

# THE TRAILER EDITING CHECKLIST

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## 31-STEPS TO CUTTING A HOLLYWOOD TRAILER

For many editors, the hardest part of cutting trailer is knowing where to start. I know it was for me.

Back in 2005, while working at Universal Pictures I had the opportunity to edit a trailer for the movie Van Helsing. I was super excited about the opportunity to work on a big budget film, but I had no clue where to start.

Should you begin the trailer by just working from the front and moving to the back? Should you choose your lines first or your music first? When should you add sound design? How much should you add? So many questions. Most of them related to the sequencing of tasks.

We designed this quick Trailer Editing Checklist to help simplify the process and steps of cutting a Hollywood Trailer.

The 31 steps listed on the next couple pages will guide from start-to-finish through the key stages of the trailer editing process. It's meant to be a simple, easy-to-read checklist that you can print out and keep somewhere near your editing computer for quick access.

I hope this checklist reduces some of the confusion and overwhelm you might feel next time you sit down in front of an empty timeline...ready to tackle the beast known as (dun dun dun)...trailer editing.

Please enjoy!

**- Chris, Lead Trainer, Film Editing Pro**

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# TRAILER EDITING CHECKLIST

## 31 Steps to Cutting a Hollywood Trailer



### STAGE ONE: VIEWING

- 1 **WATCH THE FILM**  
Watch the film (duh). Then watch it again.
- 2 **SUMMARIZE THE STORY**  
Summarize the story in one simple sentence.
- 3 **LIST TOP MOMENTS**  
List the top 3-5 moments in the film. What impacted you the most?



### STAGE TWO: ORGANIZATION

- 1 **BREAKDOWN DIALOGUE**  
Sub-clip or label each dialogue line in the movie with the character's name and what they say.
- 2 **MARK FAVORITE LINES**  
Highlight your favorite lines (good jokes, powerful speeches, kick-off lines such as "alright, let's do this" etc).
- 3 **BREAKDOWN VISUALS**  
Breakdown your visuals by category. Cut each type of shot into a separate sequence.
- 4 **GATHER SOUND EFFECTS**  
Gather sound effects, foley and sound design useful for your specific trailer subject matter and tone.



### STAGE 3: PLANNING

- 1 **CREATE PAPER CUT**  
Paper cut the trailer using lines from your dialogue breakdown.
- 2 **PLACE THE MOMENTS**  
Determine where your favorite moments will go (ideal places are the beginning and the end).
- 3 **RESEARCH MUSIC**  
Research music, pulling a variety of act 1 opening cues, act 2 mid-tempo cues and act 3 big energy cues.
- 4 **TEST MUSIC**  
Test your music options against a rough picture montage, then choose 2-3 cues for the trailer.



## STAGE FOUR: ROUGH STRUCTURE

- 1 **CREATE TIMELINE**  
Create a timeline and mark your desired duration using markers (2:30 for a full trailer).
- 2 **CUT IN ANCHORS**  
Cut in your anchor points like logos, main title, narration and graphics.
- 3 **CUT DIALOGUE**  
Drop in your dialogue according to your paper cut. Mix it up to -8dB. Add EQ and compressors as needed.
- 4 **ROUGH OUT MUSIC**  
Cut in your music. Plan where each act will begin and end and edit the cues accordingly. Match the tone of the music to the mood you're trying to create in each section.
- 5 **SHIFT LINES**  
Shift around lines to complement the rhythm of various music cues.
- 6 **ADD KEY VISUALS**  
Add key visuals like scares, explosions and set-piece moments. No need to fine-tune yet. Just slug them in where they need to land.



## STAGE FIVE: SOUND DESIGN

- 1 **PLAN SOUND DESIGN**  
Listen to the cut with only dialogue, narration and music. Imagine which areas could be accented and enhanced with sound. Think of it like composing a song.
- 2 **ADD IMPACTS**  
Add whooshes and hits to accent graphics and moments of impact.
- 3 **ADJUST STOPS & STARTS**  
Use cymbals, suckbacks and reverb to start and stop sections of the music as needed.
- 4 **ACCENT DOWNBEATS**  
Add hits to main downbeats in your act 3 cue to build momentum in the back-end.
- 5 **ADD RISES**  
Add rises to build intensity into small and large climaxes.
- 6 **POLISH AUDIO**  
Polish and tighten everything audio-related. If you close your eyes and listen, the trailer should almost sound complete, despite the missing picture.

*"Listen to the cut with only dialogue, narration and music. Imagine which areas could be accented and enhanced with sound."*



## STAGE SIX: FILLING IN PICTURE

- 1 **ADD SEE-AND-SAY PICTURE**  
Add all see-and-say picture (establishing shots, described places, people, objects etc).
- 2 **ADD CONNECTING SHOTS**  
Add connecting shots between key moments. Try to create a logical flow of imagery between sections. Use favorite shots from your visual breakdown.
- 3 **MONTAGE**  
Create your act 3 montage(s).
- 4 **REFINE PICTURE**  
Rearrange, re-time and re-adjust all picture until it flows with the music and tracks logically. Don't be too random. Tell mini-stories with each 3-4 shot sequence.



## STAGE SEVEN: AUDIO MIXING & SOUND LAYERING

- 1 **KEYFRAME MUSIC**  
Use audio keyframes to dip music under dialogue. 6 to 10dB decreases should carve it out nicely.
- 2 **LAYER FOLEY & SFX**  
Layer additional foley, effects and sound design as needed to fill out your mix and create audio interest (drones, wind, misc ambiance, reverses, etc).
- 3 **REDUCE POPPING**  
Add at least 1-frame dissolves on the edges of all clips to prevent popping.
- 4 **ADJUST GLOBAL MIX**  
Make global mix adjustments to avoid peaking. Shoot for -8dB as a goal
- 5 **POLISH, POLISH, POLISH**  
Go through the cut and polish every single moment, down to the frame. Finally, once you've got it perfect... polish it one more time.

*"Re-adjust all picture until it flows with the music. Tell mini-stories with each 3-4 shot sequence."*

*"Layer foley, effects and sound design to fill out your mix and create audio interest."*