

# Top DIY Video Tips for beginners

## Why are you using video?

Are you recording your work, filming a show? Making a drama or documentary with Young People? Do you have the resources to buy professionals in to help or do you have to make do with a small camcorder and a simple PC based edit programme such as Movie Maker?

It all depends on what you want out of it.

If the important thing is to do it yourselves, then go for it! It's easy to download videos to YouTube and other sharing sites so you don't have to spend lots of money on copying and mailing out DVDs or VHSs. If you want a really good quality piece

## Before you start

Check that you know how to use your camera and edit software. The camera manual may be boring, but it's worth reading it to learn what it will and won't do. Check that you can easily input video from your camera to your computer. Check that your edit software is user friendly.

## Do you have a budget?

You will need to buy tape stock for you camera, ensure you have the right lead for connecting everything and you will need a tripod! Blair Witch style has it's place, but give yourself the choice! A directional microphone is also useful.

## Plan what you're going to do

Storyboarding can be useful if you are constructing a documentary or drama piece. Draw a picture for each shot or scene- stickmen drawings are fine.

If you're filming a performance make sure you know where you need to place the camera and if sound is important, get a pair of headphones and do a sound check. Remember, you can't stop a performance in the middle because the audience is being noisy!

## Check your equipment

Before the shoot check you have everything you need including a battery charger.

## The Shoot

Set your camera on a tripod and frame the action you want. If you need to move the angle while filming, practice first so that you are familiar with the movement of the tripod and where the parameters of the actins are.

If you need good sound make sure you're filming somewhere without lots of extra noise, or pug a 'directional microphone' into the camera and get someone to hold it near to the sound you want (e.g. next to the stage area for performances, close to an interviewee). Plug a pair of headphones inot the camera so you can check the sound.

If you are filming without a tripod, hold the camera as steadily as possible. Avoid sudden movements and use the zoom button carefully.

## The Edit

Your edit software will have a help facility to explain how to use it. If you have limited memory on your computer, view the tapes first and do a 'paper edit'. See logging tips and logging sheet below! Basically editing is using a cut in a film/video in order to tell a story, so make sure the footage you use is relevant to what you want to say!

For more info see below and

<http://lifeandhealth.guardian.co.uk/guides/makingvideo/0,,2244453,00.html>

## **Other useful tips**

### **Interview techniques**

Know the reason why you have chosen to interview particular people.

You may arrange an interview that requires you to go & meet someone for a period of time, you may approach people in the street, you may want to catch someone off guard.

### **Arranged interviews.**

Brief your subject when you are arranging the interview, even if you want them to respond spontaneously, by explaining what your project is about and why you have chosen to talk to them. Some interviewees will want a lot of details about the questions you intend to ask beforehand. This includes people who are acting in official capacities, such as the police. With others you will get away with providing a minimum amount of information about what you are doing.

It is advisable to make your interviewee feel comfortable. Unless someone is used to giving interviews it can be a nerve racking experience. Do this by reassuring them, making sure they are physically comfortable, or even talking about the weather or a topical subject.

### **Stopping people in the street**

Approach people with consideration, say that you'd like to ask them a few questions about your chosen subject, let them know what it is for. It is sometimes useful to be quite vague. Keep interviews as short as possible when they are not pre-arranged, you may think of it as 'Vox-Pop'.

### **Coping with a difficult interviewee**

If someone is not responding to your questions, keep trying to ask them in a different way. If they are very monosyllabic, ask if they will re-answer giving a little more details. Sometimes people are not forth-coming because they are nervous, other times because they may hold a very different view point from yours. A useful method is to turn the interview into a conversation and don't worry too much about asking the list of questions you have. Always be conscious of the time if someone has a limited amount of it.

### **The Picture**

Try to make sure that the interviewee is the most eye-catching thing in the frame. If your eye is led to the person then you will focus more on what they are saying. Make sure they are in focus- use the manual focus when contrast in lighting is noticeable. Don't put them facing close to the edge of a frame. You do not have to use the 'two thirds rule' all the time, but placing a person affects their status. If you film from below they will look more powerful, from above they will look small, straight-on and close-up can be quite intimate.

### **Choosing Locations**

Think about the following when choosing locations:

- Sound conditions
- Lighting conditions
- Suitability for your subject
- Whether you need permission to film
- Location Check list
- Shooting Kit
- Power sources (batteries or mains supply)

### **Sound**

If you are interviewing on location and the area has a lot of loud extraneous sound make sure you have a mono-directional microphone & boom. Sometimes particular sounds are useful and it is a good idea to record surrounding sounds and log them separately in case you need to use them.

## **Lighting**

Check that your natural light sources are adequate for the subject. The camera can make certain adjustments, but low level lighting may provide you with a grainy picture. Shooting in full daylight should rarely cause problems, but using reflectors & diffusers can help. Indoor filming can be more difficult, you can hire a lighting kit, but remember you will need an extra pair of hands. Usually it's possible to use the available lighting. Refer to '*lighting analysis*' sheet.

## **Suitable Locations for your Subject**

Some locations may look fantastic, but are they relevant to your subject. Sometimes simple, even 'boring' spaces are best to bring out what you want to focus on. Use location filming to collect a series of 'cutaways' (those shots that you can use to fill in over narration etc.). If you have your own camera or access to one, how about taking it on the London Eye, for example, or on a train, tube or London tourists bus?

## **Permission to Film**

In Britain generally you don't need to permission to film in public places, but think carefully about whether your location is a public place. If not find out who you need to seek permission from. It can be very time-consuming to get permission so have a few alternatives where you know you are safe. You can often get away with filming in most places if you are discreet & work quickly.

## **Location Check List**

This will include:

- filming equipment or 'shooting kit' which will vary from one camcorder to a full kit including lighting, sound recording, etc...
- Props, costume, etc...
- Shooting script or story board and tape logging sheets
- Permission documents (if required)
- Refreshments
- People working on the shoot with roles allocated
- Weather proof gear
- Tape Stock

## **Shooting Kit (a selection from the following)**

- Camera
- Tripod
- Lighting kit and/or reflectors & diffusers
- Tape stock
- Batteries
- Sound recording equipment
- Steady cam
- And any additional filming equipment, e.g. lenses. Try not to take more than you need unless you are catering for unforeseen circumstances!

## **Power Sources**

Bring enough charged batteries to cover the duration of each shot bearing in mind that you may need to do several 'takes'. If you are on location for long periods of time, and have a lot of lighting equipment check out if there are mains power sources. If not you will need to hire a power pack.

## **Subject & Style**

Make sure the styles you choose to use to make your film suit the subject. Style is very powerful and observing other documentaries can give you all sorts of ideas about different styles to apply. Every technical decision you make can implicate a use of style. For example if you light a scene will influence it's style. Adopting 'film noir' styles, reportage styles, docu-soap styles will all influence your audience. If

you want to adopt styles or experiment with techniques, think about how they influence your subject and what messages you are creating.

### **More on Sound**

Sound is as important to your film as image, even if you choose to make a silent movie. Sound consists of background noise, music, conversation, narration and silence. When you edit images you also have to edit sound and getting it right may become very absorbing. With non-linear, or digital editing you have the ability to separate the sound from the image completely, so any sound you record can be placed over any image- this is a very easy process, except if you are trying to achieve lip-sync!!!

### **Recording sound**

Camcorders tend to have in built microphones, which are stereo and multi-directional. In practical terms this means they will choose the loudest sound from anywhere in the surrounding vicinity. If you are close to the camera and talking at the same time as someone further away it is your voice that will be heard above the other. If you want to record incidental or background sound, this kind of microphone is fine, although different camera's will have different quality microphones. If you want particular sound to be recorded above all others then it is better to use a mono-directional microphone. This will record sound from the direction in which it is pointing. Using a boom, which is a stick to hold a microphone close to the desired subject will give even better results. A simple pair of headphone will allow you to determine how the sound is. Watch out for lose wires or leads as these can cause interference often in the form of nasty crackling noises!

### **Using sound**

Sound, like images can be used to tell stories in many different ways. Emotive music, crowd noises, screaming, a baby crying, laughter, the sound of waves breaking or a low distant rumbling can all affect the way people view the image you have used. Think about a moonlit scene with first the sound of laughter & carnival music, and secondly the sound of a scream- the scene will have an entirely different meaning. You make choices about the way you use sound, but always consider how it will affect your image. Once again a good exercise when thinking about how to use sounds is to watch other films and try to analyse what the filmmakers or programme makers have done. Try turning the volume down on your TV set and playing different music in the background.

### **Narration choices**

Narration is one of the key elements of documentary films and the choices of how to do it are extensive, each one influencing the tone of your work. Audiences often respond to what they're accustomed to in similar ways. If you choose to narrate your documentary with a voice like a newsreader the implication will be that you are presenting inarguable 'facts'. Male voices are more commonly used for narrating factual programmes, and using a woman's voice can be useful to present a more ambiguous tone. This is not a sexist statement, just an illustration of how the media has shaped us as audiences.

### **Recording Narration**

Choose your narrator carefully. Although digital editing means you can cut out any mistakes, it is better to get it right in the recording. A lot of the interview techniques apply here. Give your narrator a script in advance and let them practice reading it- it will make a lot of difference. Decide beforehand if you mind whether they recite the script word-for-word or whether they are allowed to improvise. Using a professional actor is always preferable, especially one with experience of radio, so ask around the people you know to see if any contacts can be found. Leave enough time to get the narration recorded- this is where it differs from an interview- you have already decided what you want them to say.

### **Alternatives to the recorded narration**

It is possible to construct a narration from previously recorded interviews and this is a good technique to use if you are keen that people represent themselves in your film. Remember how patronising some narration can sound, particularly if it is assuming a superior knowledge over certain subjects and peoples.

