



## UNIT 6: SHOOTING YOUR FILM

Having used film to better understand literature and having used literature to better create film, students are now ready to MAKE A FILM. After the last five units, students are now well prepared for the responsibility and undertaking of creating a film inspired by literature.

### **Objective:**

To create a film (from development through post-production) based on or inspired by a literary work

### **The Process:**

The process of filmmaking breaks down into five basic stages:

#### **1. Development**

- The writing and revising of the film treatment
- The writing and revising of the script
- Putting a crew together
- Casting the actors
- Creating a production timeline

#### **2. Pre-production**

- Scouting locations
- Securing and testing the camera(s)
- Choosing and preparing lights and all other equipment
- Creating storyboards
- Costuming the film
- Selecting props
- Setting a shoot schedule

#### **3. Production**

- SHOOT THE FILM

#### **4. Post-production**

- Transferring the video to a computer for editing
- Editing the video
- Dubbing a music track
- Adding titles and end credits

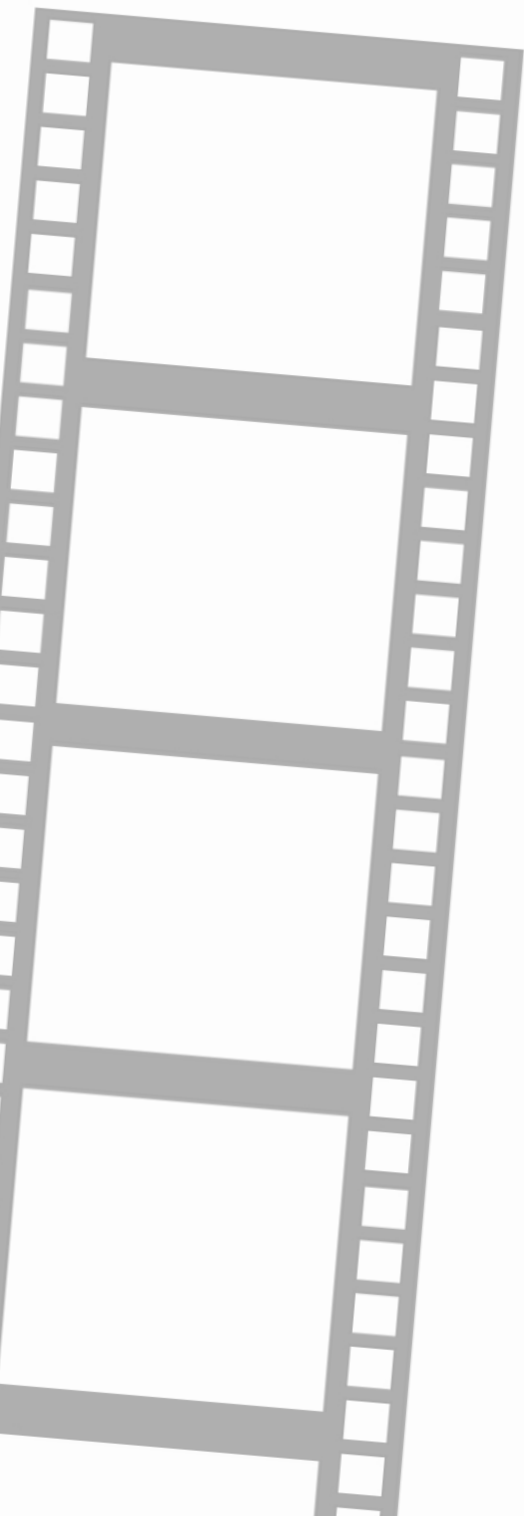


**5. Distribution**

- Transferring the final version to a DVD or VHS tape for showing or for finding appropriate Web sites to host the film

Rather than containing specific lessons, this unit will consist of several steps that will give the students the guidance they will need to plan, shoot, edit, and show their films.

## UNIT 6: STAGE 1 DEVELOPMENT



In the previous lesson, each student wrote a treatment for a literary-based film and then pitched that idea to the entire class. To select the films either:

- Organize the class into several film crews and create 4-5 films. Use the evaluation sheets to select the films that the class feels would be the most "film-able." This is the place to eliminate any films that are too ambitious, too controversial, or too simplistic. Facilitate the class decision-making process. Help students take charge of their own learning while maintaining some control over the situation.
- Be truly democratic (and a bit risky) and let the class decide entirely on their own which films they want to shoot.

*The option DOES exist to have each student create his or her own film. In this case, use the class assessments to give each student individual feedback before he/she begins shooting. OR, alternatively, the class could just choose one film that they will all work on together as a class.*

NOTE: Plan ahead for a Film Festival of several days where students can proudly present their films at the conclusion of this project.

Once the film treatments have been selected, create several film crews. Distribute the workload and delegate tasks. While a film could be made with as few as one or two people (+ actors), for a classroom project suggest about five roles. Here's a sample of how that could break down:

### 1. SCREENWRITER

The screenwriter fleshes out the treatment into several scenes, writes the dialogue, and decides on the camera angles and camera movement.

### 2. DIRECTOR

The director is most responsible for the look of the film. He or she supervises all members of the crew, creates storyboards, prepares a shot list for each scene from the script, casts the actors, and directs the film during shooting.

### 3. CINEMATOGRAPHER

The Cinematographer operates the camera, works with the director to research appropriate settings for each scene, finds and modifies the shot for optimum lighting conditions, and finds additional video clips or still photos.

### 4. EDITOR

While the film is being shot, the editor logs the footage, describing each take that is shot. Once the filming is completed, the editor is responsible for transferring the video to a computer, learning and operating the editing software, and determining the final edits of the film.

### 5. PRODUCER

In professional films, the producer is the money person. Here, the producer is responsible for the budget as well as securing and maintaining the camera and other equipment, "hiring" the cast, getting release forms from the cast, arranging all screenings, and gaining the largest possible audience for the film.

The person with the largest responsibility during the development phase is the screenwriter. His or her role is to take the treatment, break it down into several workable scenes, write the dialogue, and dictate the envisioned camera shots and movements. Impatient students will be tempted to skip this phase, grab a camera, and see what happens. But it is essential that they create a "blueprint" that will guide them when they get on location. While writing the script could be collaborative, the final version should ultimately be the responsibility of one person.

There are several online sources for scripts. The following is an early draft of "10 Things I Hate About You," the adaptation of William Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*. It was written by the film's screenwriters, Karen McCullah Lutz and Kirsten Smith. They also co-wrote the screenplay for the 2001 film "Legally Blonde."

More scripts can be found at <http://www.imsdb.com/scripts/>

The students should use the same format as the example below. The four basic principals in every script are:

1. SETTING
2. CHARACTERS
3. DIALOGUE
4. ACTION

Elements students can consider before working on a scene are (but are not limited to):

1. TIME OF DAY
2. CHARACTERS IN THE SCENE
3. ACTION OF THE SCENE
4. COSTUMING
5. SCENERY
6. PROPS

## **ENGLISH CLASS - DAY**

*A room full of bored seniors doodle and stare off into space while MS. BLAISE, the one-step-away-from-medication English teacher, tries to remember what she's talking about.*

### **MRS. BLAISE**

Well, then. Oh, yes. I guess that does it for our analysis of *The Old Man and the Sea*. Any other comments? *(with dread)* Kat?

*Kat, the girl we saw as we entered the school, slowly takes off her glasses and speaks up.*

### **KAT**

Why didn't we just read the Hardy Boys?

### **MRS. BLAISE**

I'm sorry?

### **KAT**

This book is about a guy and his fishing habit. Not exactly a crucial topic.

*The other students roll their eyes.*

### **KAT** *(continuing)*

Frankly, I'm baffled as to why we still revere Hemingway. He was an abusive, alcoholic misogynist who had a lot of cats.

*JOEY DORSEY, a well-muscled jock with great cheekbones, makes fun of her from his row.*

### **JOEY**

As opposed to a bitter self-righteous hag who has no friends?

*A few giggles. Kat ignores him. A practiced gesture*

**MRS. BLAISE**

That's enough, Mr. Dorsey.

*Really gets fired up now*

**KAT**

I guess the school board thinks because Hemingway's male and an asshole, he's worthy of our time

*She looks up at Ms. Blaise, who is now fighting with her pill box.*

**KAT** *(continuing)*

What about Colette? Charlotte Bronte? Simone de Beauvoir?

*Patrick, lounging in his seat in the back row, elbows a crusty-looking crony, identified by the name SCURVY, embroidered on his workshirt.*

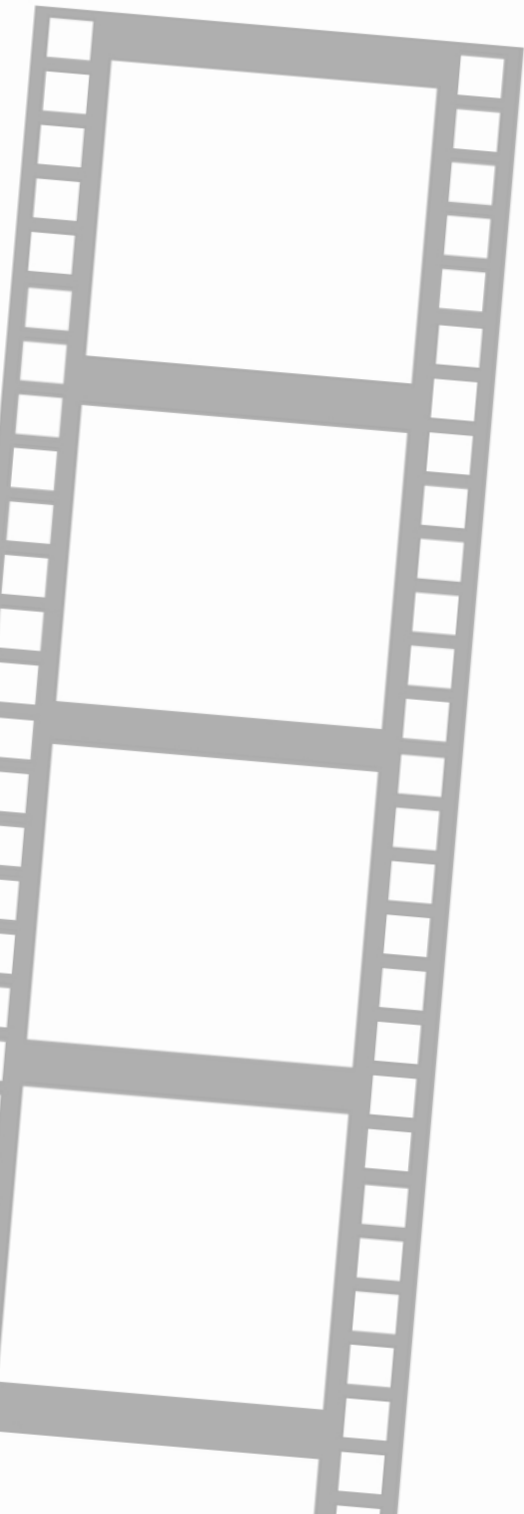
**PATRICK**

Mother Goose?

*The class titters. Kat wears an expression of intolerance*

## UNIT 6: STAGE 2

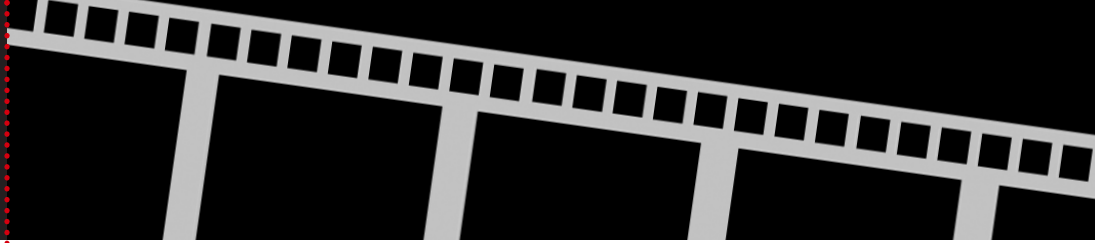
### PRE-PRODUCTION



The production phase will go much smoother if the film crew does the necessary preparation. Some of the absolutely necessary tasks are:

1. **SCOUT LOCATIONS:** Students should look for visually interesting places to shoot the film. Good locations also need to have adequate lighting and limited background sound.
2. **SECURE AND TEST A CAMERA:** Whether they borrow a school camera or use one owned by a crew member, it is essential for the "cinematographer" to get familiar with how the camera works. Cinematographers must read the camera's manual because it explains such important issues as lighting (and backlighting), manual and auto exposure, manual and auto focus, optical zoom and digital zoom, digital effects, and how to read the information in the viewfinder.
3. **WORK WITH A TRIPOD:** While there may be occasion for a handheld shot, the majority of these films need to be shot with a tripod. Even with some of the more expensive cameras that have image stabilization, a tripod will prevent the audience from getting seasick from wobbly camera movement. It's important to practice getting fluid "pan and tilt" movements with the tripod before going on location. Monopods are simpler to haul around, but they are not as stable. If neither of these is available, the camera operators should brace themselves against some large immovable object (a tree, a car, a wall) or rest the camera on a table or some other flat surface.
4. **LEARN TO FILM USING CRANE OR HIGH ANGLE SHOTS:** An easy way to get overhead shots is to shoot from a balcony, second story window, or jungle gym. These won't have the movement of a true crane shot, but they'll create an interesting effect.





5. LIGHT THE FILM: While many modern cameras claim that they're able to shoot in low light situations, the image they capture in such situations will be indistinct and the colors will be quite gray and muted. Adding artificial light will improve the shots immensely, and prevent low light situations. Encourage students to use multiple light sources. A simple way to do this is to use high-wattage bulbs. Floor lamps, which bounce light off the ceiling, work especially well. For more professional lighting, consider the three-point system described below.

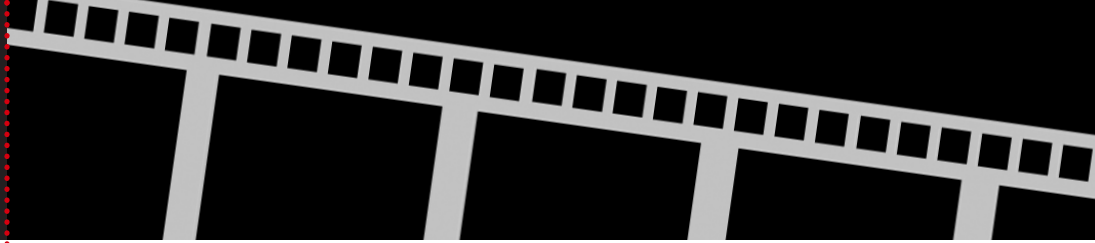
### **Three-Point System**

This system consists of a key light, a fill light, and a back light.

- The key light is the primary light in the scene, and it simulates natural light. It should be placed in front of and above the subject's head, pointing down at about a 45-degree angle.
- The fill light softens the shadows created by the key light. It shouldn't be as powerful as the key and should be placed on the opposite side of the camera from the key light, at an angle of 45 degrees from the camera-subject axis, and at about the same height as the camera.
- The back light is placed above and to the rear of the subject, so that the light does not come directly into the camera lens. It helps to outline the subject, especially the upper portion, and to separate the subject from the background.

Of course, shooting outdoors is much easier, though there can still be problems if the sun is too harsh or the shadows are too deep. The camera's auto exposure might not account for the back light and the subject's face will be totally in the dark. The camera's user manual will probably help to override the auto exposure with manual settings.

6. COSTUME AND SELECT PROPS FOR THE FILM: Two words: "Garage Sales."



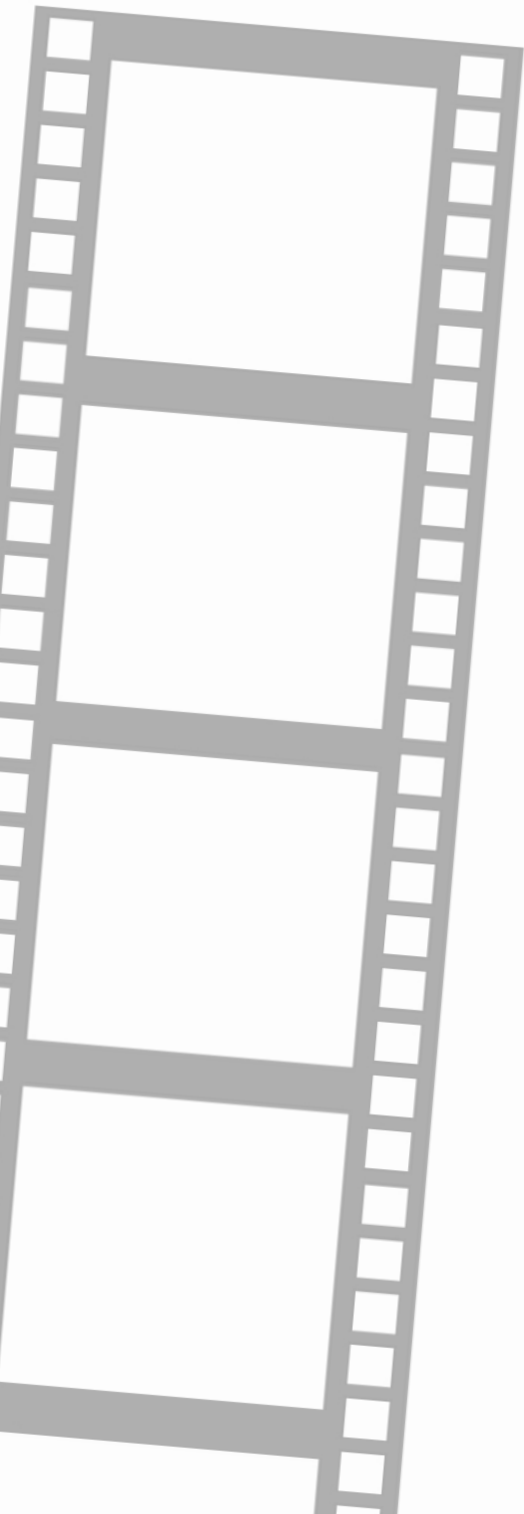
7. CREATE A STORYBOARD: Storyboards are like comic books or graphic novels. They display the different shots that make up the film and give some basic information about each shot. They tell where the action takes place, what's going on in the shot, and what angles are probably going to be used. They may also include any specific lighting that's required. The drawings in the storyboard don't need to be highly detailed; simple stick figures work just as well. (See Unit 4, Lesson 1.)

8. CREATE A SHOOTING SCHEDULE: Impress upon the class the need for a schedule that organizes the script by scenes. It is important to know in advance which scenes will be shot on which days (so they don't need to get a key actor back for another shoot later). The shooting schedule takes the script and breaks it down by locations and by days, and always refers to page numbers in the script.

9. (IF THEY'RE FEELING AMBITIOUS) LEARN HOW TO FILM USING DOLLY AND TRUCK SHOTS: Rather than rely on zoom shots, which tend to be overused in amateur films, students should learn to use dolly shots or truck shots to really capture a sense of movement. While professional dollies or wheeled tripods will most likely not be available, the crew can improvise. A skateboard, a shopping cart, a rolling office chair, a wheelchair, a bicycle, or even a baby stroller could substitute for a dolly, as long as the camera operator has a few strong (and trustworthy) friends to move the "vehicle." (Be sure that the surface is smooth. Imagine the way a shot would look if the camera was being wheeled over a lawn in a shopping cart.) These wheeled dollies could also work for a truck shot, but if the shot is on a quiet street, the rear of a van or pickup truck could also work. With all of these creative approaches, be sure to emphasize *safety*!

## UNIT 6: STAGE 3

### PRODUCTION

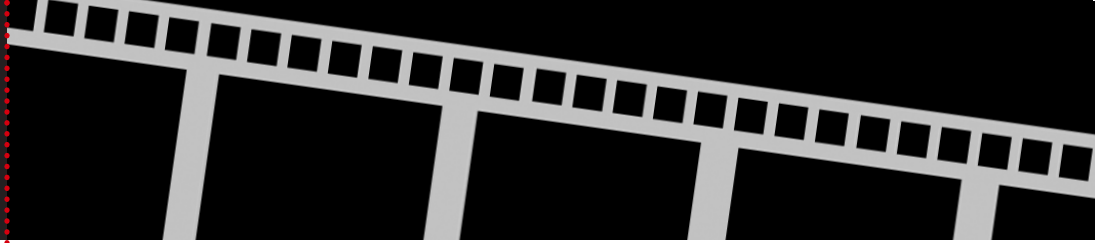


LIGHTS ... CAMERA ... ACTION! If all of the previous pre-production steps were done right, shooting the film is actually easy. The famous director Alfred Hitchcock did lots of preparation before shooting his films. He was particularly fond of creating elaborately detailed storyboards. He once said that after doing all the prep work, the entire film already existed in his head, and at that point he wasn't particularly interested in filming it. But film he did, and so must our fearless film crews.

Here are some things to ask students to think about when on location:

#### **20 Shooting Hints:**

1. Always record a few seconds before and after the shot you want. Editing needs some space to make the transitions work.
2. Use the manual focus if you can. Auto focus hunts for people or things to focus on, so if someone or something passes through the shot, it will try to focus on that, putting your subject out of focus. Auto focus also uses up a lot of battery power, so using manual focus makes your batteries last longer.
3. Whether you use manual or auto focus, make sure your subject is in focus. To be absolutely sure, zoom in on the subject, focus, and zoom out.
4. These are not your parents' home movies, so try to leave that zoom button alone. It's so easy to squeeze that button, but that's often your ticket to bad filmmaking. When you zoom in and zoom out, your audience can get nauseous and the film can look amateurish. Zoom for effect-not because the button is tempting you to. By all means use it to set up a shot when the camera's not rolling, but leave it at that. If you want to get closer to the subject, stop the camera, walk up to the subject, move to the left or right, and start shooting.
5. Use a tripod if you want a steady shot; use a table or a wall or something solid if you don't have a tripod.



6. Don't use a tripod if you want to give a shot or your entire film some energy and a sense of urgency. To keep it steady, get as close to your subject as possible and shoot with a wide angle (zoomed out) to minimize shake. Many newer and more expensive cameras have auto stabilization devices that can also help to steady handheld shots.

7. Check your white balance, especially if you are in a room with several different types of light bulbs. White balance is essentially setting what color your camera thinks is white. Some cameras have buttons for this, i.e., indoors, outdoors etc. Other cameras sort this out automatically and some allow you to set it manually. In either case, it pays to read the camera's manual.

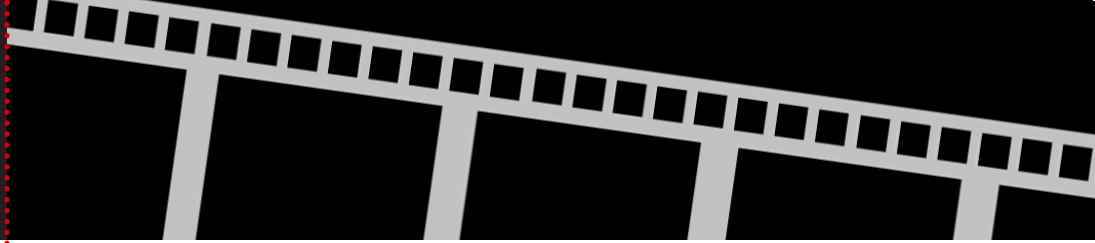
8. Avoid backlighting, which is when your subjects are standing with the sky or a window or white wall behind them. The camera says to itself, "Hey, look at all the bright light. I better set my exposure to that light." When you look at your footage, you see a silhouette of your subjects and you can hardly see their faces. The solution is rather simple. Turn yourself and your subjects around. Then use the light from the window or sky to light your subjects. Some cameras might have a backlight compensation button, but these aren't always reliable.

9. Try not to appear in your own film. Obviously, if you've got limited resources, if your actor fails to show up, or there is some other emergency, go for it rather than cancel the shoot.

10. Avoid putting your fingers in front of the lens or getting your long hair in the shot.

11. Be careful not to catch a view of yourself when shooting through glass, mirrors, or shiny objects. Use a polarizing filter to cut down on any reflection. Be sure that your and your crew's shadows aren't in the frame.

12. Don't point your camera at really bright lights, i.e., the sun



13. Pay attention to what audio you're picking up. Most cameras have headphone inputs so you can check your sound as you are shooting. Recording without checking your sound is like shooting and not looking down your viewfinder. Your ears can filter out background noise and focus in on just one voice, but your camera can't. It picks up every deep breath, squeak and footstep.

14. To get better sound, use an external microphone that plugs into your camera. If you are doing street interviews, you should use a unidirectional microphone to cut down on all background noise.

15. Keep your camera and other equipment clear of dust and dirt. Use a cover to protect them from the rain.

16. If your camera uses tape, always use the best quality tape you can afford. Be sure to keep all your takes. You may need them.

17. Always carry a fully-charged extra battery, if you can. Remember that batteries have a shorter lifespan in the cold or if you have been doing excessive zooming. If the camera has an A/C adapter, be sure to bring an extension cord and find a nearby plug.

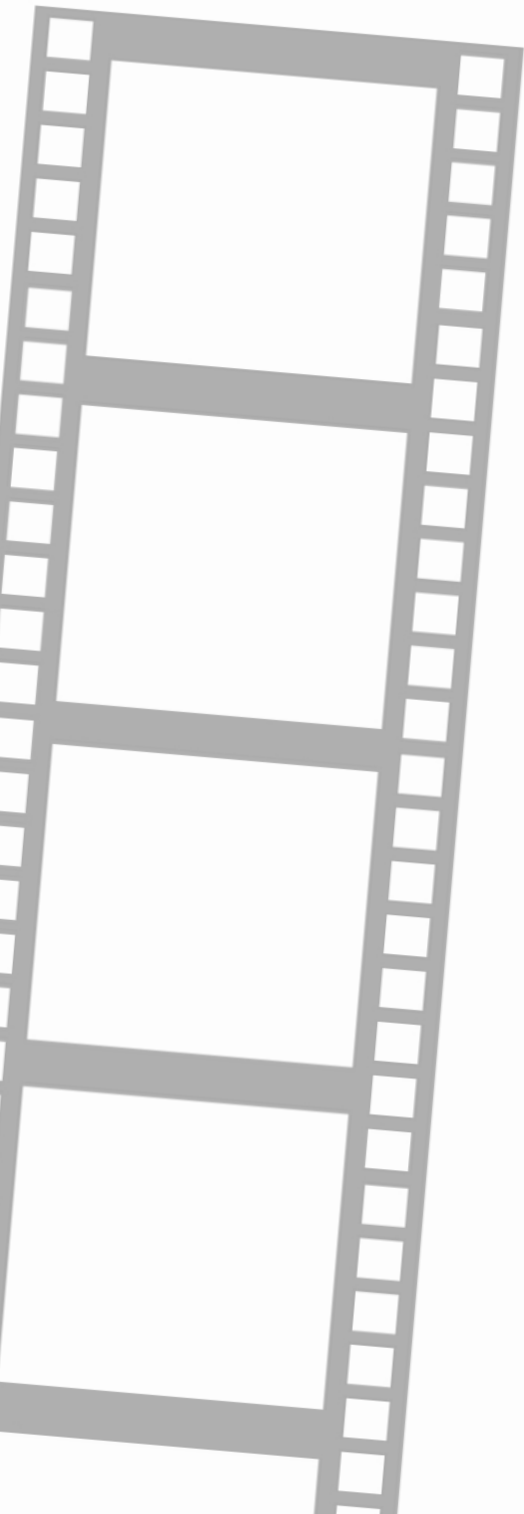
18. When you get around to editing, you might just need a certain shot, so shoot everything and don't worry about wasting tape. Tape is cheap. Shoot lots of cutaway shots, such as close-ups, reaction shots, building shots.

19. Shoot with both eyes open. It takes some practice, but it allows you to see what's going on in the viewfinder as well as around you.

20. Pay attention to what is in the background of your shot. Avoid trees growing out of people's heads or other bizarre accidents. Also, avoid backgrounds where there's visually exciting stuff going on. Your audience may pay more attention to the backdrop than to what your actor is saying or doing.

## UNIT 6: STAGE 4

### POST-PRODUCTION



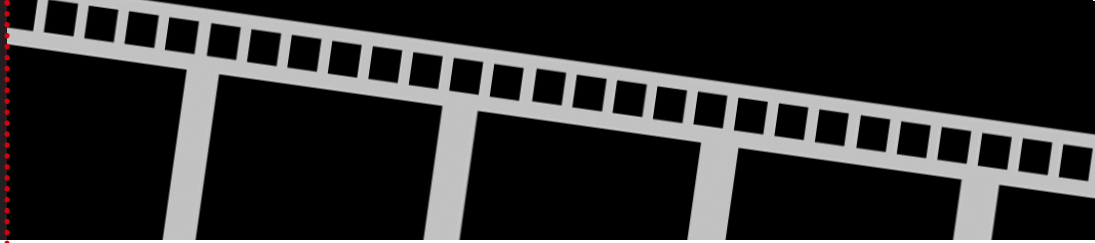
The best way to edit your film is to use editing software on a relatively powerful computer. Since computer technology changes so rapidly and new software becomes available all the time, this section will not go into too much detail about how to actually edit the video. Instead, it will give some generic guidelines that are necessary to create the final product. We suggest that the editor learn the software well before attempting to edit the final product. Most software packages even come with a tutorial. **Don't skip the tutorial.**

1. Converting and downloading to computer - This is where the camera connects to the PC or MAC and the images are downloaded into an editing program. Having shot a good amount of video, we now need to download and edit it.

2. Getting the right computer - The simple rule of thumb here is the bigger the better. Video editing works most smoothly with computers equipped with fast processors (Intel Pentium 4 or Apple's G4 or G5 are examples) and large amounts of RAM, or memory. (512 MB or more is preferred but not a strict requirement.) Slower systems can certainly still work, but the timeframes for editing the video may need to be extended. Fortunately, most recently-purchased PCs or Macs (desktops and many laptops) will be sufficient for your needs.

3. Consider an external hard drive to store these very large files. One that can hold at least 80 gigabytes (GB) of data would be a good choice.

4. Transferring to the computer - Getting what's on the tape to the hard drive- is best done via a Firewire connection (AKA i.link and IEEE 1394). Many newer computers (all computers sold by Apple in the last several years and many PCs) and most recent video cameras have Firewire capability built in. Many cameras also support USB 2.0 ports for file transfer. While less efficient at data transfer than Firewire, USB2.0 ports are more common on typical PCs than Firewire ports. If neither option is available on your editing station (computer) you will need to add that functionality by installing a Firewire card.



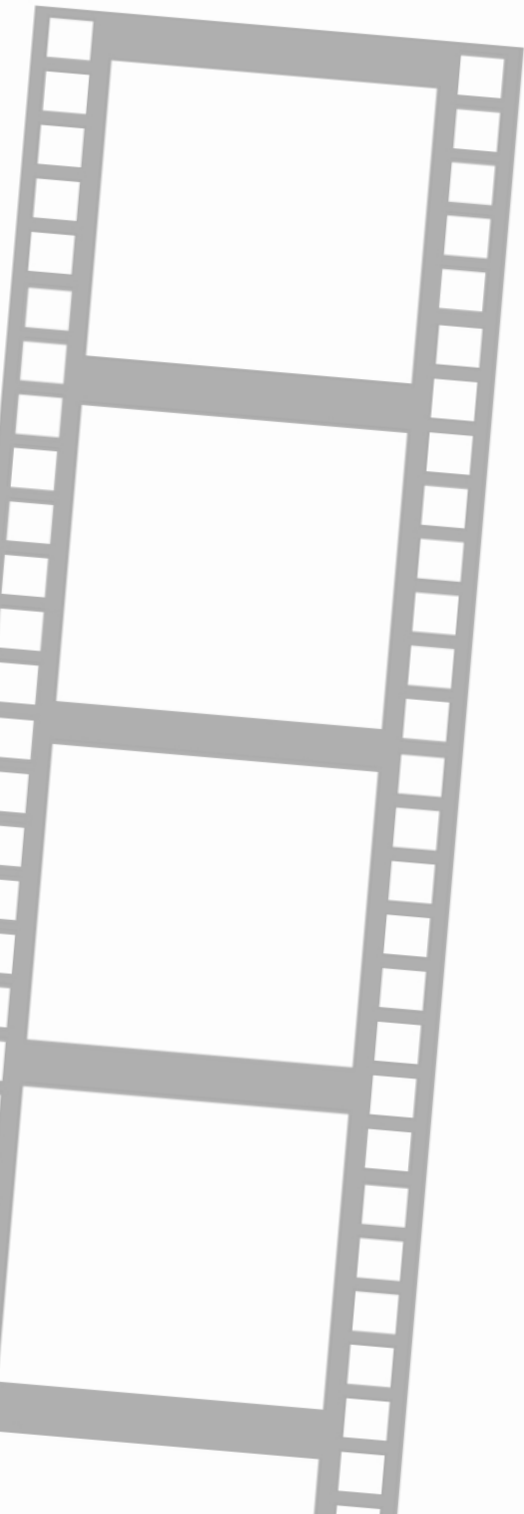
5. Capturing the images - If you are using a digital camera, this is done through the editing program. Essentially, you need to make sure that your camera is switched on and recognized by your computer and the software. The editing software will most probably have a tab to click for capturing. When this is accessed, the software will take over the controls of the camera. The software will allow you to stop/start the camera. The software may check your hard disk to see if there is enough space but most of the operation is relatively painless. If you have shot the video on 8mm, Hi8, or VHS analog, you will first need to convert your tape to a digital format.

6. At the end of this step you will have all of your digitized video stored on your computer. It may be wise to check your disk capacity to be sure you have enough space to do the editing. Online resources such as video-editing enthusiast sites may help you best define "enough" for your specific hardware/software setup.

7. Depending on the editing software you use, you will end up with a series of scenes that can then be pasted onto a timeline. Once on the timeline, the scenes can be shortened, cut, and re-pasted in different places. Then you can add additional sound or music. You can then place transitions between scenes and add titles.

## UNIT 6: STAGE 5

### DISTRIBUTION



Once the film has been edited, you may publish it in a variety of forms, depending on your distribution needs. Those forms may include DVDs, online streaming or VHS tape. Here are a few options to consider.

1. Print to Tape - A simple way to view the film is to re-connect your digital camera to your editing station once the final product is ready. Doing so, you can export the edited file back onto an appropriate tape (DV, Hi8, etc., depending on your camera). This is known as Printing to Tape. After Printing to Tape, you can connect your camera to a television for viewing.

2. DVD - If you have access to a DVD burner, this is a good option. Most modern editing and DVD production software/hardware is able to generate discs that work with the vast majority of set top (and/or computer) DVD players.

3. WMV, AVI, or QuickTime files - These are common digital video file formats. If you plan to post your videos on the web, e-mail them, or put them on a CD, you are likely to use one of these formats, depending on the software and hardware (such as PC or Mac) you use.

4. Output to VHS - Though the analog VHS format does not offer the same high-quality video or audio experience of its digital counterparts, VHS players are still in everyone's homes. So, if your goal is to make the videos accessible to the highest possible percentage of people, you may consider converting your digital files to this analog format. To do so, record the final film directly to VHS either through your VHS camera or by recording your video through a standard VHS recorder<sup>1</sup>. While similar to Print to Tape, the process may prove more complicated, as additional steps may be required, depending on your software and hardware capabilities.

<sup>1</sup>The following collection of steps is one way to consider creating a VHS version of your videos. 1. Print to Tape onto a typical DV tape in your video camera. 2. Connect your camera to a television (that is also connected to a VHS recorder). 3. Play your video. 4. While the video is playing, record a copy of it with the VHS recorder.



And now, it's show time. This is the moment students and crews have been waiting for. Here are some suggestions for how to get a wide audience:

- a. Search for online student film sites. There are new ones cropping up all the time. It's a great place to post your film and let the world see it.
- b. Look for local movie festivals and submit your video. You may get lucky.
- c. Start a school-wide film festival. Invite parents and classmates and turn the entire evening into a major event. Get local shops to donate prizes and be sure to get lots of publicity.

## Unit 6: Assessment

	1	2	3	4	your score
Creativity/ Originality	Does not express originality or creative thought.	Expresses some originality or creative thought, but does not always meet requirements.	Displays some originality or creative thought while keeping in mind the task at hand.	Displays a lot of creativity and original thought; keeps in mind task at hand but is not afraid to experiment.	
Film Fundamentals	Has difficulty demonstrating film fundamentals; film does not demonstrate facility with basic skills.	Has some difficulty demonstrating film fundamentals; film demonstrates some knowledge of basic skills.	Demonstrates confidence with film; is able to create acceptable film with this knowledge.	Demonstrates mastery of film technique; is able to use this knowledge to create exemplary works of art.	
Film Literacy	Displays little to no understanding of the visual arts.	Displays basic understanding of the visual arts through discussion and application.	Displays good understanding of the visual arts through discussion, application, and some interpretation.	Displays excellent understanding of the visual arts through discussion, application, and sound interpretation.	
Applied Knowledge	Is unable to put into practice skills and theories based on discussions, readings, and observations.	Has little ability to put into practice skills and theories based on discussions, readings, and observations.	Has some ability to put into practice skills and theories based on discussions, readings, and observations.	Has excellent ability to put into practice skills and theories based on discussions, readings, and observations.	