

Quick Guide to Video Production

– Principles of planning, recording, and editing

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Great Video – low budget – or no budget:

Don't worry, today you can record sound and video in good quality using just your own normal smartphone. You just have to use it in a *smart* way (to be explained).

And you can edit your material using a *free* (no pay) app that can easily be downloaded and run on your ordinary Mac/pc, stationary, laptop – or even on your phone.

More about *equipment, hardware & software* below, but first:

How to communicate with video? Planning Principles:

To start out, consider: **Why video?**

In your case, in this context: What is it that video could be good at?

Clarify what you want to communicate **to whom?** Is it all about promoting yourself? A self-portrait – probably not.

Think impact – and choose an overall form-genre-style of your video (interview, drama, instruction, poetic, story, is there a narrator? actors?)

Consider **avoiding actors** and **avoiding being a star host yourself**. Don't depend on long-spoken dialogue, explanations, or voice-overs. Let the camera and sound **show** what you want to convey. It is the work *behind* the camera and in the editing phase that is important.

Don't plan too much in detail! I know, here I probably differ from most other teachers and experts. But much thinking and writing in advance could be a waste of time and block you from seeing and hearing the actual opportunities. Go prepared, but very openminded into the process – and let the nature of the location, the event, the people you meet, and perhaps the weather, allow for **new ideas**.

Keep it simple – and **explore**, make test shots with your camera/your phone, and check the sound too. Just because the picture is nice, does not mean you have nice sounds too, but you should find them. Just to free your mind: start by looking...sorry, **listen** for good sounds.

Shoot a quick, rough version of your film – edit it quickly, just a rough draft to see what might work – then go back and do the recordings for real.

Recording sound (typically the weakest aspect of amateur films):

Think about and explore for good sounds – sound is not just an appendix to your pictures: To get a nice and clear sound: go **close to the source**, e.g., a person speaking, or a coffee machine snoring.

Avoid locations with much background **noise**. Machines, traffic, and even refrigerators and light fixtures can be too noisy on the recording. You may not notice is at first, but when editing it will be annoying.

Short **technical-acoustic hint**: As we have two ears and sounds from different directions arrive a fraction of a second earlier to one ear than to the other (and the shape of your ear has an influence on determining from up-down, and front-back) we are capable of focusing on sounds from one direction (your brain does it automatically, so to speak). But most sound recordings mix everything together, microphones – even the best - are not very directional, and later in playback, all sounds will come from the same speaker or speakers, usually in flat front of us, or in a headset, again mixed up. Okay, you can work with two or more channels (panning left and right), four speakers or more, but that's not quick and easy. Advice, go for clear sounds and sources when recording.

Clear sound: In editing, you can apply many effects to sound and quite easily make, for example, speech recorded in a broom closet sound like a sermon in a cathedral. The reverse is not the case.

Microphone distance: Different distances to the microphone, for example between the interviewer and the interviewee, give different sound characteristics – and it's not just a matter of volume, and it can be very difficult to correct in editing.

Wind noise in the microphone: Wildly annoying, can't be eliminated in the editing. If covering the microphone with a wool sock or rabbit isn't enough, try keeping it sheltered by your big coat or behind a tree. It might also be a good idea to put the

microphone down into tall grass, for example. then you might even get some interesting sounds of the rushing wind.

Avoid noise from fiddling with the phone, with clothes, and you breathing heavily!

Make sure your actors or interviewees **articulate** well.

Note that different rooms have different **echoes and ambient** sounds.

Note the huge difference between **outdoor and indoor** sound recording.

Voice-over: chose a room with care, and rehearse several times to get the right energy and intonation.

Make **additional long shots** (picture side irrelevant) with **ambient** sound.

Record relevant **additional** illustrative or decorative sounds on location.

Find additional **stock sound effects online** (royalty free, of course)

Music: use only royalty-free music (like online: "Creative Commons").

Note that music is usually highly compressed – **decrease the volume** considerably to make it fit your editing level.

When you record sound (and/or picture or both) make sure to have **some start-up time and close-down time** - often recordings are not quite smooth when you start and when you end – because you are handling the start/stop button etc. Please note that many cameras/phones set the sound level dynamically-automatically and therefore may misjudge the appropriate level, e.g. at the beginning of speech.

Recording video (images)

Of course, we often try to record both good sound and good video at the same time – but occasionally it can be a good procedure to separate the two aspects (media) while recording.

For a good video-idea to be realized you are very **dependent on good camera work** – e.g. where you place and how you handle your phone! It is not just a matter of finding an interesting object, persons to interview, nice actors or a funny cat, or a beautiful landscape – you must **show it** to your audience in a clear and interesting way. And that is not just a matter of what is in front of the camera/phone, but what is **behind the camera**, i.e. what you do with it, where you place it, adjust it, move it...

Placing the camera:

There is no "right", "neutral", or "objective" way to place your camera, but it all has **significance** for how in the end we will see the motif (the scene/thing/person filmed):

from what angle, what height, what slant, what light, what focus, what composition, what zoom-status, with what movement, etc.

Consider: Should the camera (and the audience) **look up or down** on this person/object – or be on the same (eye-)level? Should we see **front, profile**, back?

Alternate between total shots (some distance, e.g., to establish a scene) and closer shots. Also, some very close shots showing details are usually interesting. Use the camera to **make us see more!**

Framing - empty space – **composition of picture** – golden rule of proportions? Not necessarily, long story.... But try yourself and practice, practice, and practice some more – and find your own style... or rather, the style that is apt and suitable for communicating to your audience in this case.

Light: there should be enough, consider also the color/warmth of the light.

Back-light: observe that if you film a person placed up against a bright window or the sun that person will look like a criminal (just a dark silhouette).

Mixing light outdoors/indoors (artificial) light might give strange results.

Light and colors can be **changed in many ways in the editing** – but start out with nice, clean, well-lit shots in natural color when you record. You can make a sharp picture look blurred and foggy in the edition – the reverse is difficult.

Moving the camera:

Moving the camera can tell a lot - but usually, you don't want to tell that you are a happy amateur who walks about in a clumsy way and just found the zoom button.
Don't make me dizzy!

Whenever there is a good reason for it, move the camera well. This should be **motivated**: showing more clearly what is going on, the layout of a location and the position and actions of persons, drawing attention to details or following the main actor – or mimicking the excitement or horror. So, you can pan, tilt, travel, zoom, shift focus, walk along or go by drone.

Zoom-in or travel closer: usually means: look here, this is interesting. Zoom-out, travel back: often means the scene is about to end.

Hand-held or on a tripod, selfie-stick/gimbal: the different forms of camera handling communicate differently, think it through. As a rule, the audience should **not** notice the camera movements nor the placement/adjustments of the camera – they should just be moved or influenced by your great skills in using the camera (and the dynamics of sound, for that matter!).

Nice moving shots without expensive equipment: use a wheelchair or a bicycle (big wheels, wide tires, not too many PSI!) to make smooth traveling shots. If you do it handheld: Try **rehearsing your moves** to pan, zoom, re-focus, or relocate several times before you take the shot.

Editing:

Gather all your nice shots and other files you might want to use (like music, still pictures, graphics, sound effects) **in one main folder** (with subfolders, if it is a bigger production). When you start working on your timeline (in the editing program), don't move any of these files to different places. You may add new material to your main folder – but **don't move** or remove things.

I recommend putting **only your best and most needed elements in the main folder to start with** – to have a better overview. **Make it simple** – and make a quick and **rough first edit version** (here you do not finalize levels, transitions, titles, etc.)

I recommend also working **directly on your timeline** - don't spend a long time on setting in- and out-points in the preview monitor, because things might look differently once you place shots (and sound and music) next to each other on the timeline. Just place your good shots on your timeline with some space between, then shorten them down, and try assembling them together. Leave a little empty space (time) at the beginning of the program – makes it easier to adjust with new beginning/titles etc. later.

Take your best shots, the golden moment in your interview/story/expositions – in short, your **"Darling" – and place that first** – and then work on what leads up to this and what comes after. Don't be a slave of linear thinking and spend a long time doing an introduction before you know where/how your golden moment will be. So, don't "kill your darlings" but "kindle your darlings".

As said: Make a quick and rough **first edit** – and then make **another** where you change e.g. the order of things, the music, just to see. If you work in a group, perhaps you have somewhat different ideas about the best edit: then just try it, place a new version after the first one (it can be quick, because you can probably cut and paste sections of the first version). Don't spend a long time talking and arguing and imagining in advance – just try and see... and hear ... and feel what works the best.

Once you have the **overall content and mood** in place – **then go to refining** sound levels, and cut shots closer (we tend to have too long shots and too many similar

shots when we are happy amateurs). And maybe then use filters for color/brightness etc. to make it smooth.

Transitions/wipes etc.: don't just throw in some random effects here, just because you can. They should be consistent/help the audience to understand your film. Dip-to-black usually means time/place change – scene ends. Wipes: now to something else! Cross-dissolves can cover up (for otherwise abrupt changes) and be nice, but consider having the same length/duration for your dissolves.

If you can make your film using **only hard cuts**, but they are not felt like hard: well, in my book that is a mark of excellency!

You can use "**bridges**" of sound (music too) to make your edited shots more coherent – a nicer flow.

When you add **music** – even low volume and slow rhythm – it usually **speeds up** the experience of a scene, but it also contributes to the mood. Music is (conventionally) nice even if short, in the beginning, at the end – and for longer scenes without dialogue. To **let music guide** the cutting etc. is an exciting playground for the editor.

Once in a while, during editing sessions: lean back, or even stand up, and watch your program as it runs without interruption. **Feel it in your body/test it by moving, dancing**, in order to know if your cuts and the rhythm and tempo of the program are right. This is not about reading or writing: this is about creating a film experience and that is a (physical, corporeal) phenomenon involving our senses, emotions, sense of rhythm etc.

Watching a film is not like reading a text from left to right and then try to understand or translate what it is about and perhaps imagine the described scenery. **The phenomenology is different!** With video you should be directly immersed (feel present) in a scenery immediately tuning you into various moods. Personally, I find video editing to be a very **satisfying creative** process...and to take the **meta-theory** of video up one more notch: editing video and film is a bit like playing a video game: to a wide extent you can explore and create the action yourself. Indeed, video editing should not be theorized as a form of writing, but as a **forerunner of interactive media**.

For finer editing it might be an advantage to see things in the editing on screens bigger than a smartphone – even when the product is designed for viewing on a smartphone later (consider, by the way, what format you should choose). Watching your video on a really big (cinema-like) screen might change the colors and the whole experience quite a bit. So, try it out before the premiere (Showtime!). Also, consider testing the sound both on small devices, big speakers, and with a headset.

And not least, **user-test** early versions of your video on (representatives) of your target group (or at least on someone who will tell you the truth), go for a realistic viewing situation, and do it **before it is too late to change things** –before you are getting too tired or stubborn.

Equipment, hardware & software

Equipment for recording.

Of course, it would be nice to have access to a dedicated, professional, or semi-professional video camera with a tripod, microphones, light, and whatnot. But it takes some time to get to know all the features and to handle such equipment well. And advanced equipment might also take the focus away from learning the basic principles of how to communicate with video. An easier start would be to use your own regular smartphone for recording – nowadays smartphones usually have fairly/surprisingly good cameras and reasonable microphones – and though there are some limitations, you can usually work around that, if you are creative. And you can improve your smartphone with some low-budget features:

To have a **better grip** on your smartphone while recording you can (besides practicing not to fumble too much) use a handle of some sort or a simple selfie stick (starting from less than 100 kr., I believe, even with Bluetooth start-stop).

To obtain a better, more **directional sound**, you can add a directional microphone to your phone (check that the connection matches). Or you can have a better sound of your own voice or that of the interviewee with a **clip-on** (wireless) microphone. Prices begin, last I checked, below 200 kr.

For an even smoother, more balanced grip, you can invest in a “**gimbal**” - this allows for smooth (“stirred, but not shaken” – like James Bond) recording while walking, etc. I found a simple one costing only about 400 kr., but then I had to find a charger for it myself, as that was not included in this cheap package. These gimbal devices can have many advanced features – and advanced prices. But note, today most smartphones have digital picture stabilization built in – and things get easier.

You can also invest in a “vlogging kit” which has perhaps extra light, an external microphone, etc. Some sets can be quite advanced connecting more recording phones (different shots simultaneously of the same scene), clip-on microphones (lavalier), a headset for monitoring the sound (great, if you want

to go pro), etc. And you can go on investing as a nerd who has everything for going in the air (a drone) or under water (a submarine).

Editing equipment:

As for editing your video material: Again, of course, it might be nice to have access to a professional or semi-professional studio set-up with large monitors and comfortable chairs. But in terms of both hardware and software, this is quite an investment, licenses for an updated advanced editing program like Premiere Pro or Final Cut can be rather expensive. However, quite a few editing programs free to download and use are now available, and they have a lot of features, they are relatively easy to use, and for most purposes, they are quite sufficient - they look and feel much like the expensive applications, and it is no problem to start here and then move on later if you find a good sponsor. Some of the better free video-editing programs like DaVinci Resolve or Shotcut can be easily downloaded to both Mac and PC, so you can use your ordinary stationary computer or laptop.

You can now also do some (basic) editing using apps already on your smartphone, things are quickly developing in this field. Probably some sort of AI-supported video editing is arriving too...

Free editing software

Lots of instructive tutorials are available, both for beginners and for the more advanced filmmaker. Often it is a good idea to look quickly through a couple of different tutorials on YouTube if you are interested in how to do some special thing – like changing the speed of a clip or applying some other special video or audio effect. There are different ways of explaining things, and usually also different ways of arriving at the same effect, and some might personally suit you better than others. Go with what you like.

For MAC and PC and Linux:

Shotcut – free download page:

<https://shotcut.org/download/>

Perhaps the best choice right now:

DaVinci Resolve 19 – (obs: the "Studio" version is not free, chose the standard, unless you need and want to pay for extremely high resolution)

<https://www.blackmagicdesign.com/products/davinciresolve>

Link to DaVinci tutorial:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AcNOi-PUTL4>

Good luck.

And remember, it should be fun to make video – that way we learn the most 😊

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