SIGHT AND SOUND: FILMMAKING

Class Syllabus, Project Schedule and Reading List
Sight and Sound: Filmmaking

*Sight and Sound: Filmmaking* encompasses the basic elements of high definition digital video production (directing, producing, cinematography, writing, picture and sound editing, storytelling in a cinematic context.) The entire class will meet during lecture sessions for production information, technical training, screenings, critiques, lectures and discussions. The technical component of the class, *Tech Theory & Practice* will also meet at regular intervals throughout the semester/summer session. During the scheduled lab sessions, students will work in an assigned three or four-person crew rotation. Every student will write, direct and edit five short motion picture projects during the semester/summer session. When not directing or editing, students will serve as the cinematographer or the AC/Digital Assistant for crew projects as part of the scheduled four-person crew rotation.

Each lecture and lab session will be intensive. Work missed because of absence will be difficult, if not impossible to make up. Punctual attendance at all lectures and labs is mandatory. All projects will involve out-of-class preparation.

As a student enrolled in an NYU Film/Television production class, it is expected that you complete work on time, demonstrate a professional respect for those that you are working with and the tools and facilities that you will be using. Further, all work must conform to established production advisement & safety guidelines and all insurance policies and requirements.

Principles of Sight and Sound

The course, *Sight and Sound: Filmmaking* has been central to the training of our student filmmakers for over seventy years. The very heart of this class involves directing, editing and screening a new movie project every week. Within the production and scheduling rigor that this class demands, the creativity associated with Sight & Sound: Filmmaking is both spontaneous and disciplined. The initial focus of the first three projects will be silent filmmaking (MOS) — the central cinematic challenge of making visible the invisible. As sound is introduced in the fourth and fifth projects, students will explore how sound functions in relation to story, character, mood, expression and dramatization.

The primary course philosophy is to explore the essential cinematic elements (shots, image relationships, light, and shadow) and teach students how to utilize the fundamental building blocks of visual and aural communication through their filmmaking. The resources available to the students are therefore limited:

- Black and white imagery
- Prime lenses
- Limited edit effects (straight cuts, fade-ins and fade-outs, dissolves, simple titles)
- Limited project length
• No “lip sync” sound recording (no on-board microphones)
• Strict deadlines
• Basic equipment package
• No rentals

Students will always have creative control, responsibility, and authority over the content of their work (point of view, subject matter, craft, language and aesthetics), within safety and production advisement guidelines established by the department.

SUGGESTED TEXT:


MOTION PICTURE PROJECTS:

Following the project assignments carefully and staying on schedule is an essential component for success in the class. Completed work that is ready for screening must be delivered with proper head and tail “leaders” to the class on a USB Thumb Drive with the following information presented on the departmental slate or countdown sequence (Academy Leader for Sound Projects):

(Name, Project #, Instructor, Length of Project, Screening Date).

Projects that are not properly presented for screening will not be screened in class. Please remember to pick up your USB Thumb Drive at the end of class.

PRODUCTION BOOK OVERVIEW:

For each project, all directors must submit a production book. The production book is handed in with your project at the beginning of class on your screening date and will not be accepted later. Production books are to be typewritten and stapled together with a cover sheet listing your name, the instructor, your e-mail address, the assignment number and project title (Chase, Character, etc.), crew members and their role on the film as well as the project screening date.

Each production book will include the following five sections:

I. CONCEPT – Why make this project? Why is it of interest to you? What craft elements will shape it? What outcome do you want it to have?

In a few sentences, sketch out the vision behind your project. What were you thinking about? What were you trying to show us? What experience did you want to give us?
II. SYNOPSIS – Describe the action in front of the camera.

Help the reader see the location, the characters and the actions that they take. Do not describe framing, camera movement, or editing. Save that for part three of the production book.

III. VISUAL PLAN – This is a tool for communication with your crew and a guide to help you through a successful shoot.

Include one or more of the following three options:

1) **Storyboards**. Draw storyboards for each shot with a succinct description of action shown. Include opening and closing frame for moving shots. Be sure to use correct aspect ratio.

2) **Floor Plans**. Draw a floor plan for each shot showing blocking, camera position and movement, and light source.

3) **Shot List**. Write a detailed shot list including type of camera position, camera moves if any and action within frame.

Note: It is expected that the visual plan might change while you shoot. Include original plan in your production book. Do not spend your time re-drawing (storyboards) to match final shots. Discuss any changes in the evaluation section of your production book.

IV. BREAKDOWN SHEETS FOR EACH SCENE THAT CONTAINED ANY “SPECIAL SCENE ELEMENTS” AND REQUIRED FURTHER REVIEW.

V. EVALUATION – Look back at your objective. Be honest. Assess the effectiveness of your shoot and the vitality of your project. Consider the following points:

- How did you prepare for this shoot? What chief obstacles did you encounter during pre-production? What did you do to overcome them? How could you have been more productive with your time and energy?

- Did your shoot stay on schedule? If not, what altered the game plan? Could this problem have been anticipated? DID YOU HAVE A PLAN B?

- To what extent were you able to control what happened on the shoot? If unforeseen circumstances came up (Murphy’s Law), how did you address them? Go into detail.

- How did you manage the crew during the shoot? How did you get the most out of them?
• What was your most effective directing strategy when working with the actors? What was the least effective? What did you learn from working with these actors?

• How would you rate your performance as a director? Why?

• What changes in the script took place in the editing room? Why were these alterations necessary? Use specific example to illustrate your point.

• Does the project work? Why? Why not? If you could do the project over, what would you do differently?

• What important lessons have you learned? How has this project affected your approach to forthcoming projects?

Sections 1 through 4 as described above are produced before shooting.

Section 5 (Evaluation) is written after editing and before screening in class. The goal is to acknowledge successes and to identify the source of any shortcomings. Speculate on how to improve with your next project.

All work must be completed by the last day of class. Incompletes (IP) will not be issued.

FINAL GRADE:

Your final grade will be based on:

Punctual completion and screening of (five) projects and submission of (five) production books (5% per project & production book) — 25%.

Participation in class discussions, critique, and collaboration as a crewmember, which includes responsible work practices — 10%.

Progress, sustained effort, depth of knowledge and insight into the filmmaking process—in other words, what did you learn and are you able to demonstrate it on the screen and in your production books? — 65%.

Compliance with all policies associated with production advisement and safety guidelines is mandatory.
PROJECT ASSIGNMENTS AND CREW POSITIONS:

The following series of assignments provides the foundation for this course. The assignments include specific story and craft problems to be solved. You will write/direct/edit every fourth assignment and serve as a crewmember (cinematographer or AC) on the production days when you are not editing. All work will be screened and discussed in class. Your instructor will provide specific examples to illustrate all assignments.

FIRST PROJECT ASSIGNMENTS:

The first group of assignments is intended to introduce you to shot, character, movement, and interaction. Each is to be carried out in an exterior setting. It is important that you gain sufficient technical competence in focus, exposure, and editing through these early projects. Pre-visualize your project. Make sure that your story has a beginning, middle, and an end.

PROJECT 1 — Shot

Produce a short film that presents a place. Conduct extensive research in the location. Look for various camera angles and meaningful details. Pay attention to the foreground, middle ground, and background. Be sure to use the long shot, medium shot, and close up.

PROJECT 2 — Continuity

Control the continuity of action in front of the camera. Pay critical attention to the change of angle (from shot to shot), the overlap of action (for match cuts), the continuity of screen direction, the continuity of movement, light, gesture, props, costume, and location so that your film will cut smoothly from shot to shot. Plan your cut-away and shoot from the proper axis.

PROJECT 3 — Movement

Produce a short film that includes a chase sequence. Motivated camera movement (and controlling the movement within the frame) along with a dramatically motivated chase is the objective for this project. Establish and control screen direction. Select locations that will intensify the development of the chase.

PROJECT 4 — Parallel Action

This assignment asks you to intercut between two or more different locations in the course of two or more unfolding lines of action.
SECOND PROJECT ASSIGNMENTS:

The next series of assignment is designed to further explore the process of telling a story in a cinematic context in an exterior location.

PROJECT 5 — Character

Do a character study of someone who interests you. Concentrate on this person’s dress, behavior and company. The portrait is to be built through what the character does and by how he/she reacts - A character is based on his/her actions (not thoughts). What choices does your character make and how are they carried out?

PROJECT 6 — Interaction

Produce a short film that features an interaction between two people and follows the development of that interaction. Consider both action and reaction shots to ensure sufficient coverage for editing.

PROJECT 7 — Close-Up

This assignment exposes you to the potential force of the close-up. The challenge is to convey your ideas through details.

PROJECT 8 — Dream

Produce a short film about a person contemplating an event outside his/her present reality. The objective here is to manipulate time and space. Employ slow motion, soft focus, swish pan, and be aware of transitional elements of the piece. Think about using silhouettes, reflections, and shadows.

THIRD PROJECT ASSIGNMENTS:

This next series of assignments will introduce lighting as a primary aesthetic element, shot interior. Include a lighting diagram in your production book.

PROJECT 9 — Three - Point Lighting

Three-point lighting is the foundation upon which all-artificial film lighting is based. Your assignment here is to develop a scenario that utilizes three-point lighting technique (key, fill, back). You should concentrate on one character in one interior location. Control the contrast ratio from shot to shot.
PROJECT 10 — *Bounced/Soft/Diffused Lighting*

The objective is to control and direct soft pools of light with minimum lighting. Use reflectors, white cards, ceilings, and show cards to obtain the desired aesthetic quality in the lighting of your image. Learn how to focus reflected light and think about ways in which you can use it to cover a broad area. You can also use direct lighting units covered with white diffusion. Practical lamps and “China balls” may also be used. This assignment should be shot indoors.

PROJECT 11 — *Lighting for Movement*

This assignment calls for lighting a person moving from one point to another. This movement should be limited to single room or hall. The objective here is to match the lighting from one set-up to another.

PROJECT 12 — *Special Effects Lighting*

The challenge of this assignment is for you to use light in an unusual and creative way. Consider using a single light source that visually underscores a dramatic moment. Or, attempt to create a special effect such as the suggestion of lightning or the effect of light streaming through venetian blinds.

FOURTH PROJECT ASSIGNMENTS:

The next group of assignments introduces post-production sound to the image. You will be responsible for recording or acquiring your sounds and synchronizing those sounds during post. No live lip-sync dialog production sound. Proper mix *output standards* will be essential.

PROJECT 13 — *Activity with Music*

Document an activity. The length of your film should be determined by content, not by the length of the prerecorded piece of music (no lyrics).

PROJECT 14 — *Sound Effects*

Produce a short film that uses sound effects to enhance the visual environment of a location. Don't overlook simple location presence as an effect. Record your sound effects from the proper perspective. Use room tone for ambiance.
PROJECT 15 — Voice-Over

This assignment introduces the human voice as the pre-dominant sound element in your film. Consider using the voice either subjectively or objectively, on-mike or off-mike, coherent or incoherent. It is essential that you record sufficient room tone to be used in gaps between phrases.

PROJECT 16 — Off-Screen Sounds

This assignment stresses the creative use of off-screen sound to imply a world beyond the frame.

FIFTH PROJECT ASSIGNMENTS:

This last set of assignments (17, 18, 19 and 20) is your opportunity to do a short project of your choice, building upon all of the elements worked on this semester. You are encouraged to discuss these projects with your instructor before starting production. Any potential special scenes elements & activities will have to be reviewed by the instructor and the production advisor for the class.

Demonstrate your understanding of the key craft elements. You may use multiple tracks of sound. Be sure that you are clear about the balance of your mixed tracks.

ADDITIONAL EQUIPMENT REQUIREMENTS:

Every student is required to purchase a hard drive (it is also recommended that you purchase a back-up drive) which you will need access to for the duration of the semester/session.
RECOMMENDED TEXTS:

This supplementary list of texts covers a range of topics that will help you focus on very specific craft and aesthetic skills, theory and practice. These supplementary books are mostly available at the Bobst Library and a variety of retail and on-line outlets.

Acting:
Respect for Acting by Uta Hagen, Wiley
Sanford Meisner On Acting, Vintage
Creating A Role by Stanislavsky Theatre, Arts Books

Directing:
Notes on the Cinematography, by Robert Bresson, Green Integer
On Directing by Harold Clurman, Collier Books
Making Movies by Sidney Lumet, Vintage
On Directing Film by David Mamet, Viking
Lessons with Eisenstein by Nizhny, DaCapo
Fundamentals of Film Directing, by David K Irving, MacFarland Press
Directing the Film: Film Directors on their Art by Sherman, Acrobat Books
Directing Actors: Creating Memorable Performances for Film & Television by Judith Weston, Michael Wiese Productions

Editing:
The Technique of Film and Video Editing by Dancyger, Focal Press
In the Blink of an Eye by Walter Murch, Silman-James
The Technique of Film Editing by Reisz and Millar, Focal Press

History, Criticism & Aesthetics:
Film Theory: An Introduction by Robert Stam, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
Hitchcock by Truffaut, Simon and Schuster
30,000 Years of Art: The Story of Human Creativity Across Time and Space, Phaidon

Production Design:

Producing:
Filmmaker’s Handbook by Pincus and Asher, Plume.
Producing and Directing the Short Film and Video by Rea and Irving. Focal Press.
Shooting to Kill: How an Independent Producer Blasts Through the Barriers to Make Movies that Matter by Christine Vachon and David Edelstein, Harper Paperbacks

Sound:
Sound Design: The Expressive Power of Music, Voice and Sound Effects in Cinema by David Sonnenschein, Michael Wiese Productions
Writing:
The Short Fiction Scenario by Sergei Eisenstein, Seagull Books
sudden fiction, numerous volumes edited by James Thomas, et al.

Reference:
Ways of Seeing by John Berger, Penguin
The Story of Art by E. H. Gombrich Phaidon
The Courage to Create by Rollo May, W.W. Norton & Company
The Creative Habit: Learn It and Use It for Life by Twyla Tharp. Simon & Schuster.

Magazines:
Film Comment, Sight and sound, Cineaste, Filmmaker Magazine

PRODUCTION ADVISEMENT

Production Advisement is the process by which NYU Film/Television works with filmmakers to manage the intersection of their films with the 'real world' beyond the set. Production advisors focus on working out solutions to production challenges and fostering safe, professional production practices on NYU sets.

Sight & Sound: Filmmaking presents an opportunity for fundamentals-level filmmakers to learn firsthand how to work within the production guidelines of Tisch. These guidelines can be found on the TISCH UG/FTV WIKI site: www.nyu.edu/filmguide > UGFTV > Fundamentals > Sight & Sound Filmmaking Basics. Students are expected to be familiar with and to follow these guidelines for their projects. Each section of Sight & Sound: Filmmaking is assigned a Production advisor who can help clarify the guidelines and answer any questions students have regarding production questions.

Production advisors are a team of faculty who apply their expertise to help guide and support filmmakers as they prepare to shoot their films. Sight & Sound: Filmmaking gives filmmakers a chance to work directly with Production advisors (in addition to class instructor) to identify whether elements of their film create higher levels of risk on the set - “Special Scenes and Activities” - and how to address those risks while preserving their creative vision.

Failure to adhere to the process by which a student engages a “special scene” may include the lowering of a student’s grade. A major infraction, such as shooting in a moving vehicle, on a rooftop, or brandishing a weapon, may result in disciplinary action. No film that violates “special scenes” rules is eligible for the Fundamentals Showcase.

PRODUCTION GUIDELINES

Work produced in Sight and Sound: Filmmaking must use class allotted/school issued production equipment (no outside equipment rentals under any
circumstances will be allowed). Additionally, student productions must not exceed a 100-mile shooting radius from 721 Broadway. Students must become familiar with University and Departmental policies concerning the use of simulated weapons, as well as the restrictions or limitations for shooting in higher-risk situations (subways, rooftops, stunts, moving cars).

**CSI Insurance**
In addition to insurance provided through New York University, each student is responsible for purchasing student personal property insurance (CSI) through Fireman’s Fund. This supplemental insurance will cover students for one year & can be used in all production classes during the year of coverage. **No equipment will be issued until a copy of the insurance certificate is sent by email to the production center.**

**Areas of coverage**
- **Personal Property** - This policy insures all personal articles owned or in the care, custody or control of the named insured while the insured is an enrolled student.
- **Rented or Borrowed Equipment** - Covers photography or film related equipment that is rented or borrowed, provided the equipment is rented or borrowed for a period of thirty days or less.

**Cost of CSI Insurance**
The total minimum cost of the plan is $155. This total is broken down as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policy ($6000 Limit/$500 Deductible)</td>
<td>$90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equipment Endorsement ($25,000 Limit)</td>
<td>$60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processing Fee</td>
<td>$5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>$155</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**How to Purchase CSI Insurance**

**Step 1**: Go to [www.collegestudentinsurance.com](http://www.collegestudentinsurance.com). Click **Order Policy**.

**Step 2**: From the pull-down menu, select **New York** as the School State and **New York University (Film/Photo/Journalism)** as the School Name.

**Step 3**: Select **YES** for the $60 Equipment Endorsement and choose your personal property coverage: The minimum Policy Limit is **$6000** with a **$500** Deductible for a cost of **$90**. Continue to fill in your personal information.
**Step 4:** Enter your credit card information and purchase the policy. Once your order has gone through you will receive a confirmation E-mail that will include your policy number. The day you and your crew check out equipment for the test shoot you will be required to enter your policy number on a form at the production center. (You will not be permitted to check out equipment from the Production Center without a CSI policy.)

**Special Scenes & Activities**

In this class you may encounter certain aspects of your projects that may need to be approved by your instructor beforehand. Please contact your instructor if your project contains any of the special scene elements listed below.

Depending upon the situation, some of these activities can be approved quickly, while some may take additional time, up to two (2) weeks. We recommend that you begin the process at least three weeks in advance. We strongly encourage you wait until your 4th or 5th project to feature special scene elements.

**MTA Policy:** No shooting in a subway car, on a platform or station. **Film and TV Department Policy:** No shooting in or of a moving car.

**Special Scene Elements**
- Prop Weapons
- Rooftops, fire escapes, balconies and bridges
- Water scenes, oceans, rivers, pools, piers, decks, bathtubs, etc.
- Railroad tracks and property.
- Choreographed fights and physical stunts
- Open flames, camp fires, fires, etc.
- Other potentially hazard exposures (if you have a question, ask)
- Prop Weapons: All use of prop or simulated weapons (including toys) must be approved in advance by your Professor and cleared by your Production Advisor. For a complete explanation of what is defined as a ‘prop weapon’ please refer to NYU’s policy on Weapons, Simulated Weapons and Theatrical Use of Weapons, located here: [http://www.nyu.edu/about/policiesguidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/weapons--simulated-weapons--and-theatrical-use-of-weapons.html](http://www.nyu.edu/about/policiesguidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/weapons--simulated-weapons--and-theatrical-use-of-weapons.html)

**What You Need To Do:**

- You need to contact your Professor and discuss the possible special scene elements with her/him. During this discussion you may find alternative solutions and can shorten the pre-production period. If your Professor approves your special scene elements, he/she contacts the class assigned Production Advisor about the issues.
• At this point you will need to provide essential and detailed information about your shoot to the Production Advisor in order to be approved by her/him:

Email your Production Advisor and cc your Professor with:
(a) Your Project Title & Number
(b) Professor’s Name
(c) Date of the shoot
(d) Details Regarding Your Special Insurance Request:
  • screenplay format scene description (not the whole script),
  • detailed logistical explanation - of how you plan to direct the scene.
  You should also address any potential safety concerns associated with the scene and please describe how you are going to proceed in a safe manner.

• After you have submitted all of the required information, your Production Advisor may contact you with additional questions and details, before granting approval for you to shoot the scene as planned. Once all of the details are in place, you can be approved to shoot and start the insurance process, if needed.

• Keep in mind that some activities, like the use of a prop weapon, require insurance paperwork, which your Production Advisor can assist you with. However, insurance can take up to two (2) weeks to process. If your Production Advisor asks you to file insurance, you will have to file your project with the NYU Department of Insurance & Risk Management web site: http://www.nyu.edu/pages/insurance/insurance_web_site_005.htm.

• Visit the Production Office on the 9th Floor can assist you with the step-by-step filing process.

  IMPORTANT – TIME TABLE: Please Remember:
  It may take up to TWO (2) weeks get approved for special scene elements. Please discuss these elements with your Professor as soon as possible. We recommend that you begin the process at least three weeks in advance.

Equipment is for curricular use only, specifically for faculty approved projects assigned in a production class. Non-authorized use of equipment, including a loan-out to any other individual, is prohibited and may result in disciplinary action and/or loss of equipment privileges.

Your health and safety are a priority at NYU. If you experience any health or mental health issues during this course, we encourage you to utilize the support services of the 24/7 NYU Wellness Exchange 212-443-9999. Also, all students who may require an academic accommodation due to a qualified disability, physical or mental, please register with the Moses Center 212-998-4980. Please let your instructor know if you need help connecting to these resources.