

Welcome to the first week of lessons for the Phoney Film Festival! This week we're going to learn about Story Writing and Framing.

Story Writing

What makes a good story? Stories tend to follow a basic formula. There's usually a main character, also called a protagonist. The protagonist has a goal and there are obstacles in the way of them reaching that goal. Over the course of the story, they overcome those obstacles and achieve the goal. It's a very simple recipe that's been used in most films, TV shows and books throughout history.

Think about *The Lord of the Rings* for example. Even though the world it creates is complex, it relies on this overarching rule. Frodo is the protagonist. His goal is to destroy the ring. He struggles to reach the volcano which has the power to destroy it. After overcoming many obstacles, he finally destroys the ring and achieves his goal.

Sometimes the obstacles in the way of that goal make the protagonist realise that their goal isn't actually important and that they should be focusing on a different goal entirely. So they learn from the mistakes they make along the way and achieve the new goal. This approach teaches the audience a moral lesson. It's the formula that *The Simpsons* and lots of other cartoons use.

What's great about short films is that you don't have to follow the rules that writers of feature films and TV shows follow. You can experiment more! Because you don't have much time to tell your story, the best ideas are simple ones. You don't want to try and fit too big of an idea into a few minutes.

Let's look at the basic structure of 'Aperture', a previous winner at the Phoney Film Festival. Aperture is about a boy who finds a camera with special powers. It can make objects and even people disappear. He realises that he can make money from kids at school by getting rid of their bullies. When his principal finds out what he's doing, he gets rid of the kid that he thinks doped on him. Coming to terms with the fact that he just "killed a kid", he accidentally captures himself in the camera, a cruel twist of fate.

It's a simple idea and very effective. If we look at the story elements, the filmmaker started with a concept; that a camera can capture people in a "kind of cage". The goal of the protagonist is to make money. When the protagonist starts to lose his sense of morality entirely, he's given an obstacle that he can't overcome.

If you're making a documentary, you usually don't know what your story is exactly until you start shooting. In the *Finke Device Race*, filmmaker Device Ronson wanted to make a film about the Finke Race. So he went out and shot the whole journey and did interviews with riders. With documentaries, you end up writing the story when you're editing, using the footage and sound recordings that you've captured. Device's story ended up being about him making the film, how it felt to interview people and what the race was like.

The approach to making documentaries is very different to making fiction films but both are really fun to make and require lots of creativity. The best way to learn how to write stories is to write lots of them. Remember simple is often better! Have a look at these videos to give you more of an idea about writing stories.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zi_TqRQHK3o&pbjreload=10

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wMqIQcTMIA0&t=297s>

Framing

The first thing you should think about when turning your ideas into images is 'Framing'. What do we mean by 'Framing'? Your frame is the rectangular box that your camera captures and everything in it. How you decide to frame your character can say a lot about them. It can give the audience insight into their personality, their emotional state or their desires.

The most important thing to consider when framing your character is the 'shot type' you'll use. There are five main shot types that are used in most films. You can use these different shot types for very different reasons.

The first is a 'wide shot', where you see the environment that your character is in. This gives the audience lots of information about the character and their circumstances. Films often use a wide shot to establish a scene, to set up the story that will follow.



The next is called a 'full shot'. This is when the whole character from the top of their head to their feet is in the frame. This gets you a little bit closer to the character, allowing you to see their body language and the way they carry themselves.



The third is a 'mid-shot', where you see the character from their hips to the top of their head. A bit closer again, a mid-shot can be a good way to fit two people on screen.



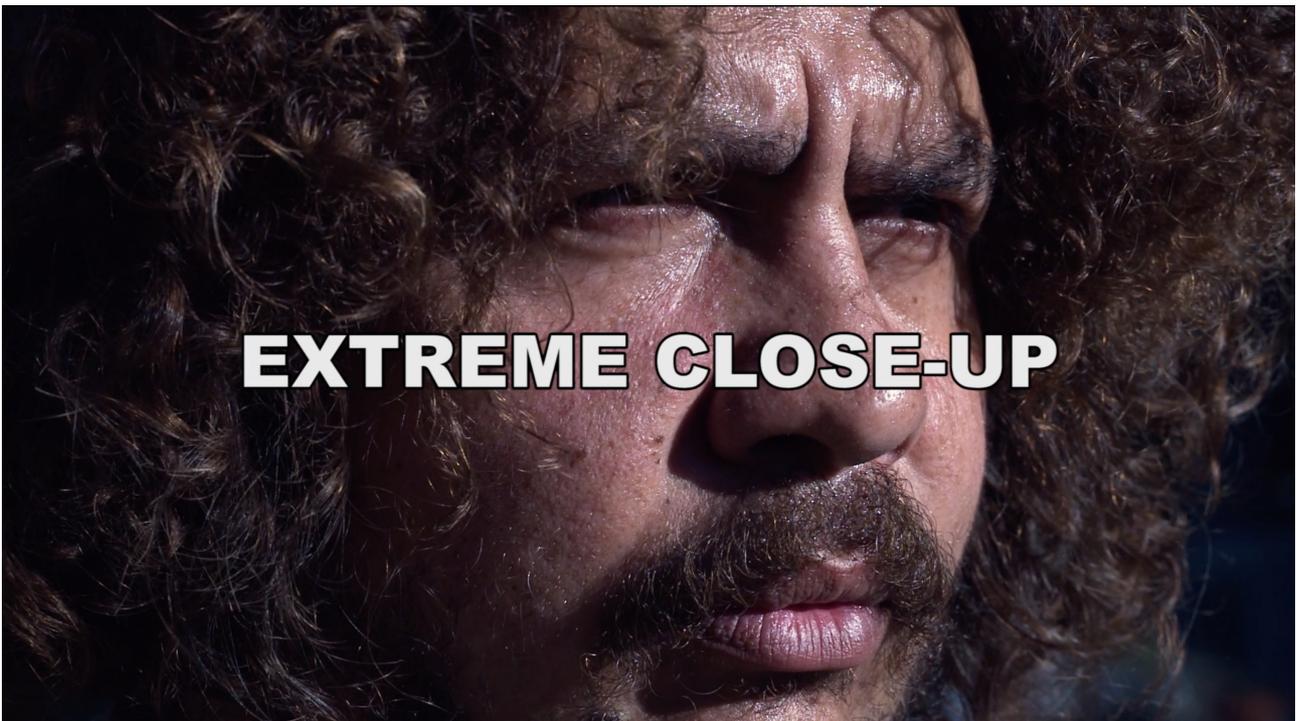
When two people are in the same frame, it's called a two-shot.



The next is called a 'close-up'. This lets the audience see all of the characters facial expressions, bringing them close to the character and how they're feeling.



The last is an extreme close-up, where the audience is almost in the characters head. You see all the details in their eyes and face. The extreme close-up can bring tension to your film, a classic of old spaghetti westerns.



A thing to keep in mind when you're framing your characters, is 'headroom'. Usually you don't want to cut off your character's head in the frame.



Once you've picked your shot type and given them proper headroom, the last thing you should think about is 'looking space'. If you're shooting your character from an angle, it often feels nicer if you give the frame a bit of space in the direction that they're looking.



Remember, rules are meant to be broken! But it's good to understand them so you know how to break them. Check out the videos on Framing below.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fM64ycm7tz4&t=213s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MflanZimZR8>