



a free guide by

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Getting Into Film School

The 5 things nobody tells beginners before they apply – from someone who's actually been through it.

When I applied to film school, I couldn't find anyone who actually understood the process – just a lot of guessing. I figured it out myself, and it worked: **I got into USC, NYU, Chapman, LMU, Boston University, Emerson, and UC Berkeley for film.** This guide is the version of advice I wish someone had handed me on day one.

01 Stop Telling The Same Story

Admissions committees read thousands of portfolios a year, and most of them blur together. The "tragic backstory" short film, the coming-of-age walk-and-talk – they've seen it. **Your goal isn't to be good, it's to be specific.** Find the angle on your story that only you could tell.

02 Follow The Spec. Exactly.

This is the most avoidable rejection in the entire process. If a school caps your film at 5 minutes, file type, or format – match it exactly. **A great film that breaks the rules can get disregarded before anyone watches it.** Read every requirement twice.

03 It's Not About Your GPA

Your transcript matters less than you think. Schools are trying to picture who you'll become – **they're investing in your potential**, not just your past. A strong, specific point of view will move the needle further than one more AP class.

04 You Know More Than You Think

Most beginners think they're "starting from scratch" when they're not. One self-directed short, a film you made with friends, even a documentary on your phone – **that's a real start.** Don't wait to feel ready. Build from what you already have.

05 Start Earlier Than Feels Necessary

Portfolios, essays, and reels all take longer than expected, and rushed work shows. **Give yourself real runway** – ideally a full year before applications are due – so your strongest piece isn't made under deadline panic.

QUICK-START CHECKLIST

- Pick one story only you can tell
- List what you've already made – it counts
- Draft a school list (reach + realistic + safety)
- Read every school's submission specs twice
- Start your portfolio 12+ months out
- Find one mentor or second pair of eyes

Hi, I'm Ziyu

USC · NYU · CHAPMAN · LMU · BOSTON UNIV · EMERSON · UC BERKELEY

I coach students through the exact process I had to figure out alone. If you're ready to talk through your specific application, let's get on a call.

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