

Workshops

DOCUMENTARY FILM WORKSHOP: DEVELOPMENT OF IDEAS AND PROJECTS

Unless a project is developed, “an idea is just an idea”. To make a good documentary film, therefore, it’s necessary to take various steps in the correct order and with a special understanding of the three pillars on which the film is constructed: script, direction and production.

Using my experience as a director, the workshop will be based on how we, as directors, can create a good dossier that provides the producer with the material he or she needs to get financing. It’s important to have a viable project in order to successfully pass through the different stages of its realization.

Each project has its own characteristics and a specific formula has to be found to defend it, so that afterwards it can be successfully realized. An awareness of the types of components we are dealing with – historical, monitoring, investigative, personal – will help us develop a work plan appropriate to the project’s needs. Thus, for example, we can know whether we need a more open or closed shooting, whether to use archival material or instead recreate things to explain the past, or how we relate to the people who will be filmed.

Before beginning the process, it’s also important to know what the possible outlets are for the documentary – film distribution, television channels, film festivals or other possibilities – to plan beforehand such things as format, duration, or other aspects of the work, which will facilitate the work of the producer and the success of its development.

The goal of the workshop is to share my experiences with students and to help them in their own future projects or those of others. The priority will be to help students with projects or ideas to develop interact with the dynamic of the classes and advance in the creation of a good documentary film. During the workshop constant dialogue will be encouraged between everyone to share our points of view.

Methodology

The methodology of this workshop has been elaborated from the experience of various workshops in which I’ve found a balance between the amount of information to be shared, the group dynamic, and the appropriate amount of time to make the workshop a satisfactory experience for those attending.

Each session is focused on sharing my professional experiences and those of other cases I’m very familiar with, with one-on-one dedication to the projects proposed by the students. Normally, an average of between 20 minutes and half an hour is dedicated to each student in an initial stage, which is a good moment to treat each case jointly. The student is asked to briefly explain his or her project and then the other students discuss how well they have understood the content and development of the story that the student aims to tell.

Once refinements have been made about how to express the subject so that it can be understood, an analysis is made about how the documentary project will be told. I will act as moderator to measure the intervention times and highlight the most useful commentaries so that the person sharing their project can improve their focus. Sometimes I also intervene to compare the idea, with practical situations I’ve experienced in my professional career.

Special attention is paid during the sessions to the elaboration of dossiers and teasers, which are the basic elements used to look for a way to realize the project. We will review real-life, practical cases, and analyze their errors or successes. A video clip or dossier may be shown, for example, that didn't work well for presentations or pitchings, even though it was created with the best of intentions.

The most important thing about the workshops is to share in a joint way the content and form of the projects, to share knowledge and learn from the experiences and points of views of others. My intention is to improve the virtues of each project and try to overcome their defects, respecting the style of each participant.

Joan López Lloret, Documentary Film Director.