Writing for Film: Film Scripts 101

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Introduction

In recent years, the Dominican Republic has produced a growing number of films of varying quality, but with undeniable economic success. The sudden interest on the part of artists, producers, writers and directors to contribute to the success of the local film industry has been supported by a parallel level of curiosity on the part of the public, anxious to see the films and to identify with their own country's issues.

It is an interesting detail to note that the majority of people getting involved in this spontaneous Dominican film boom happen to be people who have little or no formal film education and are in fact participating in the process in an intuitive fashion or are depending on what they know from having worked in other areas of the audiovisual industry such as theater or television. Previous experience in these related areas, a love of the seventh art, combined with the unique intuition of talented individuals have provided a series of commercial films that possess excellent technical quality. With respect to the conceptualization of the stories and narrative structure, nevertheless, there is a level of disorientation and improvisation that makes it evident that young, immature writers are involved in the process, and that detracts from the productions.

Participants

This seminar is being offered to all individuals interested in writing for film, but it will also be useful for people involved in other related areas of industry such as:

- Students of Advertising

- Creative artists/writers at Ad agencies

- Writers

- Television producers

- Actors

College or high school students can equally participate in the course. However, the course is only open to individuals who are at least fifteen years of age at the time of registration.

The Program

The seminar *Write for film,* is an intensive work program that can be put toward a degree at Universidad Iberoamericana (UNIBE). In other words, it is a rigorous academic program that carries prestigious accreditation upon completion. Participants should know that they are taking a

university level course and that, in their capacity as students, they must accept and complete all responsibilities and assignments as part of the program.

The degree combines two courses in one. The work program is made up of the following modules: "Literary workshop for filmmakers" and "Basic format of the film script." The first module never actually comes to an end. Beginning in the fourth week, it is combined with the second module and they both end at the same time.

The total length of the seminar is **72 hours** of work with **two meetings per week**: Monday from 5:00 to 8:00 pm and Saturdays from 2:00 to 5:00 pm. That schedule is open for modification to accommodate the needs of the *majority* of participants.

Activities and films

With the goal of illustrating the theoretical points discussed in class, in both modules, we will show a series of films, only on Saturdays. The film scripts will be available to the participants, in keeping with the assigned activity; on other occasions, participants will write a screenplay after seeing the film. These are the films included in the program:

- Close Encounters

- Raiders of the Lost Ark

- The Exorcist

- Citizen Kane

- 2001: Space Odyssey

- Unforgiven

- The Sixth Sense

- Alien

- Total Recall

- The Godfather

- Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind

- Dog Day Afternoon

- Chinatown

The participation of important personalities from the world of film will also share their views with participants and offer master classes.

The work

Participants in this program are expected to write and present a screenplay in which they work on an initial idea and incorporate it into the language of film and into a visual format previously discussed in class.

Also, they will describe in detail the two modules and their respective syllabi.

Literary workshop for filmmakers

The goal of the workshop is to provide the necessary technical and narrative sensibilities to tell a well-rounded story. The workshop will converge with the second module *Basic format of the film script.* From the beginning, participants will work on an original idea and will be refining it according to what we discuss in class and what is on the syllabus. There will also be short lectures and exemplary fragments that illustrate the topics of the course.

Topics

- The myth of the hero in the history of the narrative.

- The original idea: How do I know if it's a good idea? How do I invent one? Myths of inspiration.

- Characters

- Action

- Twists

- How to begin a story? Opening lines

- The end: know where we're going

- The connecting thread

- The narrative angle

- The atmosphere

- Controlling information

    o Hints

    o Distract and confuse

    o Anticipate

    o Turn of events

    o Surprise ending

Basic format of the film script

The most important component of this seminar to be directed toward students, writers, advertising creative writers/producers, film industry and television workers, film lovers and the general public is contained in the *Basic Format of the Film Script*. The main goal of this module is to show participants how to acquire the necessary knowledge to write a film script.

Topics

- Transform the idea into a screenplay

- Elements of a screenplay

- The structure of three acts

- The first 10 minutes

- Narrative turns

- The golden rule: 10, 30, 90

- Development or evolution of main character

- The conflict

- The resolution

- Scenes

    o General rules

    o Location

    o Time

- Instructions

    o General rules

    o Characters

    o Identification of characters

    o Capital letters

- The dialogue

    o General rules

    o Names

- o Dialogue

- o Use of the parenthetic

- Transitions

  - o General rules

  - o Scenes, sequences and transitions

- Refine the narrative

- Slug lines

- Master copy

- Slug lines functions

  - o Return to a scene

  - o Establish

  - o Insert

  - o Voice-overs

- Slug lines visuals

  - o Point of views

  - o Series of takes

  - o Inserts

  - o Sub-divide a scene

  - o Sub-divide a space

- Slug lines non-visuals

  - o Critical sounds

  - o To emphasize something dramatic

  - o To indicate a lapse of time

- Special situations

  - o Parallel action

  - o Telephone conversations

  - o Car scenes

- o   Televised or projected images

- o   Flashbacks

- o   Unusual beginnings

- o   Unusual effects

- o   Unusual introduction of a character

- o   Appearance and behavior of a character

- o   Dreams and fantasies

- o   Material written on the screen

- o   Emblems and signs

- o   General usage footage

- o   Other languages

- • Common errors

  - o   To confuse real time with screen time

  - o   To confuse the title of the scene with the slug line

  - o   To confuse locations

  - o   To improperly insert images

  - o   Confusing cuts

  - o   Use of mistaken format for a series of takes

- • Errors in instruction

  - o   To write in past time

  - o   Illogical phrases

  - o   Illogical actions

  - o   Abuse of capital letters

  - o   Providing unverifiable information

  - o   Premature descriptions

  - o   Overly-describe a basic activity

  - o   Forget an important description

- Introduce too many characters too quickly

- Introduce a character incorrectly

- Not clarify who is in the scene

- Forget to remove a character from a scene

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