



LET'S MAKE A MOVIE

Planning Your Shoot

Discuss your shoot with other members of the production team and make sure you're clear on what shots you need to tell the story. If you're on your own, plan all the shots you are likely to need to make up your story and list all the elements you want to get in your video. It sometimes helps to sketch out a rough storyboard. This will help you to develop your shot list as you will be able to easily visualize what will be required. Think about what's going to look good visually, and how your shots are going to come together sequentially.

Check all the equipment you will need for the shoot and don't forget plenty of tape stock, you will use more than you think so take extra rolls with you. Remember to take a tripod or something like an old sock filled with dried peas on which you can rest the camera, this will help to stabilize your shots.

Recce Your Locations

If possible try to do a full reconnaissance of all the locations in which you hope to be filming. Take note of any permissions or permits you will need to obtain beforehand and familiarize yourself with any potential Health and Safety requirements which may have to be taken into consideration. Look at the available lighting, ask yourself do I need to take in any additional lights or is ambient lighting sufficient? Listen to the sound – do I need special microphones to cope with any extraneous noise or do I need to find a quieter location in which to record my interview with the CEO?

Try to work out a logical progression for the filming so that you don't have to recover areas you've already filmed a previous scene in. Moving from one location to another can take up valuable time in a tight shooting schedule so you may need to shoot out of sequence and rearrange the shots back in order later in the edit suite.

Roll Blank Tape Before You Shoot

Before you start shooting, record at the beginning of your tape for at least 30 seconds either with the lens cap on (or with colour bars if your camera can generate them - see your camera manual for setting your camera to display colour bars). This will avoid having any unusable footage at the start of the tape appearing in the video you want to shoot.



Shoot Selectively

Think before you shoot and don't waste tape. Be aware of what you're shooting and when the tape is rolling. Don't roll tape unless you're taking a shot. For example, don't roll tape when you're changing from one shot to another or focusing. Focus the camera and compose the shot before you start to record. Wait until you have the shot you want and then roll tape. That way you'll save a huge amount of time later when you're in the edit suite and you won't have to go through a hour-long tape with a lot of junk to find the 2 minutes of shots you want.

Check Your Audio

Use a good quality microphone to capture the sound. Don't rely on the microphone built into the camera, generally these are of poor quality and they are liable to pick up handling noise or the sound of the zoom lens. If shooting an interview or a piece to camera (PTC). NEVER use a built in microphone. I can say with all certainty that the sound you get will not be useable as it will probably be inaudible. Be sure to plug a set of headphones into the camera and check your audio to make sure you're getting good sound, if you can't hear it through the headphones then you will not be able to hear it in the final production. If all you can hear is background noise then move to a quieter location. I can't tell you how many times I've been asked to put this right in the edit and the answer is always *"No – that is what you have recorded and sadly there is nothing now I can do to correct it."*

It's easy to forget to plug an audio cord into the camera or to properly set the audio level - and wind up with great video but no audio to accompany it. Audio is just as important for your final film as your video.

Remember : without good sound all you have is a silent movie!

QUIET ON SET!

Shut Up When You Shoot

When you press the record button, shut up!

Keep in mind that when the camera is rolling it picks up all the ambient sound, not just what you're focusing on. And you won't be able to separate the unwanted audio out in the editing process. Don't talk while the camera is rolling, either to yourself or with other members of your team, and no humming. This is especially important when you're shooting B-roll rushes like natural sound, such as the noise of a busy street or a nature scene, where the sound is important to the shot.



Hold Your Shots

Always let your camera 'roll up to speed'; just like any car it doesn't do nought to sixty in zero seconds, it takes a few seconds to reach the correct speed so always count to 15 before calling for 'ACTION' or before asking that first question to your interviewee.

Hold your shots for at least 15 seconds, before you begin to pan or zoom or go onto another shot. The editor will need a little bit of video at the beginning and at the end of every shot to allow him to create an effect such as a dissolve from one shot to the next. So allowing 15 seconds at the beginning and end of a sequence will ensure you have enough video of a scene to work with later when you do your editing. When you're starting out, silently count out the 15 seconds to yourself - to make sure you've held a shot long enough. Remember that you can always take a 15 second clip and make it a 2 second clip during editing, but you can't take a 2 second clip and make it into a 15 second clip.

Use A Tripod

Don't hand hold the camera even if it has image stabilization as a part of its functionality. Hand held shots are always wobbly and the constant movement of the camera makes the viewer feel uneasy. Use a tripod or a sock filled with dried peas to provide a stable base for your camera. Even a cheap tripod is better than none at all, although one with a good fluid head will provide much smoother camera pans so it's worth paying a little extra for a tripod with a good fluid pan and tilt head.

TIP:

If you have no other option than to hand hold the camera then zoom out to the widest shot and physically move closer to the subject this will reduce the amount of camera shake, also turn on the 'steadyshot' or 'image stabilization' function if your camera has this. Avoid using the zoom (telephoto shot) as this will tend to accentuate any camera shake.



OH LOOK, I'VE FOUND THE ZOOM CONTROL!

Excessive Panning and Zooming

Don't constantly pan from side to side or zoom in and out with the camera - hold your shots and look for the one moment that's really captivating. If you're constantly panning and zooming, the one shot you'll really want to use will lose its impact with all the movement by the camera. It looks unprofessional and worse still will irritate you viewer. Never use the zoom whilst the subject is speaking.

Start with a static, wide angle shot, and hold it for 15 seconds. Then make your move to zoom in or pan, and hold the next static shot for an additional 15 seconds. This will give you three useable shots - the wide-angle, the close-up and the zoom in between - to choose from in the edit room.

This is especially important for video you're using on a Web site because video with a lot of movement - such as panning and zooming - doesn't display well on the Web. Video clips need to be compressed to play on the Web, and that means if there's lots of movement in your clip - such as pans and zooms - it will appear choppy and slow.

Similarly, to get a close-up it's better to keep your camera set to a more wide-angle view and move the camera closer to the subject of your shot, than to have the camera farther away and zoom in for the close-up. A telephoto shot using the zoom feature will accentuate movement by the subject and make the shot appear shaky. Where possible don't be afraid to get 'up close and personal' rather than be a long way off and use the zoom.

Shoot in Sequences

This is especially true when shooting B-roll such as crowd scenes or nature shots, rather than a static shot of an interview with someone. Remember that you will be determining what the viewer sees and how the story unfolds, so try to shoot discrete segments that you can then assemble into that story when you're editing.

Here's an example:

Think of different scenes, as in a movie. Each of those scenes is made up of sequences. In each sequence, you need to follow the action, and shoot wide, medium and close-up shots. Say you want to capture a person arriving at work in the morning on her bicycle -- that's one sequence. It could be made up of the following shots: the person pulling up to the building, getting off the bicycle, chaining the bicycle to the bicycle stand, taking off gloves, taking off her helmet, tucking gloves into the helmet, and walking into the building. It might break down like this: a wide shot of her arriving. A medium shot of her getting off the bicycle. A close-up of her pushing the front wheel of the bike into the bike stand. A close-up of her chaining the bike to the stand. An extreme close-up of her taking off her gloves. An extreme close-up of her eyes as she looks at her hands while she's taking off her gloves. A close-up of her taking off her helmet and tucking the gloves into it. A close-up of her straightening her hair and looking at the building. A medium and wide shot of her walking into the building with the helmet tucked under her arm.

Don't be tempted to shoot the whole sequence in one wide shot, this makes it impossible to cut the sequence down in the edit suite should it prove to be overly long. Obviously, this means that you may need the subject to repeat the action, exactly, several times to capture all these shots.



Framing and Composing Your Shots

Be aware of composition in your shots and how you frame your shots, particularly with interviews. For example, avoid a shot of a person with a plant or pole in the background. It will look like the plant or pole is growing out of the back of the person's head.

When shooting interviews pay attention to your surroundings and don't be reticent or shy about rearranging furniture, moving things on a desk, pushing plants out of the frame of your shot, etc. to improve the setting, or asking the subject of your shoot to change positions so you properly frame the shot.

And if you're having technical problems, don't be afraid to take charge and stop the interview until you can properly set up the shot.

Headroom and Looking room

Leave the proper amount of headroom above the person's head and an appropriate amount of looking room, that is space in the direction the subject is facing. The camera should be set up at about the head height of your subject.

Rule of Thirds

- Mentally divide your viewfinder into thirds horizontally and vertically.
- Place your primary point of interest on the intersection of two lines.
- Lines of interest should occur at 1/3 or 2/3 of the way up (or across) the frame, rather than at the centre.
- In shots of people, the main line of interest is the imaginary line going through the subject's eyes. So try to place the eyes about 1/3 from the top of the screen.

Simplicity

Don't place your subject against a busy or congested background. Each scene should have a single story to tell. To simplify your shot, you may need to alter the camera position, alter the size of the image, or select another background.



Framing

- Look for natural "frames" within your scene.
- Also, beware of horizontal and vertical lines in the frame (edges of buildings, counter tops, picture frames, and so forth). Make sure the horizontal lines are level and the vertical lines are straight up and down.

Depth of Field

Be aware of ways to increase the sense of depth within your shot. If you're shooting someone, try to include other objects in the background or foreground that give the viewer a sense of depth. That way your subject won't appear to be just a two-dimensional object on the screen.

Also remember that a wide angle shot will provide a much better depth of field than a telephoto shot where you've zoomed in on your subject. In other words a wide angle shot has more in focus than a telephoto shot where the background may appear totally blurred or out of focus.

Focus

Check your focus all the times, especially when changing shots. Nothing is worse than showing an out of focus (soft) shot, especially if the subject is a person. When shooting people you should first zoom in and take focus on their eyes as this is where our attention will be on the screen. Then zoom out to compose the shot you are looking for.

Change Angles and Perspectives

Try to change the point or angle of view after every shot, this way shots will cut together. If shots are too similar then they tend not to cut together unless they are of different subjects. Look for interesting perspectives. Try not to shoot everything from eye level. Especially try shots where you hold your camera close to the ground and shoot up toward your subject (LA or low angle shot). For example, if you're shooting a scene like people walking on a pavement, hold the camera low to show their feet moving, rather than straight-on shots of their faces.



Shot Terminology

EWS or XWS (Extreme Wide Shot)

The view is of a vista and is often used as an establishing shot and can incorporate panning of the camera. Usually the first shot of a new scene, designed to show the audience where the action is taking place. It is also useful in scenes where the action is very spread out. For example, in a war movie an extreme wide shot can show the scale of the action.

WS (Wide Shot)

This is also used as an establishing shot but with a particular point of interest included in the shot. Allows for several people to appear in the same shot.

LS (Long Shot)

The subject takes up the full frame from head to toe. The small amount of room above and below the subject can be thought of as safety room — you don't want to be cutting the top of the head off. It would also look uncomfortable if his feet and head were exactly at the top and bottom of frame.

MS (Mid Shot)

Shows the subject from the waist up. This allows the viewer to see the background and places the subject in relation to the surroundings. Often used for PTC (pieces to camera). The MS is appropriate when the subject is speaking without too much emotion or intense concentration. It also works well when the intent is to deliver information, which is why it is frequently used by television news presenters. You will often see a story begin with an MS of the reporter (providing information), followed by closer shots of interview subjects (providing reactions and emotion). As well as being a comfortable, emotionally neutral shot, the mid shot allows room for hand gestures and a bit of movement.

MCU (Medium Close Up)

From the 'breast pocket' to top of head. Half way between a MS and a CU. This is the most often used shot providing a relaxed, comfortable framing taking in the subjects immediate environment and allowing for some movement of the subject within the frame.

CU (Close Up)

This shot includes the whole head and is the most common shot used in interviews. A close-up of a person emphasizes their emotional state. Whereas a mid-shot or wide-shot is more appropriate for delivering facts and general information.



BCU (Big Close Up)

This shot features the face and cuts through the top of the head and has the effect of focusing the viewer's attention on the facial expressions and removing the distraction of the background. A big close-up exaggerates facial expressions which convey emotion. The viewer is drawn into the subject's personal space and shares their feelings. There is little room for the subject to move in this shot and so needs to be fairly still.

ECU or XCU (Extreme Close Up)

A shot which is very rarely used, except in drama.

Focuses attention on the eyes of the subject. There is no room for the subject to move in shot. You would normally need a specific reason to get this close. It is too close to show general reactions or emotion except in very dramatic scenes.

CA (Cutaway) *sometimes shown as c/a*

A shot of something other than the subject.

This is often used to cover edits where two shots will not cut together. It can also be used to breakaway from the subject to provide a scene change.

2S (Two-Shot)

A shot of two people, framed similarly to a mid shot.

There are a few variations on this one, but the basic idea is to have a comfortable shot of two people.

Often used in interviews, or when two presenters are hosting a show.

A "One-Shot" could be a mid-shot of either of these subjects.

A "Three-Shot", unsurprisingly, contains three people.

Two-shots are good for establishing a relationship between subjects. If you see two sports presenters standing side by side facing the camera, you get the idea that these people are going to be the show's co-hosts. As they have equal prominence in the frame, the implication is that they will provide equal input.

OSS aka OS2S (Over-the-Shoulder Two Shot)

Looking from behind a person at the subject. Used when there is dialogue between the subjects.

Often used during interviews where you cannot see the interviewees mouth (lip-sync) but the interviewer nods to show agreement (noddy). This shot is framed from behind a person who is looking at the subject. The person facing the subject should usually occupy about 1/3 of the frame.

This shot helps to establish the position of each person, and get the feel of looking at one person from the other's point of view.

It's common to cut between these shots during a conversation, alternating the view between the different speakers.



Noddy Shot

Usually refers to a shot of the interviewer listening and reacting to the subject. Common in interviews, this is a shot of the person listening and reacting to the subject. In fact, when shooting interviews with one camera, the usual routine is to shoot the subject (using OSS and one-shots) for the entire interview, then shoot some noddies of the interviewer once the interview is finished. The noddies are edited into the interview later.

POV

(Point-of-View Shot)

Shows a view from the subject's perspective.

THE CUTAWAY

Using Cutaway Shots

If you're shooting someone working at a computer terminal, take one shot from over their shoulder, then another that is a close-up of their hands and fingers using the keyboard and mouse, then a shot from over the person's other shoulder, then a low angle shot looking up at them and then a facial shot. These are called 'cut-away' shots and can be used in the edit to shorten a lengthy sequence or to add interest to the scene.

Don't just rely on zooms to get these different perspectives - move the camera closer or farther away. If you take shots from these different perspectives, when you edit your video you'll be able to put together a sequence of 4 or 5 second shots of your subject, rather than one 20 second shot from a single perspective.



...AND ACTION!

Anticipate Action

Anticipate action by trying to predict where the subject/action will go, and then be ready to shoot it when it moves into the frame of your shot. Think ahead and get positioned for the action that's to come. Let action happen within the frame. Don't constantly move the camera in an attempt to catch everything and don't be afraid to allow your subject to move out of frame, rather than trying to follow them with your camera. This is especially important if you're taking a shot of a person who is walking and then later another shot of the person sitting down. If you follow the person while they walk with your first shot and always keep them in frame, and then cut to second shot of the person sitting down, it can confuse the viewer as to how the person arrived at the second position. If instead you show them walking out of the frame in the first shot, then the viewer will accept the person seated in the following shot.

Interviews

Ask the person you're interviewing to look at you and not at the camera.

Try to avoid them sitting square on to the camera, it's a much nicer composition to place them at a slight angle. Don't have your interviewee sit in a chair with wheels or one that swivels as the tendency will be for them to rock from side to side. Keep an eye open for any nervous activity that may create noise - like someone jangling change or keys in their pocket. Stop your shoot, point it out to them, and then start shooting again.

Try not to do a pre-interview off camera where you tell them the questions you'll be asking beforehand. It makes them sound stilted and canned in their responses when the real interview begins. Just give them a general idea of what you'll be discussing. During the interview, relax and listen. Don't interrupt the interview with comments but keep silent and just show that you're attentive by nodding or smiling appropriately.

TIP:

When you start the each 'take' of the interview, always have the camera roll for a few seconds before you ask your first question. This allows the editor a few frames in which to carry out a dissolve or special effect or to gab a little piece of the natural sound (room ambience) to cover a later audio edit.

Microphones

If you're using a handheld microphone, hold it about 5-6 inches below the subject's mouth and slightly to the side this will help avoid "popping" noises from a person's lips as he/she speaks.

Tell the interviewee to ignore the mic and concentrate on you, or the person asking the questions.

If it's noisy, then use a lavalier clip-on (personal or lapel) microphone to reduce the ambient sound and watch out for any jewellery that could rub against the mic and create a noise.

TIP:

NEVER, NEVER, NEVER use the camera's internal microphone. It's too far away from the subject to record clear sound and it will pick up every noise that surrounds you, including the noise of you operating the camera. If your camera doesn't have the facility to plug in a separate mic then use a digital audio recorder on which to record the synchronized sound separately and then join the two in the edit suite. To aid with sync'ing up sound and vision either use a Clapperboard at the beginning of every new 'Take' or



simultaneously video and audio record a clap of your hands, this will do the same job as a Clapperboard. Obviously, once you have 'marked' your 'Take' do not stop either the video or audio recorder until you have finished your recording.

...LET THERE BE LIGHT.

Avoid High Contrast in Lighting Situations

Avoid shots in areas that have high contrast such as bright sunlight and shadows. Cameras are not as sensitive as our eyes and are not good at shooting high contrasts in scenes.

For example, don't place a subject against a bright window or white wall or with sunlight behind the person, this will cause a silhouette effect. This back light is problematic for the exposure features of most cameras. If the camera's iris adjusts for the light in the background, then the face of the subject will be dark against the background, and if the camera adjusts the exposure for the person's face, then the background will be appear washed out. It's usually best to shoot with the sun or light source behind you. As a general rule don't shoot directly into a light or into a window.

Check White Balance

Digital video cameras usually have an automatic white balance that adjusts the camera ensuring that white areas appear white and not yellow or bluish in colour. The principle is that if the camera records white correctly then all the other colours should also be correct.

Most cameras have a White Balance setting. For this you need to hold up a piece of white paper next to the subject of your shot, and then zoom the camera in on that white paper. Then push or select the white balance button on your camera to set the proper white balance. Some video cameras also come with white balance pre-sets, such as artificial light or natural sunlight, these are not very accurate so use my tip below.

TIP:

If you are unsure if the camera has recorded the correct colour balance or if you forgot to do a White Balance at the beginning of your shot, then shoot about 20 seconds of a piece of white paper almost filling the viewfinder under the same lighting then the colour adjustment can be made in the edit suite, although this is not generally good practice.

Manual Exposure

Where possible, try not to rely too heavily on the auto exposure function on video cameras. Best to allow the camera to auto set its exposure and then turn off the auto exposure (iris) function to prevent the camera from constantly opening and closing the aperture to compensate for changing lighting conditions. Most difficult lighting situations should be solved first by changing the position of the camera or the subject, such as not shooting into direct sunlight.

If you have to take a shot of a person from a certain angle, and there is bright light behind the person aim your camera at the light setting you want for your shot and then switch from auto to manual exposure. For example, if you're shooting an interview with someone, zoom in on the person's face, hold the shot there and then switch from auto to manual exposure. The camera then will retain or lock in whatever setting you selected throughout your shoot, despite any changes in the lighting.



....LET'S TAKE THAT ONE MORE TIME.

Get All the Shots You Need

Make sure you get all the requisite set-up shots, cutaways, and so on, even if you don't think you'll use them. They may come in handy in the edit suite.

So start with an establishing shot - such as video of the person who is the subject of your story - and then remember to get the other kinds of shots you may use to supplement that in your final film.

The latter is called B-roll, which refers to the earlier days of film when you had two rolls of film; A and B and you had to edit them together to make your show print.

A-roll is the main subject of your shot, invariably with audio such as an interview with someone.

B-roll is the background video for your film, often just video over which you'll lay an audio track (such as the person talking in the A-roll). So don't forget to shoot a variety of B-roll footage.

.... PRINT IT!

Labelling Your Tapes

When you have finished recording each tape slide the record tab over to prevent accidentally erasing your rushes. At the end of the day make sure you have labelled all your reels with as much detail as you can so that each can be identified later in the edit suite. Don't forget to include your company name and address.

I once had a Producer leave all of the day's rushes on a train, they didn't have the address on them so he never got them returned and we had to re-shoot everything again.

Keep each mini-DV tape in its plastic box to avoid dust getting into the tape.

....AND THAT'S A WRAP.

'Scorched Earth' Syndrome

Finally, when your shoot is over please then leave the location as you found it. Replace all the furniture, props, papers, files etc., exactly as you originally found it at the location when you arrived. 'Scorched Earth' is a term used to describe a location where a film crew has already visited in the past and disrupted the location to such an extent to make it unworkable for all future film crews. So much so that the owner of the location says that they do not want crews on their premises because of their past experience. So, please be mindful not to spoil the location for others that follow you.

