Cutting film production costs

Rewriting your scene in a cost-effective way

by Leslie Tabuteau

my pocket guide FILM, TV & MEDIA

Introduction

You have finished your script and sent it to a few professional readers. The feedback is great but a common concern is that it might be expensive to shoot.

But what is meant by an expensive script to shoot? Or an expensive scene? How can you identify them?

Unfortunately at this stage of your project, you don't yet have a full production report established by a Line Producer and/or an Assistant Director, listing all the expensive scenes of your script.

This guide will help you to identify those expensive scenes and suggest ways to rewrite them in a cost-effective way whilst preserving the essence of each scene of your script.

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Constraints vs creativity

As a screenwriter, you always need to give free rein to your imagination. It's important to write without any form of censorship or constraints. You must only be guided by the desire to deliver an engaging and well-structured story with great characters.

Once this is done, then there is the inevitable second phase of reflection. This consists of simplifying certain expensive scenes of your script to reduce the cost of production in order to match a budget threshold, whether your script has been optioned or not.

Many writers fight against this as a form of constraint against your creativity. But you'll be surprised to realise how it can actually help to improve many scenes by getting you to focus on the story. It's often substance over style that makes a scene shine.

It's like a painter, confronted with a canvas of limited size, yet using imagination to create a great work of art. Ever see the Mona Lisa at the Louvre? You'd be surprised at how small it is. Yet, it's certainly a masterpiece.

What is an expensive scene?

An historic film whose story takes place in the 18th century or post-WWII is going to be expensive. A film with a lot of actions, VFX, stunts is going to be very expensive too.

On a low-budget film, some basic scenes which look easy to shoot on the page, in reality may be more difficult and time consuming than originally anticipated, hence too expensive for the restricted budget.