Foundations of storytelling. The following slides introduce storytelling, primarily from the angle of film. However, much of what is described here is valid and relevant for any form of storytelling or narration, regardless of if the aim is to present scientific findings in a paper format or to amuse and entertain an audience. Because why should a scientific paper not be intriguing and engaging, or a film not contain important information and scientific findings?

THE
AUDIENCE

- Who
- Why
- What
- Where
- How

Who are you addressing? Why are you addressing this audience? What do you want to achieve with your story? Where will this be presented?

Only when you know the answer of these questions you konw how to prepare and form a story.

THE
SITUATION

- Live or pre-recorded
- Text
- Presentations
- Poster
- Film
- Auditory
- Interactive

Different situations need different approaches in the storytelling. Will it be live or pre-recorded? Is it some kind of text, if so, what type of text? scientific paper, essay, dissertation, popular science... What about figures, tables, text, fonts?

Will it be an aural presentation? Will it be live or pre-recorded, will you as an presenter be present/shown, is it scientific or popular science. Is it a poster, will that be a stand-alone poster or a poster for gaining interest and a support for conversation? What about visual elements and graphic communication?

Will it be a film? What type of film, what style, what storytelling elements, what equipment and possibilities are there to use? Is it an auditory only presentation? What sound elements can be used to communicate? Will it be an interactive presentation? How will the interaction work, what will be the communicative building blocks?

THE FORMAT

- Text
- Image
- Sound
- Presentation
- Installation
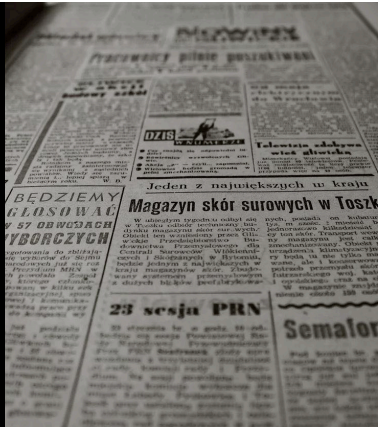
The format and the setting for the storytelling is essential for the story and the narration. There are a number of communicative elements when working with text such as font, color, size, phrasing, use of words and so on. In the same way there are many different aspects and different elements when working with images, be it photos, figures, illustrations, symbols, or icons. And of course also when working with sounds and/or music, being an ambient mood provider, or performing a style or genre to create a specific attitude or image, sounds can be in focus or peripheral, there are numerous sound elements and musical approaches to use. For an aural presentation, body language, posture, facial expressions, deportment plays an important role for how the presentation is perceived. For an installation, matters such as type of interaction and users as well as the users' knowledge are part of the format even if these might be hard to plan and predict.

HOW TO TELL A STORY
NARRATIVES

In this lecture film is used as an example of storytelling, however many of the thoughts presented are valid also for other forms of communication and storytelling.

(The Third Man, 1949)

HOW

- Linear narrative
- Non-linear narrative

A linear narrative presents the events of the story in the order in which they actually happened. This can be accomplished through any narrative perspective, be it first-person narration, second-person narration, or third-person narration.

A non-linear narrative presents the events of the story out of order, employing flashbacks and other literary devices to shift the chronology of a story.

(Pride & Prejudice, 2005)

DRAMATIC STRUCTURE

- Action, movement
- Conflict
- Engages the audience
- Brings forth feelings
- Presents the "reality"

LINEAR OR NON-LINEAR NARRATIVE

DRAMATIC STRUCTURE

Act 1 | Act 2 | Act 3

Point of no return — Climax — Conflict resolution

Rising action

Escalation of conflict

Falling action

Stirring

Exposition

Conflict

Inciting incident

Resolution

Presentation | Deepening | Catastrophe

The dramatic structure is often linear, but not always. It is often referred to as plot structure. A sequence of events where each affects the next one.

The dramatic structure builds on action and movement, and therefore requires some kind of conflict. The structure is good for engaging the audience, and brings forth feelings. It is a rather simple way to reach the audience, it doesn't require lot of prior knowledge or effort from the audience to follow the plot. The dramatic structure presents the "reality", regardless of how real or true it is.

(Casablanca, 1942)

The First Act: Exposition and introduction to the crucial story elements. The beginning presents: Characters and the conflict, The time and place.

The Second Act: A problem is defined and confronted as the stakes are raised. The middle (the bulk of the film): The conflict is developed and intensified, Plots and minor roles is added, Ends with/around "Point of no return".

The Third Act: The problem is solved with a climax and we have reflection. Presents: The resolution of the conflict, and of all (?) of the plots.

Exposition: An introduction of the protagonist(s), antagonist(s), and the stakes.

Rising Action: A conflict is introduced and the protagonist's journey begins.

Climax: The protagonist faces off against the central antagonist/conflict in a battle.

Falling Action: All the character's actions are resolved and an outcome is reached.

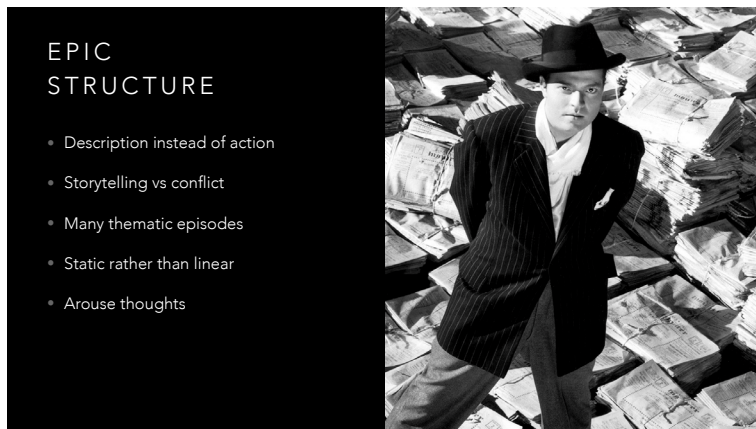Denouement: The conflict is concluded and we see what happens to the characters in the future.

(The Maltese Falcon, 1941)

LINEAR OR NON-LINEAR NARRATIVE

NARRATIVE GOAL

Narrative goal

Dramatic elements/ conditions

Start

Dramatic elements/ conditions

Narrative goal

All dramatic building blocks, elements or conditions lead to the narrative goal. Most often these building blocks follows each other, one leads to the next, but they always move the story forwards to the narrative goal.

(Blow Up, 1966)

EPIC STRUCTURE

- Description instead of action
- Storytelling vs conflict
- Many thematic episodes
- Static rather than linear
- Arouse thoughts

The epic structure is often non-linear, but not always. Where the dramatic structure is action the epic structure is rather description.

The epic structure is storytelling from one view-point, from one storyteller, and this is usually known to the audience. The structure creates the story by many different thematic episodes, which analyses something from different perspectives or from several different events. The storytelling is static in that sense that the end of the story might be the same as the beginning but that the story has given rise to thoughts, an impetus to change, or awareness in the audience.

(Citizen Kane, 1941)

NON-LINEAR OR LINEAR NARRATIVE

EPIC STRUCTURE

Narrator's point of view

Epic elements/ building blocks
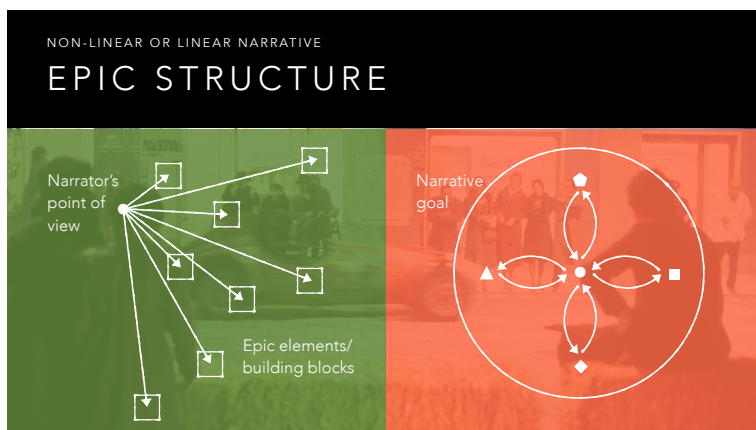
Narrative goal

A number of different epic elements or building blocks, are presented, analysed or related to from the narrator's viewpoint.

These might be different episodes, observations, events or anecdotes, and the narrative goal is to create a reflection about these than drive a story forward, thoughts based on this or these points of view. Where the story starts does not matter that much, nor when or where it ends. It ends when all epic elements has been presented. And the story (or "idea") has been communicated to the audience.

(Amarcord, 1973)

THEME

- What the movie is about.
- The theme is not the plot it is the sensmoral.
- The theme is the message.
- The theme creates unity.

7 BASIC PLOTS...

- Overcoming the monster
- Rags to riches
- The quest
- Voyage and return
- Comedy
- Tragedy
- Rebirth

E ach story is based around a theme. This is not the story, or the plot, it is rather what the story actually is about but the sensmoral, the message. And the theme creates a unity through out the storytelling.

(FORREST GUMP, 1994)

7 basic plots...

Overcoming the Monster - Hero learns of a great evil threatening the land, and sets out to destroy it. (SEVEN SAMURAI, 1954)

Rags to Riches - Surrounded by dark forces who suppress and ridicule him, the Hero slowly blossoms into a mature figure who ultimately gets riches, a kingdom, and the perfect mate. (TRADING PLACES, 1983)
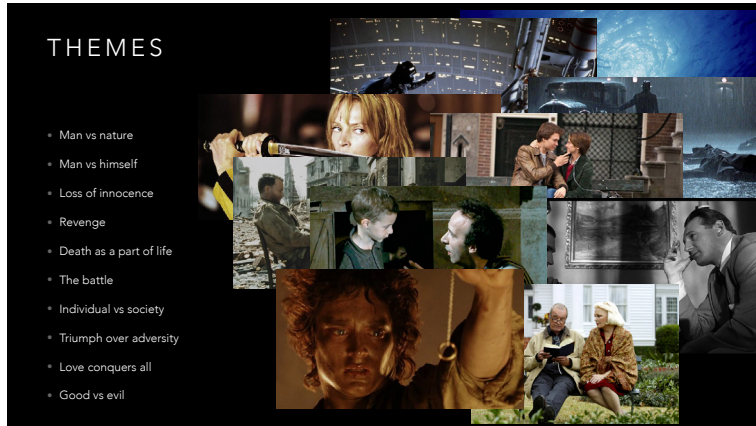
The Quest - Hero learns of a great MacGuffin that he desperately wants to find, and sets out to find it, often with companions. (THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING, 2001)

Voyage and Return - Hero heads off into a magic land with crazy rules, ultimately triumphs over the madness and returns home far more mature than when he set out. (APOLLO 13, 1995)

Comedy - Hero and Heroine are destined to get together, but a dark force is preventing them from doing so; the story conspires to make the dark force repent, and suddenly the Hero and Heroine are free to get together. This is part of a cascade of effects that shows everyone for who they really are, and allows two or more other relationships to correctly form. (LOCK, STOCK AND TWO SMOKING BARRELS, 1998)

Tragedy - The flip side of the Overcoming the Monster plot. Our protagonist character is the Villain, but we get to watch him slowly spiral down into darkness before he's finally defeated, freeing the land from his evil. (THE GODFATHER, 1972)

Rebirth - As with the Tragedy plot, but our protagonist manages to realize his error before it's too late, and does a Heel-Face Turn to avoid inevitable defeat. (PULP FICTION, 1994)

THEMES

- Man vs nature
- Man vs himself
- Loss of innocence
- Revenge
- Death as a part of life
- The battle
- Individual vs society
- Triumph over adversity
- Love conquers all
- Good vs evil

Top 10 most common themes

Man vs. nature can extend beyond the destruction of planet earth. These films can focus on an individual battling an animal of nature and can often incorporate dystopian themes. (Jaws, 1975)

Man vs. himself. The entire story is underlined by the notion that man is his own worst enemy. Therefore, many of these films deal with greed, power, and the downward spiral that they can cause. (Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back, 1980)

The Loss of innocence theme incorporates a young protagonist that is introduced to the complexity of the adult world. Sometimes the protagonist is eager to step into this new world, and sometimes they are thrown into it by some incident. (Road to perdition, 2003)

The theme of Revenge has been present in film from the early silent era and continues to be popular today. While revenge films revolve around the same idea, the endings can differ greatly. (Kill Bill, 2003)

Death as a part of life. As one of the most emotional and thought-provoking issues of life, death is an eternal theme in films. The inevitability of death, the mystery that surrounds it, and the implications that it brings make death one of the most interesting motifs of all. (The Fault in Our Stars, 2014)

The battle. Conflict is an integral part of any film. However, some films revolve around a literal battle. This battle can be between two individuals, two countries, or even two worlds. Usually, the audience does bond to the protagonist's cause. (Saving Private Ryan, 1998)

Individual vs society shows the battle between the protagonist and the social norm or social traditions. Often, these films show the protagonist sacrificing his own well-being for a cause. (Schindler's List, 1993)

Triumph over adversity is in almost all movies, the main character faces an obstacle that he or she needs to overcome. However, in films with this theme, characters' lives and stories are defined by the adversity they face. (Life is beautiful, 1997)

In love conquers all characters fight the undeniable fate of true love. No matter what obstacle a character may have to endure, movies revolving around this theme will end by reiterating this notion. (The notebook, 2004)

Good vs. Evil represents the ultimate showdown of polar opposites. (Return of the King, 2003)

CREATIVE IDEA

- The form of the film
- How to highlight and emphasize the theme?
  - The art of filmmaking and storytelling
  - Directing
  - Editing
  - Sound and music

The creative idea of a film concern how the film should be structured and how to narrate the theme to the audience. This is the art of storytelling.
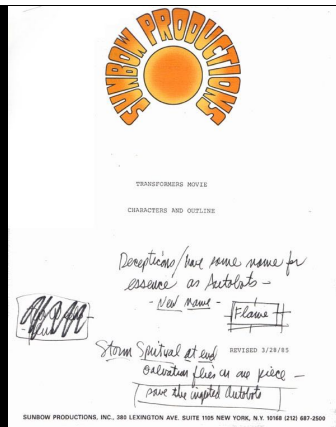
What is important?

How will this be shown?

How starts and ends the story?

And based on this writing the script, directing, editing, will form…

(Cinema Paradiso, 1988)

SYNOPSIS

- The story in brief
- "Scene cards":
  - Purpose/aim
  - Function
  - Roles
- Leads to a contour plot
- Title

A synopsis is always a good way of starting the work on a story. Regardless of the type of story, regardless of the audience, and regardless or the situation or the format.

Synopsis - Presenting the main characters and the environment (the setting) in one paragraph. Summarises act 1 (max 3 paragraphs), act 2 (2-6 paragraphs), act 3 (max 3 paragraphs).

Scene cards can be used to organise the story, or the presentation, or the scientific paper… These cards should present the aim of the scene (or section or paragraph), the function of this within the entire story, the roles/characters involved.

The order of scenes or sections will lead to a contour plot. Relate this contour to the dramatic structure…

Write the title. The title is important. It should not be something hastily thrown together. This is the face, the first impression.

SCREENPLAY

- All relevant information needed
- Character description …
- Scene structure …
  - Camera angels and shot for each scene
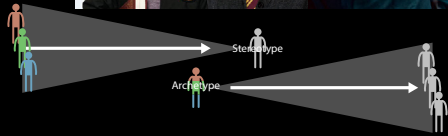 - Time of day and place
  - Characters and props
  - Dialogue

The screenplay, or the manuscript, should contain all relevant and necessary information. Description of the characters, the scene structure with all important information.

CHARACTERISATION

- Antagonist - opponent
- Protagonist - main character
- Archetype - one to many
- Stereotype - many to one

Archetype

An archetype is normally a pre-existing model, from which future copies/examples are created. A stereotype is a "conceptual model" created by abstracting the key features of current examples.

Archetype is normally a positive description (but sometimes it may be simply a neutral term). Stereotype is invariably negative/pejorative. It's rarely neutral, and almost never positive.

(Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, 2005)
(The Full Monty, 1997)
(Calendar Girls, 2003)
(Billy Elliot, 2000)

CHARACTERISATION

PHYSICAL INFORMATION

- Gender
- Age
- Body type and posture
- Appearance
- Dress/costume
- Gestures
- Way of talking
- Name

When writing a story, the author needs to know more about the characters than the audience to be able to tell a credible story. It is to some extent similar to a scientific paper, the author(s) should know more about the methods, the related work, the results than the reader to be able to present a reliable story.

(Indiana Jones: Raiders of the Lost Ark, 1981)
(Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl, 2003)
(Forrest Gump, 1994)
(Terminator 2: Judgment Day, 1991)
(Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace, 1999)
(Pretty Woman, 1990)

CHARACTERISATION

SOCIAL INFORMATION

- Ethnicity and nationality
- Class background
- Education
- Profession
- Housing/living conditions
- Family and friends
- Leisure activities
- Political and religious attitudes

(The Perfect Storm, 2000)
(Top Gun, 1986)
(The Lincoln Lawyer, 2011)

CHARACTERISATION

PSYCHOLOGICAL INFORMATION

- Ambitions
- Frustrations
- Dreams
- Personal weaknesses
- Temperament
- Intelligence
- Attitude to life and moral orientation
- Basic values

(KILL BILL, 2003)
(THE PRINCESS BRIDE, 1987)

CHARACTERISATION

PSYCHOLOGICAL INFORMATION

- Romantic/sexual orientation
- Complex/weaknesses
- Special talents talanger

(PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: THE CURSE OF THE BLACK PEARL, 2003)
(STAR WARS: EPISODE IV – A NEW HOPE,1977)
(THE GODFATHER, 1972)
(ALIENS, 1986)
(THE SECRET OF MY SUCCESS, 1987)

CHARACTERISATION

INTRODUCTION OF CHARACTERISTICS

- By actions and reactions
- By contrasts to what others do, and through others' reactions
- Through dialogue
- By appearance
- In relations to props, and the environment
- By name

Not all of the characteristics of the characters need to be presented in the story, but the author needs to know them. These characteristics are presented in various ways to the audience.

(NOTTING HILL, 1999)
(THE NAME OF THE ROSE, 1986)
(BLADERUNNER, 1982)

Writing dialogue for storytelling and film is interestingly similar to writing a scientific paper. Of course, these texts are completely different but both the scientific text and the film dialogue most be realistic and credible for the respective audiences and situations.

(THE FULL MONTY, 1997)

(SNATCH, 2000)

And similar to scientific writing, the film dialogue should not converse, it is not a live conversation the audience is attending but rather streamlined information. And, in both scientific and fiction the text should only present one thing at a time.

(PULP FICTION, 1994)

(FALLING DOWN, 1993)

When working with film, the storyboard is a very useful tool to collect information and share a common vision for the storytelling. Compare this to sketches in visual design, or wireframes and mock-ups in interactive media.
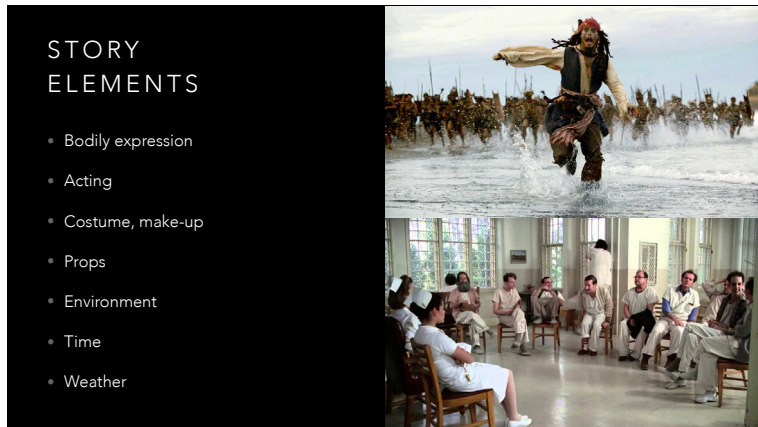
(GONE WITH THE WIND, 1939)

STORY VS NARRATIVES

When telling a story there are two different aspects, the story and the narratives (how the story is told).

(THE MATRIX, 1999)

STORY
ELEMENTS

- Bodily expression
- Acting
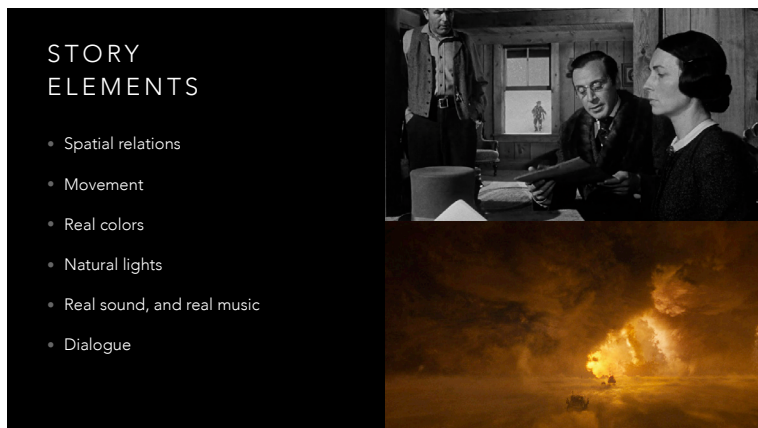- Costume, make-up
- Props
- Environment
- Time
- Weather

Elements in the story are real within the story. How characters act, how they look and dress are part of the story, and there are both realistic and dramatic motivations for these.

Props, i.e. things that the characters interact with are naturally also part of the made up reality. As are the environment, the time of the day, the season of the year, and the year (or age), as well as the weather. Also these are based on realistic and dramatic motivations.

(PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN, 2003)
(ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST, 1975)

STORY
ELEMENTS

- Spatial relations
- Movement
- Real colors
- Natural lights
- Real sound, and real music
- Dialogue

Other elements that are part of the created reality are spatial relations and movements on the screen, real colors and natural lights, real sound and music, as well as the dialogue. These elements might be described as "real" but are often planned, edited, enforced, created, and artificially added. The important thing is still that these are real in the fictive world created in the story.

(CITIZEN KANE, 1941)
(MAD MAX: FURY ROAD, 2015)

NARRATIVE ELEMENTS

- Camera scenics
  - Focal length and camera shots
  - Image composition and sharpness
  - Camera angle and forced perspective
  - Camera movement

To tell the story, to present the made up world for the audience there are a number of narrative elements. Camera scenics is one of these.

Photography is a two-dimensional reproduction of three-dimensional objects. Focal length - degree of magnification - zoom. Cameras hots: Extreme long shot, Long shot, Mid shot, Closeup, Extreme close up. Image composition and sharpness, as well as camera angle and perspective. Perspective is the two-dimensional relationship between camera and object. A change in perspective affects the two-dimensional relationship between the camera and the object. Camera angle - Bird's eye, high angle, Worm's eye, low angle.

Camera movement: Pan - left- & right turn. Tilt - upward & downward tilting. Pedestal - lifting straight up or down. Dolly - camera movement on rails. Floating stabilizer device - steadycam. Crane or boom - camera mounted on a crane or boom. Handheld - handheld camera. Zoom - a change of the focal length. Rack focus - change of focus.

(THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY, 1966)

(THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING, 2001)

NARRATIVE ELEMENTS

- Color effects and black/white
- Artificial lighting
- Special effects, and editing
- Sound effects and film music, and voice over
- Texts, and title

Color effects and black/white, Color correction, Emphasis of colors. Artificial lighting, to emphasise details and to create the right impression/feeling. Also for showing the time. Different effects and impressions by using white light or coloured lights.
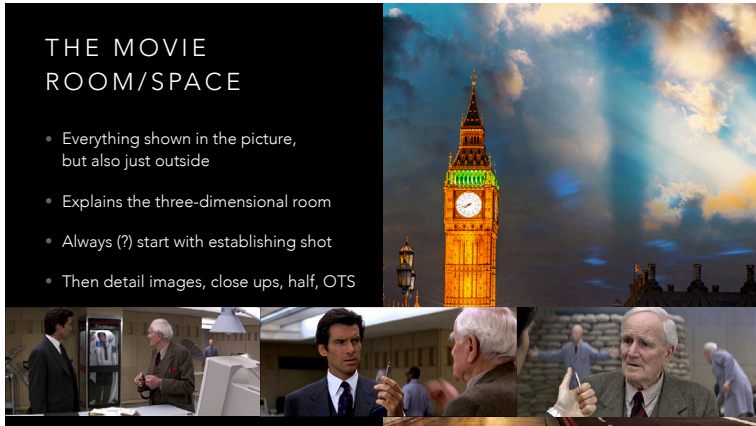
Special effects, and Editing, Chroma key: Blue screen/green screen, Color information, green is sampled twice as often, Blue requires more light, Blue has more leakage.

Sound effects and film music are added to emphasise emotions for the audience. In film music this is most often called dramatic underscore. This music, and these sound effects, are not heard by the characters in the story.

Texts, Opening titles and closing titles, To present time, To present location, For other effects... Title, Sell the story/movie/paper/poster, Tell something about the story...

(SCHINDLER'S LIST, 1993)

(BLADERUNNER, 1982)

THE MOVIE ROOM/SPACE

- Everything shown in the picture, but also just outside
- Explains the three-dimensional room
- Always (?) start with establishing shot
- Then detail images, close ups, half, OTS

The movie room, or movie space, consists of everything shown on screen, but also just outside what is shown. The two dimensional picture (usually) must be able to explain the three dimensional room. Therefore it is important to both use depth when "composing" the picture and use movement within the picture.

Often a scene starts with an establishing shot, and then continues with detail images. This helps the audience understand the room, and how characters can navigate within this room.

(THE GOLDEN EYE, 1995)

THE OPTICAL AXIS/ 180° RULE

- Optical axis for orientation
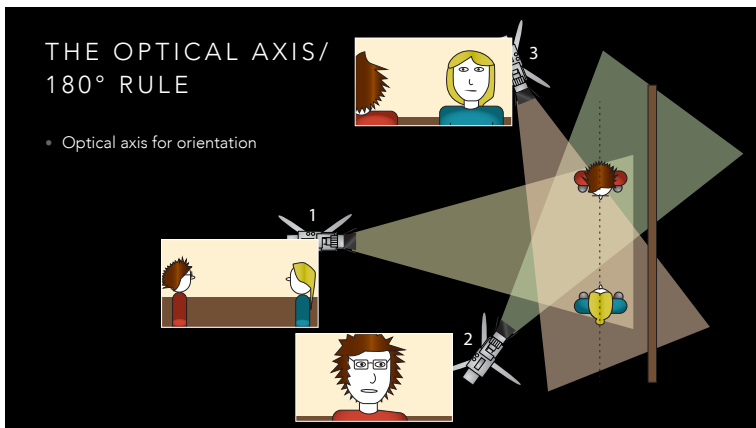
As a storyteller working with film it is important to know about the optical axis, or the 180 rule. This is a "line" that the camera setup must not cross.

This three camera setup, shown on the slide, will provide a half image of the two characters (camera 1), camera 2 will produce a close up of the character in red, and camera 3 will provide an OTS (over the shoulder) shot showing a bit of the character in red and the face of the character in blue.
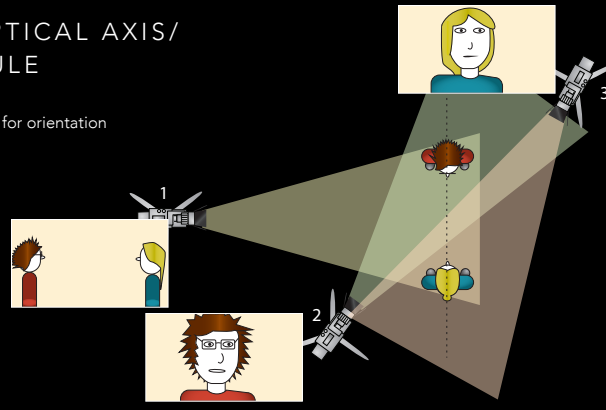
OTSs are good to use to catch reactions of one character while keeping the other character within the picture.

By keeping all cameras on the left side of the axis the character in red will keep the eyes slightly directed to the right in the image, and the character in blue will keep the eyes directed somewhat to the left in the image.

However, if one camera is moved to the other side of the axis, both characters will have the eyes towards the right (in the image) and it will not look as they are standing facing each other but standing in a line facing in the same direction.

Imagine if a car is filmed driving from top of the slide and downwards. Camera 1 would show a car moving from left to right, camera 2 would also show a car moving from left to right (but with a slightly different angle), while camera 3 would show a car (seen somewhat from behind) going from right to left. When the pictures from these three cameras are edited together, the car will be driving back and forth on the same road.

It is possible to break the 180 rule and cross the axis, either by changing the camera shot (for example to a close up of a specific detail), or by using a movement by one of the characters (for example one character is turning around, and then the camera is moved over the axis).
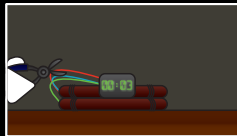
Finally, movie time is also divided in two parts, the time that is real in the story and the time used for telling the story.

Most often the time is shortened, i.e. time cuts, as the story would be very slow if everything was shown in realtime. These time cuts are either invisible (the most common version) where parts of the course of events are shown but these cuts are not experienced or noticed by the audience. Visible time cuts are obvious cuts where the audience is aware that the time passes in the story.

Time can also be prolonged to emphasise a specific event.