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Developing an Idea & Writing a Treatment

CAN TV - Training Department

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GIFs by @jjjjjohn
An Idea can be a lot of things....

- Big
- Tiny
- Scary
- Half Baked
- Old
- New
- Exciting
- Silly
- Good
- Bad
- Funny
- Sad
- Important
- NOT Important
- Someone Else's
- Easy
- Hard
- Short
- Long
But an idea doesn’t mean much if you don’t do anything about it.
It must be nurtured

Going from the seed of an idea to a complete concept and plan can be the most difficult part of the creative process, but the most important. Developing a project can take hours, days, months, or years. Every project is different, but it’s important to follow through on some basic tasks to make sure an idea can actually come to life.
Developing the Idea

Is it feasible?

Does it make me excited?

Is it just an idea?

Has it been done before?

Can someone help me do it?
An idea can come in any form:

A project can be any of these things, but it can’t be ONLY one of them.
Enough with the fluffy stuff...
Is it feasible?

- Do I have the resources?
  - Budget
  - Equipment
  - Crew
  - Talent
  - Location

- Is it a story?
  - Am I making an argument? If so, what?
  - Does it have a beginning, middle, and end?
  - Does it make sense?
Writing a Treatment

What is a Treatment?

A brief, written overview of a project. A Treatment includes both the creative and technical aspects of a potential project. A good treatment proves the validity of an idea, and convinces others to become involved in the project.
Research!

No matter what kind of project you plan on doing, it is going to require some amount of research.
Parts of a Treatment

- Title
- Logline
- Format
- Target Audience
- Synopsis/Story Outline
- Characters/Subjects/Guests
- Visual Look/Style
- Sound Elements
- Budget
- Goal/Rationale
- Constraints/Contingency
Title and Logline

Title

Doesn’t have to be perfect, you can change it at any time. It’s just helpful to have something down to get you started.

Logline

A one to two sentence description that gives a very broad idea of what the project is about.
Logline examples

An insurance salesman discovers his whole life is actually a reality TV show.

After awakening from a four-year coma, a former assassin wreaks vengeance on the team of assassins who betrayed her.

A boy who communicates with spirits seeks the help of a disheartened child psychologist.

A panel of four women discusses the news and politics.

A young African-American visits his white girlfriend's parents for the weekend, where his simmering uneasiness about their reception of him eventually reaches a boiling point.

The lives of the kids at Degrassi Community School dealing with the serious and sometimes taboo issues that plague teenagers.
Format

What form will your project take? It's possible that your idea can work in multiple formats, so be sure to really consider what the best possible option is to tell your story. It can even be a mixture of more than one.
Target Audience

It’s important to know who you are making this project for. That will inform a lot about how you execute the project.

Your audience should NEVER be “everybody”. If an audience is too broad, it will water down whatever your project is, and you won’t attract the attention of anybody.

Remember: CAN TV encourages you to be as niche and specific with your audience as you want. This is your chance to speak to a group that maybe doesn’t get enough representation in traditional media outlets.
Synopsis/Plot Outline

A short explanation of what happens in the story or show from start to finish. Not only gives an overview of the plot, but also starts to give an idea of the style and tone of the project; the world the story exists in. Can be a few paragraphs or a few pages.

For nonfiction: Does your talk show have segments? Documentaries still need a storyline with acts.
Characters/Subjects

Who is this project about? Write a few sentences about each character in the story, or real person on the show. It should feel like a short biography.
Visual Elements/Style

What is the mood or tone of the project?
How are you going to convey it visually?

Setting - On Location? Studio?

Production Style - Lighting, Cameras, etc.

Editing

Costume/Wardrobe
Sound Elements

What is the mood or tone of the project? How are you going to portray that aurally?

Music

Soundscape: Ambient sounds, sound effects
Goal/Rationale

The WHY of your project. What should the viewer take away after watching?

Think of this as an extension of the target audience section.
Budget

Now that you have listed out the scope of the project, you can start to think about where the biggest expenses may come from.

- Actors
- Locations
- Sets
- Costumes
- Equipment
- Post Production
Constraints/Contingency

What are the potential barriers to carrying out this project? It is important to address these, even if you don’t have a solution to them yet.
Title
Treatment (date)
Author Name(s)

Logline
In the near future, a jaded police officer tracks down a band of rogue androids who seek a longer life.

Characters
Rick Deckard - A retired police officer who hunted down and "retired" genetically manufactured replicants. He's been through the bureaucracy long enough and is happy his own retirement. But the LAPD has other plans for him.

Roy Batty - The leader of the replicants Deckard seeks. He's been through the bureaucracy long enough and is happy his own retirement. But the LAPD has other plans for him.

Dr. Eldon Tyrell - The founder of The Tyrell Corporation, who manufactured the replicants.

Rachel - Tyrell's assistant, who is also a replicant.

Synopsis
In 2018, a police officer tours through Los Angeles -- now a Dystopian megalopolis -- to find DECKARD. Deckard is told to hunt down four rogue replicants who have traveled to Earth.

Replicants, once used for off-world slave labor, are dangerous and illegal. So police officers like Deckard, called Blade Runners, "retire" them.

Deckard starts by interviewing TYRELL to see if his replicant testing mechanism works. Tyrell has him test it on RACHEL.

Deckard follows a string of clues which lead him to SHORA, who he retires...
You did it!

This treatment is a compass to guide the rest of the project.

The more complete the treatment, the more prepared you will be to continue onto the rest of pre-production and production.

Refer back to it whenever you lose sight of what you are doing.

If something doesn’t work out, come back to it and adjust!
What Next?

With this treatment you can now...

- Write a script
- Start to build a crew
- Scout locations
- Contact possible guests
- Search for actors
- Start fundraising
Resources

ShoreScripts.com - TV Series Bibles: Show Bibles, Pitches and Treatments

The Internet Movie Script Database (IMDb)

savethecat.com/tips-and-tactics

screencraft.org - 21 Movie Treatments and Outlines
Thank You

We’re here to help!

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