Video Production Guide

Planning and Pre-Production

Planning a Video Project

1. **Form groups to select topics (instructor has final approval)**
2. **Brainstorm project ideas**
3. **Select project(s) from the brainstorming session based on criteria including:**
    - The ability to obtain the necessary video footage and information about those involved in the activity
    - The equipment, time, and technical expertise must be available to complete the requirements for the project
    - The project topic must meet the requirements and needs of the school program
4. **Research background information of topic**
    - Identify research questions
    - Narrow topic
    - Develop search strategies
    - Identify sources for primary and secondary sources
    - Schedule interviews
5. **Use print, nonprint, and Internet sources for research**
    - Print materials
        - Encyclopedias (e.g. *WorldBook, Compton* 's, *Britannica)*
        - Reference Sources (e.g. almanacs, atlases, *Book of Days,Current Biography, Facts on File* publications, etc.)
        - Magazines/Periodicals
        - Newspapers
    - Nonprint materials
        - Internet
        - Virtual Libraries such as *DISCUS*

        - Magazine Indexes
        - Online Newspapers and Newspaper archives
        - Online Encyclopedias
        - Online Reference Sources (e.g. *Prelinger Archives, Library of Congress, National Geographic, Discovery, Military Channel, History Channel*, CNN, *Smithsonian)*
    - Other
        - Subject matter experts (Leading experts in the field: administrators, government officials, teachers, doctors, lawyers, clergy, scientists, engineers, etc.)

6. **Acquire footage and production elements**
    - Contact and schedule individuals who are the subject of the project
    - Secure the location (e.g. availability, necessary video support, electrical outlets, adequate lighting, quiet setting, freedom from interruptions)
    - Secure the necessary permission from teachers/administrators and parents for all members of the crew involved in the project
7. **Take all of the equipment needed to complete the video shoot:**
    - camera/tripod mic(s)
    - lights/reflectors as necessary
    - blank video tape(s)
    - extension cord(s)
    - AC power supply
    - spare charge~ battery
    - spare microphone batteries as needed
    - gaffer tape
    - script and/or storyboard
8. **Gather and record still photos**

   Still photos may be used in association with or as a replacement for unavailable video footage. This is known as "The Burns Effect." Bulletin

boards, walls, and music stands can be used as backdrops for photos Ensure that lighting doesn't distort the photo image.

Interview Background Research

Before the interview, you will need to do research. You need to know as much as possible about the era and the war you are covering before you begin your documentary.

You may begin your research online but also consider other sources such as the library and the archives of your local newspaper. Look for articles, columns and editorials about the war and the impact of the war on the home front.

There might be a historical society, museums or military organizations in your community that have materials to explore for more information.

Online resources for research:

- The Library of Congress
- The National Archives and Records Administration
- United States Army
- United States Navy
- United States Marine Corps
- Our Documents
- The War Search & Explore
- SC Military Museum
- Prelinger Archives
- Media Literacy Clearinghouse
- Archives.com

The Art of Conducting an Interview

A good interview is not the result of improvisation but the result of careful preparation and thoughtful questioning. The object of the interview is to bring out the personal story and character of the subject, to put the subject's knowledge center-stage. It is never about showing off the interviewer!

Preparation

Research, read and digest all the relevant information you can find. Distill what you know into interesting questions, questions that elicit facts and details of the story and also questions that probe feelings and reactions to other people and events that influence the story. Discuss these questions with peers and refine them.

Behavior

Be professional. Arrive on time, dress appropriately; introduce the members of the production crew. Engage the subject in friendly conversation but don't reveal all your questions in advance. You want spontaneity when you roll tape, not a rehearsed response. Always speak clearly, maintain eye contact with the subject and sit or stand straight with neutral body language. When you begin the interview, created a recorded identification of the interview by asking the subject to say his or her name, correct spelling of the name, and title or rank as appropriate.

Interview Techniques

Opening Question Put the subject at ease with a question designed to draw out energy and enthusiasm for the topic. For example, "Thank you for agreeing to

talk with us. What excites you most about_____."

Factual Questions Create a record of all the important details of the story even if you won't use all the answers in the final cut. Use the basic questions of any good journalist: "who, what, where, when, why and how?"

Probing Questions This is where good preparation pays off. Listen to the answers you are getting. Probe further--ask for more details. While you can't expect the subject to have special knowledge beyond the scope of personal experience, you might ask a soldier who invaded Normandy, "Did you have any idea what the master plan might be that the Allied generals had made for you."

Hypothetical Questions Invite the subject to do their own probing beyond personal experience. For example, "What if you had the moment to live over again. Is there anything you would have done differently?"

Interview Style

An interview should be an extension of the interviewer's personality. You are having a conversation, not a formal chat. Let the viewer feel like they are looking in on an intimate talk that could occur over a dinner table or lounging on a patio. Keep it informal.

Avoid "stepping" on the words of the subject. Let the subject finish sentences and paragraphs, let there be a pause at the end before you speak. Don't interrupt. If you do, the tape will be hard to edit and you might lose good elements of a story. Never make guttural noises common in conversation that

indicate assent or agreement, noises like “uh huh,” etc. Be quiet! (In these respects, your interview is not exactly like informal conversation.)

Be courageous. Don’t look away from genuine feeling and intense emotions. Some memories overwhelm the subject with their power. Keep the camera running, let the subject wrestle with these emotions without the intervention or artificial reassurance of the interviewer. Your job is to put the real story on the screen, not a softened version of the truth.

Remember, the interview is a knowledge transfer. The interviewer, acting on behalf of the intended audience, solicits information the audience would want to know if they could participate in the conversation themselves.

Sample Veteran Interview Questions

Segment 1: For the record

Give information on date and place of interview, name of person being interviewed, birth date and current address, and the people attending the interview. Ask the veteran what war(s) and branch of service he/she served in, what was his/her rank, and where he/she served.

Segment 2: Jogging Memory

Were you drafted or did you enlist?
Where were you living at the time?
Why did you join?
Why did you pick the service branch you joined?
Do you recall your first days in service?
What did it feel like?

Tell me about your boot camp/training experience.
How did you get through it?

Segment 3: Experience

Which wars did you serve in (WWII, Korea, Vietnam, Persian Gulf, Global War on Terrorism - Afghanistan, Iraq?)
Where exactly did you go?
Do you remember arriving and what was it like?
What was your job assignment?
Did you see combat?
Were there many casualties in your unit?
Tell me a couple of your most memorable experiences.
Were you a prisoner of war?
Tell me about your experiences in captivity and when freed.
Were you awarded any medals or citations?
How did you get them?
Higher ranks may be asked about battle planning. Those who sustained injuries may be asked about the circumstances.

Segment 4: Life

Ask questions about life in the service and/or at the front or under fire.
How did you stay in touch with your family?
What was the food like?
Did you have plenty of supplies?
Did you feel pressure or stress?
Was there something special you did for “good luck” ?
How did people entertain themselves?
Were there entertainers?

What did you do when on leave?
Where did you travel while in the service?
Do you recall any particularly humorous or unusual events?
What were some of the pranks that you or others would pull?
Do you have photographs?
Who are the people in the photographs?
What did you think of officers or fellow soldiers?
Did you keep a personal diary?

Segment 5: After Service

Appropriateness of questions will vary if the veteran had a military career.
Do you recall the day your service ended?
Where were you?
What did you do in the days and weeks afterward?
Did you work or go back to school?
Was your education supported by the G.I. Bill?
Did you make any close friendships while in the service?
For how long?
Did you join a veterans organization?

Segment 6: Later Years and Closing

What did you go on to do as a career after the war?
Did your military experience influence your thinking about war or about the military in general?
If in a veterans organization, what kinds of activities does your post or association have?
Do you attend reunions?
How did your service and experience affect your life?

Is there anything you would like to add that we have not covered in this interview?

Storyboard Template

Download a storyboard template to use when planning your video production.

Production

Vocabulary of Images and Shot-making

A video documentary is a sequence of discrete shots that form a pictorial continuity, telling a story that a viewer understands.

The ability to edit shots together in a new order and in new relationships to each other accounts for the artistry in video production. The producer/editor is in control of the presentation order, the dramatic juxtaposition of images and sound, and the emotional influence the depiction has on its intended audience.

The order in which pictures are made in the camera does not govern the order of the shots in the finished production.

Here is the convenient nomenclature for describing shot-making in production.

SHOT FRAMING

Long Shot or Establishing Shot (LS) – Establishes the setting or locale of the action often with a wide angle view, an overall look at the setting.

Medium Shot (MS) – Often used to introduce a subject or character for the first time. The framing is usually set so that the top of the frame is just above the head and the bottom of the frame is just below the waist.

Medium Close-Up (MCU) – This shot is tighter than a medium shot with the top

of the frames just above the character's head and the bottom of the frame just below the chest.

Close-Up (CU) – The top of the frame is just above the character's head and the bottom of the frames is just below the chin. This shot is often used to reveal a character's feelings. Many producers use this too sparingly. Television is an intimate medium and invites us to ponder the inner feelings of a subject.

Extreme Close-Up (ECU or XCU) – This is a shot to focus attention on a specific detail. It might be the eyes of the subject or the details of an inanimate object such as an old photograph or a letter.

SHOT ANGLE

Straight Angle – A straight-on, eye-level shot of a subject; the camera lens is at the same height as the eyes of the subject. (Many producers allow camera operators to adjust camera height for personal comfort. This is a mistake. It is the angle the viewer gets that's most important and this angle is the best for interviews of subjects.)

Side Angle – This is a straight-on shot but at a 45-degree angle from the subject. Sometimes described as a "cutaway," it provides relief from the close up or a transition shot when editing two separate parts of an interview together.

Low Angle – The camera is below the level of the subject. This gives the impression that the subject is large and powerful.

High Angle – This shot diminishes the size of the subject and gives the impression of smaller and less powerful.

CAMERA MOVEMENTS

Pan – The camera is moved horizontally from left to right or right to left to reveal a scene or to follow action.

Zoom In/Zoom Out – This movement, usually governed by a control on the camera, changes the focal length of the lens to move viewers closer to or father away from the subject.

Tilt – The camera is moved vertically up or down, usually to follow an action.

SHOT COMPOSITION

The "Rule of Thirds" – Imagine the viewfinder divided into thirds horizontally and vertically. The camera operator should consider composing each shot so that the center of interest is at one of the four intersecting points or on one of the lines.

Leading Looks – The camera should allow more room in the frame in front of the subject when shooting a person or object in profile.

Leading Lines – Lines in the subject's surroundings may be used to lead the viewer's eyes to the center of interest in the shot.

Framing – Natural "lines" in the image such as a line of trees, arches, etc., may be used to create a border or frame around a shot.

Screen Direction – When shooting a scene, think of the center of interest on an imaginary line. The camera should not cross this line. For example, if the subject is riding a bicycle through the frame, the bicycle is following this imaginary line. If the camera crosses it, a left to right direction would suddenly change to a right to left

Basics of Lighting

Natural Light - Sunlight

There is nothing like sunlight to solve the problems of capturing a good image with a video camera. Contrary to first impressions, slightly overcast days offer the best conditions to capture images that are evenly lit. Bright sunlight means deeper, darker shadows. You may need to fill in some of those shadows by using a "reflector," a device to bounce sunlight into a shaded area. This is easily accomplished by taping aluminum foil over a sheet of cardboard, usually a two foot by three foot piece is acceptable. A person on location needs to hold the reflector steadily to bounce the light to where its needed.

Modern video cameras are very forgiving of light problems but it is important to try to capture the best images possible.

Lighting Kit – Basic Set-up

Key Light – The main source of light on a subject.

Fill Light – A second light source called the fill light is used to balance shadows on the subject.

Back Light – A light used behind the subject to create visual dimension and separate the subject from the background to give depth to the shot.

In an interior setting, the key light is like the sunlight outdoors, the principle source of lighting. To eliminate the hard shadows that bright sunlight gives, a

filllight is used. Commonly, the key light is set at a 45-degree angle to the subject and to the right of the camera. The fill light occupies a similar position to the left of the camera. It is also common for the key light to be somewhat higher in wattage than the fill light so that there is some sculpting in the shot but not so much as to project hard shadows. A camera shot is a two-dimensional image that needs to look like a three-dimensional image. The back light, sometimes called the "kick" light, adds that sense of dimension. Think of a slight "halo" around the hairline of a person facing the camera. It tends to separate that person's image from the background.

This is the basis of what is called "**three-point lighting.**" It is the solution for interior images made in one place. For large scenes shot in studios, many more lighting instruments are used though the principles of sculpting with light are the same.

It is possible to create a natural feeling with this kind of lighting using a combination of added lights and room lights such as desk lamps and floor lamps. Give yourself plenty of time to set up and experiment with some test shots to achieve the look and balance that pleases you.

Working with Sound

Audio Basics

Video camera mounted microphones are unacceptable for recording interviews and high quality sound tracks. At most, they are useful for capturing the ambient sound (or "nat" sound – natural sound) on a location. Always use external microphones to achieve quality sound.

The pickup pattern of microphones fall into two categories: omnidirectional and unidirectional. In the first case, the microphone will pick up sounds from all sides of the microphone. In the second, unidirectional mics will pick up sound from only one side.

External Microphones

Handheld Mics – A microphone is held by an interviewer and moved back and forth from the interviewer's face to the subject's. This is adequate when there is no alternative, such as covering news, but a poor solution for a thoughtful interview.

Lavaliere Mics – Small mics placed approximately six inches below the talent's chin and attached by a clip. These omnidirectional mics are the best solution for interviews.

Shotgun or Boom Mics – These cylindrical mics are aimed directly at a sound source and are often used in studio and field work. This mic has a very narrow unidirectional pickup and is helpful when the direction of the sound is changing or when there's a need to reduce ambient noise. Boom mics are most commonly used on movie sets.

Wireless Mics – Wireless mics use a radio frequency instead of a wire to connect to an audio mixer. These mics provide greater mobility but remember, they are battery dependent in both the microphone transmitters and the receivers and are subject to radio interference.

Audio Mixers – Portable mixers are used on location when more than one microphone is used. Generally, an oral history recording doesn't require the voice of the interviewer for the finished production and a one mic set-up greatly simplifies location work.

Video Production Equipment List

- Video Camera
- Light kit
- 2 batteries (w/ charging kit)
- Tape
- AC power cord
- Powerstrips or surge protectors
- Firewire cable
- RCA to mini cable
- Headphones
- XLR cable
- Hand-held or lavaliere microphone
- Tripod
- Computer editing station
- Video editing software

Editing the Video Interview

Production Editing

All films and video productions are reductions of information. The art of making editorial judgments with images and sound is really no different than a project that takes a student to the library and ends up in a term paper. The biggest difference is that most term papers reflect a single voice; video productions are the result, usually, of the multiple voices of the production team working purposefully to create a coherent and meaningful story.

We must understand that a good story comes from good footage. If it's not on the tape, it won't be in the finished presentation. Preparation is the key to getting a comprehensive story and a complete narrative that is suitable for editing.

Why cut at all? Hasn't the subject of an oral history given a complete narrative that should stand on its own? Consider how humans tell stories. We go off on tangents. We backtrack. We start and stop, pause to ponder another thought, tell an anecdote, reminisce about something peripheral to the point. While a scholar might want to wade through the raw footage to see and hear everything, an audience wants the main point, the essence of a story.

That's why a typical production captures up to twenty minutes in the camera for every minute used in the finished presentation. You will find the natural ratio, more or less, as you go along. Just remember, you want as many options as possible to make the story meaningful when you sit down to edit.

Common Editing Mistakes

Pictures really are worth a thousand words! Too often, producers try to explain everything in sight. Let the pictures "talk" whenever possible. (Consider how many television news reports feature a reporter babbling on non-stop about events we can see with our own eyes. This can defeat the purpose of having the pictures in the first place!)
Fall too much in love with your footage and you risk boredom. Selecting shots requires an honest assessment of what really tells the story, not how difficult it was to shoot the material or how pretty it looks. If the rose tinted sunset doesn't advance the story, don't use it!

Good editing finds a rhythm, like an internal clock or heartbeat that is suitable to the material. Don't rush the information. An oral history isn't a music video. The description of a battle remembered may feature a fast pace as you cut from shot to shot and intercut the interview with stock footage or old photographs. But a comrade in arms remembered for his heroic act may require a tranquil pace, even the long silence that might follow the end of the story.

There is no image more interesting to other humans than the human face you are showing us. You should count on those features, the sound of the voice, the look in the eyes, to compel us to pay attention and listen. Don't cut away to something else too often.

Never cut away from powerful emotions. If an old soldier sheds tears, stay with the shot. The same is true in the memories of a war widow, or the nostalgia for the camaraderie that accompanies shared dangers. The cold type in a printed book can never give us the catch in the throat or the tears in the eyes that tell us the real truth in many of the personal histories of these war years.

Be honest with yourself and you will tell the truth to your audience. Editing is manipulation; there is no other way to describe it. You are transferring information into new sequences, putting things together in new sequences they didn't have before, creating dramatic context. Ask yourself, "Am I creating an honest portrayal of the information I have in my control?"

Screening and Logging

Much of the most useful work in editing can be done before you even start. Make duplicate tapes of your camera tapes for purposes of screening without risk of accidental erasures or losing camera originals. Then screen, screen, and screen some more! Take notes. Select the shots you know you must have in the finished production. Select the shots that would be nice to include or that you might need. Identify the shots that are duplicative, technically deficient, or that you can safely ignore in editing. Create a log of your footage. Lay down time code if you have access to it.

This is the time to start making an outline of the finished production. Check your screening notes against your storyboard and the treatment you prepared originally. Some producers actually transcribe much of the sound track they are working with and use paper documents or a computer file to cut and paste together a coherent continuity.

Begin to lay out an editing plan. What shots go where in the sequence? What things do you have to do to add effects, graphics, narration, new sound effects, and the like? Knowing where the shots are located on each tape will save lots of time and make editing more efficient. Write shot logs as you screen unless you've already made detailed notes while shooting on location.

Editing to Keep it and Keep it Interesting

You need to use editing software to edit the raw material of your interview to tell the story. There are many different software editing systems, some for PCs and some for Mac users, here are some general guidelines for editing your documentary.

Never use the original videotape. Always make a complete copy and work off the copy. That way, you can go back to the original if need be. Since film is digitized, you won't lose a "generation" in the process of making a copy.
Label your and number your "Master Tapes." Never tape over them. Just set them aside and use the copy. That way, if your hard drive crashes, you will still have your master tapes. Know that editing takes lots of time. Editing is about making a thousand judgment calls about what to keep, what to discard and how to fit everything together to tell the story.

Remember that the story needs dramatic tension to hold an audience's attention. Tension is based on conflict. A documentary about a time of war is automatically full of tension. Who will survive? Was the veteran hurt? Conflict can be surviving as a prisoner of war, not knowing how parents are doing or concern for family members and friends serving overseas.

Project Evaluation

Generations of Heroes provides the opportunity to assess students in a different way from the traditional paper and pencil test. The following evaluation tool suggests evaluating the different steps in the process of developing a digital story. These steps include preparation, production, editing, curriculum connection, and project management. Point totals are attached to each step of the process. Indicators of achievement are listed under each heading. These are merely suggestions and can always be improved through the input and modification of the classroom teacher.

Preparation 20 Pts.

- Selected topic to address curriculum objectives
- Developed appropriate focus questions
- Used appropriate reference sources
- Created storyboard
- Selected and arranged location
- Identified and arranged talent interview
- Completed appropriate forms, templates, documentation and met deadlines

Production 20 Pts.

- Completed appropriate checklist
- Captured quality video footage
- Captured quality audio
- Used appropriate camera angles

- Used appropriate lighting during capture
- Followed copyright requirements
- Followed production plan/treatment/storyboard

Editing 20 Pts.

- Selected appropriate video/audio clips
- Organized clips appropriately to share story
- Inserted audio elements and appropriate time and level
- Used transitions to add to the overall story treatment
- Selected graphics appropriately to add to the overall story treatment
- Used appropriate timing or pacing for edited segments
- Used appropriate size, color, and arrangement for text

Curriculum Connection 25 Pts.

- Used research, video production, and interview techniques to share knowledge of curriculum objectives.
- Demonstrated awareness of topic of inquiry

Project Management 15 Pts.

- Worked as contributing member of project team
- Completed individual tasks on time
- Submitted project with all appropriate documentation on deadline
- Used appropriate resources to support project development

Credits

Funding for Knowitall.org was provided by the S. C. General Assembly through theK-12 Technology Initiative.

Knowitall.org is a free, not-for-profit K-12 educational Web portal developed andmaintained by the South Carolina Educational Television Commission for use by the state's students and teachers. South Carolina Educational Television is a department-level agency of state government in South Carolina.

Visit **scetv.org/education** for more educational resources.