

Multimedia Unit - Writing Screenplays

by Jim Davis

Below is a chart that outlines a practical Multimedia Unit in writing screenplays and producing a video for the Senior High English Language Arts program. The chart represents a sequence that I have developed over two years of trial and error at Main River Academy (Spring 2002) and Pasadena Academy (Spring 2003). This Unit can take between 4 and 6 weeks. It satisfies SEVERAL curricular outcomes as outlined in the Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation document (APEF).

STEP	ACTIVITY	CURRICULAR OUTCOME
1	<p>Write the Story - Write the plot (brief synopsis) of your video on the board in front of the whole class. For each English student, you have a scene. If you have 24 people in your class, you FORCE your story into 24 plot points (or scenes). This is a truly collective process – you are facilitator and they are the genesis of the story.</p> <p>This step is definitely the hardest because finding original stories is an oddly abstract activity. I have had some success in using an individual student worksheet (see attached). These sheets glean information about genres and stories that your students like. Keep in mind that some experts believe that there are only a few truly original stories. There is nothing wrong with re-vamping an old story and updating it for your students!</p>	<p>(Grade 10) Demonstrate an awareness of what writing/representation processes and presentation strategies work for them in relation to audience and purpose.</p> <p>(Grade 11) Apply a variety of writing/representation strategies to construct increasingly complex texts.</p> <p>(Grade 12) Apply their knowledge of what strategies are effective for them as creators of various writing and other representations.</p> <p>EVALUATION: If you do use a Synopsis sheet, this can be evaluated. You can also evaluate their participation and contribution within the group. Some students can grow incredibly irritated with the abstract nature of this initial step. Generally, do not give this mark much weight. Most students will get a good mark.</p>
2	<p>Write the Scenes - Students type their scene on a computer following a SPECIFIC format for screenplays (see attached).</p> <p>The students save their files in the proper</p>	<p>(Grade 10) Demonstrate commitment to crafting pieces of writing and other representations.</p> <p>(Grade 11) Demonstrate a commitment to crafting a range of writing and other</p>

	<p>[server] folder and on your floppy disk. You MUST keep a master list of who is writing each scene and EVERYONE should have a copy of this list. Each file should be saved with a naming convention (i.e. SCENE05-sheldon).</p> <p>Because of the exacting specifications of the screenplay format, nearly ALL your students will have formatting mistakes. These MUST be corrected by you on the floppy. However, I would not correct any spelling, syntactical, or punctual mistakes at this step. Interestingly this step is truly an individual and solitary step – the students are on their own as their classmates have their own scene to write!</p>	<p>representations.</p> <p>(Grade 12) Demonstrate a commitment to the skilful crafting of a range of writing and other representations.</p> <p>EVALUATION: You can assess the ability to adopt and adhere to a unique format. You can also evaluate how accurately they satisfied the original scene synopsis that the class agreed to on the previous step. On rare occasion, a student will not write the scene they were supposed to write. In this event, the student MUST be asked to re-write the scene. I would NOT evaluate grammar at this step.</p>
3	<p>Production Meeting - You compile all the files into ONE master and print it. You create a cover page that indicates that it is the 1st draft, you list all the student names and the characters they will be playing and you bind the scripts with a nice heavy paper for the front and back of the script (see attached).</p> <p>You then arrange your class in a circle and you have your 1st read-through. You stop and start as often as you want. You make all the changes you want. You discuss narrative structure and you question if this script satisfies the original theme. You are also VERY careful of constructive and destructive criticism. You also discuss audience and purpose. Now, you talk about language and word choice and how to say what you want in a modern teenage drama without foul language or by being crass.</p> <p>You write all your proofreader’s marks and all the additions, changes and deletions on your script to develop a 2nd draft. It’s up to you how many copies you want. I do NOT make copies for the whole</p>	<p>(Grade 10) Consistently use the conventions of written language in final products.</p> <p>(Grade 11) Demonstrate control of the conventions of written language in final products.</p> <p>(Grade 12) Use the conventions of written language accurately and consistently in final products.</p> <p>EVALUATION: How many mistakes were made? How well did students critique? How well did they take being critiqued? Now you can look at spelling and grammar. You can examine voice, dialogue, characterization. Again, you can evaluate contributions to the group.</p>

	<p>class. I make just a few for yourself and the actors to read on-location.</p>	
4	<p>Shoot the Video - Create a master shooting schedule that lists times and places to shoot. Contact ALL legal guardians to obtain permission.</p> <p>DON'T shoot too much in one day. You can get a student to shoot all the scenes if they don't want to act. Generally, you should aim for a 20 to 30 minute video and shoot it over a 5 to 10 day period. You can also get another student to direct. Or, you can do it all yourself to ensure quality control.</p> <p>I ask students to look over their script before we shoot, but I don't ask that they memorize lines. Since shots tend to be brief, students can memorize a line or two at a time. In between takes, they can consult the script.</p> <p>Don't be afraid of re-takes. I have gone up to 40 takes to get the shot <i>right</i>. You MUST be satisfied with your dailies. Otherwise, you have to re-shoot scenes that are poorly shot..</p> <p>Obviously, you shoot out of sequence for convenience. You shoot all the scenes at Sheldon's house at the same time even if the script tells you otherwise. (DO have a change of clothes though.)</p>	<p>(Grade 10) Experiment with the use of technology in communicating for a range of purposes.</p> <p>(Grade 11) Make informed choices about the use of computer and media technology to serve their communication purposes.</p> <p>(Grade 12) Use technology effectively to serve their communication purposes. Design "texts" that they find aesthetically pleasing and useful.</p> <p>EVALUATION: You have to critique the cameraperson for their visual choices and/or direction. You also have to evaluate actor's performances.</p>
5	<p>Edit the Video - You capture your best scenes to a computer with a video capture card. There are several software programs out there you can use to edit (MovieXone is FREE from Microsoft's download site).</p>	<p>(As with Step 4)</p> <p>EVALUATION: You re-iterate notions involving narrative structure. You can give a mini-lesson on montage (see Eisenstein). Alfred Hitchcock's movie, <u>Rear Window</u> [1954] is an excellent example of montage.</p>
6	<p>The Premiere - You allow as few people in the editing room as possible. You create a</p>	<p>[Here you satisfy the final stage of the Writing Process – Publish, in a very</p>

<p>buzz about the video with the help of your editor and you advertise The Premiere around your community, clearly setting the time and place.</p> <p>I have aired student videos on community television channels (in Pollard's Point and Jackson's Arm we aired it before and after BINGO). Generally, these people are more than happy to help broadcast their children's fine performances.</p> <p>You can also get your hands on a video projector and have The Debut at a public place.</p>	<p>unique manner.]</p> <p>EVALUATION: The teacher can finally take a break as you hand criticism back into the hands of the masses. Many people will get to see your production, there WILL be a buzz and you will have added to the spirit to your school and community!</p>
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Resources:

<http://www.ati.com/products/multimedia.html> (video capture cards)

<http://www.tigerdirect.ca/> (great prices for hardware)

<http://www.craftyscreenwriting.com/> (Alex Epstein's great advice)

<http://www.wordplayer.com/> (Screenwriter, Terry Rossio)

<http://lewhunter.com/> (Writing Professor, Lew Hunter)

Crafty Screenwriting: Writing Movies That Get Made, Alex Epstein (Owl Books: New York, 2002).

Writing the Script: A Practical Guide for Films and Television, Wells Root (Owl Books, New York, 1979).

The Little Digital Video Book, Michael Rubin (Peachpit Press: Berkley, California, 2001).