

Training with Impact:

The MILO Range Guide to Creating
Better Police Training Scenarios



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Training with Impact:

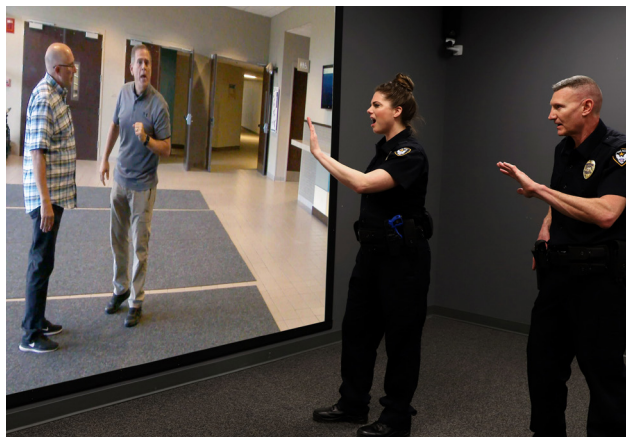
The MILO Range Guide to Creating Better Police Training Scenarios

All successful films—from the blockbuster Oscar-winner to the lowliest Tide™ commercial—have one thing in common: emotional impact.

The audience is startled, or amused, or feels the tug on their heartstrings. Subsequently, they remember that story or want that product.

Training videos are no different: When they are boring, they are worse than useless. But when they create a genuine emotional impact, that seals memories in place. In the case of an interactive law enforcement training scenario, creating emotional impact can save lives.

Immersive filmmaking is an amazingly powerful tool. With a little careful planning, you can create emotionally rich training scenarios that capture the uncertainty of real-world interactions—yet still reproducibly and verifiably meet a discrete training objective. Instead of being blindsided, your officers will have the opportunity to confront stressful situations and tricky emotional realities away from the public eye. They can then debrief the experience with your trainers and among their colleagues, examine their decisions, determine how they might want to handle a situation differently, and practice doing it all better—so that when they meet these challenges in the field, they are prepared to make the right call the first time.



Great filmmakers (be it on the big screen or in a brief ad) use emotional impact to sear a fundamental message into their audiences' minds.

Story is the fundamental message of a great movie. The “call to action” is the fundamental message of an effective commercial. For law enforcement training video, the fundamental message is the **training objective**.

Examples of common training objectives include:

- ✓ ***Demonstrating a firm grasp of a specific ordinance***
- ✓ ***Applying a particular de-escalation technique***
- ✓ ***Honing situational awareness and observational skills***

With proper planning, you can create an immersive training video that will make a consistent emotional impact on trainees and effectively meet your training objectives.

Making Movies

In traditional filmmaking, people often fixate on technology—especially cameras. It's true: having RED Digital Cinema cameras, a full audio production package with Sennheiser microphones, and a slew of quality lenses, filters, and lights is great.



But, in general, good technique is much more important than good technology; there are major motion pictures shot entirely on iPhones, and absolutely awful movies filmed with the very best equipment money can buy.

You can film and produce a good immersive training scenario on almost any budget and with any equipment (within reason)—provided you plan accordingly. When producing immersive training scenarios for video-based simulation training, planning has two critical stages: **development** and **storyboarding**.



PRO TIP:

Good technique compensates for slightly lower grade equipment; **good equipment** means having to worry less about coming up with clever techniques.

Development

Development begins by clearly stating the fundamental message you're trying to communicate. Sit down with your **subject matter expert (SME)** and identify your **training objective** (the specific skill, policy, or tactic you want the trainee to hone).

Now list situations in which this skill is used. For example, you may decide you need to train on your department's new policy for engaging with a person who appears to be emotionally disturbed. In what situations has this been an issue in your community? In what situations do you suspect it might create additional challenges to officers in the field? Are there gray areas in the policy or procedure that your trainees need to understand?

There are no "bad" ideas during this brainstorming phase—provided you don't invest too much time on any one idea. Taking just a few minutes, work up a brief **sketch** of each idea:

Give the sketch an easily recognizable title (such as "emotionally disturbed(ED) man living in van"), then list the following three elements of that potential scenario:

- **Participants:** How many officers, suspects, victims, and bystanders are involved? What does each do that defines the situation?
- **Location:** Where does this situation occur? What time of day? (If you would handle a situation one way in a church parking lot, and a different way in a bar parking lot, that's worth considering.)
- **Challenge:** How does the training objective come into play? What factors in the situation might complicate the trainee's attempt to meet that objective?

Remember, there are no bad ideas at this stage of planning—so be honest during this process. Is a situation more challenging when the officer and suspect are from different cultures or of different genders? If so, note that. Do you think you have a good chance of locating actors that fit these roles? If not, can you revise the sketch without weakening your ability to meet the training objective? How might bystanders in your community complicate matters? (**Remember:** You can almost certainly cast much better and more diverse actors than you suspect; see the **Actors** section for details.)



While there are no bad ideas, there are certainly very-hard-to-film ideas. This is an excellent time to start considering feasibility. If you have trouble finding young-looking actors, don't plan to film a "teen rumble at the mall" training scenario. If the local shopping mall is hesitant to let you use their building overnight, hold off on that "Black Friday active shooter" scenario. As a rule:

- **Filming indoors** (where you can control noise, ignore weather, and prevent people from wandering into frame) is much easier than filming outdoors
- **Using real actors** (even amateurs) is much easier than taking any old volunteer
- **Filming more material and alternate takes** is much better than getting down to editing and realizing you don't have quite all the material you need

Variations

Once you've sketched out the base scenario, start considering variations you may want to film. **Variations** address the variables that can present themselves in the field. Some of these have already popped up during your brainstorming. For example, possible variations on "emotional disturbed(ED) man living in van" might include:

- "ED elderly man living in bus—public park"
- "ED elderly man living in bus—private parking lot"
- "ED elderly man living in bus—many bystanders"
- "ED young man living in bus—public park"
- "ED young man living in bus—private parking lot"
- "ED young woman living in bus—public park"

... and so on



With a little planning and smart location selection, it can be very easy to film several variations in one session. A single well-planned day of filming can result in enough footage for a nice little library of related training scenarios, covering a range of potential challenges related to your initial training objective.

Once you've settled on one or more sketches that are 1) worth pursuing, 2) feasible to film, and 3) meet your main training goals for that scenario, move onto creating a **storyboard**.

Storyboarding

Your storyboard will guide you through the filming process. This is how you guarantee that your fundamental message (the **training objective**) will be sharp and clear.

There are lots of different ways to organize a storyboard. These range from outlines with a few quick stick figures and arrows, to detailed full-color drawings that look like a comic-book adaptation of a film.



Storyboarding an immersive training scenario (which has multiple different possible storylines, depending on how the trainee acts and reacts) is a little different. We've attached several sample storyboard templates to this guide, including one used for one of our own productions.

The first step in storyboarding is to flesh out the scenario(s) and variation(s) you'll be producing. Sit down with your SME and others with pertinent expertise (e.g., trainers, administrators, active officers, social workers or other para-professionals, etc.) and review the sketches your drafted during the development stage.

Ask these questions:

- 1) **What is the scenario setting?** Be as precise as possible, and attach pictures (quick snapshots taken with your phone are fine).
- 2) **How many people are in the scenario? What are the ages/genders/cultures/etc. of each participant?** Be as specific as possible.
- 3) **What created this situation? How much of that does the officer know before arriving? What does he or she see upon arriving?** Also, how might a person (victim, suspect, officer, or bystander) behave in such a situation?
- 4) **What options does the officer have?** Include both your desired officer reaction(s) and poor decisions.
- 5) **How do suspects typically react to these options?**
- 6) **What are the best and worst case scenarios?**

Answers to the first three questions will form the basis of your **Approach** (which includes anything the trainee is told in advance, plus the first portion of the scenario, which they see as the training session begins). The answers to the last three questions are the basis for the dynamic pathways, or **branches**, that you will film.

Planning Your Branches

Each scenario offers a trainee multiple opportunities to make decisions. Each choice sends them down a different scenario path, or **branch**, which in turn may branch again and again, until the situation is resolved (for better or worse).

Broadly speaking, there are two types of branches: Instructor Branches and Trigger Branches.



Instructor Branches

Instructor branches are branch options the instructor can manually trigger as the scenario is running. The instructor triggers a branch either as a response to a trainee action/decision, or to drive the scenario toward a given possible outcome. Common instructor branches include:

- **Compliance:** The subject stays engaged and fully complies with officer (this usually ends the scenario)
- **Non-compliance:** The subject gives verbal or non-verbal indications of non-compliant or violent behavior. Trainee responds. The instructor can determine if this response de-escalates the situation to a **compliance branch**, shifts to a **disengagement branch**, or moves it into an **escalation branch**.
- **Escalation:** The subject stays engaged, but escalates the situation (becomes argumentative, verbally abusive, physically aggressive, etc.). This can lead to another branching decision, perhaps further **escalation branches**, **disengagement branch**, or even a **force branch**.
- **Disengagement:** The subject attempts to disengage (tries to walk off, puts space between themselves and the trainee while becoming more aggressive, etc.); this may end a scenario, or branch further.
- **Force:** The subject may engage in an action that can be perceived by a reasonable person as being likely to cause great bodily injury. The trainee is obliged to apply lethal or less-lethal force.



Trigger branches

Trigger branches are branches automatically triggered by a trainee interaction with the scenario (usually via a laser-fitted training device, such as a model OC spray canister, Taser, or firearm). Triggered branches are mapped to specific target areas on the screen, allowing you to have branches specifically tied to very specific events (i.e., one branch for Taser contact with an arm, another branch for Taser contact with the trunk, a third for a hit—or miss—with OC spray, etc.)

As you fill in the sections of your storyboard, make a point of noting what the trainee must hear or see in order to properly ascertain **means**, **motive**, and **opportunity** (having this written down makes it easier to be sure these visual and audio cues are clear and present when you're filming). Every scenario is an opportunity for your trainees to practice seeing through the haze of an emotionally charged situation in order to note (and later precisely articulate) the evidence of **means**, **motive**, and **opportunity** they observed, and how these oriented them to the situation and justified their decisions and actions.



As you draft your branches, think about two types of **blocking**:

- **actor blocking**: Where are actors standing so that 1) their interaction makes sense and 2) the trainee can see what they need to see in order to meet your training objective?
- **“blocking the shot”**: How does the camera need to be placed so that you capture everything the trainee needs to hear and see (without being distracted by things you don't want them to see)?

The easiest way to illustrate proper blocking on your storyboard is to go out to your location with a few **stand-ins** (i.e., volunteers who are basically the right size to represent your actors) and take a few quick pictures. Attach these pictures to your storyboard.



PRO TIP:

Properly blocking a shot can be really frustrating at first, because it means having to keep everything in mind at the same time: Actors, camera, props, structures, vehicles, and anything in the background. On the tiny camera screen you may hardly notice the church carnival happening across the street. Once it's on the big screen in the simulator, the clowns, pony, and bounce house can be tremendously distracting.

Finally, for each branch, you'll want to note the actor's **"base position"** (similar to **"first position"** in television and filmmaking). The **base position** is the actors' blocking at the beginning of the branch (which is probably quite similar to their final blocking at the end of the previous branch). You may want to attach a picture of the actors in their base position to your storyboard. Your editing and branch programming will go more smoothly if you can easily **match** up the tail end of one branch with the beginning of the next. Making sure that actors return to their base positions can make this easier (and also help you avoid distracting continuity mistakes).



Actors

The right talent bridges many gaps: An actor with even minimal stage experience will have no problem emoting for a camera that's awkwardly far away. They can use their voice to compensate for less sensitive mics or poor filming conditions. Given the outlines of a scene, they will improvise the needed dialogue. They have experience evoking real emotional responses, both in each other and in those watching the scenes you film.

Finding Actors

Contact local community colleges, universities with theater programs, and community theater groups. If you need to shoot a scenario with teens in it, then consider reaching out to the local high schools (bearing in mind that you'll need to get parental permission to work with most teen actors). When you treat your talent like professionals, they will behave professionally, and you'll get good results.



PRO TIP:

You can direct actors while cameras are rolling. If you make sure that your audio is **clear** (i.e., the microphone is capturing dialogue at a good volume) and **clean** (i.e., you don't talk over your actors), then you can edit your voice out later.

Creating Emotional Impact

A big part of what makes an immersive training scenario so effective is that it triggers a genuine emotional response in the trainee. Triggering a genuine emotional and physiological reaction stamps the training objective into your trainee's memory. This starts with making choices that make it easy for your audience to believe in the scenario:

If you're preparing trainees to de-escalate a conflict involving a high-school girl infuriated over a social media post, filming that scenario in a school hallway with some girls from the drama club will be much more effective than having a couple of female officers yelling at each other in the parking lot.



Always remember the fundamental truth of all filmmaking: Keep it Simple. If you have limited experience filming, basic equipment, and are still developing your talent pool, start with something simple, and you'll end up with a solid immersive training scenario. As you build skills with your equipment and develop relationships with local actors, you'll find you can quickly expand to more ambitious projects.



PRO TIP:

When filming, pad both the beginning and end of each shot with about 30 seconds of the actors standing in their first or final position (this extra footage is often called “**heads**” and “**tails**”). Having good heads and tails makes it easier to edit the film later, and to program the scenario's **in-point**, **out-point**, and **loop points** in simulation software like **MILO Course Designer**.



From a technical standpoint, it's easiest to produce an emotionally powerful scenario if you:

- 1) **use a single indoor location:** Film in a closed room with decent acoustics (i.e., few echoes, little background noise); you won't have to worry about weather, distracting sounds, shifting light conditions, people walking into your scene, etc.
- 2) **use a small cast:** A single actor is very easy to film (although poses an acting challenge to someone with no acting experience). A scenario featuring several people, but with only one interacting with the "officer" (i.e., the camera, which serves as the officer point-of-view) is similarly straightforward. A domestic disturbance or other two-party argument is only a little tougher. A big crowd is a challenge.
- 3) **focus on creating branches that are relevant and seamless:** Be sure each branch you film contributes to meeting your training objective. Also, watch out for distractions in the frame (continuity errors, distracting activity in the background, etc.) You want the trainee to seamlessly flow from one branch to the next; nothing should draw their attention to the fact that a new branch has triggered.

Finally, don't forget your **subject matter expert (SME)**. This person should be as much a part of production as planning. Have them on-site while filming, so that the actors and director can consult with them.



Our experience in **MILO Studios** has been that a quality scenario does a tremendous amount of work—but it can be a tremendous amount of work to get it right. We regularly guide law enforcement agencies at every stage in their production: Talking through ideas, defining training objectives, even sending our production team down with equipment to film scenarios with your SMEs, in your locations. We're here to support law enforcement agencies, their trainers, and the officer in the field. When you're ready, just call.



“The week consisted of long hours, multiple sites for filming, inclement weather conditions and working with a new group of actors each day. [MILO Studios’] professionalism, consideration, and work ethic were above and beyond what I expected and I truly want to thank you and them for an extremely productive week.”

— Thomas DePaul, Acting Director
Cape May County, Department of Public Safety Training Center

Contact Us

Having a question? Feel free to contact us. We're here to help.

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GLOSSARY

- **approach:** The first portion of the training scenario. It sets the mood, and presents the basic facts of the situation the trainee is encountering.
- **blocking:** Blocking refers to how elements are positioned for filming. **Actor blocking** covers where the actors are standing, where they move, and how they interact. **Camera blocking** (also called “**Blocking the shot**”) covers how you’ve positioned everything in relation to the camera (e.g., actors, props, background elements, filming equipment, the camera itself, etc.)
- **branches:** An interactive training scenario gives the trainee multiple options; they’ll experience different storylines based on their decisions. Each choice sends them down a different “**dynamic pathway**” or “**branch**”. An **instructor branch** is manually triggered by the instructor, while a **trigger branch** is automatically triggered by a trainee action (usually involving the use of a tool—such as a sidearm, Taser, or OC spray—equipped with tracking hardware).
- **continuity:** The careful filming and organization of video clips to maintain the illusion that the action happens without pauses or interruptions.
- **base position:** This is the actors’ blocking at the beginning of a branch. In television or filmmaking this would usually be called the actors “first positions,” “ones,” or “reset.”
- **“heads and tails”:** The amount of time recorded before and after an action during recording.
- **“interactive law enforcement training scenario” or “immersive training scenario”:** A controlled, reproducible, emotionally vivid simulation-based immersive role-playing session in which a trainee (or group of trainees) works through a specific real-world law enforcement situation with the intent of meeting a specific **training objective**.
- **in-point / out-point:** The **in-point** is where the video clip begins. The **out-point** is where it ends.
- **loop points:** Short, loop-able video clips with minimal action/movement. The loop points define a clip that can smoothly loop while your trainee makes a decision.
- **matching:** The process of being sure that your clips match up. Poor matching of clips can be distracting. (See **continuity**.)
- **MILO Course Designer :** The scenario editing software included with every MILO Range solution.
- **“scenario”:** (See “**interactive law enforcement training scenario**”)

- **sketch:** A brief written overview of an immersive scenario you might create. A sketch can be as simple as a bulleted list that includes these four elements: Descriptive Title, Participants, Location, Challenge.
- **storyboard:** Traditionally this is a sequence of pictures created to describe each scene in the film production. In filming an immersive training scenario, your storyboard will include notes and images, and serve as a guide through your filming and editing process.
- **subject matter expert (SME):** A person—such as a law enforcement officer or trainer—with specialized knowledge in a specific field.
- **training objective:** The specific skill, policy, or tactic you want your trainee to develop and improve.

Scenario Storyboard Template

Date:

Written by:

Title:

What is the training objective for this scenario?

What force options will the officer have? (Firearm, OC, Taser, etc)

Where will this scenario take place? What time of day?

How many suspects/assailants will be in this scenario? Are there any bystanders/victims?

What are the suspect(s)/assailant(s) doing/want to do?

Possible branches

Describe each:

Branch #1

Type of Branch: (circle one) Compliance, Non-compliance, Escalation, Disengagement, Force, Trigger

Branch #2

Type of Branch: (circle one) Compliance, Non-compliance, Escalation, Disengagement, Force, Trigger

Branch #3

Type of Branch: (circle one) Compliance, Non-compliance, Escalation, Disengagement, Force, Trigger

[illegible]

Scenario Storyboard Example

Date: April 1, 2019

Written by: Alan Smithee

Title: Subject smoking in public lot claiming immunity under MMMA

What is the training objective for this scenario?

To highlight and gauge trainee's knowledge of current Michigan Medical Marijuana Act law—particularly when encountering subjects claiming immunity and defense provisions under the MMMA in areas open to the public. (Michigan Medical Marijuana Act [MMMA]. MCL 333.26421 through MCL 333.26430. Plain view/plain smell doctrine. *Graham v Connor*)

What force options will the officer have? (Firearm, OC, Taser, etc)

- OC
- Taser

Where will this scenario take place? What time of day?

After business hours—but lighted/still light out. Parking lot with cars still in it. Clear weather, radio or simulated radio call to patrol vehicle giving dispatch instructions and information about call from business owner/security.

How many suspects/assailants will be in this scenario? Are there any bystanders/victims?

One middle aged white male (40-55) as the qualified MMMA card holder. Possibly another officer to cover passenger side approach and to call out observations (you can smell it...I can see a roach on dashboard..)

What are the suspect(s)/assailant(s) doing/want to do?

Security personnel monitoring parking lot video feed notice a subject smoking what appears to be marijuana in his car. Officers respond to the parking lot to investigate. Upon arrival at car, meet with subject who admits to smoking marijuana and is a qualifying patient under the MMMA. A marijuana roach is visible on the dashboard, and officers find four more bags during a search of the car. Camera faces and confronts subject at back of car after search. This is base position.

Possible branches (Example: comply, assault, etc)

Describe each:

Branch #1

Compliance: Subject agrees that he knows it's illegal to smoke in an area that is open for use to the general public. Scene ends with subject complying to orders he is under arrest.

Branch #2

Escalation: Subject argues that officer doesn't know what he's talking about and that he is immune and it's his own private car and doesn't care that it's an open lot. Takes aggressive base position (e.g., hands clenched but empty and down by sides).

Instructor branches:

1. De-escalate: back down due to officers rational commands
2. Escalate: officer resorts to force (**Trigger branches:** OC spray / Taser)

Branch #3

Disengagement: Subject walks off some distance then turns back with hands in pockets (base position). Officers give commands to show hands.

Instructor branches:

1. Suspect complies, shows empty hands, and de-escalates
2. Suspect pulls gun/knife and menaces officer. (**Trigger branch:** If officer uses force successfully, suspect falls to ground.)

Additional Notes:

Props, Costumes, & Effects:

Parking lot, cars, subject in car. Some kind of roach and smoking paraphernalia. Cigarette, herbal cigarette, vape, or prop cigarette to blow smoke out window as officers/patrol vehicle approach

Secondary/ancillary training objectives:

(e.g., Use of the radio, communication skills, observation, conflict resolution, etc.)

Observation skills. Knowledge of plain view and plain smell doctrine. Communication with subject about restrictions to claims of immunity under the MMMA. De-escalation and conflict resolution skills.