

2026 State Digital Cinema Prompt

Overview

Your team will create an original narrative short film up to 5 minutes in length, based on the story criteria below. All filming, editing, and final delivery must occur within the official competition window. Your film must demonstrate strong visual storytelling, creative interpretation of the prompt, professional production techniques, and effective use of required elements.

2026 Prompt Theme: “*The Unchosen Detour*”

Your narrative must explore a moment when a character is unexpectedly forced to change direction, literally, figuratively, or both. This detour must initiate or accelerate the story’s conflict. The audience should clearly understand:

- What the character intended to do,
- What created the detour, and
- How the character responds to it.
- Your team may choose any genre that fits the prompt (drama, comedy, mystery, adventure, etc.).

Required Story Elements

Your film must incorporate all of the following:

- **A Physical Object:** A map (digital or paper) that is meaningfully used in the story. It must play an identifiable role in the narrative (guiding a plan, revealing an obstacle, creating confusion, etc.).
- **A Line of Dialogue:** “*This wasn’t part of the plan.*” The line must be spoken on camera by a character (not as narration).
- **A Specific Action:** A character must pause to observe something unusual (an object, a sound, a person, a clue, etc.). This moment must influence the direction of the story.
- **A Location Requirement:** One scene must take place at or near a doorway, threshold, or entry point. This may be symbolic or literal but must support the “detour” theme.

Content Restrictions

All content must comply with:

- Digital Cinema technical standard safety & content rules
- School-appropriate language and imagery
- No depiction of real-world brand logos or copyrighted material
- Music must be original, public domain, or royalty-free with proper licensing

Length

- Final film must be no more than 5 minutes, including titles, excluding the required slate.

Deliverables to be Submitted:

1. Final Film

- a. Filename: [team number].mp4 – check your email for our team number.
- b. Export in 1080p, H.264 format.

2. Title Slate (5 seconds, placed before the film)

- a. Must include:
 - i. Team number
 - ii. Film title
 - iii. Names and roles of team members

3. Statement of Originality (PDF, 1 page)

- a. A brief team-written document stating:
 - i. All footage and audio were created during official production time
 - ii. All music and graphics are original or properly licensed
 - iii. The film is an original creative work following all rules
 - iv. Signed by both team members

4. Script or Shot List

- a. Upload your working script, storyboard, or shot list used during production.

5. Raw Footage Folder – do not upload in advance

- a. A folder containing all original unedited clips from the competition window.
- b. To be brought to the competition via portable storage device or accessible via cloud service. Wifi will be available upon request (for use in the competition space only).

Judging Considerations

Judges will evaluate:

- Story & interpretation of “*The Unchosen Detour*”
- Cinematography (composition, lighting, camera movement)
- Sound (clarity, design, mixing)
- Editing & pacing
- Production quality
- Creative use of required elements
- Teamwork and professionalism (based on documentation)

Other Important Information

- The prompt will be distributed to advisors of registered teams via email, and posted to the Contest Updates page at skillsusaf.org/updates at 12 PM ET on Monday, March 2, 2026.
- The submission is to be a creative narrative piece. It is not in the form of a PSA, documentary, news story, or promotional video.
- Final submissions must be uploaded using the link below no later than 5 PM ET on March 6, 2026.
- Teams will submit their final film by uploading it here:
<https://form.jotform.com/240355956682163>
 - The film should be exported as an .mp4 file in 1080p, H.264 format
 - Be sure to also bring the file on a USB flash drive to the competition.
 - Teams may opt to share an unpublished YouTube link instead of the full file via the form linked above. Upload a text document with your team number and the YouTube link.
- Each minute late will result in a penalty. Entries not received in advance of the conference are subject to a penalty up to 50%.
- The film may be no longer than 5 minutes long, including credits.
- Additional students may be used as crew members and cast, but they cannot fill the roles of director and/or producer/editor. See technical standards for additional information on students outside of the official team of 2.
- Maturity rating must be either Everyone, Everyone 10+, or Teen.
- All footage must be shot within the timeframe of the competition.

File set up

- 5 Second Slate with your team number.
- 5 Seconds of Black
- Film, including credits (up to 5 minutes)
- 5 Seconds of Black
- Save file as “[team number].mp4” – i.e., 1234.mp4