



The Situation Report

“Honest Reporting”

WALTER MURCH’S “RULE OF SIX” ALSO APPLIES IN SCREENWRITING

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In post-production, Walter Murch’s “Rule of Six” ensures that every scene in every movie communicates with the audience. Surprisingly enough, it all starts with the screenplay because the three most important traits of a good cut, emotion, story, and rhythm, are also necessary components into writing a selling screenplay. In theory, writers should follow the rule of six because its core elements, emotion, story, and rhythm, serve as important elements in creating dynamic characters and advancing a story’s plot. Therefore, Walter Murch’s “Rule of Six” is an essential foundation for screenwriters.

In order for a movie to be interesting, emotion must be at the heart of the story because we want the audience to perceive a particular feeling. Also, emotional content enables everyone to understand both the story and the character at the same time. As a screenwriter, “you are considering a range of...[words]...in the film...that [give] the right emotion and [move] the story

forward.” (Murch 19). In an editor’s terms, each and every cut emphasizes emotion because it reveals something special within the story. Therefore, emotion is the most essential component in the “Rule of Six” since it reveals something special about the film and its main character. With that, this challenges screenwriters to develop dynamic characters and more complex plot lines to make the film more interesting.

If emotion reveals something special within the story, then the plot line must follow the “Rule of Six” because every word and every shot heading all come together in one way or another. The challenge for screenwriters is to evaluate the words on the page and visualize them in the finished film. By writing two or three drafts, writers can visualize the words on the page as action on the screen and camera point of view. “Every scene, every piece of information, no matter how seemingly small, reveals something about the story....” (Field 110). To make it easier on in the editing room, screenwriters should write short, declarative sentences and leave enough breathing room to create a rhythmic flow in the story.

If story structure weren’t enough, then a rhythmic flow is just as necessary to create an emotional attachment between the story and its main character. Just like shot angles and points of view, the words on the page must flow in unison to propel the story towards the climax. With that, integration is necessary if every word portrays different points of view, contributing to character and story development. In “Essentials of Screenwriting,” UCLA Professor Richard Walter calls integration as “screenwriting’s great equalizer...” (Walter 14) because “The

integrated screenplay is one whose every aspect...(1) [advances] plot and (2) [expands] character.” (Walter 14). By advancing the plot and expanding a character’s point of view, screenwriters create rhythmic flow within the story.

Given the significance of Walter Murch’s “Rule of Six,” its three main components, emotion, story, and rhythm, all come together into writing a selling screenplay. By emphasizing story structure and character development, writers are able to integrate emotion and rhythm into screenplays. This makes it easier for the production team to translate the words on the page into actions on the screen. Once the picture makes it into the finished film, audiences are touched and inspired by the movie because the emotional content is embedded in the story itself. “The Blind Side” (2009) is a perfect example of this. By embracing emotion, story, and rhythm, the movie emphasized character development as a method to advance the story.

In the ever competitive field of film and television production, Walter Murch’s “Rule of Six,” serves its place in screenwriting by underscoring emotion, story, and rhythm.

References

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