



The Top 10 Mistakes Beginner Filmmakers Make

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Oh no – the ‘M’ word. Let’s get into this piece by first recognizing one thing: We all make mistakes. Veteran filmmakers make mistakes. So, to think beginner filmmakers are flawless is pretty laughable. It’s just that none of us feel good about, or like to admit when we’ve goofed, somehow. But, let’s clear the air and get some of these mistakes out in the open. Maybe you’ve lived through some of them, but hopefully, some of the top beginner filmmaker mistakes on here are things you can avoid.

1. Confusing Characters

Filmmaking is about connecting with your audience. Most of the time, we do that through characters in our film. They drive the story and push it forward. If your characters are ‘weak,’ or don’t have clear goals that the audience can relate to, people are going to get very bored, very quickly. Characters can be complex, without being confusing to the viewer.

2. We Can't Hear You

Invest in some solid sound equipment. If you have bad sound, people will notice. And they won't take you seriously. This includes everything from conversations, to hearing footsteps walking. Focus on the details of sound, and people will respond positively.

3. Dead Space

Shot composition is incredibly important. Filling up your space with contrast, focal points, etc. can make a scene look far more professional. Dead space will really make your film look amateur, giving the audience nothing to engage in. Take the time to set up your shot properly, instead of simply focusing on one element of it.

4. Too Many Pauses

Pauses between characters, or to suggest thinking and reflecting can add a lot to a scene. But, too many of these elongated pauses can make a scene drag on, and take the audience out of it. Be selective with these moments of thought and silence. The fewer there are, the more dramatic they can be.

5. I've Seen it Before

How many times in a film have you seen someone going through their morning routine? Or, turning off a lamp before they go to bed, and the scene cuts to black? Cliches are in place for a reason; they're comfortable, but when things like that become too comfortable, they can get boring. Try to look for new ways to tell those stories, and avoid the generic side of things. You want to create something new, not something people can see in a thousand other films.

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6. Lighting Choices

Lighting can really make or break a scene. Not only does it set the mood, but it adds complexity and contrast between characters, objects, background scenery, etc. Simply put, it also allows the viewer to, well, see the scene. Darkness for dramatic effect is one thing, but if your audience is struggling to see the action in the scene, it becomes a distraction. Find a lighting setup that works for you, and play around with it often, depending on each scene.

7. Boring Backgrounds

There is nothing more yawn-worthy than a bunch of white walls in the background of every scene. No big explanation for this one: Paint those walls, or hang some pictures. It'll make a world of difference.

8. Standing Still

How often do you have a conversation where you literally...do nothing? Blocking is incredibly important in film when it comes to mimicking reality. It's simply not realistic for two characters to stand facing each other, and not doing anything else but talking for several minutes. Add in some action to your shots – even conversations, and try to make your blocking setup as realistic as possible. Otherwise, it can take the audience out of the scene, and feel forced.

9. Bad Casting

As a beginner filmmaker, no one expects you to harness Oscar-worthy performances from your actors. However, casting can make a huge difference in your content. You could have a beautifully shot and edited film, only to have it fall flat because of bad acting.

It's not enough to just grab your friends to fill the roles you want to depict. Instead, take the time (and sometimes, make the investment) to actually hire actors who are passionate about what they do. Advertise what you're looking for, check out local college acting classes, etc. The right cast is out there, with just a little bit of searching.

10. Poor Music Choices

There are plenty of royalty-free music sites out there, where you can browse to your heart's content to find the perfect song for your film's fight scene. Or a love scene. Or an intensely-dramatic scene. There are a few problems with this practice: First of all, a lot of this music ends up sounding the same, and doesn't exactly provide a lot of excitement, build, or emotion. Consider this – it's royalty-free for a reason. Second, there's a good chance a lot of it has been used before. Yes, there are some solid royalty-free songs out there. But the best ones may have already been scooped up. You don't want someone watching your film to associate a song you're using with something they've seen before. So, be selective, and take the time to think about your musical choices before tossing them in your film. You may even find that sometimes, a scene doesn't require music, and works better with silence.

Again, keep in mind that everyone slips up now and then. Talking about these mistakes aren't going to make them disappear, and there's a good chance you'll make at least one or two of them in your early filmmaking career. But, utilizing your resources and aiming to avoid these common mistakes can be what sets you apart from other filmmakers, in the long run. So get out there, and mess up!

Have questions about starting out in filmmaking?

I'm always checking on the site for new comments ... so if you need some help, leave one below and I will pop back on and answer as soon as possible!

Comments