

Class Description and Outline for
“Making Your Own Nature Film”

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An 8-week on-line virtual course covering the creation of your own nature film. Each week will begin with a critique and Q&A for 10 minutes about the previous weeks efforts. Extra time will be allowed for help with specific students and their projects. Projects will be posted on a Dropbox account so we can view them, and shared Zoom screens will allow us to look at educational information simultaneously.

Weekly modules:

1. **VISION.** Telling your story through film.
 - A. OVERVIEW and introductions.
 - B. VISION. Why are you doing this?
 - C. GOALS. Examples.
 - D. AUDIENCE. Who is your audience. Friends n Family or Sundance Film Festival?
 - **1st Project:** Pick a subject and explore what kind of story you want to tell. Who is your subject? What is the message? What is the take-away? What is the feeling? Using your smart phone or video cam shoot some concept scenes.

2. **SCRIPT.**
 - A. SCRIPT. Telling your story and subject matter.
 - B. MESSAGE. Emotional, Documentary, Fiction, Awesome, etc.
 - C. CHALLENGES. Trying to film animals - that never stay still - Tripod rules.
 - D. LENGTH. Target film length.
 - E. AUDIENCE. Again, Target Audience / Media: Social media: YouTube & Facebook, Websites, NETFLIX, Film Festivals - laptops to the big screen.
 - F. OWNERSHIP. You own it vs. Public Domain (NOAA, NASA) vs. Private (YouTube, Facebook) and Copyrighted (All news agencies and broadcasting companies, and Internet companies). Permissions and purchases.
 - G. CREDITS. Who should you recognize or thank. Legal aspects (for sale or public).
 - **2nd Project:** Write (or outline) a simple script for a 5 to 10 minute story that will become your film. Who is your subject (protagonist). Is it a documentary time-line story, or something more mixed and dramatic? Write it in terms of scenes - those parts of your story that will be told in different filmed segments or scenes. Use the 3-Act format. Using your smart phone or

video cam shoot some “idea scenes” to see how various elements of your script will come across.

3. **SETTING.**

- A. **LIGHT.** Sunlight or artificial light; reflected light [snow], day or night, back lighting.
- B. **SOUND.** Sound.
- C. **COLOR.** Resolution and correctness.
- D. **SETS.** Setting, sets, backdrops, windows.
- E. **WEATHER.** Wind, weather, wet, dry, hot, cold.
- F. **SETTING.** Wilderness to urban setting.
- G. **SUBJECTS.** Pets and farm animals *to* zoos *to* bird feeders *to* friendly wild animals *to* dangerous wild animals. And, most difficult, people (actors *or* un-tutored talent)!
- H. **AMBIENT SOUND.** Chirps, roars, grunts & growls. Wind and rain. Flowing water.
- I. **MUSIC.** No film is complete without a sound track of music.
- J. **TROUBLE SHOOTING.**
 - **3rd Project:** In your script add your story boards - sketches, or filming notes on what angles, lighting, sounds, and backdrops you want to capture. How do you want to visually present your subject. Using your smart phone or video cam shoot some “Test Shots” that begin to consider contrasting lighting, colors, or sound. Shoot some segments at different times of day and under different weather conditions. Shoot some scenes inside and outside. What would the sound track sound like for what you are seeing?

4. **EQUIPMENT.** Cameras, computers, lenses, and other stuff.

- A. **CAMERAS.** iPhones *to* Nikons *to* GoPros *to* motion activated trail cams *to* drones.
- B. **FILE TYPES.** MP4, etc. and computer programs: MAC vs MICROSOFT
- C. **LENSES.** F-stop, ASA, fixed, zoom, low-light, wide-angle, macro, etc.
- D. **RESOLUTION:** 1K or 4K
- E. **TRUE COLOR.**
- F. **STABILIZATION.** Tripods, gimbals, etc.
- G. **VIEW.** Depth of Field and Field of View.
- H. **CASES.** Backpacks.
- I. **SOUND.** On-board mics, remote mics, lapel mics, collar mics.
- J. **BACKUP.** Backup and files
- K. **TROUBLE SHOOTING.** Cameras are Complicated. Where is that noise coming from?
 - **4th Project:** Review what video and sound equipment you have, whether it be an smart phone, a digital SLR with 20-minute video capability, or a video camera. Review aspects of your equipment, such as lenses, file types, resolution, color accuracy, views using lens capabilities, sound accuracy, and so on. Do you have what you want or need? Or is there an investment in

the future. Either way, we will be using what you have to make your 5 to 10 minute film. Shoot some more scenes really seeking

5. **PROGRAMS.** Computer programs for film making:
 - A. DAYLIES. Import “Daylies” - load your files and make sure you got what you want.
 - a. Quicktime.
 - B. COMPUTER PROGRAMS.
 - a. Final Cut and iMovie and file types revisited.
 - b. On-iPhone mix down apps.
 - c. MAC vs Microsoft.
 - d. Audio Programs - Garage Band
 - C. APPS that help
 - D. On-LINE INSTRUCTION. On line instruction videos and courses.
 - E. ANIMATION.
 - F. TOUCH-UPS. Post processing - leveling horizons, color balance, editing out mistakes or accidental inclusions in the background or sound track.
 - G. IMPORTING. Use of old clips, VHS & 8mm to MP4 conversions. Internet downloads.
 - H. TROUBLE SHOOTING. Files corrupted or don’t work with programs.
 - **5th Project:** Assess your computer’s ability to work with video files. Try downloading your smart phone files or digital SLR files or video cam files into your computer. Upload these into your movie program. Start a project file, and load the timeline with files in the order matching your script and storyboards. See how they look. You’ll be shooting more footage next week, but this sets you up to understand the functionality of the video processing programs you have.

6. **CINEMATOGRAPHY.**
 - A. 5C’s. Camera Angles, Continuity, Cutting, Close-ups, Composition.
 - B. TEXTURE. The emotional texture & style in your film.
 - C. MOTION. Hand-Held, Tripod, Gimbals, POV attachments “Animal Cams”. And time lapse, slow-motion, fast-motion, Stop motion, animation.
 - D. VIEWPOINT. Point-of-View vs Observer View.
 - E. HORIZON. Where’s your horizon? Is it level? Does it need to be?
 - F. ACTION. Following vs Fixed View.
 - G. LIGHTING.
 - H. ARTWORK.
 - I. MODELS & MAPS.
 - J. SETS & BACKDROPS.
 - K. GREEN SCREENS.
 - **6th Project:** With an understanding of your video processing capabilities, which reflects your post-processing capabilities of the footage you’ve shot, take your camera and re-film or shoot new footage using the above suggestions to create more dynamism in your video. Play around with motion and light. What does your eye follow - what do you want the viewer

to “learn” or “experience” in each shot? The better the original footage (the higher quality and content), the less post-processing you’ll need to do.

7. **MIX-DOWN.**

- A. SELECTING CUTS.
- B. STACKING.
- C. COLOR BALANCE.
- D. EDITING. Making the story come alive.
- E. TRANSITIONS.
- F. TITLES.
- G. SOUND TRACK. - ambient sound, subject sound, sound effects, voice-overs, music.
- H. RENDERING.
- I. TROUBLE SHOOTING. Things crash.
 - **7th Project:** Back to the computer. You’ve shot your movie, and you’ve loaded all the files into your video processing program. It is time to edit.

8. **MOVIE.**

- A. WATCH. Watch your movie (and segments) for balance, consistency, quality, and necessity to story.
- B. LISTEN. Listen to your movie (and segments) for sound quality, appropriate levels, accidental noises
- C. TEST GROUP. Test it on your friends.
- D. AUDIENCE. Again, Target Audience / Media: Social media: YouTube & Facebook, Websites, NETFLIX, Film Festivals - laptops to the big screen.
- E. DUPLICATION or UPLOAD.
- F. MARKETING.
- G. PREMIER.
 - **8th Project:** Show your film to friends and family and get feed back. Now you’re a film maker!