7 Rules to Making a Good Short Film

1. An Original and Unique Idea
   a. Avoid clichés – (e.g. Do not start the film with you waking up in the morning/alarm clock going off. It’s boring and overdone!)
   b. Try to look at the subject from a different angle
   c. Keep it simple
   d. Focus on a theme/message, not individual character development

2. It’s Not About Fancy Special Effects
   a. The subject, message, or theme is the most important
   b. Often used tip: think about editing/changing scenes when you blink. This may signal a natural “break”
   c. If you remember the special effect more than the message of the film, you should revise
   d. Beware of style over substance, even if you’re experimenting with new techniques or developing your own style

3. Ensure High Production Values
   a. Colour and lighting adjustments should be made for continuity
   b. Sound quality should be clear and volume should be appropriate (think of both music as well as dialogue)
   c. Editing should be appropriate and clean

4. Make it Short
   a. A good rule to go by: The longer your short film is, the harder it is to keep the viewer’s attention, especially if you plan to post your film for an audience online. (The avg. amount of time an online viewer spends watching film is 4 minutes!)
   b. The more you do with less, the more impressive your product will be
   c. Every scene must have a purpose. If you could eliminate one and the film would still be effective, then you don’t need it
   d. This should hint to you just how important planning each scene is

The End – By Tim Clayton and Robert Crowther
http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/filmnetwork/A5209823

5. Start with a Strong Beginning
   a. Grab the viewer’s attention from the very first shot
   b. Don’t waste time on long intros and/or credits. It’s not about you!
   c. Don’t waste time on long establishing shots
   d. Audiences like to “put things together” – don’t spoon feed them with too much information
   e. Show the work-in-progress to someone who has never seen it to get feedback throughout the post-production process!

6. Tie Up Some Loose Ends (if you want to)
   a. Short films are often about showing a glimpse of real life so you do not need to have an ending where absolutely everything is resolved. It’s OK if the film could continue after the credits.
b. There is no need for a happy ending

7. Avoid Repetition and Punch Line Twists
   a. Stay away from “too smart for you” twists. It’s not about the film maker!
   b. Repetition can waste time unless it’s used for a specific purpose
   c. Humour is difficult to showcase in short film if your audience has to wait 10 minutes for a punch line that isn’t funny. This also causes film makers to start with a strong shot and fill the middle with useless scenes, just to get to the punch line.
   d. If you would like to surprise the audience, make sure that it’s done in a unique way

_Le Cheval 2.1 – by S. Scott-Hayward and A. Kirkland_
http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/filmnetwork/A4565450

You can explore some short films and get more tips online. However, beware of Terms of Use rules for appropriate subject matter. Try the following links:

BBC Film Network:
http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/filmnetwork/relatedlinksrecommendedwatching

Vancouver Film School:
http://www.vfs.com/