LA COUNTY LIBRARY

DIY Library Program

SMARTPHONE CINEMA

CREATE A SHORT FILM WITH YOUR PHONE

Recommended for Ages 12+

Want to be a film maker, but feel like you don't have the proper gear? If you have a smartphone, there is an entire movie studio right in the palm of your hand! Learn how to plan, shoot, and edit a film. Here is how to make a 5-minute short film.

Materials Needed

- Smartphone
- Free editing app
- Selfie stick (optional)
- Tripod (optional)

Pre-Production

This is where you plan out your film. Planning makes the process go smoothly and creates an excellent product. Your first and most important rule in making this film is to keep it simple. Let the resources you have on hand guide your story. Who do you have for actors? What props do you have? What will your location be? Develop your story around what you have and where you are. Remember, film is a visual medium, so most of your storytelling will be visual, including the expressions on your actors' faces. As you write your script, always keep in mind that the images tell the story, not the dialogue.

A note on sound:
The internal recorders on most cell phones are weak. They will only pick up a good sound recording when they are near the actors. Using the built-in mike may mean getting in close. Test your microphone beforehand. If the quality is low, restrict your dialogue to shots closer to the phone camera. You could also add a voiceover when you edit or create a story where you edit images to a soundtrack. A music video, perhaps?

Script:
A short film needs a short script. Tell the story from beginning to middle to end. In a script, you designate the location, time of day, characters, dialogue, and action related to a scene. Each

page of a formatted script translates roughly to one minute of film. Below is an example of a simple format you can use.

Scene 1

Interior. Library. Day.

ARTHUR, the librarian, is sitting at the Reference Desk reading from a computer screen as DARRIAN, a teenage student, walks up.

DARRIAN
Excuse me, can I get some help?

ARTHUR
How may I assist you?

DARRIAN takes a seat at the desk and leans across toward ARTHUR.

DARRIAN (Whispering)
I would like the *Lost Book of Darkness*.

ARTHUR looks shocked. He leans across the desk toward DARRIAN.

ARTHUR (Whispering)
I don't know who told you we had that cursed
tome, but that's none of my business, is it?

DARRIAN (Whispering)
No. Take me to it.

ARTHUR stands and looks disapprovingly down at DARRIAN.

ARTHUR
Please follow me, sir.

Cut to:

Cut to:
"Cut to:" is your transition to the next scene. Remember to number your scenes. This will make it simpler when you begin to design shots (Wide, Medium, Close-up, Insert) for your storyboard and when you set up a shooting schedule.

Storyboard:
Before you film your movie, you are going to draw it by hand. In this way, you almost pre-shoot the movie. This is where you design how to visually tell your story shot by shot. A good way to think of a storyboard is to look at it as a comic book version of your film. This is where you make the decisions on what shots you will use to tell your story.

Types of shots:
Wide= Location + Actors + Action
Medium= Actors + Actions
Close-up = Faces
Inserts = Small actions

For example, using the sample script, here are some possible shots to tell the story:

1. Wide – Arthur at his desk as Darrian walks up and asks for help.
2. Medium – From Arthur's Point of View (POV) as Darrian sits down and asks for the book.
3. Close up – Arthur's shocked face.
4. Medium – Arthur + Darrian. Arthur leans across the desk and they whisper.
5. Wide – Arthur stands and disapprovingly regards Darrian.

An Insert Shot is for small actions that spur the story forward and make the action clearer. For example, if someone opens a door in your film, show a close-up of their hand turning the doorknob. Perhaps Darrian opens the *Lost Book of Darkness:*

> Insert – Darrian's shaking hand lifts the cover of the *Lost Book of Darkness*

Hint: You can use index cards. Draw what you want your shot to look like on the blank side of the card. Make dialogue and action notes on the lined side. This way, you can move the shots around on your storyboard, should you find a better order in which to tell your story.

Shooting Schedule:
Once you have your script done, and your shots planned, you can make a shooting schedule. If your storytelling calls for many different locations, this is a great time saver. This is why you should number your scenes. You do not have to film them in order. Let's say you use the same location at the beginning and end of your film. Instead of going back to the same place twice, the scenes at the beginning and end can be filmed at the same time. Your shooting schedule can look like this:

1PM
Location: Library
Scene 1, Scene 5

2PM
Location: Hotdog Stand
Scenes 2, Scene 3, Scene 4

Production

This is where your planning pays off! Here are some important things to keep in mind when shooting your film:

- Clean your lens.
- Put your phone in airplane mode to avoid distractions.
- Always use horizontal mode for filming as it gives a better grip on the device and aligns the video orientation for viewing on a PC or TV.
- Shoot five seconds before and after any scene to aid in editing. Make and save two takes of every shot to be sure.
- After recording a scene, play it back to make sure it came out how you intended, then move onto the next scene.
- Video consumes storage space on your phone. If you're short on memory, stop shooting and backup your work to a computer or cloud service.

Lighting:
Phone cameras have tiny sensors and catching the emotions of faces on film requires plenty of light. Try to shoot in brightly lit areas. When indoors, arrange standing lamps in a three-point setup to eliminate shadows:

1. *Key Light* - Your main source of illumination. The key light goes in front of and off to the left or right of the subject. The closer the key light is to the subject, the flatter the illumination. The further away the key light is, the more shadows you will have.
2. *Fill Light* - The fill light lessens shadows caused by the key light. It is placed in front of the subject to the left or right (Depending on which side is not the key light) and moved about to lessen or increase shadows for dramatic effect.
3. *Back Light* - The back light goes behind the subject, usually in a straight line opposing the key light, and is used to light a subject's head and shoulders.

Selfie Stick or Tripod (Optional) – The biggest challenge to filming with smartphone is to keep the shot from being shaky. To avoid blurs or shaky video, place the phone on a tripod.

A note on camera angles:
Probably the best part of shooting with a smartphone is how incredibly creative you can get with your shots. Think about the possibilities for a moment. If you want to follow someone in an action scene, why not fix the phone to a skateboard? For something unusual, place the smartphone on the ground or fix it to the ceiling to get a strange angle for a shot. Just

remember, be careful not to break your phone or make it sticky with duct tape. Also, though it is great to be creative, don't let too many creative camera angles get in the way of telling your story. Telling your story is always the most important part of the film.

Post-Production:

This is the most time-consuming part of the process, but with the great selection of free video editing apps available to download to your phone, it can also be the most fun. First, in the same way you numbered your scenes to make storyboarding and scheduling easier, go into your photo gallery on your phone and put all your shots into a single album to make editing easier. Label your shots with descriptions within this album.

You can download any video editor from the Google Play store or iStore. We recommend started with the *FilmoraGo Free Video Editor* app as it includes the major functions needed for editing as well as free options to add music or voiceovers. Additional app recommendations are below. Note: this is not an exhaustive list.

Editing apps for Android: *Magisto, Filmmaker Pro, Adobe Rush, Andromedia*
Editing apps for iPhone: *iMotion, PicPlayPost, iMovie*

Your entire film can be made on your smartphone, but if you are having trouble editing because of the small size of the screen, use a computer. Transfer your files and download an editing app to your computer for this stage of production.

What Now?

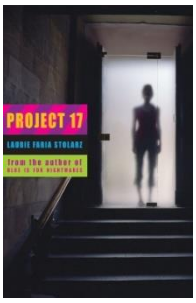
You just made a film! Share your film with family and friends or upload your film to social media like YouTube or Instagram. Don't let your creative genius go unseen.

DIGITAL RESOURCES AVAILABLE THROUGH LA COUNTY LIBRARY

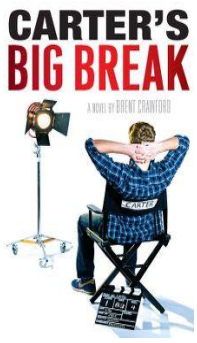
eBooks & Audiobooks

LA County Library offers numerous resources that can help you learn more about film and video production. Here are just a few, all of which are available as eBooks on OverDrive and Libby or Hoopla:

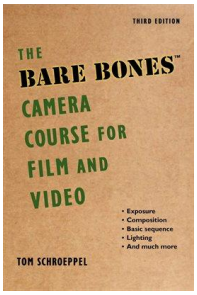
Me and Earl and the Dying Girl **by Jesse Andrews**
On the first day of his senior year, Greg Gaines thinks he's figured it out. The answer to the basic existential question: How is it possible to exist in a place that stinks so much? His strategy: remain at the periphery at all times. Keep an insanely low profile. Make mediocre films with the one person who is even sort of his friend, Earl. This plan works for exactly eight hours. Then Greg's mom forces him to become friends with a girl who has cancer. This brings about the destruction of Greg's entire life.



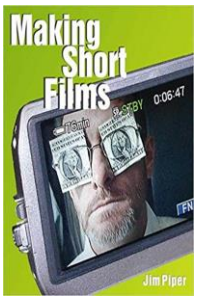
Project 17 **by Laurie Faria Stolarz**
When six high school students sneak into an abandoned mental institution to make a film about their night there, they do not expect the inexplicable and terrifying events that keep occurring within the crumbling, maze-like building, causing them to question themselves and make different choices about the course of their lives.



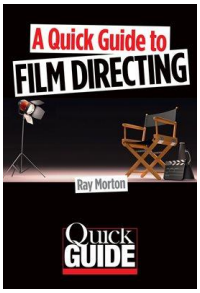
Carter's Big Break **by Brent Crawford**
After barely surviving freshman year, Carter is craving his summer break. Unfortunately, when he and his girlfriend, Abby, part ways, it looks as though summer just might break him. Things start to look up when he's unexpectedly cast in an independent film opposite the world's biggest tween sensation, Hilary Idaho. With Hollywood knocking on his door, Carter gets a taste of the good life. But as the film spirals out of control, he begins to fear that he's not the "somebody" he thinks he is and more the "nobody" he's sure he always has been.



The Bare Bones Camera Course for Film and Video **by Tom Schroeppel and Chuck DeLaney**
This title has been chosen by over 700 colleges to teach basic film and video techniques. Written by a working professional, *The Bare Bones Camera Course* is the most user-friendly book available on film and video production; it reduces the shooting experience to its essence, making complicated concepts easy to grasp.



Making Short Films **by Jim Piper**
Want to make an art film, a documentary, a video biography? Here's how to create real movies using consumer digital video format—without spending a lot of money or time.



A Quick Guide to Film Directing **by Ray Morton**
This book provides the reader with a concise and comprehensive overview of this creative and exciting occupation. Written in a fast-paced, easy-to-understand fashion, the book addresses such topics as what film direction is; the history of the profession; how to become a director; the creative and practical duties and challenges of a film director, and more.

Online Courses

- *Lynda.com*. Stream videos on video production with courses such as Creating Online Video with Android Phones and Creating Online Video with the iPhone.
- *Gale Courses*. Take a wide range of free online classes, led by expert instructors, including an Introduction to Screenwriting course.
- *Universal Class*. Access nearly 500 online classes taught by real instructors and explore a diverse range of subjects including Learn Adobe Premier Pro.

ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCE

MobileMovieMaking.com. Watch how-to tutorials as well as featured videos and contests on this comprehensive site.