

This document is intended to be used in conjunction with the Official Rulebook and Evaluation Criteria, and not as a substitute for either. Download the Official Fine Arts Rulebook and the Evaluation Criteria at www.faf.ag.org/rules.cfm.

SHORT FILM

1. FOCUS ON THE BASICS.

The audience can forgive a lot of technical filmmaking mistakes if the story is compelling, or the actors are engaging, or if it's funny enough. But there is a point where technical flaws get in the way, usually it's the point where the viewer can no longer follow the story or tell what's going on. Master the basics of shot composition. Pay close attention to angles, lighting, and editing.

2. STORYLINE.

Develop your story and characters. Take on the three-act structure:

Act I: Set up and hook – introduce plot point 1 at the transition to Act II.

Act II: Confrontation/Conflict - introduce plot point 2 before the transition to Act III.

Act III: Resolution

Also in your story, look for a moment you can layer in an unexpected plot twist, ending twist, or heartfelt moment.

3. CAMERAWORK.

Imaginative camerawork increases the sense of connection your audience has to your story. Experiment with unusual shots and angles – just be sure that the choices you make are driven by the characters and the scene – don't just be wacky for wackiness' sake. Try the use of foreground objects. Foreground objects can be anything from a tree branch to an actor's shoulder and when used effectively, add texture and depth to your film. Learn and experiment with additional techniques like tracking sideways, track-in, and zooming.

4. EDITING.

Editing is the assembly of different shots aimed at creating a coherent sequence. The most important lesson in film editing is that, for the smoothest/best results, cut on action – especially if you're cutting from a wide shot to a tighter shot along the same visual axis.

5. EYELINE/180 DEGREE RULE.

The most basic rule in filmmaking – the Eyeline/180 degree rule. When two actors are talking, there is an imaginary line between them known as the eyeline, line of action, line of continuity, or line of interest. Whatever you call it, the camera must not cross that line. If you cross the eyeline, when you edit the scene, both actors will be looking in the same direction and it will look as if they are both talking to a third party when, in fact, they are talking to each other. Makes for a confusing film.

6. LIGHTING.

The lighting of your film significantly affects the way your audience perceives your film and your story. Dark and moody lighting for a teen comedy doesn't make much sense; your film noir isn't going to work with bright colors and flat lighting. Imaginative and tonally appropriate lighting is crucial to good filmmaking. Where can you effectively use full light, dark areas, backlighting, and smoke/haze?

7. GOOD, HIGH-QUALITY SOUND.

Do your best to record good, consistent sound. If you can't, then make a silent movie – there's too much talking in most films anyway.

8. PRODUCTION DESIGN.

Storyboard or design your entire film before you start shooting. Your film world must be conceptualized in advance, right down to color schemes, props, furniture, costumes, etc. Don't just show up at a location and put up with, or settle for, whatever is there – decide in advance how everything should look and then make that film.

9. ORIGINALITY.

Make the film you want to make not the film that you think others want to see. Tell the story you want to tell. Be creative.

10. BE A FILM STUDENT.

Watch your favorite movies with the sound off. Look closely at the camera angles, shots, and zooms; notice the mood set by the lighting; watch closely for the flow created by the editing. Watch other short films to see how others have told effective stories in just 5 minutes.