



# THE BACK DOOR TO HOLLYWOOD



## Case Studies



SIGNATURE BETH  
PRODUCTIONS



# THE BACK DOOR TO HOLLYWOOD

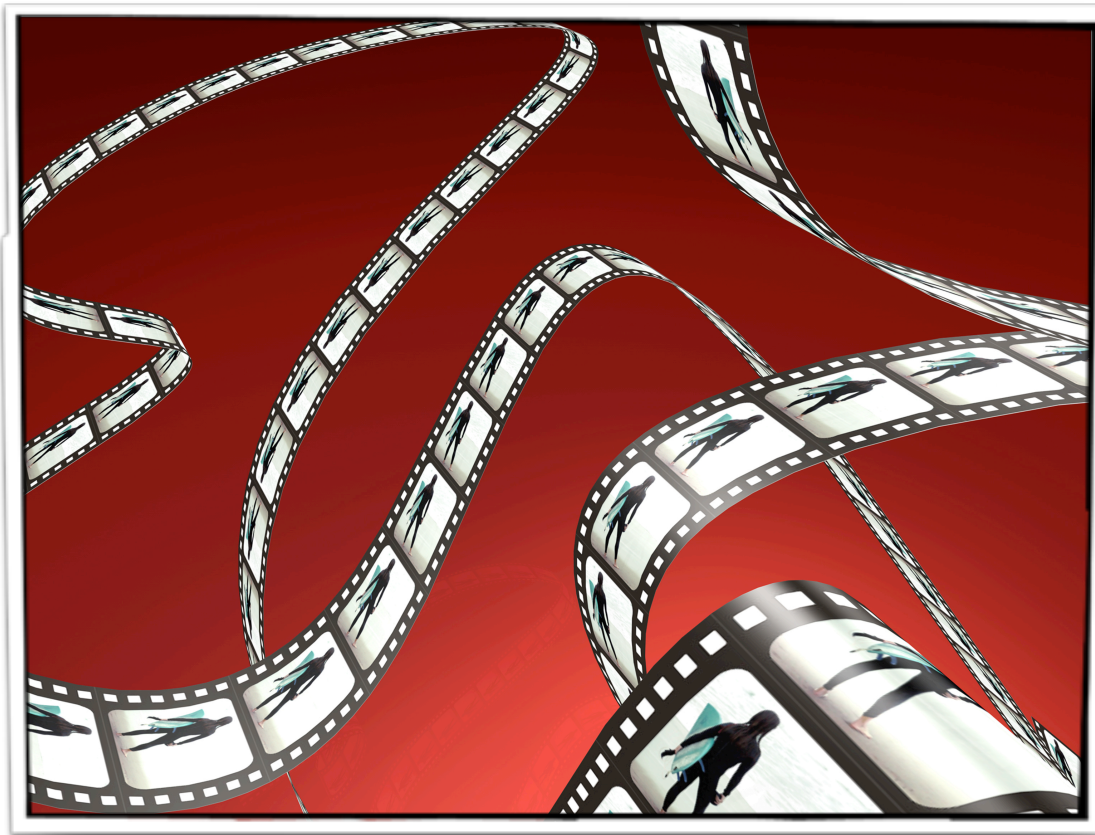


## Blockbuster Case Studies





# CASE STUDIES FROM BLOCKBUSTER FILMS



**The Back Door to Hollywood  
by Beth Rosen**

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## ACTION SCENE EDITING TIPS



Here are some tips on how to cut video transactions for action scenes.

### 1. **Cutting on the Action to Maintain Continuity**

Action scenes maintain continuity of action by cutting on the action. This means you cut the clip on the action before you move to a different angle so that you get a seamless sequence of events. For example, you have a two shot of your hero punching the villain. You could cut the clip somewhere on him throwing the punch. The next clip could be a close-up of the villain getting smacked in the face with a loud sound effect or him reacting to the punch in slow motion, depending on where you chose to cut the initial punch.

### 2. **Maintain Screen Direction**

This means when you cut from clip to clip, the subject must always move in the same direction.

### 3. **Parallel Editing**

Parallel editing is a powerful technique. You cut back and forth between different story lines or actions so it appears that multiple events are happening simultaneously. It is a useful technique to create suspense, anticipation and anxiety, especially where the characters in the intense action packed scenes are fighting to protect the character from harm in the parallel scene and/or the villain is getting closer to the unsuspecting character in the other scene. It is often used in horror films, suspense thrillers, and action films.

#### 4. **Thematic Editing**

Thematic editing uses rapid impressionistic sequence of shots and/or a montage of images to convey an emotion in a very short period of time.

##### **Case Study: *The Fifth Element* - The Diva Dance**

*The Fifth Element* was a blockbuster movie. It used the different action cutting techniques masterfully.

Click here to watch clips from the film: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n0qy3JHz6X0>. It is also available for viewing on the private membership website under the Case Studies tab in the navigation bar for this respective blog entry. This video is from *The Fifth Element*: the Diva Dance Scene. Notice how it makes use of the parallel editing technique to convey the simultaneous happening of two events and create suspense.

For a video tutorial of how to use the different editing techniques in action scenes, you can visit the following videos on Youtube and search more tutorials as you need them:

Editing Sound and Video to Heighten Tension: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NrSWHabOA2s>

Editing Tips for Fight Scenes In Premier: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mt7HZX2caAs>.

## ACTION MOVIE SECRETS



### Elements of Dynamic Action Scenes

If you plan on writing and producing an action movie, you will want to make sure you follow a proven formula for success. Set forth below are some tips to craft your action scenes so that you create a blockbuster film.

1. Most fight scenes and/or karate scenes are choreographed by experts in the field. These include police officers, karate experts, fighters, boxers, etc. You will want to hire someone to help you with these scenes so they look authentic unless you are an expert yourself.
2. There is constant movement of images and characters.
3. There is a mix between speeds of clips: normal, slow motion and fast motion.
4. They cut on the action and maintain scene direction which means the subject always moves on screen in the same direction.
5. They often use rapid impressionistic sequences and/or a montage of images to convey an emotion or tell a story.
6. They are intense and fast moving.
7. The sound effects are loud, sharp and accompanied by blockbuster music scores.
8. They use many different special effects such as lights, smoke, fire, green screen backdrops, etc.

## Writing Action in Your Screenplay

When you write your screenplay, don't get consumed by putting in all the different shots. You might want to highlight certain actions with slow motion headings or inserts for emphasis and to convey a certain emotion or feeling.

The general rule is to write the action so it is exciting to read because a shot by shot description will distract the reader. Your shooting script and story board however will contain much more detail of the shots.

When you film and edit your action scenes, you will want to get creative with the different shots. Study blockbuster action scenes to see what works and then model them. But always add your own creative flare to the mix.

### Case Study: Ten Different Action Movie Scenes

Click here to watch great action scenes from ten blockbuster films: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=fxCElagfoVA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=fxCElagfoVA). You can also watch on the membership website under Case Studies for this respective blog entry.

Notice how all the elements of action movie scenes are used in these different blockbuster movies.

The mixing of normal speed, slow motion and fast motion within one continuous clip is a powerful editing technique.

Notice the mixing of types of clips: long shots, establishing shots, close-ups, inserts, obtuse angles, birds-eye view, worm's eye view, etc.

Notice how quickly they move from clip to clip to maintain the pacing of the film.

Blockbuster action movies compress time on screen. They give us a few intense and very exciting moments and take out the slower elements that slow the pacing of the film. The result is a compelling and emotional story conveyed within a short period of time. To select a few moments in time and still give us the entire story is the mark of a master.

## WHY THE BLOCKBUSTER HAPPY ENDING WORKS IN DIRTY DANCING - TIME OF MY LIFE



### Happy Endings Speak to the Heart and Soul of the Audience

Blockbuster movies follow a proven formula, taking you step by step to a story climax – the point of irreversible change where the final conflict is resolved. If filmed correctly, it will speak directly to the heart and soul of the audience and will draw them into the world of the characters so much so that they leave with the same visceral feeling the characters experience. In the happy ending, viewers walk out of the movie feeling so good that they can't stop talking about it and go back to see the movie over and over again.

### Why the Movie *Dirty Dancing* Works

*Dirty Dancing* was a box office smash. It combined several different winning plot lines, including forbidden love, maturation or coming of age, rescue and transformation. The climax of the story, where Johnny returns to rescue Baby and dance with her on stage, resolves many conflicts that leave the audience feeling hopeful. Why? Because not only does boy rescue and win the girl in one of the best romantic moments on film, but good triumphs over evil on several levels: ethical behavior is rewarded and unethical behavior is punished, truth prevails over false allegations and ego-based lies, the underdogs are given their shining moments on stage, and forbidden love is finally free to express itself.

Notice how you feel when you watch the end of the *Dirty Dancing* video. Not only does the story work but also the music. Bottom line, *Dirty Dancing* ignites in you that same romantic spark and passionate fire that the characters experience. That is why it works.



Click the link below to watch the Final Dance of the movie. When you watch, notice how many times they change the camera angles and shots to keep your mind, heart and soul riveted to the screen. You can also watch on the membership website under Case Studies for this respective blog entry.

**<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WpmILPAcRQo&feature=related>**

# CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT



## Basic Rules of Character Development

When developing your characters, remember to keep in mind the following steps:

1. Choose your protagonist and flesh out all their attributes, good and bad. Identify their motivation, their object of desire and their tragic flaw(s), meaning the weaknesses in their character that could stand in the way of their object of desire and contribute to their downfall.
2. Pit your protagonist/hero against the antagonist or villain. Remember that evil characters are often intelligent, brilliant, seductive, strong, and even likable on some level. Identify their tragic flaw(s) and the elements of their backstory that contribute to them thwarting your hero in his or her journey. Is there a way to reconcile the motivations of your hero and villain and if so, how can you weave that into your story line?
3. Give your protagonist a side-kick. The side-kick can be a mentor, a friend, a partner, etc.
4. Use supporting characters.
5. Don't use superfluous characters (other than extras on set). Every character should contribute to moving the plot and story line along.

## Rules of Thumb

1. Avoid creating cliché characters as you breathe life into them. Even if you have a stereotypical character, choose a few attributes of that character and change them - turn them on their head - something the audience would not expect - so they really come alive as something new and exciting.

2. Weave the depth of human experience into your characters and reflect that in their behavior, mannerisms, dress, dialogue and voice intonation.
3. Write from what you know and then do additional research to flesh out your characters and add a new dimension of reality and/or fantasy to them, depending on your genre.
4. Write, re-write and re-write again, each time eliminating the attributes that make your characters cliché until you have created original characters that we can love or hate.

### **Yoda in *Star Wars***

The character of Yoda in *Star Wars* is a great case study of original character development. Rather than using a cliché old wise man, the creator of *Star Wars*, George Lucas, chose to use an unlikely character to deliver ancient philosophies and wisdom, namely a green alien elf-like mystic named Yoda.

The character Yoda is anything but cliché. Yoda is a Jedi Master who is aligned with the positive side of the force. His voice and animated movements add to the mysticism surrounding his character. Normally, you would not expect so much power and wisdom to come from such a small character.

In choosing to use a small animated puppet to deliver a giant message, George Lucas effectively changed an entire generation's pattern of thinking and empowered visionaries into action. Yoda's wisdom has weaved itself into the minds and hearts of Western pop culture.

As you watch the videos, notice how masterfully George Lucas tells the story of a mentor's decision to take on a new apprentice. Also notice how the audience is slowly drawn into the world of Yoda and comes to expect only the best from this small alien creature, even when he is facing giant evil forces.

### **Luke Meets Yoda**

In the first *Star Wars* video, Luke Skywalker meets Yoda but is unaware that he has met the mystic master he is seeking. The powerful Jedi doesn't initially identify himself to Luke but rather provokes and tests his patience by disguising himself as a comical creature. In doing so, he uncovers character flaws in Luke, namely anger and recklessness, which could interfere with his Jedi training. Click the link below or watch on the membership website under Case Studies for this respective blog entry.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W2aFjE6MSZ0>

### **Yoda's Cave**

In the next video, Yoda continues to try Luke's patience in his tiny cave-like hut. Disappointed with the potential apprentice, Yoda drops the charade and takes both Luke and the audience by surprise as his true identity is revealed. It is brilliant story telling, character development and

foreshadowing of the hero's tragic flaws which could lead him to the dark side. Click the link below or watch on the membership website under Case Studies for this respective blog entry.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i3jI3RrMsVI&t=132s>

### **Yoda Teaches Skywalker Telekinesis**

In the next video, Yoda's true power and wisdom are revealed as he teaches Luke. The audience is forever drawn into the ancient wisdom of this small but masterful Jedi. Notice how the director chose to convey the immense power of this character using an animated puppet. Yoda's voice and movements as well as the music make this scene very powerful. Click the link below or watch on the membership website under Case Studies for this respective blog entry.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E3-CpzZJl8w&t=197s>

### **Yoda Fight Scenes**

In the next video, the audience is fully aligned with Yoda's power and the force he yields, irrespective of his size or the power from anyone tapped into the dark force. We naturally expect him to defeat the villain. Click the link below or watch on the membership website under Case Studies for this respective blog entry.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRd9PGmAQUE>

## COMEDY SET-UPS AND PAY-OFFS



### Timing the Set-up and Pay-off

Timing is everything in comedy. You accomplish this by using set-ups and pay-offs. They are characterized by a gap between initial information and final information, where the viewer hears something which is only part of the story, perhaps a foreshadowing of things to come or an invitation to learn or experience something more.

Clearly something is missing which instantly prompts the viewer to ask questions or make their own guesses as to what's coming next. The pay-off closes the gap in the viewer's mind.

In comedy, the gap can be filled with funny dialog and/or unexpected comical situations. Good comedy is fast-paced so the set-ups and pay-offs happen very quickly.

### How to Create Powerful Set-ups and Pay-offs

Here are some ways to create powerful set-ups and pay-offs:

1. Connect topsy-turvy ideas or situations that go together.
2. Connect ideas or situations that are completely diametrically opposed so that the gap takes the audience completely by surprise.
3. Put your character in funny situations that heighten the comedy, such as taking a person who is very orderly, neat and scared of anything that causes chaos and plunging him into chaotic situations that are completely beyond his control so that he can't handle it.
4. Play out the absurd situation or funny statement repeatedly in the gap to capitalize on the comedy. Slapstick comedy uses this technique quite a bit, especially where a clumsy person is constantly falling or bumping into things.



## Case Study of the Set-ups and Pay-offs in the Blockbuster Movie *Hangover*

The blockbuster film *Hangover* makes great use of all of these. The entire film is a set-up and pay-off. They toast to “a night to remember” and in the very next scene, they can’t remember anything - a diametrically opposed situation. In the gap period, they play on the amnesia repeatedly and connect similar topsy turvy situations as the characters try to find their friend.

A good part of the comedy also derives from the fact that they place a goody-two shoes character afraid of his own shadow in outrageous situations that are completely beyond his control and have him do things he would normally never do. First, he finds himself in a destroyed hotel suit which he reluctantly placed on his credit card. If that’s not bad enough, next he discovers that overnight he got married to a call girl with a baby. How could things get worse? He gets arrested by the police for stealing a cop car. Things go down hill from there.

The final pay-offs come when they learn why they can’t remember anything and why the mattress was dangling off the top of the sky-scraper hotel.

Set forth below are several examples of blockbuster comedies and how they use set-ups and pay-offs. Notice how fast the set-ups and pay-offs come in each of the clips.

### *Hangover*

The movie trailer for the blockbuster movie *Hangover* is replete with examples of set-up and pay-off. Notice how they use dialog for the set-up and close the gap with situational comedy. The trailer immediately lets you know that the film is predicated on “a night to remember” and in the scenes that follow, they can’t remember anything. Notice how quickly the set-up and pay-off happen and how they use this repeatedly throughout the movie trailer, filling the gap with more and more absurd topsy turvy situations that play off their amnesia so that the viewer is totally hooked and compelled to go see the film to find out what happened that night. Click the link below or watch on the membership website under Case Studies for this respective blog entry.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aMuv\\_OqxWGw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aMuv_OqxWGw)

### *A Fish Called Wanda*

The next two videos are from *A Fish Called Wanda*, where Otto asks Archie to apologize for calling him stupid. This is a classic form of situational comedy. The set-up comes from taking a prim and proper British Barrister who doesn’t show any emotion and placing him at the mercy of a crazy American. What makes the second scene so funny in the movie is the way the director chose to convey the apology with the camera angle. Click the links below or watch on the membership website under Case Studies for this respective blog entry.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZK\\_mqgVOLU4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZK_mqgVOLU4)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MpHWr7GgzMg>

### ***Harry Met Sally***

The next video is the famous fake orgasm scene from *Harry Met Sally*. The set-up comes from the dialog between the characters and the pay-off comes when Sally sets out to prove him wrong. With his male egotistic comments, Harry actually sets himself up for what follows. A little piece of movie trivia, the last line in the scene was not a scripted line. It was improved on set. Click the link below or watch on the membership website under Case Studies for this respective blog entry.

**<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eFpnPZpFTEk>**

### ***Austin Powers***

In the next video from *Austin Powers*, the set-up and pay-off comes in the form of funny dialog. The viewer wonders how Dr. Evil will kill Austin Powers in a shark pit where there are no sharks. The pay-off comes in the absurdity of what they actually have in the shark-pit to kill them. Click the link below or watch on the membership website under Case Studies for this respective blog entry.

**<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bh7bYNAHXxw>**

## ELEMENTS OF BLOCKBUSTER MOVIE TRAILERS



### Movie Trailers

A movie trailer (also known as a sizzle piece or teaser) is a coming attraction or a preview of the film. A successful movie trailer will captivate the audience in the first 3 seconds and hook them into seeing the full film.

### Core Elements of Successful Movie Trailers

1. A good movie trailer contains a dynamic initial sound effect that immediately grabs your attention, such as a drum hit or crescendo notes. It can either be part of the trailer music score or separate from it.
2. It contains a blockbuster music score that plays to the human emotions in the genre of the film. If the story is about the triumph of the human spirit, the music will be dynamic and uplifting.
3. Trailer music is characterized by dynamic music accents that match the movie clips.
4. It contains the most exciting and/or compelling clips from the movie to prompt viewers to see the film.
5. The movie trailer moves quickly from clip to clip. Sometimes the clips are less than a second long. Some are two to three seconds.
6. It includes clips of famous stars, whether they are leading roles or just cameo appearances because celebrities draw fans to see the film.

7. It contains moving images that play on human emotions, such as love, sadness, excitement, hope, desperation, inspiration, fear, etc.
8. It contains subtitles over moving images or in between clips that weave together the plot without giving away the story.
9. The subtitles include the names of celebrities in the film as well as famous producers, writers and/or directors associated with the film. If someone has won or been nominated for an oscar or golden globe award, it may contain such accolades in the trailer.
10. It contains movie ratings at the beginning (PG, R, etc)
11. It contains the name of the production company.
12. It contains an image with the credits at the end.
13. It contains the premiere date of the film (date may include the day, month or year of the film, depending on the stage of production).

### **Movie Trailer Editing Tips**

A good movie trailer will be somewhere between 50 seconds to 2 1/2 minutes. Great movie trailers are cut from scratch. You can find royalty free blockbuster and film score music and clips at <https://www.audioblocks.com/> and [videoblocks.com](https://www.videoblocks.com/).

### **Movie Trailer Template in iMovie**

If you need a quick movie trailer and you do not have the funds or time to produce one from scratch, there are several movie trailer templates in iMovie if you have an apple computer. The program comes with drag and drop editing and places to put the titles so that the images from your movie and titles are perfectly timed with music accents.

### ***Avatar* Movie Trailer**

James Cameron's *Avatar* movie trailer promised viewers an entertaining film experience where they would be drawn into an exciting new fantasy world. The movie delivered on its promise. Notice how the trailer music and accents match the images and how quickly it moves from clip to clip. Click the link below or watch on the membership website under Case Studies for this respective blog entry.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ziBFh3V1aM>

### ***Titanic* Movie Trailer**

The trailer for the James Cameron film, *Titanic*, promised viewers a dynamic love story couched in one of history's greatest tragic moments at sea - the sinking of the Titanic. Notice how the trailer plays on human emotions and draws you into an epic drama that has already captured the heart and soul of the public.

Notice the difference in the movie trailer when *Titanic* returned to movie theaters again in 3D. It contained the award winning song by Celine Dion and the high-lights from the film that captivated the audiences first time around. Click the link below or watch on the membership website under Case Studies for this respective blog entry.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2e-eXJ6HgkQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kVrqfYjkTdQ>

### ***The King's Speech* Movie Trailer**

The movie trailer for *The Kings Speech* promised an emotionally charged yet entertaining and comical movie about a true story. Notice the choice and placement of the clips with the music and how it inspires and compels you to go see the film in theaters. Click the link below or watch on the membership website under Case Studies for this respective blog entry.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gSw6ei5tdbg>