

### **FM3 Step Outline Guidance Structure**

From WJEC INSET Autumn 2008

**Documentary Step Outline** – this builds directly on the skills learned through the Extended Step Outline in the FM1 Unit through the development of a step outline.

Candidates should utilise an industry standard approach to creating a step outline for a 30-minute documentary that is intended to be broadcast on a suitable television channel or as a DVD ‘extra’. The step outline should ‘walk’ the reader through the proposed documentary, and should be approximately 1800 words long.

For this option it is essential that the documentary idea arises from the area of investigation from the small-scale research project. It does not have to have a direct correlation and can be loosely (though clearly) connected.

A Documentary Maker’s role is essentially about communicating an issue or concept to an audience in order to raise their awareness and offer them

information with which they can engage with the viewpoint being expressed.

There are a variety of documentary approaches that can be adopted and these can be explored in FM4.

In all documentary making there are two key elements that the maker needs to keep at the forefront of their mind:

- the audience – their level of existing knowledge and interest in the subject
- the form or style being adopted and its relationship to the subject.

These two elements should shape every content and stylistic decision the documentary maker makes, and as such are primary to the success of the documentary.

Once the subject and the audience are identified, the documentary maker begins ordering their thoughts through a planning system called a step-outline. This is a brief note-form activity that sketches out the structure of the documentary sequence by sequence, and is often written out on small 6"x4" cards so that they can be physically laid out in a line and then rearranged to make the finished piece flow appropriately.

A difficulty that novices have with such an activity is connected to the belief that documentary is either 'truth' or at best should be unmediated. This belief means it is impossible to sketch out what would be in an interview until after the interview has happened, and so impossible to insert such an interview into a relationship with sequences either side of it.

However, documentary is like any other form of filmmaking – it is a construct. As a construct it is fairly easy to work out what a potential response in an interview will be based on who is being interviewed and what questions are asked. It is a safe bet that the Conservative Party Leader, David Cameron, would answer in the negative if asked if he believes in nationalisation. Similarly, it is a safe bet that a Catholic Priest will speak out against euthanasia. It is not only possible to estimate the kind of material an interview is likely to contain, but also equally possible to ask the questions that will elicit such desired responses.

Thus, in accepting documentary as a construct the planning of this construct becomes possible.

A typical step-outline may run like this one for *Things Can Only Get Better – British Film after the Tories*:

<b>Scene No</b>	1	<b>Page No</b>	1
<b>Slugline</b>	Int. Studio. Day		
<b>Endpoint of last scene</b>	n/a		
<b>Characters in scene</b>	Narrator + key politicians on rear screen footage of Labour's May 1 <sup>st</sup> Election Victory		
<b>Point of scene</b>	To show the jubilation at the defeat of the Tories and to give a context for the Narrator's discussion of the state of UK Film		
<b>Conflict</b>	Tension between scenes of jubilation and expectation and audience's knowledge of subsequent history		
<b>Ending / central question</b>	Can things only get better for British Film		
<b>Scene description (without dialogue)</b>			
Narrator sits in front of rear-projection of news footage from Labour's landslide victory over the Tory government. Speaks directly to camera			

<b>Scene No</b>	2	<b>Page No</b>	2
<b>Slugline</b>	Int. Film Council Offices. Day		
<b>Endpoint of last scene</b>	Narrator introduces Wilf Stephenson		
<b>Characters in scene</b>	Wilf Stephenson		
<b>Point of scene</b>	For ex head of BFI to give a view of the position of British Film at the end of the period of Conservative government		
<b>Conflict</b>	Bitterness at wasted years		
<b>Ending / central question</b>	What would the incoming government do for British Film?		
<b>Scene description (without dialogue)</b>			
Wilf Stephenson sits in a darkened office with film paraphernalia (Steenbeck, posters, etc.) behind him. He is suited and speaks confidently including questions in his answers.			

You should be able to see that there is a formulaic approach to noting down the scenes in a step outline, and you should also see that this form allows for each scene to be interchangeable. The scenes are described briefly as they are designed to sketch out the documentary, not to be the definitive script for it. Accordingly only key information is recorded, and there is a succinct nature to the step outline's construction.

Extracted from: Gaffney, F et al. *A2 Film Studies: The Essential Introduction* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed) (Routledge due for publication April 2009)