

SCATTERFLIX

**documentary
film workshops**

@scatterflix.com

by jeanne Pope



DOCUMENTARY FILM PRODUCTION

Pre-production outline for low budget filming

Jeanne Pope and Wang Ying©

Beijing Film Academy Modern Creative Media College

BFA_TEACHERS - China

Contents

Introduction	4
FIND YOUR IDEA	10
APPROACH, STYLE & GENRE	18
NARRATIVE STORYTELLING	22
GETTING TO KNOW YOUR SUBJECT	24
RESEARCH AND ARCHIVES	26
LEGALITIES AND RELEASE FORM	30
LOCATION SCOUTING	32
COSTS & FUNDS - BUDGET	35
EQUIPMENT	36
NOW FOR YOUR SYNOPSIS	39

THANK YOU

*“In feature films the
director is God;
in documentary films
God is the director”*

Alfred Hitchcock

Since I started writing we are all in severe lockdown. This changes the way we are living and creating.

Making documentaries is going to be much harder, and finding our vision more challenging, and we are adapting.

Video-diaries. Cell phone filming, live streaming, stories made on the fly...

This year will bring out incredible innovations.

*The structure does not change,
just the way we execute it.*

*We are more limited, but maybe more creative.
For the first time ever, all of us are part of the
Whole Community, if we want to be, and the
community needs our stories....*

Welcome to part 1 of DIY Documentary Workshop Outline **PRE PRODUCTION**

Hello and welcome. So glad that you are here and you will find this outline useful. This is Part 1 of a 4 part, **step-by-step** guide in DIY, low-budget, mixed Media documentary film production.

The workshops will have tips, techniques, links, to get you started on your journey.

I will use my new documentary project, ***6 Months, waiting for my brain***, which is in PRE-PRODUCTION, as an example.

This outline is the one I use with my colleague Wang Ying at the Beijing Film Academy Modern Creative Media College, China, with our first year students. They have never made a documentary and many have never touched a camera before. They are ABSOLUTE BEGINNERS ... and end up with great work.

I hope you enjoy the documentary journey. Thank you for being here.

JEANNE

You need passion

What does DIY documentary filmmaking mean?

It means you will be doing most of the work yourself. You might get some help, but you are the director who will drive your project, from initial idea to getting it out to the public. You become the Jack of all trades. Be prepared, documentary making is like a great love, once involved, it's very hard to let it go of.

**All you really need
is the desire to
tell a story**

If you have never made a documentary my workshops will motivate you, get you going and encourage you to pick up a camera, or your cell phone and start shooting.

You no longer need an expensive editing suite. There are so many free apps you can download for both Mac and PC, such as:

www.openshot.org

DIY DOCS

It is important to have an idea of the documentary production structure

The process can be broken down into 4 parts, just like in a fiction film. We call the process **the 4Ps**

Easy to remember

- **Pre-production**
- **Production**
- **Post-production**
- **Promotion**

**Sometimes pre-production and production entwine with each other*

PRE-PRODUCTION - Preparation for your documentary

Idea. Approach/style/genre. Narrative/visual storytelling. Getting to know your subject. Research & archives. Location scouting. Legalities & Release form. Funds. Equipment

PRODUCTION – Collecting the material to make your documentary

Filming – interviews. Collecting audio. Pick-up shots. Sorting out footage-images

POST-PRODUCTION – To add the touches which brings the documentary alive

Editing. Color correcting. Sound mix. Output. Mixing Media.

PROMOTION - Getting your work seen

Festivals: www.filmfreeway.com,
www.withoutabox.com Cinema. DVDs. Social Media. Posters. Vimeo. Youtube. Website. Other platforms.

**AT SOME POINT ALONG THE WAY YOU WILL WRITE A
SYNOPSIS OF YOUR DOCUMENTARY**

DIY DOCS

Find your idea

IDEAS - the starting point

Don't loose your head over an Idea

Sometimes an idea comes out of the blue,
or it is a slower process - you have to find it

“My ideas are like uninvited guests. They don't knock on the door; they climb in through the windows like burglars who show up in the middle of the night and make a racket in the kitchen as they raid the fridge.”

Werner Herzog on filmmaking

Often, our idea has been in our minds for a long time. In the first workshop I will dive into the different ways to brainstorm for an idea, an idea we can fall in love with.

The idea I want to turn into my next documentary is my own story about a brain tumor and the operation I had in China. I had just finished my last feature, THE SEA HUT, was in the promotional stage, when I was diagnosed with an acoustic neuroma, May 2019.

Being curious, my first thought was: *I gotta capture this on camera. **6 Months Waiting for my Brain*** (my working title for now) is the result of this very personal experience. I am right in the early stages, **pre-production**, and am still trying to work it all out in my mind, reflecting on **WHAT story I really want to tell.**

Once you have an idea, no matter how vague, it really helps to write it out 'what' you think you want to create. Create a one-liner, and a few paragraphs.

WRITE ONE SENTENCE

Later as you move along in the process your idea might change, or the direction might change, and then, you create a new one liner.

Finally, by the end of the process when you have completed your documentary you will write a **LOGLINE** which is the essence of your story in a nutshell. This will used to promote your work

MY ONE-LINER

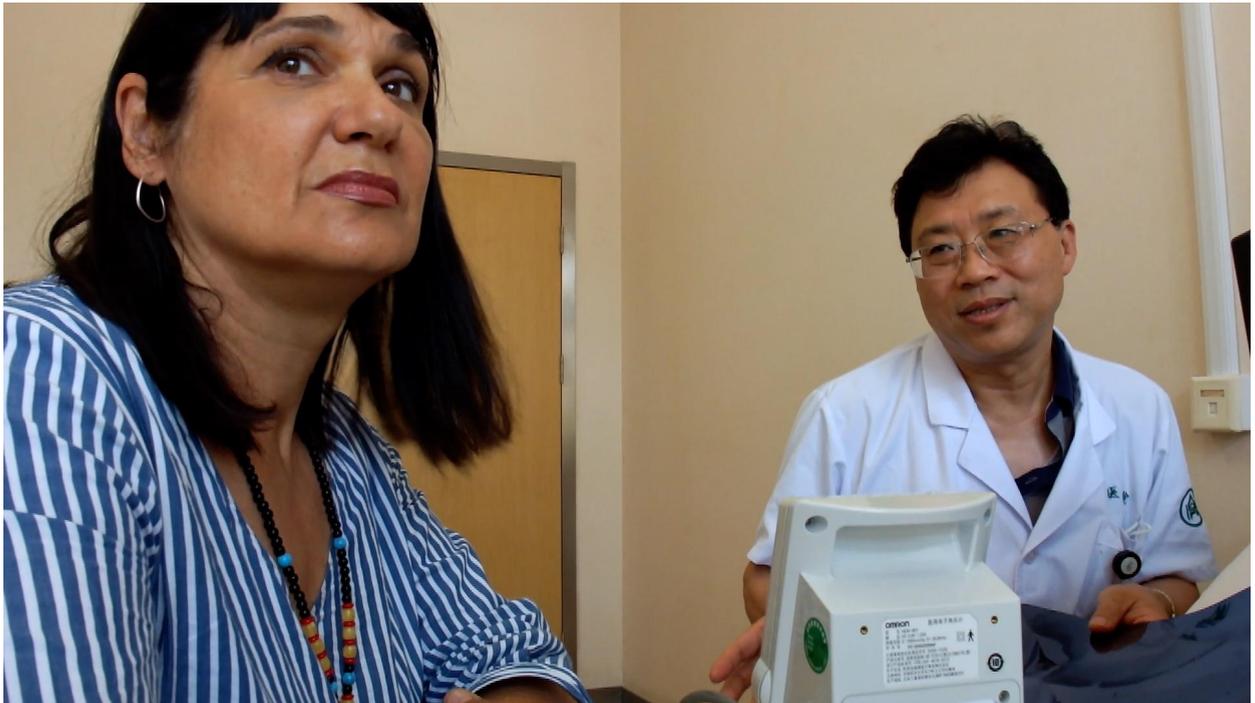
6 Months Waiting for my Brain

*6 Months, waiting for my brain follows my
changing feelings before, during and after brain
surgery, in China.*

**Later I will create a complete Logline which
will be the resume of my documentary in a
nutshell**

This sentence is enough for me to work on for now. I have some sort of structure, a base to work with.

***Dr. Wang has just told me I have a brain tumor,
May, 2019, Qilu Hospital, Qingdao, China***



There are Important criteria to consider and pond upon before you move to the next step

- Why are you making this documentary?
- What questions will you raise?
- What do you want your audience to get from viewing it?
- What type of documentary would you like to make?
- How can you turn your story into great viewing?
- Is it a very personal portrait?
- Is it intended just for family members?
- Is it a memorial piece to give to a friend or family member?
- What are the values you want to share?
- What impact can it have once out in the public?
- Who is your audience intended to be?

I would travel down to hell and wrestle a film from the Devil if it was necessary.” WERNER HERZOG

Why do you want to tell this story?

How will you tell this story?

What will you tell In this story?

Why do you want to tell this story?

Where Is this story set?



Your idea might change, that is normal.
Wang Bing the Chinese documentary filmmaker
says it is *ebb & flow*

As Is life _ documentary is unpredictable

It is not possible YET to write a complete script for my documentary as I do not really know what will happen. Unlike Fiction where we need the script before, we don't in documentary production.

However, I find brainstorming my idea by using mind-maps - my preferred method - is so important, that way I feel my documentary is born. It begins to breath . . .

for It Is life ...

“in the time of writing, we are all In lockdown, who would have known that a few months ago, so my treatment or script will change, and continues to change.”

APPROACH
STYLE & GENRE

THINK ABOUT THE APPROACH AND STYLE YOU WANT

- How will you make this idea into a documentary?
- What sort of documentary do you want to make?
- What form will it take?

It helps to have some sort of idea of

EXPERIMENTAL
TALKING HEADS
POETIC
HYBRID
ARCHIVAL
ANIMATED
MUSICAL

These are but a few..

These articles below give a generous reading of what types of documentary genres there are. It is important to reflect upon your idea.

[Documentary genres](#)
[Doc Genre - Wikipedia](#)

MY APPROACH FOR 6 MONTHS?

How will I treat my work?

What texture will my documentary have?

What form will it take?

What will the genre be?

What inspires me?

Will I mix media for this documentary?

[From the 6 Types of Documentary Film](#) it appears that “6 Months, waiting for my brain.” will be a Reflexive Documentary as I will focus solely on myself and the act of me making the film

Pope Jeannette

术前



**NARRATIVE
STORYTELLING
in documentary**

Narrative structure

Story and Plot

- How do we drive our story to keep an interest and give our story energy?
- How do we *show* rather than *tell*?
- How to use the 3 ACT structure?



What is the arch - the turning point?

Somewhere in the middle of a documentary we are given some information which changes the story's direction.

**OR THERE MIGHT
BE SOME CONFLICT**

“*Searching for Sugarman*” has a terrific turning point

[Searching for Sugar Man Official Trailer #1 \(2012\) -
Documentary HD](#)



GETTING TO KNOW YOUR SUBJECT



You have the idea, and sort of know where you want to go with it. Now you need to begin to get to know your subject if you have not already done so. **This is where you need time.** To know anything or anybody takes time. Time to watch, to listen, to study. Whoever or whatever your subject and subject matter is/are, you need to know them/it

... TIME HOLDS THE KEY

I used to wake up every morning very early in the hospital. I recorded the sounds as dawn came up. I would film the rising sun, the mists, then the evening coming. I watched endless sunsets and sunrises. Would stalk the corridors with my camera. I knew my ward well. It was my world for a long time. I learnt the movements, captured the voices. I feel I found the 'soul,' of the ward.

**GETTING TO KNOW
YOUR SUBJECT**

RESEARCH & ARCHIVES

RESEARCH IS AN ELEMENTARY PART OF YOUR DOCUMENTARY

I am still not sure which way I will *direct 6 Months*: however, I do know an aspect I would like to try and unravel: *does the way we encounter and accept our situation make a positive/negative impact on the surgical outcome?*

To get this answer I cannot rely only on myself; this would be biased. I need to research and ask other people

I met a woman called Ewa through an online search. She had written a newspaper article. I wrote to the paper and she has agreed to be interviewed. (She lives in the UK.) I also would like to speak to another woman who recently played violin during her brain surgery if I can obtain permission.

Research can take you onto many different adventures, and you never know what you will find. It is very exciting.

RESEARCH IS AN ELEMENTARY PART OF YOUR DOCUMENTARY

What other archival material might I need?

What elements could be useful?

Where should I look?

What am I allowed to use, and how do I find free images?

What exactly is **public domain** and **creative commons**?

Creative Commons: When we share, everyone wins

What is my responsibility towards copyright?

How to deal with legalities?

These are all elements that need to be considered and understood.

MIXING MEDIA

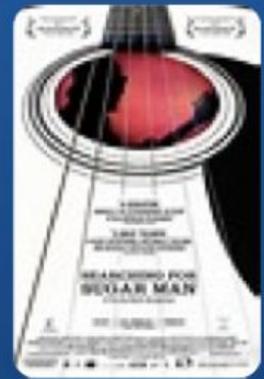
Will I MIX MEDIA?

Mixing Media is when we take different elements to weave them into our work. (I will discuss this in detail later). [“Searching For Sugarman,”](#) the 2013 Documentary is a prime example of hybrid or mixing media. I use this documentary with film students as:

*The first 10 minutes use Drone. HD. Super 8
Rich sound design, animation. Talking heads.*



**MIXING MEDIA
ANIMATION
RECONSTRUCTION
VOICE OVER
SUPER8 FOOTAGE
STILL PHOTOS
MUSIC**



LEGALITIES & THE RELEASE

RELEASE FORMS

Before you begin weeks of work, make sure you have the **OK** from your subject that you **CAN** film them. The same applies for any private location. This is called a release form, which must be signed and dated.

You are asking for permission to film your subject or location. You are also asking to use their image and voice, *meaning their comments*.

A release form also gives you the right to edit the footage (images) in the way you desire. If your subject is an artist and you film their work, you need to include **use of all media in your release. You can find many examples of a release online**. I will go into in-depth detail about this in the workshop as it is so important to understand.

I **URGE** you to make this a **priority**. If you do not have that permission, then you need to get it, as later, down the line, it could cost you your entire work.

[What Are Your Rights as a Documentary Filmmaker? A Primer on Permission](#)

This article is from NO FILM SCHOOL.

LOCATION SCOUTING

WHAT APPEALS TO YOU AND HOW WILL IT MOVE YOUR FILM ALONG?

Other than the Qilu hospital ward what other locations could be interesting for my documentary?

I live near the sea in China, I might use beach images. I did shoot some violent winds and sea huts being blown about for my last documentary THE SEA HUT, which I never used. I feel they could be perfect as a metaphor.

We call these extra images **'B Roll'**. Images in a documentary which cut away from the main story.

I am excited by kites; I admire birds, especially the naughty Magpie, China's love symbol. I also find curious the furniture left on Qingdao's sidewalks for others to pick up, and demolition sites.

**SO, WHAT WILL MY OTHER LOCATIONS BE?
HOW WILL THEY REFLECT MY INNER FEELINGS?**

What will yours be? **WHAT & WHERE**

COST & FUNDS

Cost & Funds

PRE PRODUCTION SETS THE FOUNDATION

How much will all this set you back ? Low budget means just that. Naturally you need to spend some money, but today a documentary can be shot very cheaply, it is the time to craft it which is the harder part. As you will be doing the shooting yourself, or with a friend, the real costs at this stage will be in buying a camera or a cellphone.

There are different ways you can create funding. If you have a great synopsis (I will cover synopsis in **production**), and want to do a **kickstarter**, you could possibly raise money to fund your work.

With **CHEZ LISE**, a documentary on mental health, co-directed with a friend, James Galwey, we raised 4,000\$ for our sound mix.

[Productions2BA - productions2ba](#)

I always suggest to students and first time filmmakers to be humble in the beginning. Find a documentary idea which will not cost thousands to make. Start short rather than long. A short documentary is powerful and easier to control.

[Six Smart Ways to Write a Powerful Fundraiser Title](#)

EQUIPMENT

EQUIPMENT

Camcorders & DSLR

Cameras for documentary filmmaking

[What is the Best Cheap Documentary Camera for Filmmaking in 2020?](#)

If you do not have a lot of experience using a camera, the important thing is to learn with a camera that is not too complicated, and easy to carry. A camcorder might be what you would like to invest in. Above are some examples of documentary cameras.

(You can also use your [cellphone](#), If you have one.)



EQUIPMENT

Camcorders, DSLR & Cellphones

I used both Camcorder and DSRL. The camcorder was great in the hospital as it was so light, easy to manipulate and I did not want people to worry about a big camera. So it was ideal. Lots of people are using their [cell phones](#) along with apps for filming: <https://www.filmicpro.com>.

For ‘**pick-up**’ shots and ‘**B Roll,**’ I used and will use the DSRL so I can experiment with different lens for a different feeling and texture. However, the lure of getting using my cell phone is in the cards...



Now for your synopsis

By this point you should have many elements

- You know what you want to film
- You have done some research
- You know about your subject.
- You know about your locations
- You might have already begun some preliminary filming
- You understand the legalities and the need to have a release from your subject
- You know the genre, the style, the approach
- You watch different styles of documentary

NOW - This is when you can add a little bit more to your synopsis. You can add a budget.

Will you need to employ other people to work with you? If you are looking for funding you will need a good synopsis. Depending on the country, different rules apply.

[NoFilmSchool](#) has a great outline here



“That’s it for now”

www.doityourselfdocumentaries.com

THANK YOU

Thank you for your time, see you in the first workshop

[5 tips: how to find your documentary idea during lockdown](#)

Documentary filmmaking is such a huge subject with so many different approaches; **this is mine** and an approach which works well for the students I have taught with Wang Ying, my colleague at the BFAMCMC

I hope it will work for you. *jeanneX*

SCATTERFLIX

documentary
film workshops

@scatterflix.com

by jeanne Pope



Sign up for the workshops

Coming, 28th April

DON'T LOSE YOUR HEAD FINDING YOUR IDEA