

HOW TO WRITE A TREATMENT

Film and Television MFA Program in Production/Directing

Proposals should be for short films **UNDER TEN MINUTES** that might be produced during graduate residence at UCLA. Submissions **MUST** be in 12 point font and follow the guidelines below.

Please submit a treatment based on your selected Production Area (Narrative or Documentary).

Documentary Treatment:

This three-page max SHORT FILM TREATMENT should be written in simple, nontechnical language (i.e. no camera angles, transitions, etc.). Write in the active voice using present tense. Tell the reader what they will see and hear on the screen as it unfolds dramatically, from beginning to end.

Describe the overall story and introduce any relevant characters. Be specific about what you think you will find, even if you are not sure the final outcome. What will we have learned by the end that we didn't know in the beginning? Why is this story important? Why now?

Make human truths emerge through images—not just verbal description. This is a film treatment, not an essay.

Narrative Treatment:

This three-page max document can be submitted as a SHORT FILM TREATMENT or a screenplay or an excerpt in STANDARD SCRIPT FORMAT.

Treatments should read like a short story and be written in the third person, present tense. It should present the entire story including the ending. Do not write in screenplay form unless necessary to present key scenes and dialogue from the screenplay it is based on.

While it should read like a short story, keep in mind that it is not a short story. It is a film. Write down **ONLY** what the audience will see and hear.

Some Conventions:

- Introduce Characters in CAPS, followed by age in parentheses:
 - *"JOHN (22) flags the BARTENDER (50s). Orders a drink. John toasts the bartender."*
- Describe only what is seen and heard on camera—no desires, emotions, or thoughts of characters.
- No extensive backstory that describes what happened before your story starts
- Do not describe camera directions.

Elements of a Strong Treatment:

- A clear beginning, middle and end.
- The treatment should have a theme – a premise that creates the structure of the narrative, or a theme that emerges from the story's resolution.
- The main idea should be clear – what is your story about?
- Who is the main character and what does he/she want? What is his/her goal? What is the impediment to that goal (conflict)?
- What are the stakes? What action does the character take?
- How is the conflict resolved?
- How does the character change? What is different at the end of the film?

*Keep in mind this is a project that IS DOABLE as a student SHORT film, not a FEATURE. While treatments about outer space, dinosaurs and ancient Greece might show imagination, make sure the project is feasible.

*We look for applicants with the ability to tell a story visually. Always ask yourself what the audience will see and hear.

*Is the story impactful? Is it memorable? Try to write from a place of personal experience.

*Use ACTION words. Film captures the actions of characters. Add DESCRIPTIVE WORDS to create images that will stay in the mind of the reader.

*Avoid stereotypes and clichés. Characters should have clear and logical motivations and goals.