

## QUICK TIPS FOR BETTER VIDEO

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### Pre-Production

- 1) Pre-production is hugely important. Plan your project and write even a simple script.
- 2) If you're going to record interviews, try conducting the interview over the phone first before you show up with the camera. This gets both you and the subject more comfortable with the questions.
- 3) Make a shot list based on your script, and use that list to make sure you get what you need.
- 4) Charge your batteries and clear your memory cards (or buy blank media) the day before; and make sure that you have plenty of battery power, a charger, and plenty of recording space to last you the day!
- 5) Make sure that you have all the pieces and parts of your camera kit, and that they're all packed and ready to go.

### Production

- 1) Know your camera. If it offers manual focus and exposure control, learn how to use those features... and use them. Automatic focus and exposure can hurt more than help. Manual white balance is especially important.
- 2) Buy a tripod. Most of what you need to do can be done with a tripod, and this will help to eliminate shaky video.
- 3) If you have to shoot hand-held, use both hands and stabilize yourself against a solid object.
- 4) Shoot to edit. With each shot, think about the next shot, or, where you are going to go with it when you cut them together. 4a) Take really good notes as you shoot, or have someone help, so you're organized when you go to edit.
- 5) Get plenty of coverage. Instead of one, long shot to cover a scene, get a variation of shots and angles: wide, to establish the setting; medium, to focus the viewer on something happening in that scene; and close-up to get an intimate view of what's going on (emotion, action, reaction).
- 6) For documentary or "news magazine" styled pieces, get your interviews first if you can and then shoot your other footage, so you'll know what you need to illustrate the interview.
- 7) Pay attention to the camera's height. Standing eye level is great for standing, but not for shooting. Lower the camera to enhance both the subject and the foreground/background as needed.
- 8) Use negative space to lead the subject. Emptiness behind the subject looks unnatural and a little uncomfortable.
- 9) Leave yourself heads and tails: hit record 5 seconds before "action" and don't stop recording until you're 5 seconds past "cut" to ensure that you have room to make edits. You'll thank yourself later!
- 10) Get the mic off the camera and into the action: the camera's built-in mic just won't do you much good in the long run, especially for dialog. If your camera doesn't have very decent sound, use a hand-held audio recorder.
- 11) Wear headphones that are plugged into your primary audio recording device (whether it's the camera or another device). If you aren't monitoring your audio while you record, you have no idea what you're recording.
- 12) Keep control over your exposure, and adjust if lights are too bright in the background or are causing hot spots on your subject; and if it's too dark... add light. Footage from dim environments will be very grainy and hard to see.
- 13) If you see or hear a problem in your picture or sound, that's the time to fix it. A lot of neat things can be done in editing, but fixing bad picture or sound are not to be left for post.

### Post-Production

- 1) Organize your media before you edit, and use any notes that you took during production to do so.
- 2) Lay your interviews down first to tell the story, then start to fill in everything else around it.
- 3) Avoid inside jokes, or long montages of silly faces and other things that don't really tell the story.
- 4) If you're using still images, edit those images. 5 shots in a row that all look similar/the same can be a bit boring, and can lose the viewer's interest. If you have multiples, pick one.
- 5) Watch your time. 3-5 minutes is a really good target for your finished video. Anything longer can lose the viewer.
- 6) Sound is just as important as picture, so spend just as much time building your soundscape in post. Use layers of sounds (dialog, ambient sounds from your footage, music) to make a complete image.
- 7) Mix your sound levels. They aren't all correct coming straight out of the camera or out of the sound recorder. Pay attention to how each piece is placed among the other pieces so that the viewer hears what needs to be heard, and watch for jarring transitions (loud music that suddenly pops in after really quiet dialog, for example).
- 8) Avoid zany video transitions. The cut and the dissolve are your best friends.
- 9) Keep titles simple, and in a font that is easily read. 9a) Pick one font and stick with it.
- 10) Use only music and images that you have permission to use. Copyright infringement applies to non-profits, too.