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In your meeting with the subject matter expert for your video, you worked up a list of the main points you plan to demonstrate and the issues you plan to raise in your video. Now it's time to begin putting together the video itself. The process begins with a detailed content outline and a treatment.

The content outline serves two purposes. First, it is a document you can give to the subject matter expert to confirm completeness and accuracy. Second, it's a checklist you can use while you're writing your script to be sure you've "covered" everything you wanted to.

The treatment is a narrative description of the content. It helps you and your client "see" the as-yet-unrealized video. It takes the bare bones of the content outline and fleshes it out into a dramatic sequence. If the content outline is the skeleton, the treatment is the flesh, the script adds underclothing, and the storyboard provides the clothes or outward appearance. If any of these is weak or flawed, the end result will be mishappen.

You can see why, even though this is "just paper-and-pencil" work, it is really where 95% of the "creativity" happens in a television production. So dig in and wallow in the process. Use creative techniques such as brainstorming to help you and your team come up with a strong outline and treatment, and the rest is "downhill," as they say.

Creating the Outline

Think of the outline purely in terms of content—don't worry much about sequence. The main purpose of the outline is to "say it back" to the content expert and/or client to see if you heard them right. Once approved, the outline serves as a checklist to use when you're writing the treatment and script, to be sure you're covering all the bases.

Here's how to make the outline with the members of your team. First, take the notes you made during your meeting with the content expert and make a list of all the important points. Don't worry about wording, just get them down. Second, group related points together under main headings. Third, assign one member of your team to create a one-page, finished version of the outline and submit it to the project content expert for approval. Keep it short and concise.

On the next page is a sample outline for the "Executive" segment of the EduCalm project.

Situation:

- 175 engineers who go around company/country giving briefings on new company products to employees.
- They're getting poor reviews on their briefings.
- Presentations important both for company and success of exec's group.
- Exec wants to build understanding and support for engineering division.

Exec:

- Complaints from recipients about effectiveness of presentations.
- Exec has seen some impressive PowerPoint slides and thinks that will help the engineers make better presentations.
- Concludes training in PowerPoint software will solve problem.

Training Manager:

- Training manager cautiously responds to exec's needs, but skeptical that it's a training problem.
 1. Suspects it's not as simple as it seems, wants to know more details.
 2. Seeks to elicit optimal and actuals from exec.

Seeking Optimals, Describe Ideal Presentations:

- Exec: wants good visuals, clarity, good communication, uses vague terms like "elegant."
- Exec shows training manager examples of good PowerPoint visuals that inspired her.

Seeking Actuals, What Presentations Look Like Now:

- Exec Engineers give too much technical detail to which audience doesn't relate.
- Generally "not communicating effectively."

Creating the Treatment

A treatment is a short, narrative description of what viewers will experience as they watch and listen to the video. This is where you flesh out the skeletal outline you created in the last step. This is the creative part. It's where you set the scene, hatch the plot, add the characters, and describe what they're feeling and doing. It's where you make the content "come alive."

The treatment should include descriptions of the setting, plot, characters, and action. Here's how to write the treatment.

Setting: *If you haven't already come up with it in your meeting with the content expert, brainstorm and decide on a situation that will convey the important points of the content outline. Is it a meeting in a conference room, a casual conversation in an elevator, or a single individual receiving a phone call? Is it an incident in a parking lot, the aftermath of a presentation, or some combination of these?*

Plot: *Sketch out the main points of the plot.*

- What is the situation as the scene opens? Is there tension in the air or just healthy excitement? Is it "business-as-usual" or is this a watershed event? What has happened before this scene? How much of what has led up to this do we need to show and how much can we merely imply with a few well-chosen words of a character?
- What happens to get things moving? Who sets the agenda, raises the issue, or throws up a problem that must be resolved?
- What events (words or actions) elaborate the issue or complicate the problem?
- What events promise or actually deliver resolution or progress towards resolution?
- How does the scene end? Do the characters resolve the situation? Does the ending leave the viewer hanging, trying to anticipate what might happen next?

It is vitally important during this stage that you keep referring back to the content outline and check that each twist in the plot is purposeful—each event helps make one of the main points of the content outline. This is not soap opera in which you can afford plot-for-plot's-sake. This may be less exciting than soap opera, but it is still a little story that will help learners remember the ideas you are illustrating. Trim gratuitous events.

Characters: Identify and describe the characters. Create one character to represent each important point of view you need to make the plot happen and get the ideas across. Use as few characters as you absolutely need. Next to each character's name or label (programmer, lead designer, etc.), jot down two or three words that describe what that individual is feeling at key points in the plot. Are the characters excited, nervous, frustrated, tired, resigned, grateful, relieved, doubtful, or adamant?

NOTE: If the project requires that the same characters appear in more than one segment, be sure to negotiate and coordinate important attitudes or behaviors with the other groups involved.

Action: The plot is the sequence of events. The action is what the characters say and do to express their feelings and ideas and move the plot forward. Use your own experience and the ideas you picked up from the content expert to help you "get inside" the characters and identify behavior and speech that express what's going on. For each point in the plot, for each character, jot down two or three ideas for non-verbal behaviors and/or speech that will communicate to the audience what that character is thinking or feeling.

After you've brainstormed ideas for the setting, plot, characters, and action, assign one member of your team to draft the treatment. The treatment writer should sort out all the ideas, make them fit with each other, and put together a coherent narrative of what will happen in the video. Just describe one event after another, with suggestions of the various characters' speech and behavior.

When the draft is complete, circulate it to the other members of your team for comment and suggestions. Set a deadline for returning feedback on the draft, then revise the treatment accordingly and submit it to the content expert by posting it on the course forum for review. Be sure to check for spelling and grammar before you submit it to the forum. The content expert is often one of the people who controls or at least influences the organizational support—not to mention the budget—for your production. Make a good impression.

Here is a treatment for the "Executive" segment of the EduCalm video.

EduCalm "Executive" Treatment

A busy executive sitting at her desk buzzes her secretary to get the company training manager on the phone. As she waits, she looks over good-looking PowerPoint presentation slides. In a moment, the call back comes in from the training manager. The executive reminds him that they met recently at an executive planning session. She gets right to the point. She's discovered some software that she believes is the magic bullet to a problem in her division, and she wants a software training workshop asap. She is obviously enthusiastic about the idea and very clear about it in her own head. "How soon can we get it scheduled?" she asks.

We hear only her side of the conversation. She pauses to listen, and her face reveals a little irritation. The training manager apparently wants a meeting with her to talk about the training. She doesn't see why scheduling a training should require a half hour meeting, but after another pause, she reluctantly gives in and puts it in her schedule.

The next scene is the meeting between the exec and the training manager, in the exec's office. They've already concluded the preliminaries, and she comes directly to the point. She tells the training manager that she's getting complaints about her engineers' briefings and she thinks PowerPoint presentation software is the solution.

The training manager affirms her statement but casually begins to probe a little. He asks her for more details about the presentations. She tells him that x number of engineers give new product briefings to company employees all over country. She explains importance of the presentations for company and for cultivating support for her division.

The training manager acknowledges her urgency, and asks her for her vision of what a great presentation looks like. She realizes she hasn't really thought much about it, and starts out rather vaguely, using terms like "elegant," finally remembering PowerPoint, she focuses in on the visuals. She shows him the overhead transparencies that inspired her idea in the first place.

The training manager agrees with her on the quality of the PowerPoint slides, but tries to probe a little deeper on her vision of an ideal briefing. She reveals that the engineers have problems explaining complex relationships among products. She ruefully admits they need help in this area.

The training manager presses the exec for more information about the current complaints. She turns to the idea of clarity, citing complaints that briefings are "over the heads" of the audience. She reflects that good engineers are not necessarily good communicators, and again cites the feedback she gets from the field. She ends by restating her naïve faith in PowerPoint and her desire to get started on training right away.

Do you see what's happening here? You're telling the story as the viewer will see it unfold in the video, with enough directorial "scene setting" as is necessary to really help the reader "see" it in their mind's eye.

Once the treatment is approved, you're ready for the script and storyboard.