

7 Stages of Student Film Production

First Idea to Final Cut

This competition is built to mirror the creative process of professional filmmakers. Each stage builds on the one before, guiding students toward a fully produced short film.

If accommodations are needed, throughout the competition, please submit them to kaylin@ajff.org and we are happy to work with your team.

STAGE 1: Competition Kickoff - Concept & Theme Exploration

Date: Wednesday, August 27, 2025

Time: 4:30–6:30pm

Location: The Westminster Schools

Goal: Set the creative foundation for your film. Think personally and collaboratively around what connections matter most to you, and how can you show them through film?

- Explore the theme: *Building Bridges: Stories That Connect Us*
- Brainstorm your genre, tone, key message, characters, setting, and point of view
- Submit: **Team Ideation Worksheet**
- If your team is unable to attend the Kickoff, please reach out to kaylin@ajff.org for more information.

STAGE 2: Scriptwriting & Visual Storytelling

Deadline: September 12, 2025

Anticipated Time: 4 hours

Office Hours with AJFF: September 9th, 4-6pm

Goal: Get your story out of your head and onto the screen by developing your script and storyboard. The more detail you put into this planning, the more time will be saved later in the process.

- Write and submit your full **script** (up to 5 minutes) with clear scenes, dialogue, and/or voiceover
- Create and submit a **storyboard** that visually outlines key moments
 - Optional: add a mood board with images, color palettes, or tone references



STAGE 3: Casting & Character Development

Deadline: September 26, 2025

Anticipated Time: 3 hours

Office Hours with AJFF: September 18th, 4-6pm

Goal: Develop characters and begin planning to set the stage for great performances.

- Create a short **character breakdown** for each speaking or key role (Include name, age, personality, and purpose in the story)
- Cast your actors from within your school or community and submit **Casting Sheet and Character Breakdown**
- **(As Needed) Or:** Submit **Character Breakdowns and Audition Scripts for 1-2 requested Atlanta actors by September 20** to participate in AJFF's **Virtual Casting Call with Atlanta-based actors**

→ **Casting Zoom Date: September 26, 2025 (after school hours)**
- Practice directing actors and helping them bring their characters to life

STAGE 4: Production Planning 1

Deadline: October 10, 2025

Anticipated Time: 3-4 hours

Office Hours with AJFF: October 6th, 4-6pm

Goal: This is the logistics phase 1. Be specific, realistic, and thoughtful. A solid plan will give you more time for creativity on shoot day.

- Create and submit your **shot list**: a breakdown of key camera shots you'll need, scene by scene
- Sign up for your **filming location/time preferences** if you would like to use locations offered by AJFF

STAGE 5: Production Planning 2

Deadline: October 24, 2025

Anticipated Time: 2 hours

Office Hours with AJFF: October 21st, 4-6pm



Goal: This is the logistics phase 2. Be specific, realistic, and thoughtful. A solid plan will give you more time for creativity on shoot day.

- Finalize your **props, costumes, and technical needs**
- Build a **call sheet**: a detailed schedule for filming showing who needs to be where, when

STAGE 6: Filming & Editing Window

Window: October 24th - November 7th 2025

Anticipated Time: 12 hours

Office Hours with AJFF: October 29th, 4-6pm

Goal: This is your moment, and it may get a little crazy. Stay flexible, trust your preparation, and bring your vision to life.

- At 8:00am on October 24th, your team will receive a special ingredient that must be included in your film
- Your team will film and edit your entire project within this window
- Final films and production materials must be submitted by midnight on November 7th

STAGE 7: Student Film Showcase & Awards Celebration

Date: Tuesday, November 19, 2025

Time: 6:30–8:30pm

Location: To be announced

- Celebrate the completion of your film and share it with an audience of friends, family, educators, and the wider community
- All films will be screened as part of an official AJFF program
- Awards will be presented in categories recognizing the Best Overall Film, the Peer Award, and the Bridge-Building Award
- Teams may be invited to speak about their process or participate in a post-screening Q&A