

One of the biggest hurdles for would-be moviemakers is the fear that they don't have a worthwhile story to tell. It is the primary aim of this book to obliterate that misconception. Once you've overcome the outmoded notion that masterful storytelling is the domain of an elite few, you will begin to notice how stories fill the moments of your own life. In fact, we are all innate storytellers, constantly practicing our craft as we go about our daily lives.

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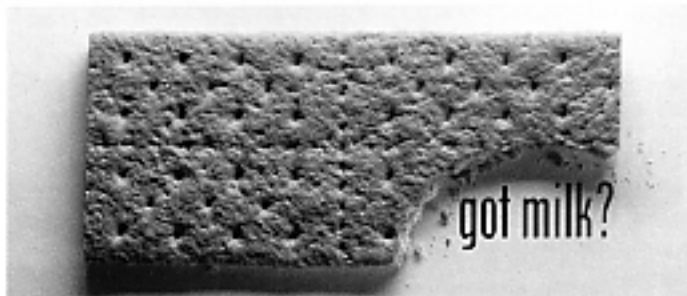
Another common phobia of the budding director is the daunting task of preparation. Many creative individuals simply throw up their hands at the idea of scriptwriting, production planning, and rehearsals. In this chapter we toss aside the antiquated Hollywood-style procedures that promote unnecessary delays—as we do throughout this book. We'll sketch just enough of the basic structure underlying effective storytelling to infuse you with the confidence you need to get started. From that point, you can begin to build a story as you create it, using the power of digital technology to free yourself from the cumbersome conventions of traditional moviemaking.

Stories Are Everywhere

Beyond the conventional storybooks, television dramas, and blockbuster movies, there are thousands of ways in which stories are presented to us every day. In fact, there is a story at the heart of every form of communication. To see it at work, consider the legions of yarnspinners and hucksters who populate your life with little tales—each delivered through greeting cards, jokes and riddles, radio commercials, music videos, instructional pamphlets, and advertising. And you—you're a storyteller too. In fact, you probably use traditional storytelling techniques dozens of times in your daily routine; when you are explaining project delays to your boss, talking your way out of a traffic ticket, or asking a sales clerk for assistance, for example. You will begin with a phrase like, "Well, this is what happened..." and conclude with a declaration like, "So next time, I won't do that again!"

There are stories happening around you all of the time. Capturing them should be your mission. Open your ears to the voices around you, and the stories will come pouring in. Listen to the experiences that people share during meals, at social gatherings, while discussing office politics, or while relating a child's sporting events. Try to absorb these stories without the filter of feasibility; don't worry whether you can tell the story with your skills and resources. Good stories shine through even the most amateur moviemaking efforts.

If you plan to showcase your movies on a Web page or share them with distant friends over email, remember that the local issues you find trivial and mundane can appear colorful and fascinating to viewers who live far away. Those tiresome anecdotes told at the annual family reunion may seem shockingly original when told to a fresh audience. Use your own expert knowledge as the basis for a story; surely there are others who share your passion for a particular hobby or interest.



Billboard Advertising Could there really be a story in a graham cracker? Here, the advertiser sets up a simple dramatic dilemma and the readers fill in the blanks: they imagine a kitchen table, a hungry child just home from school, the child eagerly bites into a favorite snack but forgets to check the fridge for the perfect complement. There in a single photograph is a story—complete with a setting, a character, and a conflict.



Event Posters This turn-of-the-century circus poster skillfully uses vignettes throughout the layout to suggest the various strength-building activities these fighters must endure to prepare for the dangerous duels they will perform before a live audience. The bustling, scattered design helps create a feeling of movement, and the final scene is highlighted in silhouette against a bright circle.

Storytelling Is About Structure

As you listen and look for inspiration in the stories of others, study the ways in which they tell those stories. Storytelling is about structure; it owes its rich and expansive heritage to familiar patterns. So, welcome a story twice told. Don't discard the opportunity to hear jokes you've already heard. Revisit the favorite songs and poems and fables of your youth to determine what has allowed them to exist so long in your memory.

Dramatic Structure

If you've ever taken a literature or writing course, it's likely that you already know everything you need to know about dramatic structure (sometimes called narrative structure). It's a basic formula: As the story begins, the main character's goal or desire is established. This goal is usually thwarted by a conflicting character or action. Tension rises as the character attempts to overcome obstacles and complications that keep the goal out of reach. Eventually, the tension will mount until it produces a climax, a breaking point, and the conflict is somehow resolved.

Much has been written of this basic formula; it appears in the structure of nearly all mythology and folklore of every civilization known to man. No matter how many times human beings see it played out, they are attracted to the tension created—momentarily or at length—before the story's conflict is resolved.

Dramatic structure takes shape in many forms. A playwright must apply this age-old formula across a three-act stage

production. An author must spread the structure across several chapters. A cartoonist presents it in the form of a multi-panel gag. There are many variations and mutations, but the basic dramatic structure has remained unchanged since ancient times. Stories that fail to resolve conflict are as unsatisfying as jokes without punchlines.

No one person or company can hold claim to this structure (in fact, you should feel compelled to follow it, for it is tried and true), so you're free to emulate dramatic storytelling techniques wherever you find them. That's not to say there is no room for creativity in your movies. Stories differ mainly in the sequence of events. What makes a movie unique is the rearrangement of scenes into an interesting or original presentation of the formula. Unlike other forms of communication, movies derive added power from the juxtaposition between the picture and sound and the way in which sequences move effortlessly through time. These are excellent ways to add dimension to a story.

Most often, dramatic structure has a straightforward chronology, a step-by-step procession to the resolution of the story. Sometimes, an inventive moviemaker might choose to jumble the sequence of events to breathe life into the old formula. For instance, flashbacks, premonitions, and time travel are all common devices used to shake up the chronological order of a movie's story. Other moviemakers may embrace a well-worn structure that sets up the audience for an expected ending and suddenly twist events in humorous or surprising ways.



How-To Articles Often, scientific and engineering magazines such as *Popular Mechanics* will spice up an article with a simple dramatic structure. By placing photographs at both ends of this step-by-step procedure for fixing a flat tire, the magazine tells a story. The man has a flat, follows a course of actions, and is back on the road. Just imagine the article without the two photographs, and you'll see how a story structure immediately adds interest to an otherwise dry subject.



Comic Strips The funny pages contain excellent examples of story structure at work in our everyday lives. We read comics in the same way we watch movies—we follow a linear story through a series of dramatic progressions. In this gag from the popular “Nancy” comic strip, the conflict is established immediately. Sluggo is in a boxing match. Several reaction shots of Nancy lead us directly to the dramatic quandary: Will Sluggo outlast this larger and more aggressive foe? Cartoonist Ernie Bushmiller helps the story visually by making both Nancy and the opponent more agitated as the strip progresses. He also breaks several panels into smaller sizes to create a sense of urgency. Notice how the second series of quick punches are drawn smaller still, to suggest even faster flurries of action. Of course, the emotional resolution of the story comes when we realize that Sluggo is not concerned at all.

Title										
ESTABLISHING ACTION	REACTION SHOT		QUICK ACTION	REACTION		QUICK ACTION	FINAL RESOLUTION			
			QUICK ACTION			QUICK ACTION				

Structure at Work A breakdown of this comic strip reveals the storytelling structure used by the cartoonist to heighten the dramatic tension. Studying these simple story forms in the daily newspaper can help you create your own movies.

Getting Your Story Started

If you've already got videotapes lying around the house, each filled with precious footage, you are ready to begin making movies without any further planning. Buried in those hours of recorded events may be enough material to create a perfect story. Perhaps all you need is some attention to structure.

Shoot First, Structure Later

The beauty of iMovie is that you can pick up your camcorder and start recording ideas without a comprehensive plan for every scene, every line of dialogue, and every actor's motion. Just shoot wildly and make it up as you go. If you don't like the footage, you can always erase the tapes and reshoot. For home moviemakers, there's no risk or cost associated with doing this.

Reshoots are virtually unheard of in Hollywood studios. Occasionally, when a movie fails to receive great audience approval at previews and screenings, a gifted director or a savvy producer might deem it necessary to replace or remove footage from a scene—even if this means assembling the actors and tradesmen for a reshoot. Fortunately, DV technology makes reshoots simple and affordable.

You may want to shoot a few scenes, structure them in iMovie, reshoot the ones you don't like, replace them with new footage, and restructure them until you are satisfied with the results. You can shoot, structure, reshoot, and restructure to your heart's content. Master joketellers do this endlessly, always perfecting their setup and delivery, crafting the perfect opening, honing the timing of the punchline, and whittling the joke down to its bare essentials. Just as brevity is the soul of wit, economy is the key to effective storytelling. Only by restructuring your story can you discover more efficient ways of getting your point across.

Circumvent the Script

The most profound change that the digital video revolution has brought to the moviemaking process is the plausibility of making movies without a script. And what a welcome change

it is. Frankly, screenwriting can be daunting for the budding moviemaker, and too many good visual artists have stifled their careers believing they couldn't make this initial step. There have been some wonderful filmmakers who were also wonderful writers, and there have also been some great directors who never relied on a script when filming. Precedents aside, the quickest way to get your story started is to forget about a script.

Historically, the reliance on scripts came about in the silent era of cinema, when Hollywood studios suddenly found the demand for their pictures increasing and needed to produce several films simultaneously. Used largely for continuity, the script became an essential communication tool between the lone producer or director and the hundreds of actors and tradesmen struggling to remember all of the details. Without a script, any delay or miscue on the set could result in escalating costs. Expensive film stock could be wasted or damaged. Union craftsmen might demand overtime pay. Actors on loan from other studios might have to return to other productions. Scripts helped filmmakers avoid delays, saving the studios money.

These conditions no longer apply. Yet today, independent filmmakers follow the traditions of the past almost blindly, spending a great deal of time on scripts and screenplays. Ironically, they often find that much of their script is tossed out when the constraints of shooting on location force them to make last-minute compromises.

Scripts are not altogether useless; they can be helpful in planning long projects, or those which require careful stunts or special effects. Scripts are a great way for writers to articulate a vision to the person who will ultimately direct the movie. They are ideal for big corporations that must pass an idea around its bureaucratic decision mill. But scripts are hardly a necessity for a one-person production. If you are the only writer/producer/director/soundman/technician/editor who will be working on your movie, you are the only one who can determine if a script is necessary.



CLIP ART

TO ASSIST YOUR STORYBOARDING EFFORTS, A COLLECTION OF LINE DRAWINGS LIKE THE ONES USED IN THE TUTORIALS ARE AVAILABLE FOR FREE DOWNLOAD ON THE MAKING iMOVIES WEB SITE AT www.makingimovies.com



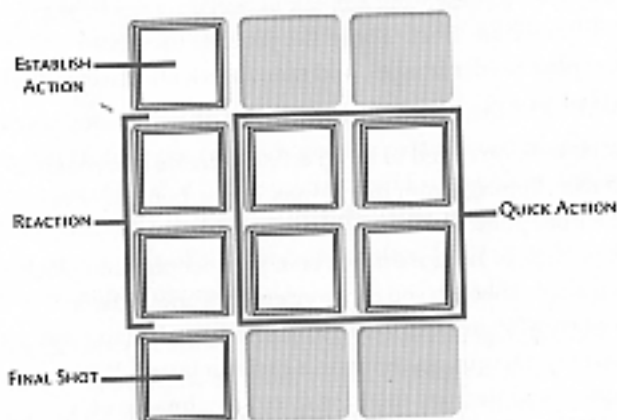
Using iMovie to Structure Stories

The iMovie interface is ideal for organizing your footage in intuitive ways. You can easily import still images, Web graphics, or scanned drawings to supplement any missing footage while you develop the structure for your stories.

The Clip Shelf

Much like a storyboard mounted on a wall, the Clip Shelf in iMovie provides an ideal workspace for arranging your picture elements into a story structure. You can drag video clips and imported images from place to place in the Clip Shelf until you find an order that works best for telling your story.

Imagine you have previously recorded a grandparent reading a book to a child. You captured the footage in iMovie and placed it in the Clip Shelf, but you may need additional footage to complete your story. You can scan pictures from the book, import them into iMovie, and spread them throughout the footage to help illustrate the story. Or maybe you'd like to show old family photographs as the grandparent reads. This kind of experimentation is fast and flexible when you use the iMovie software.



Structuring Clips By dragging video clips and imported images around the empty spaces and rows of iMovie's Clip Shelf, you can discover which sequence works best for telling your story.

LESSON: BUILDING STORYBOARDS IN iMOVIE

To demonstrate ways in which iMovie can help you structure your stories and explore ideas for dialogue, narration, and sound effects, the Building Storyboards project uses images scanned directly from an actual storyboard. A sample of the finished movie, *Flower.mov*, can be found in the QuickTime Gallery folder on the DVD-ROM disc.

To begin this lesson, launch the iMovie application and open the project called *Storyboard Lesson*.

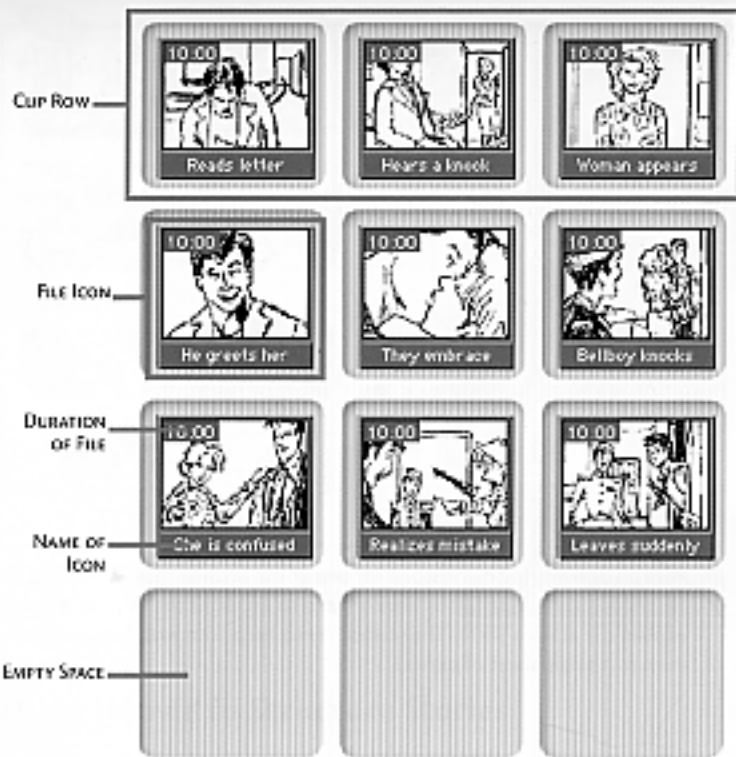
This sample storyboard, developed for one of the tutorial movies used in this book, was created to fit on a single sheet of paper. When creating storyboards, highlight the main scenes or shots and explain the actions within the scenes in text below each illustration.



Sample Storyboard Developed for one of the tutorial movies used in this book, these illustrations were created to highlight the main shots and explain the actions within the scenes. Try to keep your storyboards short, even to a single sheet of paper.

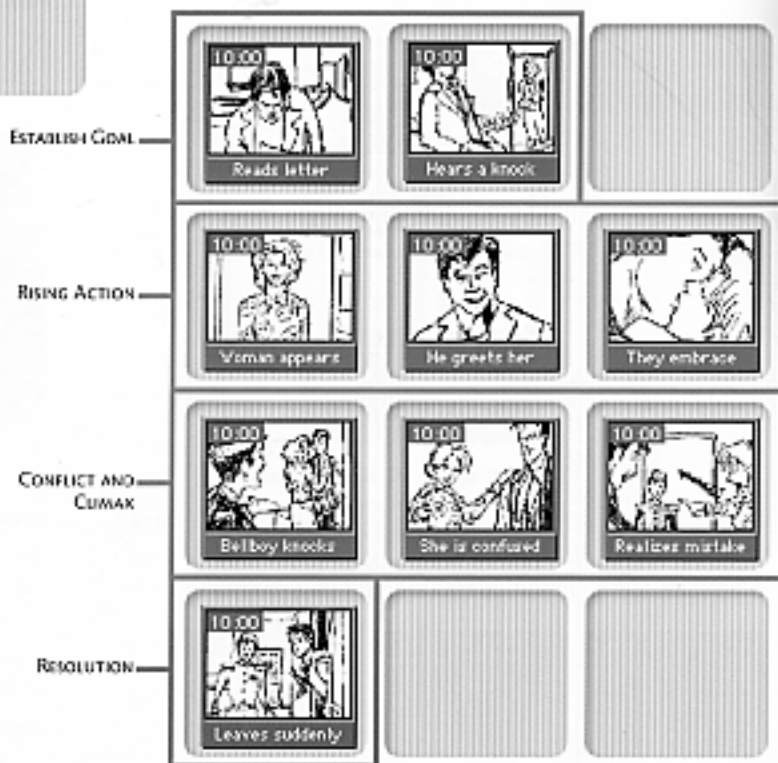


- 1 Choose **Open Project** from the File Menu.
- 2 Locate the **Building Storyboards** folder and select the **Storyboard Lesson** project.



3 With the Storyboard Lesson project now open, iMovie will display nine icons in the Clip Shelf. When you select any icon by clicking it, a larger image of the file will appear in the Preview Window.

4 Icons can be dragged to any empty space in the Clip Shelf. To reorder the icons, select each one individually and drag it to a new location.



TIP

ACCEPTABLE FILE FORMATS
 iMOVIE WILL IMPORT GRAPHIC FILES ONLY IN JPEG, GIF, PICT, BMP, OR ADOBE PHOTOSHOP FORMATS. YOU CANNOT IMPORT QUICKTIME MOVIES OR VECTOR-BASED GRAPHICS SUCH AS ADOBE ILLUSTRATOR FILES.



HIGHLIGHT INDICATES SELECTION

- ◀ **5** To duplicate a clip, drag your cursor over the icon and click once to select it. A yellow highlight will appear around the edges of your clip. The image will also appear in the larger Preview Window.

Edit	
Undo Move	⌘Z
Can't Redo	⇧⌘Z
Cut	⌘X
Copy	⌘C
Paste	⌘V
Clear	
Crop	⌘K
Split Clip at Playhead	⌘T
Select All	⌘A
Select None	⌘D
Preferences...	

- ◀ **6** Choose Copy from the Edit menu. (The keyboard shortcut for this command is Command-C.)

Edit	
Undo Move	⌘Z
Can't Redo	⇧⌘Z
Cut	⌘X
Copy	⌘C
Paste	⌘V
Clear	
Crop	⌘K
Split Clip at Playhead	⌘T
Select All	⌘A
Select None	⌘D
Preferences...	

- ◀ **7** Next, choose Paste from the Edit menu. (The keyboard shortcut for this command is Command-V.)



- ◀ **8** By placing your cursor over the name of an icon and clicking, you will highlight the text below it. Once highlighted, the text can be edited by simply typing a new name.

CREATING IMAGES FOR IMPORT INTO iMOVIE

Most of the images used in this lesson were traced from comic book illustrations and magazine photographs. If you are not accustomed to drawing or tracing, you can "borrow" GIF or JPEG images from the Internet by saving them from your Web browser onto your hard disk.

(Of course, many of the images on the Web are copyrighted, so you'll want to use them only as placeholders.)

When you are scanning or creating storyboard illustrations in an image-manipulation program such as Adobe Photoshop, you'll want to use

an image size of 640 x 480, for they will appear in the iMovie Preview Window and Clip Shelf as full images and icons. When you import photos or illustrations that are smaller than that size, they'll appear with a black border surrounding their edges.

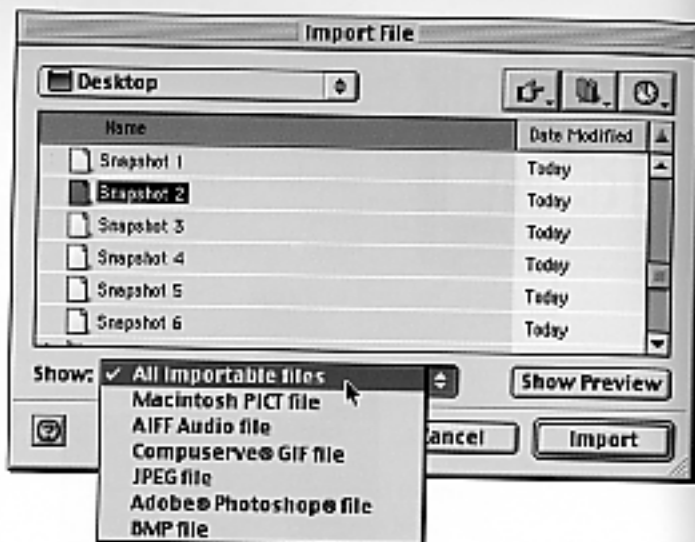


LESSON: IMPORTING PICT AND JPEG IMAGES

You can add files to the Clip Shelf by importing graphic files in a number of popular file formats. This is an excellent way to enhance your storyboards as you experiment with story structure.



- ▶ **1** With the Storyboard Lesson still open, choose Import File from the File menu.



- ▶ **2** A dialog box will appear, prompting you to select the file you wish to import. Select the file called Drawing 10.jpg from the Building Storyboards folder.

- ▶ **3** Drag the icon to the appropriate position on the Clip Shelf and change its name to reflect the story.



Showing and Telling

Movies have virtually all the advantages of other mediums. Like a great painting or stage show, they can dazzle the eyes. Like a radio program or a symphony, they can spark the imagination with sound. Best of all, movies can do all of these things at once. Where visuals add mood, narration can add tone. Mood and tone together are a potent combination, so it's important to think about both sound and pictures when developing a story.

In fact, the best cinematic moments are those that skillfully combine beautiful imagery with a perfect auditory complement. For example, "trigger" actions in movies—the shot of a gun, a woman's scream—are best punctuated with a strikingly clear picture accompanied by a startling sound effect.

There are several effective ways to mix visual action and narration to enhance your stories. Typically, it is better to "show" primary action visually and secondary story points with sound. Dialogue is best used to illustrate parts of the story that would disrupt the narrative if they were shown visually. For example, if two men are leaving for a party, and they expect to meet a woman there, it is more effective to explain in dialogue that the woman is on the way than to cut to footage showing the woman preparing for the event, hailing a cab, stuck in traffic, and so on. Overall, sound and visual information should be unified by a driving action—the two men heading to the event—which keeps the story progressing through time.

Movies are more than just simultaneous sound and pictures. What makes them unique is their ability to depict the events of characters as they march toward a goal. This should be your guiding principle in storytelling.



- ▲ **4** You might want to use the text beneath the icons to suggest a line of dialogue in your storyboards. Keep your text short; clip icons can display names of only 10 to 26 characters in length.

5 To keep your revisions, choose Save from the File menu.



PRINTING THE CLIP SHELF

YOU MAY WANT TO PRINT THE CLIP SHELF AREA OF THE MONITOR SCREEN TO USE AS A REFERENCE DURING SHOOTING. YOU CAN DO THIS BY TYPING COMMAND-SHIFT-4 ON YOUR KEYBOARD. A CROSSHAIR CURSOR WILL APPEAR. DRAG THE CROSSHAIR TO DEFINE WHICH PART OF THE SCREEN YOU WANT TO CAPTURE AND LET GO. A "PICTURE" FILE WILL BE SAVED TO YOUR HARD DRIVE. LOCATE IT AND PRINT IT USING THE SIMPLETEXT APPLICATION, WHICH COMES PRE-INSTALLED ON YOUR iMAC COMPUTER.