

Creating a Storyboard that Doesn't Suck

Your "To Do" List

There are several things that you can do to make sure your storyboard doesn't suck. None of them are hard. All of them are things students don't want to do. Essentially, it does down to paying attention to detail, following directions, reading, and working hard. So, if you can just do find a way to accomplish these items, your subsequent grade will be fine. But before you even start writing, you need to:

- Read or review the Stockman book (especially pp. 1-95).
- Scout your locations, and photograph them. Odds are good that if it looks bad on your camera phone, it's going to look bad in video.
- Write up your basic story in one paragraph and then outline the plot. You all know how to make an outline – but make this one very detailed. Someone should be able to understand the basics of the project from the outline.
- Write up basic character sketches for your primary characters. How would you describe them? What motivates them? What are they trying to do? Keep it to 3-5 sentences for each character.
- Pitch your movie idea to your friends and family. Would anyone else want to see the film?

Draft the Storyboard

This document contains all your thoughts concerning story, plot, photography, location, shots, and dialogue. It should, in essence, be a photo and text representation of the film. Thus, it's fairly extensive. As a rough rule of thumb, one page of a script typically equates to a minute of film. This is even easier to accomplish with a storyboard since we're using pictures. Still, a 20-minute film is likely to require a storyboard in excess of 20 pages. Specifically, your storyboard should contain:

- Your basic story description paragraph (see above).
- Your character sketches (see above).
- Breakdown by shot including – photo of location, shot description, complete dialogue, transitions, special effects, images and audio/music.

Items to Keep in Mind

The storyboard reflects the least of what you need to get the job done. If you really want to make your life easier you'll also compose a shot list (see Stockman's book for an example). Having a shot list will help keep you organized, and will help in coordinating disparate schedules. Also, please try to avoid the following common mistakes:

- Don't forget this is a group effort. Don't be the person that's hard to schedule. Everyone is busy – and everyone's time is precious. Work with others and respect the demands on their time as well as yours.
- Because this is a collaborative effort, work together on it. If you just split of the work and combine it later, it's going to suck. Make sure everyone knows all aspects of the project, and that the final storyboard is well edited and cohesive.
- Make effective use of your time in class. You have several lab sessions where you can spend all your time in project work. Every minute you waste means scheduling more time outside of class.
- You can afford to cynical about this project. Video work is a pain. It can be a ton of fun, but it's also a lot of work. Don't underestimate that, and don't shortcut the planning process. Every minute you spend thinking it out beforehand avoids two minutes of wasted shooting/editing.