

INNOVATIVE PEDAGOGY



YOUNG MOVIEMAKERS MEETS ACADEMIA

YOUNG MOVIEMAKERS' PEDAGOGICAL METHODS HAVE BEEN RECOGNIZED IN ACADEMIC RESEARCH CONDUCTED AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA (UBC) WITHIN THEIR MASTER OF MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY STUDIES EDUCATION PROGRAM. IN ADDITION TO PROJECT-BASED LEARNING (PBL), YOUNG MOVIEMAKERS' APPROACH ALIGNS WITH THE BRITISH COLUMBIA MINISTRY OF EDUCATION'S NEW CURRICULUM, EMPHASIZING CONFIDENCE, SELF-ESTEEM, AND INCLUSION, WHILE EXPLORING COMPETENCIES LIKE COLLABORATION, COMMUNICATION, AND CRITICAL THINKING—QUALITIES VALUED BY UNIVERSITIES, COLLEGES, AND EMPLOYERS ALIKE.

EXPLORE THE RESEARCH BELOW!



THE YOUNG MOVIEMAKERS METHOD FOR WRITING SHORT FILMS

by

Young Moviemakers Inc.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The goal was to create a multimedia e-learning series on the topic of writing stories for short films, using Clark and Mayer's (2016) "*e-Learning and the Science of Instruction: Proven Guidelines for Consumers and Designers of Multimedia Learning (Fourth Edition)*" as a benchmark guide. Their "*Principles of Multimedia*" were developed over "thirty years of research by Richard Mayer and his associates at the University of California" (Clark & Mayer, 2016). "*E-Learning and the Science of Instruction*" is based on hundreds of empirical investigations and "research-based answers to questions that practitioners ask about effective e-learning" (Clark & Mayer, 2016).

Studying their "*Principles of Multimedia*" was the inspiration to create this e-learning series on the filmmaking techniques and lessons that have been developed with associates at Young Moviemakers Film Education Studios (YM) over the last 18 years. YM's writing methods are highly successful at producing short films with relative ease, but the teaching of these skills has never been effectively translated into an efficient and digestible e-learning medium. Film students often consider writing one of the more challenging aspects of the filmmaking process, and past attempts at creating multimedia lessons on this topic failed to be effective.

Many educational resources already exist on the topic of writing, whether in classes, books, articles, or even other e-learning series such as Masterclass (n.d.), where subscribers learn from some of the greatest writers in the world. However, the YM method for writing short films (3-5 minutes in length) is different because it focuses on a specific practical skillset for beginner filmmakers. It's important to distinguish that the goal of the YM method is not to

produce advanced-quality writing but rather to learn the practical skillset to produce ready-to-shoot story concepts with a quick turnaround for a completed product.

The complete journey of beginning-to-end filmmaking is essential, as YM programs practice the Project-Based Learning (PBL) model, which this paper intends to review. The goal of any YM film is for it to be of high quality, as measured by the film's overall enjoyability. Consider the common experience where a parent attends their child's low-budget school play. They may not genuinely enjoy the overall production quality, but they still appreciate their child's participation and experience. YM Films, on the other hand, aims to create the opposite experience, impressing all audiences with the overall production quality of each film, despite being made by inexperienced children. Since most YM participants are children, the YM method for writing short films is designed to produce comedies; however, the method captured in this e-learning resource can successfully be used for other genres.

Numerous methods for teaching story writing already exist, some of which have no known author, such as the five elements (or five pillars) of storytelling. While it's true that anything can be recorded with a camera, not everything has the potential to entertain an audience. The YM method adheres to several guiding principles, including the five pillars detailed in Table 1.

First Pillar • Setting	Where does the story take place? Should be a non-geographical location.
Second Pillar • Character	The Protagonist is the main character. Usually, but not always, “the good guy”. Objective is what the protagonist wants. Motive is the reason why they want it.
Third Pillar • Problem	The Antagonist is the reason the protagonist can’t get what they want. This can be a person, place or a thing. Usually, but not always, “the bad guy”. The antagonist’s objective and motive create the conflict .
Fourth Pillar • Stakes	This is the reason the story is being told. What will happen if our protagonist doesn’t get what he wants? Why does it matter?
Fifth Pillar • Solution	How does the story end? Does the main character’s plan work? Is there a twist?

Table 1.

1. Purpose

What is the most effective way to teach our YM method for writing short films in an asynchronous, multimedia format? The goal of this inquiry was to review the best available research and use it to guide the creation of this own e-learning series. Learners can now use these lessons as self-paced educational materials to supplement their creative writing knowledge and help develop their story-writing competency and confidence. This series provides learners with a formula designed for beginners, offering a repeatable method to create scripts for short films, generally up to 5 minutes in length. Additionally, other educators will benefit from this e-learning series, as it is now available online for free use in perpetuity. Finally, the process of creating this e-learning series has allowed us to document these abstract skills and ideas into a coherent, empirical, research-based package, further strengthening their understanding.

2. Problem

Online educational content is harder to create when it requires the creative input of the learner, compared to other instructional videos that have the ability to teach a skill step by step. One could spend countless hours developing multimedia lessons only to have audiences find them complicated or confusing. The challenge with teaching writing is that stories are limited to one's imagination. As a result, beginners tend to get overwhelmed with the infinite possibilities of writing. Even individuals with significant experience in writing can find it difficult to translate their skills into writing for film, particularly for short films.

The following questions guide the inquiry:

1. What is an effective sequence of multimedia lessons for writing short films, up to 5 minutes in length?
2. What multimedia features are essential to each video lesson?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this review was to investigate existing literature on what works best for multimedia learning, distance learning, and the teaching of scriptwriting. The inquiry project focused on a specific niche subject: a multimedia e-learning series on writing short films up to 5 minutes in length, which made finding related literature a challenge. Clark and Mayer's (2016) "*Principles of Multimedia*" served as the primary guide for the creation of this project. However, it was important to review other literature and understand the history of the theories and concepts relevant to this inquiry project.

For this review, JSTOR and ScienceDirect were used to search for key terms such as "distance learning," "multimedia learning," "filmmaking," "film students," "project-based

learning,” “human cognition,” “cognitive theory,” “constructivism,” “instructional design,” “writing for films,” and “scriptwriting.” Numerous sources were selected based on their relevance.”

1. Constructivism

Constructivism is a theory developed by psychologist Jean Piaget, who argues that humans learn by actively constructing new understandings based on their experiences. He states that prior knowledge and one’s life story are an integral part of their learning (Tam, 2000). According to Bodner (1986), a constructivist views learning as being personal and not objective.

Learners construct understanding. They do not simply mirror and reflect what they are told or what they read. Learners look for meaning and will try to find regularity and order in the events of the world even in the absence of full or complete information.

(Von Glaserfeld, 1984, as cited in Tam, 2000, p. 51)

Constructivists believe that learning is an active process (Tam, 2000, p. 51), a concept integral to the science of instruction and the goal of this multimedia series.

2. Online Education

Buket and Meryem (2008) urge educators and institutions to consider the diversity of learning styles when designing an e-learning course. Ni (2013) furthers this point and details the unique advantages and disadvantages that online learning has (p. 213). She points out that online learning can have particular advantages for students who tend to be reserved in the classroom

setting; however, she makes the distinction that their findings indicate online learning is a strong supplement to face to face learning, not a complete substitute (p. 212).

Going the Distance with Online Education (Larreamendy-Joerns & Leinhardt, 2006) is a critique of online education, published right before the 2007 release of the iPhone, which subsequently ushered in the smartphone era and changed the world and our very behaviour as a global civilization. They had no way of knowing how soon the democratization of educational content would revolutionize learning. Platforms like YouTube (n.d.) and services like Masterclass (n.d.) are accessible to anyone with a modern computer device and internet connection. Vast numbers of people can learn nearly anything from certified professionals, hobbyists, or unfortunately even charlatans.

In their paper, Larreamendy-Joerns and Leinhardt (2006) share various arguments and predictions about the future of online education as they explore the strengths and concerns of distance learning. They weigh the concerns of critics who argue that the lack of control educational institutions will have on online learning could be devastating (p. 592).

Some foreseeable implications of this commodification are the disenfranchisement of faculty within institutions of higher education and the prevalence of non collegial forms of academic administration. For example, courseware developed by faculty as a result of their personal interest in teaching and technology can become marketable products over which faculty may have, in the end, little or no control. Likewise, institutions can adopt courseware primarily on financial grounds, rather than for pedagogical reasons, in which case administrators may have the last call in decisions regarding academic matters. (Jaffee, 1998, as cited in Larreamendy-Joerns &

Leinhardt, 2006, p. 592)

Of course, we now know how accessible education has become. Even the YM method for writing short films was developed in part by learning from non-traditional institutions, made possible by the democratization of information via the internet. As of 2022, academic institutions have embraced online education and distance learning. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic ushered in a mass adoption of online learning, which researchers are currently studying the effects of, including Mayer (2021), who continues to verify his “*Principles of Multimedia*” (p. 233) and has since updated his book with two new principles.

3. Cognitive Load Theory

Cognitive load theory states that there are two categories of knowledge: primary knowledge, acquired through evolution, and secondary knowledge, acquired through one’s culture and upbringing. They believe that the brain’s processing power for secondary knowledge consists of two structures: working memory and long-term memory. Different types of information are processed by different parts of the brain, and a learner can become overwhelmed by poor instructional design (Sweller et al., 2011). Although the design of professional instruction can leverage what is known about human cognition, “it is regrettably rare for instructional design to be based on human cognitive architecture. Frequently, instructional design principles are promulgated as though human cognition either does not exist or if it does exist, it has no implications for instruction” (Sweller et al., 2011). Cognitive load theory is the foundation of Clark and Mayer’s (2016) “*Principles of Multimedia.*”

4. The Principles of Multimedia Learning

As mentioned in the introduction, the goal of this project was to create a multimedia e-learning series on the topic of writing stories for short films using Clark and Mayer's (2016) "*Principles of Multimedia*". These principles are summarized in Table 2 below.

Coherence Principle	Reduce extraneous, distracting material.
Signaling Principle	Highlight and signal most important visuals.
Redundancy Principle	Don't combine text with narration when possible.
Spacial Contiguity Principle	Keep relevant visuals close together.
Temporal Contiguity Principle	Audio and visuals should play at the same time, not consecutively.
Segmenting Principle	Chunk information into relevant segments.
Pre-training Principle	Utilize introductions to basic concepts and terms.
Modality Principle	Reduce text as much as possible.
Multimedia Principle	Images combined with text is more powerful than text alone.
Personalization Principle	Use informal, conversational narration.
Voice Principle	Use human voice over a computer generated voice.
Image Principle	Use images instead of a talking head instructor.
Embodiment	Display gesturing instructor.
Generative activity	Insert generative learning activities.

Table 2.

5. Project-Based Learning

PBL is widely accepted for its benefits in problem solving, collaboration, and helping students achieve higher-order thinking (Bell, 2010). YM has been using the PBL method since 2005, and they often credit the popularity of their film education programs to this model. In a typical YM program, students work in small groups with the guidance of an instructor. Together, they start and complete the entire process (journey) of creating a short film, which is then distributed and watched by the participants' friends, family, and community. Despite its acclaimed reputation, traditional school systems struggle with implementing PBL. Perhaps the most surprising discovery in this literature review was how old the concept of PBL is. To discover that one of the scholars and pioneers of these ideas, John Dewey, shared his beliefs in his book *My Pedagogic Creed & Demands of Sociology upon Psychology* (1897), over 125 years ago, was shocking. "To know what a power really is we must know what its end, use, or function is" (Dewey, 1897, p. 6). He explains how a student will not have power over their future until they know what their future can be and that teachers cannot prepare students for a future which cannot be predicted, especially with the rapid change of technology. "To prepare him [or her or them] for the future life means to give him [or her or them] command of himself [or herself or themselves]" (Dewey, 1897, p. 6). He explains how students can only prepare for the future by learning to empower themselves. Beckett et al. (2019), state that Dewey's teacher, William Heard Kilpatrick, built on Dewey's ideas and introduced the project method as a component. Other scholars, such as Greeno (2006) associate PBL with Piaget's constructivist theories, summarized earlier. Piaget believed in "situated learning", which focuses on process rather than memorization (Greeno, 2006). Many studies can be found that verify the benefits of

PBL. Chun-Ming et al. (2012) decided to incorporate an element of storytelling into PBL and found that it:

improved the learning motivation, attitude, problem-solving capability, and learning achievements of the students. Moreover, from the interviews, it was found that the students in the experimental group enjoyed the project-based learning activity and thought it was helpful because of the digital storytelling aspect. (p. 368)

Their results show that PBL combined with digital storytelling could “effectively enhance the students’ science learning motivation, problem-solving competence, and learning achievement” (Chun-Ming et al., 2012, p. 368).

6. Principles of Screen Writing

As mentioned in the introduction, many educational resources already exist on the topic of writing. Some educators feel that the pedagogical rules of writing have already been established; however, it’s important to recognize that many institutions exclusively teach or focus on a contemporary, western style of storytelling. One can look at other cultures or eras and realize that not all principles of story-writing are the same. Many educators speak with absolutes when teaching writing; for example, Zebba (1953) uses the word “must” over 37 times in her paper *Principle’s of Screenwriting*. Experts like Zebba (1953) offer excellent information, and the mastery of their teachings will certainly produce strong writers; however, their guidelines may still be too overwhelming for a beginner. The YM method offers a means to create a story’s foundation, a basic outline for writing about anything.

Chapter 3: Methods and Procedure

This project employed an action research methodology, specifically a Design-Based Research (DBR) approach, which focused on the design of a significant intervention in a real educational context, as this project ended with the creation of an educational resource and product. The creation of this e-learning series involved a significant time commitment, with over 100 hours spent on both the recording and post-production processes of the audio and visual aspects of the project. One might assume that recording our original YM lesson, a traditional oral lecture, and then screening it to students would have the same educational value as being there in person. However, this type of educational video would, in fact, result in a significantly less effective teaching resource compared to that which follows Clark and Mayer's (2016) "*Principles of Multimedia*".

The first phase of this project required in-depth research of the relevant academic literature, with a particular focus on understanding the nuances of Clark and Mayer's (2016) work. Following the literature review, the second phase of the project began with the composition of the transcript, which captured all the verbal information contained in the original YM lesson.

Clark and Mayer's (2016) "Segmenting Principle" was first applied by the division of the lesson content into appropriate sections, each written as a separate lesson. Once segmented, the lessons were evaluated, and the decision was made to write an additional introduction segment as well as a review segment in order to adhere to the "Pre-training" and "Generative Activity Principles" (Clark and Mayer, 2016).

After all lessons were planned and written, the third phase began with the recording of

the dialogue. A professional voice-over artist was hired, and the audio was recorded in a high-quality recording studio to capture clear, professional sound. The decision to use a professional voice actor was an intentional choice in order to adhere to the “Personalization Principle”, as the talent was able to recreate an informal, conversational narrational tone (Clark and Mayer, 2016). The fourth phase began with editing once all of the audio recordings were completed. For this phase, the best takes were selected, and all unwanted material was removed to produce the assembly cut. This was followed by a series of audio passes, a process where each pass took 3-5 hours of precise attention to detail. The first pass was selected for final timing and overall feel. The next pass was to digitally enhance and mix the audio timeline to ensure sound levels were consistent at -6 dB and the quality was the highest for finalizing.

After the audio was finalized, the visual portion of the project began, using keyframe animation on professional-grade software. Text and images were selected in accordance with the remaining principles and then a final pass was run to ensure proper timing of the audio and visuals. All visuals were sourced from Flaticon (2023) and purchased through their full licensing premium subscription. Originally, the creation of 6–12 videos was anticipated for this series, resulting in a final product of 7 total, each taking multiple days to complete. The completed series is now available worldwide for peers and learners to watch and use, and it can be found on YouTube (2023) at <https://youtu.be/ALUGWxcTy9E> (Mihalik et al., 2023).

Chapter 4: Applied Principles

This chapter reviews and explains the strategic application of each of Clark and Mayer's (2016) guidelines relating to this e-learning series. Although not every principle is always

applicable for the creation of an e-learning resource, this project was able to utilize the vast majority of them. Aside from principles numbers 9 and 13, all principles were maximized during the creation of this project. This chapter will individually highlight each principle and outline how and why each decision was made to achieve the best overall final product.

1. Coherence Principle

The coherence principle recommends the elimination of any extraneous and distracting material within instructional content. In alignment with this principle, the final product was chosen to exclusively feature dialogue and animated visuals only. The integration of background music, a common and recommended practice in online videos, was experimented with for this project. Despite the perception of music as a potentially enhancing element, its removal was deemed necessary due to its violation of this principle.

2. Signaling Principle

The signaling principle recommends emphasizing the most crucial visuals. To adhere to this principle, all extraneous visuals were avoided in order to maintain focus on the essential elements only. Consequently, each visual functions as the highlighted feature for every idea and concept.

3. Redundancy Principle

The redundancy principle advises against combining text with narration when possible. In adherence to this principle, the choice was made to entirely omit text when narration is present.

4. Spacial Contiguity Principle

The spacial contiguity principle recommends keeping relevant visuals close together. In accordance with this principle, primarily individual images were chosen for the project, and related visuals were grouped when necessary.

5. Temporal Contiguity Principle

The temporal contiguity principle suggests that audio and visuals should play at the same time, not consecutively. To maximize this principle, every visual was aligned synchronously with the audio narration as a specific stylistic choice.

6. Segmenting Principle

The segmenting principle suggests chunking information into relevant segments. To adhere to this principle, the content of the original YM lessons was divided into appropriate sections, as mentioned above.

7. Pre-training Principle

The pre-training principle suggests utilizing introductions to basic concepts and terms. To follow this principle, additional pre-training, introductory, and review segments were added to the e-learning version of the YM lesson.

8. Modality Principle

The modality principle recommends reducing text as much as possible, which was

maximized by avoiding text entirely, as mentioned in the redundancy principle.

9. Multimedia Principle

The multimedia principle states that images combined with text are more powerful than text alone. As text was entirely avoided in this project, this principle did not apply.

10. Personalization Principle

The personalization principle suggests using informal, conversational narration as opposed to professional or jargon-heavy terminology. This principle was utilized by hiring a professional voice actor who had the ability to deliver an effective performance while maintaining an informal, friendly tone suitable for a generalized audience.

11. Voice Principle

The voice principle suggests using a human voice over a computer-generated voice. This principle was maximized by hiring a professional voice actor, as mentioned above in the personalization principle.

12. Image Principle

The image principle suggests using images instead of a talking-head instructor. This principle was maximized by using narration over animated images.

13. Embodiment

The embodiment principle suggests displaying a gesturing instructor, which was not applicable to this project since the aforementioned image principle was utilized.

14. Generative activity

The generative activity principle suggests utilizing generative learning activities within an e-learning lesson. This principle was maximized by creating a final recap review lesson, which can be found at the end of the e-learning series.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

The goal to create a multimedia e-learning series using Clark and Mayer (2016) as a benchmark guide was a successful endeavour. The YM method for writing short films has now adopted Clark and Mayer's (2016) research-based "*Principles of Multimedia*", and is now available in an efficient and easily digestible e-learning medium, officially titled "*Young Moviemakers Lesson | 6 Pillars of Storytelling*". Prospective film students can now supplement their learning of story creation with this digital resource.

1. Utility As An Educational Resource

This multimedia e-learning series is an invaluable resource for educators seeking to supplement their students' storytelling education. The step-by-step nature of these lessons ensures that students receive a structured approach to learning while also encouraging creativity and critical thinking. The series, while accessible for self-directed learning, is best utilized under the guidance of an educator who can provide personalized support and facilitate discussions around

the content. Educators can seamlessly integrate this e-learning series into their lesson plans, using the engaging videos to spark classroom discussions, assignments, and collaborative projects. Overall, the e-learning series best stands as a dynamic tool for educators to inspire and guide their students in mastering the art of crafting compelling narratives for short films.

2. Emerging Technologies

Over the course of the creation of this project, a historic and global technological development occurred: the emergence of generative artificial intelligence (AI). Generative AI has the ability to create human-like text responses when given a prompt or input. Programs such as ChatGPT (2023) have the remarkable ability to create stories from nothing, utilizing as many (or as few) user inputted details as desired. This raises the question about the usefulness of the e-learning series created for this project within this new technological landscape. Will generative AI make this video series irrelevant before it is even launched?

Only time will answer that question; however, there are many reasons to remain optimistic. The stories an individual can produce from mastering the YM method for storytelling are superior to generative AI for reasons such as the ability to adjust a story's depth, the understanding of nuance, subtext, and context (which are important to the creation of stories and their characters), as well as the personalization of those characters for each performer. These are all necessities for maximizing audience enjoyment. Appendix A and Appendix B explore how most stories share a universal structure. Due to these facts, it is evident that it is not simply the plot that maximizes audience enjoyment but rather the nuance of what audiences find relatable in certain characters. The YM method for storytelling is designed to teach learners how to use the resources around them in real time, including the

specific locations and actors at their disposal. This requires the personalization of the people around you and discovering how each actor's unique attributes can be leveraged to create an engaging story compared to a general plot produced by generative AI technology. Additionally, the YM method for storytelling refines the skill of adaptability. Stories are rewritten countless times, in both big and small ways. Often, these changes are inspired by the nuances that individual actors and their personalities bring to the project. Generative AI does not understand these nuanced personality traits, therefore lacking the ability to customize and adapt a story the way even an intermediate storywriter can.

3. Ethical Considerations for Future Research

The BC Teachers' Council (2019) states that "educators act ethically and maintain the integrity, credibility, and reputation of the profession" (p. 4). Important ethical considerations must be kept in mind when writing stories and teaching writing. Creative choices can both intentionally and unintentionally cause pain to vulnerable groups. For example, many classic animated children's films produced by Disney now include a warning message at the beginning of certain films:

The 12-second disclaimer, which cannot be skipped, tells viewers, in part: These stereotypes were wrong then and are wrong now. Rather than remove this content, we want to acknowledge its harmful impact, learn from it and spark conversation to create a more inclusive future together. (Pietsch, 2020)

Enforcing negative or harmful stereotypes and the appropriation of cultures are just a few ethical considerations one must make when writing stories. It is important practice to consult

with members of a community if one wishes to represent them with fictional or non-fictional characters.

In the event that these multimedia lessons are used for further research, participants in that research must be clearly informed about the study's purpose and procedures. Written consent must be obtained, which clearly states that participation is entirely voluntary and that they may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without any consequences. The identity, recordings, transcriptions, and data must be encrypted, password protected, and stored securely. Personal identifiers must be removed, and pseudonyms must be used to ensure anonymity.

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Appendices

Appendix A - Six Dimensions of Humour

Scott Adams (2015), author of the *Dilbert* comic strip, formulated what he terms the “*Six Dimensions of Humour*”. He believes that in order for concept to be humorous, at least two of the following elements must be included.

- Recognizable
- Cute
- Clever
- Naughty
- Bizarre
- Mean

You have to use at least two of the six dimensions to be recognized as humor. You can use more than two dimensions for even better results, but two is the minimum. And it does not matter which dimensions you combine. (Adams, 2015)

The majority of films created by YM are with children who perform in their own films. These children who are inherently “cute”, either act as themselves, or as adult characters performing anything from everyday life scenarios to dramatic recreations of their favourite Hollywood movies, all of which is “recognizable”. As Adams (2015) states, only a minimum of two dimensions are required for writing to be humorous, which is the default for most YM films. One can add a “mean” character, or a “clever” idea and instantly the writing and its resulting film increases its humour.

Appendix B - The Hero's Journey

In 1949, a scholar named Joseph Campbell studied hundreds of myths from around the world. His findings were that the majority of these stories share a fundamental structure, which he termed the Monomyth (Chase, 2016). Campbell introduced his theory in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Campbell, 1949), and argued that many ancient stories are comprised of the same elements. The YM method often uses the Monomyth as a guide.