

The challenge when beginning a project from scratch is not just to implement all of these elements, but also to develop an original idea. This section consists of a series of stages intended to plot the route from idea to finished product – either a storyboard or script extract.

The stages for presentation of work-in-progress and feedback on that work are designed to be opportunities for formative assessment – public and open spaces for dialogue and discussion about what works, what doesn't, what's appropriate, what isn't and so on. This should mean that we eliminate the possibility of students accepting an assignment brief, working in secret for a month and then submitting work which does not meet the requirements and subsequently receiving a disappointing grade for it.

Planning a project

Worksheet 18

worksheet 18 Planning a project

Activity 1

Finding a story

It's not easy coming up with a story from scratch. If you need inspiration you could try the following:

- Look at other films (especially if you need to produce something in a particular genre) and consider:
 - What sorts of stories are typical of the genre?
 - What sorts of characters are typical?
 - Are there any opportunities for 'innovation' or making elements from a 'familiar' genre?
 - What qualities would you expect a main character or protagonist to have?
- Look at newspapers and magazines and consider:
 - Which of the stories sound interesting?
 - Which would make a good visual story?
 - Can you identify a protagonist?
 - Can you imagine what might drive the protagonist?
- Look at your own experience and consider:
 - An event that was funny/shocking/suspicious dramatic.
 - How might this event form part of a story?
 - Does an individual emerge as a central character?
 - How might they have reached the moment of the event?
 - What might they do afterwards?

Activity 2

Finding a protagonist

You may have an idea for a moment, a character, an image but have difficulty seeing how this could be made into a story.

- Brainstorm for a while – use a big sheet of paper and put your character, moment or image in the middle, then just write down ANYTHING that occurs to you in relation to the central object.
 - Your aim is to come up with a main character, male, female, young, old, gay, straight, rich, poor, black, white – who are they?
- Next: What do they want out of life? Perhaps, the following list of things that make people act will give you some ideas:
 - Pursuit of love/fuel!
 - Desire for justice/love/vengeance
 - Fear
 - Greed
 - Compassion
 - Ambition
 - Need for validation
- So what will your character DO in the story? Will they be driven by different things at different points in the story?

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Activity 3

Developing a story statement

You should now have:

- A protagonist.
- A sense of what this character will do in their story.
- A rough idea of what kind of story they will tell – a romance, for example.

Write a statement of what your idea is about. It should be one or two lines no more than three sentences long and be based on your central character. For example:

"This story is about a politician who, as he lies in his bed before writing a memoir, remembers how he got his job as a politician and how he ends up writing the memoir in order to catch the attention."

Before you can get to this stage you will need to go through a number of longer versions. You may have built up ideas for what happens, but try to focus on the 'moment' of the story – what and why is it really about?

Read your statement to the group. Make a list of people's questions and comments – they might help you develop your idea.

Activity 4

Developing an ending

You now have a statement of what your story is about.

You now need to come up with another statement which tells us:

- How your story will end.
- How your protagonist will have changed at the end.

For example, if your story were about:

"A young unemployed man, inspired by his wife's art and son, tries to make some money by beginning his unemployed friends into a group of 'male dragons'."

Your new statement could read:

"Despite numerous setbacks, my husband managed to get on his feet and, more importantly, managed to begin some sort of career."

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● Activity 1 – Finding a story

Assuming that the requirements of a specific assignment will take precedence, initially we need to suggest some ways of finding an idea. This activity contains a number of preliminary exercises which can be used to generate story ideas. These can be whole, small group or even individual activities.

● Activity 2 – Finding a protagonist

The second stage encourages students to brainstorm around whatever idea, however small, they have come up with and to develop its focus around a protagonist. Free association at this point is probably the best policy as it may result in some genuinely imaginative proposals. It may also be useful to revisit the character exercises in Unit 2.

● Activity 3 – Developing a story statement

Our aim at the next stage is to enable students to state that their story is about a particular character and a particular action. This only needs to be brief. Set a deadline by which each group or individual will publicly state what their story is about. If necessary, introduce a preliminary activity in which model statements are developed for existing films, eg:

'This story is about an anxious, claustrophobic single mother who discovers her inner strength when she has to protect her diabetic daughter when burglars break into their house.' *Panic Room* (David Fincher, US, 2002)

'This story is about a troubled psychiatrist with marriage problems, who, through his work with a boy who thinks he can see the dead, discovers that he is himself a ghost and reaches a kind of peace.' *The Sixth Sense* (M Night Shyamalan, US, 1999)

It's also worth using existing films to establish who the story is about; *Scream* (Wes Craven, US, 1996) for example, is not really about high school kids seeking revenge, but about Sidney Prescott's maturation and education – the Sidney at the end of the film is stronger, wiser and more resilient than the Sidney at the beginning.

● Activity 4 – Developing an ending

Despite the fact that a typical piece of assessed practical work is likely to be an extract from a whole (unless a short self-contained screenplay or film is being developed), it is important for students to know what the general shape of their stories will be like. This will ensure that their extract will be focused in narrative terms and its function will be unambiguous.

It may be useful to revisit some of the approaches discussed in Unit 2 in order to remind students of:

- The need for resolution;
- The nature of resolution (the notion of irreversible change);
- Different types of resolution (in relation to genre).

When 'ending statements' have been developed, it's worth creating a forum in which these can be read out – they should probably include the first statement

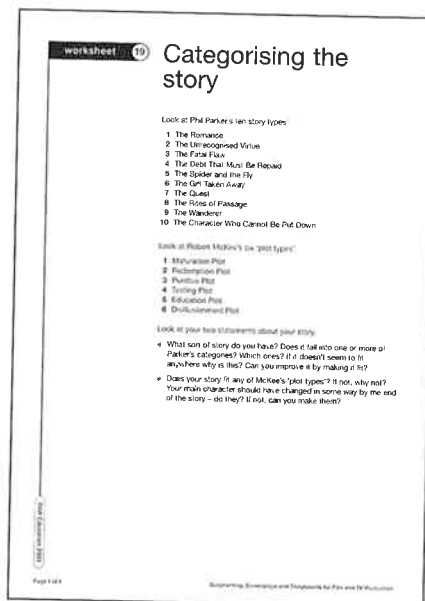
as well, especially as this might have changed in the light of subsequent work. And, again, it's worth reminding students that feedback should be constructive and focused on story issues.

Establish some rules for the readings – make sure everyone understands that this is an early stage and that this is work in progress. Critical peer feedback can be valuable, but try to ensure that it is offered positively, perhaps suggesting some ways of beginning statements, like 'I think it would work even better if ...'

Categorising the story

Worksheet 19

At this stage it's worth taking a step back in order to evaluate how the projects are progressing. Assessment so far has been peer-based, with the teacher occupying a co-ordinating role and retaining the ability to offer feedback where necessary. It is possible now for students briefly to assess the success of the progress of their own work in relation to some of the models offered earlier. This exercise can take as little as 15 minutes, but is a valuable opportunity for reflection.



Structuring the story

Worksheet 20

It is appropriate now to move towards organising the story using the Three Act Structure. Worksheet 20 asks students to use the Three Act Structure diagram to map out their story.

Make it clear that, at this stage, students do not need to know every detail, but that, by the end of the exercise, they should know roughly:

- What will be established in Act I;
- What will happen in Act II;
- What will happen in Act III;
- What the turning points are towards the end of Act I and Act II respectively.

This task can be assessed via presentation and verbal feedback again, but given the importance of establishing these story struts, you may like to take in the documents and offer written feedback.

worksheet 20 Structuring the story

The Three Act Structure represents a screenplay. You already know:

- What and who your story is about.
- How it ends.

Act I - Set up	Act II - Confrontation	Act III - Resolution
(1)	(2)	(3)

Use the model above to design the structure of your story. Draw three columns with these headings on an A4 sheet of paper. In the third column summarise the ending of your story.

Now consider the following:

- How will your protagonist get from the beginning to the end?
- What sorts of obstacles will they have to overcome?
- What is the first Plot Point to be – the one that forces them to confront something?
- What will the second Plot Point (2) be – the one that drives them towards the resolution?

Some tips

- The first act must set up who the protagonist is and should tell us if they have a particular need, flaw or quality.
- Plot Point I must be a story event that forces the protagonist to act differently – it should give the character a goal.
- In Act II we often see the protagonist confronting a problem in the wrong way or looking in the wrong place for something.
- Plot Point II should be something that makes the protagonist realise the right way to confront the problem – they may even realise that it's a different problem – or the right place to look for something.
- In the final act the protagonist is properly focused on the goal. It should build towards a climax – the high point of the story and a total encounter after which the protagonist is changed – they may have believed something, achieved something or saved a need for something.

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Developing a treatment and a pitch

Worksheet 21

● Activity 1 – A treatment

'Treatment' is a term which is used to mean various things, some of which are also referred to as the 'outline' or 'synopsis'. Phil Parker differentiates between the 'full treatment', which may be 10–20 pages or more, and the short, four-page, treatment which he calls an 'outline'. Syd Field also discusses the merits of the 'four-page treatment' and, for our purposes, given the likely outcomes of this work, four pages seems more than adequate (in fact, two to four pages would probably suffice) and we shall stick with the term 'treatment'. If the

worksheet 21 Developing a treatment and a pitch

Activity 1

A treatment

Write a treatment for your screenplay, with reference to your Three Act diagram which you have used to determine:

- Set up
- Plot Point I
- Development
- Plot Point II
- Resolution

The treatment should be about 600–1000 words long for a feature length work and about 300–400 words for a self-contained 'short'. It should be in the present tense, and tell us who the main characters are and what happens in the film. Look at an example if you feel necessary for you to reduce this to a short synopsis, but for now you will find it easier to write the long version.

Activity 2

A pitch

You have your treatment. You know what your screenplay is about. Your task is to communicate this in a brief, exciting way through a 'sales pitch'. You will have one minute in which to:

- State the title of your film,
- Give a tagline,
- Make people want to see it.

Afterwards – did they? Why? Why not?

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final product is to be a self-contained short film, a shorter treatment will be enough. If necessary the treatment can be used as the basis for an abbreviated synopsis of 200 words or so.

The treatment should be a present tense prose version of the intended screen story and should establish:

- The main characters and their motivation;
- A clear dramatic structure;
- The essential narrative events, including the resolution of the main story or stories.

Ideally, the style of the treatment should reflect the style of the screenplay – many see it as a ‘written pitch’ – although this is difficult to achieve in the shorter format.

An example of a treatment for a 10-minute ‘short’ is given in the **Appendix**.

Having a forum for individuals and groups to read out their treatments is a great opportunity for instant feedback, but it can become tedious if the treatments are all lengthy. Alternatively, the treatments can be photocopied and passed around. Students can be encouraged to offer brief written comments. It is a good idea to provide guidelines for these, suggesting that comments focus on narrative coherence, character motivation and the strength of Plot Points.

● Activity 2 – A pitch

An alternative to reading out the treatments can be to give a verbal ‘pitch’. This is a useful way of clarifying and condensing the story and it can also clarify the notional audience for the work and the genre. At the very least there is an opportunity here to discuss the effects of titles and the function of taglines. For example, you could ask what is suggested by the title *Unbreakable* (M Night Shyamalan, US, 2000) and how this is inflected by the tagline, ‘Are you ready for the truth?’ If necessary, students could create pitches for existing films (it may or may not be a good idea to offer scenes from *The Player* (Robert Altman, US, 1992) as examples of how to pitch!). Worksheet 21, Activity 2 includes some suggestions.