

# Media Lab

# SCREENWRITING

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**TEACHER GUIDE**

# AFTRS

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**AUSTRALIAN FILM TELEVISION & RADIO SCHOOL**

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PUBLISHED BY THE AUSTRALIAN FILM, TELEVISION AND RADIO SCHOOL | ISSN 0819-2316



Australian Government

## **THIS TEACHER GUIDE ACCOMPANIES THE MEDIA LAB LEARNING RESOURCE – SCREENWRITING**

For additional planning considerations please refer to the introduction section of the Learning Resource

### **OVERVIEW**

Using AFTRS' practical and creative Learning Resource, students have the opportunity to develop their creative writing skills through screenwriting for short film. The unit, which is targeted at Stage 4 students but can be used for a range of year groups, develops students' understanding of character and story and encourages them to undertake activities that will develop their ability to write scripts for short, engaging fiction films. They will undertake critical and creative activities, including examining story structure, brainstorming, editing and pitching. Students will closely examine a selection of short films and write their own short drama script. Students will then work towards pitching their script to the class, when they will also present their storyboards and story synopses to their peers.

### **USING THIS UNIT IN THE CLASSROOM**

The unit is an interconnected set of 10 linear sequences that can be completed in an intensive pattern over a few weeks or across an entire term. With an emphasis on practical activities, it ranges from introductory sequences looking at the short film format to a series of creative writing activities that culminate in the completion by each student of an edited script. The final sequences allow for reflection and the unit concludes with a script pitching session using synopses and storyboards.

Teachers can opt to use some or all of the activities presented or can modify content to suit their needs. The majority of the sequences are flexible in length and many include segments that students may complete independently.

For capable or older students, the Learning Resource may also be used as a self-paced independent learning tool. For example, a teacher may choose to introduce the resource and complete some introductory activities before assigning all or part of it to complete during school holidays. Students may respond well to the opportunity to spend an extended period on their script ideas before coming back to school to pitch.

This Teacher Guide includes a small number of additional resources not mentioned in the Learning Resource, however the majority of resources are included in the Learning Resource and referenced below.

A suggested assessment framework follows the Content Map.

## RESOURCES

The suggested list of equipment:

- Technology to allow the screening of streamed media in the classroom (e.g. Wi-Fi enabled digital projector with sound)
- Butchers paper or equivalent for capturing input from small group discussion
- Adequate computer access for each student to write their script, especially from sequence 6. Paper-based work may be adequate during sequences 1-5 before scriptwriting starts.

## MAP OF CONTENT

SEQUENCE	CONTENT	ACTIVITY	WORKSHEETS & RESOURCES
<b>Sequence 1</b> What is a short film?	<p>In this sequence, students will increase their understanding of what makes a good short film and will undertake preliminary activities prior to planning their own scripts.</p> <p>The sequence starts by focusing on the role of screenwriters in a professional setting and how they typically collaborate with producers and other filmmakers.</p> <p>Students are now asked to start thinking about how they have responded to stories in the past, as a first step towards creating their own work. They discuss the stories that have entertained them the most and give reasons for their answers.</p> <p>This sequence then explores the practical considerations screenwriters often have to bear in mind before planning to write a script, such as available resources and the merits of limited locations and characters.</p> <p>Students watch films from our selection or those chosen by the teacher and analyse them. They identify salient features, and may compare and contrast the films to reinforce learning.</p> <p><b>Extension</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Discuss film genre with students and ask them to identify the genre of the short films they have watched. For an overview of film genre see: <a href="http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/446108/index.html">http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/446108/index.html</a> (Some UK-centric references)</li><li>2. Ask students to compare the shorts they have watched with a big budget short film such as <b>Post-It</b> (US, 7'31mins): <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aVgeJ5eqISM">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aVgeJ5eqISM</a></li></ol>	<p><b>Activity 1: Our favourite stories</b> Students work in small groups then feedback to whole class. They discuss their favourite stories, discuss features of a successful story and summarise plot elements.</p> <p><b>Activity 2: Short film analysis</b> See Learning Resource for all URLs. Students watch three short films and analyse using the worksheet.</p> <p><b>Note</b> Teachers may choose other films to watch. The key goal is to present short engaging age appropriate films which show a range of storytelling strategies and model low budget filmmaking, especially if you plan to produce one or more of the scripts.</p> <p><b>Optional activity</b> Watch How to Make a Short Film – Important Tips and Advice by Darius Brit (7'17 mins, US, video tutorial) <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PalEaciHvXI">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PalEaciHvXI</a> <i>Note: The clip briefly mentions mature themes (drugs) in an educational context.</i></p>	<p><b>Worksheet A: Short film analysis</b></p> <p>For use with activity 2</p>

SEQUENCE	CONTENT	ACTIVITY	WORKSHEETS & RESOURCES						
<p><b>Sequence 2</b></p> <p>Elements of screen story</p>	<p>In this sequence students first carry out some brainstorming activities to come up with some original story concepts for their own scripts.</p> <p>Having done so, they then examine the stages of a story as presented in the framework The Hero's Journey.</p> <p>After exploring the various components of the hero's journey, they apply the framework to a well-known feature film and then to short film.</p> <p>The sequence aims to balance imaginative open-ended brainstorming with theoretical input about story structure in order prompt students to think deeply about the possible ingredients of an entertaining plot and successful short film.</p>	<p><b>Activity 3: Creative Challenge</b></p> <p>Students are challenged to think up as many different original story ideas as possible in a set time.</p> <p>They then evaluate the results and reflect on the experience with their peers.</p> <p><b>Activity 4: The Hero's Journey in a feature film</b></p> <p>After reading about Joseph Campbell's concept of the hero's journey, students attempt to match parts of a film they know well with stages in Campbell's framework.</p> <p><b>Activity 5: The Hero's Journey in a short film</b></p> <p>This time students analyse the extent to which a short film includes elements of the hero's journey.</p>	<p><b>Worksheet B: The Hero's Journey</b></p> <p>For use with activities 4 and 5</p>						
<p><b>Sequence 3</b></p> <p>Short film structure</p>	<p>Students build on their learning about plot and further investigate short film structure. They then apply the concept of a '3 act structure' to their own story ideas in order to develop and refine their original concepts.</p> <p>The sequence introduces the idea of a story 'hook' which engages viewers early in a film. It then explores the 3 act structure which sees a film in terms of a set-up, point of no return and resolution.</p> <p>From here they will further develop their new skills by beginning to formulate ideas for their own short film based on this sequence's main ideas.</p>	<p><b>Activity 6: 3 act structure in a short film</b></p> <p>Students watch one of the films listed in sequence 1 and complete the worksheet to identify a hook and match the plot with each act.</p> <p>Suggested answers:</p> <p>Hook: Milla tosses a coin for the first time.</p> <hr/> <table border="0"> <tr> <td data-bbox="1128 983 1328 1011">Act 1: The Set Up</td> <td data-bbox="1406 983 1877 1043">Milla tosses coin to decide whether to go to Grandma's, what to have for breakfast</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="1128 1102 1317 1163">Act 2: The Point of No Return</td> <td data-bbox="1406 1102 1816 1227">Milla calls up and enters the radio contest based on a coin toss. She wins \$500 and goes shopping, with a coin toss deciding each purchase.</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="1128 1270 1249 1331">Act 3: The Resolution</td> <td data-bbox="1406 1270 1805 1394">Milla's final coin toss sees her give the leftover money plus her shopping to a homeless man...who then tosses one of her coins.</td> </tr> </table>	Act 1: The Set Up	Milla tosses coin to decide whether to go to Grandma's, what to have for breakfast	Act 2: The Point of No Return	Milla calls up and enters the radio contest based on a coin toss. She wins \$500 and goes shopping, with a coin toss deciding each purchase.	Act 3: The Resolution	Milla's final coin toss sees her give the leftover money plus her shopping to a homeless man...who then tosses one of her coins.	<p><b>Worksheet C: 3 act structure</b></p> <p>For use with activities 6 and 7</p>
Act 1: The Set Up	Milla tosses coin to decide whether to go to Grandma's, what to have for breakfast								
Act 2: The Point of No Return	Milla calls up and enters the radio contest based on a coin toss. She wins \$500 and goes shopping, with a coin toss deciding each purchase.								
Act 3: The Resolution	Milla's final coin toss sees her give the leftover money plus her shopping to a homeless man...who then tosses one of her coins.								

**Activity 7: 3 act structure for your own idea**

Students revisit their own ideas, generated in activity 3 and investigate whether any of these follow the 3 act structure.

They then have the opportunity to carry out more creative brainstorming.

By the end of the activity they complete worksheet 3 for one or more of their own story ideas

**Sequence 4**

Creating interesting characters

In this sequence students engage with the specifics of character development. Awareness of key elements of design when creating protagonists will enable students not only to develop relatable characters, it will enable them when refining their story structure.

After reading and perhaps discussing the content on the first page of this section, students put their learning into practice by creating a detailed character breakdown for their preferred story idea.

Reference sites:

<http://niemanstoryboard.org/stories/building-character-a-checklist/>

<http://thescriptlab.com/screenwriting/character>

**Activity 8: Character checklist**

Students further develop their preferred story concept from sequence 3 by completing the checklist for one or more main characters from that story.

Students then share their character ideas in small groups and respond to feedback.

**Worksheet D:****Character checklist**

For use with activity 8

**Sequence 5**

## Writing dialogue

Students investigate how dialogue works within a script for short film. They will examine the way in which written dialogue differs from spoken dialogue, the importance of showing not telling, and how conversations can add to or detract from storytelling.

As students are asked to improvise a short sketch, this sequence also introduces the theme of performance. It prompts students to consider how to write actions and envisage actors' performance during the screenwriting process.

Activity 9 may be crucial in giving students insight into the importance of effective dialogue and as such, it is best to allow a generous amount of time.

If there is time remaining, however these are some additional options:

- To further illustrate the point that much dialogue is in fragments rather than in complete sentences, the teacher may choose to screen an excerpt of a film and ask students to analyse dialogue.
- The teacher may ask students to write the actions and dialogue for one part of their own story idea. This could be acted out in class.

**Activity 9: Compare the impact**

Students will complete a practical performance exercise which compares the use of heavy dialogue versus the use of body language, actions and succinct dialogue.

SEQUENCE	CONTENT	ACTIVITY	WORKSHEETS & RESOURCES
<p><b>Sequence 6</b></p> <p>Script layout and format</p>	<p>In preparation for writing their own first draft, students learn how to lay out their script on the page in a way that ensure it can be easily understood by others.</p> <p>Using 3 key resources students will compare industry layout with simplified approach and reach a decision about how they will format their own work.</p> <p>Teachers may wish to decide in advance on which layout they require students to use, and tailor this sequence accordingly. Younger or less able students may not gain as much from a close examination of industry layout guidelines.</p> <p>This sequence may also prompt teachers to deal with any practical issues around access to computers, the saving and backing-up of files and the use of specific applications.</p>	<p><b>Activity 10: Script layout</b></p> <p>Students first read a sample script, Customer Service, which follows industry layout conventions. They then read a Screen Australia layout guide which describes the conventions in precise terms.</p> <p>Next, students read a simplified version of Customer Service. (Note that the content is exactly the same.)</p> <p>Students have the opportunity to discuss the merits of both options. By the end of the activity, students understand the layout requirements for their own work.</p>	<p><b>Resources</b></p> <p>The 3 resources required for activity 10 are included at the end of the Learning Resource, not in the body of section 6</p>
<p><b>Sequence 7</b></p> <p>Writing a first draft</p>	<p>Student complete the final steps needed prior to writing the first draft of their script and then write it.</p> <p>There is no new content to deliver in this sequence, rather students are prompted to check their progress to date and revisit any prior activities or content if needed.</p> <p>The information in section 7 of the Learning Resource prompts teachers and students to check any practical requirements for their script.</p> <p>At this point teachers have the point of supporting students as they begin to write their first drafts or assigning this as homework.</p>		



**Sequence 8**

Editing and re-writing

Students are to be congratulated when they complete their first draft script! Especially if levels of commitment and effort have been high, it may be worth giving students a week or so to feel a sense of accomplishment before starting this sequence.

At this point students explore the main reasons for editing and how the process may be undertaken. Teachers may introduce this content with a group brainstorm activity.

Once introduced to the concept of a script edit, students are encouraged to evaluate their work and prepare to edit it.

Having marked up their script, they then complete an edit, before requesting and receiving feedback from peers.

Students may then decide whether to act on any suggested changes. By the end of the sequence students should have completed a final draft of their script.

**Activity 11: Script edit**

First students should make any notes in response to the eliciting questions in the introductory content.

Following this, students create a second draft of their script on the computer. This draft is then shared with other students, whose feedback is invited.

*Teachers should consider the best way to facilitate this. If all students are working together in a computer room, scripts may receive feedback in digital form using Word's Track Changes, or a similar review tool. Normally it best to print out scripts and ask students to write feedback on paper copies.*

*Teachers may also choose how much input they will have at this point. This may vary from providing detailed notes to each student to offering general points to the class.*

Once students have read the feedback from their peers, they edit the script again and create a final draft.

SEQUENCE	CONTENT	ACTIVITY	WORKSHEETS & RESOURCES
<p><b>Sequence 9</b></p> <p>Pitch preparation</p>	<p>Once students have completed their final draft, they then start preparations for a script pitching session.</p> <p>In a professional setting, it is important for writers to be able to present their ideas clearly and outline the strength of their stories. In this sequence, students learn how to create a logline and a one paragraph synopsis for their story. These will be used in the next sequence during their pitches.</p> <p>To start, students analyse example loglines and synopses before writing their own. They therefore build on their ability to summarise and link ideas.</p> <p>On completion of these two word-based pitch resources, students then have the opportunity to create summary storyboards (or beatboards) as a visual tool during the pitch.</p> <p>Teachers should give students clear instructions at this point about any practical requirements for their pitch. A suggested pitch format is given at the start of sequence 10 below.</p>	<p><b>Activity 12: Pitch Preparation</b></p> <p>This is a lengthy activity and may need to be spread over 2 or more classes.</p> <p>As per the steps described in the Learning Resource, students complete a logline, a one paragraph synopsis and storyboards for their script.</p> <p>Prior to starting their storyboards, students watch Disney Pixar's For the Birds and then study Deunan Berkeley's beatboards.</p> <p>The movie URL is listed in the section and the beatboards were accessed here on 23.08.17:</p> <p><a href="http://www.toplessonplan.com/data/storyboard-pixar-birds-1654613.jpeg">http://www.toplessonplan.com/data/storyboard-pixar-birds-1654613.jpeg</a></p> <p>For further information read:</p> <p><a href="https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/getmedia/ae5708a4-05d9-4db0-b5fb-4f999fdfed57/What-is-a-synopsis.pdf">https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/getmedia/ae5708a4-05d9-4db0-b5fb-4f999fdfed57/What-is-a-synopsis.pdf</a></p> <p>There are also many storyboard templates available online.</p>	

SEQUENCE	CONTENT	ACTIVITY	WORKSHEETS & RESOURCES
<p><b>Sequence 10</b> Pitch and final evaluation</p>	<p>Students have the opportunity to pitch their scripts in this final session. (Teachers will have given any practical guidance as part of the pitch preparation sequence above.)</p> <p>Students may have time at this point for any final preparations.</p> <p>The pitches take place and with each student using their logline, synopsis and storyboards to present their story to the group.</p> <p>Following this, a final evaluation takes place. This process allows for students to reflect on both their journey of writing for short film and their story itself. Students reflect on their achievements and complete an evaluation worksheet for themselves and for another student. In this way, key learning is made explicit.</p> <p>Teachers may wish to initiate a whole class discussion or give 121 feedback to each student as the final sequence concludes.</p>	<p><b>Activity 13: Evaluation</b></p> <p>Students complete an evaluative worksheet that allows them to consider and critique their writing skills and the strength of their stories.</p> <p>Students also evaluate a peer's story and provide positive feedback on growth areas and strengths.</p> <p><i>It is important to stress to students that this summative task is to be written kindly and in a positive way.</i></p>	<p><b>Worksheet E</b> Evaluation for use with activity 13</p>

## SUGGESTED ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

We have not created comprehensive assessment tools for this resource, as it has been designed for a wide range of different student cohorts for use in across varying curriculum and syllabus settings.

The table below outlines a possible assessment framework. It is outcomes-focused and includes the major pieces of work to be completed students, as well as two preparatory tasks. It does not assess class participation or behaviour.

<b>TASK</b>	<b>SEQUENCE</b>	<b>REQUIREMENTS AND WEIGHTING (WHERE 1 MARK = 1% FINAL MARK)</b>	<b>% OF FINAL MARK</b>
Submit completed 3 act structure table for own story	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Completed Worksheet C as per instructions in activity 7 (5)</li></ul>	5%
Submit completed character checklist for own story	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Completed Worksheet D as per instructions in activity 8 (5)</li></ul>	5%
Submit first script of script	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Script meets teacher's requirements regarding length etc. (see sequence info) (3)</li><li>Script meets layout requirements as specified in sequence 6 (4)</li><li>Any spelling, grammar or layout errors do not significantly impede understanding (4)</li><li>Script's story is coherent and able to be understood by another reader (6)</li><li>Story ideas are entertaining and/or interesting (8)</li></ul>	25%
Submit final draft of script	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Script meets teacher's requirements regarding length etc (see sequence info) (5)</li><li>Script meets layout requirements (5)</li><li>Any spelling, grammar or layout errors do not significantly impede understanding (3)</li><li>Evidence is present of editing and meaningful progress from early draft (6)</li><li>Story ideas are entertaining and/or interesting (6)</li></ul>	25%

<b>TASK</b>	<b>SEQUENCE</b>	<b>REQUIREMENTS AND WEIGHTING (WHERE 1 MARK = 1% FINAL MARK)</b>	<b>% OF FINAL MARK</b>
Submit pitch documents	9	3 marks per requirement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completed logline</li> <li>• Completed one-paragraph synopsis</li> <li>• Completed storyboards</li> <li>• Pitch documents accurately convey the essence of the story</li> <li>• Written documents use clear English and effective language</li> </ul>	15%
Pitch	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student is well prepared and organised (3)</li> <li>• Student speaks clearly and makes eye contact with audience (5)</li> <li>• Student speaks persuasively and highlights the strengths of the script (5)</li> <li>• Student uses pitch documents effectively (2)</li> </ul>	15%
Complete self-evaluation and peer evaluation	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-evaluation form completed meaningfully (5)</li> <li>• Peer evaluation form completed meaningfully (5)</li> </ul>	10%

## CONNECTION TO CURRICULUM

CONTENT DESCRIPTIONS - ACELA	CONTENT DESCRIPTIONS - MEDIA ARTS	SEQUENCES
<p>Understand the way language evolves to reflect a changing world, particularly in response to the use of new technology for presenting texts and communicating. <a href="#">ACELA1528</a></p> <p>Analyse and explain the ways text structures and language features shape meaning and vary according to audience and purpose. <a href="#">ACELY1721</a></p> <p>Analyse how point of view is generated in visual texts by means of choices, for example gaze, angle and social distance. <a href="#">ACELA1764</a></p> <p>Analyse and explain the effect of technological innovations on texts, particularly media texts. <a href="#">ACELY1765</a></p> <p>Use comprehension strategies to interpret, analyse and synthesise ideas and information, critiquing ideas and issues from a variety of textual sources. <a href="#">ACELY1723</a></p>	<p>Examine the ways in which audiences make meaning and how different audiences engage with and share media artworks.</p> <p>Explore meaning and interpretation, forms and elements including structure, intent, character, settings, points of view, genre conventions and media conventions as they make and respond to media artworks.</p> <p>Analyse how technical and symbolic elements are used in media artworks to create representations influenced by story, genre, values and points of view of particular audiences.</p>	<p>1 – 10</p>
<p>Identify and explore ideas and viewpoints about events, issues and characters represented in texts drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts. <a href="#">ACELT1619</a></p>		<p>1, 2, 3</p>
<p>Reflect on ideas and opinions about characters, settings and events in literary texts, identifying areas of agreement and difference with others and justifying a point of view. <a href="#">ACELT1620</a></p>	<p>Build on their understanding of structure, intent, character, settings, points of view and genre conventions and explore media conventions in their media artworks.</p>	<p>1, 2, 3, 10</p>
	<p>Maintain safety in use of technologies and in interaction with others, including the use of images and works of others.</p> <p>Develop ethical practices and consider regulatory issues when using technology.</p> <p>Present media artworks for different community and institutional contexts with consideration of ethical and regulatory issues.</p>	<p>7, 8, 10</p>

CONTENT DESCRIPTIONS - ACELA	CONTENT DESCRIPTIONS – MEDIA ARTS	SEQUENCES
<p>Compare the ways that language and images are used to create character, and to influence emotions and opinions in different types of texts. <a href="#">ACELT1621</a></p>		1, 2, 4, 5, 10
<p>Use interaction skills when discussing and presenting ideas and information, selecting body language, voice qualities and other elements (for example, music and sound) to add interest and meaning. <a href="#">ACELY1804</a></p>	<p>Students build on their understanding and use of time, space, sound, movement, lighting and technologies.</p>	1, 5, 10
<p>Plan, rehearse and deliver presentations, selecting and sequencing appropriate content and multimodal elements to promote a point of view or enable a new way of seeing. <a href="#">ACELY1720</a></p>	<p>Plan, structure and design media artworks that engage audiences.</p> <p>Students produce representations of social values and points of view in media artworks for particular audiences and contexts. They use genre and media conventions and shape technical and symbolic elements for specific purposes and meaning. They collaborate with others in design and production processes, and control equipment and technologies to achieve their intentions.</p>	10
<p>Compare the text structures and language features of multimodal texts, explaining how they combine to influence audiences. <a href="#">ACELY1724</a></p>		1 – 5
<p>Plan, draft and publish imaginative, informative and persuasive texts, selecting aspects of subject matter and particular language, visual and audio features to convey information and ideas. <a href="#">ACELY1725</a></p>	<p>Develop and refine media production skills to shape the technical and symbolic elements of images, sounds and text for a specific purpose and meaning.</p>	4 – 9
<p>Edit for meaning by removing repetition, refining ideas, reordering sentences and adding or substituting words for impact. <a href="#">ACELY1726</a></p>	<p>Experiment with the organisation of ideas to structure stories through media conventions and genres to create points of view in images, sounds and text.</p>	9
<p>Use a range of software, including word processing programs, to confidently create, edit and publish written and multimodal texts. <a href="#">ACELY1728</a></p>		6 – 10