

Storytelling: Narrative structures

Introduction into the topic

Since the dawn of human history, people have been both sharing and being fascinated by stories. Throughout the time, they have evolved into various structures and genres, however the main principles remain the same: introduce the audience to the plot, have important turning points which influence the lives of characters and often move the story in different directions, and resolve the story. All parts should be equally important. In the journalistic stories it's also like that, with one exception: informative pieces, where the beginning is the most important and the ending brings only additions.

In this course, you therefore learn about two types of narrations – one used by journalists and other creators of informative content, and the other used by film- and video-makers – various genres, and basics of screenwriting.

Stories shared through audiovisual means of expression are very often told three times. Films, TV content, or professional videos are commonly made like that, but many other videos as well to some extent. In this course, you explore the first stage – pre-production – during which the concept, storyline, and screenplay, among other documents, are written.

The knowledge and skills embedded in this course help you read behind and between the lines of journalistic texts, understand how they are structured and what methods or tools can be easily used to create misinformation or manipulate with an audience, better distinguish between various types of journalistic or media content, create professional journalistic work, and write a script for audiovisual media piece that can be sent to TV or film producers.

Journalistic narration

There are many definitions of journalism. For the purposes of this lecture we can use the following brief description: any text in written, audio, or visual form presented to the audience as a true description of events, or presentation of certain new, previously unknown facts. This definition and elements that it emphasises allows us to distinguish journalism from other forms of cultural discourse, which may resemble it in some respects¹ (such as documentaries).

Research and its importance

An analytical approach to journalism means looking at certain information and data from all possible angles.

Many pieces of information, which a journalist needs for a quality and analytical approach to the work, are already available in the media. In order to elaborate the most comprehensive view on certain events or affairs and provide the best possible services to an audience, journalists should carefully examine freely available sources and compare them with their own direct sources. In many cases, it is possible to write a well-founded analytical study using only secondary sources. It's also important to pay attention to the context of information and data (historical, political, socio-cultural, or economic), and supporting materials (such as methods of data collecting), especially in the case of opinion polls.

It is an established practice that journalists rely on at least two independent sources. Such sources do not necessarily have to be primary sources, such as the author's own interviews. These can be secondary sources, such as articles in magazines and newspapers, radio and television news, or news agency reports².

Features of a news piece

Making and publishing news pieces is one of the main journalistic activities. It is a way of informing the audience about events and affairs which should be accurate and balanced, and free of any personal preferences of the author or external influences. News distortion takes place when those preferences and influences affect selection (gatekeeping) and sorting of news, or when authors are interpreting (or even misinterpreting) the information and data.

Key principles of news are summarised under abbreviation "5W", which stands for questions that a news piece should answer: Who?, What?, When?, Where?, and Why? The characteristics of news genre are:

- novelty (news should bring at least one unknown fact (or the one that is already known, but shown in new contexts)
- topicality (it refers to phenomenon that recently has / has not happen, or will / will not happen);

¹ PORTÁL (January 19, 2004), Definice žurnalistiky, Aktuální, PORTÁL, s.r.o., Retrieved from: <https://nakladatelstvi.portal.cz/nakladatelstvi/aktuality/79646>

² Pehe, J. (November 6, 1995), Role analýzy a výzkumu v žurnalistice, www.pehe.cz and Kmit 7, Retrieved from: <http://www.pehe.cz/clanky/1995/role-analyzy-a-vyzkumu-v-zurnalistice>

- time and local relevance;
- clarity (it is usually free of all "unnecessary" words);
- accuracy (e.g. numbers are not rounded too much);
- completeness (no relevant context or fact is intentionally concealed);
- reliability (it is verified by several independent sources);
- emotional neutrality (for example it lacks words such as "fortunately" or "unfortunately", etc.);
- it is unbiased – not influenced by personal attitudes or external forces;
- the length is appropriate to the relevance and importance;
- it answers the basic questions mentioned above.

Creating and editing

1. *Selecting a topic:* it should be relevant for the audience and include a story. Novelty is also important, however topicality is not always required (for example when reporting on historical events). A press release can serve as a reminder of a current event or as a background. When deciding on whether to cover a topic or not, it's useful to think about whether you would like to read about it in the newspaper.

2. *Format:* define the length and genre.

3. *Start with the most important:* the title can be more creative, but above all it should be short, concise, and relevant to the topic. The first paragraph must contain all relevant information – follow the inverted pyramid structure described below. Sub-headlines also help to orientate in the text.

4. *Use quotes* when possible, which brings some valuable information.

5. *Don't rush:* take breaks and clear your head. After a while, go back to it and read it again.

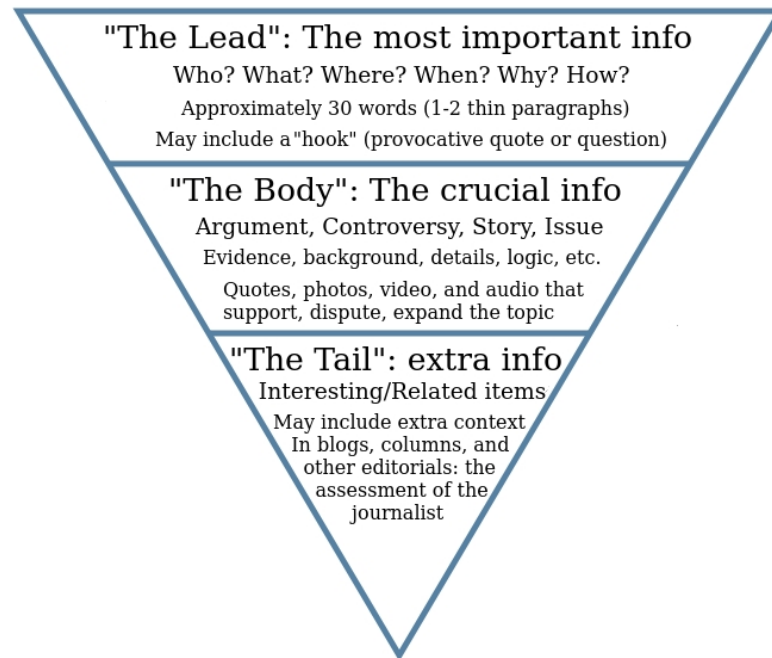
6. *Question your own attitudes* – aren't they influencing your work?

7. *Don't be afraid to ask for help* (experts on the topic or colleagues).

Inverted pyramid structure

*"Invented more than a century ago, the inverted pyramid style remains the basic formula for news writing"*³. The information is presented in a descending order – from the most to the least important. This structure ensures that the most relevant pieces of information and keywords are at the beginning of the article and catch the attention of the reader and search engines. Therefore it also allows for SEO optimization. The same principle applies to each section of the text (after subheadlines).

³ Roberts, J. (2021), 26. Inverted pyramid style, Writing for Strategic Communication Industries, Pressbooks, Retrieved from: <https://ohiostate.pressbooks.pub/stratcommwriting/chapter/inverted-pyramid-style/>



“Inverted pyramid in comprehensive form” by Christopher Schwartz is licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0⁴

The top of the page (or beginning of video and audio) gets the most attention from the reader or audience. When reading the text, the readers usually pay bigger attention only to the first 3 words of the subheadline and then jump to the next subheading; or they read a few words of the first sentence of the paragraph and then skip to the next one⁵.

Headline

It is basically a one-sentence summary of the media piece and therefore it needs to correspond with the rest of the media. The audience usually does not know anything about the quality of the article at the beginning. People can only assume what the content is and whether they will like the media piece only on the basis of the headline. It is like a business card, advertising banner, or window of

⁴ Roberts, J. (2021), 26. Inverted pyramid style, Writing for Strategic Communication Industries, Pressbooks, Retrieved from: <https://ohiostate.pressbooks.pub/stratcommwriting/chapter/inverted-pyramid-style/>

⁵ Dobiáš, R. (January 19, 2011), Jak na prioritu informací v textu – obrácená pyramida v akci, blog O psaní a web copywritingu, Retrieved from: <http://www.o-psani.cz/jak-na-prioritu-informaci-v-textu-obracena-pyramida-v-akci>

a shop – it invites you to visit the text. If the headline is good, people will enter the medium. Otherwise they will stay behind the door. In short, a few simple rules apply:

Good headline = higher number of visits – reads, or views

Good headline = higher number of reactions (likes, comments, sharing)

Good headline = higher conversion rate (newsletter subscription, demand)

Bad headline = lower number of visits – reads, or views

Bad headline = higher number of reactions (likes, comments, sharing)

Bad headline = lower conversion rate (newsletter subscription, demand)⁶

At the same time, it's important to **prevent the risk** of creating *clickbait headlines*. Their purpose is to be more attractive and draw bigger attention to the media piece (in other words, to generate more traffic and clicks). Connected problem is that these headlines can contradict the rest of the text, or simply not be related to it.

There are four main types of headlines (titles):

Neutral (or traditional) headlines provide an overview of the main idea and information in an inverted pyramid-structure of the news story. The authors - editors and writers - compose these headlines to be short, concise, and clear. They leave no, or almost no, space for an individual interpretation of the content. The idea is then elaborated in the rest of the text. However, these headlines can be creative and attractive to the audience as well.

Forward-reference headlines cause uncertainty about information and ultimately the whole story in comparison with neutral headlines, as they highlight something unknown, which should be explained or described more in the remainder of the media piece. They are representing so-called clickbait headlines.

Question-based headlines also belong to the category of clickbait. They are supposed to cause uncertainty, in this case by posing a question relevant to the story. Said question should then be answered by the media piece, but sometimes it remains unanswered, especially when the rest of the text is talking about something else.

Shocking/emotional headlines are also clickbait, made to get the audience's attention by scandal, attempt to scare, or simply through positive or negative emotions. Naturally, the perception of these headlines is also individual, because what scares one person can be considered as ordinary by the other.

⁶ Šenkapoun, P. (July 27, 2015), Titulek je základ článku. Jak napsat 10x účinnější nadpis a přivést na web 30 000 lidí za 500 Kč, nejlepšicopywriter.cz, LOGOS AGENCY, s. r. o., Retrieved from: <https://nejlepšicopywriter.cz/titulek-je-zaklad-clanku-jak-napsat-10x-ucinnejsi-nadpis-a-privest-na-web-30-000-lidi-za-500-kc/>

Types of questions

The questions can be asked during interviews, but also when an author thinks about the structure of the text or plan of the research. It's important to elaborate them carefully, as only the right type of question can bring valid information or data and move the journalistic or media piece forward. Wrong questions may bring useless information and, in the worst case, lead to creation of misinformation. There are also questions which should be avoided by professional journalists, because they are constructed to presume or lead towards an answer, force an interviewee to respond in a certain way (leading and loaded questions), or contain biases.

The most common types of questions are:

Open-ended question: the answer is not limited, there are no options and interviewees can answer whatever they want. However, even this question can have some limits, such as minutes or number of characters.

Semi-open ended questions are limiting the answer, for example *“Tell me about your country”* (subject matter limitation) or *“What will happen afterwards?”* (chronological limitation).

Closed-ended questions: it is possible to answer only by one word (yes, no) or through a limited number of options (suggested by the interviewer).

Leading questions are leading people to answer questions in a specific way that is desirable by the interviewer. *“Often they contain information that they want confirmed rather than a question that tries to get at the true answer.”*⁷ An example can be *„When would you like to sign up for our newsletter?”*

Loaded questions are constructed in a way that is suggesting or presuming the answer. They do it more or less subtly, but in any case it's difficult or even impossible to avoid the desired answer. They are effective, because *“the defining feature of this question type is the assumption about the respondent that is included implicitly in the question.”*⁸ An example can be *„Have you ceased to support this politician?”* or *„Have you stopped drinking alcohol before the event happened?”*

The following questions are used less often in journalism and media, but they can come in handy:

Dichotomous question: they are closed-ended questions, which have only two possible answers. It serves to clearly distinguish the characteristics, experiences, or opinions of the respondent. Commonly they are “yes / no” questions.

Likert scale is suitable for examining and measuring respondents' attitudes. It is most often used to determine the level of satisfaction or consent of respondents (strongly agree – strongly disagree). It is one of the favourite scale questions in the questionnaire.

Single choice and multiple choice: it is a form of closed-ended question that offers respondents a larger number of answers from which they can choose one or more options.

⁷ FormAssembly (2021), Leading and Loaded Questions: How to Avoid Telling Your Users What to Think, FormAssembly Inc., Retrieved from: <https://www.formassembly.com/blog/leading-loaded-questions/>

⁸ FormAssembly (2021), Leading and Loaded Questions: How to Avoid Telling Your Users What to Think, FormAssembly Inc., Retrieved from: <https://www.formassembly.com/blog/leading-loaded-questions/>

Ordering questions: this type is used to sort the answers according to the importance for the respondent. They are usually sorted by assigning numbers, or by moving individual answers – by dragging the mouse, the respondent moves the answers.

Matrix questions allow the interviewer to solve several parameters in one block. Using a matrix is useful when you need to get multiple different answers with the same variable.

Star rating: this type of question is most useful if you only need information on whether something was good or bad and how much. It is sometimes preferred over the Likert scale.

Semantic differential will come in handy when you want to measure certain nuances in attitudes or feelings. It can be often found in sociological or psychological questionnaires.

Distribution of points: this type of question is useful when you want the respondent to divide the value (e.g. points, money, percentages) between the different options. The answers provide information on how important each option is to the respondent. The whole value must always be divided (all points without remainder)⁹.

⁹ Survio (November 12, 2020), Typy otázek v dotazníku, Survio, Retrieved from:
<https://www.survio.com/cs/blog/typy-otazek/typy-otazek-v-dotazniku/>

Genres

1) Narration

Narration is a literary format that uses written or spoken commentary to convey the story to an audience. Narration involves a set of techniques by which the creator presents the story. These techniques include:

a) Narrative voice: the perspective through which the story is told (first person, second person, and third person).

b) Narrative time: time frame of a story in the past, present, or future.

c) Narrative type:

- **“Linear narrative:** *presents the events of the story in the order in which they actually happened.*
- **Non-linear narrative** *presents the events of the story out of order, employing flashbacks and other literary devices to shift the chronology of a story.*
- **Quest narrative** *is a story in which the protagonist works tirelessly toward a goal. The pursuit of this goal likely becomes their all-consuming passion, and they must face seemingly insurmountable obstacles along the way.*
- **Viewpoint narrative** *is designed to express the points of view or subjective personal experience of the main character or other fictional characters in the story.”¹⁰*

The narrator is a personal character or impersonal voice that the creator (author) of the story developed to inform the audience about the story. The narrator may be: an anonymous, impersonal, or independent entity with some relation to the story; author as a character; or any other character directly appearing and participating in the story, whether fictional or factual. Narrators are considered participants if they are characters in the story and non-participants if they merely connect with the story and engage in a plot.

2) Narrative structure – basics

According to **Aristotle**, a tragedy, which is one type of a plot, can be divided into three stages: a beginning, a middle, and an end. He elaborated this concept in his work called *Poetics* and stated that the *“tragedy should imitate a whole action, which means that the events follow each other by probability or necessity, and that the causal chain has a beginning and an end.”¹¹*

Gustav Freytag (German novelist and playwright) derived a model consisting of 5 parts: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, catastrophe (denouement).

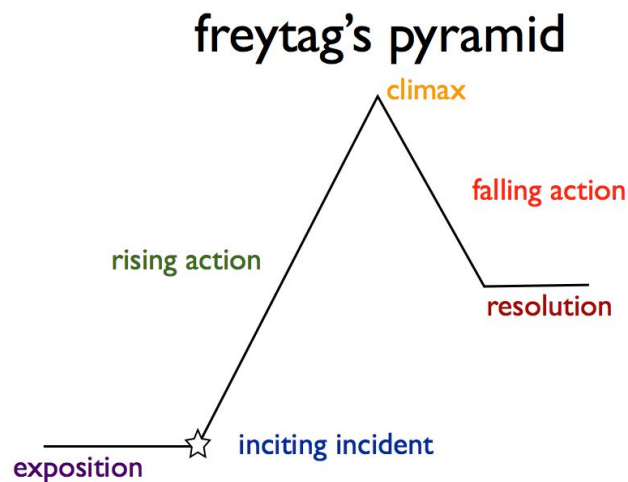
- Exposition is the beginning of the story, where the setting and main characters are introduced.

¹⁰ MasterClass staff (November 8, 2020), 4 Types of Narrative Writing, MasterClass, Retrieved from:

<https://www.masterclass.com/articles/types-of-narrative-writing#4-types-of-narrative-writing>

¹¹ Aristotle, *Poetics*, The Project Gutenberg Ebook produced by An Anonymous Volunteer and David Widger, The Project Gutenberg, Retrieved from: http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1974/1974-h/1974-h.htm#link2H_4_0009

- Rising action is elaborating the story's conflict on the way to climax. The characters are meeting their antagonists or issues they will need to solve. This part of the story can also reveal some background information.
- Climax is one of the main turning points in the story. The main conflict culminates and characters know their life will not be the same as it was before. It's often followed by a calmer part of the story, so that both characters and audience can have a rest and absorb all emotions.
- Falling action – the story continues and characters need to deal with events that happened during the climax. How do they react to it? What will be new challenges? How will the central theme/conflict continue? These are the main questions that need to be answered during falling action.
- Catastrophe is the end of the story, the conflict is resolved in a good or bad way. The ending can also be open and leaves the doors open for the audience's fantasy or potential follow-up stories.



Source of the picture: <https://writers.com/freytags-pyramid#gallery>¹²

Syd Field (American author of books on screenwriting) introduced the paradigm of the story structure, which is based on Aristotle's framework, but adjusted for film. It consists of three acts: Set-up, Confrontation, and Resolution. They also include several twists and turns. *“On a basic level, Act One sets up the world, characters, the character’s goal, as well as the conflicts or obstacles that are preventing them from achieving their goal. Act Two raises the stakes for the*

¹² Glatch, S. (May 12, 2020), The 5 Elements of Dramatic Structure: Understanding Freytag’s Pyramid, Writers.com, Retrieved from: <https://writers.com/freytags-pyramid#gallery>

character to achieve the goal, escalating the conflict. Act Three resolves the story with either an achievement of that goal or a failure."¹³

Modern structures have even more parts, but they are still based on Aristotelian 3-act-structure. The story can have for example following parts: opening, inciting incident, turning point I, pinch I (small turning point), midpoint, honeymoon, pinch II, turning point II, resolution, ending.

3) Non-fictional genres – journalistic

Genre is a formally and content-wise closed text unit, which is defined by three components: style of language, theme, and composition. The basic division of non-fictional journalistic genres is into two groups: informative and opinion-based. However, when exploring the richness of genres it's useful to have more detailed structure at hand. *"Especially considering the assumptions of Lasswell (1987) and Wright (1968), authors of this school, but also assimilating the contributions of Raymond Nixon (1963), we have the following overview of journalistic genres and their respective functions:*

- *informative: social surveillance;*
- *opinionative: ideas forum;*
- *interpretation: educational role, enlightening;*
- *diversional: distraction, leisure;*
- *utilitarian: assistance in everyday's decisions.*"¹⁴

The most important informative genre is news, which has been described in the previous part of this course. The other examples are:

Report: it describes and portrays reality on the basis of facts, mostly obtained through direct participation or observation. It's an extension of a news piece and therefore it has the same characteristics. However, some types of report can also include assessment of the event by the reporter and therefore they can be included under opinionative genres as well.

Feature: it is considered a genre or a methodology of creating the so-called less serious news, which means also important topics but described in broader context, including more personal stories and some background information. It's sometimes called a report with background.

Interview: it is both a method of work (asking questions and gaining answers to be further processed) and a genre. The journalists are clearly in the role of the interviewers and initiate the interview, determine topics, questions, areas, etc. During reproduction, they try to capture not only the words of the persons concerned, but also the atmosphere, typical characteristics of the personalities, and the meaning of their answers. At the same time, they do not have to rewrite

¹³ Maio, A. (December 9, 2019), What is The Three Act Structure? No Formulas Necessary, StudioBinder Inc., Retrieved from: <https://www.studiobinder.com/blog/three-act-structure/>

¹⁴ de Melo, J. M., de Assis, F. (January/April 2016), Journalistic genres and formats: a classification model, Intercom – RBCC, São Paulo, v.39, n.1, p.39-54, Retrieved from: https://www.scielo.br/pdf/interc/v39n1/en_1809-5844-interc-39-1-0039.pdf

everything that the interviewees say. Authorization of the interview by an interviewee is a good practice.

Typical examples of opinionative genres are:

Article: it contains a clear, factual, logical, and comprehensible expression of a topic or a description of an event. It is the result of the author's subjective approach to the issue, which is also reflected in the language used in the article. It seeks connections, causes, consequences. Article analyses, classifies, and generalises.

There is also an expert article, which aims to present scientific knowledge concisely and comprehensively, taking into account characteristics of an audience.

Comment: it responds to information presented by the news. These are listed in the introduction, followed by contextual information (putting the original news in context with other events or information) and presentation of the author's own opinions. This is followed by a conclusion containing the interpretation and summary of the text. The comment usually expresses either the opinion of the author (commentator) or the given medium.

Column: it is a piece where writers express their opinions in one or a few columns. It generalises a specific topic and is often ironic. It was usually written in italics on the edge of the newspaper in response to a current topic. In some cases it can be based on a funny narration.

4) Non-fictional – documentary

Documentary is a type of film whose main goal is to portray reality as opposed to both feature and animated films. It uses specific shooting techniques – shaky camera, hidden camera, or improvisation – which are sometimes adopted by other film genres (e.g. mockumentary). Documents sometimes become tools of propaganda (for example Leni Riefenstahl in Nazi Germany) or manipulation. Sometimes they are an important testimony, manifesto, or type of investigative work.

Alberto Cavalcanti, Brazilian-born director, producer, screenwriter, and art director of motion pictures in the mid-20th century, gave several recommendations to documentary film-makers. They were summarised by Uruguayan literary critic Emir Rodríguez Monegal:

1. Do not work on generalised topics. You can write an article about the postal service, but you have to make a film about a single letter.
2. Do not deviate from the principle, according to which there are three basic components of a film: social, poetic, and technical.
3. Do not neglect the script or rely on filming coincidence. When you have a script written, your film is completed; when you start shooting, you start again from the beginning.
4. Don't trust the commentary that it will tell your story; this must be done by the pictures and sound. Commentary is distracting - especially the groundless one.
5. Remember that each shot is part of a sequence and each sequence is part of the whole film; if it is not in the right place, even the most beautiful shot becomes worse than an absolutely ordinary shot.

6. Do not invent camera angles unless necessary; autotelic angles are disruptive and destroy emotional perception.
7. Do not misuse fast cut; the accelerated rhythm can be just as monotonous as the most spectacular slow rhythm.
8. Do not overuse music; if you do it, the audience will stop perceiving the music.
9. Excessive use of optical effects or their excessive complexity is not recommended. Use transitions and fade-outs as movie punctuation: these are your commas and dots.
10. Do not film too many detailed shots; keep them for climax. In a well-balanced film, they appear naturally; if there are many of them, they suffocate each other and lose all their meaning.
11. Do not hesitate to portray people and their relationships; human beings can be just as beautiful as other creatures, just as beautiful as machines or landscapes.
12. Do not tell your story indefinitely; the true subject must be told clearly and simply. Clarity and simplicity, however, does not exclude dramatisation in any way.
13. Don't give up the opportunity to experiment; the documentary has gained its prestige thanks to experimentation. Without it, the documentary would lose its value, it would cease to exist.¹⁵

5) Fictional

Drama

Drama is telling the story through dialogues and monologues. In the past, theatrical stage performances were common, but now they also appear in feature films, radio, television, and in other forms of audiovisual works. The basic theoretical principles of the drama were established by Aristotle in his *Poetics*, where he described the structure of a tragedy.

A comedy is a literary or dramatic genre that always ends happily. The opposite of comedy is **tragedy**. Comedy is expected to provide a humorous insight into human weaknesses and human inadequacies. Humour along with comics are usually the basic elements of this genre. The hero's problems are finally solved and everything turns out well.

6) Genres in between (cross-genres)

Mockumentary

It is a blend of fact and fiction. *“In the mockumentary film genre, a movie is presented as a documentary even though everything in it is false. Mockumentary filmmakers use parody, satire and often humour to comment on current events and ideas.”*¹⁶ The first mockumentary is dated back to 1957 in the US¹⁷.

¹⁵ Rady Alberta Cavalcantiho mladým dokumentaristům (1955), *Film a doba 1*, 1955, č. 11-12, s. 521, Retrieved from: https://af335867-038c-4e79-acd1-184b4e08a315.filesusr.com/ugd/029791_dcc4074ab0e5468eb810f014eb08fa65.pdf

¹⁶ Napolitano, V. (2020), *The Mock Doc Film Series: History of the Mockumentary Film*, CUNY Academic Works, Retrieved from: https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds/3583/

¹⁷ Wikipedia (April 10, 2021), *Mockumentary*, Retrieved from: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mockumentary>

Similar genres are docudrama (fiction that includes documentary elements) and docufiction (documentaries including fictional elements).

Dramedy

It is also called comedy-drama, “a television program or series using both serious and comic subjects, usually without relying on conventional plots, laugh tracks, etc.”¹⁸ The first dramedy is dated back to 1969 in the US¹⁹.

Satire

Satire (from the Latin *satur* and *lanx satura* – miscellany or medley) stands for a work of art, especially a literary one, using comicism, ridicule, caricature and irony to criticise shortcomings and negative phenomena. Writers and other authors use it to address societal issues. “*Satire can be part of any work of culture, art or entertainment. It is an often-humorous way of poking fun at the powers that be. Sometimes, it is created with the goal to drive social change. Satire has a long history and it is as relevant today as it was in ancient Rome.*”²⁰

7) Division of films on basis of running time

Feature film (feature length film) is usually between 75 and 210 minutes long.

Featurette is shorter than feature, but longer than short film, usually 24 – 40 minutes long.

Short films are usually shorter than 40 minutes.

¹⁸ dictionary.com (2021), Dramedy, Dictionary.com, LLC, Retrieved from: <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/dramedy>

¹⁹ Wikipedia (April 25, 2021), Comedy-drama, Retrieved from: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comedy-drama>

²⁰ MasterClass staff (November 8, 2020), What Is Satire? How to Use Satire in Literature, Pop Culture, and Politics—Plus Tips on Using Satire in Writing, MasterClass, Retrieved from: <https://www.masterclass.com/articles/what-is-satire-how-to-use-satire-in-literature-pop-culture-and-politics-plus-tips-on-using-satire-in-writing>

Screenwriting

What precedes screenwriting

Development of the film or TV show does not start with writing the screenplay. At the early stage, an author writes a short summary (several paragraphs) followed by a synopsis, which is a bit extended summary describing the core of the story, main plot points, and main characters.

The last stage before screenwriting is elaboration of a **treatment** and step outline. Treatments “*are often written in present tense, in a narrative-like prose, and highlight the most important information about your film, including title, logline, story summary, and character descriptions. Treatments are a way for a writer to test out an idea before investing their creative energy fully into a new screenplay. Treatments also allow for writers to summarise their story idea so they can present the story to studio executives or producers who might want to finance the film.*”²¹

Step outline looks more like a technical document, especially when it’s created in the form of a table. It divides the story into scenes which are described in detail and can be numbered. Dialogues and interactions between characters are also often included or suggested. In the case of a documentary film, step outline can replace a screenplay.

Log line

Log line, or logline, is a very short summary (usually just one sentence) of a media piece – typically film, TV show, or radio programme – that raises an interest of the audience and describes the central conflict of the story. It is also written for potential producers before the film or TV show is produced (along with the synopsis or treatment at the latest).

Log lines have clearly given structure:

Inciting incident – beginning of the storyline

Protagonist – in rather abstract terms, main character is not mentioned

Action – what the protagonist does, what is the most important event

Antagonist – whom or what the protagonist faces

Even though these rules are important, sometimes breaking them helps to create a better log line: “*Blacksmith Will Turner teams up with eccentric pirate “Captain” Jack Sparrow to save his love, the governor’s daughter, from Jack’s former pirate allies, who are now undead.*”²²

²¹ MasterClass staff (November 8, 2020), How to Write a Film Treatment in 6 Steps, MasterClass, Retrieved from: <https://www.masterclass.com/articles/how-to-write-a-film-treatment-in-6-steps>

²² Unitas, A. (March 8, 2020), How to Write a Logline Producers Won’t Pass On [with Logline Examples], StudioBinder Inc., Retrieved from: <https://www.studiobinder.com/blog/write-compelling-logline-examples/>

Screenplay

Screenplay or script is a written work that represents a story to be later turned into a film, television programme, or a game. Nowadays, scripts are also used to plan interactive exhibitions in museums or events where engagement of an audience is an important element. It can be an original work or adaptation from existing works, for example books. They are written in several drafts – each is elaborating the previous one. Screenplays used in the TV are called teleplays and may have a bit simpler structure.

Spec script (or speculative script) is unsolicited and meant to be sold on the open market. It's used by beginners in the field who want to prove their talent or by any other screenwriters who just try to sell their work to producers.

Commissioned script – written by authors who were hired by producers.

Shooting script is used during the production. Scenes and even the shots are assigned numbers. New elements can be added and that's why the shooting script may have more pages than the original work. New pages are issued and numbered for example 10A, 10B and so on. If the text on a certain page is completely deleted, it contains the word "OMITTED". All these revised pages are distributed on coloured pages – one colour represents one round of revisions.

Format of a screenplay

There is no standard format of the screenplay and requirements of studios, TV stations, or producers may slightly differ. However, there are two general typographical formats of so called studio scripts which stipulate "*how elements of the screenplay such as scene headings, action, transitions, dialogue, character names, shots and parenthetical matter should be presented on the page, as well as font size and line spacing*"²³:

A) Two columns – descriptions of the scenes are on the left, dialogues are on the right,

B) Continuous text – descriptions of the scenes and dialogues are arranged one after another, but are aligned differently. In this format, text is always written in 12 point and 10 pitch Courier. One page usually equals to one minutes of the final film, but it also depends on the content – pages with dialogues only may result in less time on the screen, pages with descriptions of scenes may result in longer scenes.

American Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences introduced "*Fifteen foibles that might invoke a poor first impression (based only on a script's title page and page one)*"²⁴. They are available along with the sample of the script on this webpage: <https://www.oscars.org/nicholl/screenwriting-resources>.

In order to make the formatting easier, screenwriters can use any of the screenwriting software, such as Final Draft or Fade In (the first one was SmartKey).

²³ Wikipedia (April 6, 2021), Screenplay, Retrieved from: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Screenplay>

²⁴ oscars.org, Academy Nicholl Fellowships (2021), Screenwriting resources: Formatting tips, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Retrieved from: <https://www.oscars.org/nicholl/screenwriting-resources>

Terms and abbreviations used in screenplays

Each scene has a **slug line**, which is basically a heading. It contains the following information: whether the scene is inside (INT.) or outside (EXT.), location, and time of the day.

Example:

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

When the scene is interrupted, it can be again introduced in this way:

INT. APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

When the whole film begins, it's indicated by

FADE IN:

It can be also used to indicate the beginning and ending of a scene or sequence.

When the whole film ends, it's indicated by END. But when the scene ends with fading into the black, it's indicated by FADE OUT or FADE TO.

Characters' names are written in all caps, e.g. JOHN. They can speak in front of a camera, but their voices can also be heard when they are out of a camera range. In that case, they speak Off-screen which is indicated as follows:

MARY (O.S.)

When a narrator is meant to be heard, abbreviation for Voice Over is used:

MARY (V.O.)

When the scene ends, **transition or cut** can be indicated by one of the following:

CUT TO:
TIME CUT:
JUMP CUT:
QUICK CUT:
SMASH CUT:
MATCH CUT:
DISSOLVE TO:
FADE TO:
WIPE TO:

“Cut to” indicated a simple cut from one shot to another. “Time cut” indicates passage of time. In the case of a “Jump cut”, one continuous scene (but also shot) is divided into three parts, with the middle one being removed to create the effect of jumping forward in time. It also happens that jump cuts are created unintentionally. “Quick cut” indicates that the shots are very short (in the technique called Fast cutting, about which you can learn in the course “Language of media”).

“Smash cut” is used at a crucial moment in a scene where it is not expected. The next scene often has a very different nature, for example when the character wakes up from a nightmare and everything is alright.

In “Match cut”, two shots on either side of the cut are connected by a subject, action, or subject matter (for example bone in the first shot and a spaceship in the second in Stanley Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey).

“Dissolve to” indicates that a longer period of time has passed between two scenes. In contrast to “Time cut”, which doesn’t require any special post-production work, it’s shown as a gradual transition from one picture to another. “Fade to” means that one shot is fading into the black (fades out) and the following shot starts with black frames and gradually becomes brighter (fades in).

“Wipe to” is a film transition, where one shot replaces another by moving from one point of the shot to another, often with a special shape. Examples of the wipe are: star wipe, clock wipe (indicates that a time has passed), or wipe from left to right. They are used very often in Star Wars films.

When it is needed to cut back and forth between scenes, which are happening at the same time (e.g. when two characters are on the phone), it’s not necessary to repeat the scene heading, but the INTERCUT can be used instead:

INT. FIRST APARTMENT - NIGHT

Scene description/dialogue.

INT. SECOND APARTMENT - NIGHT

Scene description/dialogue.

INTERCUT BETWEEN FIRST AND SECOND APARTMENT

Descriptions of both scenes/dialogue.

A **shot** indicates that the focal point is changed within one scene. Hence it indicates cuts within one scene. A few examples are:

ANGLE ON = shot takes place in the same location as the previous one, but shows some details (e.g. landscape and one part of it).

CLOSE ON = similar to the previous one, but showing a close up of a subject (e.g. one flower).

PAN TO = camera moves horizontally across the scene.

TILT TO = camera moves vertically.

POV = point of view of the character.

REVERSE ANGLE = it is used to film and edit conversation: reverse angle is seen when the second speaker is on the camera.

Sizes of shots are also indicated in screenplays. They can be categorised by the field size (how much of the environment or the subject is visible, figure is also used to describe the scale) or camera placement (angle of the camera). A few examples are:

EXTREME CLOSE UP = for example an eye or chin

CLOSE UP = head and shoulder line

AMERICAN SHOT = approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ of the figure

LONG SHOT = whole environment

AERIAL SHOT = shot from above

TWO SHOT = two persons are in the pictures

LOW-ANGLE SHOT = camera is placed low on the vertical axis and is looking up

HIGH-ANGLE SHOT = camera is placed high on the vertical axis and is looking down

You can learn more about film editing and types of shots in the course “Language of media”.

Titles of opening credits

BEGIN TITLES or BEGIN OPENING TITLES is followed by END TITLES or END OPENING CREDITS.

Superimpose or Title

It is used to indicate that text or an image will be placed on the screen to deliver important information. It is not used to indicate subtitles.

EXT. CITY - DAY

Description

SUPERIMPOSE: Trnava city, Summer 2021

Other terms:

MONTAGE – series of scenes which are related but take place in various locations.

SERIES OF SHOTS – series of scenes usually taking place in one location and concerning the same action.

INSERT – it's used to indicate focus on something important in the scene, which is too small and could not be seen otherwise: INSERT – PIECE OF PAPER

Adlib – they are used in crowd scenes, when more people talk at the same time. For example: The CROWD shouts: "You cannot do that" "It's not right!"

When person continues speaking, it can be indicated in two ways:

MARRY
(continuing)
You're welcome.

MARRY (CONT'D)
You're welcome.

Similarly, when the scene continues on the next page, it's indicated by

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED :

Other abbreviations:

b.g. = background

CGI = computer generated image

f.g. = foreground

SFX = sound effects

SPFX = special effects

M.O.S. = without sound

Summary

Whether it's written by a journalist, blogger, influencer, novelist, or screenwriter, each narration has a structure and several layers which convey various stories and meanings. The latter can be obvious, but also concealed, encoded through selection and ordering of words, sounds, or pictures. Even though this is important for those telling fictional, and sometimes also documentary, stories to be able to offer aesthetical and emotional experience to an audience, it's not desirable in the case of informative pieces, such as news. There needs to be a small or very limited space for potential interpretations – the actual information is the core and structure of the story is subordinated to the purpose of telling the people what is the real state of the affairs.

This structure is called an inverted **pyramid** – it refers to presentation of information in descending order of importance. What's most important is at the beginning, background is at the very end. A special attention is dedicated to the headline, which also summarises the whole story. So called **click-baits** can have other purposes, but those should not be intended by professional journalists. Unfortunately, sometimes the headline doesn't correspond to the rest of the media piece, which is a bad practice as well. There is not only news, however. The wide spectrum of **genres** allows journalists and other media makers to present the information, but also comment on them and express their opinions. Therefore it's important for an audience to differentiate between them as well.

Standard **narrative structure**, first defined by Aristotle, is helpful for both authors and audience. The former have guidance showing them how to create a story that has a needed dynamic and can more easily engage more people and provide them with planned or expected experience. The latter, if they are familiar with the structure, can presume when the important moments will come and, most importantly, decode more or less hidden meaning and thus enjoy the story to its fullest.

Basics of **screenwriting** are meant primarily for those who want to pursue a professional career in the field of film and TV production. Nevertheless, they are useful for everyone who wants to create professional videos and it may be interesting to look under the wrap. This topic is so wide that it could very easily fill several courses. Therefore the list of other useful resources at the end of this course is focusing on this topic.

Pre-production is just the first stage of the whole process. The others as well as topics related to encoding and decoding media messages are contained in the course “Language of media”, which is therefore a natural continuation of this one. Presentations, quizzes, tasks, exercises, background text, and additional resources have been designed to provide you with knowledge and skills that will help you create and understand media pieces. You can go through them as many times as you need and do not hesitate to ask us any questions related to the topics.

Resources

List of used resources

Topic 1: Journalistic narration

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Topic 3: Screenwriting

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List of other useful resources

<https://www.masterclass.com/categories/film-tv>

https://sydfield.com/syd_resources/the-paradigm-worksheet/

<https://www.oscars.org/education-grants/teachers-guide-series>

<http://guru.bafta.org/crafts/screenwriting>

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