**Tool: Filmmaking: An overview**

**The Five Stage of Filmmaking**

*­­­­­­Haere ki wīwī, ki wāwā.*

Go anywhere you like.

The filmmaking process can be organized in five separate, but at times overlapping, stages:

1. Development
2. Pre-production
3. Production
4. Post-production
5. Distribution

This document offers an overview of the different activities and aspects of each of these five stages for the purpose of helping teachers (with no or little previous experience in filmmaking) to facilitate the EOTC module/activity in which students will create a short film (max. 2 min.) based on selected *whakataukī*[[1]](#footnote-1).

**1. Development**

*Point of Departure (POD):*

Before the actual filming of a short movie can begin, the filmmakers need to establish a specific and well-defined point of departure (POD). There are several ways of looking at the POD. It can be a springboard into the unknown: the better the springboard, the greater the leap. It can be a means to an end, like the rope, which allows a kite to soar in the wind. It can be compared with the seed of a giant tree – given the right environment, care and circumstances, capable of growing into something magnificent.

In filmmaking, you can choose any POD you like, it can be: a story, a location, an image, a poem, a piece of prose, a theme or issue, a piece of music, an object, a character or collection of characters, a proverb, an oxymoron, a song, photographic images, a certain relationship, a play or section of a play – the options are endless. In this particular module the short film will be inspired by a whakataukī.

Once the POD has been established, the actual preparation and development of the project can begin. This includes:

* Establishing the filmmaking team(s);
* Pitching project proposals;
* Brainstorming and research;
* Converting the POD into film script (screenplay);
* Deciding who will direct the film;
* Finding financial resources;
* Developing preliminary schedules and budgets.

*Filmmaking Team:*

Filmmaking is a collaborative process. However, the very nature of the medium requires individual students to take on a variety of specialized roles, such as: writer, director, camera operator, actor, editor, or producer. The filmmaking’s requirement of many hands and many minds provides great opportunities for developing rich collaborative environments inside and outside the classroom. For this module we propose that a filmmaking team is made up of 6 – 8 students and that, within each team, the students themselves determine the allocation of roles.

The *writer* investigates and explores (in collaboration with other team members) the subject of the film, writes the script, creates scene breakdowns, records sound during filming, writes narration in post-production, and could write the press kit information.

The *director* leads the brainstorming sessions, creates storyboards, determines what to shoot (creates shot lists), calls the commands ‘action’ and ‘cut’ during the filming, and finds additional sounds and music.

The *camera operator* researches visual imagery (relating to whakataukī), creates shooting schedule, operates the camera, and finds additional photos and video footage.

The *actors* improvise, rehearse and act the dramatic scenes and actions.

The *editor* leads the research (during development stage), creates equipment and contact lists, logs field footage, operates editing system and determines final edit decisions.

The *producer* leads the preparation of the pitching and the pitching itself, creates budget and resources list, creates production reports, schedules editing equipment and assists team with editing.

The development stage is about asking questions, unleashing the students’ imagination, using the potential of research and creative exploration to develop and strengthen the filmmakers’ voice. Where a whakataukī is used as the point of departure of making a short film, the development stage is about exploring the traditional values and cultural knowledge contained in a whakataukī, and at the same time, providing an opportunity for the students to translate the whakataukī in material that is relevant to their world, relating to matters they care about, matters that interest them, matters they are really passionate about. There are a few suggestions, or guidelines, that can assist the process of development:

* Associate images with the whakataukī;
* Think of references to the whakataukī;
* Find new and original ways to interpret the whakataukī;
* Push the ideas as far as possible, no matter how wild, or unrealistic;
* Avoid criticism, judgments, or censorship at this stage;
* Keep a record on paper, audio or video of the ideas generated;
* Set a time to finish the brainstorm period;
* Enjoy!

*Research* offers a great platform to encounter things you never knew existed. It opens the door to possibilities and knowledge you don’t know that you didn’t know! It leads to an expansion of the world in creative and unforeseen ways. The process also fosters students’ confidence in their ability to find out about something. It is vital that value is placed on both facts *and* fantasies, in other words both objective and subjective findings and responses are of value to the process of research, learning and creation.

The process of ‘*Pitching’* a proposal will help develop the students’ oral presentation skills, particularly the ability to strongly argue a case they feel passionate about.

For the purpose of ‘*Writing the Script*’, students need to select the most striking or inspiring material from their brainstorm and research activities, and turn these into a coherent dramatic story. A film script involves dialogue, descriptions of images and the physical context of scenes and actions (locations). In order to develop ideas and materials into an effective film script it may be helpful to address the following questions:

* Where does the story/actions take place?
* Who is the hero or leading character?
* What is his or her quest?
* What are the obstacles on the journey?
* What is the dramatic climax?
* Is there a turning point?
* What is the resolution?

Think of a story as having a beginning, middle and end. Keep in mind that the story needs to be told in 2 minutes of film maximum! Once a rough draft has been written, ask the students to fill in the detail of the locations, characters and dramatic events. What time of the day is it? What are the character(s) wearing? What are the characteristics of the space (indoors, outdoors, furniture, other people, views, etc.)? And so on. Writing a script offers a great opportunity to explore language and develop literacy skills.

Once the script (or screenplay) has been drafted, it is necessary to create a ‘*Shot List*’. A Shot List is a listing of the images that will be recorded by the film crew for a particular scene, location or shooting day. It is created in order to fully understand what specific shots must be filmed to tell the story of a particular scene. The list will include information about the subject of the shot, what kind of shot it is (close-up, establishing shot, medium shot, wide shot, etc.), information about the angle of the shot, the time of the day, and the location (interior, exterior, inside a building, on a mountain, near a lake side, etc.). Often, it is the director who creates the Shot List. A Shot List helps with the planning and scheduling of the filming; it will safe a lot of time and prevents the accidental emission of important material.

**2. Pre-Production**

The pre-production stage covers all the planning, research and preparation before the first day of shooting. It involves:

* Preparing storyboards, and submitting for approval;
* Preparing breakdown of requirements (locations, materials, people);
* Preparing shooting schedule and budget;
* Arranging to use locations (permission, travel, access);
* Creating, or sourcing, props, costumes and set devices.

*Storyboarding*

Storyboards tell a story with pictures. They contain sketches of the different shots in the Shot List. Often, storyboards look like comic book drawings. They provide a visual image of what the shot is about, the location, the suggested camera angle, what lighting is required and what movement (if any) the camera provides. Storyboards function as an important tool for translating the vision inside the head of a filmmaker into a tangible image on paper. The process of storyboarding helps to open up discussion of the story, and specifies what needs to be filmed and how.

From an educational point of view, storyboarding helps students in developing visual presentation skills, which compliments the ability for oral communication.

All in all, storyboards contain information on the actors involved, the dramatic action, the setting or location, the camera angles, the camera movement, the lighting ideas, and any other relevant information. Therefore, they are of crucial importance in the preparation and planning of the actual filming.

An excellent and most enjoyable way of developing students’ skills in Storyboarding is by studying comic books. Ask the students to bring their favorite comic books to class. Comics are great tools to develop filmmaking skills, as they often provide fantastic examples of visual storytelling!

*Planning*

The pre-production process of planning provides students with the opportunity to develop skills in problem solving, analyzing, estimating, budgeting, scheduling and visioning. It is a time consuming process that requires a lot of patience, attention and communication skills.

The planning process can be broken down into a number of steps.

**Step 1:** Shooting Script (having a script that is ready to shoot).

**Step 2:** Script Breakdown (establishing what elements are required to film each scene, such as actors, set, props, wardrobe, etc.)

**Step 3:** Selecting Location (determining exactly where the filming of each shot or scene will take place).

**Step 4:** Equipment.

**Step 5:** Scheduling (creating a shooting schedule, outlining which scenes will be filmed when).

**Step 6:** Budgeting.

**Step 7:** Problem Solving (determining what obstacles and challenges may arise from the schedule, such as weather circumstances, and then solving them, finding alternatives).

**Step 8:** Communicating to the Team (distribute all breakdowns and schedules to each member of the team).

**Step 9:** Rehearsing the dramatic actions.

*Shooting Script*

A shooting script is a script in which the scenes have been given a sequential reference number in order to facilitate the breakdown and scheduling process.

*Selecting Locations*

In the context of this EOTC module/activity, it speaks for itself that the students will be encouraged to incorporate a variety of interior and exterior locations outside the classroom as locations for the filming of some or all of their scenes. In the pre-production stage the purpose of the various shots is considered when scouting for the most suitable locations. For example, the purpose of one shot may be ‘establishing a wide shot of the city’ and the Look Out point on Mt Vic (Wellington) is identified as the most suitable location for this shot as Mt Vic is not too far from school, and it offers an suitable and very interesting point of view of the city.

The locations scouts will survey the environment for suitable locations, taking still images, trying to find out whether permission is required, and if so, how the contact person can be reached. It is important to take into account the lighting situation of the various locations, as well as any sound issues that may exist (such as for example noise pollution by low flying airplanes).

*Shooting Schedule*

A shooting schedule contains the date of filming a particular scene, the title of the film, the scene number as allocated when creating the shooting script, the scene description, and an estimated time required for the shooting of that scene.

*Rehearsal*

When working with actors, it is a good idea for the director to rehearse a particular scene with the actors the day prior to the shooting of the scene. This enables the director and the actors to explore how to approach the scene without the pressure of camera operator and crew present.

**3. Production**

The production stage involves the actual shooting of the scenes, with the use of camera(s), and possibly lighting equipment and microphones. When the first day of filming arrives, it is good practice to have a production checklist. The checklist will make sure that all equipment and supplies planned for, are available and at hand (camera, fully charged batteries, tripod, sufficient blank tapes, scripts, shot list, storyboard, pen and paper, etc.).

*Script*, *Shot List*, and *Storyboard* are essential documents to identify what is required for the filming of each scene. The Script provides the details, the Shot List provides an organizational strategy, and the Storyboard provides the visual notes. Each document contributes a different angle on the same activity.

To communicate exactly what is planned and expected for a particular day of shooting, filmmakers use a tool called *Call Sheet*. The *Call Sheet* lists: what scenes are planned, what actors are required, where, when and for how long, actors and crew are needed, what will happen in case it rains, any other special instructions.

During the actual filming of a scene, the director gives the commands ‘camera rolling’ (for the camera operator to start filming), ‘action’ (for the actors to begin their actions), and ‘cut’ (to signal the end of each take and stop the camera).

Although planning and preparation are essential aspects of the filmmaking process, it is important to encourage the students to be present, in other word: to be sensory alive in the moment. Presence is an ability that will allow students to take advantage of the unforeseen opportunities that eventuate or exist in the moment. It is an ability that could transform a well-prepared creative project into something extraordinaire. Through presence true inspiration, and accidental collisions, can enter, and influence the outcome of, a creative process (whether acting, directing, writing or producing) in original and surprising ways. The key here is a willingness to experiment, allowing hereby accidents, failure or mistakes to provide new possibilities.

At the end of each shooting day/session the filmmaking team write a *Production Report*. Where the *Call Sheet* gives an answer the question, “What do we plan to do?” the *Production Report* addresses the question, “What did actually happen?” Compiling a *Production Report* offers students a great opportunity for reflection and self-evaluation. It is particularly useful to look at what went wrong, and trying to figure out why it went wrong, as there are valuable lessons to be learnt – not for the purpose of laying blame or pointing the finger, but in terms of how critical mistakes can be avoided in any future (creative) enterprise.

**4. Post-production**

The Post-production Stage involves everything that relates to the process of turning the recorded footage into a finished film. This includes the editing of the recorded material, but can at times also require the filming of additional footage, purchasing or sourcing footage from ‘stock libraries’, re-recording dialogue, scoring or recording music, creating titles and showing the finished product to a test audience.

In practical terms it comprises of the following activities:

* Logging the footage;
* Capturing the footage (for example on iMovie or Final Cut Pro);
* Editing pictures;
* Creating transitions;
* Editing sound;
* Titles and credits;
* Exporting the project to DV tape, or as digital movie file onto a CD, DVD or the Web.

Some filmmakers strongly believe that movies are made in the editing room. Editing is a highly evolved art form on its own accord. The way images are arranged in a final montage (or edit) has a huge impact on how the audiences will experience the film. Creative editing can suggest a link or relationship, between seemingly unrelated incidents. The process of editing also allows the inclusion of sudden shift in timeframe and/or location.

The great benefit of editing for student filmmakers is that it develops higher order thinking skills, such as analyzing, synthesizing, and arrangement of material to communicate an idea, image or feeling.

The post-production process can be broken down to the following steps:

1. Log the Footage (using *Footage Log* form);
2. Paper Edit (using *Edit Decision List*);
3. Assembly (putting film clips into a linear order);
4. Picture Cut (including visual transitions);
5. Sound Cut (dialogue and sound effects);
6. Titles and Finishing;
7. Test Screening
8. Exporting for Viewing.

**5. Distribution**

Distribution is about showing the film to an audience. It involves the marketing and promotion of the film, and creating a sense of excitement for potential audiences. To complete this EOTC module/activity it is highly recommended that the students organize a premiere to show the short movies to fellow students, teachers, parents and other invited guest, definitely with popcorn and perhaps even a red carpet!

1. Whakataukī: Māori proverbs. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)