

Guerrilla Doco's

or how to produce a low budget documentary video

Much of the following information and illustrations are taken from:

Guide to Video Production
Australian Film, Television & Radio School
ISBN 0 04 442165 6

I have tried to keep the theory down to a minimum, but there are a few very important issues that, if not born in mind, will make your video look cheap and amateurish and, in some cases, even unwatchable. Hence the following pages.

(look on the bright side, there's a lot of pictures ;-)

I also realise that given the shortness of the course, and my 'packing it in', you're going to miss, forget, or simply doze off occasionally. I hate the telephone, but am happy to give support via email – kaywand@bigpond.com

And your homework assignment will always be the same: watch tv (and when I say 'watch' I mean **WATCH!** You have the best tutor right in front of you every day!)

off we go...

i've tried to keep things as simple as possible, but what with one thing and another...

since i have included a number of b&w illustrations in the scriptwriting / camera techniques / basic editing sections, it might be worthwhile allowing these pages to download completely, then print out for reference - there's approximately 25 pages in total, in three sections alternatively, please feel free to save them for reference off-line in a [compressed .pdf file](#)

show me a simplified [flowchart](#) of a video production

1. [scriptwriting](#)

2. [camera techniques](#)

3. [basic editing](#)

[odds and sods](#)

(a small collection of useful information and trivia i've collected over the years and not in the least necessary for the course)

walk me through a [business production](#)

(no guarantee of success, just an outline as to how to go about producing a commercial / corporate video)

let's talk [video desktop newsgroup](#)

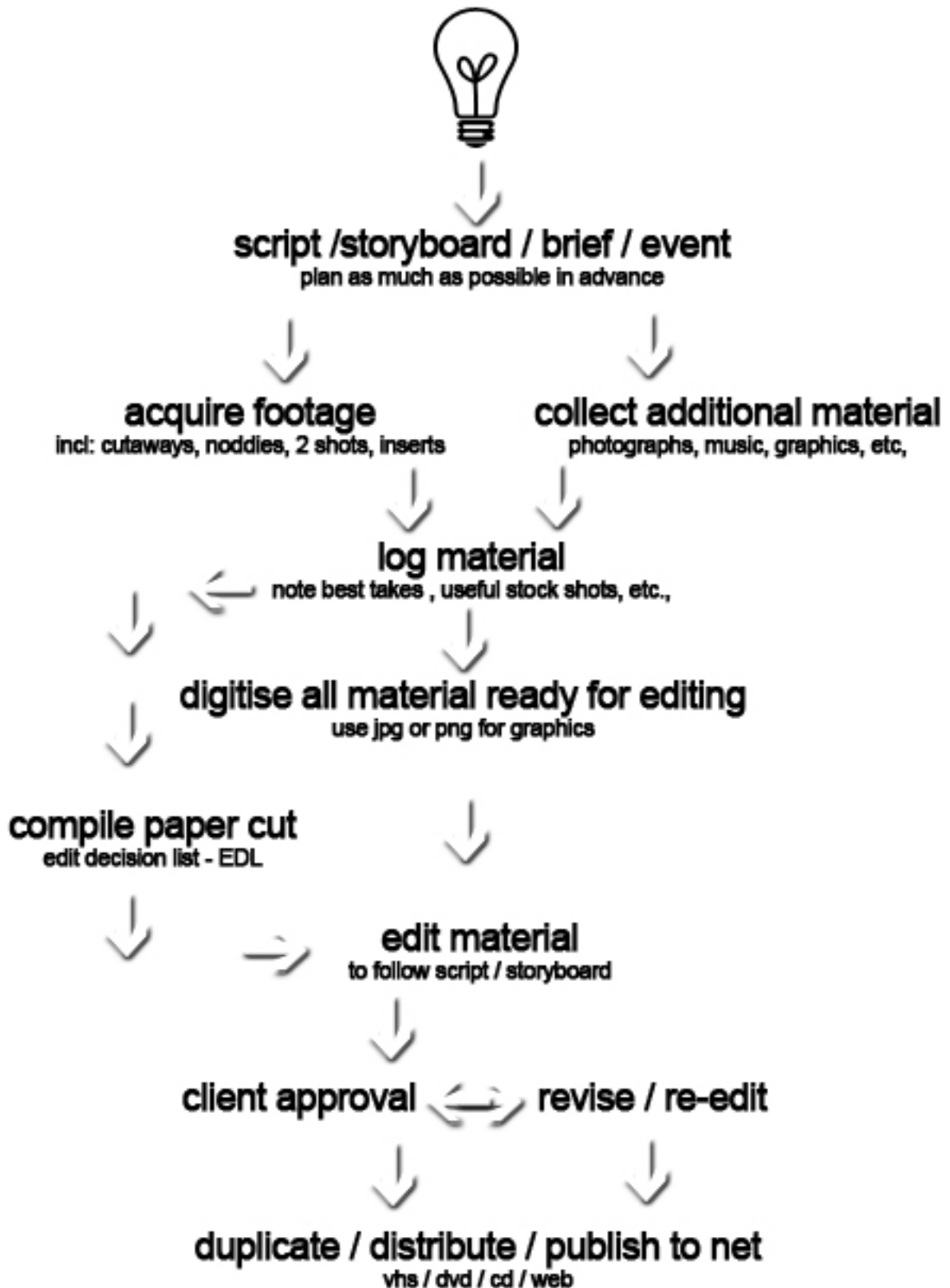
(a newsgroup with lots of talk (searchable) about video cards, operating systems, problems, etc.,)

seriously [professional video newsgroup](#)

(another (searchable) newsgroup with quite good discussions regarding production techniques, equipment, etc.,)

[email](#) with suggestions, questions, etc.,

(i don't profess to knowing all the answers, but after years working in this industry, i can bullshit with the best of them - click [here](#) for my cv)



The following (abridged) extracts are taken from:

Guide to Video Production - Australian Film, Television & Radio School - ISBN 0 04 442165 6

Scriptwriting

A scriptwriter is not an essayist or journalist, not a novelist or textbook writer. A scriptwriter is a visualiser, a writer for film and video. Scriptwriting should be 'picturising' a flow of ideas, facts and perceptions.

Always remember: A film is not a story read aloud. Though the words and soundtrack are, of course, important, the major impact of film and TV is almost always with the pictures.

The following general guidelines are designed to suggest a procedure for writing simple scripts and to help avoid a few common pitfalls in writing commentaries.

Before beginning, the following points need to be considered:

Stage one

- What are the aims and objectives of the program?
- What points will you need to make to achieve these aims and objectives?
- Remember, it's difficult for an audience to absorb more than five main points in one program. The writer needs to decide on these points right at the beginning, because they will then largely determine the content.
- Define your audience. Are they farmers, students, housewives, prisoners, patients, children, social workers, teachers ... ? What is their age group? How much do they know about the subject? (It's safer to assume they know very little.) What size will your audience be — a broadcast television audience or a small discussion group?
- Thorough research is essential before starting to write a script. A film or

video program is, by necessity, a simplification of its subject. The writer's job is to present the subject in such a way that its true significance can be seen and understood.

- How much budget has been allocated for the program? (The answer is probably `minimal'.) The budget will determine:
 - The format — what is to be shown, how it is to be shown. If the budget is limited, every means of saving money should be explored. For example, is it really necessary to take a crew to the hospital when you could achieve the same effect with a sequence of still photographs?
 - The number of different locations possible
 - The number of people who can be involved, both talent and crew
 - The amount of equipment allowable. It may mean no difficult or fancy shots because of the additional equipment required.

Stage two

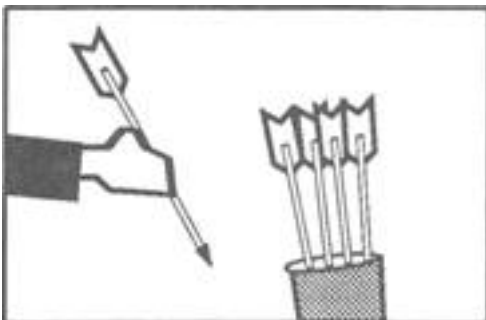
- Approximately how long should the program be? This will depend on the type of program, but as a general guide:
 - A trigger tape might be 2-4 minutes
 - A demonstration might be 5 minutes
 - A story might be 10 minutes
 - A documentary might be 20 minutes or more.
 - In general, twenty minutes is considered the best length for maximum learning, retention and concentration.
- What format should the program have?

- Is it narrative, dramatic or documentary?
- If it's a documentary, will any part of it be dramatised?
- How much of it will be shot on location? Exterior or interior? How much will be done in a studio?
- Will there be a graphic or photographic sequence? Animation?
- Will there be a link person?
- How many interviews should be allowed?
- What kind of special effects, if any, are required?

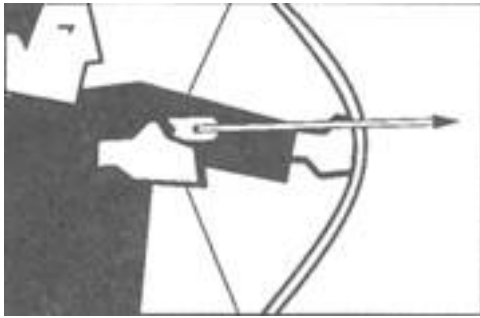
Stage three

You're now ready to start visualising the ideas, step by step. You need to think about how the program should start, develop and finish. One of the best ways of doing this is to draw the ideas shot by shot to form a storyboard. You don't have to be an artist — a rough scribble is sufficient to give the director an impression of your ideas. The storyboard should have a rough description of the shots and what happens in them.

For example: Storyboard for 'The Archer'



1. Hand selecting arrow – takes it out of frame.
CU Camera static - Low level



2. Complete the action of arrow lifting and fitting into the bow.

Aiming arrow.

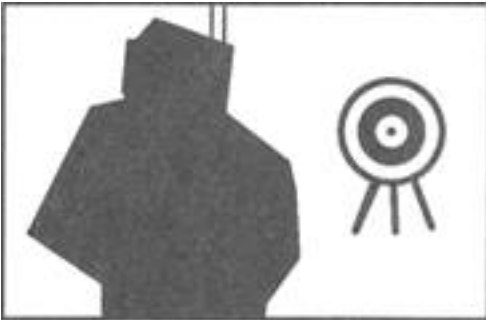
String is drawn back

MS Camera static (right of archer) - Low Angle



3. The eyes look intensely at the target.

CU Camera static - Eye level along arrow



4. Look along arrow to target.

MS Camera static - Eye level beside and behind ear (subjective view)



5. Arrow loosed

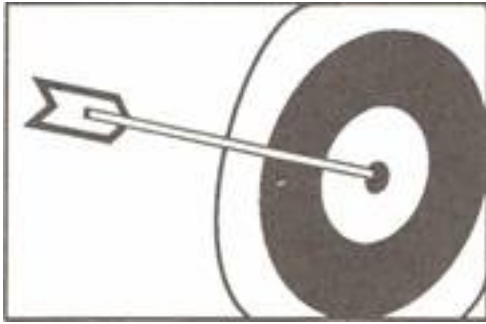
Arrow flies left to right

MCU Camera static (right of archer) – Arrow level



6. Blurred to simulate tracking arrow

MS Camera zip pan



7. Arrow flies left to right
Arrow hitting target - bullseye
CU Camera static



8. Film a repeat of the whole sequence without stopping.
Make sure the actor repeats the action exactly.
MLS Static camera - Eye level - Pan and tilt where necessary to follow the action.

Write the necessary dialogue for drama sequences, or the commentary for 'to-camera' segments by the link person.

The overall script should be completed prior to shooting so the director has a greater understanding of the shots required and the length needed for each shot.

Stage four

Shoot according to the script outline or storyboard, using a shot list which gives details of the individual shots, eg, CU, LS. Be sure to keep records of what you've taped so you don't inadvertently forget some shots.

Stage five

- Edit sequences if necessary
- Record commentary
- Record music, sound effects and do final mix
- Edit soundtrack to tape.

The pitfalls

If you're starting to write your own commentary and have had little previous experience, the following tips may be helpful.

Do not overwrite

The number one danger in writing is to write too many words. Allow 'breathing space' — let sound effects and/or music complement or reinforce your words.

Beware the illustrated lecture

If you haven't had much experience at scriptwriting, it's likely that you'll start a script by writing what you want to say, as you would a lecture, then trying to illustrate it. This can be terribly frustrating, and you can waste lots of time this way.

Start by thinking visually. Limit what you want to say to from two to five main points, then think how you can most effectively visualise these points.

It's preferable to re-write the narration after the program has been shot and edited. Dialogue and 'to-camera' commentary are, of course, the exception. These should be written prior to shooting.

Avoid 'literary' forms of writing

A film or television commentary is not a literary form of writing. Avoid literary figures of speech, long words and dependent clauses.

Use short sentences but allow variation in rhythm, tempo and mood. Make the ideas simple and easy to grasp; use simple words and use words simply; use as few words as possible. In many instances you will find that you can cut up to 25% out of your commentary once you've written it.

Use a conversational style of writing. After all, you're trying to speak to the audience.

Talk `to' rather than `at' them and don't patronise them.

Remember. The audience should be able to hear and absorb the commentary without strain or confusion.

Don't describe the picture

Don't state what's obvious, except where the audience's attention needs to be drawn to a certain aspect of the picture (eg, `The dog lying on the front step of the pub has been there since 1902!'), or in an educational program when an experiment, demonstration or unfamiliar activity may need to be described in order to be understood.

Remember that the function of commentary is to:

- Explain what the picture means, ie, its significance
- Summarise the main points and make conclusions
- Complement the picture. Picture and sound should not compete with or duplicate each other
- Interest and entertain the audience – it's a very effective way to educate and inform them.

TV script format

Not all programs have a written script, and not all scripts are alike. But whatever the script, it must be easy to read. Most production centres adopt a standard style so that personnel, such as vision mixers, don't have to constantly adjust to each new script placed in front of them.

Basically, the vision is on the left-hand side of the page and the audio is on the right. Lighting is sometimes placed in boxes in the centre of the page, and sometimes on the extreme right of the page.

A news script may not be completed until a few moments before on-air time (and sometimes not even then!), whereas a drama script has to be completed well in advance of production.

For a drama script, each camera shot is numbered, and a scene breakdown, schedule, cast list and crew list are often attached. There's often a number of different coloured papers used to help identify an episode or a call sheet from a script.

Schedules

These are best typed out in a format suited to each particular production. They must contain all required information and be easy to read.

The **shooting schedule** should include date of shoot, times, places, title, production number, order of recording, characters involved in each scene, set involved, cameras used in each scene, shots within each scene, page number of the script, and all breaks.

Call sheets should list date, time, place, names, and contact phone number so that cast or crew can report in should anything go wrong to delay their arrival.

A **breakdown** should include scene number, synopsis of the scene, its location and time of shooting, whether film or video (if an integrated production), estimated duration of the scene, page number in script.

Scripting terms

Outline

A brief explanation of what the program will be about. It rarely extends to more than one page.

Treatment

This is more specific and detailed than an outline, but does not usually have dialogue or screen directions. It will show the structure and flow of the program, name the main characters, and demonstrate the sequences and how they fit together to develop the storyline.

For a documentary, the treatment will present the main points that the narration will discuss, outline the sequences to be shot, and give details of possible interviews, etc. It's quite usual in a documentary to not proceed past the treatment stage before shooting.

Script

This is a very general term. We speak of a script even when there's no dialogue or narration and where, for instance, the program could be comprised of only music and pictures.

Draft screenplay

An incomplete script. It will follow and develop the original treatment and provide most of the proposed dialogue and directions for actors.

Rehearsal script

A draft screenplay taken to the point where the director feels that it's capable of being shot, perhaps with minor modifications.

Shooting script

A rehearsal script, slightly more refined. This is a term used more in film production than in television.

Camera script

The final script with all camera directions and shots marked and numbered. Graphics and captions are listed in order and special instructions to any particular

Script development

The following examples illustrate the development of the script through its various stages:

Outline

The need exists for a plan to help people get more use out of their roof space ...

Treatment

We open with Fred and Mary struggling to fit yet another large pot plant into their small terrace. Mary walks to the window and looks out.

Draft script

INTERIOR. UPSTAIRS ROOM. _____ DAY

FRED and MARY struggle with large potplant. FRED drops his end and almost crushes MARY's foot. MARY yelps, looks angrily at FRED who tries to move the small bookcase to another spot. MARY realises she won't get an apology out of FRED, and resignedly walks to the window.

We see MARY's P.O.V. over the flat roof.

Camera script

INTERIOR. UPSTAIRS ROOM. _____ DAY

1. WS ROOM. Through the door

ZOOM IN TO TWO FRED and MARY enter heaving SHOT the large potplant.

MCU FRED FRED is puffing and blowing

MCU MARY WIDENS MARY:

TO INCLUDE FRED I still think we should have moved the bookcase first.

FRED:

It'll be alright. Just put it down here.

Shot sizes

Variations in the size of the images which appear on the screen enable the director to emphasise or highlight different aspects of the shot. There's a standard terminology referring to shot sizes. These terms provide points of reference when describing shots. Include these abbreviations in your storyboard and script.

Very long shot (VLS)

Shows the entire scene. The human figure occupies approximately half the height of the screen.

Long shot (LS)

The human figure occupies a little under the full height of the screen.

Medium long shot (MLS)

Screen image of the human figure is cut off approximately at the knees.

Medium shot (MS)

Screen image of the human figure is cut off just below the waist.

Medium close-up (MCU)

Cuts across breast line and includes head and shoulders.

Close-up (CU)

Only the head and shoulders of the human figure can be seen

Big close-up (BCU)

Picture of the head, or part of the head only.

Extreme close-up (ECU)

Enlarges detail to larger than life size.

Single camera: Interviewee as the main shot, reverse angle questions to be cut in later

The main interview is conducted with the camera on the interviewee (the subject) all the time. Shot sizes can be varied gradually (during responses) or rapidly (during the interviewer's questions) to provide variety for the final edited version.

After the interview is complete, the camera is directed at the interviewer and he or she asks the questions again. It's important to have the list of questions available, so the interviewer can refer back to what was asked during the real interview.

'**Noddies**', mute shots of the interviewer or interviewee looking interested but not saying anything, can also be useful in editing. But remember the eyeline and make sure the shots will cut together with some semblance of compatibility in backgrounds.

The major advantages of this style of shooting are:

- A tight presentation, with the appearance of having two or more cameras on the scene. Edit points pass unnoticed.
- The interviewer is clearly identified
- The cameraperson has an easier job since not a lot of movement or change of shot is called for during each take.

Single camera: Moving style (camera vérité)

In this style of production, there are no reverses of the interviewer, and only movement of the camera or changes of shot size allow for edit points. If there's no shot variation or movement, jump cuts will be very obvious when the piece is edited.

Advantages of this style:

- The person being interviewed is the sole focus of attention, although the opening shot could pan off the interviewee to establish the interviewer's presence

- The cameraman sometimes move around the scene to objects being described and thereby pick up details that may serve as cutaways that help in editing
- An over-the-shoulder shot from behind the interviewer or the interviewee may also be useful in editing, but be careful to maintain continuity, ie, if the interviewee is looking from right to left in the close-up, then he/she should be looking the same way in the wide shot.

Some general hints for interviewing

- Make sure your questions are organised. Have a good background knowledge about the interviewee and that person's relation to the topic of discussion.
- Aim for clear and precise answers, but avoid 'closed' questions which can simply be answered by 'yes' or 'no'. Aim to draw information from the interviewee. You're not in competition and don't have to prove that you know more than the interviewee.
- Don't talk the subject out before the camera rolls. Certainly give some idea of the outline and form of the interview, but don't rehearse the actual questions and answers if you can avoid it. When the camera is finally running, try an easy or irrelevant question first just to get your subject talking. You don't have to use the answer in the final edit, but it will serve to ease the tension.
- Although the questions may have been written down, don't read them out when you come to do the interview. Ask the questions naturally and always listen to the answers. If something really interesting is said, follow it up spontaneously, don't feel obliged to go on to the next question.
- Maintain eye contact. The subjects are usually more nervous than you. If you keep looking away, the feeling of nervousness is likely to increase. If you look at them directly and nod in affirmation from time to time, they will gain confidence. Avoid punctuating their answers with 'I see' or 'Uh huh' and other verbal signals of interest which can become irritating to the viewer.
- Leave space at the end of each answer for the editor to find edit points if necessary.
- Don't go on forever in the hope of getting the answer you want. Interviewees tend to burn out after a certain time, and even if you haven't got all you hoped for,

points can be picked up in the commentary, or obtained from another interview with someone else.

- Don't be afraid to stop if things aren't going well. Occasionally look at the cameraperson or VTR operator, who may be signalling some kind of fault. If you're dealing with a hostile interviewee, it often pays to pause for a while and allow time for everyone to blow off steam.
- Don't allow the technical processes to dominate the interview. Set up as quickly as possible, don't shout or argue with the crew.
- If a hand mike is used, keep it in the hand furthest from the camera.

The following (abridged) extracts are taken from:

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Framing and Composition

Film grammar

Every form of communication has a basic grammar and a set of ground rules that have evolved through experience.

In television, as with filming, certain practices and techniques have been devised to ensure that the wide gap between the communicator and audience is minimised. This means that there are safe formulas for making television pictures effectively, though any experienced director will know that it's occasionally necessary and beneficial to depart from these practices to produce a different kind of effect or statement. There's no absolute right and wrong, only degrees of effectiveness and failure.

The following notes are designed to give you the basic rules of grammar from which you can make your own sentences, and form your own poetry if you wish. But remember, you have a responsibility to make your particular form of communication as effective as possible. By sticking to the rules you will at least have a chance of arriving at your destination, whatever it may be. By departing from them without a good reason, you could be heading for disaster.

Balance

One of your first tasks is to balance the images on the screen. Balance depends on a number of factors, such as the size of the subject, the subject's position within the frame and the relationship of the subjects to each other. Shots where the subject is always positioned in the centre of the frame tend to be dull and don't hold viewer interest for long. Angled shots often give more drama and dimension than full frontals.

Framing

The eyes play an important role in communication. Taping conversations with the subject's eyes averted or the head turned away can risk a breakdown of communication to the viewer. The mouth, too, is an important element in face-to-face communication and usually should not be shot in such a way that you only see the lips moving in profile.

In framing people on camera, you should generally aim to put their eye level roughly two thirds of the way up the screen. In medium shots you should always leave a little headroom, that is, the space between the top of the head and the top of the TV screen.

Incidentally, when shooting in semi-profile, that is to say with the head turned slightly away from the direct line of the camera, always leave 'talking space', or nose room, in front of the speaker. Similarly, if the subject is moving across the screen, always leave a little space in front into which the subject can move without appearing to bump into the edge of the frame.

Shot sizes

The following page shows the standard shot sizes used in television. As you can see, they're defined in relation to the human figure.

A fluent understanding of these shot sizes is useful in both planning your coverage and in shooting it. You don't have to stick to these shots exactly – you can plan a 'loose mid shot' or a 'tight long shot' – but these defined shots give you an industry-accepted framework from which to work.



Very Long Shot (VLS)



Long Shot (LS)



Medium Long Shot (MLS)



Mid Shot (MS)



Medium Close-up (MCU)



Close-up (CU)



Big Close-up (BCU)



Extreme Close-up (ECU)

Standard terminology of shot sizes

Note:

- With the exception of the term 'close-up', all terms apply only to the shot size of a human figure. For example, you can't have a mid-shot of a car.
- There's no suggestion here that these are necessarily always the desired framings. They're just standard points of reference.

- `Very long shot' is often a vague term meaning any shot of a figure `wider' than a long-shot.

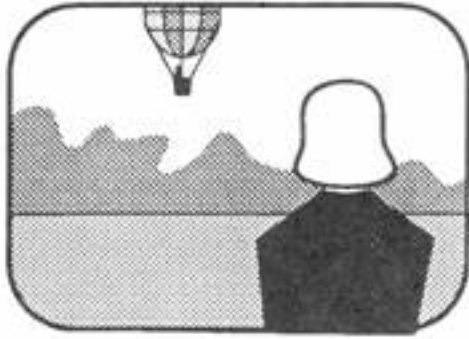
Composition

The art of composition is in arranging the elements of a scene so the totality of the picture yields the desired effect.

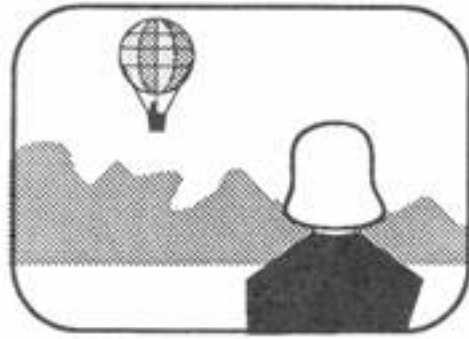
In most cases the aim is for a balanced and visually pleasing image, but sometimes a disharmonious composition is used to reinforce the tension or drama of the storyline.

Some basic guidelines are:

- Make sure that important elements are shown completely.

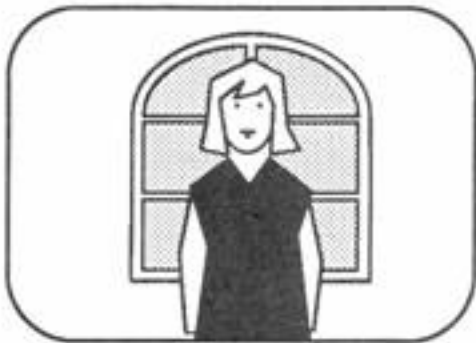


Element cut off

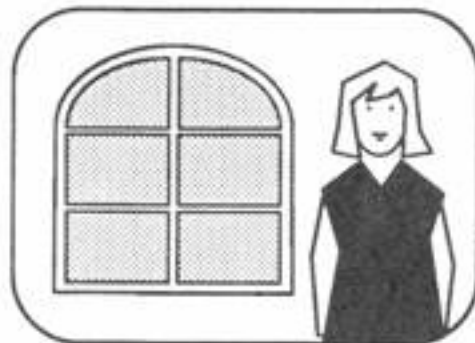


Element fully within frame

- Don't let one important element obscure another main element or its value will be reduced.



Not good



Preferred

- Make sure the subject is shown at an appropriate size, so sufficient detail can be seen and important parts aren't chopped off by framing that's 'too tight'.



Too small



Too tight

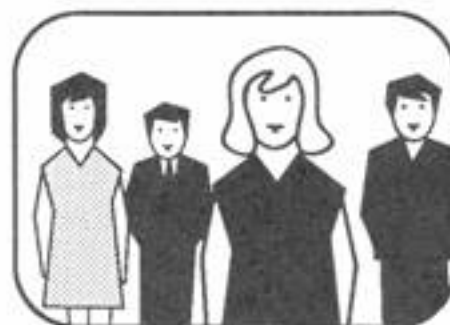


Preferred

- To add visual interest and a sense of depth, arrange your subjects at different distances from the camera, but take care that they don't conceal each other.

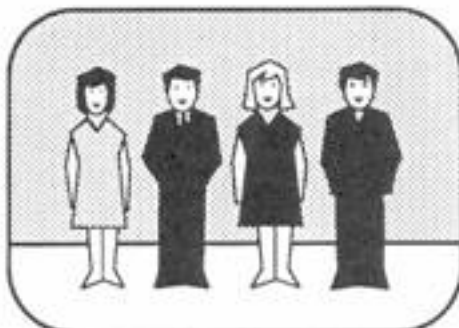


Not good

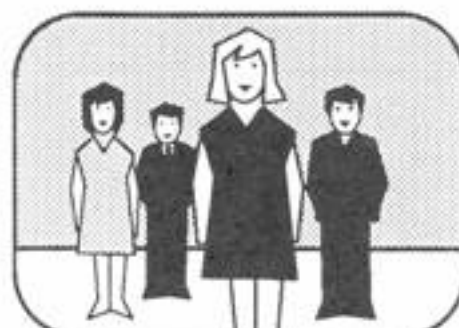


Preferred

- Don't have all main picture elements equidistant from each other.

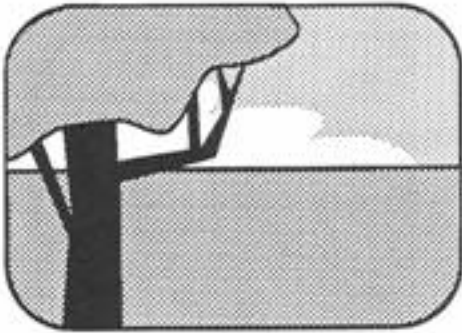


Not good

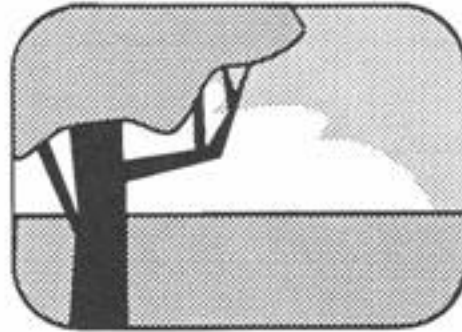


Preferred

- Keep the horizon above or below the centre of the frame.

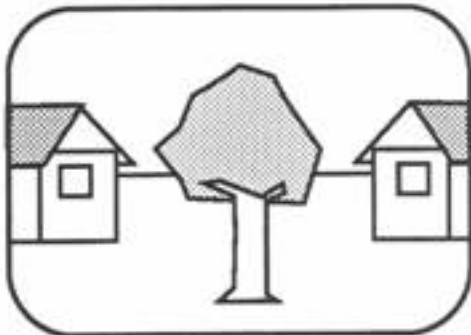


Not good

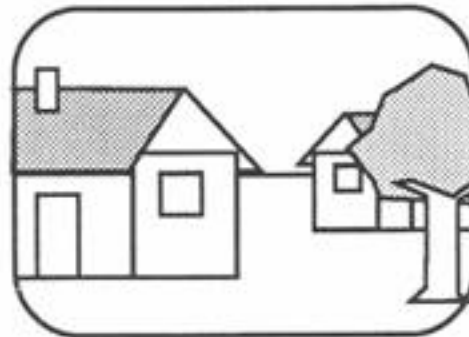


Preferred

- Left/right symmetry can be boring. Balance the elements in the frame in an asymmetrical fashion.

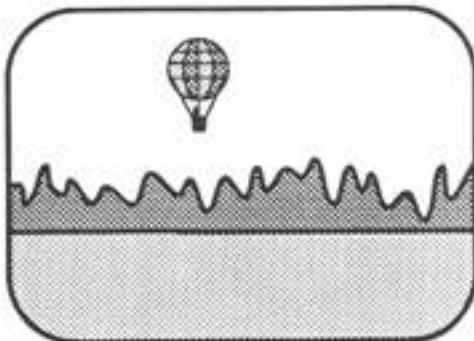


Symmetrical composition

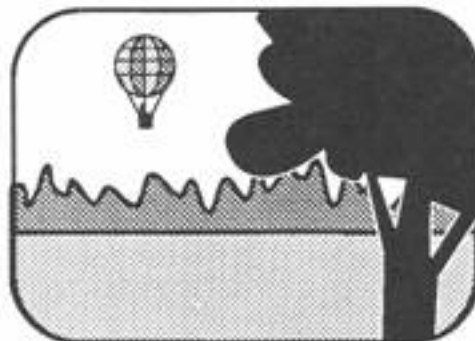


Preferred composition

- When the subject is in the distance, a secondary object in the foreground can emphasise depth.



Not good



Preferred

Not good

Preferred

- Parallel horizontal lines can shorten perspective and reduce depth of field. Try to place a diagonal against a horizontal.

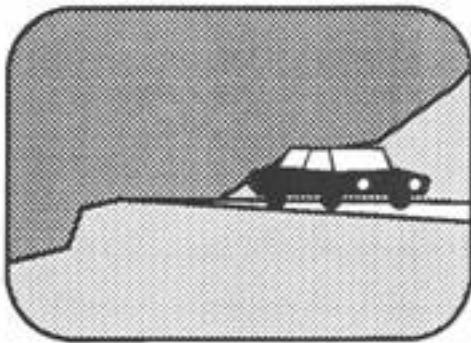


Not good



Preferred

- Diagonals and curves can bring more drama to a landscape.



Not good



Preferred

- Shooting two-dimensional objects, like paintings or signs, from a side angle will produce a distortion. Shoot them straight on unless distortion is desired.





Not good



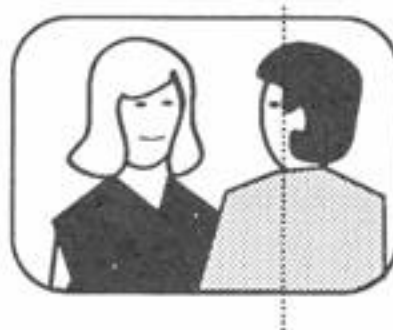
Preferred

Composition for reverse shots for dialogue

- The subject facing the camera should get about two thirds of the screen space.

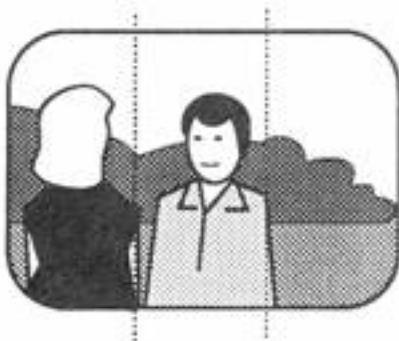


Main shot

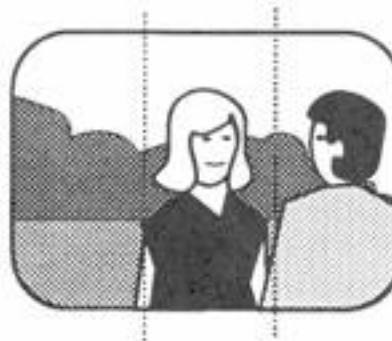


Reverse shot

- With medium shots on a wide screen, the screen is divided into three equal parts and the subject facing the camera is placed in the centre of both main and reverse shots –



Main shot



Reverse shot

Camera Techniques

Handling the camera

You'll generally have the choice of mounting the camera on a tripod, or handholding it, preferably on your shoulder, in order to follow some action more closely. Be warned that handholding is a difficult skill to acquire and, if not done properly, can lead to very shaky and unsatisfactory pictures. This jerkiness can be reduced if you use wide angle, and ensure that the camera rests firmly on your shoulder. It's best to avoid the telephoto position whenever possible when handholding because it accentuates any shakiness.

When walking with the camera, move slowly, with legs slightly bent, and try to keep the camera parallel to the ground. A camera extension cable will give you greater freedom of movement if you're working on your own.

The tripod

When setting up a tripod, it's essential to set it level. Better quality tripods are supplied with a bubble level gauge and ball-and-cavity levelling system so you don't have to waste time getting the legs exactly equal. For tripods that don't have a level gauge, line up vertical lines of buildings, etc, with the edge of your viewfinder screen.

The tripod should be used whenever possible. It's essential for stills, graphics and shots where there's very little subject movement.

Panning

Panning refers to rotating the camera in the horizontal plane; that is, turning it to the left or right. It's usually done on a tripod. Panning is used to show the spatial relationship between two subjects, or to follow the action, or even to survey a particular scene. The following points should be observed when panning:

- Make sure that the horizon line is level at the start and end of each pan.

- Roll the tape before starting the pan, and continue to record the scene after the pan stops. This will facilitate editing later.
- The speed of the pan should be slow enough so that the audience can absorb the information and fast enough to prevent the audience becoming bored.
- Whether handholding or using a tripod, always go from an uncomfortable to a comfortable position. This means you should first physically face the end of the shot and then turn the camera and your body to the starting position, with your feet facing the end shot. This means the pan gets easier for you as you move through it and helps avoid an awkward camera jerk just near the end of the pan.
- A fluid head tripod is recommended for smooth pans.

Tilting

Tilting refers to vertical tipping of the camera. It's similar to panning for showing spatial relationships between subjects. It can also emphasise height or depth or follow action up or down.

Dollying and tracking

A 'dolly' is a unit with wheels to which a tripod can be attached.

Dollying refers to *movement of the camera* towards or away from the subject.

Tracking is *movement of the camera* to the left or right. The camera can also be 'tracked' ahead of or alongside moving subjects to maintain perspective.

Zooming

'Zooming in' increases the focal length of the lens and the size of the image on the screen. Zooming out decreases the focal length of the lens and the size of the image. It is usually easier to zoom than to dolly.

The zoom lens is very useful and convenient for choosing different focal lengths for static shots, but don't overdo it. Zooming in and zooming out on a subject may fascinate the camera operator, but can quickly irritate viewers and make editing between shots quite difficult.

Objective angle

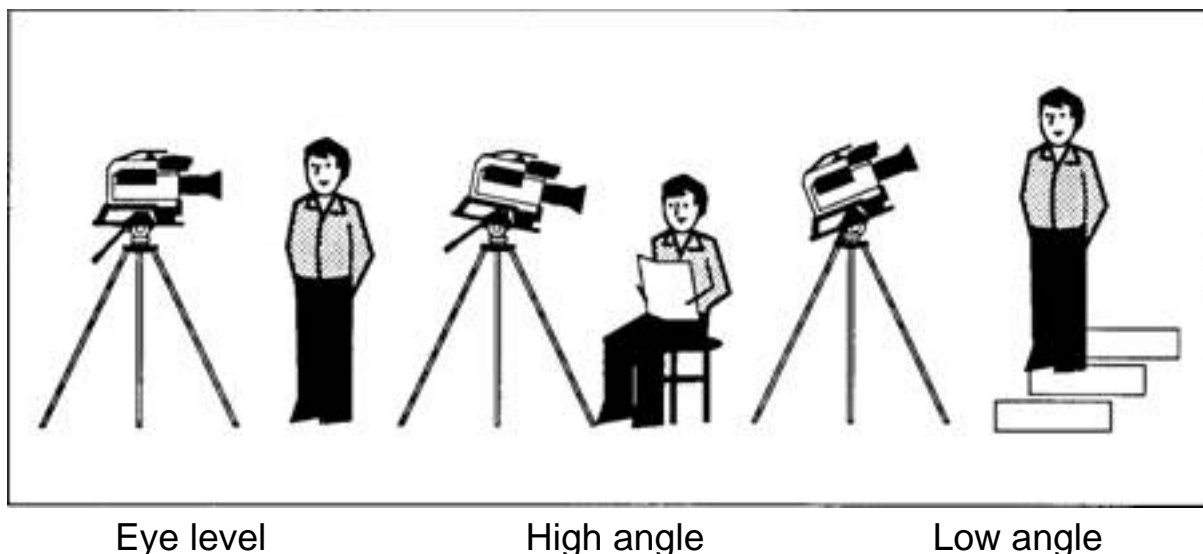
An objective camera shoots the action impersonally, as if through the eyes of an unseen, outside observer. Objective camera angles are therefore excellent for giving an overall view of what's happening.

Subjective angle

Subjective shooting brings the viewer into the scene. The camera lens becomes the eye of a person within the action. The viewer is then personally involved, not just watching the action from the sidelines. Subjective camera angles are good for demonstrating how to do something.

Camera height

Camera height refers to the angle at which the camera looks at the subject. There are three basic positions:



Eye level shot

The camera is horizontal to the ground. In wide and medium objective shots the camera should be at the height of the unseen observer. Close-ups should be made at the height of the subject.

High angle shot

The camera is tilted downward at the subject. High angle long shots help orient the viewer because they show the relationship between the various elements of the setting and are also useful if the action occurs in great depth.

High angle shots of persons can make the subject look unimportant and inferior, giving the viewer a sense of superiority.

Low angle shot

The camera is tilted upward at the subject. Low angles tend to dramatise the subject, giving it an aura of authority or grandeur.

Low shots are also useful for separating the subject from the background, for eliminating unwanted foreground and background, and for heightening the illusion of size, speed and perspective.

Camera movement

One of the problems frequently encountered with people learning how to use video cameras is the urge to keep the camera moving. Zooming, panning and tilting all seem irresistible to the newcomer, but they pose a number of problems, not only to the viewer, but also to the editor.

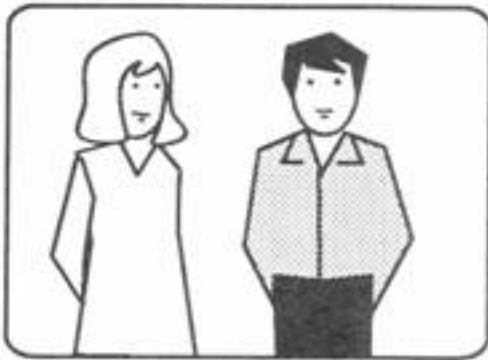
Remember, it's very possible to produce strong feelings of movement with a static camera. Don't move unless it improves the shot.

Shooting rules

Don't shoot jump cuts

Jump cuts occur if two very similarly composed shots of the same subject are cut together. The effect is distracting and can even be ridiculous. Solutions:

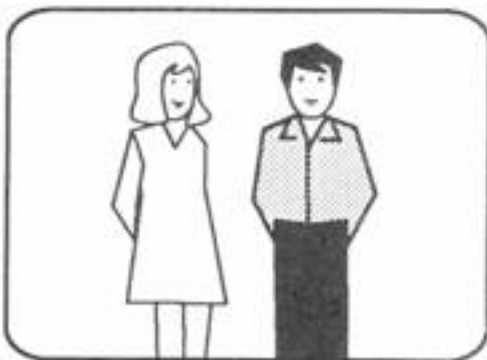
- Make a major difference in the size of adjacent shots involving the same subject, eg, long shot to medium shot, or medium shot to close-up. This can be done by (a) moving the camera nearer/further away from subject, (b) moving the subject, (c) zooming in or out.
- Change the camera angle between shots, eg, full face to half profile, or eye level to a lower angle shot.



Never cut from this ...



... to this ('jump cut')



It's OK to cut from this ...

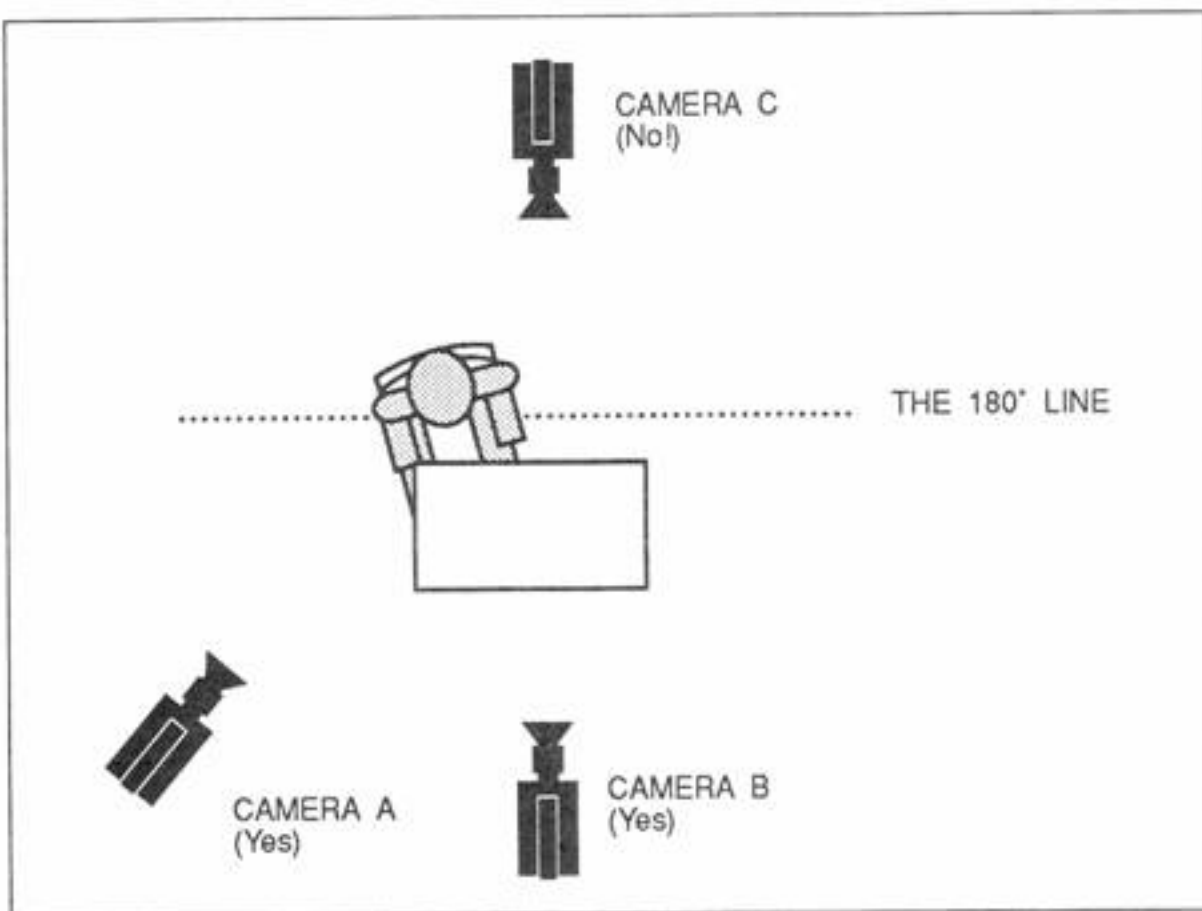


... to this (change of angle and size of shot)

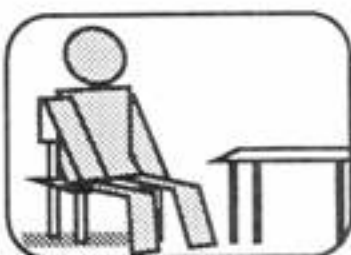
Don't cross the 180° line

In each scene you shoot, there's an imaginary line which, if crossed, will cause an object or person to jump to opposite sides of the frame in consecutive shots.

- Draw the imaginary line on your storyboard picture before shooting a scene. This will show you the limits of your camera positions.
- Always make sure that, if the subject appears on the left hand side in one shot, it also appears on the left hand side in the next.



Don't cross the 180° line



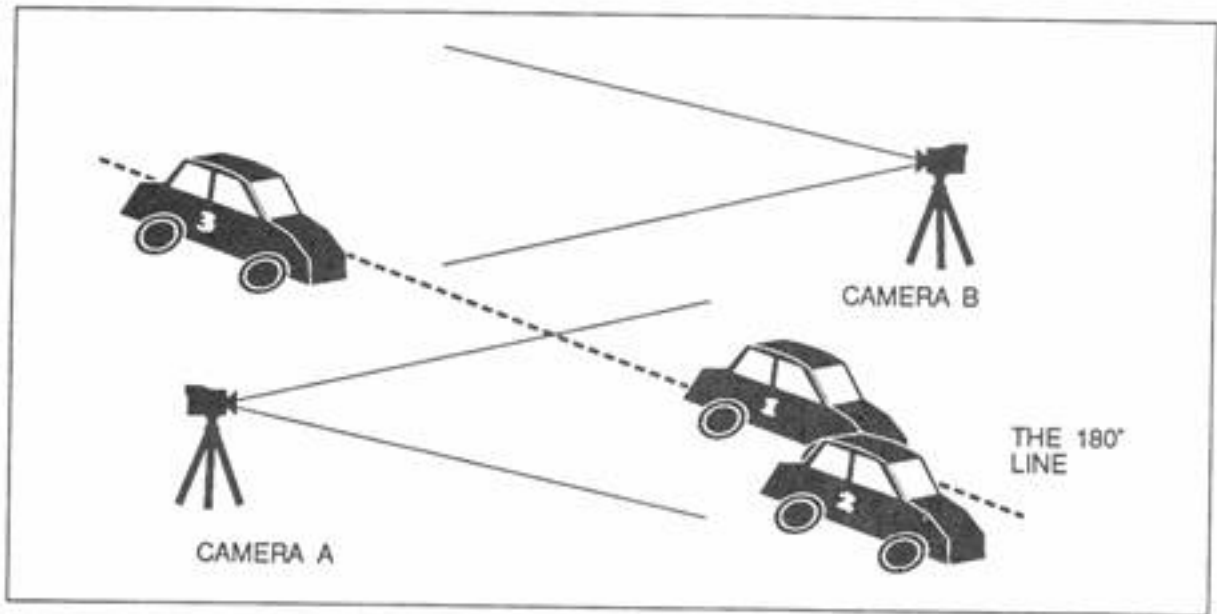
**View from
Camera A (okay)**

**View from
Camera B (okay)**

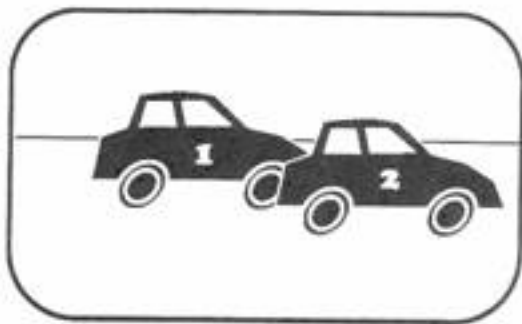
**View from Camera C
(subject appears to have
switched to the other
side of the table)**

Crossing the imaginary 180° line will also make the action appear to reverse direction. Be sure that people or objects only change direction if seen to do so in shot.

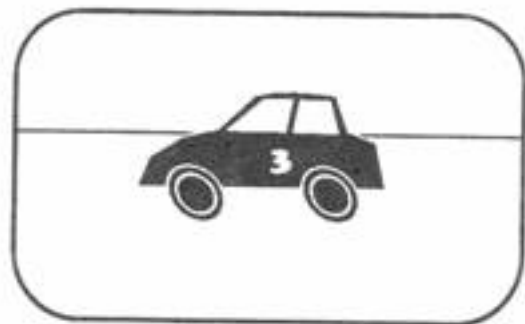
During a car race, for example, continuity of action is essential. It tells the viewer where s/he is. Break that illusion and a person becomes disoriented and distracted and the whole situation becomes ludicrous.



The imaginary 180° line



View from Camera A



View from Camera B

Don't pan, tilt, zoom or track your camera unless you have a reason to do so.

Avoid restless camera movement. The eye should always anticipate a camera movement, because the audience wants to have subconscious questions answered. For example:

- What is that object in the distance? What is that child playing with? (Motivation to zoom in so the eye can see the object more clearly.)

- Where is that person going? What's at the other end of that building? (Motivation to pan left/right.)
- How tall is that building? Who do these feet belong to? (Motivation to tilt up.)

Remember:

- Panning should be done very slowly because (a) the eye needs time to take in the information in the picture, and (b) a strobing or bending effect of vertical objects occurs if a pan is done too fast.
- The audience can become 'seasick' by frequent zooming in and out.
- Don't leave the audience wondering why the camera is panning, tilting or zooming. The motivation must be clear.

Allow enough space when framing people

If a person is not framed properly, s/he will appear to sink through the frame, or to be hanging by the neck! Keep the subject's eyes about two thirds up the height of the frame.



Too little head room



Too much head room



Good

Allow your subjects speaking/breathing space. For example, if they're talking to someone out of shot, to the right of frame, place them left of centre in the shot.



Incorrect



Correct

Basic Editing

Many film and video makers who involve themselves in the editing process for the first time are often faced with the sudden realisation that *'if you ain't got it, you can't use it!'*

By the editing stage it's a bit too late to start going out and shooting scenes you didn't get the first time round - make sure you work from a shooting script (a list of ALL needed shots), and that you mark off successful takes!

And, if you didn't learn before now - shoot what you need, might need, but certainly not what you don't need - because you're going to have to go through it all in the editing process - and the more excess footage you have, the more time it will take!

Be prepared: have all your material together when you're ready to edit!

Editing, with today's tools, isn't a major feat demanding great artistic talent or technological expertise. All you need to do is cut and paste a few scenes together to construct a lucid story – just as you would with a word processor.

However, it helps if you have a perceivable beginning, a revelatory middle and a conclusive ending. it's also a great help if you have good pictures to work with, and you learn a little of the poetry of editing so you don't leave the odd scene lingering on screen for too long, or too short for the viewer's pleasure.

On the other hand, it can be a Herculean task to edit a bunch of badly shot, incompletely staged scenes together in order to make a sensible sequence that not only has a beginning, a middle and an end, but can go further and maintain the fragile illusion that the material was shot and edited by a professional.

So, before you begin:

- decide the pacing of the video, and its style of presentation.
- work out a time frame to complete the edit in.
- work to a comprehensive storyboard or script.

With the rapid rise of affordable nle (non-linear editing) systems, it is almost impossible to give any practical technical advice. Nor is it easy to suggest which system / software is the best since nle is still developing with new systems / software being introduced all the time. Nor has there been a 'right time' to buy - what's new today is obsolete tomorrow. Fortunately, there are now numerous off the shelf systems available which will provide reliable, and quite sophisticated results for a reasonable outlay.

As a rough guide to system basics you will need a minimum of:

- 160 to 360 gbs of hard-drive for video - you get about 5 mins per gb for dv / 12gb an hour
(you will be better off with a separate hard-drive for the computer operating system & programs)
- at the very minimum, 1 gb of ram (memory) and at least a 2.0 ghz P4 processor
- a robust operating system, windows 2000, xp or (ugh!) vista

- if using a pc. a video capture card or firewire connection:

analogue - this type of card will allow regular svhs / vhs in and out - but is really superfluous with the 'firewire' card / connection below.

dv (ieee-1394) - more commonly known as '*firewire*'. this will allow digital transfer to and from a dv camera (which in most cases can also act as a transcoder for analogue signals)

- at least a 19" monitor, preferably an LCD (eye strain and screen real estate is a major problem with most nle software)

and remember, should you have problems:

a. **DON'T PANIC.** if your system was working, it will work again!

b. most 'problems' can be traced to user malfunction!

c. answers can usually be found online @ rec.video.desktop - a newsgroup searchable using [google groups](http://google.groups). (you'll often see the acronym RTFM used in replies - read the f**king manual.)

Basics:

Editing is changing from one picture or scene to another. In movie and television programs most scenes simply change, ie., they CUT from scene to scene. Another commonly used effect is a dissolve, where one scene merges in to the next. There are now limitless, and sometimes highly complex looking, effects available in even the most simple nle programs. However, these effects should be used sparingly and in context - used improperly they simple make your program **look amateurish and cheap.**

Simply watching television will give you a good idea as to what to do, and what not to do. Documentaries will teach you that showing a talking head for half an hour is not going to capture your audiences attention. Adverts loaded with special effects usually sell cheap goods. So, if you have a story to tell, a product to sell, or an idea to convey, do just that, and do it as simply as possible.

This is a list of possible things a video might include:

- **titles** - to identify people, places, things
- **narration** - to tell a story, explain the vision, an idea, or to inform or amuse
- **music and fx** - to aid the flow, to add dramatic / relaxing effect
- **credits** - to inform people who was involved

How you edit the footage you shot will make the difference between an interesting and entertaining video and a deadly boring one. As a beginner you might have a lot of unusable footage - times where you forgot to turn the camera off, out of focus shots, embarrassing views, wobble cam, etc., In editing you will simply get rid of the bad stuff and make a story of the good stuff. It helps to work from a script, and study the footage beforehand in order to choose the best scenes.

Logging:

Before you start editing view your tapes thoroughly, making notes as to what, and where scenes you may want to use in your program are on the tape. Logging of your tapes is all important regardless of which editing system you use, because this edl (edit decision list), will be the foundation of your final video, whether you use the shots therein or not.

Paper Edit:

For those without access to an editing system, or projects beyond their expertise, or for clients with limited time to spend in the edit suite, the 'paper cut' (based on tape *time code*) provides the perfect solution.

A brief guide:

1. Working from a script / storyboard shoot your material.
2. Copy the original camera tapes to vhs or dvd standalone recorder using the camera's built in time code display. The vhs tapes / dvd with the visible time code are called *time code window dubs*
3. View and log the material, noting all the scenes you are likely to use
4. Match the best takes (scenes you shot) to your script / storyboard
5. Supply the editor with the original camera tapes, any graphics, photos, etc., you want included, recorded narration, music, etc. and then start editing according to your edl (*edit decision list*) – fine tuning as you go along

Example of a edl sheet:

Ed No	Tp No	Time Code IN Hr : Min : Sec : Frm	Time Code OUT Hr : Min : Sec : Frm	Vid	Aud	Dur Sec	Description of Shot
		: : :	: : :				

key:

- ed no** Simply a reference number to keep track of edits during on-line (usually starts with 1)
- tp no** Tape / Reel no. Needs to match tape source (changed when source tape changes)
- tc IN** Time Code IN
- tc OUT** Time Code OUT
- vid** Video only. (If no marks in either Vid or Aud, then both Audio AND Video edit assumed)
- aud** Audio only. (If no marks in either Vid or Aud, then both Audio AND Video edit assumed)
- dur** Length of shot in seconds
- description** Brief description of shot, detail of title, etc.,

Example of how to fill-in a edl sheet:

For straight cut to cut (with both video and audio)

1	3	8 : 15 : 20 : 16	8 : 15 : 35 : 05			15	Close-up computer keyboard
---	---	------------------	------------------	--	--	----	----------------------------

printable form below - or [download](#) as .doc file

ed no	tp no	time code IN hr : min : sec : frm	time code OUT hr : min : sec : frm	vid	aud	dur sec	description

The Business Video

To create a commercially viable business, educational, or entertainment video, both you and your client must be clear about the following points in order that the video becomes a useful, productive tool.

A. Purpose of the Video

B. Target Audience

C. Exhibition and Distribution

D. Financial Considerations

After clarifying these matters you, as producer / director, will be able to proceed to the next step:

E. Writing the brief

The brief is the basic production document. It decides the shape and style of the video, and it is very important that you exercise great care at this stage. If the video is badly designed it could cost you and your client a lot more than budgeted for, and at the same time fail to achieve the results your client requires.

THE CLIENT'S REQUIREMENTS

Purpose

Successful videos seek to communicate one message which will motivate the viewer to take action. The single message may be supported by quite a number of examples, but the one message should always remain clear that the viewer should try a method, buy a product, avoid an accident, phone a number, write a letter, be entertained, or simply laugh. A clear purpose avoids confusing or frustrating the audience. It also saves the video from becoming too complex, and too expensive.

Target Audience

Who will see the video? Which portion of the audience is your client trying to reach? Where and how will it be shown? In other words, demographics...

Different videos may share the same purpose while being aimed at totally different audiences. For instance, a video on safety for industrial workers will be very different from a safety video aimed at families around the home, just as childrens humour will be very different from adult humour.

Identify the target audience. Try to identify their educational level, their occupation, and previous knowledge or misconceptions they might have about the subject.

The target audience will determine many aspects of the video's structure. It will determine the length, (attention span, time away from jobs), the script, (vocabulary, sophistication of presentation), and format (broadcast, or VHS / DVD / Internet distribution).

Other aspects to bear in mind are: Will the video be supported by a presentation or lesson? An insert or explanatory cover? Will there be background notes, follow up discussions, or worksheets or will the video have to stand on its own?

All of these considerations can affect the budget, and choice of methods and equipment.

Distribution

If your client intends to make only a limited number of copies of the video, and play them in his offices or at a conference, then distribution is not a problem. But if he would like to send a copy to, for example, every major building company in the state, he will then have to think about distribution right from the start you'll need to form some idea of how many copies will be required, in what format, eg., VHS, DVD, SVCD, streaming via the Internet, and budget accordingly.

Financial Considerations

It is easier to decide what format, and how much to budget, if your client has some idea of what he will get for his money. In this area there are many factors involved. Technical quality is one. Broadcast quality can be very expensive. But if he doesn't intend to broadcast, if his program is to be released on VHS, CD, DVD, then it is not necessary to employ highly expensive production techniques; in fact it would be a foolish waste of money to do so. He would opt for a much less expensive format, and still obtain excellent results.

If the video is to be used to train the client's staff, then you might well be able to

use his own employees as presenters and actors. If the video is to be a sales tool that will have to compete with other well produced sales material, then it might be necessary to employ professional actors and narrators.

You can give your client a rough idea of production costs from the following: If he merely wants to document an event on VHS it can cost as little as \$2 for each minute of screen time. If he then wants to edit the cost is \$5 for each minute of screen time. However, if you client wants a professional image or look, you'll need to budget for a professional camera, lighting, and peripheral equipment. And you might need to budget for professional presenters and actors. This could cost between \$250 to \$2,000 for each minute of screen time. Bear in mind, many TV commercials cost upwards of \$100,000 - for just thirty seconds of screen time!

PRE-PRODUCTION

Outline or Treatment

The first step in pre-production is the development of an outline. To do this job properly you'll need to carry out some research to find out about your client's company, and prepare an outline for a video that represents the company and its point of view. This research period could last a few hours, or 6 weeks. You'll need the full co-operation of your client during this period because it is vital you know the company's background, and your client's specific requirements. To support this research you should ask for a fee. (Some production companies call it a retainer, others call it a research and development fee). The cost varies, it may be quite low for a simple training program, or much more for a sophisticated corporate image building project.

When the research is completed you can give your client an outline that allows him an overview of the shape of the video, and the approximate costs involved. This outline deserves - and needs your concentrated attention. After the client has had a chance to study the outline, you should confer with him, paying attention to any suggestions he might have to make and, if necessary make suitable revisions. At this point any changes can easily be made; later, when the video is in production, changes will be time consuming and costly.

Script and Storyboards (optional)

For some projects, especially those with dramatic elements, a full script showing the dialogue, narration and visual treatment will be necessary. Your client should also study this document very carefully and correct narration which does not reflect the company's policy or manufacturing processes.

Sometimes storyboards will be developed. Storyboards are similar to comic strips and contain drawings of the video's characters and sequences.

Final Budget

When your client has approved the outline you will analyse the physical, artistic, and technical requirements of the production then develop a budget which will show all the Pre-Production, Production, and Post-Production costs.

Contracts

Most production contracts specify payment for services in three steps; the first payment on initiation the contract, the second payment on completion of the principal photography, and the third on delivery of one master copy of the video.

PRODUCTION

The actual production of a video can be a complicated process. Under normal circumstances it is best that the client allows the director, cameraman and crew to finish their work as quickly as possible.

While it is possible to make changes at this late stage, any changes your client requests after shooting has begun could be very costly.

POST-PRODUCTION

When the shoot is completed the editing process begins. With some projects the first edit will be the final video. All the visuals, graphics and sound mix will be completed in one edit. Your client's approval at this point means he will make his final payments and your contract is fulfilled.

With other projects there can be a longer process, including an off-line and an on-line edit, but in this case you will let your client know in advance if it is necessary, and explain these processes to him.

Remember, you need to develop, and maintain, a friendly, sympathetic relationship with your client. You can do this, in part, by explaining clearly where his money will be going, what he'll be getting for his investment, and of course, keeping him informed and updated about the productions progress.