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The Film Foundation presents:

MAKING MOVIES

A Guide for Young Filmmakers

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DIRECTORS GUILD OF AMERICA

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Introduction



The Mask of Zorro
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Dr. Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas
The Grinch (Jim Carrey) conspires with his dog Max to deprive the Who's of their favorite holiday.
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This manual will help you make a movie. It is written like a basic recipe for chocolate; it gives you the basic ingredients and lays out the *process*. Whether you make fudge or M & M's is your challenge. As a filmmaker, you also have a challenge: **to tell your story with your vision, using your creativity and intelligence.** Whether you are ambitiously learning how to make a movie on your own, or working with others in a moviemaking group or class, enjoy. Enjoy the flexibility and discover the fantastic foibles of filmmaking.

This guide explains the basics of making a low-budget, student film. It's a big contrast to Hollywood, but the talents and skills needed to make a good film are the same.

In Hollywood, hundreds of people often work on a single film. You might work together with just eight friends but the process remains the same.

On a big Hollywood production, there are many specific jobs. If you watch the credits at the end of a major movie, you will see that there is a director (who is in charge of the entire movie), actors, at least one writer, a cinematographer, a producer, an executive producer, an associate producer, editors, art directors, and sound-effects people. One person operates the camera, one person is in charge of moving the camera, and

still another might be in charge of making sure nothing gets in the way of the camera. There are also dialogue coaches, stunt coordinators, grips and gaffers, makeup artists, assistant makeup artists, costume specialists, and assistant costume specialists. These are just a few of those involved in a big Hollywood movie.

Fortunately, you do not need all these people to make a film. In making a short film, each person has a special role to play, and each will probably have multiple jobs in order to accomplish all the aspects of film production. This guide introduces these different components.

- Everyone has something special to offer in making a movie.
- This is about learning, having fun, and exploring your creativity.

Just like athletes must practice to build their strength, coordination and skill, this manual offers experiments, or explorations to work your moviemaking muscles. Some might be as boring as lifting weights. Others might be as fun as a pick-up game of basketball. Together, they will help give you the skills and experiences needed to direct and make a movie. You have to provide the creativity.

A Word from Your Sponsor

Do you like going to the movies?

Did you ever want to create a movie of your own?

Maybe you like working with cameras and lights. Perhaps designs, colors and costumes fascinate you. Maybe you like to compose and perform music. The film industry includes people with all kinds of talents and interests—from directors, actors, writers and cinematographers to art directors and sound engineers. In fact, film is the only creative process where people from many different backgrounds work together to produce a single work of art...called the director's vision.

Now imagine this: The film you created—or helped to create—is deteriorating. The moving images are fading to black. The soundtrack is distorted. With each passing year, the chemicals on the film tape decay a little bit more until one day the film is simply no longer there. Once a film self-destructs, no one can ever view it again.

How would you feel if all your hard work and creativity had disintegrated to dust?

What is film preservation and why does it matter?

Hundreds of movies made in the 20th century—the first century ever to use moving image technology—have already self-destructed.

“So what?” you might ask. So what if 50 % of the movies made before 1950 are lost. What does it matter if a movie made in the year you were born has begun to fade? Movies are just entertainment, after all, aren't they?

Many people—both filmmakers and movie-goers alike—would not agree. Movies matter—and here's why.

Some movies record history, capturing current events and community and family traditions. With moving image technology, we can hear and see Reverend King deliver his “I have a dream . . .” speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in our nation's capitol. We can watch Neil Armstrong take humankind's first step on the moon.

Other movies reflect history. These movies comment on current events and traditions. For example, in *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD* (1962, dir. Robert Mulligan), Gregory Peck portrays an Alabama lawyer in the 1930s. He argues his case in a segregated courtroom where African Americans must—by law—sit in the balcony.

Some movies imagine the future. In *THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL* (1951, dir. Robert Wise), movie-goers of 1950s watched in awe as a flying saucer landed on Earth. The alien had come with a warning: If Earthings did not end war and learn to solve their differences peacefully, they would face total destruction.

Movies matter because they are more than images and sounds. They are stories. The stories movies tell have a value beyond making us laugh or cry or hold our breath in suspense. They provide clues to understanding who we are . . . or were. Movies mirror our hopes and fears, our achievements and failures. Like a painting, a symphony or a novel, movies are an important source of artistic and cultural information about our country.

Movies matter, also, because they can be great teachers. Think about it. How does a young artist learn to paint or sculpt? By studying the works of the great masters. Likewise, musicians might study Beethoven or the Beatles. To learn their craft and seek inspiration, young writers may read Shakespeare, Austen, or even Harry Potter's creator, J. K. Rowling.

But, if the great films of the past are lost (as many already are) who will the young filmmakers of tomorrow study?

Because movies matter, the United States Congress passed in 1998 the National Film Preservation Act. Preservation means to protect films from deterioration as well as to restore decaying film before images and sounds are lost forever.

Because movies matter, some of the most famous directors in the film industry created The Film Foundation. The foundation's goal is to increase awareness of this country's film heritage and to preserve as many films as we can. The first step in saving movies is understanding that movies are more than entertainment.

The Film Foundation created this manual for you. We created this manual because we believe:

- viewing and/or making movies can be an exciting and creative learning experience for all youth;
- understanding the decisions, hard work, and passion required to make a movie will help you better understand why films are worth saving.

Get ready. The pages inside this manual are filled with all kinds of creative activities. Some will challenge your critical thinking skills. Some will inspire you to communicate with others as you never have before—using images and sound as well as words. Whether a movie-goer or a future filmmaker, you can be sure that the movies that matter to you, matter to us all.

Preface: What Is a Movie?

The word “movie” comes from the term “motion picture” – pictures that move.



Photo: Phil Bray

Mrs. Doubtfire

Robin Williams is *Mrs. Doubtfire*.

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Beetlejuice

Barbara and Adam Maitland (Geena Davis and Alec Baldwin) change their minds about using the skills of demonic “freelance bio-exorcist” Betelgeuse (Michael Keaton) when he shows them his scary stuff.

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Like books, movies tell a story. But instead of words on paper, movies are a visual and a listening experience. The audience sees and hears the story. People all over the world love this powerful medium — they love the way movies tell stories.

The storyteller is the director. He/she is in charge of how a story is made into a film. Exactly where and how the images are filmed and edited, how the actors portray their characters, and what the audience experiences, is all part of the director’s vision. The story itself can be simple or complex, silly or intense. The director’s vision is responsible for how the movie makes the audience feel about the story: sad, amused, bored, exhilarated, scared, powerful, or humble.

Stories in books can describe any place in the universe, with any number of characters. But there are constraints in filmmaking. Film directors can be limited by the weather, number of actors, available space, and, especially, the money needed for props, costumes, special lighting, sound and camera equipment. So, a lot of creative problem-solving comes into play.

It is the director’s challenge to make his or her vision translate from story to movie, using

the techniques of filmmaking — things like character development, camera angles, and editing. But you have to develop your own vision and probably the best way is to create (or help create) a film from beginning to end. By doing so, you will learn how to:

- develop a story and interesting characters
- write the story in the language of filmmakers: a screenplay
- create a visual storyboard to show camera angles, distance, and subjects
- plan a filming schedule
- utilize various camera, sound, and lighting techniques
- work with actors
- understand the power of art direction and continuity
- use costumes and makeup
- do post-production sound and editing

These components are presented in this manual for you to learn, practice, and adapt to fit your own vision. Throughout this manual, movies will be recommended as prime examples of different techniques and film accomplishments. Don't worry if you can't see every movie. You can observe and analyze the concepts in many films.