

SHORT FILMS - SOME THOUGHTS AND ARTICLES

From Raindance website...

A short film script can be a great calling card for a writer. Short films aren't a lesser form of cinematic storytelling. In fact writing them requires the exact same skills as writing a feature length script - though on a smaller scale. Although TV broadcast opportunities may be limited, there are more and more outlets for these opportunities. I recently read on IndieWire: "Shorts used to be this artsy thing. But now there really is this explosion in filmmaking. With all this new technology, shorts films have a lot more interest among regular people, because so many people are making them and putting them on the web. Suddenly, we're not explaining short films to people. Everybody's seen one."

Many of the best writers and directors started out with shorts. Do you know that Sacha Gervasi, the writer of "The Terminal", found his U.S agent, and then a lucrative writing gig with Dreamworks based on the strength of an extraordinary short film he wrote? It's a rarity but it happens. In any case, it's an excellent way to develop your craft and flex your writing muscles and it is much less daunting than penning a first feature if you haven't much writing experience.

There are 7 rules you should remember when writing a short film:

1. The Shorter the Better

A short film can be anything from fifteen seconds to forty five minutes in length. Make your short film script as short as possible because the shorter the short, the less costly it will be to produce. Of course, digital technology frees up filmmakers, yet time still costs money, so does feeding a hungry crew, and if you shoot too fast your short film might end up looking amateurish. It has to be cheap but shouldn't LOOK cheap! Plus, if you want to get your short into a festival, then keep it to no more than ten minutes, which is usually 7-8 pages maximum. Why? Because if your short film is longer, it will eat up a longer slot and festivals love to play as many shorts as possible! You can also create real emotion in just a few minutes.

Look at [Sebastian's Voodoo](#). It's a 4 minute animated short about a Voodoo doll who must pierce his own heart to save his friend from being impaled and it is absolutely heartbreaking.

2. Keep the Practicalities of Writing in Mind

The great thing about shorts is that they can be anything since you don't have studio execs on your tail. However, don't discard the practicalities of writing your script. I have read scripts with pages of chase-action scenes and car crashes, and many writers seem not to realize how time consuming it would be to actually shoot. In fact, see the writing of a short as an opportunity to become more aware of what each line you put down on paper implies and costs. Visions of white horses galloping in the moonlight certainly look amazing in your mind but are you sure you're good friends with a wrangler and/or a CGI specialist? If you only have access to modest resources, think small.

Apricot is a good example of short film that could have been done on a low budget (it shows such impeccable production value I doubt it was actually done on the cheap) because it deals with two people sitting at a table at a cafe yet manages to show a wide range of emotion. Along the same lines, the Asian short film **Just a Love Story** takes place almost entirely in an elevator. Write for locations that are interesting yet practical, think of access and control, and avoid remote locations requiring driving for miles.

3. Make It Visual

"Film is a visual medium". "Show, don't tell." Those are the golden rules of screenwriting the gurus keep telling us. Yet it's astonishing to see how talky most scripts are. Film is about telling stories in pictures, which is the most economical way of telling a story – and when you make a short film, economy is everything. Create visual backstories for your characters. Externalize through visual images their temperament, their profession, their status, etc. In the **Lunch Date** the posh lady polishes her fork before using it. What does it tell you about her? Note how there is no dialogue in this short film, a short film that went on to win an Academy Award for best live action short film.

4. Find Single Moments

The best short films are often a single moment that is played out, but one that has a story at its heart. What do I mean by story? I mean a conflict that has to be resolved, where there's a dilemma at stake and a choice that the protagonist has to make. Strive to add a deadline, or ticking clock. It is not necessary but it will add some tension to your short film. The short **On Time** is

a good example of a short film that meets all these conditions. It tells the story of a heart-broken young man can peek into the future and must act on it on the spot.

5. Tell a Story

You should always try to tell a compelling story. Beware of ideas that are concept-driven or just aim at breaking all the rules for the sake of breaking rules. Short films are a great opportunity to push the boundaries of what cinematic storytelling can do, yet they must still engage your audience emotionally. As a rule of thumb, unless it is extremely brief a short film should have a hero with a goal and an obstacle/antagonist in the way. Watch [I love Sarah Jane](#). It shows a bunch of teenagers in a ghost town where adults have turned into zombies, yet at the core it is a love story about a young boy who can't reach through to the older girl he loves.

6. Engage the Reader

Since you have so little time to make an impression the impact of page one is crucial, just as it is crucial to hook the reader in the first 10 pages of a feature length script. What is the world of the film? Do we root for the main character? Does the world and story of the film feel authentic? The ending is also essential as it's rare to truly feel moved at the end of a short, so work towards a meaningful, satisfying ending.

7. Beware of Cliches

There are many clichés in short films, and much navel gazing. How come everybody feels the need to write about hit men for hire, heists, people seeing themselves die, children representing innocence, incestuous relationships, etc? Avoid stereotypes unless you have a fresh slant on them. That's what *The Descendent* does. In this short film a couple of bewildered hit men actually have to kill a seemingly cute little boy and one of them gets cold feet until he realizes that the child is a supernatural being who terrifies his mother. Write what you're familiar with and what resonates with you rather than writing something you borrowed from other films. Don't shy away from small stories, short formats are the perfect vehicle for them and you won't often get the opportunity to tell small stories as a professional writer.

Last but not least, watch as many short films as possible. There is no replacement for knowing what is out there, and knowing what you as an audience (as well as a writer) think and feel about it.

Here's the link to the page on the Interweb
<http://www.raindance.org/7-rules-for-writing-short-films/>

OTHER SHORT FILM LINKS

Springboards for ideas - looking at the medium- the more you look at the more you can identify how to tell a story in the time frame, see what works and doesn't work for you.

Obviously we don't have the budget or time for some of the ambition in these but it may help as a launchpad!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9PKvgymeYVM> - pure egotism

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EhAFyaObY6U> - Great concept Selfie From Hell.

<http://iloveshortfilms.com/category/award-wining-short-films/page/2/>

<http://www.filmsshort.com/short-short-films/#.VrdDg8dvYg8> - starting points for film makers like Spike Jonze shows how you can make a stunning short film with little script. How Do They Get There/Room 8/Pixels

<http://www.indiewire.com/article/watch-this-violent-short-film-features-the-most-insane-oscar-isaac-performance-yet-20160204> - if you like Oscar Isaac

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tgOjxGjCtDM>
-early Oscar winning Steve Martin short film