

Essay

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Specialism – Post - Production

Key Question

What is the purpose of a title sequence in film and television?

Within this essay I will be exploring the importance of a title sequence in film and television. I will be delving into the history of the title sequence; the reason typography plays a significant role in the creation of a title sequence and how a title sequence sets the tone for the film you are about to watch. Exploring and learning about these areas will help me better understand what I need to do, as an editor to create a title sequence that fits the theme of the film or show I am working on. I am hoping to discover the deeper meaning of what is supposed to be included in a title sequence to make it flow correctly and look as professional as possible. Learning all of this is important to me and my chosen specialism as I will be creating my own title sequence for my portfolio, I am hoping to take everything I learn from this research and apply it to my practical work. This will also give me the opportunity to reflect on title sequences I have created in the past and allow me to understand why focusing on the smaller details can make the biggest difference, in doing that, I will be able to constantly reflect and improve on each project that I create.

The history of a title sequence can be traced back to the silent film era. In the 1800's title sequences did not exist, during this time a movie would just begin giving the audience no insight as to what they are about to watch or who created what they are about to watch. The first movie to produce something even remotely like a title sequence was the 1900 film 'How it Feels to be Run Over', which at the end includes pop up words such as "oh mother will be pleased." Only one year later we saw the introduction of the title card in the 1901 film 'Scrooge, or Marley's Ghost.' Which is used to set the scene. In 1903, when the movie 'The Great Train Robbery' was released, title cards at the beginning of film became the standard for filmmakers. Traditionally, a title sequence would include lettering in the colour white placed over a dark background. Whilst these title cards were sometimes embellished with frame-like imagery, outlines, and basic illustrations, one thing remained a constant: the simple nature of the title card. Due to the lack of sound in this era of film, the title cards were a necessary element as they provided the audience with context, and they were used between scenes to establish the narrative. An example of this type of title sequence is the opening scene in Charlie Chaplin's 1931 film 'City Lights', the sequence begins with a card that has a simple outline on the edge and the words "Charlie Chaplin, City Lights" in the centre, it then fades onto another card where it displays the genre along with the directing and writing credits. The last two cards display the names of the cast and crew. Although this was in the 1930's when sound had already been introduced to film years prior, this title sequence includes the same style as movies previously before the introduction of sound. As time progressed, so did title sequences. The introduction of sound and later the introduction of colour in film played a significant role in how the title sequence developed. Colour gave filmmakers more versatility, now there wasn't any need for over-the-top facial expressions to convey emotion (a style of acting that was extremely popular during the silent film era) this could simply be done through different colours used on screen. Darker

colours and shadows would often mean danger or sorrow, whereas brighter colours would mean the opposite. The introduction of colour in film gave filmmakers the opportunity to find new ways to portray emotion.

Over the last 100 years there have been many title sequences in countless styles and genres, but what exactly makes a title sequence good today? Given the advancements in technology and how ordinary people have access to the right equipment to try their hand at filmmaking, it makes you wonder how anyone could stand out when it comes to creating something that has been done so many times. The title sequence was originally a place to credit the cast and crew, but after Alfred Hitchcock's 'Psycho' was released in 1960, rather than using a title sequence to store names, it became a place to tell a story before the story. When it comes to the art of the title sequence, Saul Bass is revolutionary, Saul Bass once said "For the average audience, the credits tell them there's only three minutes left to eat popcorn. I take this 'dead' period and try to do more than simply get rid of names that filmgoers are not interested in. I aim to set up the audience for what is coming; make them expectant." This is one of the most important quotes there is about title sequences because it shows that they are more than just a nod to the cast and crew, they can be a short story that often gets overlooked. To create a title sequence that grabs the audience's attention and leaves them wanting more is what any post-production editor should be aspiring to do. To summarise, a good title sequence is one that has used the spare time to show something original and artistic, this can be done using different fonts and colours, maybe even characters within the opening sequence. Although Saul Bass was creating title sequences as early as the 60's, his work was so revolutionary that filmmakers today have taken inspiration, an example of this is the incredible title sequence in the movie 'Catch me if you Can' designed by Florence Deygas and Olivier Kuntzel, within this title sequence you can see the classic Saul Bass style through the kinetic type, which is the moving font.

Perhaps the most important element in a title sequence is typography. According to career foundry, typography is "the art of arranging letters and text in a way that makes the copy legible, clear, and visually appealing to the reader." (2022) Typography is the appearance of text within the title sequence, this includes the font and the style. Before the internet took over the world, typography was prominent in magazines and books, but today, we see examples of typography in everyday life. There are numerous reasons why typography is important in general, but why is it so important in film? Just like in advertising, the type of font and style you choose is extremely important as it could make or break your brand. An example of a TV show with stand-out logo thanks to typography is Stranger Things. The font Stranger Things uses is Benguiat Bold and it is instantly recognisable not just to the fans but to anyone who has even seen it once thanks to its bold appearance and red colouring. This is exactly why choosing your font, style and colour correctly is important, it makes your brand, or movie/TV show instantly recognisable and sets it apart from the competition. Furthermore, typography is important when it comes to a title sequence because it's the beginning of what the audience is about to watch, if you do not bother to put effort into your typography it could be the difference between someone continuing to watch the movie or someone who turns it off, it must be eye catching and engaging. It's not just as simple as choosing a pleasing font and slapping it on top of a title card, there are other elements that you should follow, this includes the correct use of white space (which is the space around the text) and even the distance between each letter. I have found in the past when creating a title sequence, it looks aesthetically pleasing if you put a space between each letter when you type a job role above a crew member's name. These small details are the fine line between a professional title sequence and an amateur one.

Any filmmaker will tell you that if you don't have good sound in a movie, then you don't have anything. I have researched how important the visual elements of a title sequence are, but how important is sound when it comes to a title sequence? As previously mentioned, title sequences

began during the era of silent films and slowly progressed over the last century into small stories told before a film. Just like the visual elements, the sound is important as it grabs the viewers' attention. As a matter of fact, sound may be even more important, as when you watch a film, if there's a problem with the audio a viewer can almost always pick it up but if there's a mistake with the graphics, it's sometimes harder to spot to the untrained eye. There are variations of audio you can include in a title sequence, typically this will be music and sound effects. Soundtracks are detrimental to the emotion of the viewer; the editor must pick the right song for the emotion they want you to feel. There are two types of sound that is used in a title sequence, these are known as synchronous and asynchronous, according to Beverley Boy Productions; "When the sound corresponds with an action on screen, it is synchronous. When the sound does not correspond with an action on screen, it is asynchronous." Similarly, to the style of font you choose, the music chosen for a title sequence can make the movie/TV show recognisable, an example of this is the Star Wars soundtrack, the song used during the credits is very popular and is attached to the films. Not only can they make the audience feel emotion, but they can also give a hint as to what genre the film is. If you're about to watch a horror movie, if you can't tell by the graphics used you will certainly be able to tell by the dark background music. Having the right visuals and music is just the start, you need to ensure that these elements work well together or else you have a mess on your hands.

When creating a title sequence an editor should have a rough idea of what it is they intend to do and where they want the edit to go. Although as we have discussed, it is popular to create a story within a title sequence, some editor may decide they'd rather go down the old-fashioned route and stick with just naming the cast and crew with minimal design that includes typography. What should an editor be asking themselves when creating a title sequence? To begin with the editor needs to fully understand the genre of the film they're working on. Knowing the genre is the beginning when it comes to constructing your opening sequence. Once the genre is established, familiarising yourself with the themes, the characters and the story of the movie/TV show is how you will create a relevant captivating title sequence, this is what Saul Bass did throughout his career and that is why the title sequence for 'Psycho' is still considered one of the all-time best even to this day. The editor needs to be asking themselves what they can do to keep the audience hooked for a few minutes with small hints of what's to come without giving too much of the story away or if they're not telling a story the typography and graphics need to be impressive. Everything needs to be considered, the style of font that will be used throughout, the colouring of the sequence to match the tones of the scenes, the genre of music and the type of sound effects that will be used. As well as any other graphic designs created in order to make the sequence more aesthetically pleasing. Overall, the editor needs to have confidence and creativity when it comes to creating a title sequence. Ensuring that they're using the very few minutes that they do have wisely.

To sum everything up in this essay, I have researched the finer details within a title sequence that makes it flow together. I began my research by educating myself on the history of the title sequence and looked at some of the pioneers of title sequences such as Charlie Chaplin and Saul Bass. Saul Bass has been an inspiration to me and my work for years, so it was very rewarding to research into his work for this project. Additionally, I researched the reason why typography is so important when it comes to creating a title sequence and found that it isn't as simple as having a nice font, you must understand sizing, colours, spacing and staying on theme or even on brand. After looking at the graphics side of a title sequence, it's only necessary that next I would delve into the audio side of things. I believe that audio sometimes gets overlooked when it comes to working on a project, however, audio is one of, if not the most crucial element that goes into any bit of creative media work, we could certainly tell a story with just audio and still convey emotion to the viewer, but I think it would be slightly more difficult for the viewer to feel emotion from text and graphics

only. I researched the types of sound used in a title sequence and learned what I need to do when I add sound to my own. Finally, I asked myself and all other editors an important question, what should we be asking ourselves when it comes to creating a title sequence? The answer was simple, pay attention to even the smallest details, stay on theme and be as creative as possible. Overall, I have learned a lot throughout my research, I now feel as though I have the confidence to create my own title sequence for my portfolio without second guessing myself and overthinking.

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