Independent Lasagna - The Independent's Guide to the Feature Film!

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"Keep it Simple Stupid!"

This guide is designed to aid you in putting together and distributing a feature film for $10,000! Join us and share Independent Lasagna's Do It Together Creative Film Collaborative to help find crew around you and others!

Intro to Making Movies

What is Independent Lasagna?

Independent Lasagna is a recipe on how to put together a feature film for basically the cost of food (or approximately $5,000 - $10,000 dollars).

There are many layers involved. This guide is designed to take you through each step of the filmmaking process; from the inception of the script, into pre-production, through principle photography and post-production; all the way through marketing and distribution of the film.

I hope this is helpful for anyone who aspires to get his or her ideas from script to screen!!!

Who Am I?

My name is Reyshan Parker, and I am a writer, director, author and producer. I have Masters Degree in Film from Savannah Collage of Art and Design and a Bachelors Degree in Playwriting with a Film Minor from Ohio University. For the past three years I have been working on making a feature film called Noir: the Good Girl, the Detective and the Femme Fatale. My producing partner and I had originally planned on it being three films, each shot for half an hour, by three different crews, then put together as a feature film. Well, that slowly morphed into just me directing it, and we then planned on a $100,000 dollar budget! Ok, we could probably get that without too much difficulty. But then, the script managed to get into the hands of our now producers

representative who insisted that the script was so good that it deserved named actors and a "real" budget! The whole thing spiraled up to a $2 million dollar budget with a $700,000 dollar cast break, and another $4.3 million dollars for marketing and distribution, which includes three hundred, select screens across the country. If you're doing the math the total budget came out to 6.3 million dollars, that's 63 times more money then was originally planned.

Right after all this had been decided, I was approached by an ex-professor of mine who said he would be interested in helping us make the movie for $300,000 dollars… WE TURNED HIM DOWN!! This is probably the biggest mistake I have ever made in my life, hands down. The lesson learned: NEVER LOOK A GIFT HORSE IN THE MOUTH!!

Since then, we did manage to find an investment group and spent about $25,000 dollars in due diligence for them to broker the financing of the film. Over a year later it seems the film still isn't even close to seeing production.

Not to say we haven't made strides on it. During this time we shot **Noir.0 a 12-minute prologue** to the feature film. I wrote the **novel** version of the film. Recorded the **audio book**, the screenplay has been made into a **graphic novel,** and still we wait…

The point is, that I started with an amazing simple script that could have been made on the cheap and reaped a large profit; unfortunately we let our heads and the project get to big. The idea of having "A" list actors and a full-on film set was too enticing at

the time and we lost site of the bigger picture that was simply getting the film made.

So now I have decided to do it my way, and to help others follow in my footsteps. Together we are going to change the landscape of the industry forever. Don't get me wrong, it has already been changing, but now is the time to jump on and ride the wave to the finish line.

I am a firm believer that in this day and age any polished feature film, and by that I mean a thought out and original script with compelling characters that tells a great story, shot in 2K or higher with a perfectly textured, color, sound design and score, made for $100,000 dollars or less will sell for at least $100,000 dollars, or easily make it back in digital distribution. This means zero risk on the investment side!

But… what if we could make them for the cost of food? Well, that's my plan!

Who are you?

You should be a passionate and creative leader of man; someone with great and innovative ideas, who has the ability to inspire others to follow you to the ends of the earth and back for the sake of a great film… and get there!

Check out these inspirational video's:
[Christopher Nolan Shares DIY Shooting Tricks of His No-Budget First Film, 'Following'](#)

[Do You Want To Make A Small Indie Film Or Have A Job? by James Cullen Bressack](#)

Lesson 1: Inception, story and script foundations for film.

LESSON 1: INCEPTION
"A journey of a 1000 miles begins with a single step!"

RULE #1: Keep it Simple Stupid!

Keep in mind financial feasibility in regards to every aspect of the filmmaking process. Money's money, and that's what we're trying to avoid spending! This is particularly true for the screenplay itself as it does serve as the blueprint for the entire film. I know it's easy to get carried away in the world of our imaginations, especially when writing. So, try and get creative by keeping things simple. Keep your locations minimal and free. I recommend no more then one or two primary locations. Limit your main characters to 2 or 3 actors. Keep your story character driven, don't try and get all crazy with things you know you can't afford and won't be able to pull off, (explosions, car chases, special effects, etc.) instead think outside of the box, this is where some of the best ideas usually come from anyway.

Check out **Writing Character For Film and Television - A Film Courage Screenwriting Series** for a wonderful breakdown on screenwriting.

Narrative Style:
"Plot, structure and time!"

Once you have decided what you want to write about, it is now time to decide how you will tell your story. Basic film structure follows the three-act formula. First in act one you have the "setup" where we meet the protagonist in stasis, an "inciting Incident" occurs setting the film and the character into action at plot point #1. Act two leads up into the confrontation or the objective the character is now undertaking, whatever it is it's either going to go very well or very bad. The "Midpoint' of act two usually finds the protagonist at his/her lowest point of the film, (when the guy loses the girl, etc) but this could also be a high point if your going for tragedy. Plot point #2 occurs at the end of act two once the confrontation or objective has either been resolved or accomplished leading to the Climax of the film. Act three embodies the "Resolution" or falling action where the world of the protagonist returns to a new stasis.
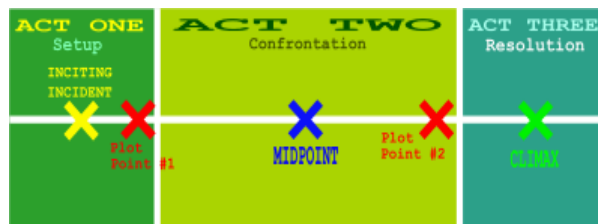
For a more in depth analysis of structure please see: **scribemeetsworld.com - screenplay-writing/how-to-write-a-script-outline-the-8-major-plot-points** or **screenplayer.org**

These rules are of course not set in stone and like all rules are meant to be broken, but it is essential to understand the rules before you can break them appropriately. Pulp Fiction is an excellent example of seemingly breaking the rules of structure while still holding the same basic pattern of the rules.

When structuring it helps to breakdown the entire script into scenes with the "Who, what, where, when, and why" of each scene so you know how each step of the film affects the next. You can then go onto breaking down each scene into it's own "beats" or moments of escalation. Understanding the rising and falling actions and climax of each scene within itself will make writing each scene and the entire script a lot easier throughout the process.

Before you even begin writing it is a good idea to outline your screenplay scene by scene. I use an ABC system as follows:

Scene 1:

A - The Scene Location

B - The Characters in the Scene

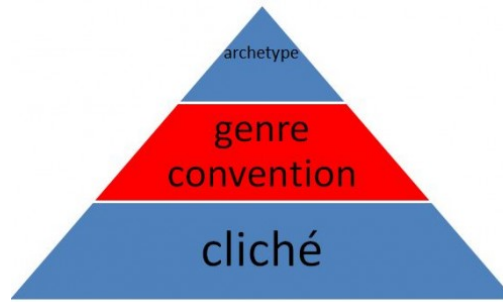C – The Major Point/The Action/What happens in the Scene.

Do this for the entire screenplay and never have writers block again!

Genre Conventions: "I am whatever you say I am!"

When thinking about what you want to write about, take great heed from the classic conventions of genre. This can be a great tool in solidifying what type of film you will be making as well as help you structure the ins and outs of the script. For instance if you were going to shoot a movie in one room with two characters the film will be completely different based on the conventions you apply. If it is going to be a horror film you will most likely build suspense through the beats of each scene and have a lot of "shock" moments intended to scare the audience and keep them on edge. Or, if you're making a drama, you will build up intense moments with close ups and tension, leading the audience along by making them empathetic to the protagonist and his/her situation. However, if you employ conventions of comedy you would want to keep your dialogue light hearted and fun, with long scenes that employ "beats" leading up to major "punch lines," (actions and/or dialogue) that seals the joke.

Be careful though genre conventions can run a fine line between Archetypical and Cliché so bring a

new spin to whatever genre you decide to go with.

Here is a list of major Genre Conventions:

	Film genres	[hide]
V · T · E		
By style	Action (heroic bloodshed · Hong Kong action) · Adventure (survival) · Art · Biographical · Comedy (black · parody · screwball · slapstick) · Documentary (docudrama · mockumentary · mondo · pseudo) · Drama (dramedy · historical · melodrama) · Erotic (pink · blue) · Educational (social guidance) · Epic · Experimental · Exploitation · Fantasy (comic · contemporary · dark · fairy tale · high · historical) · Film noir (bad girl · neo-noir) · Horror (body · comedy · eco · natural · psychological · slasher · splatter · satanic) · Musical · Mystery · Pornographic · Propaganda · Reality · Romance (romantic comedy · romantic thriller) · Science fiction (cyberpunk) · Thriller (comedy · conspiracy · erotic · financial · giallo · legal · political · psychological · techno)	
By theme	Animals · Beach party · Blaxploitation · Buddy (buddy cop · female) · Cannibal · Coming-of-age · Concert · Crime (heist · hood · mob · yakuza) · Dance (hip hop) · Disaster (apocalyptic) · Drug (stoner) · Dystopian · Ethnographic · Extraterrestrial · Found footage · Funny animal · Ghost · Hentai · LGBT · Martial arts (chopsocky · girls with guns · gun fu · kung fu · wuxia) · Monster (giant monster · jiangshi · vampire · werewolf · zombie) · Mountain · Nature (environmental issues) · Outlaw biker · Pirate · Prison (women) · Rape and revenge · Road · Samurai · Sexploitation · Slavery · Slice of life · Snuff (Crush) · Sports · Spy (eurospy) · Superhero · Swashbuckler · Sword-and-sandal · Sword and sorcery · Travel · Trial · Vigilante · War (anti-war) · Western (acid · epic · meat pie · northern · ostern · revisionist · space · spaghetti · weird · zapata)	
By audience	Chick flick · Children's · Guy-cry · Teen · Woman's	
By format or production	3D · Animation (anime · computer · stop motion · traditional) · B movie · Black-and-white · Blockbuster · Color · Compilation · Cult · Feature · Featurette · Independent · Live action (animation) · Low-budget · Major studio · Mockbuster · No budget · Serial · Short · Silent · Sound · Underground	

For detailed descriptions of each genre please see Wikipedia's list of **Genre Conventions**.

Genre convention may be combined of course and no film usually falls into simply one category so feel free to play around with the notions!
A great example of blending genre conventions is "Back To The Future III":
A Sci-Fi/Western/Romance/Comedy

Story and Plot "Are you a Martian?"

Are you a Martian? If answer is no! Then don't write about Martians. Instead, write about something you actually know about… don't write about stuff that is outside of your own experience unless you're prepared to do a lot of research.

I will reiterate this statement throughout this guide because it is probably the most important statement you can make when approaching a film, please, for your own sake, "keep it simple stupid!"
Write about what you love, what you're passionate about. Everyone is unique and has special interests that they find pleasure in exploring. Figure out what yours is and see if you can't find a simple story in there somewhere. Whether it's a concept, a notion, a character, a love of the pottery, or the ridiculousness of your day job, if you can structure a story around it, with some awesome well-rounded and empathetic characters, you have the makings for a great screenplay.

Characters: "The players!"

Characters sometimes come out of thin air, or you can build them piece-by-piece. I recommend spending some time with and getting to know each one of your characters before you begin writing.

Write complete backstories for them, their passions and pains, their joy's and sorrows; the details! The smaller the better, what is their favorite color/food…

You don't have to use everything you write down about them but it will aid in the flow of your script as well as help you out of binds if you find yourself stuck at points not knowing what to do with them. Trust me it will surprise you.

Writing Your Screenplay - L1S2

STEP 2: WRITING YOUR SCREENPLAY!

Its time to take all the ideas you've jotted down on those napkins, notepads whatever, and get them into a screenplay!

Formatting "It goes like this!"

Formatting is pretty universal I'm not going to get into details about exact formatting, but a good simple breakdown can be found at: **scripped.com - screenplay_basics**

Definitely get a screenwriting program. I like **Movie Magic Screenwriter**. It's not free, but it does go along with the entire suite; **Movie Magic Budgeting and Scheduling**.

There are some good freeware programs out there though such as, **Celtx** and **Adobe's Story Free**. Both have hot keys that make screenwriting simple and everything is formatted for you. Both also have a budgeting and scheduling suite to go along with them as well.

A plethora of screenplay examples of can be found at **Script-O-Rama** I recommend reading a few in your genre choice before you begin writing.

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            FADE IN:

    1       EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

            A dark and dreary alley where the wet pavement reflects the
            moonlight as if after after a light rain.  Dumpster's and
            trash cans line the walls creating shadows that ominously
            hide the unknown.

            A couple has sex against the alley wall.

                            DAVID (V.O.)
                    The saying is luck be a lady tonight,
                    but to me she's always been more of
                    a seductress.  But what can I say, I
                    have a problem.

            A mans black dress shoes and a woman's high heels can be
            heard tapping down the street.  Their reflections are
            distorted on the wet pavement.

            DAVID BRISSEL, 27, a slim handsome man in jeans, a blue suit
            jacket, fedora and a camera around his neck, walks with
            MELANIE DIANGELO, 27, a brunette, who is both sexy and
            wholesome in her light yellow dress.

                            MELANIE
                    Wow, I don't remember when...

            EARL JONES, late 60's, lies dead in the alley.

                            DAVID
                    No.

            David runs kneeling next to him.  He rolls the body over.

                            MELANIE
                    Who is it?

                            DAVID
                    Earl.

                            DAVID (V.O.) (CONT'D)
                    There he was, the closest thing I
                    ever had to a father, strangled to
                    death in an alley.  He deserved
                    better. The worst part... it was my
                    fault.
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If you want more details about formatting I recommend the "Screenwriters Bible", or the always-good time series "Screenwriting for Dummies", you can get both used on Amazon for a few bucks or check out these web sites:

Dialogue: "Say what!"

It is important to remember the difference between real life conversations and structured dialogue. Characters are made up of what they do and what they say. Dialogue should always be "functional" meaning that it pushes the story forward, makes a statement, incites comedy, or all of the above.

Make sure not to make your dialogue "on the nose" people don't always say what they mean, and they don't always mean what they say. This is called subtext. Writing between the lines if you will - when characters are talking about one thing yet are saying something completely different. The balcony scene in Woody Allen's Annie Hall is a great example of subtext. Annie Hall - Balcony Scene

Keep it snappy. Try and limit lines of dialogue to 1 to 3 lines.

INT. BAR – NIGHT

Mark and Dane finish putting caution tape on the bathroom door.

                    DANE
          There.

MARK
Perfect. Then we'll just let Cici clean it when she gets here.
                    DANE
Why Cici?

                    MARK
Why not?
                    DANE
Fine.
                    MARK
Sounds like a plan.
                    DANE
It's not, but it sounds like one.
                    MARK
Do you feel like there's someone behind us?
                    DANE
Like standing right behind us?
                    MARK
Yeah.
                    DANE
Yeah, we should turn around.
                    MARK
Yeah, let's-

A gravelly voice interrupts.

                    SANTA
Get me a whiskey sour!

They turn to see a man that looks vaguely like Santa Clause, SANTA, sitting at the bar. His scowl could murder a Russian bear.

    If it's not snappy make sure that long speeches or monologues are at the very least an embodiment of all the above, memorable and quotable. They must have momentum and make a meaningful impact on the story.

INT. DETECTIVE OFFICE – NIGHT

THUNDER ROLLS outside.

DAVID sits in an old leather spinning chair drinking scotch. The office is dark and drab. Another chair sits opposite David at the old oak desk. Black and white pictures adorn the walls.

The office door reads, "EARL JONES DETECTIVE AGENCY".

                    DAVID

The old man left everything to me. I mean it wasn't much, but it was better than my digs. But nobody would kill for this dump, the cops knew that. Scotch though, the old man would have killed for his scotch.

KNOCK KNOCK!

Startled, David swings his chair around.

*Hint: Cast your characters in your mind with people you know or your ideal actors, it can really help in the fluidity of dialogue and pushing scenes forward.

Action: "Stupid is as stupid does!

When it comes to writing action there are several different styles. Everything from simple and direct to beautiful and almost poetic. Pick what style works best for you, but always keep it entertaining. Make sure to always keep your action lines in the present tense and keep it snappy, action lines should be no more then three lines, four at most.

FADE IN:

EXT. BAR - NIGHT

A rooftop bar with opposite balconies that's totally kick ass.

MARK and DANE walk towards the front door. Mark is a tall skinny fucker with a smile for everyone and Dane is a bit shorter but with a face every woman could love. You know, if they were drunk enough to get over the whole shortness thing. Which most don't.

Ending: "It's gotta end sometime!"

It's your ending just make it good. The end of your screenplay should leave a lasting impression on your audience. It's up to you what that impression should be. Do you want all you're loose ends tied up in a nice little bow, or do you want to leave the finality

up to your audience's discretion? Whatever you decide just make sure it is satisfactory and appropriate to the screenplay as a whole. If you have several ideas and you cant decide, write all the separate endings then sleep on it or have them critiqued:

Critique: "Everyone has an opinion!"

Now that you have a first draft it's time to get some feedback. Let a few trusted friends whose advice you respect give it a read. Ask them to take notes as they read. Anything that strikes their minds could be useful – or not. That's up to you. Write up a specific list of question that you may have about the script for them to answer when they are finished. Such as:

1. Did you find any part of the plot Confusing?
2. Were the characters well rounded?
3. Were you satisfied with the ending?
4. ETC…

Every script will of course require its own specific set question depending of the type of film you are writing.

Remember praise is not critique. There is no feedback in pure praise. You will learn a lot more from the negative things people have to tell you then the positive things. Stay away from yes men. Your adoring mother who love's everything you do is probably not the best critic you could get. The people who say it's wonderful because: A: They love you, or B: They don't know better, or C: They think they might hurt your feelings; are just not good options. Let your readers know you need to hear the worst. This will at the very least force you to think about Let