

Creating Successful Video Projects

Important Tips for Creating Video

Traditionally we think in a linear manner - the day's events are one long clip played in front of us. Actually our own camera (eyes and brain) are closely working to change the scenery every few seconds. A good video will "recreate" the natural human environment by switching camera angles or focus of interest every 3-5 seconds. This takes practice and planning to be effective. A carefully composed video will need a minimum of editing, saving you and your students hours of time while allowing the focus to be on adding effects and music to enhance your content.

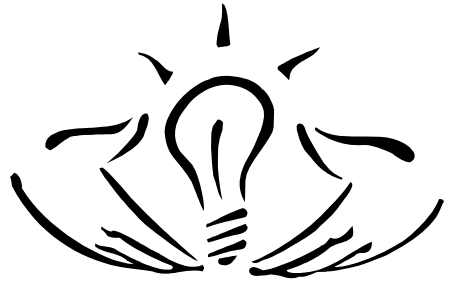


Consider the following:

- **Follow the writing process** – brainstorm, plan, draft (storyboard, script), revise, edit, and produce a final product
- **Change the camera angle often** – wide angle, close-up, pan, follow, tilt, etc.
- **Recreate “natural eye”** – minimize zooms and “artsy” transitions. Your eyes cannot do these!
- **Keep only your best footage** – too often there are shots kept in a video that do not add to content. The clip might be kept in because someone in the group thinks it's cool. The rule: if the scene makes sense without it, cut it out!
- **Keep projects short** – goals of 2-3 minutes for projects should be firm. You and your class do not want to sit through several poorly planned and created, five minute videos.
- **Simplify Editing** – try to do most editing while on the shoot. Got a bad take? Rewind and tape over it. Also use simple linear editing from camera to VCR when possible. Most student projects can be easily created using just a camera and a VCR.
- **Know Your Strengths** – take advantage of everyone's strengths. Develop your camera experts, sound experts, and expert performers.
- **Know Your Limitations** – most school video editing equipment works best with simple projects of 1-3 minutes. Trying to recreate a full length movie is very impractical. Keep it simple!
- **Get Everyone Involved** – your first projects should involve the entire class to show how to plan, shoot, and edit a movie.
- **Keep it original** – parodies are hot, but copying is not. Putting together clips from taped TV shows or movies is easy to do, so is using sound from a CD. Learn how to create simple sound files and MIDI. Music should give an “A-B-A” effect so it can be used to create coherence with the video. Don't use ten different music clips in a two minute video (see keep it simple!).
- **Production Editing Matches Target Media** – advanced students learn the differences between creating a video for VHS and for the Internet. They are two entirely different mediums.

Planning

This is the most important part of making a video. Once properly planned, preparing and actual shooting of scenes will be considerably easier, not to mention saving time and frustration. For every video (especially students) make sure it has been carefully planned, scripted, and storyboarded.



Brainstorming

One thing that can happen is that the idea for a video is too quickly settled. Allow time to consider many avenues and options, before diving into a final plot sequence. Many of things important to consider during brainstorming are the same things we consider during the beginning stages of the writing process:

- **Purpose** – What is the purpose for the video? Consider why the concept “Why”. Why are we making this video? Why would people want to watch it? Why do we think it is important?
- **Audience** – Who is the target audience for the video? Consider how you can script elements to appeal to your target audience. What are they interested in? Why would they want to watch it?
- **Timeline** – This is an overlooked element of planning. Make sure you know how much time you have to complete the project. Also have an idea about how long the finished product will be.
- **Sketch** – Develop a thumbnail or sketch of how your idea might be pursued. This can be something as simple as a beginning-middle-end idea.

Develop your Skills

Good video takes practice. Of course planning and concept play a key role, but content without eye appeal is no fun to watch. Here’s a list of things to practice:

- **Hone your zoom skills** – the best skill to have here is that really slow, unnoticeable zoom. Be able to “feather” the zoom at any speed.
- **Pan** – the good pan has to be the right speed. Too fast and we get dizzy – too slow makes it boring. Practice panning with the zoom. Zoom out is a good effect with a pan.
- **Steady Cam** – for most applications you’ll want the little LCD screen to be open to help you steady the camera. Large cameras are easier to keep steady. Be careful on extreme zoom as it is very unsteady.
- **Framing** – with practice and evaluation of your video, you will develop a “feel” for what works and what doesn’t work. In general the novice doesn’t get close enough to the subject. Try to fill the middle third of the screen for most shots.
- **Exposure** – make sure that you know how to quickly adjust your camera for any lighting condition.
- **Follow** – the good follow has to be smooth. The correct approach is a “heel-toe” step – roll the foot with each step. Keep the upper body still – motion is from the waist down. The classic model training technique with book on head is a good analogy. Be able to do the smooth follow forward, backward, and sideways.
- **Tripod shots** – use the tripod as much as possible. Practice the pan/tilt action left hand on tripod and right hand on camera zoom.
- **Watch the Pros** – always keep a watchful eye when watching TV or movies. You’ll find a lot of cutting edge video on MTV, commercials, and extreme sports.

Starting Video with your Class

Plan a short video that involves your entire class. A good one is the “*Annoying Student*” video where while the teacher drones on with a pointless lecture, students are engaged in a number of very annoying actions (fixing makeup, sharpening pencil, passing notes, etc). Any type of short video will surely get everyone involved by sharing camera work and assigning lines and scenes so that each student has a part.

Equipment

The primary purpose of this presentation is to involve you in the steps involved in making a video. We won't get into pros and cons of different equipment. There are several "musts" for your equipment considerations. Of course you'll need a camera, but think about the following:

- Case
- Tripod
- Extra Battery
- Charger
- 12 Pack of tapes
- Microphone
- Headphones

In general, the more you pay, the better quality you get. Make sure the equipment is heavy duty. Remember, your students can create extreme wear on equipment.

Video Roles

As with most activities in school, video is easy to incorporate with small groups. A 3-4 student video crew is ideal, as everyone will have a job to do for every scene. This is something that you will have to work out for yourself depending on your equipment, class size, and comfort level with various degrees of chaos. Below are some roles for student crews while shooting the video. Try to alternate roles within each crew.

- **Director** – the director has to be aware of the concept and then make sure it is carried out by coaching actors and camera crew. The director evaluates each take and makes the decision when to move to a new scene. Directors also give the countdown to "action".
- **Camera** – the camera person is responsible for shooting the take. He/she must be able to determine the right exposure and framing of the scene. The camera person should also be aware of audio quality in absence of a sound person (headphones).
- **Sound** – the sound person plays a very critical role in filming. In some cases students will come back from a "shoot" with unusable footage because the sound is inaudible (low levels, wind, traffic, etc.). Remember what your ears hear and what the camera or mic picks up are two separate things. Handheld mics are advisable in many situations. Be sure to always have headphones and use them whenever you are shooting.
- **Props** – we generally give our propmaster two roles. First, he/she needs to be responsible for all the props used when filming. Most of the time this won't be much, but props should be carefully kept in one place and checked at the end of a session to make sure they all have been returned. The propmaster doesn't have to find all the props – just keep track of them. We also have our propmaster "track" our filming. This involves maintaining the continuity of each scene by ensuring that actors have the same props, positions, and looks. The propmaster should also make sure that "anomalies" don't pop up during a scene (a car suddenly appearing, bystanders gawking, etc.)
- **Winder** – the winder was needed back in the old movie days. The winder had to keep an eye on the cameraman, ensuring that film was traveling through the camera. We tend to ignore this role now, but we have had a number of video sessions ruined when the cameraman "reversed" a thumb – on "standby" when supposed to be recording and on "record" when there was no action. The winder just makes sure that the camera is recording when it's supposed to.
- **Clapboard** – another optional position, but helpful when you can use it. The clapboard keeps track of scenes and takes. This is most helpful to film editing later on as it makes for easy scene detection.

Whatever the situation, each person must be responsible for his equipment – checking it out and returning it when done.



Examples of how to use video in the classroom:

- **School Projects** – take your camera along on field trips and special activities. Film assemblies, talent shows, plays, and sporting events. Put together a short 2-4 minute video to give the flavor of each event. Use video to show off what happens inside the school. A video tour of your school is a great thing to show new and entering students.
- **Class Activities** – as above take short clips of your class working on projects or taking part in some activity. Add music and you have a great video collage to show at open house.
- **Class Projects** – make video an option for some of your more involved class projects. Let students create their own video to show important learnings and skills. Once it gets started everyone will want in. Create authentic scenes with costumes and props give students outlets for some of the neglected “intelligences” – add music, sound and Foley effects. Make sure that any project video is planned and shot at least one week prior to due date.
- **Service** – take on projects as a “service”. Make videos for other teachers or groups – PTA, Clubs, Band, Choirs, and Parent Groups.
- **"How-To"** – teachers can use this to show how to do something in your classroom. Show steps for a lab or other activity. You can also show “how to”: play the guitar, ride a unicycle, juggle... the list is endless.

The Final Product - Sharing Your Video

A few years ago, the standard final format for projects was a VHS tape. Due to the boom in the DVD market both in players and recorders, VHS will soon be a forgotten format. Here's a quick breakdown on the different file formats (codec) that are used for video.

- **AVI (use only for capturing video)**
Most computers will import your camera video into an AVI file. This is a very high quality, full motion, format that quickly fills hard drives. In general capture with AVI, but do not export to this format.
- **MPG (multi-use format, especially suited for computer and CD)**
Standard format for smaller video formats for use on a computer, CD, network, or even streaming. There are various sizes and qualities to this format so select the one that matches your purpose. If MPG will be your final project format, try to minimize camera movement or fast motion in production.
- **MPG2 (use for DVD projects)**
Standard for DVD video. However, to create a DVD that will work on home players, you must create a DVD project. You cannot merely burn an MPG2 file to a DVD and have it play.
- **MPG4**
This is a newer format and will be replacing previous MPG formats over the next few years.
- **WMV (great for streaming on web)**
This is a streaming Windows format. Creates a very small file footprint and excellent video quality. Mac owners may not be able to play movies in this format.
- **MOV/QuickTime (industry standard for both Mac and PC)**
Apple's movie format that is often used as an industry streaming standard. QuickTime is available to all computers. With a QuickTime Pro license, you can export common video files into the QuickTime format.
- **RM/RealMedia (streaming format)**
The file format created by RealNetworks and used for a variety of media streams.

Quick List of Do's and Don'ts

	Do's	Don'ts
Content	video tells a story	no coherent content
Clothes	solids, bright colors	wild patterns, wavy lines
Attitude	smiles, laughing	no emotion, no wanting picture
Music	music added to fit scene	music chosen first
Frame	subject clearly visible	too far away to tell
Filming	camera stops 5-6 sec	camera runs extended
Light	light is in front	light is behind
Transitions	use to show time	try everyone in the book
Graphics	black and white	mixes wild colors and fonts
Script	all dialogue is planned	leave it up to ad libs
Blocking	all action is planned	let people go wherever
Shots	mix a variety of angles	shots are all similarly composed