

COMM-631-003, 331-02, Film and Video Production 1

Professor Larry Engel

Class time: Tuesday 6:30 – 9:30P

Class room: MPC 100

Office hours: Monday 3:30-5:30p, Tuesday 11:30a-2p and 5-6:30p, and by appointment

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EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

In the event of a declared pandemic (influenza or other communicable disease), American University will implement a plan for meeting the needs of all members of the university community. Should the university be required to close for a period of time, we are committed to ensuring that all aspects of our educational programs will be delivered to our students. These may include altering and extending the duration of the traditional term schedule to complete essential instruction in the traditional format and/or use of distance instructional methods. Specific strategies will vary from class to class, depending on the format of the course and the timing of the emergency. Faculty will communicate class-specific information to students via AU e-mail and Blackboard, while students must inform their faculty immediately of any absence due to illness. Students are responsible for checking their AU e-mail regularly and keeping themselves informed of emergencies. In the event of a declared pandemic or other emergency, students should refer to the AU Web site (www.prepared.american.edu) and the AU information line at (202) 885-1100 for general university-wide information, as well as contact their faculty and/or respective dean's office for course and school/ college-specific information.

REFUSE, REDUCE, REUSE, REPAIR, RECYCLE

In the spring semester 2009, the Film and Media Arts faculty voted to adopt “The Code of Best Practices in Sustainable Filmmaking,” which was co-authored by me and British film producer Andrew Buchanan. As part of that adoption, the department requires that all class and thesis productions become carbon neutral by following the Code’s guidelines and offsetting the carbon footprints of those projects. We believe firmly that as film and media makers and as citizens we must take environmental responsibility for our actions and must do what we can to reduce our impact on climate change immediately. To that end, bringing the Code into the classroom allows future

generations of communication professionals to learn how to practice sustainable conduct and make it an integral part of the production process. While there is a small personal or group cost to offsetting carbon footprints, there are also commensurate savings.

Please go to www.sustainablefilmmaking.org for the Code.

In addition, our efforts to help all Film and Media Arts courses become more environmentally friendly and reduce our collective impact on climate change, I have developed several policies applied to all my classes and thesis advising. To reduce paper and ink use, I will only accept “papers” electronically as Word, Excel, Pages, Numbers, GoogleDocs, RTF or PDF documents. They may be emailed to me or dropped in Blackboard. Please email me a notice if you drop the document into Blackboard.

Similarly I will not print out this syllabus. Please feel free to bring your laptops to class and use Tiffany Screens, a free download for you that allows us to share screens (<http://www.tiffanyscreens.com/>). We will test this in the first class.

For video projects, I prefer movies posted to Vimeo or Youtube and announced to the class for viewing and comments. My preferred website is vimeo.com, but youtube.com, and others may work too.

Finally do not bring throwaway plastic water bottles or coffee cups to class. Instead rely on reusable bottles and mugs, plastic or metal.

Creative Property Rights:

By enrolling in this course, you grant the University permission to have your work, which you created in conjunction with this course, copied and distributed (in print, electronic, and/or any digital medium) and to incorporate your work, in whole or in part, into derivative works for educational, research, archival, promotional, and other purposes consistent with the mission of American University.

FINAL CUT TRAINING:

There is a mandatory FCP Practicum at the beginning of the semester for all new students registered for Film and Video Production 1. Please make sure that you’re aware of times and register for it.

Required reading:

Osgood, R. & Hunshaw, M.	VISUAL STORYTELLING
Sharff, S.	THE ELEMENTS OF CINEMA
Franklin, J.	WRITING FOR STORY

Recommended Reading:

Proferes, N.	FILM DIRECTING FUNDAMENTALS
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Katz, S.
Brown, B.

**FILM DIRECTING SHOT BY SHOT
CINEMATOGRAPHY THEORY AND PRACTICE**

Additional Books:

Bordwell & Thompson **FILM ART, 8th Edition**

Course Description:

Students explore narrative tools at the filmmaker's disposal, with a particular emphasis on camera and editing. Students concentrate on basic cinematic syntax that provides a foundation for visual storytelling. Close-study of scenes from a variety of films and various video exercises allow students to investigate the critical relationships between plot and image, and between character and camera. Experimental, fiction, and documentary are all welcome as final projects.

This is a hands-on workshop that combines relates a basic understanding of the history and theory of film to the way in which film works its magic on an audience. The course concentrates on film phrasing – namely, on how film communicates and influences a viewer or “reader.” Consideration will be given to writing, directing, producing, acting, shooting, sound recording and design, and editing. Students will work in the three main phases of filmmaking: pre-production, production and post-production.

There is much to do in a very short timeframe. If you are having difficulty with the readings or the projects, please contact me as soon as you can. This is a demanding course. And I expect all of you to work together to help make the learning experience exceptional!

Goals for my students:

1. To learn and practice the basics of visual storytelling through a careful investigation of film grammar.
2. To appreciate the need to create media that matter.
3. To practice filmmaking skills that include writing, directing, producing, shooting, lighting, sound recording and editing.
4. To learn how to collaborate effectively and fairly with colleagues, including the ability to critique others and one’s self with respect.
5. To learn how to treat equipment professionally, to behave responsibly regarding the Equipment Room or other rental and supply facilities, and to follow policies concerning equipment carefully.
6. To begin finding your “voice.”
7. To engage in responsible filmmaking toward the environment, habitats, people and their cultures, other animals, and the audience.

Assignments:

The exercises and final projects will all be produced on video, edited on Final Cut Pro and presented in class on DVD (QuickTimes) but I prefer Quicktimes copied onto a flashdrive or FCP projects on your hard drive. The latter allows for in-class revisions.

[The Center for Teaching Excellence (and their New Media Center) is a great source for online podcasts on FCP and compression settings. The centers are also an invaluable resource for problem-solving in person. <http://american.edu/cte/student/training.html>]

Your class portfolio will be due at semester's end. This is best done on a DVD-R (data storage rather than a DVD video – which is an option but can take more time and effort than you may have at semester's end).

You may make a single FCP sequence of all your projects (including critical revisions made based on class feedback) and export it as a Quicktime, or you may make a series of Quicktimes (one per project).

In any case, there should be a head slate that lists the student's name, course, titles (including assignments) and running times for each project (TRT). Make sure that there is a 2 second bump to black between slates and projects and make sure that there is a slate for each video in the body of the work. Finally make sure that there is a 5 second bump to black between projects if they are on a single timeline. Count-downs are optional.

A rundown would look something like this:

:60 Color Bars and Tone

:10 Head Slate

“YOUR NAME” Prof. Larry Engel, Comm-631-002 Fall 2006

PORTFOLIO

Lumiere: “Untitled”

TRT :60



:10 Countdown

:02 Black

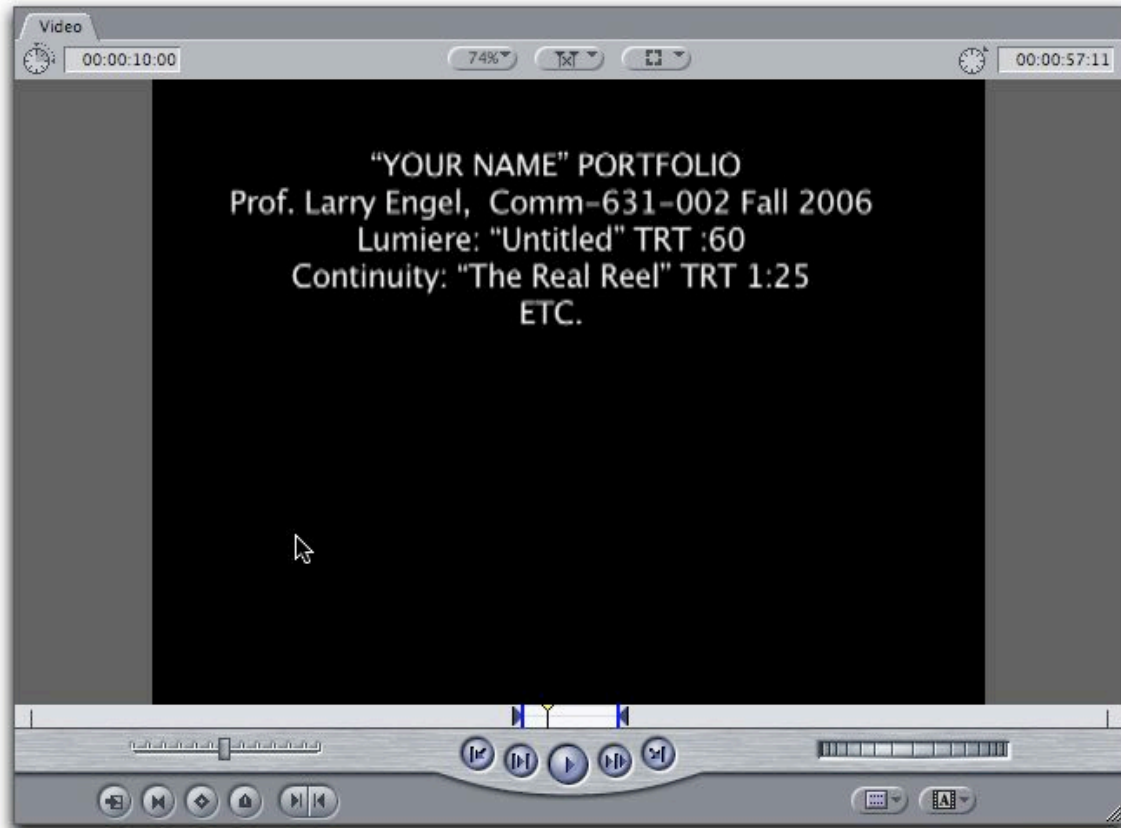
:60 Lumiere project video body

:05 Black

:10 Project Slate

ETC.

Here's one way of how it could look using <Text> selection from the Viewer window in FCP:



Production Books:

You will also create a Production Book that acts a record of your projects through the semester. Your final project will have a separate one. I will supply you with a guide to building the books, but they essentially reflect your actions and thoughts on each project as you go through the various stages of production – from concept through completion. Your entries should be done whenever you are working or thinking about the assignment. Use a standard bound lab-book to keep it separate from class notes. Or make entries on your computer. You will want to convert your journal to electronic media because these on-the-fly notes will be combined with pitches and one-pagers, loglines and spines describing the story, the director's premise and exploration statements, budgets, location scouting, casting reports, preliminary shot lists, floor plans and storyboards, early scripts, director's notes, environmental impact statements, and more. Make sure that you organize your journal by date within sections, if appropriate. (See "Production Book," a PDF.)

Editing

There are two main editing programs available to you: Final Cut Pro and Avid. I work primarily with FCP and will always have my laptop with me. I also have Avid Media Composer on my Mac. (Those on PC's may use Premiere, but I do not have access to that program.) By bringing in your portable hard drives we will be able to review work in the native editing program. If this is difficult for you, you may export your sequence to a Quicktime Movie. However, by presenting work directly in your editing program, we will

be able to view projects in class and during office hours, and we will be able to make immediate changes to the edit. This is critically important to the semester's success. I highly recommend that you purchase a 320 gb hard drive (I prefer G-Tech but there are many less expensive brands; just make sure that you buy one that has at least a firewire 400 connection -- USB2 is not good enough for editing).

Also please participate fully in the Final Cut Pro Practicum; it is mandatory for this course. FCP itself has a tutorial that I highly recommend. The single most important element of learning FCP is file management (workflow). There are several good books out on FCP 6. There are also several websites and resources that we will discuss in class.

One main element to concentrate on early in your work with any post-production non-linear editing system is the organization and labeling of your projects and media files. I will not look kindly on those who end up losing media or being unable to find projects. Also, make sure that you always backup your projects on CD or jump drives. Keep early sequences because I like tracking the trajectory of your projects from beginning efforts to final revisions.

Just as with writing, the key to successful editing is revision.

Scholarly and Academic Focus

It is imperative that we recognize this production course is set in a historical, theoretical and analytical context. While this course is devoted to the development of professional skills in the practice of filmmaking, and therefore must by definition concentrate on the craft and artistic attributes needed to create strong fiction and nonfiction narratives or experimental works, it also must provide a historical, analytical and theoretical grounding as well. Students are encouraged to bring in films of their choosing for discussion and analysis.

Consideration for Others

Because you will be working in groups, it is important that you learn to communicate well and be considerate of your colleagues. Professionally film is very much a collaborative art and I want to work together effectively. This is not always easy. Even if you are doing your own project you will need to work in a group project.

Grading:

Class participation (15% of the final grade)

Because this class depends heavily on in-class discussions and process, students must be willing to attend every class, come to class prepared to present their work and ideas, and provide critical feedback to other students about their work. Each student will propose three topics or stories for consideration to the class at the second meeting. A single topic or story will be selected as the basis for the exercises and final project.

Exercises and Projects (70% of final grade)

Students produce five exercises. They should all be between one and five minutes long. You will produce these in teams of two. You do not have to stay in the same pairing for each project, but if you do not choose your teammate, I will. If there is an odd number of students in the class, one section will have three students. No student may do more than one project in a three-some.

Exercise 1 is the so-called “Lumiere” experiment. This takes us back to the first days of cinema, with cameras that had a fixed-focal lens, limited recording time, and were used on an unmoving tripod. So you will emulate these early days when cinema was in its infancy. Put the camera on a tripod. Pick a position, compose a shot, set the focus and exposure manually if you can, and stop looking through the eyepiece or at the monitor. When you think everything is ready, record the “scene” for one minute. Please do not record for five minutes and select one. You may bring the tape to class cued to the head of the scene and we will play it back. Or you can use this first foray into video/film to digitize into FCP and bring the project into class on your hard drive.

While you will be collaborating in the production of this exercise as well as other exercises and projects, I would like each of you to do one as “director.”

Exercise 2: Continuity

Revisions of Continuity (voluntary)

Exercise 3: Montage

Exercise 4: Lighting for Reel

Exercise 5: Sound Spaces

Project 1: Swap

Project 2: Autobiographies

Each exercise will be described in more detail in class and/or via Blackboard.

Swap

We will be working closely with students in Professor Douglass’s and Meyers’ Writing for Visual Media course on a “swap” of short narrative films. Five-page scripts will come into our classroom and be assigned to production teams. The writer of the scripts will not be part of that team. Director’s notes will be provided the writer who will have the opportunity to revise the script in Writing for Visual Media.

Final Project and Production Book (15% of final grade)

The final video project, between five and seven minutes long (if you are doing a documentary, you may request going longer), is made up of several components including a journal tracking the evolution of the project (as mentioned above), a script or treatment, a storyboard and/or shot list along with a floor plan (or in the case of a

documentary or experimental film, a visualization plan), and the film itself. Selecting a historical period, a genre, a theory, or a director, the student develops a final project as a visual and aural exploration of the specified choice. The final project, then, is more than a “story”; effectively it becomes a visual and aural investigation of film as well.

Extra Assignments

All of my exercises are meant to help you explore film phrasing. You may do two extra assignments voluntarily for me to review. Successful completion will add a third of a grade bump. Let me know which you may be interested from the list below before you start.

Evaluation

Evaluation of a student's performance in this course as a whole will be guided by the following criteria:

A: demonstration of superior work (production, written and oral) in fulfillment of course requirements; improvement during the semester will be weighed in evaluation

B: excellent work (production, written and oral) in fulfillment of course requirements; improvement during the semester will be weighed in evaluation

C: satisfactory work (production, written and oral) in fulfillment of course requirements

D: assigned work is not satisfactory or not completed and/or student fails to meet minimum attendance requirements

F: failure to meet course goals – production work, written assignments, class participation, and other course requirements

Grading and Late Work

The percentages that contribute to the final grade are listed above. Because the course depends heavily on student work and participation week to week, students must be able to present their work on time. The final project is due at the last class.

I will provide you with a criteria report of my evaluations, but I essentially look at three general aspects of your work, creativity, effort, and execution (in that order) as it applies to each exercise, class participation and final project.

Late assignments will be automatically charged a third of a grade for every day that it is late unless a prior agreement has been reached in writing or via email with the professor.

Four unexcused absences will lead to an automatic F. Three missed classes will cost 1 grade.

STUDENT RESOURCES:

Academic Support Center. If you need assistance with writing or composing the required class assignments the Academic Support Center has a Writing Lab for undergraduate students. The Center also offers study skills workshops, individual instruction, tutor referrals and services for students with learning disabilities. (885-3360, MGC 243).

The Writing Center: This center is an additional resource for students in need of writing assistance. (Gray Hall, 206).

English Language Institute: This is a resource for international students or non-native speakers of English. You should contact the Institute if you are having language difficulty with the lectures, written assignments or readings. (885-2150, McKinley 206).

Disability Support Services: This office provides technical support and assistance with accommodations for students with physical or psychological disabilities. (885-3315, MGC 206)

Counseling Center: If you are experiencing emotional stress or personal problems which are impeding your ability to function in and outside of the classroom the counseling center offers counseling and consultations regarding personal concerns, self-help information, and connections to off-campus mental health resources. (885-3500, MGC 214)

DV Lab and New Media Center: You will be doing most of your editing in the DV Lab 212 MGC. Through the lab you should be able to get some support for FCP but it is your responsibility to learn FCP, so again, use the help guide and tutorials as well as the assigned reference book (which also comes with a DVD tutorial). The New Media Center is another great campus resource. The good people there are to found in Hurst Hall, room 212.

Academic Integrity:

Standards of academic conduct are set forth in the University's Academic Integrity Code. By registering for this course, you have acknowledged your awareness of the Code and you are obliged to become familiar with your rights and responsibilities as defined by the Code. Violations of the Academic Integrity Code will not be treated lightly and disciplinary action will be taken should such violations occur. Please see me if you have any questions about the Code in general or as they related to the particular requirements for this course.

Computer Imaging Integrity Code:

Respect for intellectual labor and creativity is vital to academic discourse and enterprise. This principle applies to works of all authors and publishers in all media. It encompasses respect for the right to acknowledgment., right to privacy, and right to determine the form, manner and terms of publication and distribution.

Electronic information is volatile and easily reproduced. Respect for the work and personal expression of others is especially critical in computer environments. Violations of authorial integrity, including plagiarism, invasions of privacy, unauthorized access, and trade secret and copyright violations, may be grounds for sanctions against members of the academic community.

EQUIPMENT AND FACILITIES:

I cannot over-emphasize this: Treat every piece of equipment from the Equipment Room with great care and responsibility, as if you had paid for it yourself (which you have

done). Carefully follow all policies and procedures for reserving, checking out, using, and returning equipment. Treat the staff with respect and make sure that any malfunction or breakage is reported on check-in.

Being irresponsible with any cable, battery, lens, camera, tripod, microphone, light, etc. only means that you will be jeopardizing your and your colleagues' access to equipment. This includes post-production computers, playback decks, and other equipment.

We will talk about how to treat equipment properly, even down to how to coil cables. I expect that you will take this concern to heart and bring a high level of professional conduct into the classroom as well as out in the field.

Make sure that you follow ALL reservation requirements. If you are not going to use gear or facilities, please be kind enough to let the right people know so that others may get to use them.

If you break something, whatever you do, do not hide it. Let us know that something is broken, lost, or might be. Any damaged or broken gear should be taped and labeled so that when you return the equipment to the Equipment Room you and they will know about it.

It is required that, as part of the check-out procedure, you do what we all do in the profession -- budget time to assemble all the equipment to make sure that you have everything that you reserved or need, and that every piece of gear is in good working order.

YOU MUST DO THIS BEFORE YOU LEAVE THE EQUIPMENT ROOM.

If there are expendables such as batteries for the microphones or bulbs, have extras or spares with you. (You have to supply your own mini-DV tape, but they can be purchased, along with gaffer tape, from the Equipment Room.)

NECESSARY MATERIALS AND SUPPLIES

Needed stuff for class:

Mini-DV tapes. You'll need about four of them. You can buy them from the ER, online, or locally. Make sure that you use only one brand, preferably Panasonic or Sony (I prefer Panasonic) -- high end. Don't go cheap.

Highly recommended stuff for class and beyond:

Hard Drives

G-tech, LaCie or similar, 250 gig minimum up to 500 gb or a terrabyte.
Mandatory: Firewire connectivity, either 400 or 400/800. USB isn't good for FCP. Also look for a 7200 rpm drive rather than a 5400 rpm drive. Plan on bringing the hard drive to class so that we will be able to revise edits on the spot.

You may also add a smaller (100-250 gig) portable hard drive -- powered by your laptop.

TiffanyScreens. This is a software program that allows us to connect our computers in class. It is a free download from www.tiffanyscreens.com.

Celtx. This is a free download that allows you to write in formatted scripts. It has limitations but please note that it is free. www.celtx.com

USB flash drive

Important for bringing short work to class and screening compressed Quicktimes. Also very good for saving projects from FCP as backups.

DVDs

A good idea is to burn your Quicktimes for making protection masters of final exercises and projects. Also good for presentations. However, I would suggest that you not burn too many as this is a carbon drain.

Headsets

You should invest in a decent pair of audio headphones. Sony makes good on-ear models that work well under field conditions and in the edit room. They cost around \$50-60. You may also consider in-ear headphones, but make sure not to use noise-canceling or buds. You'll use them for production and post-production.

Field Stuff (locally, Serious Lighting and Electric, Dominion Camera, Penn Camera, Ritz Photo, Barbizon, R&R Lighting, Washington Source):

- Grip bag or tote
- Lens cleaner
- Lens brush
- Micro-cloth
- Air syringe
- Gaffer tape (2") (ER sells)
- Black paper tape
- Duvetyne
- Black wrap for blocking light
- Clothes pins (called C47's in the trade)
- Gels for color correction, coloring and diffusion
- Sharpies
- Multi-tool such as Leatherman or Gerber
- Pair of leather gloves
- Flashlight (Mini-Maglight)
- Fanny pack
- Shower caps
- Chinese lanterns and bulbs
- Bobbles
- 1/4 or 1/2 inch paper tape for labeling broken or damaged equipment

Spare batteries
e- tap/cube
Sharpies

Online sources:
filmsource.com
bhphotovideo.com
studiodepot.com

CLASS OUTLINE (subject to change)

- Class 01 What it's all about: Introduction to the course, equipment and lab
8/25 The dynamic relationship among plot, character, and the screen
 Film Clip: **Rear Window**
 Introduction to cameras and tripods
- Class 02 Visual Storytelling
9/1 Introduction to film syntax: Composition & Basic Continuity
 The Master Shot Sequence and Fragmentation
 The Post-production workflow
 Film Clip: **Rear Window**
 Exercise 1 due: The Lumiere Experiment
- Class 03 Camera and Composition
9/8 Introduction to Film Syntax: Montage
 Multi-angularity and Separation
 Film Clips: **Man with a Movie Camera, Breathless**
 Exercise 2 due: Continuity
 Receive Swap scripts from Writing for Visual Literacy
- Class 04 Camera Movement
9/15 Introduction to Film Syntax: Camera Movement and Mis-en-Scene
 Film Clip: **Rules of the Game & Sherman's March**
 Submit director's notes to writers in Writing for Visual Literacy
 Pitch of documentary and experimental ideas by students
- Class 05 Lighting
9/22 Introduction to Film Syntax: Familiar Image and Parallel Action
 Film Clips: **Seven Samari & Hiroshima, Mon Amour**
 Exercise 3 due: Montage
 Revisions of Continuity due (extra credit)
 Notes to writer due

Class 06 9/29	Sound Recording: From Pre-production to Location Recording Film Clips: M, Frenzy, Cleo From 5-7 Due: Revisions of final project's treatment/script First draft of final project's treatment due
Class 07 10/6	Performance: the relationship between actor (or character) and camera Film Clips: Bicycle Thief Casting Exercise 5 due: Lighting for reel Presentation of Master Plan for final projects
10/13	NO CLASS/Friday Schedule
Class 08 10/20	Revised storyboards or shot-lists and floor plans (Master Plan) due for final fiction project, or production plan for final documentary project Exercise 6 due: Sound spaces
Class 09 10/27	Review Master Plans for Swap Review final plans for documentary/fiction projects Review "dailies" and/or rough cuts
Class 10 11/3	Project 1: Autobiographies due Review dailies for final projects and Swap
Class 11 11/10	Rough cuts and dailies all projects
Class 12 11/17	Rough cuts and/or fine cuts all projects
Class 13 11/24	Fine cuts due
Class 14 12/1	Final Projects due w/ portfolio and journal Pix Lock and Sound Mix due

There is a separate PDF spreadsheet that shows the reading assignments along with class goals on a weekly basis.

LIST OF “FRAMING” OR EXTRA EXERCISES (for your reading pleasure, in no particular order):

1. 45°-180°. Choose a simple action of a single character. Then create a story board that fragments the action into a set of at least 10 shots. The entire sequence must be made up of only one of these angles -- each shot must be 45°, 90°, or 180° from the preceding shot. Thus the sequence will be all 45°, all 90° or all 180° cuts. If you have the time and interest, take the same action and do two of these angles.
2. The extraordinarily mundane. Take a mundane action and make it extraordinary. One -- or two-person scene. Dramatic intensification through shot selection and editing.
3. The moment before — a two-person scene. Take two people in the same place, create the moment before a key action takes place, and make that the scene. It is a scene of building tension and should be nonverbal. The last shot of this sequence is the first shot of the moment (action) sequence.
4. The long single take, or sequence shot. Take a moment in time and shoot the action in a single, continuous shot. Rather than connecting the graphic arrangements or “shots” through cuts, use camera movement and mis-en-scene to get you from one composition to the next. This should be at least one minute long. If you wish, you may also shoot exactly the same action through fragmentation and cut the scene so that you have two variations.
5. Screen direction, geography and fragmentation. Take a simple action of a single character and test continuity of screen direction. Do two different sequences of the identical action. One strictly observes the convention of the continuity of screen direction. The other does not. The latter deals with opposition of screen direction. Create a pattern of opposite movement, so that the first and last shots of the sequence are the same screen direction.
6. Setting change. Take a two-person scene, cast it, rehearse it and shoot it in two significantly different locations.
7. Linear/Nonlinear. Take a simple action of a single character or choose a two-person scene. Either follow the convention of continuity of real time or break it.
8. Cut/Take. Take a single action or a short scene and shoot it two ways. One will be through a series of shots of short to medium duration, the other through fewer but longer duration shots.
9. Compression/Expansion: Rhythms. Create a scene in which a character arrives at a location, then leaves. One of the actions (arrival or departure) will be longer than the actual event; the other will be shorter.

10. Chase/Escape. Create a chase sequence. Shoot it either from the point of view (not a literal point of view shooting style) of the predator or the prey, the cat or the mouse. Narrator's voice.

11. Sound effects. Select an interior location for this one. Shoot a short scene with one or two characters. Cut it. Then create two different sound effects beds that locate the story in two different places. Also use the sound effects to expand the frame and the narrative.

12. Parallel action. Create a short narrative involving two characters. They are in two clearly different places. Establish their action lines and bring them together. Use cinematic glue to make their bond hold before they meet.

13. Alone in my room. A single character is in one of her or his rooms. Over the course of one to three minutes and through the use of slow disclosure and/or fragmentation, show us who she or he is and what she or he is doing. Reveal narrative and dramatic information through the setting and its details, and through the activity of the person. Sound effects are allowed, but no music or dialogue. Non-verbal exposition and mood.

HAVE FUN!