

LEE'S TEN RULES WHEN MAKING YOUR FIRST SHORT FILM

Having made a few of my own short films, I've come up with ten things I think every first-time writer-to-filmmaker needs to remember as they dip their feet into the deep end for the first time.

Some people may not need this list (or may have their own) but this is a great set of reminders because we all want to start somewhere. I was scared my first time because I'd written something I was very attached to and wanted to do it right. So check out this list and see what you think.

(There are plenty of others I've probably left off this list, but I think it's important to keep these ten in mind.)

1. **Make sure people have read the script.** This is super important. If nobody's read it or given feedback, you don't really know what you have. Your confidence may be too high or too low to even make honest decisions about your script. Get yourself an audience that will speak to you openly and honestly. Then, after you've gone through your rewrites, you can start thinking about actually producing.
2. **Create Your Budget.** If you don't know how much things will cost, you won't know how much to spend, which will leave you in a space where you'll spend far more than you need to or grossly underestimate the amount you'll need. So find someone who has made budgets before, understands script breakdowns, and will give you honest answers about your financial guardrails.
3. **Get yourself a fellow producer.** This one is all about guidance. You want someone who has done this before. It doesn't matter the scale, just someone who gets the process. That way, you'll be able to learn at the feet of someone who wants to teach but not take over. You want to be involved, not take a back seat.
4. **Understand people's worth.** This means knowing that people's time, locations, and other factors will need to be paid for. You are making a movie, not begging for scraps. You know your budget, and that budget should include money for payments to your actors and to people offering locations. If people are willing to provide time and space for free, that's fine. But don't bank on it.

5. **Check the weather.** This one might sound silly, but if you're planning on filming outdoors, watch out. You could live in the Sahara Desert, but on the day you're going to shoot, that's when the 100-year monsoon will strike.
6. **Preparation is paramount.** You've worked out your budget, your actors, locations, etc., but think about all the nuances of things that you might not have considered. Are actors bringing their own wardrobe? Are you planning on renting equipment? What are the rates for these things? Lean on your producing partner for this one. You won't regret it.
7. **Keep a cool head.** You're the leader. You are the one people are looking to with questions. They might even get angry at each other or you during the process. Your job isn't to yell and scream. Your job is to facilitate, delegate, and soothe. Egos get big. Let the air out of balloons, don't pop them.
8. **Enjoy the process.** It's a scary whirlwind of activity to make a film, even a short one. But that work is rewarding and fun if you can take a quick step back and see all the people who want to work on the thing you created. They want to make the best thing right alongside you. That's pretty cool.
9. **Think about what you want from all this.** If you want to walk away with a huge moneymaker, you might be disappointed. But if you're walking away with proof that you can write and produce (and direct?), you're well on your way to making a splash.
10. **Always remember the importance of festivals.** There's nothing better than showing up to a festival and hearing the crowd's reaction to your awesome creation. Look what you did! Look at the people looking at what you did! They might even give you prizes! Plus, you'll meet amazing people and find your creativity bubbling with all that extra energy around you.