

PRE-PRODUCTION

WRITING THE “ESSAY”/VOICEOVER

- Has a general structure (INTRODUCTION / MAIN POINTS / CONCLUSION)
- Identify one or two general THEMATIC IDEA(s) which the video will explore throughout
- A broader theme can therefore relate back to individual sub-points which will define each of the main points in the “body”
- Video essays don’t have to follow this generic structure, but is effective in clearly breaking down points

General Structure of “The Essay”

1. Introduction

- Introduce name of film, director, genre
- How the film fits into the directors’ other filmography
- General synopsis of film (outline events, introduce main characters)
- Socio-cultural/historical context of film
- Summarise and introduce main thematic idea of video essay

2. Body

- Introduce the main point you are trying to make by providing examples
- For each example, take into account aspects of: **CINEMATOGRAPHY, EDITING, SOUND DESIGN, COLOUR/LIGHTING, MISE-EN-SCENE, SCRIPT, FILM SCHOLARSHIP/CRITICISM, etc.**
- It is more engaging to analyse sequences by theme rather than chronologically or splitting up cinematography/editing/sound into separate categories
- Keep linking everything back to initial primary theme for consistency and cohesion
- For each point made, ensure there is something to evidence it (it also helps to note down the **TIME CODES** beside the points made for a smoother editing process later)

3. Conclusion

- Summarise general points from above
- Conclude with allusion to the directorial intention, why the director may have portrayed such themes, etc.

PRODUCTION

RECORDING THE VOICEOVER

- a) **Record Voiceover before Editing:** This makes it much easier for you to later manipulate and stretch out clips to match the pace of your voice, rather than vice versa.
 - b) **Leave Silence between Sentences:** This was important in case I wanted to cut and re-order any of my points. It's important to leave a few seconds of silence before starting the next sentence to ensure your cut is seamless / won't sound unnatural, sudden, or jarring.
 - c) **Ensure sound is equal in volume throughout:** Try to keep the same distance for each point when recording voiceovers. This will make the equalising sound process much easier in post-production.
- After all audio has been recorded, drag all audio tracks (if more than one) into the timeline of Premiere Pro
 - Cut and space out audio clips accordingly
 - The audio clips will act as the fundamental basis and starting point of the video essay, so it is critical that the pacing, timing and clarity of the voiceover is ideal
 - Once audio clips are all lined up, visual and other additional auditory material can be added in

CONSOLIDATING RESOURCES / MATERIALS

- **Clips from the original film:** (Obviously) preferably a high quality version of the film analysed in the essay will need to be acquired, this will be critical in evidencing points.
- **Screenshots / Still images:** Often still images can be useful in evidencing points! This also allows for annotations/arrows/captions to be easily added to reinforce your point.
- **Sources from Critics/Scholars:** Clips of interviews/documentaries/reviews from critics may sometimes be useful in supporting a claim.
- **Background Music/Sounds:** Depending on the atmosphere of the video essay, often it is more engaging to have a consistent soundtrack playing in the background of the film; this could either be (if appropriate) the film's own soundtrack or music that is not too distracting/loud. Sound effects may also be downloaded to accompany visuals for added effect.

*(Not sure if this will be a particularly useful point, but when making my video essay, the range of clips that were available to me were limited since the film was still being shown in theatres and I had to cut most of the clips from trailers and previews. Because of this, one of the points I was stressing upon about the drowning of soldiers I couldn't show due to the inaccessibility of the clip. I was, however, able to locate some of the original storyboards for the film. **Using direct material from the film's making is much more professional than sourcing stock images.**)*

INSERTING CLIPS FROM FILM

After the timing of the audio clip has been adjusted to liking, locate the clips (from the time codes written down at the beginning). These clips can then be dragged into the timeline to accompany particular points made. Gaps in the visual timeline can be bridged by adding photographs, illustrations, and (if applicable) even behind-the-scenes footage. Using an array of materials and not simply only cutting from the film will make the video much more interesting and engaging.

In my video essay, I selected a range of stills from the film, as well as photographs from the true event of Dunkirk. I also was able to access some of the storyboards drawn for the film, which were significantly useful in helping me break down a point about cinematography and editing.

USING GRAPHICS /AFTER EFFECTS

Using visual stimuli can be particularly effective when explaining or elaborating on a point. These animations can be created in AFTER EFFECTS. Shapes, lines, and text can be easily created to represent narrative timelines and breakdowns, character arcs, as well as annotations on cinematography, mise-en-scene, and lighting.

Some AE tutorials regarding basic animation:

Line Growing Effect: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T9Gku3RJ6OY>

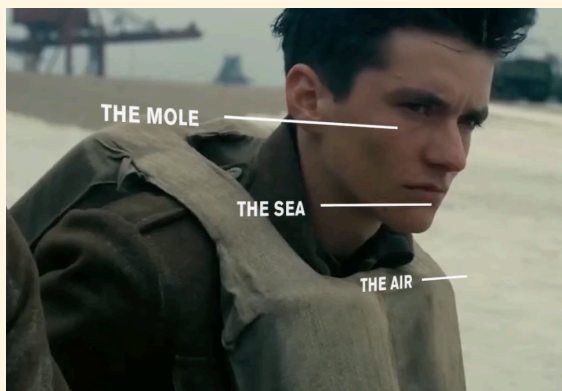
How to Animate a Line: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K1YOSwFYm0w>

Learn After Effects in 20 Minutes: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6tR3fpv4Aco>

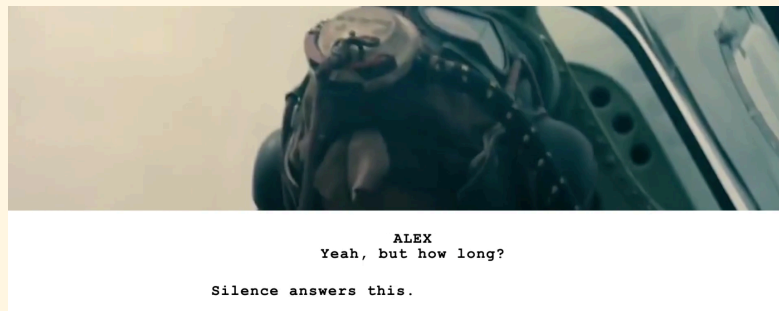
Super Easy Animations: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lfUYjpRhJRr>

After Effects Basic Tutorial: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O2p0ErTLxSk>

For instance, as much of my analysis was based on the narrative structure of “Dunkirk”, I found it was useful to evidence some of my points using graphic representations. When breaking down the three stories that were portrayed simultaneously, I drew out this timeline which depicted the convergence of the three narratives.



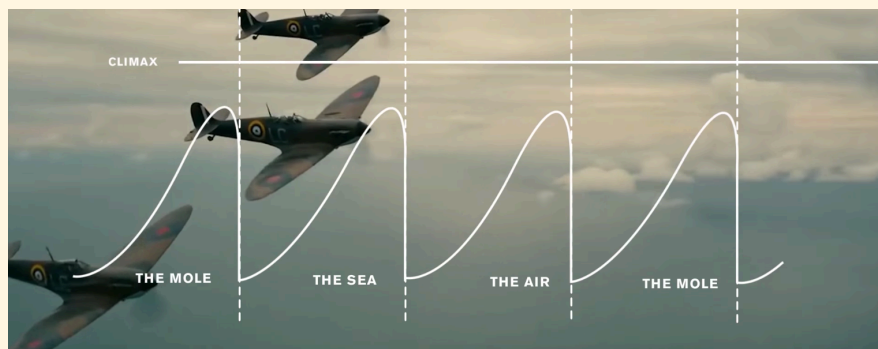
Similarly, at one point I wanted to highlight a particular action / line in the script. For added effect, I created a short animation of an extract from the screenplay imitating the format of a script.



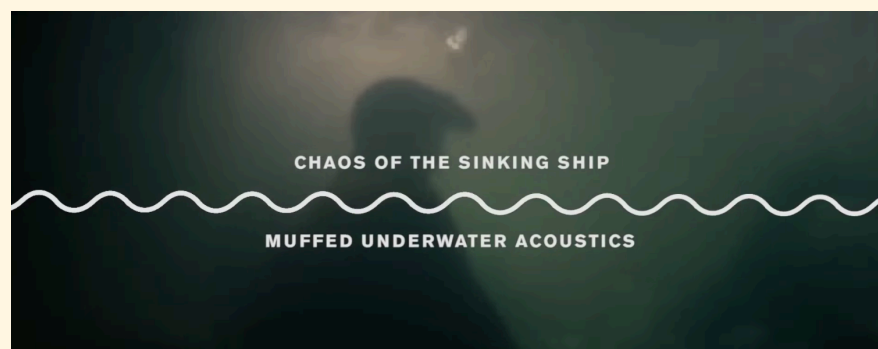
ie. some more examples of graphics I made to accompany my analysis:



The shift / convergence in timelines as the spitfire enters the "Sea" narrative



The Shepard tone in both music and reflected in the narrative



Shifting between muffled / clear sound

