

Expedition Film-making Advice Sheet

Exploration is discovering, communicating and conserving new knowledge. We are all explorers because we all have something new to learn. Film-making can be an important part of exploration, part of the process of discovery and an excellent way to communicate what you learn. In its most simple form, filmmaking is story-telling. It's not rocket-science and with a few simple techniques everyone can record and tell compelling stories.

Pre-production

Message: What is the message I want to communicate?

Audience: Who is the audience? General public - TV? Kids - Schools/Educational resources? PR - corporate? Academic - anthropological record?

Medium: What is the best medium to reach this audience? Is film best?

Film: What genre, style, format, structure? Documentary? News? Travel? No need to reinvent the wheel - Watch and study 5 examples of films similar to the one you want to make.

Storylines: TV thrives on character-driven narratives. Remember jeopardy, risks, problems, personal clashes makes good TV. Be prepared to roll during all the most difficult moments. Think sequences and continuity of storylines.

Storyboard: Think through visually how you may want to tell the story – write a 1-page narrative outline & shot-list.

Personnel: dedicated camera operator (and ideally audio), commitment from the expedition members to the film.

Budget: budget in equipment, insurance, personnel and post-production costs.

Sponsors: expedition sponsors may be interested in your film for use in PR and marketing opportunities. Be careful on product placement and rights issues (see on).

Time Factor: extra time will be required during the planning and field phases of the expedition for filming. Factor this into your itineraries and be flexible to change to meet to filming requirements.

Cultural Impact: consider cultural sensitivities, and ways to minimise negative and maximise positive impact. If working in areas of extreme sensitivity (e.g. religious, indigenous peoples etc) consult a specialist.

Permissions: asses what permission you will need to film and secure them prior to departure.

Reflexivity: as an outsider you're perspective will always be looking in, but locals can look out... Consider working with local film-makers or just giving a local the camera for a day!

Extreme Natural Conditions & Hostile environments: **assess risks, climatic and human difficulties and build** into expedition risk assessment and film and equipment planning.

Equipment Essentials - For TV quality

Camera - 3-chip digital camera and ideally back-up camera – single chip mini-DV for more 'flexible' filming situations. Some new photographic cameras like the CANON shoot brilliant HD quality film and

Lenses – wide angle and Filters (if shooting in bright light – desert, snow etc)

Audio – standard shotgun mic (top of camera); radio mics (check frequencies before departure); radio microphones

Tripod – trade up light-weight for heavy with fluid-head for steady pans, zooms, fixed shots etc.

Tape stock, cards, or onto hard-drives: – lots – remember DVCAM records 42mins on 60min Mini-DV cassettes

Cleaning equipment – Can-air, air-brush, lens cloth (use 'Cleaning cassette' sparingly as they erode the camera heads), gaffer tape for taping up any area where dust could enter the mechanisms and ruin your camera.

Specialist – hidden cameras, under-water casing, lipstick cameras, splash cases, hard travelling case

Lighting – Fold-away reflector, camera light with diffracting gauze

Power – investigate power sources in the field before departure. If away from power sources, make sure you've got lots of batteries. Charging possibilities include (with appropriate adaptors): mains, car battery/cigarette lighters, generator, solar.

Technical Specs - For Presentation/PR/Personal use

Camera – Single chip digital camera (*ideally with the ability to plug in an external microphone to improve audio quality – without sound you aint got a film!*)

Lenses – wide angle and Filters – makes all the difference to a little camera (if shooting in bright light – desert, snow etc)

Audio – on board microphones are notoriously poor and pickup noise from the camera mechanism. So try to get a camera with an input for a simple external microphone.

Tripod – light-weight tripod for fixed shots, interviews

Tape stock, cards, or onto hard-drives – lots – Mini DV

Cleaning equipment – Can-air, air-brush, lens cloth (don't use HEAD Cleaning cassette as they erode the camera heads), gaffer tape

Specialist – hidden cameras, under-water casing, lipstick cameras

Field Production - What to shoot – How to Shoot

To Zoom or not to Zoom? – keep zooming to a minimum - if you want a closer shot, get closer to the subject rather than zooming.

The line – imagine there is a 180degree line running through the subject and never cross it.

Tripod – if possible ensure all shots are 'locked-off' on a tripod unless you know what you're doing and trying to create a certain feel to the film (aka Bourne Identity!)

Lighting - use natural light where possible, best times are brief windows early morning and late afternoon. Use reflector/lamps if required. Subtle use of reflector can help bring out subject's features & add/subtract contrast.

Interviews – set-up shots (wide angles of interview, subject at work and/or in natural environment); framing – medium headshot (i.e. head and shoulders) and head-shots for most telling/important parts. Subject should be talking into space – so frame off centre. Only zoom at moments of intensity, otherwise zoom in/out to fix a new shot when the subject is not talking. Subject's eye line should be one third from the top. Camera should be set at subject's eye-level (i.e – don't shoot them from above looking down or vice versa.)

Interviews with translations – as above but ensure a) the subject and translator are recorded on separate audio channels b) the translator does not talk at the same time as the subject.

Audio for interviews – a) check audio levels, b) minimise background noise by i) pick a quiet location ii) ensure mic is closer to subject and adjust levels c) ensure that the subject is not interrupted whilst talking d) conceal mics and cables out of shot.

2-way interviews – as above but you will need a) cutaways of the interviewer reacting to what the subject is saying; b) fixed shots of the interviewer asking the questions; c) separate audio channels for the subject and interviewee d) cutaways – over the shoulders of each etc... remember don't 'cross-the-line'.

Talking heads – as above but ensure both subjects are 'miced' up, you will need more cutaways including reactions from both, over shoulder shots, reverse angles etc. – play with the angles.

Cutaways (c/a) – standard c/a's include hand gestures, close-ups of eyes, interesting clothing etc... but have a play with angles (high, low, reverses, moves). Duration: 10second each minimum.

Subject matter – remember to ensure that you have picture of what the subject talks about – e.g. if they're talking about chickens, you'll need pix of the chickens in question.

Stand-ups – presenter talking to camera - could be a) fixed shots b) walking and talking to camera. Very important for news but ensure the environment and the activity is motivated. It's always more engaging to relay information during an activity rather than the random walking and talking shot!

Diaries – personal diaries, fixed shots – think 'Big Brother', make them personal, emotional and continuity of your story-line.

FX – some cameras have inbuilt FX. Don't use them unless you know what you're doing! Shoot only 'clean picture', all effects can be added in post-production if required.

Landscape – GVs – General Views – the mainstay of most films. Shoot as much as possible. On tripod fixed shots – wides, mediums, close - with pans if possible. Think framing – not too much sky, position of subject etc.

Flora & Fauna – fixed shots - pans for motion with animals, shoot early morning late afternoon for best light, contrast and times when fauna are most active

People – fixed shots, framed portraits, people at work, people 'living' – think about ways to illustrate the character visually and creatively.

Specialist Knowledge– Every environment has specific skills

Audio – if possible record good natural ambient sounds ('wild sound/buzz track') for 30 seconds minimum... for making your edit easier. If there's background noise, e.g. a fan, make sure you get a shot of the fan and the clear audio. Take good headphones so you can check audio when recording.

Field Production - In-Field Production tips

Tapes, Cards, Hard-drives – store tapes in water-tight dust free containers, insulation for extreme conditions. Carry as hand-luggage, never put in hold. Only post tapes (only use recorded delivery, DHL etc.) as complete last resort. Review the tapes at the end of each day checking for possible 'digital fallout', lens specks, damage to the recording heads.

Logging – where possible try and log your tapes as you go along. This will enable you to build the story as you go, ensure continuity and plug holes as the story develops.

Shotlists – Try to update your shotlists on a daily basis.

Cleaning – Ensure your camera equipment, especially the lens and the heads, are clean at all times. Carry an air-brush and can-air with you when filming and constantly check the lens for dust, splash etc.

Post Production

Editing – the style and professionalism of your edit will be dependent upon what film you are making and for which audience. Film schools are a good source of free editors who are looking for experience and material to edit. Editing is not rocket science – for simple edits teach yourself.

Presentations – cut short films to illustrate your talk. Alternatively cut the audio from your film and set it to photographic slides.

Other places for your film – if no one in TV-World wants it, don't give up hope. Consider video libraries (like photo libraries); video archive libraries; news organisations (if news angle); campaigning organisations (always need strong video for their campaigns).

Rights issues – Whoever owns the rights has the power... and rights means money. Trust no one! Especially media professionals! Read contracts thoroughly and take legal advice.

Selling - Pre-expedition

Research the commissioning editors you are approaching, what they have commissioned in the past and 'strands' they are currently commissioning. Strongly consider working alongside an established production company to pitch ideas to broadcasters.

Submit 1-to-2 page written pitch with illustrative photographs including:

- Title (Catchy)
- Duration: (1X30mins; 1X1 hour etc)
- Outline – 5line max (sell the story)
- The Story (more details – including characters, subject matter etc)
- Production Details (style, type of cameras, Production schedules & timeframes)
- About You (Film-making and expedition experience)
- Contact details.

Selling - Post-expedition

Notoriously difficult - as above with either a) short promo (to get money for post-production or b) complete edited film. Consult legal advice on all contracts.