Let's Talk
Teens, Sexuality & Media

Using media literacy to address issues of sexual health among youth.

INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIAL: Scriptwriting & Storyboarding

Two key components of preproduction are scriptwriting and storyboarding. Both are essential for constructing your media message, and translating it from page to screen.

SCRIPTWRITING

Step 1: Brainstorming Message Ideas

Brainstorming ideas can be a very creative experience for everyone involved. Participants can toss out all sorts of ideas and concepts. Be sure to consider every idea that is presented, discussing its merits. You may find that many ideas add them to you can be added to the script, or combined to suit your media message.

Once you have a message, you can decide what you want the final outcome to be. For example: " We want our video to send a message about condoms and we want to put it on YouTube or FaceBook.

Step 2: Determining Your Demographic

To get your message across, you have to be familiar with your target audience. In media production, this is called determining your demographic. For example, "We are going to do a series of teen health related public service announcements to show to middle school aged youth." If you establish a demographic in the preproduction process, you can be sure that your audience will respond to the language, graphics, and images you choose. You may wish to research your demographic by examining ads, magazines, TV programs, or films that target the same audience.

Step 3: The Writing Process

After you have fully developed your message and have an idea about how you can use words and images to impact your chosen demographic, you're ready to write your shooting script. Scriptwriting involves writing dialogue, making note of the ambient sounds you wish to include, and determining what the camera shots will actually look like, including required sets and framing.

There are several models you can use to build a script.

TWO-COLUMN, OR DOCUMENTARY STYLE:
This approach allows you to make notes for both audio and visual components of your video. To begin, draw a line down the center of a sheet of paper. The left column will be for audio, and the right column for visuals. In the audio column, list any sound elements you wish to use. This will include any and all scripted dialogue, ambient sounds, sound effects, and music. For example, "birds chirping behind VO (voice over)." In the visuals column, you should include camera angles, and the type of shots you wish to use. For example, "CU (close up) of John with cars going by in the background." Try to list as many details as possible, as this will save time during shooting.

NEWS SCRIPT:
This is a variation on the two-column script that shows who is on camera in the visual column, and their exact dialogue in the audio column.

SINGLE COLUMN, OR DRAMA SCRIPT:
This approach lists basic shot descriptions that correspond to either extended character dialogue, or descriptions of action.

- When writing a script, your message should reach the viewer as a strong, clear statement. To achieve this, follow these simple guidelines:

- Make your message simple and to the point. Messages that are too wordy can confuse your target audience, and are easy to dismiss or forget.

- Be sure to research your facts. If you plan to present statistics or facts in your video, check your facts with reliable resources. For facts about STIs, for example, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) is an excellent resource for fact checking.

- Editing is essential. Most scripts require a second or third write. Each time you rewrite, try to strengthen the script by cleaning up any mistakes or miscues. The cleaner your script is, the easier the shoot will be.

- Copyediting is the final step in the scriptwriting process. To avoid embarrassing misspelling and punctuation mistakes, have a copyeditor check all the graphics, logos, and text that you plan to use on screen.

STORYBOARDING

Storyboarding is an activity that helps you determine how your script will translate to on-screen images. Storyboards use cartoon-like drawings or photographs to sequence each shot in a video production. Because it is a more visual approach, some videographers make storyboards before producing a final script.

To begin, draw 6 to 8 squares on a piece of paper in vertical columns. Each square represents a single shot. Tell your story by making a drawing in each square, sequencing them in the order you wish them to appear on screen. Some storyboards contain simple drawings of stick figures. Others use photographs of the actors engaged in the action or dialogue called for by the script. Point is, you don't have to be an artist to storyboard—you can decide which method suits the needs and the abilities of your crew.

Looking for examples of storyboarding? **www.famousframes.com** offers an excellent selection of single frame images to entire scene storyboards from a variety of films. Highly recommended.