Thomas More
SCUOLA PARITARIA BILINGUE

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## THINKING ABOUT A SHORT FILM

*Finding an idea*

Creativity and emotion are two essential ingredients to make your first short film, a miniature movie complete with plot and protagonists. First of all, you need to think about a **theme**: what do you want to talk about? Friendship, love, environment? Then you have to go into detail: what kind of friendship will it be? Between a child and his dog? Among classmates? After that, you need to identify the **topic**, what the short film tells (for example, about an adventure of a famous writer). To make the plot more compelling, an idea of plot is to compare two characters who represent two opposite side of the story. Immediately after, you have to move on to the plot, the structure and the order of events that will characterize your story. In each scene it will be necessary to always highlight the theme of the initial question, alternately supporting the reasons of the two protagonists. This is **the lumberjack rule**: to cut down a tree, you must always hit the same spot, your theme.

Example: In Shrek, the topic is the parody of a fairy tale; the plot is about an ogre who lives in peace until starting an adventure with Donkey. The theme is loneliness: the protagonists give different answers to the question "is it better to be alone or in company?"

*Inventing a story*

All most exciting stories, from movies to jokes, are divided into **three acts**.

Let's take Cinderella for example. In the first act we meet the protagonist, her goal and her problem: Cinderella is an orphan exploited by her two stepsisters. One day an invitation arrives from the prince who is looking for his future princess, but her stepsisters hinder her: this is the narrative conflict. In the second act, the conflict escalates. The protagonist is close to the goal, but she is in danger to the point that everything seems lost until her friends help her. She goes to the prom and loses her shoe: a small element to assists Cinderella in facing the final challenge and reunite, in the third act, with the prince with an happy ending.

One idea could be to invent an alternative ending in which Cinderella's happiness can be obtained in another way. **The surprise ending** makes the audience satisfied, but it has to be justified by the story. **The suspense** is different: if the audience knows there is a bomb under a table in a bar, but the characters are not aware of it, the dialogue has tension, because you know that at any moment the disaster might happen.

Another idea for the making of the short could be a silent film, that is, accompanied by music but without sounds. In this case the dialogues have captions... after all, cinema was born silent and in black and white.

*Creating characters*

When you create a character, you have to do it from “head to toe”: deciding what he/she likes, what he/she hates, what scares him/her, what he/she does and how he/she does it, his/her strengths, his/her weaknesses, and how he/she relates to other characters. Define his **personality** by finding five characteristics of his character and ordering them by relevance. The important thing is to make sure that **all the characters have different personalities** by creating an explosive mixture.

During the film, the protagonist must evolve according to **the model of the hero's journey**: He lives a fantastic adventure and faces a difficult experience: overcoming one's limits and putting all of himself to reach the goal. After he has learned his lesson, he returns wiser to everyday life.

In case of a **tragic ending**, on the other hand, it is necessary to offer the viewer "a justice of values" in order to give satisfaction to the public (for ex.: if the protagonist is killed, the police has to imprison the killer).

*Tips for dialogue making*

- Simple but effective conversations
- Avoid difficult words or vulgar and exaggerated terms.
- Don't tell what you already see in the scene of the film (e.g.: if there is a box don’t say “This is a big box”)
- Characters should not explain what they are about to do or have already done.
- Characters should not describe their emotions: they have to emerge from their behavior.
- Recite the dialogues you write aloud, to check if they sound natural..

*Writing a script*

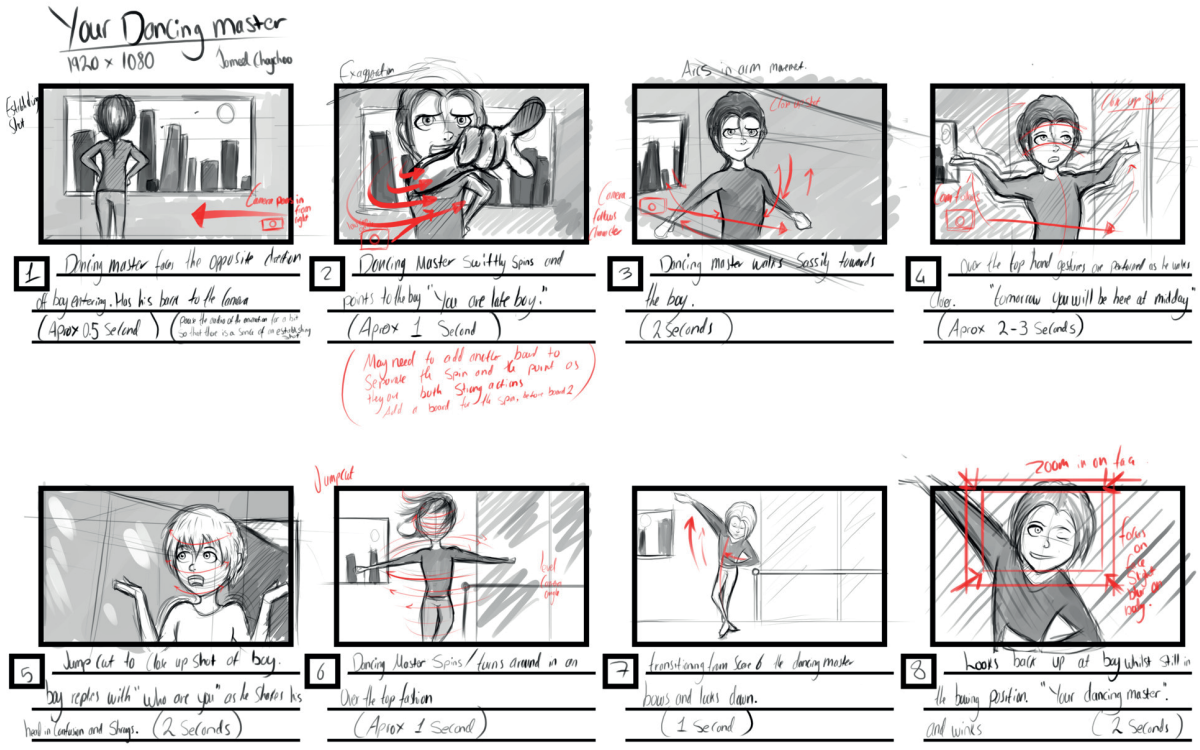
The **script** is the skeleton of the film, its structure and its soul, it needs a lot of energy and enthusiasm. It is divided into **scenes**: units of time and space. Each scene is preceded by a **scene header**, which indicates the location (i.e. the place) and the theme. After the header there is the **description of the action**, in which the verbs are always in the present tense to better understand what happens in the scene. When a character speaks, write his name in capital letters and his line of dialogue on the next line, so that each actor can easily identify his lines.

## Tips for script writing

- Use a clear and simple language, with active verbs (e.g. she runs, he speaks, they work..)
- In dialogues, ask questions and delay responses to capture the audience.
- If possible: start a scene with an action; end it with a line that asks a question; answer the same question in the following scenes.
- Start each scene by immediately entering the heart of the action.
- The protagonist must be the center of the story: active and decisive. The others characters are used to accompany the action, they never “steal” the scene.

*Creating a Storyboard*

The storyboard consists of a series of **images with a description of the scene and the dialogues** beside or below. The images can be **photographs** (taken in the location by arranging the actors in the space) or **drawings**. Put the images (photographs of drawings) on different sheets and arrange them on a table/wall to get an overall look at the whole project and move around the shoots. When the sequence convinces you, take a picture of it and start working on the schedule.

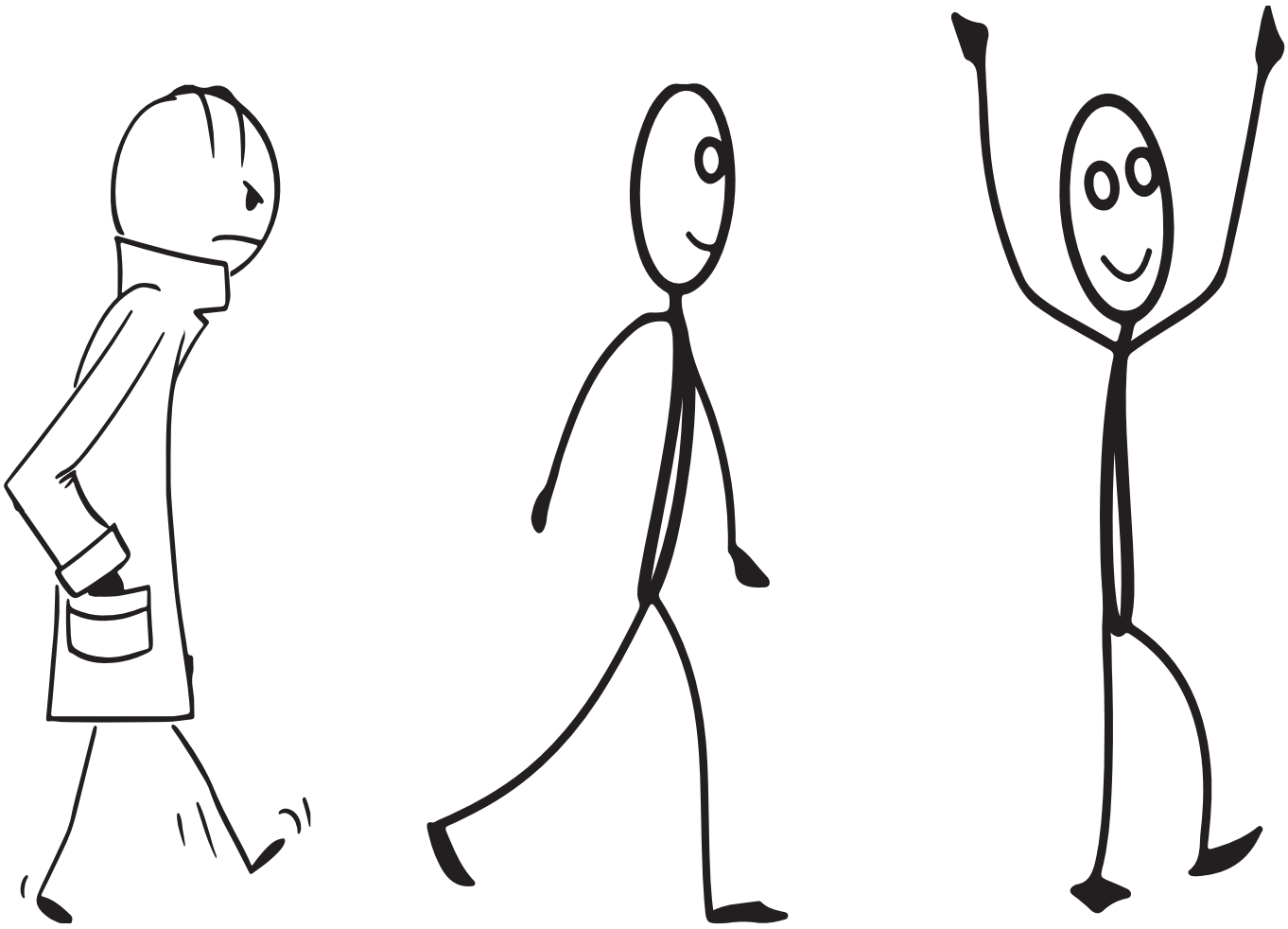



*Organizing a video-making troupe*

First of all, choose the actors who will play in your short. The **director** will have the task of coordinating the creative decisions and the choice of location. The **scenographer** will modify the places to adapt them to the needs of the scene. The **director of photography** will take care of the lighting and technical choices relating to the camera, agreeing on the shots of the film with the director. In a short film the same person can play the role of cameraman, **sound recording engineer** and **production manager** who organizes the people on the set.

*Tips for acting*

An actor is all the more credible the more he gives authentic emotions on stage. To achieve this, you need to know as much as possible about the character you are going to play. What behavior does he have: is it impulsive or meditative? Reserved or outgoing? Besides character: how does he/she walk? Does he move nervously or relaxed? Does he gesticulate a lot or a little? Think about all this aspect when you play a character.



## ACTION!

*The ICT tools*

To make a short film, you can use even just a **smartphone**. The shooting parameters go automatically, but there are apps that allow you to adjust them manually. The zoom (i.e. the possibility of approaching the view to a closer point from afar) is digital and not optical, and this leads to a loss of image quality. You can fix it on suitable easels and it is ideal for short documentaries. It has less battery and memory than a video-camera but you can use an extra memory SD card, or a computer to upload footage to.

The **tablet** shoots like a smartphone. It is slightly lower in terms of resolution, but the larger screen controls creates less vibration than on the phone. The **webcams** are small and connected to computers: they can focus up to two centimeters away and capture tiny details indoors while poorly outdoors.

The **compact photo-cameras** have an optical zoom, a good adjustment of the image capture parameters and can be fixed on the tripod (a small stool). They stop recording after a few minutes, so they are not suitable for long shots. **Compact video-cameras** are similar to compact cameras but don't have the same limitations. They are designed for making videos, so they are the best compromise between size, weight, cost and performance.

**Reflex cameras** are designed to take beautiful photos with the best image quality. Nevertheless, they often fail to adjust the focus while recording. Disadvantages are the huge weight, bulk and cost.

The **action cameras** (e.g. the Go-pro) are small and water-proof, designed to be attached to helmets, surfboards, skateboards and bicycles. They have a lens capable of capturing the widest possible horizon (wide angle) which deforms the image - so it should not be used for close-ups of faces.

**Semi-professiona**l and **professional camcorders** have many technical advantages, but you need to get experience first.

*The lighting*

Lighting is essential for a film. **If you go outdoors**, a white cardboard or polystyrene panel of about one square meter is useful for lightening the shadows of the characters. The sun is a very powerful light, which should be used as a counter light.

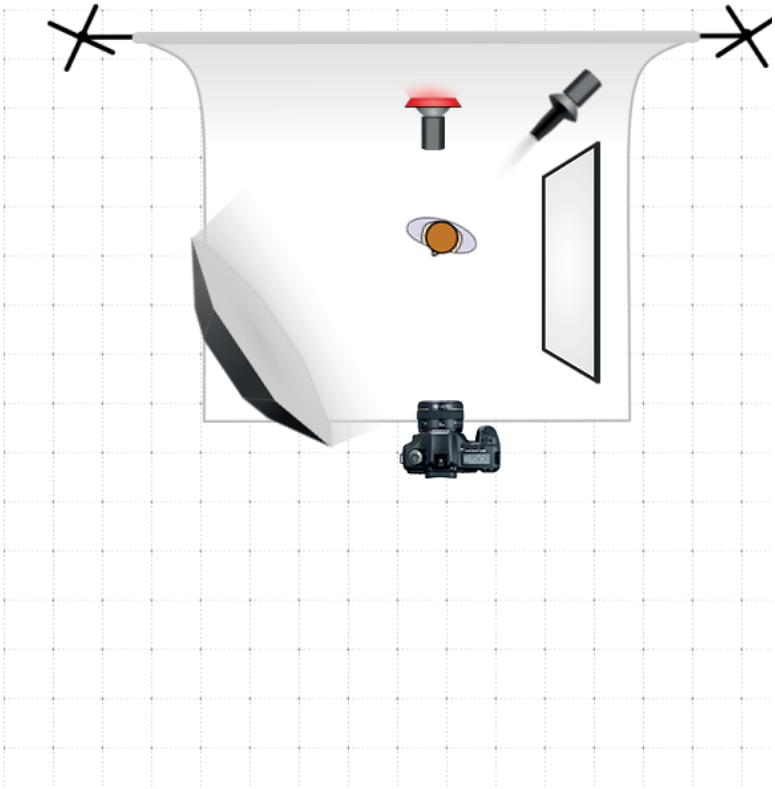
If you are **indoors**, first adjust the lights to illuminate the environment well. It is necessary to find the right balance between the lighter and darker areas so that the scene has depth and the characters can be seen well in their movements. A person stands out better if the background is more in shadow, while the dark silhouette of an actor stands out powerfully against a light background such as a lighted window.

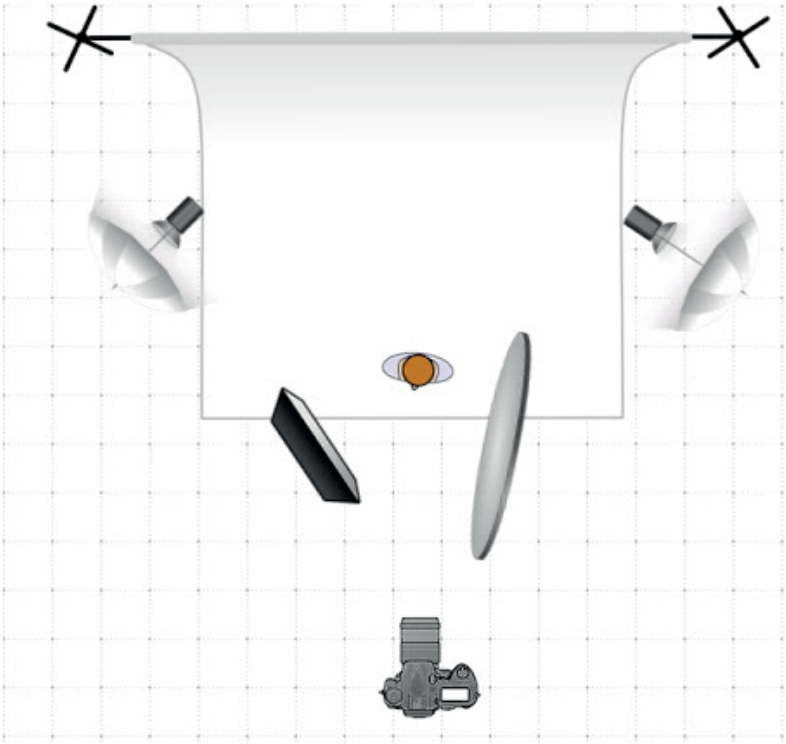
*How to point the light*

The light can be soft or rough: the first is evenly distributed and tends to wrap around the subject, creating soft shadows. **Soft lights** are those filtered by a lampshade or those that come by bouncing, or again, the light of a bright. **Rough lights**, enhance the volumes of a face and is therefore particularly suitable for portraits.

On the other hand, a character illuminated by a hard light will have sharper shadows. Usually this type of light is aimed directly at the subject, so it is not reflected. There are also different lights according to the role they play on the set: the **key light** dominates the scene, the secondary fill light called **fill light** lightens the shadows that are too dark.

The light behind the character is called **back light**. There are two types: either the light comes only from behind the subject, enhancing the dark profile, the silhouette; or the light illuminates its outline, detaching it from the background.



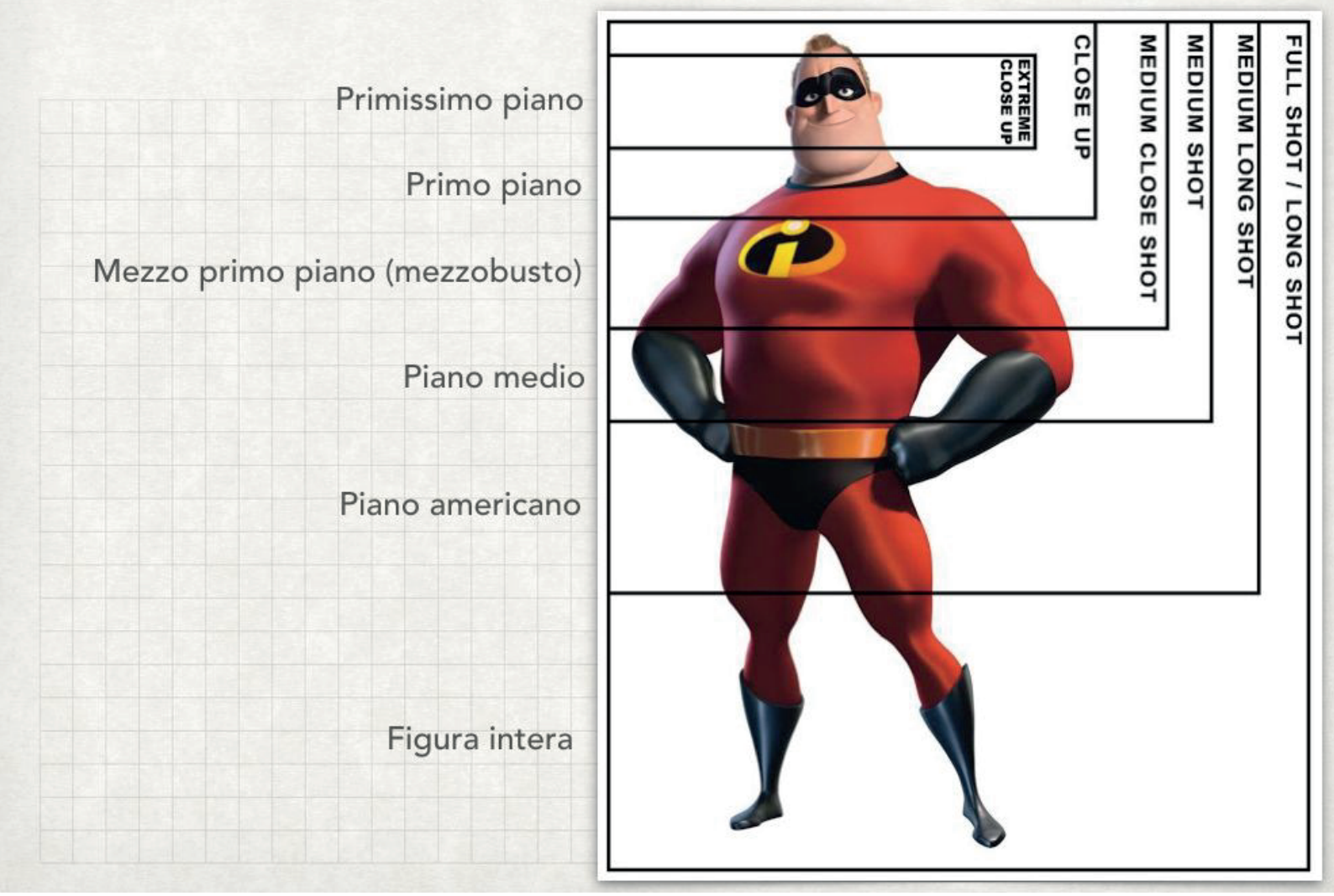


*The framing shots*

The shots are the fixed/moving points of view on which you shoot your film. What you frame is in the **field**; what you don't frame is **out of frame**. A scene is made up of several shots, while the sequence is a set of scenes that form a narrative episode: for example, a girl who gets up from the sofa goes out into town and enters a bar is a sequence made up of different scenes. If, on the other hand, you shoot a scene with a single shot, following the various characters, you are making a **sequence shot**.

*Position of the subject*

**Framing a character is not a neutral choice**, because it changes the relationship it has with the environment and with the edges of the frame. Here's an exercise: Imagine placing the character in the center of your frame, what emotions does it convey? Change the angles and check how different it can be!



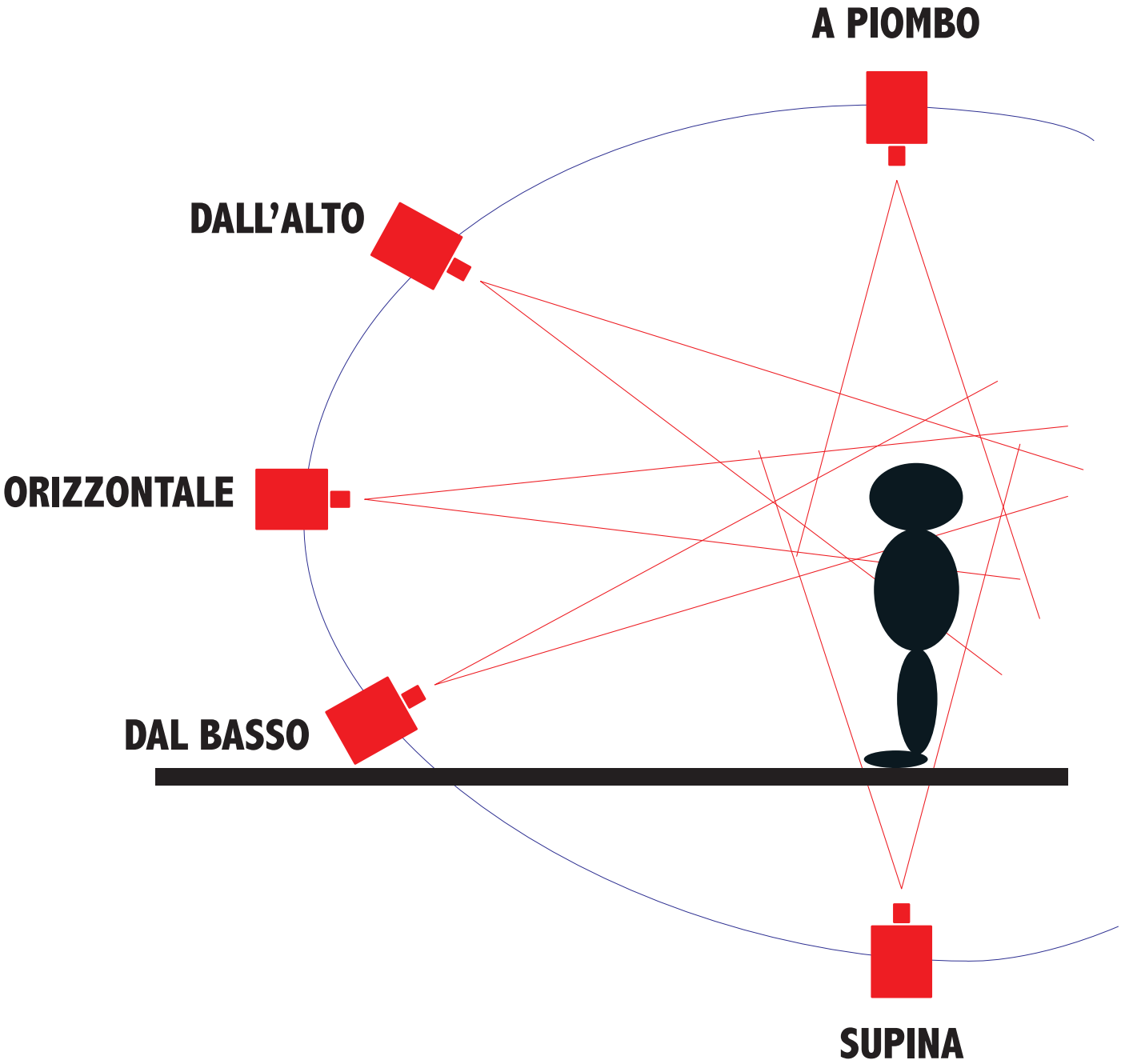
*Angulations*

**In front**, the typical angulation with camera at eye level

**From above**, the character is lower compared to the viewer of the movie, therefore transmits greater fragility.

**From below**, the character is higher than us, therefore he/she is more authoritative and powerful.

**Inclined** if you tilt the device, the character will be diagonal and our eye will read the image "rolling" - the movement conveys agitation and fear.



*Use of colors*

Colors drastically change the emotions that characters feel. In most cases, **colors convey vitality**, while black and **white convey melancholy**.

*Camera movements*

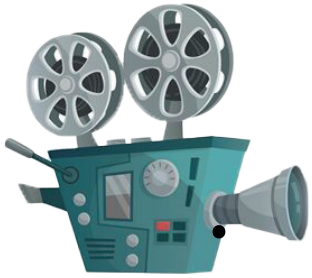
If you use a **tablet** or a **mobile phone** and you attach it to the **tripod**, you make a static shot and then you have a fixed camera; if you hold it in your hand and follow the action, you have a **hand-held machine**. You can avoid the vibrations caused by your movement thanks to a stabilizer for your device called a **steady cam**. You can also use drones to make **aerial shots**.

*Tips for a good audio*

- Approach the speaker with the microphone.
- Find a quiet location. If you need background noise like traffic, it's worth recording it separately and adding it during editing.
- Indoor locations are preferable to outdoor ones because they are more suitable, but pay attention to the eco of rooms that are too large.
- To improve the sound of your dialogue with a pin microphone to attach to sweaters/t-shirts

*The clapperboard*

The clapperboard is closed in front of the camera after it is triggered, but before the director shouts action. The closing of the clapper is used during the **editing phase** to synchronize the sound with the images. It is also used to label a video clip indicating the title of *the film*, the scene and *framing shot number*.



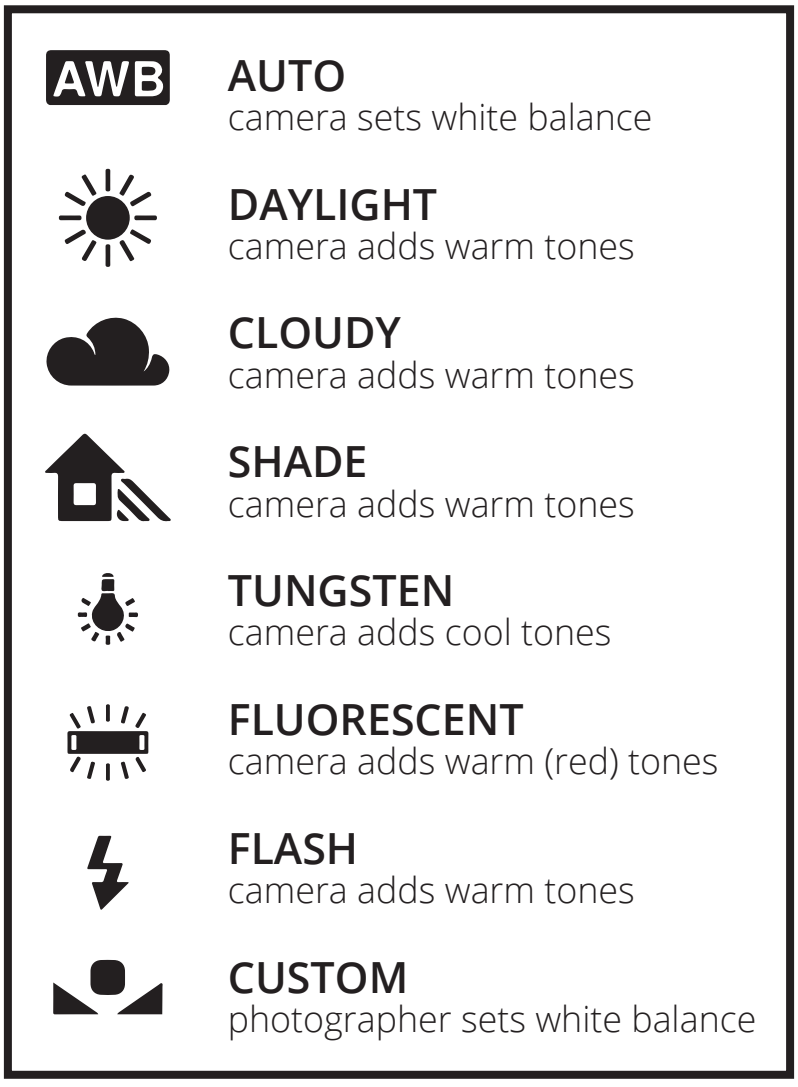
*Photography*

Since the film consists of a series of photographs, it is necessary to understand how an image is technically captured. **The basic ingredient of photography is light** and for an image to be legible, the camera must receive the right amount of light through the lens. Thanks to a sensor called **exposure meter**, each device calculates the average amount of light that passes through the lens and automatically adjusts its parameters. When an image is **properly exposed**, both highlights and shadows have recognizable details. On the other hand, when there is too much light, the image is said to be **overexposed** and loses details in the bright areas. Conversely, if the photo is **underexposed**, i.e. it does not have enough light, it will lose details in the dark areas.

You can adjust the **ISO sensitivity** of your device, that is the degree of sensitivity you can give to your sensor: with a low ISO sensitivity (for example 100) your sensor can take pictures with great lights. With a high  sensitivity (1600 and above) the device can take pictures even in the darkness.

*White balance*

The sunlight is white, the moonlight is blue, the lamps make yellow lights and the flames orange. The parameter that evaluates the color of the light is the **color temperature**. All devices have an automatic **white balance system**, that is, they try to ensure that in the photograph the color is balanced.



## EDITING

The editing is the **selection and assemble all the parts of your film**. It is an exciting phase of the work but it requires technique and patience. You need to choose the scenes carefully by cutting out all those that can burden the film. There are **technical aspects** related to the software, that is the program you use to assemble the short film and **aesthetic aspects** necessary for a nice editing.

*Photo/Video Formats*

A digital photograph is made up of many small squares called **pixels** (the more pixels they have, the more detailed the photos and videos are).

Videos are distinguished by proportion of the image (most common being 16/9), but also by **extension, compression and size of video files**. The extension is the format of your file, such as the "identity card" about the file digital information: **Avi** and **mov** are the most common extensions and are the same even if they originate from different operating systems. **Flv** and **mp4** are used for online videos, while **mkv** and **hdv** for high definition videos. Compression determines the weight of the file; high or low compression greatly changes the quality of a video. The more compressed, the lighter it will be, but it will lose quality.

*Editing Software's*

The editing does not necessarily have to follow the chronological order, but simply follow the story as you want it to be. To understand when it's time to cut, the advice is to make everything as short as possible. You could also think about interrupting a scene at the most interesting moment, leaving the viewer the desire to know how it ends. There are many **editing software's** and **apps** for phones and tablets. When you have the project ready, save it in a folder. The program interface is generally divided into two windows:

- In a first window you will find the audiovisual materials you want to use in the editing: video clips, images, music and noises that you should divide into folders. You can import the items on your device's hard disk to the software you use.

- When you create a sequence you must indicate the type of video format you want to work on (DV, Full HD...); the sequences open in the **timeline** window (timeline) where you can insert any material you have imported into the project by simply dragging it. Usually the audio tracks are arranged below, the video ones above.

*Cutting a video*

The biggest value of the editing is given by the cuts, that is the video fragments you choose to keep in the final version. You can shorten videos by dragging their edges along the timeline. To cut it you need to look for a specific command (usually called **split or blade**), so that you can keep the fragments that interest you the most. When you juxtapose two different pieces of video (moving from one to the other) you create a **break**.

*Effects*

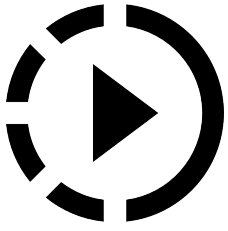
An editing effect is a manipulation of images and sounds. Once you have chosen the effect from a list, just drag it to the element you want to apply it to. You should try to experiment all the effects you find in the software's you are using, as to decide what's best for you.

**Transitions** are visual effects to move from one segment (or image) to another. For example: **fading**: when an image gradually appears from black or disappears from black. **crossfading**, one image fades onto the other, this effect is used to combine similar moments. Among visual effects, you can change also the size of the images, the position, saturation, contrast, brightness, blur and so on adjustments.

For **audio**, on the other hand, you have volume effects, equalization, reverb, voice distortion, cleanliness and so on.

Another category of effects concerns **time**: you can slow down or speed up a video, or just a part of it. **Slow motion** emphasizes an action - it works well in parodies of action scenes or to highlight ridiculous moments. You can **speed up** a clip when you are interested in showing the passage of time through a series of actions or through a changing landscape. However you manipulate the speed of a video, pay attention to what happens to its audio track, it could distort itself to the point of being unusable.

Once your editing work is finished, you just have to export and save your new video file – this process is called **rendering** (if you use high resolution video and many effects the process will be slower). If you choose, for example, an avi or mov extension, you can indicate the compression codec, that is, the program that compresses your video file; the best compromise between quality and weight is H.264.



Slow Motion

Fade

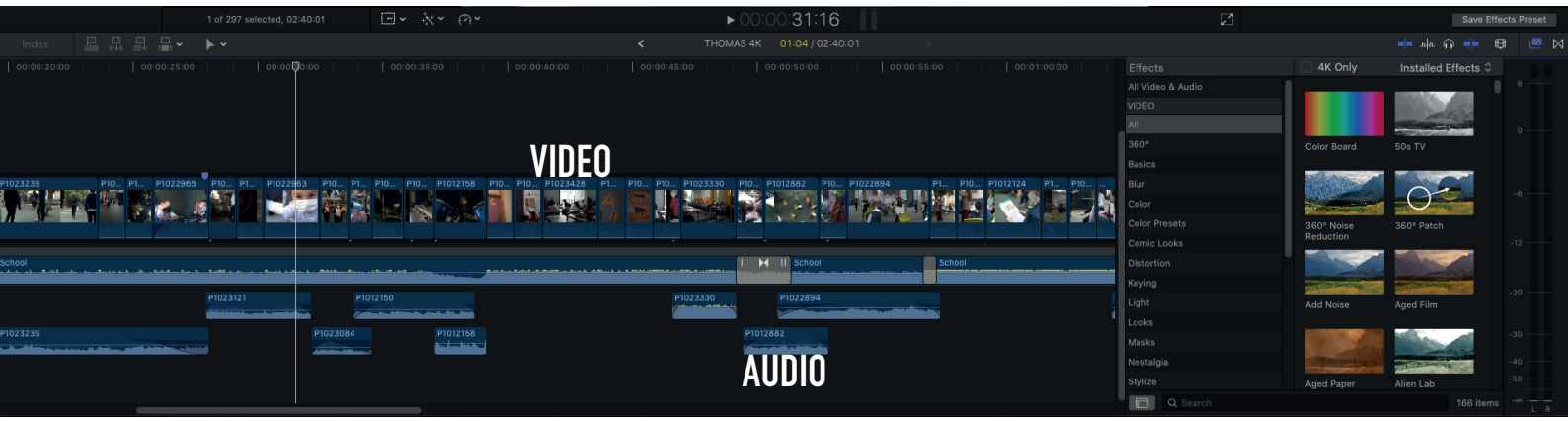
Rendering

Export

*Synchronization of sound with images*

In the **timeline** you can add music and sounds to the video you are editing. You can then **synchronize** images and sounds, that is, make sure **they happen at the same time**. For your videos you will necessarily have to place the right music. Music is like your comment on the film: the emotion aroused by music (cheerful, excitement, fear ...) is transferred to the scene it is combined with. Remember to **adjust the volume of the music** so that it does not cover any dialogue and that certain scenes work more without it.

If you want to publish the video online, use only non-copyrighted materials; in any case you will have to mention the materials used and the respective authors in the credits.

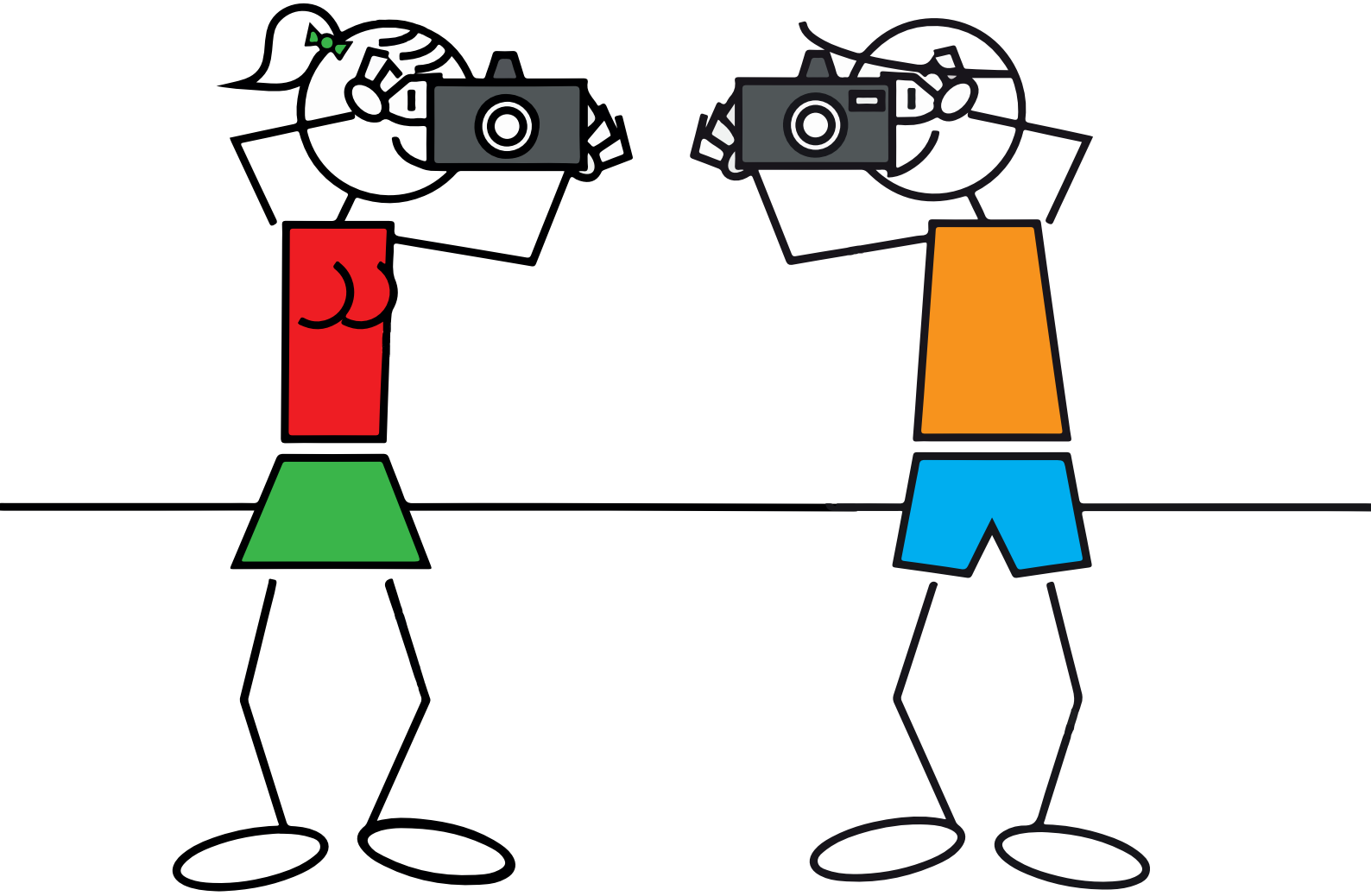


*Titles*

The titles are the writings that you add to your video during the editing phase; the command to create text is usually found in the toolbar. In addition to the **text**, **font and color control**, you can **position the text in the frame** and possibly apply a movement or animation to it.

The writings are said **superimposed** when they are placed over the video, while they are called **captions** when they are placed between two clips

The **subtitles** are written in the lower part of the frame showing the lines of the speaker on stage (for example for a foreign language or for the deaf). Choose a color that is legible at various times when they appear. Finally, there are the **opening credits** and **closing credits**, which show the names and roles of those who made the film.



## DOCUMENTARIES

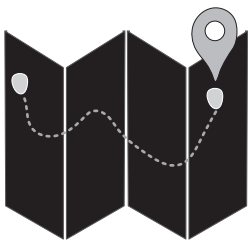
Documentary films try to capture reality or reconstruct it.

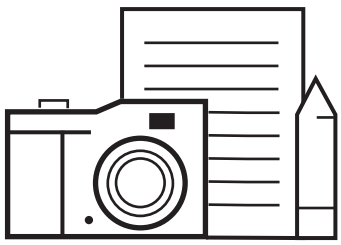
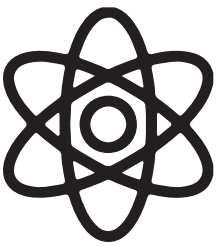
If you make a video of what is happening around you, even with your phone alone, you are making a documentary video: just open your eyes and become an amazing observer.

There are many documentaries we can make: If you tell the life of a person, you are making a **biographical documentary**. It is not necessary to tell his life in a chronological sense, you can focus on the aspects that interest you most. In some cases, the non-chronological narrative can make the story particularly compelling.

**Travel documentaries**, on the other hand, are a window on adventure. These are compelling stories of travels (close and afar)

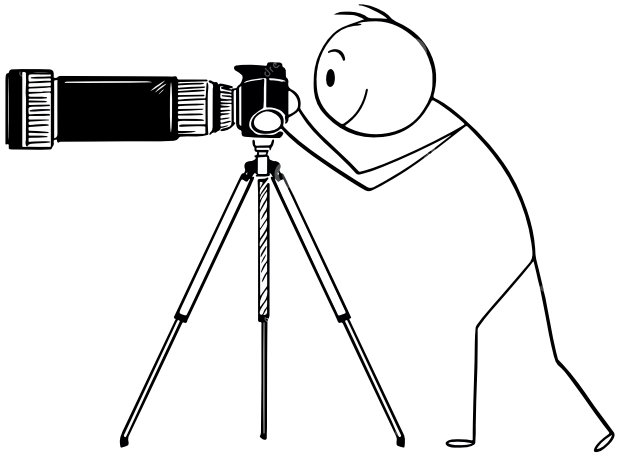
If you like investigations or prefer to fight against injustices you might love **journalistic investigations**, which are mostly about news or the recent past. Another type are the **scientific documentaries**, which explain the new frontiers of medicine or astronomy, and the naturalistic ones, where the beauties of nature are celebrated by spectacular images.



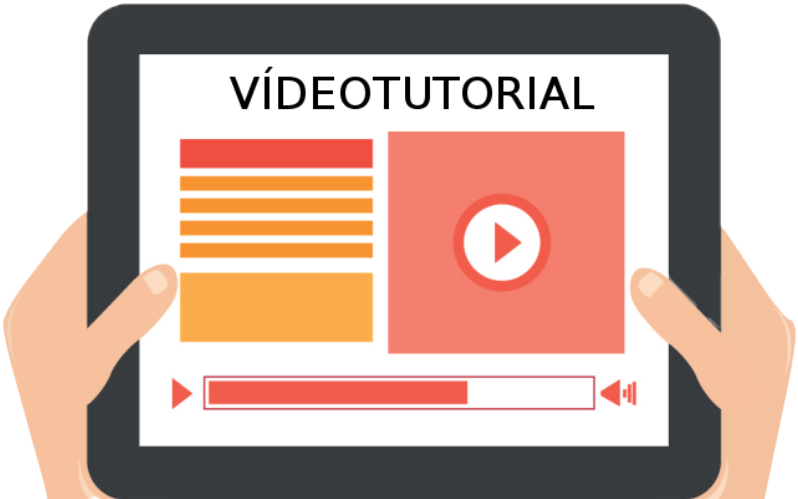
*Time-lapse*

The time-lapse is a **speeded up view of something happening**. You can do it by placing your camera/phone on a tripod and shooting whenever the scene in front of you has significantly changed (e.g. the sliding of clouds, the growth of mushrooms, the blossoming of flowers, the setting of the sun), and chose the option “time-lapse”.



*Video tutorials*

When you don't know how to do something, such as using software, building an object or using a game, you can find **video tutorials on the internet that explain it to you**. The world improves thanks to the open spread of beautiful: if you are good at doing something and want to share your knowledge on the net, know that somewhere in the world someone will be grateful to you!



*The tools of a documentary*

The **phone** or **video camera** are the first tool, and a **tripod** that to limit vibrations. If you cannot be on site filming an event, because it is distant or belongs to the past, you can do a **search among archival materials**, i.e. videos made by others. On the internet you will find a lot of material to study, acquire and insert in your montage.

*Tips for a good documentary*

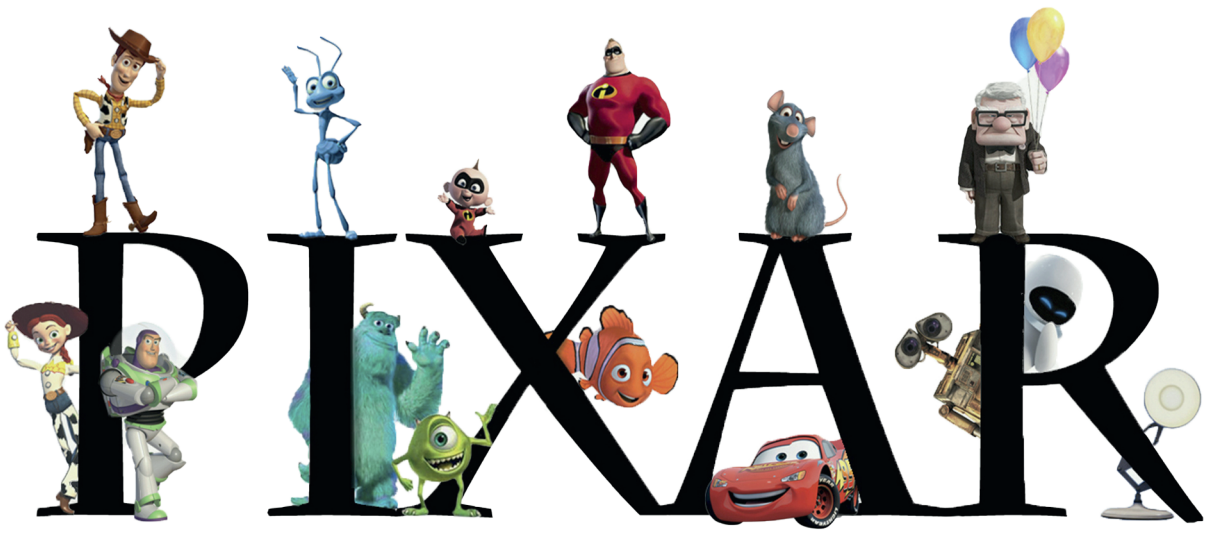
- **Look for subjects that are interesting** for you and for the people who will be watching your documentary.
- **Find someone to film** (at least two people) while someone else check if everything goes according to the plan.
- Collect all **materials you think necessary for editing**. Remember that your presence on stage can compromise the success of what you are filming.
- Mind **not to trip or run over someone** while shooting!

## RULES ON HOW TO WRITE AN EFFECTIVE STORYTELLING

Emma Coats, story artist and PIXAR author has posted on Twitter the 22 "secret" rules to tell unforgettable stories:

1. A character is admired more for his attempts than for his successes.
2. Keep in mind what interests you as a reader rather than what you enjoy as a writer. They can be two very different things.
3. Practice on the subject of the story as well, but you will never know what it is until you have reached the end.
4. Use the following structure: “Once upon a time ... Every day ... But one day ... Because of this ... Until finally ...”
5. Simplify, concentrate, combine the characters, take shortcuts.
6. What can your character do, what does he do best? Throw him into an opposite situation, put him to the test. How will he behave accordingly?
7. Make up the ending before you're halfway through the story. The endings are difficult.
8. Finish your story, even if it's not perfect. In an ideal world you would have both (the ending and a perfect story) but go ahead, you will do better next time.
9. When you feel stuck make a list of what you know will not happen.
10. Put aside the stories you like: what you like about them is a part of you.
11. Write up your idea, it will help you focus. If it stays in your head, you certainly won't be able to share it with anyone.
12. Discard the first idea that comes to mind. Then discard the second, third and fourth as well. Put the obvious aside, surprise yourself.
13. Give different opinion to different characters
14. Why do you have to tell this story? This is the heart of the film.
15. If you were the character, in this situation, how would you feel?
16. What is at stake? Create reasons to cheer for your characters. What happens if they don't make it? Suggest obstacles.
17. No work is wasted, collect all ideas you have.
18. Creating a story depends on continually challenging yourself.
19. The opportunities to get your characters in trouble are fantastic; the opportunities to get them out are deceptive.

20. Practice, take clips from a movie you don't like. How would you rearrange them in a way you like?
21. You have to identify with your characters and their personal situations, you can't just write "this is cool". What would make you act one way rather than another?
22. What is the essence of your story? What is the simplest way to tell it? If you know you can start building it from here.



***Start right-away!***

Once you have chosen the theme, **research material on the internet**: look for those who have already dealt with topics similar to yours, look for references and directors to take a cue from their way of telling a story. Research is an essential phase of film.

For a start, **record short videos** of what is happening to you for technical exercise; grab pen and paper to **start writing your story; share with the people around you** and observe the reactions.

Try to represent your story in the simplest way possible through the **storyboard**: it is not necessary to know how to draw well, you can also use simple photographs.

**Decide your shooting tool** (phone, tablet or camera) and check the video settings: this instruction booklet and the video-tutorial links will come in handy.

Make sure you have a kickstand and/or a stabilizer for smartphones and tablets; if you do not find them buy them (they have affordable prices).

***Be curious***, *it will help you make a better movie!*

Thomas More
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**USEFUL WEBSITES**

the following websites are tutorials for video editing
video editing program for windows:
**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mjxMjn9IKLM**

video editing program OPEN SHOT
**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e10a5vlu7bU**

Video tutorial iMovie
**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NtU62R_IjKY**

InShot Video Editor Tutorial (2020) Free Version | iPhone and Android
**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1opcVKmjKt4**

[Tutorial] How to edit a video from a smartphone with the free Inshot app
**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GxDqKYD_rbI**

How to make a Short Film for Beginners
**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U8fSLzuRc7M**

How to make a short film
**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=suSmdtXZ0jU&t=304s**

write a short film
**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HsOdEl1Pk24**

make a short film
**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_G3f23t7tlY**

Nicolò Balini (youtube travel lover)
**https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjMIGhRExEB-Q6ZyEr1gBeA**

How I filmed a DOCUMENTARY for 6 months around Europe (SPORT)
**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9FRnGvWC0-g**