

AN ITV SCRIPTWRITER'S CHECKLIST

BY BOB FRYE

You could call it magic — a certain indefinable element in writing and producing successful instructional television. It is there in different amounts each time a creative team reaches its audience and helps them learn. The mysterious element isn't produced by complex hardware, people in beads and sandals or consultants with dark glasses and berets. It is a product of the right people, with a specific discipline working toward a common objective. If the people have an extra touch of imagination and inspiration — that just makes the magic stronger.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the mystique of video writing and production so that you, as a developer of training materials, can work your own sorcery.

We will concentrate on the program developer or writer, but the producer and director are also essential members of the team. In addition to the basic skills of their trade, they need an understanding of education. They must place the trainee's learning at the top of

their priority list. The video people also need to provide an atmosphere in which a writer can develop through experience.

The following checklist is designed to help the new writer during the learning process as well as to refresh and sharpen the skills of

the veteran. It presents, in checklist form, a discipline for planning and writing video scripts. Instructional strategy and the techniques of writing for the video medium are emphasized. The checklist should help bring out the latent magic in any ITV team.

CHECKLIST for Developing Instructional Television Scripts

I. Personal Qualities of a Video Program Developer

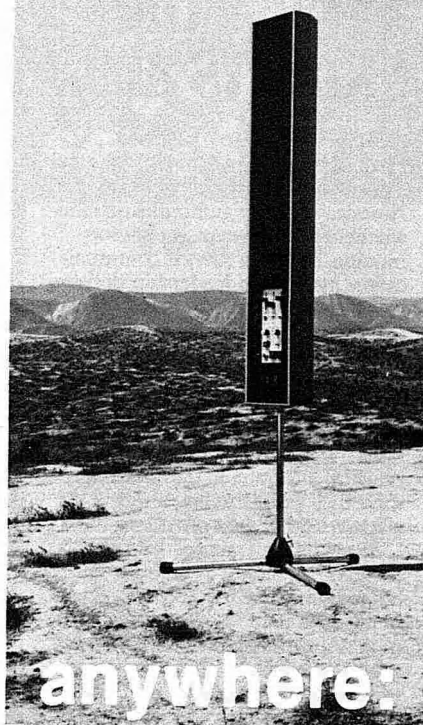
- A. Is the developer *analytical*? Can he or she:
 1. understand the material?
 2. separate important from irrelevant elements?
 3. organize material into a logical teaching sequence?
 4. determine the attitudes, needs and entry level of the audience?
 5. determine corporate needs, tone desired and hidden objectives?
 6. select achievable performance objectives?
- B. Does the program developer have *empathy* with the student? Can the person:
 1. understand the attitudes and needs of the students?
 2. recognize factors in the student's situation or desired behavior that motivate or demotivate the student?
 3. design materials that hold attention and recognize materials that do not?
 4. separate what the trainee needs to know from what is just "nice to know"?

- C. Does the developer have *writing ability*? Can the person put words together with good flow, continuity, simplicity and clarity?
- D. Can the developer *think and write in terms of pictures*? Is the person able to conceive scenes and action that will communicate on video and describe them on a script?
- E. *Is the developer creative*? Can the person absorb information and put it together in new ways? Does he or she have a childlike imagination?
- F. *Is the developer motivated to help people learn*? Does the person desire to be of service to others by helping them improve their performance through learning?
- G. Can the developer *communicate with others*? Can the person establish good relationships with source people, writers, directors, artists, producers, managers and trainees to receive and transmit information?

II. Planning an Instructional Video

- A. Have you considered the advantages of the alternate training media? *People learn fastest and retain the most when they receive information through the eyes and then have a chance to practice.*
 1. For *factual* material that cannot be illustrated in pictures, the *print media* is a highly effective format that provides information through the eyes.
 2. *Audio is effective when it guides* a person through visual material such as *diagrams, references, photos, slides or workbooks*. It also works well when the *training is for the ear* as in language, music or telephone contact work.
- B. Will understanding be improved if the student sees the subject in motion or in person supported by audio dialogue and description? Video has been proven effective for visual communications such as:
 1. Allowing the viewer to *be there*. For example:
 - a. see a machine or process
 - b. view a news event
 - c. see a place
 - d. experience a selling call
 2. Showing *timing and motion* or relationships between parts as in:
 - a. step by step construction, assembly or maintenance
 - b. craft or trade practices
 - c. science or physics demonstrations
 3. Providing a *model for motor-skills* development, such as:
 - a. sports
 - b. crafts or trades
 4. Providing *review or reinforcement* through repetition of material presented in another medium.
 5. *Entertaining and providing relief* and release of tension.
 6. *Substituting* for other media such as:
 - a. film
 - b. slide tape
 - c. audio-graphic
 - d. lecture
 - e. field trip
 7. Developing *viewer feelings* such as:
 - a. motivation
 - b. safety consciousness
 - c. enthusiasm
 8. Conveying feelings and emotions of *others* such as:
 - a. pride
 - b. fear
 - c. anger
 9. Developing message *credibility*, rapport and identification with the viewer as in:
 - a. conversing face to face with a peer
 - b. talking with a real source person
 - c. experiencing a real situation
 10. Demonstrating *effects of human actions* such as:

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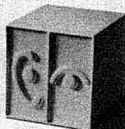
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- a. employee-supervisor relations
- b. salesperson-customer actions
- c. manager interactions

C. Is there a *less expensive way* to show the subject in motion or in person that is just as effective as video?

1. If the group is small, *taking the student* to where he or she can *see the actual subject* or bringing in a *qualified instructor to demonstrate the skill* may be the cheapest and best.
2. Cost studies *may* show that film is the cheapest medium to show motion.

D. Is the video compatible with the *distribution system, learning format and administration* of the training program?

1. Is necessary playback equipment available?
2. Are qualified program administrators on staff?
3. Does the program fit the organization's training system?

E. If you have decided on video, have you *analyzed the content*, student entry level, and the desired student *performance*?

F. If the video will be part of a total course, have you determined *where the video fits in* and how it *contributes to the learning*?

G. Have you written specific *performance objectives for the video*?

H. Have you considered the *students' motivation and environment*?

1. Is the student *motivated* to learn?
 - a. Are there *positive or negative* reinforcers to the desired performance?
 - b. Does the student believe he or she will benefit?
 - c. Is the student naturally interested in the subject?
2. Which format best fits the student's *learning patterns*?

- a. lecture by an expert
- b. simulated situation
- c. coverage of an actual situation
- d. demonstration
- e. programmed learning
- f. role-playing
- g. game format
- h. documentary
- i. other

3. In what environment does the student work? What format provides the best *transfer of learning* to the job?

- a. paperwork — use print and written exercises
- b. construction or mechanical — use demonstration and hands-on practice
- c. sales — use demonstration and role-plays
- d. telephone contact — use audio and audio exercises

I. What video treatment would *communicate* best?

1. Vignettes
2. Graphics
3. Animation
4. Show format
5. Documentary
6. Remote
7. Illustrated lecture
8. Other

J. Have you worked with the video director and producer in planning your video?

K. Is the proposed video *producible*?

1. Do you have necessary staff and talent?
2. Do you have needed equipment, sets and facilities?
3. Do you have adequate budget?
4. Do the producer and director feel comfortable with it?

III. Writing an Instructional Video

A. Are you aware of the differences between writing for print and writing for video?

1. Because a reader of printed material gets the content message through the *eyes*, the text writer has several advantages:

- a. The reader can reread complex sentences until the meaning is grasped.
 - b. The reader can learn at his or her own pace.
 - c. If a word has more than one meaning, the spelling will provide a clue.
 - d. The writer can use indentations, paragraphs, subheads, spacings and other visual devices to indicate changes in thought and provide organization and flow for the reader.
 - e. The reader can see words in groups or thought patterns that help in grasping their meaning.
 - f. The writer can use underlines, bold type, spacings and other devices to emphasize important ideas.
2. The video viewer gets the *content message* through the ears, which presents the video writer with several challenges:
 - a. Because they are constantly bombarded with sounds, people are accustomed to *turning off their hearing*.
 - b. The listener's *mind wanders easily*, because the brain processes information much faster than the rate of speech.
 - c. *Retention* of audio material is very low.
 - d. With pure audio, a listener finds it difficult to *concentrate* on the message for *more than three or four minutes*.
 - e. A listener must *retain the first words* of a sentence in memory so that he or she can *put them together* with the words spoken later to *make sense out of the sentence*.
 - f. If a listener *doesn't understand* a sentence, his or her mind *will continue to work on it*, missing the next point or *will skip it* to keep up with the audio.
 - g. There are *no paragraphs, heads or spaces* to show changes in thoughts or ideas.
 - h. There are *no visual means* of showing emphasis.
 - i. *Unscripted* spoken dialogue is *inefficient*, can ramble, be disjointed and lack direction.
 3. The video writer must describe for the producer and director what the viewer will see.
 - a. The *picture must be coordinated with the audio* (but not describe what the viewer can see for him or herself).
 - b. *Camera angles, movements, special effects* and contents of shots *necessary to convey the message* must be described. (Composition, angles and effects to improve the video quality are generally the province of the video director.)
 - c. Words, arrows and symbols *keyed in* for emphasis *must be indicated* and directions for when they come in and come out must be included.
 - d. The method of *changing shots* should be specified (*cut, fades, dissolves, wipes*) depending on whether the thoughts are closely linked or there is a change in idea, time or place.
- B. Will you apply principles of education that will increase the student's learning and retention? Will the program:
1. Include *only* material that the student needs to achieve performance objectives?
 2. Present a *limited number of facts* or a *single concept, idea, motive or feeling* to communicate in one video?
 - a. Because the learner must absorb material at the pace of the video, he or she can understand, learn and retain a limited amount.
 - b. Feelings of satisfaction and accomplishment will develop in the viewer rather than discomfort and resentment if he or she can handle and absorb the material without difficulty.
 3. Provide *pacing* that allows student to think and absorb ideas, terms, concepts?
 4. Keep the video *short* to keep student attention high?
 - a. 10-15 minutes is good.
 - b. 20-25 minutes long but o.k. if well done.
 - c. 30 minutes maximum — break up into two or more videos.
 5. Present material in the proper *learning sequence* to improve student understanding? Does it:
 - a. provide prerequisite material first?
 - b. show overall picture before the parts?
 - c. provide a summary at the end?



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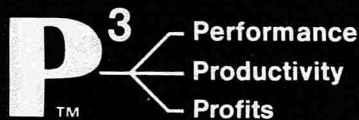
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6. Show *relationships* between learning steps, cause and effect, and reasons why things happen to improve learning?
 7. *Emphasize key points* through audio or video effects and by using one to augment the other to allow student to learn through both senses?
 8. Provide *repetition* to insure that key points are retained? Does it:
 - a. repeat key information in different ways?
 - b. cover important items three times in a program?
 9. Provide for active student *involvement* and interaction by stopping the TV and asking him or her to do something, then providing positive reinforcement?
 - a. Will written or verbal responses be required?
 - b. Will the student get feedback on his responses?
 - c. Will the student have an opportunity to practice and develop skills?
 10. Permit students to *know their goals*, feel they will *benefit* if they achieve it and that they are *progressing* toward the goal as the video develops?
 11. Build in *attention-getting material*, if required, that *does not distract* student?
 12. Use situations and people with which the student will *identify*?
 13. Develop *criteria* for determining whether learning produces desired performance on the job?
 - a. Do not depend on immediate reactions.
 - b. Ask "How can we tell if the change has taken place?"
- C. Will you use standard script format and terminology?
1. Does the heading include the:
 - a. title?
 - b. writer's name?
 - c. date of last revision?
 - d. page number?
 2. Are the video instructions for the director
 - a. on the left side of the page?
 - b. in lower case?
 - c. single-spaced?
 - d. placed opposite the audio that will be heard while the picture is on the screen (or opposite a blank area if there is no audio with that picture)?
 3. Is the audio script for the talent
 - a. on the right side of the page?
 - b. double or triple-spaced?
 - c. typed in upper case?
 4. Have you indicated the types of shots needed?
 - a. two shot — two people in the picture
 - b. three shot — three people in the picture
 - c. cover shot or establishing shot — orients audience to scene or set
 - d. ECU — extreme close-up
 - e. CU — close-up
 - f. MS — medium shot
 - g. LS — long shot (or WS — wide shot)
 5. Have you specified camera and lens movements?
 - a. Pan — turning camera left or right to follow action or show another part of scene
 - b. Tilt — tilting camera up or down
 - c. Zoom in — smooth movement to closer shot (longer lens focal length)
 - d. Zoom out — smooth movement to wider shot (shorter lens focal length)
 - e. Truck left or right — moving camera left or right
 - f. Dolly in or out — moving camera in or out
 6. Have you described video transitions?
 - a. Cut — abrupt change from one shot to the next — used to show simultaneous events, reactions between characters, different

views of a person or scene and to establish the tempo and pacing of the action.

- b. Fade to black and fade in from black — used to show passage of time or change of subject.
- c. Dissolve — picture dissolves into another picture — used to show change of time, place or subject with smooth continuity.
- d. Match dissolve — one picture dissolves into another similar picture to show differences.
- e. Wipes — one picture wipes another from screen.
- f. Patterns — a pattern is used as one picture wipes the other from screen.

7. Will you use these other script terms?

- a. Key — electronically adding words or symbols such as arrows over pictures.
- b. Voice over (VO) — voice over picture (person not on camera).
- c. Split screen — to show two pictures at once using a part of the screen for each picture.

D. Have you applied the skills and techniques for putting the words on paper?

1. Make the writing appropriate for video.

- a. Keep *sentences* direct and simple.
- b. State *thoughts and points clearly* so listeners know where they are going.
- c. Use clear, understandable *words*.
- d. *Don't put too many facts* in your program.
- e. *Pace* information so that the audience can digest it.
- f. Make *audio conversational* by using short sentences, or fragments, informal words, contractions and pauses.
- g. *Coordinate the pictures with the audio*, augmenting, not describing the video. Use the power of video where it can best be used to convey the message.
- h. Use transitions that *tell the viewer when* you are going to *change* the subject, *add* a new point or *summarize* so he or she will know where you are going. This will keep him or her from becoming disoriented. Try to develop logical connections and flow between ideas so that the video progresses steadily, smoothly and logically toward its goal.

Visual transitions include titles, connecting pictures and mechanical transitions such as fades and dissolves.

Audio transitions include music, sounds and narration that ties the story together.

- 2. Write the *first drafts quickly* so you can get your ideas down on paper with good flow and continuity.
- 3. When your first fast draft is complete, go back to *tighten it up*, add description, and simplify the audio. You should also expand the picture descriptions and directions.
- 4. *Read the copy aloud*. Take out tongue twisters, run-together words and things that don't make sense or sound right. The test is whether the message is communicated clearly — not in how it looks in print or whether it follows the rules of grammar or punctuation.
- 5. *Participate in the production*.
 - a. Correct content problems and make sure the message is clear.
 - b. Edit the copy on the spot if the talent has problems or if the intent is not communicated.
 - c. Be observant, and learn how well your script works. This will help you in future scriptwriting.

Robert H. Frye is president of the Learning Shop, an instructional development company in Glenview, Ill. He specializes in training for scientific, engineering, plant and sales people in the manufacturing industry. Prior to starting his own firm, he was training program development manager for United States Gypsum, a company with a fully staffed, in-house video facility. His degree is from the University of Illinois, where he studied engineering and business. He is president of the Chicago chapter of the National Society for Performance and Instruction.

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