

UNIT 5 Film

- Writing a screenplay
- Pitching successfully
- Organising a shoot
- Writing a film review



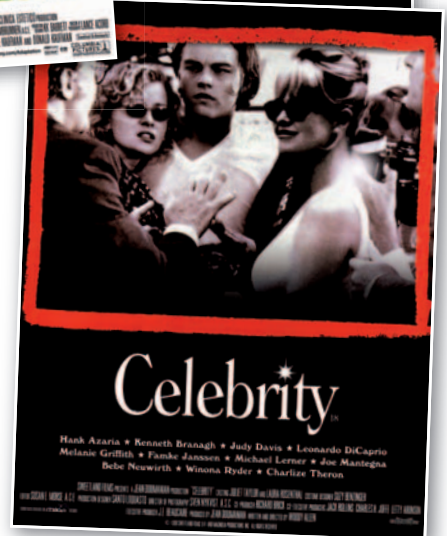
Writing a screenplay

- 1 a** The film posters at the top of the page are all about the film industry. In pairs, discuss the following questions.
- 1 What films have you seen about the film industry?
 - 2 Do you have a favourite film about the film industry?
- b** Complete the following definitions using the words in the box.

the cast director **editing** plot screenplay screenwriter
 special effects soundtrack the stars

- 1 The putting together of sequences and scenes in a film:
editing
- 2 A story written for a film: _____
- 3 Someone who writes stories for a film: _____
- 4 All the actors in a film: _____
- 5 Series of events in a film that make up the main story: _____
- 6 Images or sounds in a film that are created by trick photography or computers: _____
- 7 The music in a film: _____
- 8 The main actors in a film: _____
- 9 The person responsible for overall artistic content of film, including telling the cast what to do: _____

- C** In pairs, discuss the aspects of a film that are the most important for you when deciding which films to see. Use the words in Exercise 1b to help you.



2 a Most screenplays are divided into three Acts. Match the Acts (1–3) to the descriptions (a–c).

1 Act 1	a The main conflict
2 Act 2	b The resolution
3 Act 3	c The background

b In pairs, think about a film you each know well and take turns to ask and answer the following questions.

- How is the story set up and how are the characters introduced? (Act 1)
- What conflict(s) do the characters deal with during the story – that is, what is the problem/desire/goal at the centre of the story? (Act 2)
- How is/are the conflict(s) resolved at the end of the film? (Act 3)

c Think about a story you would like to tell, or a book you would like to adapt into a film. Make notes under the following headings.

Act 1: The background Act 2: The conflict Act 3: The resolution

3 a Read a scene from the second draft of the screenplay *Adaptation*, which is about a screenwriter, Kaufman, who is having problems adapting a novel to a screenplay. Answer the following questions.

- Who** is involved in the scene?
- Where** does it take place?
- When** does it take place?
- What** is happening?
- Why** is this scene taking place?
- How** do the protagonists feel?

INT. L.A. BUSINESS LUNCH RESTAURANT – MIDDAY

Kaufman, wearing his purple sweater, sits with Valerie, an attractive woman in glasses. They pick at salads. Kaufman steals glances at her. She looks up at him. He looks away.

KAUFMAN (V.O.)

I'm old. I'm bald. I'm repulsive.

VALERIE

We think you're just great.

KAUFMAN

(with studied modesty)

Oh, thank you.

Valerie rubs her nose. Kaufman self-consciously rubs his nose in response.

VALERIE

And we're thrilled you're interested.

Valerie rubs her nose again. Kaufman pulls at his nostril. Sweat slides down his forehead. Valerie watches it. Kaufman sees her watching it. She sees him seeing her watching it. She looks at her salad. He quickly wipes the sweat away.

KAUFMAN

Oh, thanks, wow. That's nice to hear.

VALERIE

You have a really unique voice.

KAUFMAN

Well, thanks. That's ... I appreciate that.

VALERIE

Very talented. Really.

KAUFMAN

Thanks. Thank you. Thanks.

VALERIE

(looking up)

So –

Kaufman is sweating a lot. He smiles, embarrassed.

KAUFMAN

Sort of hot in here.

VALERIE

(kindly)

Yeah, it is a bit. So, why don't you tell me your thoughts on this crazy little project of ours.

In one motion, Kaufman wipes his forehead and pulls a book entitled *The Orchid Thief* from his bag.

KAUFMAN

First, I think it's a great book.

VALERIE

Laroche is a fun character, isn't he?

KAUFMAN

It's just, I don't want to compromise by making it a Hollywood product.

VALERIE

Oh, of course. We agree. Definitely.

Kaufman is sweating like crazy now. Valerie is quiet for a moment.

VALERIE

See, we thought maybe Susan Orlean and Laroche could fall in love –

KAUFMAN

New York journalist writes about weird guy and he teaches her to love. I mean, it didn't happen, it wouldn't happen.

INT. OFFICE – DAY

b In pairs, discuss the following questions.

- 1 Do you think Valerie and Kaufman have the same vision for the film?
- 2 What do you think Kaufman means by “a Hollywood product”?
- 3 What do you think will happen next?

c Complete the following statements about the standard format of screenplays, using the words in the box and excerpt in Exercise 3a to help you.

action present centre V.O. ~~capital~~ dialogue INT. brackets

- 1 The names of characters and scene headings are written in capital letters.
- 2 Dialogue is written in the _____ of the page.
- 3 Descriptions of settings and _____ are written in blocks which are wider than the dialogue.
- 4 Descriptions of how a character delivers his lines are in _____.
- 5 Characters generally have little _____ at one time.
- 6 Descriptions of settings and actions are written in the _____ tenses.
- 7 Voice-overs are abbreviated as _____, external shots as *EXT.* and internal shots as _____.

d Read a later scene from the same screenplay and answer the following question.

- Who do you think McKee is?

INT. BAR – NIGHT

Kaufman and McKee are sat at a table with beers. Kaufman is reading from his copy of *The Orchid Thief*.

KAUFMAN

(pause)

I've got pages of false starts. I'm way past my deadline. I can't go back.

MCKEE

Ah, the ever-present deadline. Yes, I was doing a *Kojak* episode once and ... it was hell.

McKee drinks his beer, watching Kaufman.

MCKEE

Tell you a secret. The last act makes the film. You can have a boring movie, but wow them at the end, and you've got a hit. Find an ending. Use what you've learned this weekend. Give them that, and you'll be fine.

Tears form in Kaufman's eyes.

KAUFMAN

You promise?

McKee smiles. Kaufman hugs him.

MCKEE

You've taken my course before?

KAUFMAN

My brother did. My twin brother, Donald. He's the one who got me to come.

MCKEE

Twin screenwriters. Julius and Philip Epstein, who wrote *Casablanca*, were twins.

KAUFMAN

You mentioned that in class.

MCKEE

The finest screenplay ever written.

e In pairs, discuss the following questions.

- 1 What do you think of McKee's advice that a “wow” ending can save a bad film?
- 2 Think of a film ending that you like/dislike. What do you like/dislike about it?
- 3 What do you think is “the finest screenplay ever written”? Do you agree with McKee's choice?

- f** Look at the following list of features that are typical of spoken dialogues, with examples from the screenplay in Exercise 3a. Can you find any more examples of these features in the screenplay in Exercise 3d?

Feature	Examples
Incomplete sentences	<i>That's ... I appreciate that.</i>
Missing subjects	<i>Sort of hot in here.</i>
Repetition	<i>Thanks. Thank you. Thanks.</i>
Short sentences	<i>We agree.</i>
Simple linking words	<i>So, why don't you tell me your thoughts ...</i>
Use of shared knowledge to leave things unsaid	<i>We (i.e. the people at the film studio) think you're just great.</i>

- g** In pairs, make a list of any other features typical of spoken conversations and screenplay dialogues.
Interruptions, rephrasing
- h** Write a scene for the film you made notes on for Exercise 2c. Use standard screenplay format and make the conversation seem as natural as possible.

Pitching successfully

- 4 a** In pairs, discuss the following questions.
- Once you have written a screenplay, what do you think is the next step?
 - Which is more important: talent or being in the right place at the right time?
- b** You are going to read a query letter written by a screenwriter. In pairs, discuss what you think a query letter might be.
- c** Read the query letter and check your answer to Exercise 4b.

Dear Mr Godfrey,

I have recently completed my second screenplay, entitled *on stAGE*. Last year I completed a one-year postgraduate course in screenwriting at London Metropolitan University, and I was one of the ten finalists in the Nicholl Fellowships in Screenwriting. I would like to ask if you would consider reading my latest work.

on stAGE is a touching musical comedy set in the North of England about a group of men who, on turning 40, decide to re-form their teenage band but find that teenage values and ideas aren't always the same across generations. There are a number of great rock scenes which are accompanied by a wonderful soundtrack of classic songs from the last three decades. *on stAGE* is a feelgood film which combines tears and laughter. Think *Spinal Tap* meets *The Breakfast Club*. I am confident it will generate lots of critical and box office success.

If you are interested in reading my screenplay, please contact me at the address at the top of the page.

Yours sincerely,

JAMIE LOUIS

Jamie Louis

d Read the query letter in Exercise 4c again and decide if the following statements are True (T) or False (F).

- 1 The first paragraph outlines the writer's credentials and the reason for writing.
- 2 The second paragraph outlines the plot and the most important points about the screenplay.
- 3 All the tenses in the second paragraph are either present tenses or the modal verb *might*.
- 4 The third paragraph says what the reader should do.
- 5 The letter is quite informal.

e Write a query letter for the film you outlined in Exercise 2c or a film you have seen recently, using the query letter in Exercise 4c to help you.

5 a Read the advert for a seminar and answer the following questions.

- 1 What is a *pitch*?
- 2 Do you think the seminar would be interesting and/or useful? Explain why / why not.

FILMMAKING IN THE DIGITAL AGE with Michael Wiese
About the Pitch Session
SEMINAR EMPHASIS: GET THE MONEY!

Background
 The Pitch Session is the most popular and challenging part of the seminar. Besides filmmakers, we are inviting investors to the seminar who may be willing to invest millions of dollars if they learn about a project they like. To increase your chances of obtaining the financing and resources you need, we recommend you prepare your pitch before the seminar.

The Pitch Session
 Your pitch will be one or two minutes in length.

Key Elements of Your Pitch
 Your opening sentences will include:

- The (1) _____ : is it a comedy, a thriller, a drama, a teen movie, a documentary, etc.?
- The (2) _____ : something active and engaging that would make us want to see the film.
- The (3) _____ : a one-sentence synopsis of the screenplay.
- Any other (4) _____ : anything else that will get people's interest (target audience, location, music, etc.).

Practising Your Pitch
 Write out the most significant selling points, and then pitch it until it naturally rolls off your tongue and you no longer need notes. The pitch itself will evolve as you practise – you'll quickly find what works and what doesn't.
 Stand up and pitch to family and friends; describe your project using the four elements above; use your hands to express yourself; make eye contact with the audience; be aware of your physical appearance and dress appropriately; remember that the most successful people are natural at presenting themselves, so use humour where appropriate and engage authentically in a real one-to-one dialogue with the audience.

b Read the advert in Exercise 5a again and answer the following questions.

- 1 Who do you think Michael Wiese is?
- 2 Who is the seminar for?
- 3 Who else might be present?
- 4 How much time will the people attending the seminar have in order to pitch their film?
- 5 When will the pitches be prepared?
- 6 Why are family and friends mentioned?
- 7 In what other situations do you think the skills involved in pitching would be useful?

c Complete the advert in Exercise 5a using the words in the box.

genre hooks logline title

d Match the film titles (1–3) to the loglines (a–c).

1 <i>The Shakespeare Code</i>	a This is a story about a group of men who, on turning 40, decide to re-form their teenage band but find that teenage values and ideas aren't always the same across generations.
2 <i>Conviction</i>	b The story is about Sylvia, who is drawn into a conspiracy encoded in the writings of Shakespeare, only to find that the people she trusts most are those most able to harm her.
3 <i>on stAGE</i>	c Set in the 1970s, it's a story about an ex-convict-turned-policeman who discovers that a string of brutal NYPD cop killings are part of a larger conspiracy.

e In pairs, discuss the following questions.

- 1 What is the purpose of a *logline*?
- 2 Why do you think loglines are so important for screenwriters and film executives?

f Match the formulas for writing loglines (1–3) to an example in Exercise 5d.

- 1 ... story about (character), who (problem), only to find that (conflict).
- 2 ... story about (character) who discovers that (problem and conflict).
- 3 ... story about (character), who (problem), but finds that (conflict).

g Write a logline for the film you made notes on for Exercise 2c or for a film you have seen recently. Then, in groups, compare your loglines. Decide which you think are the most effective. Explain your answer.

- 6 a** ▶5.1 Listen to a pitch for one of the films in Exercise 5d and answer the following questions.
- Which film is being pitched?
 - What hooks (for example, music and location) does the screenwriter mention?
 - If you were a film executive, would you invest money in this film? Explain why / why not.

b ▶5.1 Listen again and tick (✓) the phrases that you hear.

Small talk

I hope you found us without any problem?
 I trust you had no problem getting here?
 So, is this your first screenplay?

The pitch

My film's called ...
 It's a (touching musical comedy) set in ...
 This film is aimed at ...
 There are a number of great ... (on stAGE) is a feelgood film ...
 Think (*Spinal Tap*) meets (*The Breakfast Club*).

Clarifying information about the pitch

... could you explain how the audience is expected to believe that ... ?
 Can you tell me more about ... ?
 I don't fully understand ...

Ending the pitch meeting

If you leave a copy with us, we'll get back to you within ...
 That's everything for now. We'll be in touch one way or the other.

c In pairs, role play a pitch. Student A, you are pitching the film you have prepared your logline for in Exercise 5g; Student B, you are a film executive. Student B, you must assess Student A's pitch and give feedback. Use the notes in the box on the right to help you. Swap roles and practise again.

Name of film:	
Mentions	Uses
<input type="checkbox"/> genre <input type="checkbox"/> title <input type="checkbox"/> logline <input type="checkbox"/> hooks: _____ _____	<input type="checkbox"/> eye contact <input type="checkbox"/> hand gestures <input type="checkbox"/> relaxed style
How effective is the pitch? ___ /10	

Organising a shoot

- 7 a** In groups, discuss the following questions.
- Have you ever had any experience in film production? If so, what did you do? If not, what would you like to do?
 - What do the following people do during the production of a film?
 • film producer • film director • director of photography • sound director
 - Of the people above, who do you think is the most important to a film's success?
- b** ▶5.2 A pre-production meeting for the film *The Mystery of the Maharashtra Caves* is taking place at Hindi Films Production Bollywood Ltd., in Bombay. Listen to the meeting and tick (✓) the points they discuss.
- Finance
 - Road conditions
 - Permission to shoot on certain locations
 - Availability of electricity on site
 - Availability of facilities on site
 - Technical issues
 - The need to contact a location agency

C Match the terms from the pre-production meeting (1–9) to their meanings (a–i).

1 lighting rig	a the activity of organising practical and financial matters connected with the preparation of a film
2 reconnoitre (<i>recce</i>)	b coloured glass which controls the light entering a camera
3 sound crew	c the team taking care of shooting and photography
4 production	d an organisation providing location management for film production purposes
5 to shoot	e the team taking care of the sound system
6 camera crew	f a machine producing electricity
7 generator	g to film
8 filters	h a check that everything is OK with logistics and technical equipment on location
9 location agency	i a system for lighting a location

d ▶ 5.2 Look at the two alternative words/phrases in *italics* in the table below. In each case, both alternatives are possible, but only one is said in the pre-production meeting. In pairs, try to remember what was said, then listen and check your answers. The extracts are numbered in the order they appear in Audio 5.2.

Explaining potential problems	Presenting solutions
1 ... there are practically no problems with access for <i>teams and equipment / crews and gear</i> ...	2 My next recces will be aimed at checking on <i>medical care and safety / health and safety</i> in case anything happens while we're on location ...
3 ... my main concern at this stage is that whatever <i>locations/sites</i> we select, we need to bear in mind how they will look on film.	6 ... my camera crew think the problem can be solved with <i>extra lighting rigs / additional lighting equipment</i> ... and <i>filters / lens protectors</i> that reduce the amount of light let into the camera.
4 ... we also need to avoid any problems that may slow down <i>filming/shooting</i> ...	7 I'll try to get you the <i>most advanced / most reliable</i> generators we can.
5 ... I'm a little concerned about the <i>lighting/illumination</i> ...	8 I've decided to contact our usual <i>location agency / full-service location agency</i> ...

e The expressions in **bold** in the table above are used for explaining potential problems and solving them. In pairs, practise using the expressions. Student A, read out the expressions in bold; Student B, try to complete the phrase without looking at your book. Swap roles and practise again.

f In groups of four, role play a meeting to discuss shooting on location. Student A, you are the film producer; Student B, you are the film director; Student C, you are the director of photography; and Student D, you are the sound director. Choose a film from the following: one of the film treatments you outlined in Exercise 2c, *on stAGE* in Exercise 5d, or a real film you are all familiar with. The following list includes some possible problems you may have to solve.

- * getting local authorities' permission to shoot at certain locations
- * no electricity or other facilities available
- * testing all the equipment before using it
- * needing local actors in crowd scenes
- * making sure there is easy access to everywhere we need to shoot
- * other?

Writing a film review

8 a In pairs, discuss the following questions.

- 1 How many different stages are there from the initial idea for a film to the film being shown to a paying audience?
- 2 Who do you consider to have the most important role in the success of a film: the creative people or the investors, promoters and distributors?

b Put the following stages in the journey from film concept to cinema/DVD screen in the correct order.

- Copies are sent to the cinemas a few days before they start showing the film.
- The studio or producer decides the number of prints of the film to make.
- The buyers make an agreement with the distribution company about which films they wish to lease and fix the terms of the lease agreement (i.e. % of the box office).
- A studio or producer buys the rights to the film.
- The film is shot, and when completed is sent to the studio.
- When the film run ends, the film is returned to the distribution company, which pays the amount due.
- The studio signs a licensing agreement with a distribution company.
- At screenings, the film is shown to potential buyers representing the cinema chains.
- A producer, director, cast and camera/sound crew are hired to make the film.
- A screenwriter has an idea for a film, which is pitched to potential investors.

c Complete the following definitions using the underlined words in Exercise 8b.

- 1 Legal authority over who may use a film: rights
- 2 Place where films are edited and produced: _____
- 3 Contract giving someone the legal right to use a film: _____
- 4 Copies of the film: _____
- 5 Rent: _____
- 6 Ticket sales; literally, the place where people buy tickets at a cinema: _____
- 7 Period in which a film is shown: _____
- 8 Showings of the film: _____

d In pairs, try to describe the stages of a film from concept to screening, without looking back at Exercise 8b. Correct any mistakes in your partner's description.


9 a In groups, discuss the following questions.

- 1 Do you ever read film reviews? Explain why / why not.
- 2 How much influence do you think critics have on the amount of money a film makes?
- 3 Do you think film reviews should be written by people who have been involved in the film industry, by reviewers specialising in film, or by ordinary journalists?

b Read the film review. Would you like to see the film? Explain why / why not.

The Killing of John Lennon Cosmo Landesman

- 1 This is a **well-researched, fact-based** drama about Mark Chapman, the man who, in December 1980, murdered Lennon. **Since** we know what happened, all that's left for the writer and director, Andrew Piddington, to explore, is the mysterious: Why? **And** this he does with great enthusiasm, going deep into Chapman's dark, mad mind.
- 2 The challenge for Piddington is to make the narcissistic nobody Chapman an interesting **character**, which is a result he definitely achieves.
- 3 **But** the best thing about the film is that it successfully challenges the Chapman story as it is conventionally told. **First of all**, we see he was not your typical isolated, rootless young man. He was not abused as a child or tormented as an adult. **Secondly**, since killing Lennon he has come to symbolise the dark side of modern celebrity: the fan who becomes the fanatic, who will kill for his own 15 minutes of fame. **Yet** though Chapman came to enjoy his notoriety, that was not his prime motive; he killed Lennon because he thought he was a hypocrite.
- 4 What's missing, however, is a sense of the private Chapman. **Although** we hear a **voice-over** of his actual words, you never really get a sense of him **off camera**, as it were. **So** we never really get to understand him.
- 5 The film ends with a curious irony. Chapman must remain in solitary imprisonment forever, to protect him from the peace-loving Lennon fans who want him dead.



Cert 15, 110 mins

c Read the review again and answer the following questions.

- 1 Is the review positive or negative? 3 What does *Cert 15* stand for?
- 2 What do the stars at the end stand for?

d Complete the following definitions using the words in **bold** in the review.

- 1 Based on authentic information: _____
- 2 Not being filmed: _____
- 3 Carefully investigated: _____
- 4 Comments of an unseen speaker: _____
- 5 A person in a film: _____

e Language devices such as connectors can help you write a more coherent and logical text. Match the **highlighted** connectors in the review to their functions (1–4). If you can, add more connectors to each function.

- 1 To give contrasting information 3 To order points
- 2 To give additional information 4 To show cause and effect

f Complete a different review of *The Killing of John Lennon*, taken from a newspaper, using the connectors in Exercise 9e.

Here is the film that many people, especially Lennon's fans, have been waiting for all these years. A homage to the great Lennon, different in tone from similar films.

(1) _____ he was killed 18 years ago, our interest in John Lennon continues to this day. (2) _____ Andrew

Piddington's new film, *The Killing of John Lennon*, taps into our collective fascination in two novel ways: (3) _____, by presenting a new side to Lennon's killer, Mark Chapman; (4) _____, by drawing parallels between Chapman's actions and our current fascination with celebrity.

(5) _____ the story of Lennon's murder is so well known, it is to Piddington's credit that the film is both gripping (6) _____ revelatory. Highly recommended.

The Killing of John Lennon
★★★★★

g Match the paragraph numbers in the film review in Exercise 9b (1–5) to their functions (a–e).

- a Tells us what is bad about the film
- b Introduces the film: genre, director, basic plot
- c Concludes the review in an interesting way
- d Tells us what is difficult for the film to do and whether it achieves it
- e Tells us what is good about the film

h Match the phrases (1–5) to the functions in Exercise 9g (a–e).

- 1 The best thing about the film is ...
- 2 The film ends with ...
- 3 This is a well-researched, fact-based drama about ...
- 4 What's missing, however, is ...
- 5 The challenge for the director is to ...

i Think of a film you have recently seen. In pairs, take turns to say what you thought about the film, using the phrases in Exercise 9h.

10 a Does the review in Exercise 9b meet the following requirements of a good film review (1–5)? Explain why / why not.

- 1 It is written using mostly the present tense.
- 2 It gives a brief outline of the plot and characters without revealing everything, so that readers will want to see the film to know how it develops and ends.
- 3 It avoids using over-emphatic language such as *the best film ever* and *superb acting*.
- 4 It provides a critical assessment of the successes/failings of the film, based on a specific example from the film.
- 5 It highlights features, when relevant, which make the film worth seeing.

b You are going to write a review of the film you talked about in Exercise 9i. Before you write your review, answer the following questions.

- 1 Is the film a novel/play adaptation? How close is it to the original? Is its cinematographic version better or worse than the novel itself?
- 2 Alternatively, is the film based on an original screenplay? Is it new and fresh?
- 3 Are the characters convincing?
- 4 Is the casting up to your expectations?
- 5 Is the theme of the film successfully conveyed to the audience?
- 6 Is the setting appropriate and effective?
- 7 Are camera effects (texture, lighting, colour, etc.) and the soundtrack effective and functional? Do they enhance the mood, theme and setting of the film?

c Make notes for your review under the headings in Exercise 9g.

d Write your review. Add connectors to make it clearer to read. When you have finished, read your review and correct any mistakes.

e Read as many of your classmates' reviews as possible. Decide which you think is the best review and which film you would most like to see.