

# one on one NEWSLETTER

Issue 1

individualized filmmaking education

September 2005

## Why I created One on One Film Training: Filling a need

**O**ne on One Film Training basically reinvents workshops for filmmakers. I've been teaching filmmaking in workshop environments for over 20 years, most recently in a program in Los Angeles for first time directors, but I have had so many people unable to make the schedule, or who don't want to be mixed in with students of various experience levels, or won't show up because of celebrity status, that I decided the best way to teach filmmaking in our modern, busy world is individually.

The One on One program is completely customized

for each individual client. If someone comes into the program with a script or treatment, we can use that as the basis for the program, creating a visual analysis, scene breakdowns, and blocking exercises specific to the script. We can study the post production workflow for the project. At the end, a large amount of the prep work is done, all in an educational environment. For clients who come into the program without a specific project in mind, we find scenes that are applicable to the kind of work they plan on doing, whether it's a narrative feature or a low budget DV documentary.

One on One's clients vary from feature writers and directors and commercial



photo by Gary Gold

One on One Film Training's Jeffrey Seckendorf on set.

directors to film students and career changers - each program is different, tailored exactly to what each client needs to grow as a filmmaker.

We encourage clients to be in Los Angeles for the program, at least for the first

few weeks, although we are happy to travel. I have one client in New York who is working with me via iChat video conferencing.

The costs of the program are clearly outlined on the web site, so please feel free to review that. We also have a program we call Two on One, which allows for someone to go through the program with a partner. Details about that are also on the web.

I like to think of One on One as training for the new millenium.

  
Jeff Seckendorf

See Jeff's bio on the web, [www.oneononefilmtraining.com](http://www.oneononefilmtraining.com). Clips and resumes are at [www.snaproll.com](http://www.snaproll.com)

**Whatever you can do, or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it.**

*Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*

**Vision without action is a daydream. Action without vision is a nightmare.**

*Japanese Proverb*

**[www.oneononefilmtraining.com](http://www.oneononefilmtraining.com)  
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**Commitment is what transforms promise into reality...it is the stuff character is made of.**

*American Express Company, 1978*

## DEVELOPING A VISUAL STYLE

These are a few guidelines that can be followed when developing and planning the visual style for any feature film, documentary, commercial, or music video.

### 1. Read

Read the script. Then read it again, even if you wrote it. Read it at one sitting, no cell phones, no pagers, no interruptions. Read it straight through like you would see it on the screen. Try not to make notes on the first read...just enjoy the story. On the second pass, start to think about the look, the overall visual feeling the script gives you.

### 2. Write

Make notes, make lists, make a plan. Jot down films you want to reference. Note the major locations. List the main characters. Expand this document with another reading of the script, adding more notes on the visual aspects of the project. Write

yourself about what you can and cannot do visually. Prepare to talk about the story, the plot, the theme, how it begins and ends.

### 3. Listen, then talk

Meet or call the key collaborators. Be prepared for these conversations...it will be obvious if you're not. First and foremost, listen. Listen carefully and listen a lot. Extract as much information from the filmmakers as you can, then lay your ideas on the table. Be definitive; offer concrete ideas. Explain, in simple, non-technical terms, your vision for the film: tone, contrast, color, camera movement, photographic energy. Be honest in your opinion about the script, both strengths and weaknesses. Then listen some more.

### 4. Watch

Watch all the reference material you can find. Films you've seen, films you haven't seen, films the collaborators recommend. Tear images out

of magazines and create a visual file for reference.

Go to museums and see the paintings that will have the strongest influence on the project's photography. And write everything down.

### 5. Test

Draw, make still photographs, roll some video tape. Continue to build the visual foundation for the film. Test color, test filters, test lenses, test perspective. Use these tests as a visual communication device. Use video to explain a particularly complex camera move. Use

black and white still photos to explain contrast. Use color slide film to explain subtle color and filter combinations. Shoot makeup and wardrobe tests, watching carefully how the actors' faces respond to light, shadow, color, and camera position. Test, test, and more test. It's far better to test at this stage than on set with the actors all watching.

### 6. Story board & shot list

Draw the shots and/or list the shots. Stick figures work just fine; it's just a map. Shot lists can assist all the departments: camera, grip, set lighting, art, script. Make them as complete as you can, a solid plan for the photography. But remember,



Jeffrey Seckendorf on the set of *THE CRUX*.

photo by Eric Lee

these boards and lists are just a plan to deviate from. The actors and the moment will combine to cause the best of plans to get scrapped for something spontaneous. Be prepared, but be open.

## TENACITY AND TRAINING

I am in the midst of a long and successful career as a filmmaker, both as a Director and as a Director of Photography. I can attribute that success to two things—tenacity and training.

The dictionary defines tenacity as “persistent in maintaining or adhering to something valued.” I would define tenacity as taking “no” for encouragement and hearing “yes” with gratitude. What does “no” really mean? Does it mean “get lost?” Or does it mean “get back to me with something more reasonable [to me].” My feeling is that it's the latter. “No” only means that you have missed the mark with one particular person by

just a few degrees. When I hear someone say no, I immediately look at the big picture and figure out if I'm either talking to the wrong person or saying the wrong thing, then I adjust one or both and try again. When people ask me for something and I decide to say no, I try to look at it the same way—am I the wrong person, or is it just the wrong moment?

Then there is the magic that happens when someone says “yes.” Sometimes that is the culmination of years of work, sometime just a few hours, but in either case I think the most important reaction is gratitude. “Yes” is usually the payoff for tenacity.

Tenacity comes from within. It is a learned skill, developed

### 7. Hire the best

Get the finest crew you possibly can. Try to put people in the key positions who have more experience than you do. Filmmaking is a collaborative process. Surround yourself with people who will collaborate, contribute to the overall process, and provide a constant flow of ideas.

### 8. Know your vendors

Use your vendors' expense accounts...that's what they're there for. Go to lunch with the film or tape rep, have coffee at the lab, take a bottle of wine to the camera rental house, and a case of beer to the grip and electric house. Create long-term relationships with your vendors...these are the people who will rescue you when things go haywire, and offer ideas when you lay a problem on the table.

View the vendors as part of the crew, another group of collaborators you have to work with.

### 9. Make it all count

Only shoot what you want to see on the screen. Anything that rolls that's just 'good enough' will still be just 'good enough' in the theater; anything that is out of focus will still be out of focus in the theater. Treat every shot like it's the most important shot in the film. Resist the pressure of time and money as a sacrifice to quality. Design great shots within the confines of your schedule and budget. Plan to watch the film in the theater without ever having to make excuses for a any shot.

### 10. Always think out of the box

The road most traveled has been traveled and traveled. Try a different path.

by practice. Training is purely skill by learning.

I have set up One on One Film Training to address both of these elements. We're focused specifically on directors, writers getting ready to direct, and film craftspeople looking to broaden their overall knowledge of filmmaking. We've stripped away the fat and created a training method that is specific to the needs of someone standing on set directing actors and the camera for the first or second time. The information is easy to understand, technical when it needs to be, non-technical when it's appropriate. I have worked to create the best possible training environment that will give you the most information possible during

the time you invest with us.

But you will also come out completely fired up, ready to take your new-found knowledge out into the world and do something with it—we train you in tenacity. We encourage you and empower you in your projects, whether that project is green-lit or just a germ of an idea. We bring life to filmmaking, because filmmaking is our life.

## The Syllabus

This is the starting point in creating a syllabus for the full, 10-unit program. A more detailed syllabus is on the web site. We sit with each client and customize the syllabus so each person coming into the program gets exactly the information he or she needs.

### Unit One

## The Overall Look

### Unit Two

## Cameras, Lenses And Film Stocks

### Unit Three

## Color, Lighting, And Camera Movement

### Unit Four

## Labs, Post Production, And Visual Effects

### Unit Five

## Visual Analysis

### Unit Six

## Blocking And Scene Design

### Unit Seven

## Shooting A Scene

### Unit Eight

## Directing Techniques

### Unit Nine

## Production

### Unit Ten

## Preperation



Contact One on One film Training at  
[info@oneononefilmtraining.com](mailto:info@oneononefilmtraining.com)  
or 1-877-SHOTLIST

definition: filmmaking

**Visual storytelling originating on any medium shown to an audience of any size on any screen or device.**

Jeffrey Seckendorf

down all your concerns about the script: difficult situations, expensive situations, impossible situations. Be realistic; it's easy to get dragged into a project that, due to budget or time constraints, can't possibly be completed. Be honest with

**Conrad Hall, ASC, was once asked how he knew where to point his camera. "I point it at the story," he replied.**

**Before making movies (I was a trial lawyer for many years), I considered entering NYU film school. I even went so far as to fill out the application. My daughter, who is a screen writer, then called to see if I might be interested in Jeff's course which she had signed up for but, at the last minute, couldn't make. Great break for me!**

**In four days I learned enough about cinematography to allow me to jump right into making films rather than attending school. I'm not saying Jeff made me an instant expert, but with his rather extraordinary talent to teach - making even the most complex simple - and his great love of the craft, he did in fact equip me to complete my education on a film set. Having now made two films, I still use techniques I learned from Jeff.**

**I don't mean to denigrate film school, I'm sure it's a great experience. But if you want to get on with it now, call Jeff.**

*Alan Hruska  
Writer/Director: Nola, The Warrior Class*

## **What I learned in film school was how to make movies in film school.**

*Former workshop student*

**This One on One course in film directing is an amazing idea, and Jeff Seckendorf is just the guy to deliver it. He's not just a talented and accomplished director and DP, but a gifted teacher. He's got a rare knack for making every topic challenging to the most experienced while keeping it fully accessible to the least experienced.**

**With the unique chance to focus on one student at a time and tailor the lessons not only to that aspiring filmmaker's needs but to the specific material, this program is going to be absolute dynamite.**

*Howard M. Gould  
Executive Producer: Cybill  
Writer: Mr. 3000, The Jeff Foxworthy Show,  
Home Improvement*