

Regardless of the series, pilot episodes always stand out. By definition, they're going to be different than the rest of the show just because of the sheer amount of ground they have to cover. TV shows thrive off the familiar: the core characters, setting, and ideas are similar week to week. But a pilot doesn't have any of that weight behind it. We don't know any of those things, and it's a pilot's job to get us there. As you could see from the title, this video is going to be talking about the pilot of Lost. Now, Lost is one of the most polarizing shows of all time. Some people, like me, love it, and others hate it, which I get. But one thing I think both sides can agree on is that the show starts off <i>really</i> well. In its 2-part pilot, creators Damon Lindelof and JJ Abrams give us everything we need from a pilot, hooking the audience, setting up the series, and teaching us how to watch their show. So that's what we're going to look at today, how the pilot of Lost executes its very high degree of difficulty using every piece of equipment in its storytelling toolbelt. Spoilers ahead but only for the pilot episode. I'm Jackson and this is Ideas At Play. So, why Lost? There are plenty of shows that are more recent and have less baggage. And in doing research for this video, I actually found that Lost breaks a lot of the quote/unquote rules of writing a pilot. Conventional TV wisdom is that you have to set up a story in your pilot that can carry on indefinitely. In his 2011 book "Writing the Pilot," screenwriter William Rabkin explicitly says:	Montage of pilots that look way different than the rest of the series: 30 rock, crazy ex girlfriend, game of thrones Lost opening sequence Articles about the end of Lost MGFX: fans on one side, haters on the other Shared idea: "the show starts off really well" B-roll from pilot Minimize window within a window Spoiler warning Opener Characters looking confused, looking through luggage Character trying to break something MGFX: Conventional TV Wisdom at the top, text - "a pilot has to set up a story that can carry on indefinitely" Wipe over, bring in William, his book, 2011
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"It isn't a serialized novel. There has never been a long-running series that started with an outline for a beginning, middle, and end to play out over a set of seasons."

But that already feels dated just 7 years later. Today, there *are* shows that start out with a beginning, middle, and end in mind, and I've even made videos about two of them: Mr. Robot and Crazy Ex-Girlfriend. Before, shows tried to reach syndication, to be played on multiple broadcast networks, but with streaming services more essential than ever to TV watchers, syndication doesn't matter nearly as much.

And Lost kind of sits on the threshold between these two worlds: the new world of binging and the old world of syndication. The show didn't have a set beginning, middle, and end in mind when it started, but it did figure to have an intensely serialized story. So the pilot of Lost ends up being a really relevant episode for TV shows to learn from today, even though it aired nearly 15 years ago.

Okay, so what's so great about it? Well, let's start with how it hooks its audience immediately.

Now, tons of TV episodes, not just pilots, start with a scene that grabs you, and in screenwriting it actually has a name: the teaser. By definition, the teaser comes before the 4 acts of an hour long drama and is meant to preview the central conflict of the episode, often by putting a main character in peril.

But, in a pilot, we don't care about these characters yet, so the show needs to create

Text

Quickly age (rust, tatter, decay, etc) as the date turns up to 2018

Mr. Robot and Crazy Ex-Girlfriend clip, transition them into thumbnail-esque clips
Transition

Syndication across the top, have a show pop up on multiple TVs labelled USA, TNT, FX, have them wiped out by Hulu, Netflix, Amazon Prime

Separate the 2 sets of TVs and put Lost between them. Label right one binging era, the left one syndication era
Zoom back in to Lost, play b-roll with season thumbnails along the bottom, highlight beginning, middle, and end and on "serialized" draw an arrow through the whole thing and use that to transition to the right to something

Title overlay: hooking the audience

Cold open of Breaking Bad or The Wire

Overlay, "The Teaser"
Underneath the teaser graphic layout of 4 act structure zoom into it, define it as "previews the central conflict of the episode, often by putting a main character in peril"

Highlight "main character," darken so it isn't legible

something novel, a combination of images and ideas that are both confusing and interesting. Think of two hugely successful pilots that will air after Lost: Game of Thrones and Breaking Bad. Breaking Bad gives us a man in a gas mask and tighty whities driving an RV with two dead bodies. Game of Thrones kills off a scouting group that finds some really creepy stuff. Both scenes are a combination of images that intrigue us. And here, Lost does the same thing.

The show opens on Jack, a character in a suit in the middle of the jungle. He's out of place and we want to know what he's doing there. When he hears a noise, we start to imagine all the things it could be before a yellow lab walks out. At first, we're relieved right along with Jack, but then we remember that that's weird, and as he runs out of the grove we see a sneaker hanging from a tree, which brings more questions.

There are only 5 sporadic shots of the wreckage without Jack running through it or it exploding, totaling only 11 seconds. Add in heavy camera shake, and we don't ever get a great look at what's going on in the background. We're intensely focused on what Jack is doing, and even though we can see an entire world starting to form beyond him, we only get glimpses of it in the background.

While this teaser hook combines confusion, intrigue, and action, it's not the only hook in the episode. Lost places a completely different kind of second hook at the end. In this scene, a group of the survivors climb to high ground to get a signal on their radio, and hear a French distress signal that has been playing for 16 years. Charlie looks up and delivers the iconic line:

Transition: confusing + interesting

Bring up Game of Thrones and Breaking Bad side by side, zoom into Breaking Bad, play cold open.

Zoom out. Zoom into Game of Thrones cold open.

Zoom out. Gas mask + tighty whities + dead bodies under BB, wight girl, crazy symbol and blue eyed white walker under GOT

Opening scene

Zoom out to show the timeline beneath the window with exact time on one side and 0:00 on the left.

Break that timeline into 169 shots = 2.6 seconds each

Highlight the 5 shots and play them. Zoom back in to highlight camera shake. More teaser broll

Ending where he's winding down and walking with the credits rolling
Gang hiking

Around the radio

Into...

"Guys, where are we?"

This scene isn't *just* a cliffhanger. Characters aren't left in danger on the edge of a cliff and it's not the introduction of a brand new element, it's shedding light on the danger that's already present in a way that somehow brings more mystery. Where the first hook was packed with action that gets our blood pumping and ready for an episode of TV, the second is a quiet scene that draws us in.

These two different styles of hook represent its creative approach to reading the rules of writing a pilot. It takes the idea that a pilot should tell a "self-contained story that gets us to come back for more" and focuses on the second part: coming back for more. Like all teasers, that first hook gets us to stick around for the whole episode. But the second hook is key here, it almost begs you to click on the next episode.

Where many pilots marinate in your brain for week to week consumption, *Lost* demands your attention *right now*. But hooking the audience doesn't mean anything if you don't have a series to hook them to.

And setting up that series is a lot of ground to cover. There's the setting, central conflicts, and each main character, and each one brings with it a new challenge. For example, the central conflict that drives the show hinges on the idea of working together to survive. As Jack will say in a later episode:

"If we can't live together, we're gonna die alone"

MGFX: Animation of a gang hanging off a cliff
Put them in a circle with darkness around them, widen the lit area slightly, showing scary shapes

Transition
Insert: Two hooks next to each other

Sayid trying to fix the radio and other b-roll

Blur: text "self...."

Highlight "coming back for more"

Teaser broll

End broll

Overlay: setting up the series

WS of island
Sayid and Sawyer fighting
Group of survivors

Michael and Jin
Jin refusing guy in the rain

Jack clip bleed into...

The tension is going to come from characters who otherwise might never have met being forced to work together despite their considerable differences and suspicions. So, great, we've got a conflict in mind, but, like storytelling Jenga, there's now less material to work with and new challenges, namely introducing a range of characters that are different enough to make this premise work *and* some of the kinds of obstacles they'll have to overcome.

And just introducing characters is going to be tough, even with 90 minutes. There's Jack, Kate, Sawyer, Hurley, Locke, Sayid, Jin, Sun, Michael, Walt, Boone, Shannon, Charlie, and Claire. That's a *lot* of different people who are going to be essential to this story. So Lost uses a combination of symbols, relationships, and editing to give us the shape of 14 distinct characters. I don't have time to go into detail on each character so I'm just going to pick one example that uses all three.

While he's a central character to the series, we don't see much of John Locke in this pilot, he's on screen for less than 4 minutes. But every second of that screen time is used well. This shot is the first real look we get at him. The orange slice not only emphasizes his out-of-place smile, but it's also a symbol of nature in the middle of wreckage. It shows us that he's the first character to embrace the island.

We see this willingness to embrace the island later with some really stellar editing. As Jack, Kate, and Charlie walk through the jungle on their way to the cockpit, the show cuts back to Locke alone. And it's a cut that stands out because it feels separate from the story and

Hurley and Jin with fish
Sun and Kate

Jenga MGFX: pull out conflict piece, whole thing shakes a little

Under that conflict piece:
Wide range of Characters,
Shape of obstacles to come

Each character

Sawyer with his note, Jin and Sun together,
Claire on the beach
Charlie looking scared in the jungle

Locke hiking

Kate looking at him

Orange slice

Locke on the beach in the rain

the group. When we return to Jack, Kate, and Charlie, it starts to rain.

"Is this normal? Day turning into night end of the world type of weather?"

Now the show cuts back to the group scrambling for shelter, but not our main guy Locke. He embraces the rain, and that shot from earlier gains some weight and gives him a unique connection to the island.

His mysticism is played up even more by the one relationship he gets in the pilot, a short conversation with Walt.

Walt immediately looks up to him. He seems wise, shedding some perspective on Walt's life

"You've had a bad month"

and sharing his extensive knowledge of backgammon, revealing it to be the oldest game in the world and somewhat ominously describing it as a struggle between ____

"Do you want to know a secret?"

The combination of these tools of symbols, editing, and relationships give us a lasting image of Locke and the flesh out the rest of the cast to show how different they all are, and how they contrast with each other.

As for the setting, every obstacle they face is part of the island antagonist from the monster in the jungle that attacks the group at the cockpit to their climb to find high ground for a radio signal. While we don't really understand the island yet, we do learn a lot about it, and we can tell that it is formidable — the perfect

Walt Locke scene

Quick brush up: Locke's smile, Locke shot, Locke with Walt.
Charlie doing heroin
Michael with Walt

Island at night

Island broll

Overlay: teach us how to watch the show

place for the series conflict and characters to thrive.

Which brings us to the final thing that the pilot of *Lost* does so well — teach us how to watch the show. Just looking at the two hooks, we can tell that the show is prepping us to focus on its mysteries through the lens of character. Of the 169 shots in that opening teaser, 78 are framed this close or closer.



While we want to study the wreck in the background, *Lost* emphasizes the character first. Anything we learn is going to be with these people in mind.

Later, as trees crash in the jungle, we see what the group sees, and turn away from it to see their reactions.

Hurley's reaction

It's this focus on character that leads *Lost* to use the flashbacks that will become the calling card of the series in the seasons to come. After this pilot, episodes will tell two stories of a single character — one from their life on the island and one from their life off — that weave together. Those interlocking stories give color to their current choices by seeing these previous ones that they've made.

Teaser scene

Freeze frame on this shot show graphic in corner of $78/169 = 46\%$

Jack running in front of the plane to Claire Hurley yelling to him, what's your name?

"Jack"
Watching the trees fall

Jack's flashback

Quick b-roll of future flashbacks that don't reveal anything, maybe a Locke one

Same thing with Charlie or Jack or Kate

Three flashback scenes next to each other playing

Zoom into Jacks

And while the pilot opts for the assorted flashbacks of Jack, Charlie, and Kate, the basic idea is the same. Each flashback gives us some color to a character on the island. In Jack's flashback, we see him as a leader. In Charlie's, we learn of his heroin addiction. In Kate's, we learn that she is the prisoner and that she tried to save her marshall.

It's perfectly normal

Each of these revelations gives light to the characters we see on the island and their choices: Jack's leadership as a coping mechanism, Charlie's cowardice in the cockpit, and Kate's inner conflict between running away and helping out. On top of that, each flashback crosses their paths with each other. They introduce the idea of their past not just influences their own choices, but the people around them. This is huge, because Lost is going to be about how these characters can work together to become greater, whether that's to survive or to discover themselves.

And we don't just get hints of this theme through the flashbacks. Jack tells Kate a story of how he dealt with fear that she uses to find courage later in the episode. Sawyer and Sayid find themselves at odds as an Iraqi and a redneck, but both prove valuable to the group, with Sayid fixing the radio and Sawyer shooting a polar bear. While neither becomes less suspicious of the other, it helps to reveal the layers beneath these characters and how they'll interact with each other.

"I'm a complex guy sweetheart"

That final hook scene is a perfect microcosm for what the show will be. A group of

Cut to Charlie's
Cut to Kate's

Back to Jack comforting Rose then studying the crash before leaping into action

Charlie in the bathroom then cut to have him come out of it, Kate looking at the marshall and then hiking
Charlie bumping Jack, Shannon, Boone
Jack talking to rose, then reviving her

Group working together

Jack story to Kate
Kate in the jungle (audio clip)

Sawyer and sayid fighting (audio clip)
Sayid fixes the radio
Sawyer shoots the polar bear

Both looking at each other side-eye

Final hook scene

strangers is going to have to work together, overcome their differences, survive, and move forward. And that moving forward might just bring as many new questions as it does answers.

Lost noise

And if you're looking for the answers to some of the questions you have in your life like "How do I work Photoshop?" Or "How do I start my own freelance business?" Hop on over to Skillshare. It's one of my favorite places to learn because you get to learn by doing instead of just watching. Every course has a project in it and a community where you can share your work, give, and get feedback from people working on exactly the same things you are. They have a huge library of over 22,000 courses and if you follow my link in the description below you can get FREE unlimited access for one month to all of them.

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