

TREATMENT

In the treatment section of the MPB proposal we ask you to communicate your passion and to explain how you envision translating your story from page to screen - taking into account structure, theme, style, format, voice and point-of-view. What do these words really mean? Here, members of the programming staff offer notes on writing an effective treatment. Remember, these are only suggestions; your treatment will undoubtedly be unique - tailored to the specific demands of your story.

PASSION

When writing the treatment, don't be afraid to infuse your words with passion. Your excitement and sense of urgency should be contagious.

STRUCTURE

Structure determines how the story will unfold dramatically, how it will build - moving through moments of tension and conflict - from beginning to middle to end. Structure is the road a reader takes through the dramatic terrain of the program.

One obvious structural framework is chronology - for example, following a character through an event in their life from start, through transformative changes, to finish. But there are as many possible structures as there are stories. The key is to find the one that fits, so that the reader/viewer is drawn in, compelled to stay, to discover the outcome. If you don't know the outcome of your story, you can help the person evaluating your treatment by speculating a little, spelling out possible twists, turns and endings. Tell us what the overall story is, what happens in the course of a half hour or an hour, what we will have learned by the end that we didn't know at the beginning. Try describing a key dramatic moment in detail, and locate it in the context of the whole story, so we get a sense of the program's emotional trajectory.

THEME

Theme is what your story is really about - the underlying point your story is making. While your program tells a specific story rooted in a particular time and place, it no doubt addresses an overarching societal issue or universal human concern. Edgar Allen Poe's words on the theory of composition are apt here:

A skilful literary artist has constructed a tale. If wise, he has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents; but having conceived, with deliberate care, a certain unique or single *effect* to be wrought out, he then invents such incidents — he then combines such events as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his very initial sentence tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design. And by such means, with such care and skill, a picture is at length painted which leaves in the mind of him who contemplates it with a kindred art, a sense of the fullest satisfaction. The idea of the tale has been presented unblemished, because undisturbed; and this is an end unattainable by the novel. Undue brevity is just as exceptionable here as in the poem; but undue length is yet more to be avoided.

STYLE

Style refers to a variety of tools one can mobilize to give the story a distinctive quality,

feel, look, or tone. Style can be articulated through camera work, editing, sound design, score, lighting, production design, interviewing technique, etc. Every stylistic choice becomes a signifier, telling the viewer something important about the story.

We encourage you to be specific when describing why and how you will engage stylistic tools. For example, what framing, composition, lighting or camera angle choices best serve the story? What editing strategies will accomplish the desired pace and rhythm? What kind of sound effects and score will you employ? Where will interviews take place and what interviewing method is most appropriate? If you are working with actors, what directing style will you use? What is your vision for the production design? If you are relying on still photographs or archival footage, how will you integrate them into the narrative? Use **concrete examples** to explain how style will illuminate the subject matter and theme. Be economical and deliberate.

Reading the treatment, we should be able to visualize your program and get a sense of how it will make us feel as we watch.

FORMAT: LENGTH AND SHOOTING FORMAT

To conform to standard public television broadcast lengths, your program must be either 26:40 or 56:40 minutes. Make it clear why the story is best told in either the half-hour or one-hour format.

Regarding the shooting format, explain why a particular format - for example, 16mm, digital video or beta - facilitates the stylistic and structural demands of the piece.

VOICE AND POINT-OF-VIEW

"Voice" can be a many-layered thing. When considering voice, we have to ask, Who is the storyteller and whose story is being told? The answers to these questions determine not only the viewer's sense of intimacy with the characters, but the program's point-of-view. In a truly personal story, the teller and subject are one and the same. When a maker represents another character or community, it is useful to be conscious of the ways storytelling can mediate the voice of the subject or main character.

SYNOPSIS AS DISTINCT FROM TREATMENT

Like a thumbnail sketch or abstract, a synopsis is a condensed statement outlining the subject of the program and the story the program will tell. The synopsis might also briefly summarize the background of the program, that is, the larger context out of which the story emerged. Save the specific description - how you plan to tell this story - for the treatment.