

Planning

Keep your idea simple

Don't over-complicate the basic idea of your video. You should make sure your idea is very simple and clear or your audience will lose interest. Write one sentence that conveys the idea of your video. For example: Aliens invade Earth to wipe out humans but just when things look hopeless, they all catch a cold and die. That's it, that's your story. Try doing this with your idea.

Write your screenplay

The screenplay details all the scenes in your video and includes any dialogue that you want your actors to say. It should describe your shots and sequences, where they are set, do they need any special effects, what other sounds or music might be needed.

Create a storyboard.

A storyboard is for planning the shots you need. You don't have to be able to draw very well - stick men will do fine. Creating a storyboard makes you think about the visual style of the video and the types of shots you need.

Shooting

Keep the camera still.

It should be the pictures that move and not the camera! Use a tripod if you have one. Don't zoom in or out whilst shooting. If you need a telephoto, then zoom in to the subject and only then start filming.

Break your story into various shots.

At the beginning of every natural sequence you should use an establishing shot. For instance, if you move from the beach to the harbour, show a wide view of the harbour to establish that's where we are. Then go in for the close-ups.

Between every shot you take, change your position or the angle of shot. In general a wide shot should be around 8 to 10 seconds, a medium shot should be 4 or 5 seconds and a close-up can be as little as 1 - 3 seconds.

Nothing captures the viewer's attention better than a close-up. Get lots of them and don't be afraid to get in real close (a local character's face filling the screen.) As well as the main action (the parade going right past you) get lots of shots you can cut away to - (the reaction of the faces in the crowd, the small child playing at the parents' feet, the old woman looking from a high window.)

Composing your shots and the 'Rule of Thirds'

In your mind, split the frame into 3 parts vertically and also into 3 parts horizontally. Then position your key area of interest on one of the intersections. Look for more exciting angles on an otherwise mundane subject. Get really high up and look down. Look from between some pillars. Maybe have some grass waving in the wind in your foreground. Be daring, it will pay off.

Lighting your video

Daylight is great for shooting video, but it's best to avoid shooting in bright sunlight. Try and shoot on a slightly overcast day if possible. If the light is very strong and directional, use a reflector (even a large sheet of white card will do) to bounce light into the darkest side of your actor's faces.

If your subject is a friend stood indoors in front of a bright window, the camera will see all that light coming in and decide to close down your lens aperture. Your friend will be in darkness! The answer is to lock the exposure on the subject first and let the windows 'wash out'. Alternatively, move so that the windows are not so prominent in the shot.

Indoors you might need extra lighting. Tungsten halogen worklights, the kind available from DIY stores, are a cheap and effective way of lighting your video. A good technique is to bounce these lights off the ceiling to get a soft overhead light.

Sound

If your recording people speaking, it's well worth using either a tie clip microphone or a directional mic on a boom. You can buy cheap additional microphones for any camera that has an external mic socket. Get an assistant to hold the boom (a microphone on the end of a long stick) as close to your actors as possible without being in shot.

Editing

Create a rough cut first

With all your clips captured, put them all together in the right order, but don't worry about exact timing. Once you have this rough cut, you can refine it by trimming and adjusting your clips.

When joining two clips together taken from different angles, try to make the cut occur during an action. If a person is walking, look carefully at their position and cut so that they continue from the same position in the next shot.

Be ruthless when cutting

Don't be afraid of cutting the shots down in length. It is always surprising how short a shot can be and still be effective. There is nothing worse than unnecessarily long shots. If in doubt, cut it out!