

## WRITING YOUR TREATMENT: SOME GUIDELINES FOR A SHORT DOCUMENTARY

After you have completed your project analysis (program needs analysis) and researched the topic, it's now time to think about how you would like to take all this information and put it into a **visual** format, that is, how does it become a video?

You have to imagine what you would like the audience to see and what would you like them to hear. **Pretend you are behind the camera** – what would you shoot? And while you're shooting, you're **also recording audio** at the same time – what do you hear while you're shooting? Or maybe there will be audio you'll add to the shot later, a song perhaps, or possibly a narrator.

A treatment needs to describe both visual and audio content, but does not contain dialogue, that is, the conversation between characters on screen. It is written in first person plural, present tense which means you use phrases like "**we see...**" or "**we hear...**" to help the reader completely imagine the program.

You also may be reading your treatment aloud to the client who hired you to do a video. You want to make sure s/he can visualize exactly what you have in mind. And unless you are sure your client knows terms used in videography, don't use technical language. For example, instead of "now we see a rack focus shot....." write "we see the tree in the front go out of focus, while the barn in the background comes into focus....."

But the treatment is not a random collection of shots and sounds. You need to put the pieces together with a beginning, middle and an end. It is written in narrative form. So you are, in essence, writing a "short story" that explains what the audience will see and hear throughout the finished production.

REMEMBER: DON'T TELL US - SHOW US!

Telling: "The young woman was really happy to smell the sweet fragrance of the roses."

Showing: "We see the young woman lean over the rose bush, put her face close to the blossoms, breathe in deeply, and raise her head with a big smile."

For example, let's say I've been hired to do a one minute video about something in my neighborhood. I come up with the idea that I would love for people to know about the Boathouse in Prospect Park, Brooklyn. It's a beautiful building that has been restored to its original 1905 elegance. It's on a lake and you can take boat rides on a battery operated boat that travels the waterways throughout the park.

Here's the beginning of my treatment:

"As the video begins we see the screen filled with a black and white photograph from 1905 showing the original Prospect Park Boathouse. In the background we hear the piano music of Scott Joplin's "Weeping Willow" written in 1903. After a moment, we see the photograph begin to fade away as a shot comes into view of the Boathouse today, busy with people on the patio and children playing on the nearby lawn. The music also fades away and we begin to hear birds twittering and children laughing...."

I would continue in this manner, describing specifically what I want you to see and hear. Perhaps at one point I would show two young boys playing while we hear one of their voices telling us why he likes the Boathouse. Or I can have a narrator (a voice over) explain how you get to take a ride on the electric boat, while we see people buying tickets and getting on. ....etc. ....

Here's the end of my treatment:

"As we return to the view of the Boathouse that we saw in the beginning of the video, we see the words "Prospect Park Boathouse: A Journey to the Past" appear on screen and we again hear Scott Joplin's "Weeping Willow". After five seconds, both picture and music fade out."

## TREATMENT EXAMPLES

Below are very short excerpts from two different treatments: the first was written for a 15 minute documentary on air pollution in India and the second for an hour television special on under age drinking.

Note: words were put in **bold** to illustrate how treatments explain what the audience will **see** and what they will **hear**.

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### ***IZET: INDIAN ZERO EMISSION TRANSPORTATION PROGRAM***

The Writing & Editing Company, Inc.

<http://www.write-edit.net/work1.htm>

The proposed video tells the story of a serious problem and the way USAID brokered public-private cooperation to find a solution. It **opens dramatically** by presenting the problem of air pollution caused by vehicle emissions. **We see images** of crowded city streets clogged with vehicles producing pollution, visible pollution in the air, people affected by pollution, coughing, turning away. A **graphic shows** the incredible rise in numbers of motor vehicles in use in India since 1981 and especially in the past decade. (About 40 seconds.)

The **narrator or an Indian health official talks about** the rise in health problems and deaths related to air pollution caused by vehicle emissions. A **graphic shows** that two-thirds of the air pollution in India comes from vehicle emissions. Another **graphic shows** the numbers of hospital admissions related to air pollution, as **we see crowded hospital wards**. (About 50 seconds.)

..... This leads into **scenes of Bajaj Auto, Ltd.** We learn that it is the largest manufacturer of vehicles in India, and that it was reluctant to become involved with electric vehicles, at first. An **executive of Bajaj Auto, Ltd. explains the company's** interest in the project. (About 90 seconds.)

A USAID **official says** that the project needed a technology partner, which it found in New Generation Motors. (About 20 seconds.)

**We see scenes of solar car races** as we learn a bit about the company's experience with electric vehicles. An executive of New Generation Motors **tells why** the company became involved with Indian Zero Emission Transportation Program and what its contribution is. (About 90 seconds.)

**We see the ceremony** showing the inauguration of the autorickshaws in Agra. An **official of the Indian government explains** the government's hopes for the demonstration project. (About 40 seconds.) .....

## ***UNDER AGE AND UNDER THE INFLUENCE***

Creative Treatment by Lisa Adams

<http://www.lisaadamswriting.com/portfolio/every15.shtml>

.... The special begins with a dramatic opening that immediately grabs the attention and hearts of viewers. **An audio montage—voices** of bereft parents and friends, **sounds of parties** and clinking bottles, the **screeching of brakes**—enhances **haunting images** of crash wreckage, **pictures** of victims, and **newspaper features** on teenage victims and perpetrators of drunk driving. As we introduce the problem, we reinforce its severity with **statistics** (for one: in 1997, 21 percent of the young drivers involved in fatal crashes had been drinking). Then we **hear from both students and experts** on the current situation, including teenage attitudes toward alcohol and drunk driving, and the prevalence of alcohol abuse in high schools and universities.

.... **We also ride along with paramedics**, racing to reach the hospital before a 17-year-old's massive head injuries prove fatal. **We hear their views** on the underage drinking situation and hear what they experience—how it feels to rush an ambulance to the scene of a wreck, only to see the vehicles mangled, the young bodies burned, knowing that there's nothing to be done. Likewise, we examine the problem from a physician's perspective, **following doctors and nurses** into the emergency room. How does it feel to close the eyes—forever—of a seven-year-old boy whose teenage sister has just taken his life?

We gain the police's perspective as **we accompany them on calls and patrols**, particularly during high-risk situations such as prom and graduation nights. What do police forces do to try and stop tragedy before it happens? How effective are their efforts?

Additionally, **we speak with those who have experienced collisions and survived**. In wheelchairs, in comas, in rehabilitation programs—in prison—kids face the anguish of drunk driving for the rest of their lives. ,,,,,