IT’S NOT JUST LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION  By: Maggie Warner

To an audience a film is composed of many images, projected on a big screen, conveying a story. But to a filmmaker a film is so much more. It is a creative process coming together into one cohesive vision where several steps lead to the finished product. Film is a visual medium, so people tend to overlook the fact that there is a lot of writing going on behind the scenes. For a filmmaker the writing process is extremely important and can be thought of as the backbone of a film. There is writing being done on the creative, business and organizational aspects. Each is a viable part of the writing process that makes the finished product possible.

Writing on the creative end usually entails writing proposals, treatments, film synopses and scripts. It is the first step in the writing process and is often the most difficult. As a filmmaker you are trying to sell your ideas to a particular audience. You want people to believe in your idea and knowing how to write well can better your chances of having your ideas chosen.

Rod Bingaman, Film Professor at The Pennsylvania State University, has been writing feature length scripts for 11 years and he states, “Writing makes me nuts. It takes a lot of self discipline to be able to sit down and write a good script.” It is a difficult task but without a script you do not have a movie. He goes further to say, “Good stories are important because we interpret visuals in a language sort of sense and this is why writing is so key.” But not all writing in filmmaking is creative and artistic. There is loads of writing that is done on the business level.

This type of writing is not as exciting but is an extremely important step. It is important because it protects all those involved in the production of a film. The most common forms of business writing include: budgets, cast and crew contracts, locations and talent releases, press releases and copyright forms. All of these formal documents are required and they allow those involved to know exactly what they are responsible for. Careful attention must be made to detail and it is important to be knowledgeable about the proper way to write these documents so as not to violate rights and restrictions of the industry.

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The legal and business end of the writing process is usually the most tedious but there is also writing done on the organizational level that is much easier and beneficial. For example, most filmmakers keep daily film journals or reports that simply record what took place throughout a day of filmmaking. These reports usually include what was shot, any complications or problems that occurred on the set and thoughts that the director may have had while shooting. Film journals and reports are good to refer back on throughout the production of a film.

So as you can see filmmaking is not just about the lights, camera and action. There are many different forms of writing that take place behind the scenes. However, with the increased use of technology there are now many programs that make the job of the writing process an easier one for filmmakers.

Filmmakers that are writing scripts now use a computer software program called Final Draft. Final Draft makes writing scripts fast and easy. There is a precise format for writing scripts including page layout, margins and format. Final Draft takes care of all of this and allows the writer to concentrate solely on writing ideas. Technology has also helped filmmakers in creating budgets. It used to be that filmmakers created their first budgets using pencils and hand calculators but now they use computers and the estimating process is automated (Singleton, 13). Spreadsheet programs such as Excel are very useful and can speed up the process (Singleton, 400). However, it is important to remember that no matter how sophisticated the program or software is, it can not make up for one of the most important human elements: experience.

Yes, filmmaking is a visual medium but it is also important to realize that filmmaking goes beyond the bright lights and special effects. Strong writing skills are crucial in this industry especially if you want to become a successful filmmaker. Writing occurs on various levels and it is beneficial to familiarize yourself with all of them in order to gain an upper hand in the industry.

Table: Weekly Time Spent Writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professions</th>
<th>Hours</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Film and Video</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Relations</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therapeutic Recreation</td>
<td>10</td>
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The ability to write effectively is an important element needed to be successful in many professions, including the field of finance. It is crucial to be able to communicate well with clients and shareholders. “Many financial officers and analysts have to explain what “the numbers say”, what is going on financially and operationally, and why it matters. If they cannot write clearly and convincingly, they cannot be good interpreters or communicators of the essential financial position and financial dynamics of the firm, the economy, the industry...or whatever else they may be analyzing”, says Ms. Andra Cochran. Ms. Cochran has been in the banking industry for 30 years and is currently the General Manager and CEO of SPE Federal Credit Union located in State College, Pennsylvania. As CEO, Ms. Cochran is responsible for overseeing the entire Credit Union’s operations. Ms. Cochran feels that communicating in writing plays a critical role in the financial industry and especially within her office. Between 50-60% of her days are spent writing various documents in order to perform her job efficiently. Many different written forms are used daily, including: letters, performance reviews, business plans, informative proposals, and memos.

However, Ms. Cochran feels that emails are the type of documents she writes most often. She states, “Emails have taken the place of a lot of memos, some letter writing, and a lot of phone conversations”. The majority of the emails are written internally to employees within the organization, although others are also written to customers in order to straighten out account questions or to explain new products and services (Cochran, interview).

But no matter which type of document is being composed, it is important that each be written in a clear and concise manner.

In 1997, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) proposed a requirement for companies to write in “plain English” when disclosing the information on the narrative portion of a financial statement. This is necessary for the financial statement readers to be able to fully understand the meaning behind the disclosure.

Arthur Levitt, Chairman of the SEC, stated, “Disclosure is not disclosure if it does not communicate.” This statement along with the commentary provided by Ms. Andra Cochran, reinforces the notion that writing in finance must be informative and proficient yet understandable and to the point (May, 4).
Recreation therapists provide recreation services, including theories, strategies, group dynamics, applied leadership and decision-making skills. They also have to writing effective letters, reports, and other documents.

Marcia Blatt, who is a Director of Therapeutic Recreation said that she provides services in various settings such as planning, structuring, budgeting, and marketing the agency’s resources.

College students wishing to major in Therapeutic Recreation must take the Practicum before graduation. The Practicum consists of an initial report, weekly summaries of daily experiences, and a written description of the agency. Also, if you want to be certified in Therapeutic Recreation, you have to take written examination upon completion of post graduation.

Depending on what college you attend, they might offer a professional preparation class which involves self-appraisal of the recreation profession; professional ethics; writing practicum and career goals; developing a chronological and functional résumé; writing letter of inquiry and cover letter; information on job placement within recreation services; NRPA registration/certification; applying for graduate school; and the job interview process (Eastern Michigan University).

There’s not much writing that goes on in this profession. It’s more a hands on job dealing with people who have a disability.

Providing written activities for people who have a disability gives structure to the services that recreational therapists offer.

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**Weekly Writing Tips**

This week’s tips column features writing hints that are useful in all professions, including the four fields mentioned in this week’s issue.

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**4 Devices for Achieving Clear Writing**  
*from Dennis L. Wilcox, professor at San Jose State University and author of Public Relations: Writing and Media Techniques*

1. **RESTATEMENT**  
Say the same thing in different words to reinforce concepts.

2. **DEFINITION**  
Words that are uncommon need to be defined or given a simple explanation to help readers understand.

3. **COMPARISON**  
If reader is unfamiliar with subject, compare to something they easily know.

4. **EXAMPLE**  
Use an example or statistic to illustrate a point more clearly.

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**4 Tips to writing more effectively:**

1. **know readers & focus on their needs**  
the more you cater to your audience, the more likely they are to understand your message

2. **know your communication objective**  
make sure every sentence is helping to achieve your ultimate goal

3. **be clear and economical**  
try to stick to the 17-7 rule-of-thumb: no more than 17 words a sentence & 7 sentences per paragraph

4. **use active rather than passive voice**  
most people see passive writing as boring; avoid phrases like “to be” & “to have”

***These tips come to us from Suzanne Sparks Fitzgerald, who teaches graduate and undergraduate public relations and advertising courses at Rowan University. She has written several books on business writing for McGraw-Hill, including "The Manager's Guide to Business Writing."***
of what you are trying to accomplish. In journalism you tell the news, in marketing you sell a product, but in public relations you are writing to sell an image. You look to change a behavior or attitude to make it favorable to the company you are working for. PR creates an atmosphere in which people see a positive company image. Emotion and feeling is extremely important.”

Everything a person in PR writes has persuasion in it, whether obvious or not. It takes a lot of talent to be able to sell a company image in words. The messages they write cover a wide variety of mediums and audiences. They must be talented enough to write anything from a press release that will entice a newspaper to run a story on their company to a piece of direct mail for a teenager in the company’s target public that will entice him to go to the company’s new website. Writing that caters to a targeted public is essential to achieving in the field of public relations. One must be able to write well enough to change the minds of any and everyone a company looks to influence.

Depending on what audience they are writing for, there are many things a PR professional writes. Some basics include: press releases, company pitch letters, biographical releases, newsletters, brochures, direct mail, scripts for video news releases, fact sheets and more. Without writing, it is obvious that PR professionals would not be able to do their job. Public relations writing is an important part of the process it takes for those in this field to evoke the emotion necessary to effect the thought of their company’s audiences.