

Production Planning

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Overview. All students learn basic pre-production, production and post for low-budget features and documentaries. This includes scheduling/budgeting software, and, for features: script breakdown, scheduling (on computer), budgeting, basic production management, job functions, common contracts and forms, and post-production workflow. For documentary: writing the proposal, research, shaping the story and script, choosing equipment, creating a budget and a schedule, casting, crewing up, preparing interviews, on location, post-production workflow, final writing and finishing. Beginning Week 12, screenwriting students apply these skills to their own pre-existing or in progress 15-minute screenplays, and documentary students do the same for their pre-existing or in progress projects. By the end of the course, your narrative or documentary project will be ready for production.

NOTE: I have found that working from a common 15 minute short film script that the whole class, either individually or in teams, learns to break down, schedule and budget, is a good way to learn the basics. The script should be fairly simple, mainly character-driven, but with good challenges for location changes and day/night shooting. When they do the budget, I suggest that they prepare a “real world” budget, not a film school where most things are free. That said, I also give them a “crew rate” sheet with pre-established day/week/hourly rates for all crew. The students must figure out how many days/weeks of prep/shoot/wrap time, but they have the rates given to them. Other costs, like camera package rentals, grip trucks, catering etc., I ask them to research, and/or make educated guesses from reading Film & Video Budgets.

When the students prep their own projects at the end of the course, these are usually projects they will shoot as part of film school, and thus will not have to pay for crew, and most gear. Even so, there will be some costs, and they must think through the time requirements for prep/shoot/wrap, and of course, do all the scheduling. I’ve found it to be an excellent prep.

I supplement class work with screenings as appropriate, and guest speakers, usually department heads who speak about pre-production, production and post from their particular point of view.

Students also prepare and give class presentations on:

- Copyright /Registering Copyright of the Script/of the Film
- Chain of Title
- Others Who May Have Rights in Your Film
- Title Clearance
- Clearing film clips /using stock footage
- Public domain
- Personal Rights/releases
- Right to Publicity/Defamation/Privacy
- Acquiring rights
- Clearing Music/Hiring a Composer
- Fair Use/Parody
- Copyright Infringement /Copyright on the Internet
- Attorneys/Agents/Managers/Provisions common to most agreements
- Production Insurance (Entertainment package/General liability/Worker’s Comp/E&O)
- WGA/DGA/SAG/AFTRA

Textbook

Film & Video Budgets, 4th edition
by Deke Simon with Michael Wiese
Michael Wiese Productions, 2006

Recommended Books

Clearance & Copyright, Everything the Independent Filmmaker Needs to Know
3rd edition
by Michael C. Donaldson
Silman-James, 2009

Dealmaking in the Film & Television Industry
2nd edition
By Mark Litwak
Silman-James
Second Edition, 2002

Grading is based on:

Class attendance & participation	10%
Narrative Film Schedule/Budget	30%
Documentary Proposal/Schedule/Budget	30%
Your project Schedule/Budget	30%

Schedule

1

Intro: Script/Schedule/Budget. Intro to script breakdown.

Homework:

1. Script breakdown of common script...due next class.
2. Reading: *Film and Video Budgets – Line items pps. 81-125*

2

Due: Script breakdowns.

Intro to EP Scheduling. Story script vs shooting script. Special breakdown situations.

Homework:

1. EP Script Breakdown/Scheduling tutorial.
2. Input script breakdowns into EP Scheduling
2. Reading: *Film and Video Budgets – Line items pps. 126-171*

3

Before Pre-production. Negotiating crew/post deals.

Homework:

1. EP Scheduling – continue learning program/build schedule of common script into EP.
2. Reading: *Film and Video Budgets – Line items pps. 171-213*

4

Pre-production checklist. Pre-production with all departments.

Homework:

1. Continue EP schedule input. Due next week.
3. Reading: *Film and Video Budgets – Digital “No Budget” Feature pps. 325-352*

5

Due: EP schedules of common script.

Feature film budget – overview. Review *Digital “No Budget” Feature* from reading. Budget planning for narrative project. (Budget due Class 7)

Homework:

1. Begin to learn EP budgeting and apply it to narrative budget.
2. Reading: *Film and Video Budgets: Digital Feature Budget* pps. 291-324

6

Budget prep/assigning values for narrative project. Discuss short doc assignment.

Homework:

1. Continue learning EP budgeting and apply to narrative project.
2. Prep your short (5 minute) doc proposal idea for next class. (Provide sample proposal/schedule)

7

Due: EP budget of common script.

How to cut when over budget.

Planning the documentary. Documentary concept/ audience/approach/limitations/research. Short documentary proposals due Class 8.

Homework:

Short documentary proposals. (Each person or team writes a proposal for a 5 minute doc.

8

Due: Short doc proposal.

Shaping the documentary/first draft treatment/schedule/budget. Documentary Pre-production /location surveys/schedules/casting/directing the interview. Discussion: Your short doc proposals/schedules/budgets.

Homework:

1. Reading: *Film & Video Budgets – Documentary Tape Budget* (pps. 273-287)
2. Short doc schedule...due next class.

9 SEMESTER BREAK

10

Due: Short doc schedule.

Editing the documentary/final writing/narration/finishing. Budgeting the documentary.

Homework:

1. Short doc budget...due Class 12.

11

Editing the documentary/final writing/narration/finishing.

Homework:

1. Continue short doc budgets
2. Next class be prepared to discuss your own final 15 minute screenwriting or documentary project for script breakdown (if narrative) or proposal/schedule/budget (if doc) assignment aka “Your Project.”

12

Due: Short doc budgets.

Your Project/discussion/script breakdown/schedule/budget. Screenwriting students begin script breakdown.

Documentary students begin pre-production planning/scheduling.

Homework:

1. Your Project Screenwriting script breakdowns due next class.
2. Your Project Documentary schedules due Class 14.

13

Due: Your Project Screenwriting script breakdowns.

Individual project class discussions as needed. Class discussions about scheduling/pre-production as needed. Screenwriting students begin EP scheduling. Documentary students continue pre-production planning/scheduling. EP schedules due next class. Doc schedules due next class.

Homework:

1. Your Project Documentary and EP schedules due next class.

14

Due: Your Project Documentary and EP schedules.

Your Project class discussions as needed. Class discussions about budgeting/pre-production as needed. Screenwriting and Documentary students begin EP budgeting.

Homework:

1. Your Project Documentary and EP budgets due Class 16.

15

Your Project class discussions as needed. Class discussions about budgeting/pre-production as needed. Screenwriting and Documentary students continue EP budgeting.

Homework:

1. Your Project Documentary and EP budgets due Class 16.

16

Due: Your Project Documentary and EP budgets.