

Storyboarding 101: The Importance of Visual Scripting

r, Medium shot: Looking down from Max's
ent window as Parker's car pulls up to curb.

FX: Engine idling, brakes, traffic noise

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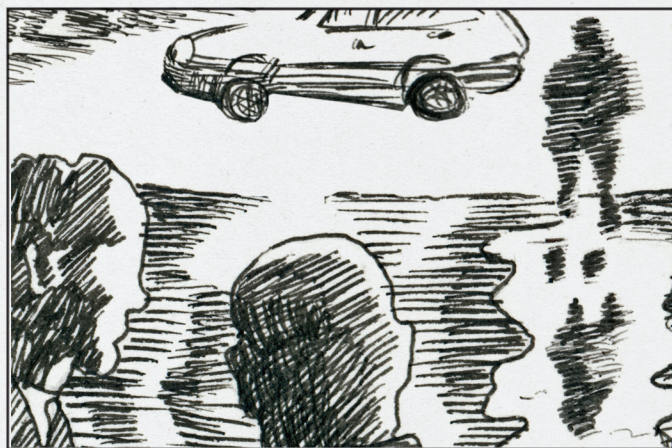
Exterior, Medium shot: Three figures emerge from

Interior, OTS of Liz and Max as
figures approach

Telephone ringing



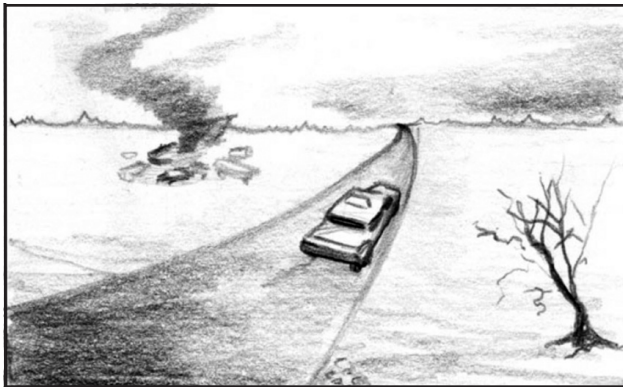
turns to look out window
ne continues to ring



Exterior: Johnson and Nichols sudden
Parker silhouetted against street light
Nichols: "It's him!"



Close-Up (CU)



Extreme Long Shot (ELS)



Long Shot (LS)

The Importance of Storyboards

WHETHER YOU'RE working on a commercial TV spot, web video, or film – storyboards are an effective way to quickly tell a story. A storyboard is a sequence of drawings that represent the shots planned for a video production. It covers all of the major shots, angles and action of your film. The storyboard is a very important part of the pre-production process because it clearly conveys how the story will flow, as you can see how your shots work together. It also allows you to see potential problems that would not go unnoticed, ultimately saving you time and money. It's much better to realize your mistake before shooting, rather than when all of the crew and actors go home for the day.

Early on in the production process, they are necessary to tell the story and communicate the concept. Later on, they serve as a guide when producing the the final work – and they often include technical notes and markup. Detailed storyboards make sure everyone is on the same page and can often prevent major pitfalls that affect production and cost.

The History Of Storyboards

Walt Disney animator Webb Smith first used storyboarding during the early 1930s. Smith used the idea of drawing scenes of the Disney short "The Three Little Pigs" on separate sheets of paper and pinning them up on a bulletin board to tell the story in sequence. One of the first live action films to be completely storyboarded was "Gone with the Wind". Storyboarding became popular in live-action film production during the early 1940s, and became standard for the pre-visualization of films.

Today it is an expected part of the pre-production process. Storyboards can also assist people working on the set of a film, to see exactly what will be happening in the scene. Some directors, such as Martin Scorsese, use storyboards for the majority of their films. Other directors, such as the Coen brothers, have a storyboard artist on staff to create storyboards for every shot. Other directors may use storyboards only for complex action scenes.

What is seen on a storyboard must be consistent with what is happening in the shot. For example, if you envision a close up shot of someone's face, the storyboard should

show the person's face very close up; the face should fill most of the screen. Storyboarding helps you visually see how your shots will fit together. Remember, if you don't understand the message, no one will. Creating a storyboard is a major part of the pre-production process and will aid in organizing your ideas, making sure that the audience understands your intent. Shot selection, camera movements, and audio notes on the storyboard also help the audience understand your intent.

The Style Of Storyboards

There are multiple styles of storyboarding but simple sketching is good for a beginning storyboard artist. There are a few ways to build one, either with pencil and paper, or on the computer, but it really all depends on your need and skill level. Depending on the time frame of the production, you can gauge how much detail is needed on the board. Often times simple sketches are able to communicate the story. Although more detailed storyboards typically leave your audience with a greater understanding of your story and goals.

Making Your Own Storyboards

Laid out on these pages are examples of the different types of shots that are often used in storyboards. (Note: You don't have to be an artist to storyboard. Stick figures work just as well.)

It helps to have a script written before you start sketching. Then you can create a list of action points in the story. Major action points are parts of the story that stand out as turning points that affect the storyline, or major camera movement that needs to be planned out in detail ahead of time. Take your time to think of the script when you begin to sketch out each board. Focus on the characters in the story. You don't need to spend a lot of time filling in the background if it doesn't affect the plot.

At this point it's a good idea to share your boards with someone to get feedback. Sharing your storyboard and script helps identify if your boards flow and make sense. If you're missing something or need to revise the concept, it doesn't



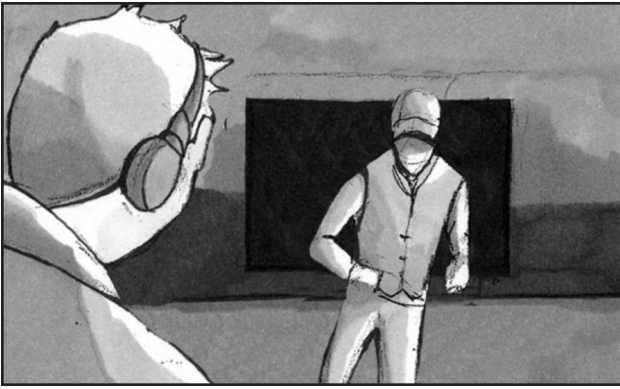
Medium Shot (MS)



Extreme Close Up (ECU)



Zoom Out



Over the Shoulder Shot (OTS)



High Angle



Low Angle

take much effort at this point to rework the boards. At the bottom of each board you should include notes that help describe what is happening in the frame. These notes can be a description of the action, dialogue or voice-over copy, time code estimates, or camera movements. These notes can help describe what the viewer can't see and help tie the boards together.

When used properly, storyboards can save you from having to later correct major mistakes. Some of these common mistakes include broken story lines, mismatched dialogue, and playback timing issues. Failing to identify issues like these early on can dramatically decrease the quality of your production. To avoid these potential disasters, spend time developing then reviewing scripts and storyboards so you can identify any headaches ahead of time and create a solid plan. Storyboards can be interpreted in many different ways and is important to make sure that everyone shares the same vision.

The art of storyboarding is a powerful tool to help communicate ideas. They can create a dialogue with your team so you can develop a compelling and cohesive story. When used properly they can streamline production, get everyone on the same page, avoid common mistakes, and keep things on track.



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