Video Projects Scriptwriting Tips & Tricks

by Mark Fulmer, OTAN

Many adult education programs now have digital video cameras available for use by teachers and students. If not, many students have digital video cameras that they might be willing to use for a class project. Equipment prices have come down, and video editing software is free and easy to use, which makes a student or teacher video project an attainable goal. This article will give the new video enthusiast some guidance for making an engaging video.

Tell your story through people. If your story is about a school, a classroom, or an element of your curriculum, find a way to use a student, a teacher, or an administrator to not only inform the audience, but to also provide emotional and subjective elements. Testimonial interviews are useful, but whenever possible try to capture activity and interaction.

Build in surprises to sustain viewer involvement. Use unexpected elements from time to time to maintain viewer interest. These can be abrupt sound bites, music hits, or narrative quips. Sometimes a bit of set-up is needed; either visuals or narratives. Feel free to walk the audience "down the primrose path" just before you squirt them with the garden hose.

Make your narrative active, conversational, and clear. If you are writing a script for your narrator, avoid passive or past tenses whenever possible. "Our class is studying the Constitution" is better than "Our class studied the Constitution." Most of us do not speak in complete sentences, so feel free to disregard the normal rules of punctuation. Use three dots…for pauses…and if you hear a particular phrasing, use commas, as often as needed, as well as *italics* and **bold** to help *guide* the narrator to moments of **emphasis**. Save your double compound complex sentences for print materials and strive for clarity in your video script. When you have finished, read it aloud. Then read it aloud to someone else. Then give it some final polish.

The best lighting is "3-point lighting."

Try these creative approaches, and your video project can be entertaining as well as informative or instructional. One effective way to do this is to mimic a video style or genre. Whether it is creating a mock newscast or a music video, this approach can be exciting for both the students and the audience.

A good example of this is "We Are All a Student," an introduction to the program by ESL students from Salinas Adult School with their teacher, Robert Paden, which can be seen online at: mms://dcpvideo.scoe.net/070305we_are_all_students.wmv .

Here is a list of more genres that could be used:

Biographical Crime	Late Night Comedies	Sports & Fitness
B-Movie Horror	Mobster	Slapstick
Comedy	Music & Musicals	Spoofs and Satire
Comic Books and Superheroes	Mystery	Sports Comedies
Courtroom	Nature	Stand-Up
Creature Features	Romance	Saturday Night Live
Crime Action	Political Thrillers	Screwball
Deadly Disasters	Psychological Thrillers	Suspense
Documentary	Science	Supernatural Horror
Drama	Social & Cultural	Television Thrillers
Espionage	Sports	Westerns
Horror	Sci-Fi & Fantasy	

Pay attention to color temperature. The fluorescent lights in your classroom give off a greenish tinted light. Sunlight can give off a blue-ish tinted light. Camcorders deal with this through "white balance", which is pointing the camera at a white piece of paper at the same location as the subject and pushing the white balance button to adjust the iris. Be sure to re-white balance when you change locations from interiors to exteriors, etc.

Train your ear to listen for background sounds. Planes, trains, and cars, oh my! They will, and do, invade your soundtrack. Leaf blowers are my personal nemesis. Interiors can be plagued with computer fans, air conditioning and phones of all kinds. So develop an "inner ear" that hears these pests and re-take or re-locate as needed.
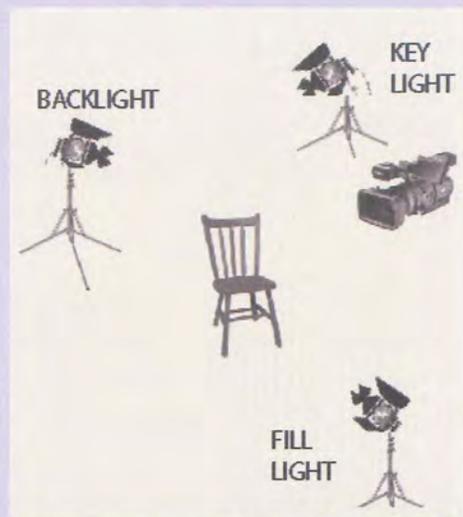
Some Helpful Web Links for Video Production

Scriptwriting – CyberCollege

Vivid detail of the style and technical differences needed to effectively write for video. While the emphasis is on news writing, there are many helpful strategies.

http://www.cybercollege.com/tvp006.htm

5 Sample Video Projects – CyberCollege

These five projects are explained as class assignments but can be customized to the needs/interests of your students.

http://www.cybercollege.com/project.htm

A Free, Interactive Course in Studio and Field Production, by Ron Whittaker, Ph.D.

Impressive full-fledged online course in television production – includes modules, associated readings, and complete translations in both Spanish and Portuguese.

http://www.cybercollege.com/tvp_ind.htm

Writing the script for video

This article contains useful tips as well as very good strategies for small group video projects.

http://edition.cnn.com/2000/fyi/sb/08/30/video.script.story

Camcorder video Production

Excellent "nuts and bolts" approach to video production in the field.
No fluffy prose in this lengthy article, just the facts.

http://www.bctv.net/telcom/tel40text/1camerascomp.html

How-to Info & Books for Videographers

Learn video equipment, setup, operation, & production

http://videoexpert.home.att.net/index.htm

Shooting Video for the Web

Tips for lighting, framing and backgrounds, and motion.

http://www.mssvision.com/MSSV/Artists/WebVideo.htm

Streaming Basics: Shooting Video for Streaming

While this article is intended for those wanting to put video on the web, the tips apply to most video productions. Use a tripod. Avoid "spray painting" and the "yo-yo." Simplify the background. Get up close and personal. Use an external microphone.

http://smw.internet.com/video/tutor/streambasics1

Videography for Educators

This guide from Apple "features tips and techniques to assist in the creation of quality video products. The exhibit provides example planning documents and video examples to illustrate concepts and skills."

http://edcommunity.apple.com/ali/story.php?itemID=365