

Documentary Filmmaking

Treatment*: The documentary treatment or proposal is generally the first document a filmmaker prepares in the pre- production process. Offering a concise description of the overall vision and objectives of the project, the treatment is used to obtain financial backing and support from collaborators. It typically includes a section outlining the budget. Although your treatment requires neither a budget nor collaborators, writing it will force you to conduct research on your topic, identify likely sources, decide on a stylistic approach, come up with a working structure, and work through some of the inevitable obstacles faced by documentary video producers (e.g., permissions, lack of access, technical challenges).

Assignment: Submit a five-page, typed, double-spaced treatment for a 10-15 minute historical documentary. Unconvincing proposals will require selection of new topics or revisions. Your treatment should include the following (use subheadings for each):

Title^[1]_[SEP]

Category: What documentary type or types (observational, interactive, etc.) does your film fall within?^[1]_[SEP]

Synopsis: A brief summary of the story at the heart of your documentary. Use the following terms from Bernard: *story, conflict, theme, emotional impact*.^[1]_[SEP]

Structure: Decide on the *arc* your story will take (based on the research you've conducted). If possible, divide the story into Acts (I, II, & III) and describe the climax and anticlimax. If it helps to exhibit your ideas on structure in storyboard form, feel free to do so.^[1]_[SEP]

Characters: A list of protagonists/antagonists.^[1]_[SEP]

Soundtrack: A discussion of narration, music, and/or other sound elements you plan to include.^[1]_[SEP]

Social Context and Research Background: Explain the larger historical and/or social framework/context for your documentary. For example, the social context for a documentary on a local environmental activist fighting for cleaner rivers might include a brief history of the type of industries responsible for polluting our city's waterways. You'll need at least 5-6 sources. Try finding articles and books on your topic by searching online databases at the Library and media sources.

Source List: Who specifically do you plan to interview for the film (provide brief biographies of each).

Shot List: Based on your work on the structure of the proposed film, create a list of all shots/scenes—A-roll and B-roll—that you'll need.^[1]_[SEP]

Bibliography: Include an appropriately cited bibliography at the end.

* Adapted from Elizabeth Gailey, DOCUMENTARY I: HISTORY, THEORY & PRACTICE. UTC.