stares at her, preparing to charge.

Kate pulls on the sword but it does not move.

KATE (pleading)
"C'mon!"

Character's name, centred and in capitals.

Dialogue: what the character says, and how it's said.

Kate looks around her, looking for somewhere to hide. There's nothing.

The Drag-lephant charges.

Kate pulls at the sword with all her strength but it won't budge.

The beast is bearing down on her.

Kate tries one final time to retrieve the sword. The Drag-lephant is now mere metres away.

Kate stops trying to free the sword, and holds out the palm of her hand.

KATE (CONT'D)
(demanding)
"Stop!"

The Drag-lephant digs its talon crested hooves in to the sand and comes to a GRINDING halt, right in front of Kate's hand.

KATE (CONT'D)
(calmly)
"Look, I would really like to do battle with you but I can't get this sword out of this dumb stone, can we do this another time?"

Capitals within Action for sound, i.e if a balloon POPS or a book is SLAMMED shut.

The beast is stunned. It exhales ash and smoke from its flared nostrils, turns and walks away.

2

INT. KATE'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Changed location means new scene. Now we are interior, and it's Kate's bedroom, in the morning.

An alarm clock BEEPS. A school uniform hangs over a chair.

Kate bolts upright in bed.

Visual storytelling - showing the uniform in the scene will tell the audience that it's a school day.

FADE OUT



SUMMARY

Story is the most important element of filmmaking. You should now have all the tools you need to get started building your own.

01. **Brainstorm an idea**
 02. **Pick a protagonist**
 03. **Give them a goal and obstacle**
 04. **Put them at risk**
 05. **Form a beginning, middle and end**
 06. **Put your story together in an outline**
 07. **Write your script**
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To find more filmmaking information, resources and helpful links on the MyState Student Film Festival website: mystatefilmfestival.com.au and on our Facebook page: facebook.com/mystatefilmfestival