Steps to creating a
Short film

Step 1

Creating the Script and Storyboard

1. **Think of an idea for a short film.**

Think of a short story that you want to tell in under 5 minutes. Focus on one core idea so that the short story isn't overly complicated. Consider what kind of tone you want for the film and whether it will be a comedy, drama, or experimental movie.

   - Think of an interesting event in your own life and use it for inspiration for your script.
   - Consider the theme that was given to you in order to create the script.
   - If you are working on a project involving a group of students, you should ask everybody for ideas regarding the film.
   - Try to incorporate in the script as many ideas that follow the theme given as you can.

The Spoon,
by Pyotr Gustillo

SCENE 1 EXT - SUBURB STREET

A child is playing with a ball in slow motion.
A man walks past the child, in normal speed
looking at the ball as it falls on the grass.

wikiHow to Make a Short Film

2. **Write a short script.**

Short films should have a beginning, middle and end. A five-minute film will only be about 3-4 pages long. If you are in a hurry you can develop the script while you shoot the scenes, and skip the part where you write it down on paper. Try to keep it simple and easy to explain to the actors and the videographer.

In a five-minute film you should have maximum 10 scenes to shoot, so you will divide the script according to the scenes.

Try to designate the roles for every member of your team. One should be the videographer, one will take charge in directing the shooting and the rest will be the actors that will play the parts from your script.

DO keep writing down any new ideas! Just because you've started your script doesn't mean any new ideas you have are worthless. Also, do not worry if you still have 'holes' in your story when you come to writing your script. The more you write, the more the story develops. Eventually you will find the 'holes' will have filled themselves.

DO try and be organised. The initial stages of converting your ideas into the basis for a script can seem a little daunting. This is complicated further when you keep getting new ideas as you are half-way through writing about a first one. Don't panic. Keep a separate document handy and the moment you get a new idea write it down as quickly and as concisely as you can before turning you attention back to your original. Once it is finished, look back to your new idea and consider developing it further.

DON'T try and develop too many ideas at once. Sometimes it's better to wait a while before going back to an idea to develop it further. Don't work yourself too hard; tackle any new ideas with a fresh attitude. Work further on your ideas because you want to, not because you feel you need to.

Share your script revisions with people you trust to give you an honest opinion. Be able to take criticism, but also use that to help improve your script. Sharing your script in this way can often help you get a fresh perspective and help you get around an obstacle you may have hit.

4. Draw a storyboard.

A storyboard is a series of pictures that outline what will happen in each scene. These pictures don't need to be detailed or artistic, but clear enough so that you get a good idea of what each scene will look like and what will happen in it. Creating a storyboard before you start filming will also help you stay on task during the shoot and will save time from having to think of things on the go.

If you aren't artistic, you can use stick figures to represent the actors and simple shapes to represent the elements in the scene.

Don't worry if you can't draw too well: The point of storyboarding is to communicate your vision of the film to a crew who will be working under your direction. For them to understand what you're trying to achieve is imperative. This saves a lot of communication problems when you eventually come to film on set, making your life as director a lot easier.

The drawings need not be large, you can comfortably fit 4-6 on a page of A4 paper. Leave space under each drawing box to write down details of the shot, for example details of location, and a brief description of the action that is occurring.

REMEMBER: Your storyboards are drawn sequentially. They are a rough guide to how the film should look after you complete post-production.

Step 2

Completing Pre-production

1. Scout for locations.

Find locations to match the script. If the shooting is happening outdoors, find a safe and legal place to film, quiet places, easy to reach and the most important thing is that the place should be empty or there should be few person in the area. If your script is going to film indoors you should ask small businesses and shops if you can use their locations for a short film, or you may be able to use your own apartment or house. If the shoot is happening outdoors, find a safe and legal place to film. Getting permits to shoot on private or public property can sometimes be very expensive.

Filming which occurs at a place not constructed specifically for the production is said to be 'on location'. This is usually outdoors, at a well-known location, or a real place which suffices.

Don't just go to one location; travel around to as many as possible. Keep in mind these key aspects:

Filming in any location will require plenty of space for cast & crew, as well as moderately easy accessibility for all the camera/sound & lighting equipment.

Unless you have many batteries, you will want to limit outdoor filming as much as possible. If you are running the camera on batteries you only have a certain amount of power to get the shots you need. This often leads to shots being rushed or not finished properly, which brings down the overall quality of the work.

When scouting for locations, take a digital camera with you. Take as many pictures as you can and log the photos for each location. To save time, this can be done simply by writing the place name on a piece of paper and having it in the first shot of that location.

For example, if a film takes place in a coffee shop, one has to decide whether to film in an actual coffee shop, which would require permission from the owners, or to mimic a coffee shop environment. If the film takes place outdoors, one needs to find a safe, legal location to film. If it takes place indoors, one needs to find an indoor spot where filming will not be interrupted.

2. Get actors for the movie.

Perhaps the most difficult part of pre-production is finding the perfect face for your movie. A little word of advice, use friends and family sparingly! Unless of course they have a STRONG interest in acting or film, a person saying they can act is one thing, but it can be a harsh surprise if you have never been on a set before. Look for actors, post ads online on your social networks like Twitter and Facebook, but also post on sites like Craigslist where there are numerous actors looking for gigs. There are also hundreds of castings sites out there, and many that focus only in your city and surroundings, you'd be surprised how many actors are willing to act for free just to enrich their portfolio. Make sure your main actors are professional and understand their involvement and commitment in the movie; the last thing you need is your main actor calling you on day 2 of shooting and saying "Yea I have plans today sorry can't make it" or my favorite one: "yea so I didn't think it was going to be this hard, I don't feel like doing it anymore". True story.

Be prepared for the auditions. Avoid having actors come in your parents' basement, the level of professionalism and credibility of your film starts here. You need to make it seem like your studio or, if not, at least make it seem like your trying. Find a little studio or office, ask a friend, or your school. Explain them your film, and ask them to read your script, but talk to them in depth about their character and their development. Set up a camera with a spot light or two, and have them recite a few lines from the script.

3. **Recruit a crew.**

A crew will help you on the various aspects of shooting a short film like cinematography, production, lighting, editing, and sound. Depending on your budget, you may be able to hire professionals or you may have fill some of the roles yourself.

If you don't have a budget, ask friends who are interested in filmmaking if they would be interested in working on the movie for free.

4. **Purchase or rent filming equipment.**

To shoot a short film, you'll need a camera, lights, and something to record audio. Select filming equipment that meets your needs and your budget. If you're on a small budget, you can usually find a digital camera at reasonable prices or you can even use the camera on your phone. If you have a larger budget, you can opt to get a more expensive DSLR camera, which can cost thousands of euros.

If you want to take steady shots, you should purchase a tripod.

If you're shooting during the day, you can try to use sunlight for your lighting source. If shooting inside, you'll need to get light clamps and flood lights.

For sound, you can get a more expensive boom mic or you can opt for cheaper external audio recorders or small wireless mics.

The external mics on many cameras aren't great for picking up actor's dialogue.

Shooting the video

1.   Schedule the shooting and rehearse the scenes.

Once the actors get onto the set, *have them go through a basic reading of the script*. Then, have the actors act out the scene. As they go through the scene, tell the actors what you want them to do, how to interact with the environment, and let them know of any modifications that you want to see in their acting.

This process is known as blocking the scene.

The script from which a movie is made contains scenes placed in the order of filming. It usually contains technical notes and/or drawings. A shooting script is essentially a script that breaks the film into scenes, placed in sequence as they are to be filmed on set/location.

These can include any sketches or photographs of locations, include ideas you may wish to film in as well as scene breakdowns, types of shot (i.e. A tracking shot) and technical drawings.

Your schedule is to accompany your shooting script.

A schedule gives you control over the day-to-day shooting of the film. You can allocate how much time you feel is needed for each shot, by looking at your storyboards and shooting script simultaneously.

Scheduling will certainly test your patience. You will need to make countless calls and send countless e-mails to make sure all your cast and crew are available on the days you want to shoot. If one person can't make it, then you will need to re-organise the whole day again.

It is worthwhile over-estimating for your first shoot until you get to grips with how long different tasks take (i.e. setting up lighting, moving cameras etc.)

Give yourself more time than you need.

2. **Dress the actors in their costumes.**

If the role requires a certain type of clothing or makeup, you'll want to make sure that your actors are in character before you start shooting. After you rehearse the scene, give your actors the clothes or costumes that they need to wear.

3. **Film scenes in the movie.**

The storyboard that you created earlier will give you a shot list. You don't need to shoot the movie in chronological order, instead, shoot whatever scenes are the easiest to do. Work around actor's schedules and take advantage of days when your filming location is free for filming. If you have access to a certain location, try to film as many scenes as you can while you're there.

This will save you time and prevent you from having to revisit shoot locations. The scenes can be put into chronological order during post-production.
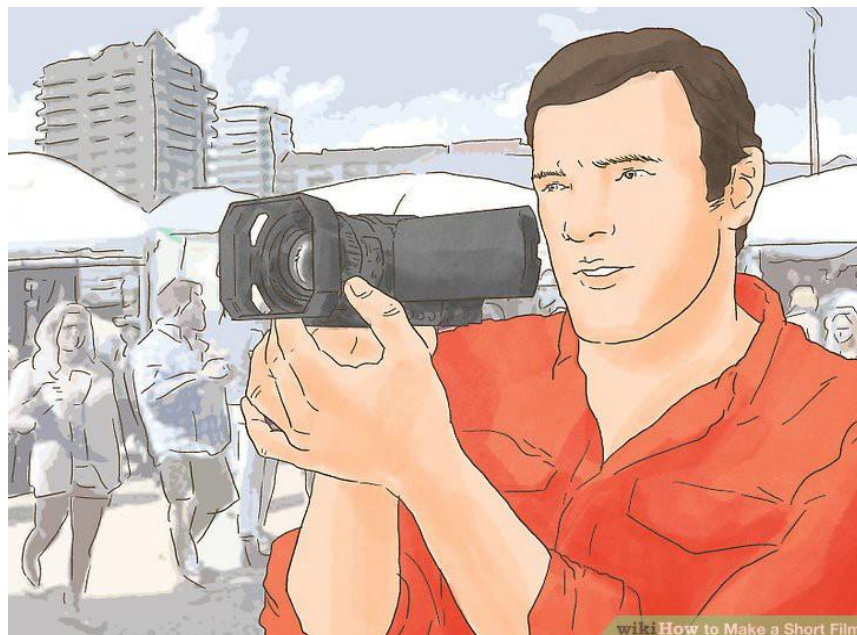
4. **Focus on visuals.**

Because your film is short, the narrative will sometimes matter less than the visuals that you are showing the audience. *Choose locations that are visually impressive* and make sure that the lighting complements the overall scene. Also, you'll want to make sure that the frame is in focus and that there's nothing obstructing or interfering with the shot.
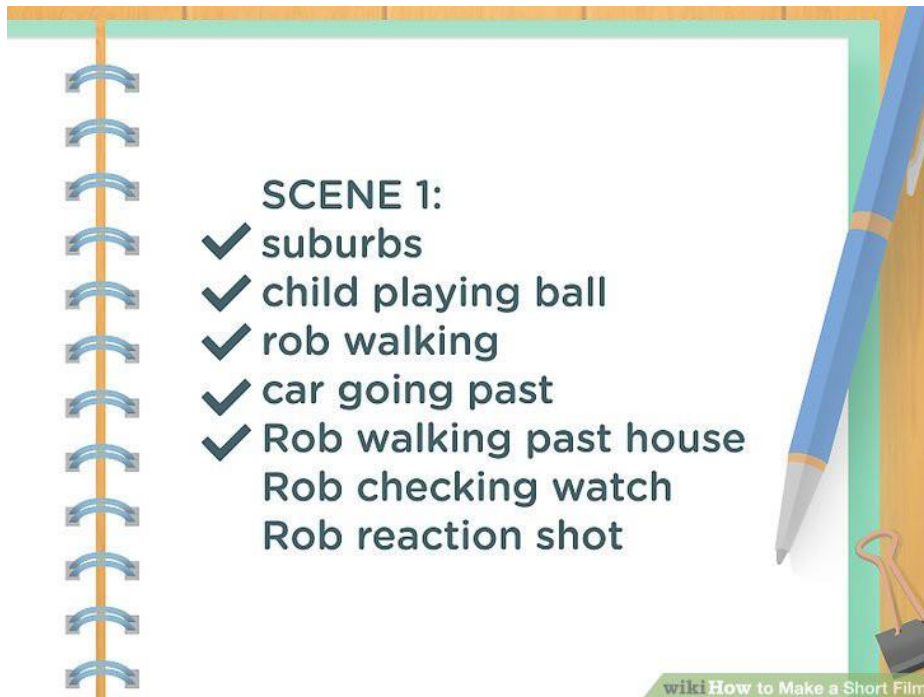

5. Thank your cast and crew once shooting has finished. Once you've filmed all of the scenes in your storyboard, you can send the film to post-production for editing. Thank everyone who worked on the film and let them know that you'll contact them once the film is finished.

Editing the movie

1. **Upload the film to movie editing software.**

Upload the video files into video editing software like Avid, Final Cut Pro, or Windows Movie Maker. Organize each of the scenes into bins or folders so that you have access to the video files quickly. This will help keep you organized while you work. Once the files are transferred and organized, you can start cutting them up and editing them.

2. Do a rough cut of the scenes.

Start putting the shots in chronological order. Review them as you go along and check for continuity and flow. During the rough cut, you'll want to make sure that the story makes sense.

3. Add audio.

Add the audio tracks of the actor's dialogue and match it up with the video. You'll also want to take this time to add any music or sound euects that you want in the movie.

4. Analyze and tighten up the scenes.

Once you have a decent cut of the film, review it with the producer and other editors. Take people's feedback and criticism and then go back and re-edit the film. Concentrate on flow and pacing during the second edit.

Implement editing techniques like fades to transition scenes.

If a scene feels like it's staggering or sluggish, you can tighten up the dialogue by adding cuts in between actor dialogue.
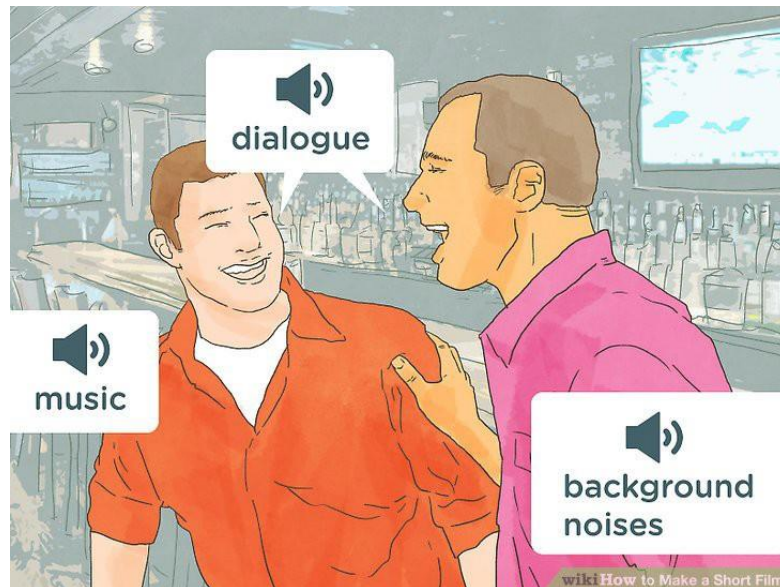
5. Review the film and create a final cut.

After you've tightened up the movie, review the movie one last time with everybody involved in the production, editors, and directors. Get final input on any details that need to be added or altered or issues that may have occurred during editing. Once all of the people producing the film agree on the final product, you can start showing your short film to people.