

Foreword by
Esther Wojcicki

MY HERO

MY HERO Youth Reporter

journalism & filmmaking Workbook

By Jonah Steinhart

This journey isn't just about technical magic.

It's about the human connection, the spark that ignites when you listen to someone's story and understand their struggles and triumphs. You'll learn how to ask the right questions, the ones that peel back the layers and reveal the heart of a hero. You'll discover the power of empathy, the way listening becomes a form of storytelling in itself.



You won't just create a video.

You'll create a window into the world of someone who inspires you. You'll share their story not just with your classmates or social media followers but with anyone who needs a dose of courage, a glimmer of hope.

You'll be a storyteller...

...a documentarian of everyday heroes, reminding everyone that heroism isn't reserved for capes and superpowers. It's in the quiet bravery of the ordinary, the resilience of the human spirit.

Esther Wojcicki

PREFACE

Esther Wojcicki is a journalist, educator, and vice chair of Creative Commons. She is the founder and was the director of the Palo Alto High School Media Arts Program in Palo Alto, CA for over 30 years. Every three weeks her students, who affectionately called her “Woj,” produced an award-winning newspaper, The Campanile, covering news for the Palo Alto Unified School District.

Wojcicki founded the Journalistic Learning Initiative at the University of Oregon School of Communications and School of Education (2016). She is also the founder and co-author of the Moonshots in Education. In 2019 she authored a book titled *How to Raise Successful People*, a parenting book on the philosophy she used in raising her three illustrious daughters.

Woj annually supports young filmmakers with the Woj Youth Reporter Award at The MY HERO International Film Festival. This workbook has been designed for those who want to create a short film for The MY HERO International Film Festival.

Lights, Camera, Heroes!

By Esther Wojcicki



Hey there, future filmmakers!

Crack open this book and hold onto your editing hats because you're about to embark on a journey unlike any other. Not to a galaxy far, far away, or a fantastical land ruled by dragons. No, this adventure is happening right here, right now, in the extraordinary world around you.

You see, everyone has heroes. That person who inspires you to pick up a paintbrush, the one who makes you dream of coding the next groundbreaking app, the one whose courage sparks a fire in your belly. This book is about uncovering those heroes, not just celebrating them in your mind, but bringing their stories to life through the magic of video.

Now, hold up. You might be thinking, "Me? Make a video? I can barely film a decent Tik Tok!" But trust me, everyone has a story to tell, and everyone can learn to tell it through moving images and captivating sounds. This book is your guide, your secret weapon in the hero-hailing universe.

We'll dive into the heart of hero hunting, helping you discover the everyday legends

living amongst you. Is it your grandma who survived a hurricane and still bakes the best apple pie? Or your neighbor, a former marine biologist who volunteers at the animal shelter? Maybe it's your classmate who overcame a disability and now champions accessibility across the school. See, heroes come in all shapes and sizes, ages and backgrounds. Their stories are waiting to be discovered, waiting to be shared.

Or if you prefer, you can pick a hero from history or someone who did something really exciting years ago. It can be a historical figure, it could be somebody in the entertainment industry, it could be a favorite movie star, it could be a scientist. You decide.

Then, we'll equip you with the tools to become a digital alchemist, transforming your raw footage into cinematic gold. We'll talk about planning your interviews, crafting compelling narratives, and capturing the essence of your hero's spirit through the lens. You'll learn about lighting, sound, and editing tricks that will make your video sing, even if your phone is your only camera.

But this journey isn't just about technical magic. It's about the human connection, the spark that ignites when you listen to someone's story and understand their struggles and triumphs. You'll learn how to ask the right questions, the ones that peel back the layers and reveal the heart of a hero. You'll discover the power of empathy, the way listening becomes a form of storytelling in itself.

In the end, you won't just create a video. You'll create a window into the world of someone who inspires you. You'll share their story not just with your classmates or social media followers but with anyone who needs a dose of courage, a glimmer of hope. You'll be a storyteller, a documentarian of everyday heroes, reminding everyone that heroism isn't reserved for capes and superpowers. It's in the quiet bravery of the ordinary, the resilience of the human spirit.

So, are you ready? Grab your phone, your camera, your notebook, and most importantly, your open heart. The spotlight is waiting, and the world needs your heroes' stories. Get ready to capture them, one frame at a time.

Lights, camera, heroes! The show starts now.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEWS

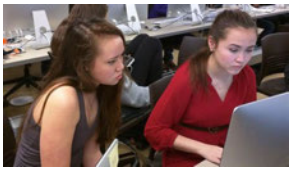
For a brief summary of each of the steps needed to complete your film and links to more detailed instruction and activities, click here. To head straight to each chapter, click the images below.



Chapter 1
Introduction



Chapter 2
Choosing an Issue and a Hero



Chapter 3
Conducting Research



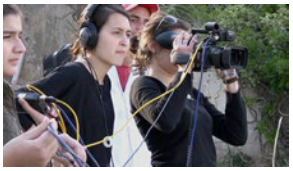
Chapter 4
Making Big Choices



Chapter 5
Prepping for Interviews



Chapter 6
Shooting Interviews



Chapter 7
B-Roll



Chapter 8
B-Roll Sound



Chapter 9
Organizing Footage



Chapter 10
Starting Post-Production



Chapter 11
Sound Design



Chapter 12
Don't Forget This Good Stuff!



Chapter 13
Putting It All Together



Chapter 14
Getting Feedback and Revising



Chapter 15
Publishing

INTRODUCTION



Edward R. Murrow said, “There is a great and decisive battle to be fought against ignorance, intolerance and indifference in the world.”

MY HERO invites you to join that battle using video.

The goal of this workbook is to empower you, step by step, with the skills to make a film about YOUR hero. The story you choose to share is a reflection of you — who you admire, your values, your passion, and the changes you hope to see in the world around you.The person you pick for your hero shows us the way forward. Hopefully, others will learn from them and their story.

Previous MY HERO films have featured the heroic journeys of well-known leaders like Nelson Mandela, John Lewis, Ruth Bader Ginsberg, Wangari Maathai, and others. Other films have focussed on lesser known heroes in local communities. Your hero does not have to be someone famous. But all of these films have one thing in common: they celebrate the best of humanity and show that positive change is truly possible in this complex and challenging time.

By the time you complete this project, you will have developed valuable skills in videography, research, writing, technology, and media literacy. It's a fun project where you learn while doing something you care about. You can do the project alone or with friends. You decide. You will gain a deeper understanding of yourself and just how much influence you have when you use videography to impact people's thinking.

Ready to start? Okay, let's go!



CHAPTER ONE: YOUR MISSION

[1]

Like any project, this one starts with a prompt:

Tell the story of a hero through a film that entertains, informs, and inspires positive change in the world.

This prompt gives you a ton of freedom. You can make your film about anyone you consider to be an inspiration for positive change. It can be someone alive or dead, famous or not, international or local. And you can focus on whichever of their ideas and experiences you find most engaging and important.

Your film should:

- Show your passion for the topic by highlighting a hero or heroic organization who illustrates that passion.
- Show evidence of thorough research of the topic and the hero.
- Tell a real life story. Most important is what the person did or what their actions illustrate.

[1] AiClassEland at English Wikibooks, CC BY-SA 2.5 https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.5, via Wikimedia Commons

- Feature original and/or archival footage and interviews, if possible.
- Short films made for this project can be a minute to ten minutes long.
- Achieve your ultimate goal: to recognize and celebrate the best of humanity.

Notice the first guideline for your film is that it should show your “passion for the topic and the hero.” This guideline is important for two reasons. First, you don’t want to put your valuable time and energy into a project you aren’t excited about. And second, your passion is crucial to your audience - if they can’t tell how much you care, why should they?

You also should spend some time watching and reflecting on some award-winning films. See the activity below.

ACTIVITY: WHAT DO THESE FILMS DO WELL?

Watch some award-winning films from the MY HERO International Film Festival. Notice the different kinds of heroes chosen, from historical figures to local, everyday people.

Click the link to view a selection of some award-winning MY HERO films.

Now choose one of the films you watched and complete the following notes here or on a separate sheet of paper. (Additional options: a) complete your notes with a partner or small group and discuss; b) repeat this exercise for multiple films.)

1. Title of film, name of director:

2. How does this film relate to heroism? Who is the hero or heroic organization?

3. What is the issue raised in the film? Does this film motivate you to take action about an issue? Why/why not?

4. Does the film elicit an emotional response? Why/why not?

Consider the following criteria for judging each film (you are encouraged to watch the film a second time with these criteria in mind before answering):

5. Originality — Is this film an original idea or concept? Is the theme or point of view unique compared to other films? Why/why not?

6. Creativity — Did the filmmaker use creative approaches to storytelling? How creative is the camerawork, sound & editing? Why/why not?

7. Emotional Effectiveness — Were you deeply moved emotionally? Did you feel connected to the story? Are you motivated to take action? Why/why not?

8. Directing — How well is the overall film put together? Is the story cohesive? Is there a clear beginning, middle and end? Do you sense a unique voice in the director's style?

AN IMPORTANT NOTE ON THE FILMS YOU JUST WATCHED:

These are award-winning projects made by filmmakers at the professional, college, high school, and middle school levels. They are some good models for you to examine as you are getting started.

It would be good if you can watch the films with friends or classmates so you can talk about the films with them. What did they like or dislike about the film? What ideas did you get from watching the films?

You may not have the experience or the equipment those other filmmakers have, but here's what you do have: an original perspective on the world. You've lived a unique life, shaped by a distinct combination of experiences. Your memories, thoughts, and feelings accumulate to forge the lens through which you see the world.

Who and what you pay attention to are distinct to you and your one-of-a-kind mind. Choosing your hero is your first step to making a creative, impactful, and original film. So before you commit to choosing a hero, talk it over with some friends and perhaps your teacher or parents. It's important to do some introspective thinking. The search can easily take a week or more.

SOME ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES AND ADVICE

Before you set out to make your film, click here for some film examples and accompanying advice from award-winning filmmakers Tiffany Shlain, Gabriel Diamond, Skip Blumberg, and Clarissa Ngo and her students.

CHAPTER TWO: CHOOSING AN ISSUE AND A HERO

[2]

There are many paths to identifying your hero and the story you wish to tell. This chapter offers three possible avenues to getting started:

a) What do you care about? Identify an issue that interests you, then research possible heroes who are working to fix problems related to that issue.

b) Identify someone you consider a hero, then research the issue they are working to fix.

c) Look around you. Who do you have access to? Consider people in your community who have overcome obstacles; these people can be heroic in the inspiration they give us. Have a conversation with someone you love or admire. Explore the stories all these people have to share — you may discover something heroic about them.

Notice that both of the above paths involve RESEARCH, which can be done on the internet, through informal conversation, and/or with more formal interviews. When you select a hero for your film, you're also selecting a topic about which you will

[2] Southbank Centre, CC BY 2.0 https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0, via Wikimedia Commons

need to know as much as possible. This is one of the most exciting and rewarding aspects of this project, but it also requires drive and persistence on your part.

So if you choose a national hero who is fighting for farmworker rights, you are going to do research on labor, immigration, and agriculture. If you choose a local hero who is helping special needs students process the world through artwork, you'll need to research people with disabilities and the social-emotional benefits of art.

The key point here is you are going to spend time thinking about your hero and your issue. So choose wisely!

The next two activities will help you generate some ideas.

ACTIVITY: WHAT DO YOU CARE ABOUT AND WHY?

Your interests and passions evolve over time. This worksheet will help you identify current areas of interest that you can use as an entry point into issues and people you want to better understand and, perhaps, spotlight. Complete the worksheet to explore ideas for film topics.

1. What's important to you? Reflect on what you like to do and what you are curious about. Consider any of the following: past or current hobbies/activities/jobs; stuff you're good at/have been praised for; things you lose track of time while doing; classes/subjects you have enjoyed.

2. When have you experienced strong emotions? Think about the last time you laughed so hard your belly hurt. Or you cried tears of sadness or joy. Or you were really mad or really scared. What happened? Why did this experience have such a strong impact on you? What are some topics and issues that might relate to your personal experience?

3. Have you volunteered lately? If you haven't ever volunteered, where might you like to volunteer?

4. Have you ever joined any clubs? Which ones and why? If you've never joined a club, what is a club you might start?

5. Consider your values. What is important to you? What kind of impact do you want to have on the world?

6. Below is a list of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which the United Nations hopes to achieve by 2030. Circle 3-5 goals that you care most about.

Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere. This means making sure everyone in the world has the basic necessities to support themselves and their families.

Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.

Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. Everyone should have the right to clean water.

Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.

Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. When businesses expand into developing countries and neighborhoods, make sure they do so in a way that benefits everyone.

Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.

Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries. Make sure everyone starts life with fair access to education, healthcare, and other basic rights.

Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.

Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns. As we harvest resources from the earth, we want to make sure to preserve and replenish them for future generations.

Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.

Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.

Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. Make sure governments and private industry respect the rights of everyone.

Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

Do you have ideas for additional goals? If so, write them here:

7. Look at the 3-5 goals that you circled. In the space below, list the goals you chose and briefly describe why each one is important to you. Consider any of the following factors:
    a. How the goal impacts you and those around you.
    b. How many people total in the world the goal impacts.
    c. What thoughts and feelings this goal brings up for you.
    d. Who in your community is working to achieve one or more of the goals.

ACTIVITY: WHO ARE YOUR HEROES AND WHY?

Complete the steps below to identify the names of people you might want to make your film about. Keep in mind the list of topics and issues you compiled in the previous activity and consider people who might be making a difference in those areas.

1. Re-read what you wrote above in the "What Do You Care About and Why" worksheet. Who are some people you admire who are involved, directly or indirectly, in any of the topics/issues/ideas/beliefs you identified? They can be people you know — from your family or local community. Or they can be people doing something admirable at the state, national, or international level. Or they can be a well or lesser known person from history. List five people:

    a)

    b)

    c)

    d)

    e)

2. Now look at the five people you listed. What do you admire about their character and their actions? Next to their names above, jot down some notes.

3. Just because someone has a quality you admire doesn't necessarily make them a hero to you or your audience. Consider a dictionary definition of a hero:

    "a person who is admired or idealized for courage, outstanding achievements, or noble qualities"

We sometimes fall into the trap of fixating on the “outstanding achievement” part of the definition. Someone who is great at a sport or getting millions of followers on social media may not necessarily be someone your audience cares to “admire or idealize.” A good way to avoid that trap is to focus more on the “noble qualities” of your prospective hero.

Look at the names on your list. For each person, how many heroic traits do they have? Give them one point for each trait below and write the total number of points next to their name.

- ☐ **Courage:** Is brave and willing to face emotional or physical danger to help others and fight for what is right.
- ☐ **Integrity:** Has a strong sense of morality and ethical principles. They do what is right, even when it's difficult or unpopular.
- ☐ **Selflessness:** Puts the needs of others before their own and are willing to make sacrifices for the greater good.
- ☐ **Determination:** Has a strong will and is unwavering in their pursuit of their goals. They don't give up easily and are always pushing forward.
- ☐ **Intelligence:** Heroes are often clever and resourceful, able to solve problems and think on their feet.
- ☐ **Empathy:** Has a deep understanding of others and is able to connect with people on an emotional level. They are able to inspire others and bring out the best in those around them.
- ☐ **Humility:** Despite their many positive attributes, they are humble and don't let their accomplishments go to their heads. They are able to maintain a sense of perspective and stay grounded.

4. Go back and look at the names on your list. Which ones do you think best qualify as a hero, based on the notes and points you compiled?

5. Now review your notes on topics, issues, and heroes. Dig a bit deeper. List at least three new people who could be the hero in your film:

TIME TO CHOOSE!

Now that you have completed your notes, it's time to choose your hero. Still not sure who to pick? Try using some of the additional resources below.

How to Choose Your Hero (guidelines from MY HERO)

Explore (a digital library of MY HERO content, with many different examples of heroes)

Want to find a local hero? Here are some tips:

- Look for people who are making a difference in your community through **local online groups** or the **local newspaper**. This could be anyone from a volunteer firefighter to a teacher who is going above and beyond for their students. Is there a classmate doing community service work that could be recognized, or a student overcoming challenges that you admire?
- Pay attention to the news. Local news outlets often feature stories about people who are doing good things in their communities.
- Search **online** for people who are making a difference and see if you can interview them.
- Find out who are your local **city council members** and see if they are addressing issues of importance to you and your peers.
- Ask around. Talk to your **friends, family, and neighbors** about people they admire. They may know someone who is doing great work in the community but who doesn't get a lot of recognition.
- Attend **community events**. This is a great way to meet people who are involved in making your community a better place.



Educator and Poet Paul Cummins

CHAPTER THREE: CONDUCTING RESEARCH



Got your hero? Great! Now it's time to do some research.

If your hero is someone alive and accessible for you to interview, you need to prepare for that interview. But whether or not you're able to interview your hero, to make a good film you'll need to understand the hero's background and the problem they have worked to address. In other words, you need to research your topic.

The first place most of us go when it's time to research is the internet. But it can be a wild, confusing place. There are sites that will misinform you, because the writers of those sites are lazy or incompetent. There are sites that will manipulate you, because the writers want to control what you think, so they can gain money and power from you. Sometimes the "writers" actually are computer programmers using AI to disorient you, control you, and, again, gain money and power.

These are not sites you want to go for facts. You also need to be careful if you want to use AI for your research. Depending on the quality of the AI, it may not provide you with the best sources and information. In fact, it may even give you false information! See APPENDIX I: SHOULD I USE AI? for more guidelines.

Before you embark on your research adventure, you will want to arm yourself with the tools to make it through a jungle of misinformation en route to your destination: the truth about your hero and topic.

This chapter will give you some of those tools and also get you started with your research.



Author and peace activist Ron Kovic is interviewed by Teen Press.

RESEARCH TOOL #1: START ON THE RIGHT PATH

One strategy that will save you a lot of time and energy is to begin your research from a reliable starting point. Using a search engine like Google can be useful, but it's not necessarily where you should start. Here are some places to begin:

Your Public and School Libraries

Public libraries aren't just places where old people sit and read newspapers. They are an excellent place to conduct research. Going to a physical library and asking a librarian for help is like getting a free, experienced research partner to assist you. You also likely have access to an online library, with many databases paid for by the library so that you can access reliable sources. Most libraries allow you to get a library card online or very easily in-person at your local branch. Your school library likely provides similar resources. Use the library — you won't regret it!

Free databases

Schools and local libraries often provide some of the best research databases around, with free access to academic studies and news and magazine articles. In addition to library databases, you also might consider these free research tools.

Free student subscriptions

If you hit a paywall when trying to read a newspaper or magazine article, do a search for "[publication name]" and "student subscription." Very often, these publications offer free subscriptions to students if you use your school email address.

RESEARCH TOOL #2: QUESTION EVERYTHING!

You should approach all sources you find on the Internet with a healthy dose of skepticism.

When you first encounter a source of information, ask yourself, "How do I know this is reliable?" Here is a checklist to use:

- ☐ Sources of information are cited.
- ☐ The website is created by a well-known organization, such as a respected news media entity, an established college/university, or a large organization devoted to your topic, such as the American Cancer Society or WebMD.
- ☐ Articles include dates when the information was posted.
- ☐ The author is identified and credentials are cited.
- ☐ The site provides a way for you to contact the author.
- ☐ You can verify the information elsewhere.
- ☐ The site has no errors in spelling, grammar, or facts.
- ☐ The site is updated regularly.
- ☐ The information is presented in a fair and balanced way:
    - ☐ If the site and its sponsor have a specific point of view and agenda, can you trust it to be fair?
    - ☐ Facts are presented as facts and opinions are clearly labeled.
- ☐ Feedback from readers is encouraged or at least allowed.

Sometimes the information you come across is just plain incredible or bizarre. If it's too good or too weird to be true, it probably is. Even if you'd love it to be true, check it out. Sites such as The Onion, The Daily Current, and the National Report present fake news as satire. If you are unsure whether something is satire or a flat out hoax,

consider using one of these sites to find out:

Politifact

Snopes

RESEARCH TOOL #3: USE THE SIFT METHOD

The SIFT method, designed by Mike Caulfield, is similar to the checklist provided above. It is a four-step process to evaluate the reliability of a source.



To see and use the entire SIFT method, click here.

RESEARCH TOOL #4: MAKE A PLAN

In addition to using reliable databases, questioning your sources, and using SIFT, entering your research process with a plan will help you find the information you need in the most reliable, efficient manner.

Focus your approach to the topic before you start detailed research. Then you will read with a purpose in mind, and you will be able to sort out relevant ideas. Consider taking the following steps:

1. First, review the commonly known facts about your topic. Think about what you already know. Read an online encyclopedia or wikipedia or basic article about the topic, and also become aware of the range of thinking and opinions on it.

2. Try making a preliminary list of the subtopics you would expect to find in your reading. These will guide your attention and may come in handy as labels for notes.

3. Choose a component or angle that interests you within the topic, perhaps one on which there is some sort of conflict or problem. **Remember our definition of a hero: *"a person who is admired or idealized for courage, outstanding achievements, or noble qualities."*** Someone shows courage when they face a problem. An outstanding achievement involves solving a problem or overcoming a challenge. Noble qualities are not easily developed or displayed — they often emerge in a time of need. What is your hero up against? And what do you need to know about that topic?

4. Formulate your research question(s) that would provide the information needed to explore not just the topic but the problem within the topic that your hero has encountered.

Now you will know what to look for in your research reading: facts and theories that help answer your questions, and other people's opinions about whether specific answers are good ones.

ACTIVITY: USE KWL TO PLAN YOUR RESEARCH

One way to build a plan for your research is to use KWL, which stands for “Know, Wonder, Learn.” In this case, just using KW will help you formulate some key research questions to pursue. Complete this worksheet to build a research plan.

1. What do you **KNOW** so far about your hero and your topic? Jot down notes on the key information you already have.

   Facts about my hero:

   Facts about my topic:

   Possible issues/problems/conflict within the topic (usually this is something faced by your hero as they do what heroes do):

2. What do you **WONDER** about your hero and topic? What else might you want to learn? Write down as many questions as you can in the space below:

3. Now it’s time to answer the questions you just wrote down, in order to **LEARN** about your hero and topic. Use the template on the next page (or any other note taking method that works for you).

RESEARCH NOTES

Complete the charts below to conduct your research and compile notes.

If you would like to make your own digital version of this document use this link.

Your topic:

Your hero:

Research Question #1_____

Title and Author of Source (paste link to source, if possible):	**Notes from Source (information, quotes, data, etc. that help answer the research question above):**

Research Question #2_____

Title and Author of Source (paste link to source, if possible):	Notes from Source (information, quotes, data, etc. that help answer the research question above):

Research Question #3_____

Title and Author of Source (paste link to source, if possible):	**Notes from Source (information, quotes, data, etc. that help answer the research question above):**

CHAPTER FOUR: MAKING BIG CHOICES (STYLE, CREW, AND EQUIPMENT)

[3]

It's time to think about how you will bring this film to life. You might want help!

Keep in mind your hero and the research you have done as you consider some big questions about the film you want to make and how you want to make it.

Question One: What type of documentary will you make?

All films have a distinct style, based on how they are shot and edited. For the sake of discussion and planning, these documentary styles can be sorted into categories, including the following:

Expository – You probably are most familiar with this type of documentary. Expository films establish a certain point of view or argument. They typically contain a mixture of interviews, stock footage, archival footage, and b-roll (you will learn more about these terms later). They also frequently use a "voice of god" narrator in

[3] Robin Férand, CC BY 3.0 https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0, via Wikimedia Commons

the form of spoken narration or text. Expository documentaries aim to inform and persuade.

Participatory – With a participatory documentary, you, the filmmaker, are a character within the narrative. Your interactions with your subjects become a part of the film. A participatory documentary has most of the same elements of an expository documentary. But the film is focused on your truth, as experienced in the telling of your hero's story.

Reflexive – A reflexive documentary focuses on the filmmaker's process of making the film. So in addition to sharing your hero's story through all of the various elements in expository and participatory, you're filming "behind the scenes" footage and sharing not just your experience of telling your hero's story, but how you managed to put this all together.

Observational – Observational documentaries often are described as "fly on the wall" films. You are there with the camera, but you try to act like you're not there, and just film your subject(s). To make an observational documentary about your hero, you will need extensive access to them, including the ability to follow them around and film them in their everyday lives.

Performative – A performative documentary puts the filmmaker's experience at the center of the film. Unlike the participatory mode, in which you might "share the stage" a bit with your hero, your filmmaking process and your interactions with the hero and other characters exist to share your own personal belief or idea. Performative documentaries can be described as the opposite of the observational documentary.

Poetic – A poetic documentary focuses on mood, tone, and creative sound and imagery. The goal is more about getting the viewer to feel something, as a way of revealing an inner truth. Poetic documentaries do not focus on structure and tend to have little or no narration or linear story.

For a deeper explanation and some examples of the different documentary types, click here.

You do not need to fully commit to one of these documentary types (or even understand them all). And your film, like all art, can blur boundaries and fit into more than just one of the above categories.

Question Two: Who is your film crew?

A crew is the group of people who make the film. Although all the crew roles can be completed by an individual, film is a highly collaborative medium. It's nice to have someone dedicated to making sure the camera is properly set up, with quality exposure and focus, as well as to have someone in charge of setting up a lavalier or boom microphone and monitoring the sound quality and levels. You should select your film crew based on your needs for the type of film you're trying to make (see above) and the availability of people who are skilled, reliable, and passionate about your project.

Start thinking and asking around about possible crew members and equipment. Imagine you're with an interviewee and are about to start filming your conversation with them. But if it's just you, work with what you've got. You can fulfill all the roles below with the proper amount of practice, planning, and effort.

Director - The person with the creative vision, who supervises the planning, filming, and editing of the film. This person is...YOU!

Producer - The person responsible for the financial and managerial aspects of making the film.This person also might be...YOU!

Camera operator(s) - The person(s) responsible for the lighting, camera, and filming of the interviews and b-roll, following the advice of the director.

Sound recordist - The person who makes sure the sound and voices are clear and there are no external noises distorting the recording. They're in charge of whatever microphones you use and ensuring proper setup and recording during interviews and all other shoots. The sound recordist also can be responsible for capturing room tone and recording natural sound.

Editor - The editor takes all the raw footage (interviews, b-roll, archival, stock, music, graphics, sound) and assembles it into the final version of the film. For your film, you will want an editor who has access to a computer and is familiar with (or willing to learn) editing software, such as iMovie, Microsoft Clipchamp, Adobe Premiere, Final Cut, Avid, or one of the many other programs out there.

Question Three: What equipment will you use?

As mentioned earlier, you can make an outstanding film regardless of how expensive or complex your equipment is. This section of the workbook will walk you through your various options for capturing the sights and sounds of your film.

Option A: Your Phone or Tablet[4]



Almost any phone nowadays has a camera and a microphone. Which means if you have a phone, you probably have the ability to record video and audio, which really is all you need to get the footage you need to make a film. Some phones even have editing software built in, which means you potentially hold in your hand a tool with which you can fulfill all the film crew roles!

The convenience and ease of use when filming on a phone is unparalleled. But phones definitely present challenges. If you are thinking about using a phone to make your film, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Will you have enough empty storage on your phone to record up to two hours of footage at a time? Go into your phone Settings-> Storage and see how much space you have available (measured in GB). If your phone is capable of shooting in high definition such as 4k, you ideally will want at least 100GB of storage free on your phone. If your phone does not have that amount of storage available, do you have a laptop or external hard drive to which you can directly connect the phone and save your footage if, say, you run out of

[4] Image by Jacek Halicki, CC BY-SA 4.0 https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0, via Wikimedia Commons

storage an hour into an interview? Or can you borrow someone else's phone (or recruit them as your camera operator)?

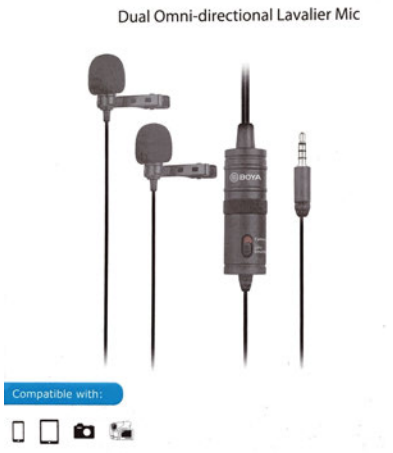
2. Have you practiced conducting interviews and shooting audio and video on the phone? Is the picture and sound quality sufficient for the kind of film you want to make?

3. Have you considered purchasing or borrowing helpful phone accessories? These may include:

    a. a small, three-legged tripod that clamps the phone in horizontally **(always film with the phone on its side!)** so that you can stand it on a table for interviews and use the legs as a handle for more stable handheld shots? (see the picture above)

    b. a supplemental microphone or lavalier mic that improves the sound.

    Examples:

Wired lavalier mic for phones:	**Wireless lavalier mic for phones:**
	

External general mic for phones:



If you answered yes to most or all of the above questions, you're likely going to be shooting on your phone. You will be able to use a lot of the strategies discussed in the following chapters. Here is a quick primer on how to shoot on a phone. Don't worry if any of the terms are unfamiliar. You'll be learning them later.

Smartphone Filmmaking: Documentary Filming With Your Smartphone

For some tips on settings and optional equipment to use when shooting with your phone, check out this video:

How To Shoot Better Video With Your Phone

Option B: Advanced or Professional Grade Camcorder or DSLR

You may be fortunate enough to have access to a more advanced or even professional grade camera setup. These types of kits are ideal, as they often allow for high quality images plus the inputs and controls to capture high quality audio as well. A fully outfitted kit can have any of the following components:

High Resolution Camcorder[5] with Microphone Inputs[6]





[5] By Xkennyhanx at English Wikipedia - Transferred from en.wikipedia to Commons by Sfan00_IMG using CommonsHelper., Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=5178019
[6] By Theonlysilentbob at en.wikipedia, CC BY-SA 3.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=5221975

DSLR (Digital single-lens reflex camera)[7]

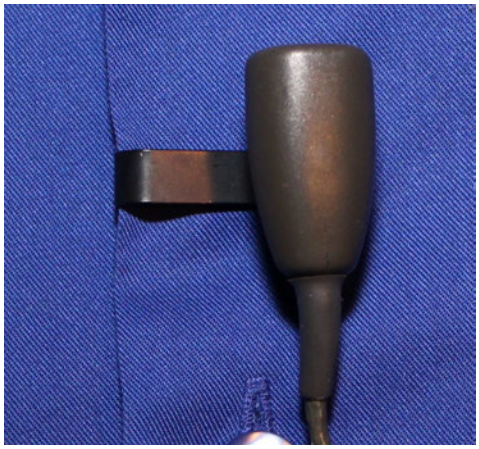




SD Memory Card[8]

NOTE: If you are shooting in a high definition format such as 4k, try to use a memory card size of at least 128GB. If you don't have access to a card that size, make sure you have a backup card and/or a laptop with you when filming, so if you run out of storage you may transfer footage to the laptop to clear up space on the card.

Wired or Wireless Lavalier Mics (clips to the interviewee's shirt)





[7] By Dave Dugdale from Superior, USA, CC BY-SA 2.0 https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0, via Wikimedia Commons
[8] By fdecomite - 128 Mo SD Card, CC BY 2.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=147468675

Shotgun Mic (attaches on top of camera)



Boom Mic[9] (sound operator holds just out of frame)[10]





[9] By Lionel Allorge - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=21125027
[10] By PRA - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=3029749

Tripod (holds camera)[11]



A kit with these components will enable interview setups that look something like these:[12] [13]



[11] By Ashley Pomeroy - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=94745089
[12] By Macchrissli - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=38347125
[13] By PRA - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=3029749



A note on getting “clean” sound:

Each type of microphone has its strengths and weaknesses. Choosing a good recording location will be the biggest factor in your sound clarity. But here are some tips for getting the clearest sound recording possible, regardless of which mic you choose:

- Use microphone windscreens. Lav mics often have small foam windscreens, whereas boom and shotgun mics can have larger foam or furry covers.
- Use the right mic for the job. Boom and lav mics are ideal for close up interviews in a quiet location. Shotgun mics are great for capturing b-roll and other footage from distance.

Ask around!

Part of being a filmmaker is being persistent and asking a lot of people a lot of questions. This includes asking people if they will help you make your film, whether by loaning you equipment or joining your crew. Don’t be afraid to ask. The worst thing that will happen is they will tell you no. But persistence can get you a lot of things, from a camera kit upgrade to someone willing to hold a boom mic (not an easy job!). Invest some time and energy in gathering your crew and equipment — it will pay off.

CHAPTER FIVE: PREPPING FOR INTERVIEWS

[14]

Alright. It's time to get ready to do some interviews! But where to start?

You've done some research and assembled your team (even if you are a team of one). Follow the steps below to make sure you get access to the most interesting interviewees and conduct the most successful interviews possible.

Step One: Identify possible interview subjects.

Who will you interview?

One obvious answer may be your hero. But perhaps that person is deceased or too famous or busy for an interview. Whether your hero is available for an interview or not, you will want to try to film people talking about how they have been affected by your hero's actions, as a way of adding characters and perspectives to your film and showing why someone is a hero.

[14] Mosborne01, CC BY-SA 3.0 https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0, via Wikimedia Commons

Some examples:

- If your hero is a teacher, you will want to interview that person. But you also might want to interview their students, fellow teachers, friends, or family members.

- If your hero is a historical figure like Frederick Douglass, who passed away in 1895, you will want to use quotes from him in articles and books, but you also will want to talk to people in the present-day, such as college professors and social justice leaders, who still find his words and actions heroic and inspiring.

- If your hero is a lesser-known person from history, you may have a harder time finding people in the present-day who know that person. But you have the option of interviewing experts who might be familiar with the person. You also might interview people who didn't know about your hero but might be inspired or impacted by them in some way when you present them with the story and information about your hero.

- If you want to focus on a heroic organization or group of people instead of an individual, you will want to interview the founder, current leader, other people working for the organization, and/or some of the people the organization helps or inspires.

ACTIVITY: WHO WILL YOU INTERVIEW AND HOW?

List some people you might want to interview. It's okay if you don't know their names yet — you can just list a type of person, then follow up to find someone who fits that type.

Here is a sample planning chart for a film about Greta Thunberg

Name of person:	**Reasons to interview them:**	**How will you contact them?**
Greta Thunberg, environmental activist.	*She is my hero because she has inspired so many people to join her fight against global warming.*	*Use contact info (https://thegretathunbergfoundation.org/contact/) to request interview.*
John Doe, president of my school's environmental club	*John is someone who is inspired by Greta and can talk about how she has influenced him and the members of his club.*	*I talked to John D at school and got his contact info. (email: —-----, phone —-------)*
Another local student activist	*Another perspective of a student inspired by Greta*	*I will ask John D if he can put me in touch.*
Jennifer Morris, CEO of The Nature Conservancy (or another leader of another nonprofit like Sierra Club, Greenpeace, etc.)	*Gives the perspective of a fellow leader in the environmental movement who has worked with/been inspired by Greta.*	*Will use the contact information on the foundation web site and request an interview.*

Your planning chart (feel free to add more rows on a separate sheet of paper!):

Name of person:	Reasons to interview them:	How will you contact them?

Step Two: Request and schedule the interviews.

As soon as you have completed your planning chart, reach out to your interview subjects to schedule an interview. Some tips for contacting your interview subjects:

1. Don’t wait to make your request — email or call them right away. You want to give them time and flexibility to agree.

2. Carefully word your request. Whether you contact the person by phone or email, you will want to be polite and professional. Consider using a template like this:

Dear _____(person you are asking to interview),

My name is _____ (your name) and I am a student at _____(your school). I am making a short film about a hero, and I would like to interview you because you _____(if this is your hero, explain why you want to make a film about them; if this is someone impacted by your hero, explain why you would like to get their perspective on your hero).

I would be grateful for the opportunity to interview you and share your thoughts and experiences in my film.

My email is above. Thank you so much for your time.

Best,

Jane Doe

3. If the person gets back to you….schedule your interview. Ideally, you want to conduct the interview in person, but you might have to settle for a Zoom. You also will want to pick a location that is representative of who the person is. For example, you might want to interview them at their place of work or in their home.

4. If the person doesn't get back to you within two or three days… be polite but persistent! Send a follow up email or call again. Let them know how much this project means to you, that you know they are busy doing important work, and that you would be grateful to get just a small amount of their time.

5. If the person does not get back to you within a week or two, after 2-3 follow-up calls/emails… ask yourself if you can still do the project without their interview. Consider:

    a. If this person is your hero, you might still be able to complete the film by interviewing people impacted by your hero.

    b. If this person is a supporting character in the film, someone impacted by the hero, then you should be able to find someone to replace them without abandoning the project.

    c. If you don't think you can make the film without interviewing this person, look back on your earlier notes and lists and pick someone new. Sometimes the timing just isn't right for certain projects, and that's okay.

Step Three: Plan your questions.

Preparing ahead of time is key to a good interview. When you finally sit down with your interviewees, you will want to be armed with strong background knowledge and a deep list of well-crafted questions. Follow the steps below and you will be good to go on the day of the interview.

1) Make sure your research is complete. If you have not done so already, make sure you:
    a) Understand the interviewee. Gather basic information such as proper spelling and pronunciation of their name, pronoun preference (he/she/they), job title, background, and relevant credentials.
    b) Have read and taken notes on any previous coverage of the interviewee, including news, profiles, their social media accounts and websites, and/or public statements.
    c) Understand the context and background of the topic or subject that will be discussed during the interview and have thorough research notes completed.
    d) Have read and taken notes on the most recent news articles, reports, and academic papers related to the topic and hero. Something important might happen the day before your interview! You will want to know about it and be fully up to date.

2) Remind yourself of the key goals of your film and your interviews:
    a) To illustrate what is heroic about this person(s) and why your audience should care.
    b) To entertain and inform.

3) One of the best ways to achieve these goals is to get your interviewee not just to talk but to **share stories.** You want to:

    a) Start with some easy questions. Once you have set all your equipment and have your interviewee well-lit, in focus, properly framed, and mic'd up, let them know you would like to do an audio/video check. In addition to letting you make sure you are getting quality footage, this also is an opportunity to start to establish rapport and put the person at ease. For example: Have the person state their name and, if applicable, their title, occupation, passion or whatever else it is that has made you want to interview them. Ask them how their day is going so far, what they plan to do after the interview, etc. Keep it nice and easy. Pause, and replay your audio and video, checking for quality, then proceed.

    b) Ask open-ended questions — questions that do not have a yes/no answer. Open-ended questions tend to start with words such as why, when, how, where, what.

        Sample open-ended question:

            "When did you first get interested in _____ and how?"

    c) Ask critical questions that address some of the most important aspects of the hero(es) and how their actions impact the people around them.

        Sample critical questions:

            "What is one of the toughest challenges you have faced?"

            "What is one of your proudest moments?"

    d) Ask good follow-up questions. Do not rush to the next question on your list. Ask them to share more, tell the entire story of a certain moment they experienced.

        Sample follow-up questions:

            "What is an example of a time when you____?"

"What happened next?"

"What details do you remember about that day/place/person/etc.?"

"What were you thinking or feeling at that moment?"

"Why was this experience important to you?"

e) Be ready for unexpected or off-topic answers and follow-up questions. Sometimes, the most interesting information comes from unexpected angles.

For more on how to conduct a successful interview, consult these tips from Susan Ager of the *Detroit Free Press*:

Tips and Tricks for Interviewing

Before building a list of your own interview questions, take a look at these examples of great questions from StoryCorps. Feel free to use any of these as you plan your own questions.

Great Questions

ACTIVITY: BUILD A LIST OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

There are many different ways to prepare your interview questions. And some of the best questions you ask most likely will be follow-up questions. But you will want to have more questions than you need, and you will want all your questions to fit the above guidelines. Use the chart below to build a list of questions for each of your interviewees or make your own copy using [this link](#).

Name of Interviewee:

Why you are interviewing them:

Type of question:	**Questions:**
Warm up/Equipment check questions. *As you check your sound and equipment, start asking very basic questions to test the sound but also warm up your interview. Example: "Could you please spell your first and last name for me?"*	1. 2. 3.
Earlier experiences. ***If you are interviewing the hero***, you might ask questions related to their	1. 2.

childhood/earlier years and how they got interested in the topic related to their heroic actions. ***If you are interviewing someone impacted by the hero****,* you might ask questions about how they first encountered the hero and/or their actions. ***Remember:*** Be prepared to ask follow-ups that get them talking about particular moments they experienced. What happened and why were they important?	3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9.

More recent experiences ***If you are interviewing the hero,*** you might ask questions related to their more recent activities, challenges, and	1. 2. 3.

accomplishments. ***If you are interviewing someone impacted by the hero,*** you might ask questions about key moments when the hero had an impact on them, either directly or through inspiration. ***Remember:*** Be prepared to ask follow-ups that get them talking about particular moments they experienced. What happened and why were they important?	4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9.

"Big Picture" Questions ***If you are interviewing the hero,*** you might ask questions related to what they hope to accomplish in the future, their possible legacy, their most important beliefs or values, advice they have for your viewers, etc.	1. 2. 3. 4.

If you are interviewing someone impacted by the hero, you might ask questions about what the hero means to them and how the hero has inspired them and/or inspired them to action. ***Remember:*** Be prepared to ask follow-ups that get them talking about particular moments they experienced. What happened and why were they important?	5. 6. 7. 8. 9.

CHAPTER SIX: SHOOTING INTERVIEWS

[15]

So far you have:

1) Assembled your equipment and crew (if only to decide you are a crew of one).
2) Completed initial research on your topic.
3) Built your interview questions and requested interviews.

Now, something very exciting just happened. One of your interview subjects said yes! What do you do next?

[15] Akshaymarwah at English Wikipedia, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Step One: Choose an interview location

Figuring out when and where you will film your interview is very important. You will need to discuss this with your interview subject, keeping the following priorities in mind:

- **Setting.** Choose a location that reflects who your interview subject is. When you interview someone, they become a character in your film. The setting in which you film them is a chance to develop that character and let us know more about them. When the audience sees this person, what will be in the foreground and/or background? Examples of locations that improve our understanding of the person you interview:
    - The interviewee's home. Think about when you walk into someone's home for the first time. What do you notice? On the walls, do you see family photos? Posters? Artwork? If there are shelves or tables, what's on them? Books? If so, what are the books? Awards? Little sculptures, collectible knick knacks, or other sentimental items? All these things can tell us something about the person.
    - The interviewee's place of work or office. Is there a desk where they sit or a conference room/common area where they meet? Are there interesting things on the desk or the walls in these places?
    - Any other location that means something to the person you are interviewing. For example, maybe they are going to talk about a personal experience or accomplishment that occurred in a specific place. Going to that place and filming them as they recount what happened there can be very effective. For example, let's say you're interviewing a heroic community organizer who successfully got a park built in a neighborhood where kids lacked access to an outdoor play space. Filming in the park could work really well!

  Choosing a location that reflects who you are interviewing can be very effective, not just in the interview shots but also the b-roll footage that you film to complement the interviews and other images in your film (more on this later).

- **Audio.** Choose a location that is quiet.
    - If you are inside, you will want to choose a place/time without other people in the room or nearby making noise. Be aware of things like refrigerators or air conditioning/heating ducts that can create distracting background noise.
    - If you are outside, avoid locations where construction, traffic, passersby, or other variables can create distracting background noise.
- **Lighting.** Ideally, you want to schedule the interview during the day, at least two hours before sunset. This will give you the option of using natural light, whether you film outdoors or indoors using light provided by windows.
- **Above all else, choose a location where the interviewee is comfortable talking to you.** If they are not comfortable doing the interview at their home, fine. If they only are available in the evenings, that's fine too. You will want to have a conversation with them about when and where to do the interview. You should share your own suggestions but also ask the interviewee for their ideas. Always respect the person's privacy and time constraints.

A NOTE ON USING ZOOM/VIDEO CHAT TO FILM INTERVIEWS. Ideally, you will want to film your interview in person, But sometimes that simply isn't possible, due to your interview subject's location or time constraints. Which is fine!

For a step-by-step guide on how to set up and record a video conference, see **APPENDIX D** for more information.

As stated above, your interview subject will have the final say on when and where you conduct the interview. But you should go into that discussion with some ideas for possible locations. Use the chart below to come up with some places you might want to do the interview.

ACTIVITY: BUILD A LIST OF POSSIBLE INTERVIEW LOCATIONS

Feel free to copy the chart below onto an additional sheet of paper for additional interviewees. If you would like your own document, with charts for multiple interview subjects, click here.

Name of person you will interview:_____

Ideas for filming the interview...	**Location idea(s):**	**For each location idea, what might this place help us understand about the person?**
...AT THE PERSON'S WORKPLACE: (If you're not familiar with where the person works, you might just write "at their desk" or "conference room," or...?)	**1.** **2.** **3.**	**1.** **2.** **3.**
...AT THE PERSON'S HOME: (If you're not familiar with	**1.**	**1.**

where the person lives, you might just write “in their living room, next to a window” or “in their backyard,” or…?)	**2.** **3.**	**2.** **3.**
…AT A PLACE THAT MEANS SOMETHING TO THE PERSON: (Based on what you know about this person, are there some places where the person experienced and/or accomplished something important to their story?)	**1.** **2.** **3.**	**1.** **2.** **3.**

Step Two: Get familiar with your equipment and basic film elements

Very often, the most important footage in your documentary will be your interviews. And you likely only will get one chance to conduct the interview and capture quality audio and video of your interviewee.

It's important, prior to your interview, that you get comfortable with your equipment and practice conducting interviews!

Familiarize yourself with your equipment.

As we established earlier, some student filmmakers are able to get their hands on high quality cameras and microphones, and others will use a phone's camera and possibly an external or built-in microphone. **You will need to search online for the manual for your specific camera/phone and/or video tutorials.** If looking at a phone manual, you don't need to worry about the other phone features, just find the camera settings and features.

Here is a video that shows how to use some different features and techniques when filming with an iPhone:

Shooting Video on iPhone: How to Record Professional Videos - Wistia Blog

Learn some of the basic principles of photography

Whatever camera you're using, there will be an "automatic" setting designed to make filming as easy as possible. A camera on automatic will adjust lighting, color, and focus based on sensors in the device. However, over-relying on the auto setting can result in bad footage. Sometimes a camera will have a "semi-auto" setting, and sometimes you will want to fully control light and color through manual settings if you are lucky enough to have access to a more advanced camera.

Among other problems, here are three of the biggest issues caused by relying on auto settings:

- Auto focus accidentally puts something in the foreground or background in focus, leaving the person you are interviewing out of focus in your footage.
- Auto lighting fails to adjust the exposure, leaving the person you are interviewing too light or too dark in your footage. See **APPENDIX A** for more information.
- Auto white balance accidentally renders the colors unnatural and/or different than your intended color temperature in the scene (see **APPENDIX A**)

This doesn't mean that you can't make a good film using a phone camera on automatic. But you will want to learn and use manual settings on your camera whenever possible. Professional directors of photography set their cameras to manual and adjust all their settings by hand. Understanding these techniques starts by learning some of the basics of photography, including the exposure triangle and white balance. **See APPENDIX A: EXPOSURE TRIANGLE AND WHITE BALANCE** for more in-depth explanations and videos on these key elements.

Composition

While you might be able to rely on automated exposure settings, you are responsible for your composition. Composition is the way that elements are arranged in the frame of your camera. Elements can be people, things, plants, animals - anything the viewer notices when you are filming. In the case of an interview, the most important element will be the person you are interviewing. Other elements will include anything in front of, next to, or behind your interview subject, including desk items or anything on a wall or shelf. Some basic elements of composition for shooting interviews include:

The Rule of Thirds. This guideline helps you divide your camera frame into "thirds," then place your subject (in this case the person you are interviewing) into the left or right "third" of the frame, for a more visually appealing composition.[16]



[16] https://phlearn.com/magazine/rule-of-thirds-how-to-use-it-in-your-photography/

Head room. This is what it sounds like — the amount of space between the head of the person you are interviewing and the top of the frame. You don't want to have too much or too little room above the person's head.[17]



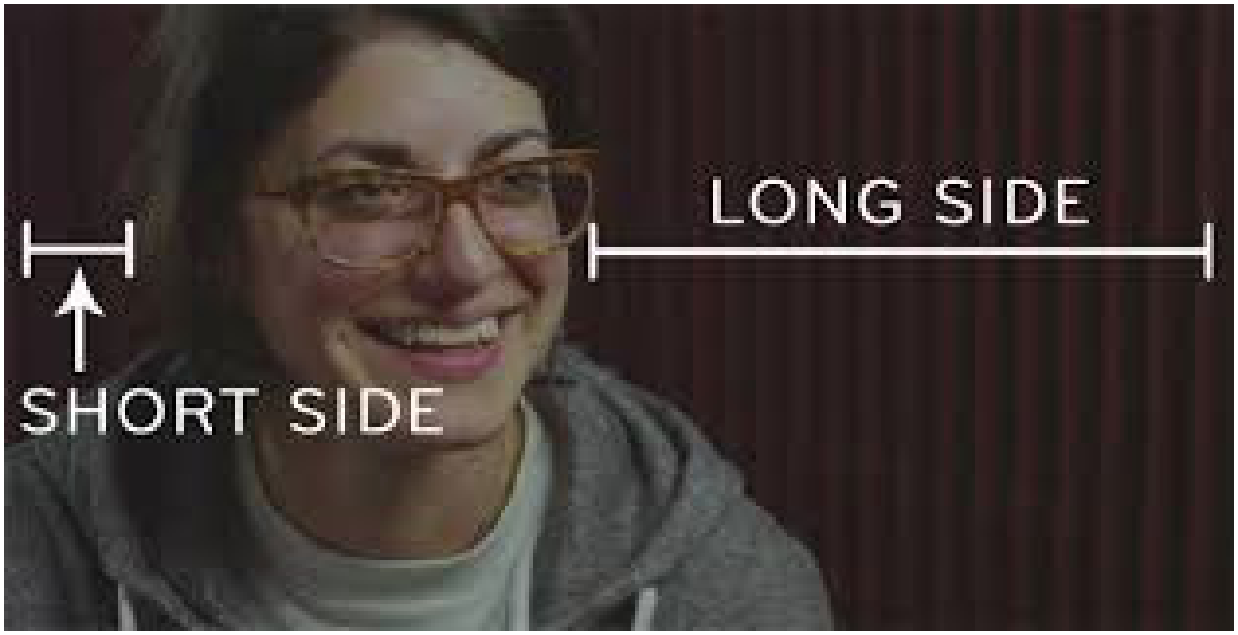
[17] https://filmsforchange.wordpress.com/2011/11/29/lesson-3/

Eyeline. The eyes of the person you're interviewing should be at the same level of the camera and you as you interview them, so that they are not looking up or down as they respond to your questions.[18]



[18] https://images.app.goo.gl/GMrakHm3k3dFcHw86

Longsided interviews (or the "speech bubble" rule). When you use the rule of thirds, you want your interview subject sitting at a slight angle, looking across the camera frame, diagonally, at you as you interview them. For example, when you and the camera are facing the person you are interviewing, if they are sitting to the left of the camera, you will want to sit on the right side of the camera. If they are in the right third of the frame, you then would sit on the left side of the camera. One way to visualize this is to look at your interview subject in the frame. Could you draw an imaginary speech bubble from their mouth into the empty space in the other two-thirds of the frame? If so, you've set up a longsided interview. Good job![19]



[19] https://images.app.goo.gl/LTcoH53t617vxhBL8

Put exposure and composition together, and you've got a great interview set up! Here are some videos on how to put all these elements together:

MAKE Your Story: Interviews on Vimeo

1 minute @ Baycat on Framing | MY HERO

Focus

Last but not least, you need to make sure the subject of your image is crisp and clear. It needs to be **in focus**! You can have excellent exposure (light settings) and great composition, with everything where you want it in the camera frame. But don't forget to focus! In the case of an interview shoot, the focus needs to be on your interview subject.

If you're not yet comfortable with the exposure triangle and want to use automated light settings, that's fine. But when it comes to exposure, you should use whatever manual settings available to you with your given camera.

On a phone camera, you often will be able to adjust the focus by tapping on your screen. This allows you to use a semi-automatic focus control. You'll want to look at the screen and tap on the face of the person you're interviewing. Oftentimes the phone will acknowledge this by showing a box or other graphic over the person's face. After you tap, the face should be the most in-focus element in the shot. More advanced phone cameras may offer additional features that give you greater control over focus. As always, read the manual and see what's available.

On camcorders and DSLR cameras, check your manual for ways to turn autofocus off and how to manually adjust focus. On most cameras, there will be a **focus ring**

around the lens of the camera. Once autofocus is off, you should be able to adjust your focus using this ring.

ACTIVITY: PRACTICE RECORDING AN INTERVIEW

If reading about the principles of photography left you confused or asleep, that's okay. The best way to learn these things is to get your hands on your camera and **practice!**

Prompt: Film someone telling a story!

For this activity, you will need to go back to earlier chapters to review key steps and prep for your interview. You will need the following before you actually sit down to do a practice shoot of an interview:

a) A person to role play as the interviewee

b) A list of questions to ask your role-playing interviewee (try to make them based on what you already know about your interviewee - make them feel like a hero for something they have accomplished!). **See CHAPTER FIVE to plan your questions.**

c) All of your audio and video equipment and, if possible, any crew members. **See CHAPTER FOUR** to review all of your possible options for building a crew and procuring recording equipment.

Follow the steps below to practice recording an interview.

1) **Find your interview location.**

   You will want a place that offers good lighting, no distracting noise, and an interesting background (see "Step One: Choose an Interview Location," above).

   IF YOU ARE RECORDING OVER ZOOM, see APPENDIX D.

2) **Set up your camera.**

Where you place your camera is crucial to good interview footage. You will want to consider the following variable when deciding where to set up:

a) **Distance to the interviewee**. Place the camera close enough to capture a clear image of the interviewee without having to zoom in too much or stick the camera right in their face.

b) **Lighting and white balance.** Be sure you have sufficient light to have quality exposure and white balance **(See above and APPENDIX A)**.

c) **Composition**. Place the camera at a certain distance and angle to allow for proper framing, headspace, eyeline, and longsided interview angle (**see "Composition" above under "Step Two"**).

IMPORTANT NOTE: When filming with a phone or tablet, you always will want to lay the device on its side. Think about a TV or a movie theater screen. You want your image to match those screens, which resemble a rectangle lying on its long side.

d) **Stability**. If using a phone or tablet, you will want to use a mini-tripod if possible (**see CHAPTER FOUR)** Set your mini-tripod (or the device itself if you don't have a mini-tripod) on a table or other flat surface using books or other items to keep it upright. Holding your device by hand during an interview should be an absolute last resort.

If using a full-size tripod with a camcorder, you will need to make sure you have relatively flat, stable ground upon which to place and adjust the tripod legs.

3) **Set up your audio.** Some considerations for audio setup:

a) **Distance to the interviewee**. If you are filming with a microphone that is inside or attached directly to your phone, tablet, or camcorder, you will need to be close enough to the interviewee to capture the best audio possible.

If you are using a lavalier microphone or a boom mic, you will want to make sure the cords or bluetooth receiver are close enough to reach the interviewee with a clear signal.

b) **Placement of lavalier mics**. If you are using a wireless or wired lavalier mic, be sure to:

   i) If using a wired lav mic, politely ask the interviewee to run the wire underneath their shirt so that the viewer cannot see the wire.

   ii) Clip the mic to your interviewee in a place that is:

      (1) Close enough to their mouth to capture their voice clearly, but not so close that their voice or breath overwhelms the mic and creates distortion.

      (2) Not where jewelry or clothing will brush up against the mic when the interviewee moves or gestures while talking.

      (3) A good spot for placing the clip often is along the inside of the interviewees shirt collar, pocket, or upper chest area. Ideally, you don't want the viewer to see the mic, but it's okay for the mic to be visible if that's the placement that gives you the best sound.

      (4) IMPORTANT: Always ask your interviewee for permission to clip the mic in a certain place prior to clipping it. Another option is to ask the interviewee to clip the mic onto themselves with your direction. Never make physical contact with an interviewee without their clear verbal consent.

c) **Placement of boom mic**. If you are using a boom mic, the boom should be angled so that the microphone is just out of the frame but as close to the interviewee as possible.

d) **Sound levels**. Adjust your sound levels, based on your recording device features and settings

   i) If you are recording on a phone or tablet, your settings likely are automated. Record a bit of practice footage, then plug headphones into your device and evaluate the quality of the sound.

   ii) If you are recording on a DSLR or Camcorder, use the highest quality headphones available and plug them into the headphones jack so you can check the clarity and levels of the sound.

4) **Complete an AV check**. Once you have set all your equipment and have your interviewee well-lit, in focus, properly framed, and mic'd up, let them know you would like to do an audio/video check. Start with one of the easy questions you prepared **(see CHAPTER FIVE, Step 3)**.

5) **Conduct your practice interview.** See **APPENDIX C: SUGGESTED INTERVIEW SEQUENCE** for a step-by-step guide to conducting an interview.

6) **Review your practice footage**. After you have completed the practice interview, load your footage onto a computer (or, if you do not have a computer handy, play it back on the device you used to record the interview — be sure to plug in headphones to check your audio).

7) **Evaluate your practice footage**. Consider the following questions:

   a) How well did you capture your audio? What might you do differently to improve audio quality in your actual documentary interview? Consider sound levels, background noise, clarity of the interviewee's voice, etc.

b) How well did you capture your video? What might you do differently to improve your image quality in your actual documentary interview? Consider exposure, white balance, composition, background, etc.

The more you practice shooting interviews, the more comfortable you will be when it's time to conduct interviews for your films. That said, **at a certain point, it's time to GO FOR IT! Get out there and film your interviews!** You'll likely make mistakes, but as long as you are kind and respectful of your interviewee, they will likely be patient with you if you have any technical problems.

CHAPTER SEVEN: B-ROLL



In addition to interview footage, you will want to capture b-roll for your film.

Interviews are the backbone of most documentary films. They give you the opportunity to tell your hero's story, using the voice of the hero and/or additional relevant people who provide accounts of important information and events to propel the narrative forward.

That said, take a moment to imagine your film. What if the entire movie consisted of just people in interviews talking? And talking. And talking. The film would be about as interesting as sitting in class and listening to your teacher lecture the entire time. Your audience wants variety. Give them what they want!

B-roll and sound design are key tools in making sure you make a film that holds your audience's attention and tells the hero's story in a range of ways. B-roll is any footage you capture that is not part of the main action. In the case of documentaries, the main action is usually what's being shared in the interviews and perhaps in a voiceover narration (more on this later). B-roll is supplemental footage that can be intercut with interviews and narration to add action, context, imagery,

and visual and auditory variety alongside the interview. It is especially useful when it comes time to edit your film (more on that later).

Here is a good introductory video by PBS about b-roll and how it works:

LEVEL UP Episode 1 - Get that B-Roll (B-ROLL)

B-roll: imagery

In order to capture quality, useful b-roll, you should consider the following questions.

1) **What am I going to film?** Your interviews are limited by the availability of quiet, well-lit locations where your interviewee is comfortable talking. But your B-roll can be shot anywhere! You don't have to worry about background noise — it might add to the footage or you can edit out the sound and just use the imagery. Here are just a few locations where you might want to shoot b-roll:

    a) **Shots with your interview subject(s)**, in and around your interview location(s). If you are interviewing someone at their home or place of work, you have a potential goldmine of b-roll. Always ask your interviewee if it would be okay if you filmed some of their home, including photos and possessions. Typically this means filming in the more public areas of the home or office. Don't ask permission to film in the bedroom or bathroom. You might want to ask permission before the sit-down interview, as a way of having the interviewee show you around and get acquainted. You also might wait until after the interview, once you have built more of a connection and level of trust with them. If possible, ask the interviewee to guide you around and explain different items as you film. Like many aspects of the interview,

you will need to use your judgment in the moment to decide when and what to ask of the interviewee.

Some ideas for b-roll footage you shoot in/around your interview location:

i) **Photos.** Whether on the wall, on a desk, or in a photo album, capturing video or still shots of a person's photographs can add to our understanding of their character and/or key moments in their life.

ii) **Wall hangings/artifacts.** Just like photos, what someone chooses to hang on the walls or display on shelves or tables tells us about them. For example, if someone has a trophy on a shelf, see if they will pick up the trophy and explain how they got it and why it is important to them.

iii) **Interviewee in action**, at work or at home, interacting with people, completing various tasks. Examples: on the phone, typing, walking through the office, petting their dog or cat, feeding their fish, greeting and talking to other people, doing the work for which they are known.

b) **Shots without your interview subjects**, outside of your interview location(s). This is an opportunity to get creative. What are some examples of footage that might help illustrate your story and characters, without your interviewee present? Some examples:

i) **Establishing shots**. Giving the audience a wide but quick look at the outside of a building or other location gives the audience a sense of the place where an interview or other key moment in the film takes place.

ii) **Footage of the town/area where your story takes place**. Filming the area around your subject can give us a sense of place and also a reflection of who people are. For example, if the story largely takes place in a city, get shots of the hustle and bustle of that city — capture the action. If the story largely takes place in an area with lots of open space, farmland, and/or access to nature, get shots of that area that convey a sense of peace, connection with nature, farming, etc.

iii) **Footage where part of your story takes place**. If your interview subject recounts an experience that occurred in a certain place, and you have access to that place, capture some footage of it, even if the interview subject can't make it to the shoot. Show us the street corner or the city hall or other location where an important event occurred.

iv) **Footage that conveys a mood or feeling** of a certain point of your film. This is a chance to get a bit metaphorical and poetic. If your interview subject starts talking about hope, maybe you capture a rising sun in the place where they live. If they are describing a dark, turbulent time in their life, maybe you capture a storm lashing their hometown. Those are some basic options — get creative and come up with some of your own. Shoot as many as you can — you don't have to use them. The goal with all of your b-roll is to give yourself as many options as possible when it is time to edit your film.

2) **What types of shots do I want to get?** Remember, one of the great benefits of b-roll is that it is your chance to vary the types of shots and images in your film. A "shot" refers to how far away from and from what angle you are filming your subject. On a very basic level, there are three types of shots: 1) Close-up; 2) Medium; and 3) Long. There are variations on these three basic shots. Here are some examples:[20]



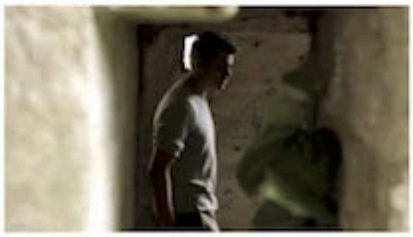
Extreme long shot XLS



Long Shot LS



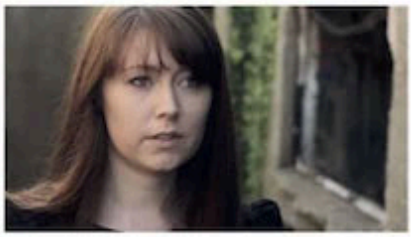
Medium Long Shot MLS



Mid Shot MS



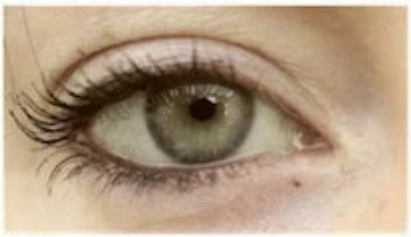
Medium Closeup MCU



Closeup CU



Big Closeup BCU



Extreme Closeup ECU

Typically, your interviews will be filmed as a "medium close-up," following all of the rules of lighting and composition that we discussed in Chapter Six. B-roll should be a mix of shots. Some examples:

a) **Long shot.** Also known as a wide shot, a long shot is filmed from further away from the subject, giving us a broad perspective of the scene.

[20] https://www.learnaboutfilm.com/film-language/picture/shotsize/

For example, if you want to introduce us to a place, such as where you interviewed your subject, use an **establishing wide shot**[21]. This is achieved by filming a long shot of the entrance to the building or home. You can do this before or after the interview, on your way in/out. In the example below, we see an establishing shot that could precede an interview:



[21] Infrogmation of New Orleans, CC BY-SA 2.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0>, via Wikimedia Commons

Long shots also are useful if you want to show someone interacting with other people. In the example below, we see a wide shot of a teacher at work.[22]



[22] https://www.ncpedia.org/media/classroom-wide-shot

b) **Medium shot**. This is a useful way to film a variety of b-roll. For example, if you are lucky enough to get your interviewee to show you family photos or other artifacts as they walk around the house, or if you want to show them in their place of work, interacting with others.[23]



[23] https://www.cadrage.app/medium-shot/

c) **Close-up**. This shot is what it sounds like — the camera is focused solely on one subject, allowing us to see the details of that subject.[24][25]



When you put all of these different b-roll shots together, you have the footage you need to create a sequence of footage that is visually engaging and helps further our understanding of story and character.

For example, imagine you are making a film about a local chef who has started a nonprofit to feed families in need. So you interview the chef sitting and talking about their program — the inspiration, starting out, struggles and successes, what it means to them, etc. But you're going to need more than just footage of the chef talking. You're in luck! During the interview, the chef explains how they care a lot about making sure the food they provide is both tasty and healthy. The chef offers

[24] © Jorge Royan / http://www.royan.com.ar
[25] https://images.app.goo.gl/bNpfk1igDxQPLCu86

to let you tag along while they shop for ingredients for a new meal they are trying out. Here is what that shoot might look like:

Shooting sequences for the edit

Now you will be able to edit the above b-roll shots into your interview footage. You can let the audience see the interviewee actually shopping for key ingredients when they describe how they plan their meals and ingredients. You will be able to cut from the sit-down, “talking head” interview footage to the chef in action at the store. (You could repeat a similar b-roll shoot of the chef in their kitchen, describing what they are making, how, and why). And you will be able to do so using a variety of close, medium, and long shots, perhaps even from different angles. In doing so, you give the viewer the visual variety they crave.

Handheld versus Tripod Shots

For interviews and many of your b-roll shots, a tripod (or placing your phone/camera on a stable surface) will be the easiest method to keep your camera steady and all elements of lighting, composition, and focus consistent. However, there may be times when you want or need to record handheld shots. For a quick guide and some exercises to practice handheld camerawork, click here.

CHAPTER EIGHT: B-ROLL SOUND

[26]

While b-roll video is essential to your film, don't forget the importance of sound.

A lot of the audio in your film will be from the interviewees talking (and, possibly, a voiceover narrator, if you choose to go that route; again, more on that later). But you always should capture audio when filming your b-roll, using whatever microphone is available to you. In fact, there may be times when you want to just get out there and record audio, without worrying about video.

There are multiple ways to capture b-roll sound:

a) **Room tone of interview location.** This is essentially the background noise of a room or space, which is recorded to be used in post-production to seamlessly edit between different takes or add natural background sound to dialogue scenes, creating a more realistic audio experience.

b) **Audio when your interview subject is walking and talking** in a key location. Similar to your sit-down interviews, you will want the clearest audio possible of the person talking. Wireless lav mics or a boom mic are

[26] Rawad Ramadan, CC BY-SA 4.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>, via Wikimedia Commons

particularly useful here, but phones (ideally with a small mic attachment) and built-in mics sometimes can capture sufficient audio as well.

c) **Background audio captured while filming video of a key location.** Oftentimes, we focus too much on the visual aspects of a b-roll shoot. Keep your sound recording on, whatever your audio capture mechanism. Background noise can either be removed from your final edit or used to add to the sense of place and feeling.

d) **Specific audio you want to capture for your sound design.** Sometimes the sounds of a place are just as important as the visuals. Filmmakers will film key moments just to capture the sounds (birds in a forest, sirens in a city, the murmur of voices as people stand in a line, etc.). These sounds can later be removed from the accompanying video footage and used on your audio track to enhance key moments in your film.

Now that you've learned a bit about b-roll video and audio, it's time to start planning how to go get that b-roll!

ACTIVITY: BUILD A LIST OF POSSIBLE B-ROLL LOCATIONS, SHOTS, AND AUDIO CAPTURE

Use the charts below to come up with some ideas for shooting b-roll for your film. Feel free to re-create this chart for as many locations/shoots as possible.

We can divide the b-roll shots into two categories:

a) **B-roll footage involving an interviewee/subject of the film.** For examples/ideas, see "What am I Going to Film, Part a: shots with your interview subject" earlier in this chapter.

b) **B-roll footage not involving the interviewee/subject of the film.** For examples/ideas, see "What am I Going to Film, Part b: shots without your interview subject" earlier in this chapter.

Here is a SAMPLE CHART of b-roll involving the interviewee, based on the video above with the chef:

Name of interviewee: *Chef Jane Doe*

Location:	**Ideas for what to film:** What are you filming? In other words, what footage might you want to get, in order to illustrate something about the person you're interviewing and what they are sharing?	**Ideas for shots and sounds:** (When filming, where might you place the camera? For each of the ideas in the middle column, add a draft plan for whether you would capture that footage using a long, medium, or close-up shots.)

Location 1: Store	*-chef shopping for ingredients for their latest meal idea*	*-chef walking into store (wide shot)* *-chef browsing for ingredients in the aisles (medium shot)* *-chef choosing an ingredient (close shot)* *-chef smiling and interacting with store clerk (close shot)* *Sounds to capture:* *-external background noise of store* *-verbal exchange between cashier and chef* *-if possible, chef describing each of the ingredients as they shop, why the ingredient might work well in the meal they are planning.*
Possible Location 2: Kitchen	*-chef and others in an industrial kitchen making and packaging meals*	*-chef walking up walkway and into building where industrial kitchen is located (wide, establishing shot)* *-chef greeting other workers, walking through, interacting with them (medium)* *-chef showing one of the*

		volunteers how to make one of the dishes they are preparing (close-up) *Sounds to capture:* *-kitchen sounds (pots and pans clanging, fridge doors opening and closing, knives chopping)* *-chefs/workers talking, laughing, giving instructions, describing what they are doing, etc.)*
Possible Location 3: Workers delivering meals to people's homes.	*-various homes/apartments where the food is delivered*	*-delivery person (or, even better, the chef) approaching home (wide, establishing shot)* *-resident answering the door and greeting the delivery person (medium)* *NOTE: YOU WILL NEED PERMISSION FROM THE PERSON RECEIVING THE FOOD IF YOU ARE GOING TO FILM THEM. ASSUMING YOU GET PERMISSION:* *-facial expressions of the two people as the food is handed over (close-up)*

		Sounds to capture: *-worker exiting the car, shutting the door, clomping up steps, knocking on door or pushing buzzer* *-worker and recipient's verbal exchange*

Now come up with your own list of possible b-roll locations and shots that might involve your interviewee.

Name of interviewee:_____

Location: Where will you be filming?	**Ideas for what to film:** What are you filming? In other words, what footage might you want to get, in order to illustrate something about the person you're interviewing and what they are sharing?	**Ideas for shots:** When filming, where might you place the camera? For each of the ideas in the middle column, add a draft plan for whether you would capture that footage using a long, medium, or close-up shots.
Location 1:	What you will film:	Shots:

		Sounds to capture:
Location 2:	What you will film:	Shots: Sounds to capture:
Location 3:	What you will film:	Shots:

		Sounds to capture:

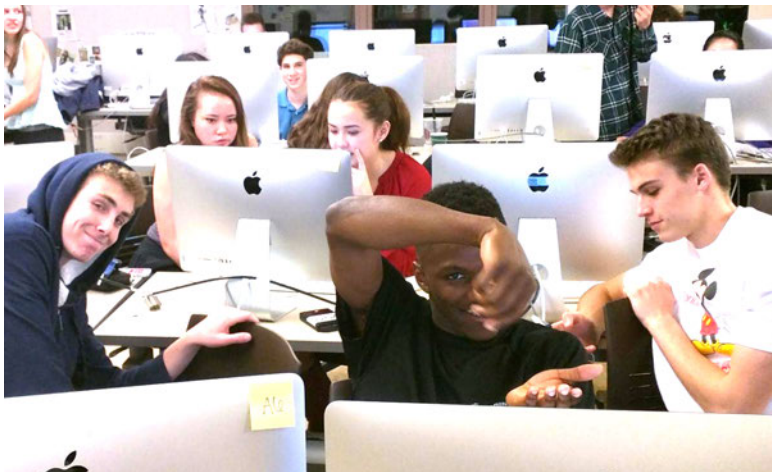
Now come up with your own list of possible b-roll locations and shots that might NOT involve your interviewee.

Location: Where will you be filming?	**Ideas for what to film:** What footage might you want to get, in order to illustrate something about the person you're interviewing and what they are sharing?	**Ideas for shots:** When filming, where might you place the camera? For each of the ideas in the middle column, add a draft plan for whether you would capture that footage using a long, medium, or close-up shots.
Location 1:	What you will film:	Shots: Sounds to capture:

Location 2:	What you will film:	Shots: Sounds to capture:
Location 3:	What you will film:	Shots: Sounds to capture:

Do not underestimate the value of b-roll. As you move into the editing process you will see how important it is to have a variety of audio and video footage to interweave with your interview footage and avoid making a film that is just people sitting and talking. The more b-roll, the better. Capture as much as you can!

CHAPTER NINE: STORING AND ORGANIZING FOOTAGE



There is nothing worse than losing footage.

You put so much effort into getting great interviews or b-roll. Then you realize that you didn't press the record button on the camera. Or that your microphone wasn't working. Or that you recorded over one of your interviews. Or that you lost or damaged a memory card or phone.

These things can happen, even to professionals. This chapter will teach you the steps to minimize the chances that they happen to you.

1. **Before you film, make sure you have as much storage as possible.** How much storage you need depends on the quality of the video you are shooting. The higher the recording quality, the more storage you will need.

   Your recording device may have very specific settings, including frames per second (FPS), that will affect video quality and file size. Keep in mind that each new camera model tends to shoot at higher resolution and require even larger amounts of storage. But if you want to do a quick estimate of what you

need for a shoot, pay closest attention to the most basic setting — resolution — and consult this chart:

Estimated amount of storage needed to record one hour of footage:

With a resolution setting of...	...you will need at least this much available storage on your phone or memory card(s) to record for one hour:
720p	1 GB
1080p	23 GB
4k	45 GB
RAW 4k	110 GB

REMEMBER: the above chart is a very rough estimate. Your results will vary, depending on the specific settings of your device. It's always a good idea to test out your device's different settings and see how much space one minute of video takes up, then multiply by 60 to find out how much storage your recording device needs to record up to an hour at a time.

2. **Before and during filming, check your footage.**

   Always record at least 15 seconds of test footage at the beginning of a shoot, whether you are shooting b-roll or conducting an interview. Then play it back on your recording device, hopefully using headphones, so you can make sure you are recording clear audio and video. It's okay to ask your interview subject

to wait a minute because you value what they have to say and want to make sure you have the best possible recording of them.

3. **Take notes while filming.**

   If you have a film crew, someone else might do this for you. If you are the interviewer, it can be helpful to take light notes for a could reasons:

   a) Taking notes is a non-verbal way of letting the interviewee know what they are saying is important. It can reinforce the connection you have and encourage them to continue talking about the subject at hand.

   b) Taking notes can be extremely valuable when you are organizing and editing your footage. Just writing down the time in the recording and the topic discussed can be helpful later. Example: Discusses role models/influences (at minute 4:57)

4. **Have a plan for what to do if you run out of storage or battery life.**

   Try your best to get your hands on these things and bring them to the shoot:

   a) **A charger for your camera or phone** that enables you to plug directly into a wall outlet.

   b) **An extension cord.** The longer your charging cord the better. Depending on your equipment setup, you want to be able to continue to shoot an interview with the recording device plugged directly into the wall without having to rearrange your setup if you run out of battery.

   c) **An external drive or computer**. If you run out of storage, you want to be able to quickly and easily copy files to this drive or computer so you may delete the files on your recording device and free up space to keep recording.

d) **A cord to connect your recording device** directly to your drive or computer. Don't depend on a wireless connection to move your files. Make sure you can move them directly across this hard-wired connection.

5. **After filming, download your footage ASAP!**

   As soon as you complete a film shoot, copy the files from your phone or camera to a computer or external drive. Ideally, this will be the external drive or computer you will be using to edit your film. The longer you wait to download footage, the greater the risk of losing that footage.

6. **Don't depend on the cloud.**

   As you can see in the chart above, your recording files likely will be quite large. If you have a Google Drive, iCloud, or other account with enough available storage, uploading your files to that account is a great way to back up your work. But if you are on a cellular or Wifi connection, these uploads can be very slow and often will fail or simply take too long. Copying the files from your recording device to a computer or hard drive is a much more reliable way to save your footage.

7. **Name your files.**

   This is very important. When you save your files for the first time, make sure you give them each a unique name "Interview with (name) on (date)," "B-roll of (whatever you filmed - be sure to describe both the audio and video you captured)"

8. **Save and organize your files.** Don't just drag files randomly onto your computer's Desktop or your external hard drive. Create a folder for the entire

project, then create subfolders for different footage. Having everything organized within a main folder is especially important when you start to edit your film (see the next chapter).

How you organize and name your folders and files is up to you. But it can be very helpful, regardless of which editing program you will use to put your film together. Here are some examples of suggested methods of organization.

Whichever editing program you use, instructional sites and videos usually are just a search away. For example, if you want to learn how to import files into Premiere, you can simply search: “How do I import files into Premiere?”

9. **Back up your files.** If at all possible, save copies of all your files on a second computer or external hard drive. It’s always best to have two copies in case something happens to one of them.

CHAPTER TEN: STARTING POST-PRODUCTION



You've filmed and safely saved and organized your interview and b-roll footage.

It's time to start putting together your film! This stage of filmmaking is called post-production, a term used to describe all of the steps you have to complete once you have your footage. Editing is where the magic happens. It's the process by which you choose which footage to use, in what order, and how you will connect the different pieces of footage by using various techniques to smooth the transition between them.

You will complete your edit using whatever editing software is available to you. The range of possible editing software is wide and includes:

- Programs built into your phone that enable you to edit if you do not have access to a computer.
- Free programs that come pre-downloaded onto your computer. On Macs, this program is currently called iMovie, on PC/Windows the program is called Clipchamp. But the names of these programs can change year to year, so you'll want to do an online search to see what may already be on your computer.

- Free applications that you can download.
- Free web-based applications that you can use from any computer without having to download.
- Professional-quality editing software that requires a paid license - be sure to check with your school or library to see if you have access to one of these programs. Some of the more common pro editing programs include:
    - Adobe Premiere
    - Final Cut Pro
    - Avid Media Composer
    - DaVinci Resolve

Because the names and features of editing software change year to year, you are encouraged to do a thorough search of your options, based on what type of phone, camera, and/or computer you are using. Consider reading reviews of each editing option, so that you may choose a software that best matches your experience level and project needs.

There are many different ways to complete the editing process. Over time, you'll identify and refine the method that works best for you. If you're just starting out, here are some suggested steps...

Step 1: Create a schedule.

Some documentary films take years to create. Others can take days. Your timeline will be unique to you and how much time you have to complete the project, prior to your due date for a class or contest. Even if you are not making this film to submit to a teacher or film festival, it's always good to set deadlines to keep yourself on task.

Make a plan for completing the various post-production steps on this list. You might want to create a table like this:

Task (see below this chart for explanations of all these tasks)**:**	**Complete by (date)**
Review footage, take notes.	
Import footage into your editing	
Pull your "selects"	
Write a draft outline for your film	
Create a rough cut (first draft edit)	
Reassess, regather, rewrite.	
Refine your film by following these steps 2-4+ times, after you have gathered more footage and revised your outline.	

Step 2: Review your footage and take notes.

Watch all of your interview footage and b-roll. As you do so:

A. Double check that all of your files are clearly organized and labeled (see **CHAPTER NINE**).

B. Take notes on each piece of footage you might want to use. Editing program software and AI can be useful doing this for you. But be careful — some transcription programs are better than others, and all of them are mistake-prone. Taking the notes yourself can improve the accuracy and your

understanding of the footage you have. When taking notes, be on the lookout for key moments that:

a. Contain sound and/or imagery that are visually engaging.

b. Are likely to provoke emotion in the viewer.

c. Provide information that is important to telling your hero's story.

C. For each note, write the time code, so you can easily locate the clip later, and also jot down a brief explanation of why the clip is interesting.

Step 3: Import your footage into whichever editing program you are using.

You will want to use whichever instructions come with your particular editing program. Or you can search: [the name of your editing software] + [how to import footage]

Step 4: Pull your "selects."

Using your notes from Step 1 above, pull "selects." Selects are your best pieces of footage. Again, how you do this will vary, depending on your editing program, so educate yourself through manuals and "how to___" searches.

With most programs, you will be taking your best segments of footage out of the larger clips and placing them on your film timeline, which is where you will actively edit your film.

Step 5: Write a rough draft outline for your film.

Once you have pulled your selects, review them and do your best to write an outline of the story you will tell. Your film is a true story, but like most stories, you want to create a basic structure that holds your audience's attention all the way through.

Your film is about a real-life hero who identifies an issue in the world and tries to fix it. On the most basic level, your film can be organized like this:

Beginning:	Introduce your hero and the problem they face.
Middle:	Show the ways in which your hero tries to address the problem.
End:	Show how the hero succeeds, in whole or in part, in their fight, and what we can learn from their success.

Or you can use a slightly more complex outline: the three act structure. Virtually every story — from your favorite novel to a person's memoir to your favorite Hollywood film to your own documentary — uses this format.

	Key elements of act:
Act One	**Exposition (key background information on your hero):** Introduce **who** your hero is and **when** and **where** they did heroic things. **Inciting action (what makes your hero want to do something for the greater good)**: Establish **what** happened that made your hero want to take action. In most cases this means you introduce the issue your hero wants to

	address and explain how they first encountered the issue. **Turning point into Act Two:** Show how your hero responded to the inciting issue and **why** they decided to take action.
Act Two	**Rising action:** Show **how** your hero took action to address the issue/problem established in Act One. Your hero would not be a hero if their task was easy. Act Two focuses on what new challenges your hero discovers when they begin to take action. **Midpoint:** The purpose of Act Two is to show just how hard it is for your hero to reach their goal. By the midpoint, they are completely committed and engaged in fighting for what they want. **Turning point into act three:** Show your hero experiencing a setback that calls into doubt whether they will succeed in their quest. Sometimes storytellers refer to this as the “dark night of the soul,” when the main character is at greatest risk of losing hope and giving up.
Act Three	**Pre-climax** Show how the hero moves through their darkest moment to continue to fight for their goal. Illustrate the events that lead up to the climax.

	Climax Show how the hero succeeds (or even fails!) in the biggest challenge they face in the entire story. **Resolution (denouement)**: Show how the hero returns to "normal life," after the climax. Illustrate how they changed and how that change will impact how they move forward (if alive) in their lives, including if they will continue to take action on a particular issue. Also show how their heroism improved the world around them and left some sort of lasting legacy. **Bonus: So what?** The best stories answer the question, "So what?" You just shared a story of how your hero fought for something they believed in, for the greater good. What is a key lesson this story teaches us about ourselves and/or the world around us? What is the most important idea we can take away from watching this film? Why does this story matter? All of these questions are ways of coming up with your "so what," also known as a controlling idea or main point of the film. The controlling idea can be **explicit**: told directly to the audience by a narrator, title card (words on the screen), or interviewee. Or it can be **implicit:** conveyed to the audience by enough clues that they can generate this idea — or their own original takeaway — on their own.

ACTIVITY: REVERSE OUTLINE SOMEONE ELSE'S DOCUMENTARY

Re-watch any of the MY HERO documentaries you watched during Chapter One and complete the charts below them to identify the key plot points.

Here is a selection of some award-winning MY HERO films.

Reverse Outline Worksheet #1: Beginning, Middle, End

Choose a sample film and complete the chart below in note form. Create additional charts on a separate sheet of paper to practice with additional films

Name of film you watched_____

Beginning:	Who is the hero and what is the problem they face?
Middle:	What are the ways in which the hero tries to address the problem?

End:	How does the hero succeed, in whole or in part, in their fight, and what we can learn from their success?

Reverse Outline Worksheet #2: Three Act Structure

Choose a sample film and complete the chart below in note form. Create additional charts on a separate sheet of paper to practice with additional films.

Name of film you watched_____

	Key elements of act:
Act One	**Exposition (key background information on your hero):** **Who** is the hero and **when** and **where** did they do heroic things? **Inciting action (what makes your hero want to do something for the greater good)**: **What** happens that makes the hero want to take action? **Turning point into Act Two:** How does the hero respond to the inciting issue and **why** do they decide to take action?

Act Two	**Rising action:** **How** does the hero take action to address the issue/problem established in Act One? The hero would not be a hero if their task was easy. What new challenges does the hero discover when they begin to take action? **Midpoint:** The purpose of Act Two is to show just how hard it is for your hero to reach their goal. By the midpoint, how does the film show they are completely committed to fighting for what they want?

	Turning point into act three: Does the hero experience some kind of a setback that calls into doubt whether they will succeed in their quest? Sometimes storytellers refer to this as the “dark night of the soul.” What is the moment when the main character is at greatest risk of losing hope and giving up?
Act Three	**Pre-climax** How does the hero move through their darkest moment to continue to fight for their goal? What happens just before the climax? **Climax** How does the hero succeed (or even fail!) in the biggest challenge they face in the entire story?

	Resolution (denouement): How the hero and/or the audience return to “normal life,” after the climax. How did the hero change and how will that change impact how they move forward (if alive), including if they will continue to take action on a particular issue? How did their heroism improve the world around them? **Bonus: So what?** The best stories answer the question, “So what?” What is a key lesson the hero’s story teaches us about ourselves and/or the world around us? What is the most important idea we can take away from watching this film? Why does this story matter?

Step 6: Edit

With your initial sounds and images and your rough outline in hand, it's time to take a swing at your first edit. See **CHAPTER TWELVE: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER**. Make a rough cut — an early edit. Then come back here and follow steps 6 and 7 below.

Step 7: Reassess, regather, rewrite.

Editing is not a linear process — you constantly will be going back and forth on your timeline and re-evaluating your footage — or lack thereof.

The act of editing will reveal what additional footage, archival or original, that you might need for your film. It also will force you to think very carefully about your story structure and existing sound and images.

After a first edit, consider the following questions:

1. What additional footage, original or archival, would improve this cut of the film?
2. Do I need to do another interview or re-shoot b-roll, due to problems with the quality of the footage?
3. Do I need to do a follow-up interview because I just realized some important questions I didn't ask?
4. How should I revise my outline, based on how the editing has gone so far?

A great way to evaluate what you have and identify ways to improve your film is to get feedback from peers, friends, teachers, or family members. See **CHAPTER FOURTEEN: GETTING FEEDBACK**.

Step 8: Rinse and repeat!

After you have paused your edit to get additional content and revise your story, jump back into the edit. Keep moving through the cycle of editing and reevaluating. It takes at least a few cycles (and sometimes dozens!) to get the film to its final cut.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: SOUND DESIGN

[27]

We watch movies. But we also hear them.

Sound design is one of the most underrated aspects of making a film. Think sound design isn't exciting or important? Here is a video that shows just how fun and valuable it can be:

The Beautiful Lies of Sound Design | Tasos Frantzolas | TEDxAthens

As you move through the post-production process, think about what the audience will hear in addition to what they see. What are some sounds that might help illustrate or even enhance what is happening in the film? It's very likely you captured some cool sounds when shooting your b-roll. Also consider getting back out there with your camera and recording more. Additionally, you have the option of finding additional sounds online, often through royalty-free sites. More on this below.

[27] Vancouver Film School, CC BY 2.0 https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0, via Wikimedia Commons

Music

Can you think of a movie you've watched that didn't have music? Probably not, because music is such an effective way to get your audience to feel something. Take advantage!

Similar to editing software, there is a wide range of options for procuring music for your film. Many of the sources also will offer royalty-free sounds that you may add to your library.

Your options include:

- Original music. If you or someone you know is a musician, original music can be a great option for a film. It especially can be effective if you are able to identify the mood of a scene and create and/or choose the original music based on that mood. You also might be surprised how easily you can create your own music using digital tools like GarageBand, Logic, or other music-making programs.
- AI-generated music. This technology is evolving every day, but it opens up the possibility of inputting a description of the scene, mood, and music genre to have the AI create an original song that fits. Just like other forms of music, be sure to follow whatever guidelines the AI program requires for crediting the music.
- Online, royalty-free music. A basic search for "royalty-free music" will generate dozens of options for tracks that you can download for free, usually in exchange for crediting the creator at the end of your film.
- Subscription-based services. A subscription-based music site can vastly improve the quality and quantity of music available to you. As with editing software, you should first check to see if your school or local library has a subscription to one of these services

To find the online source that works best for you, use search terms like “royalty free music” and “music for editing documentary” and consider reading reviews of the different providers.

When choosing sounds and music for different moments in the film, always think about what you want your audience to feel at a given moment, based on what is happening on the screen.

Narration

Narration is the act of reading a voiceover script during your film. The narrator’s voice can be a valuable tool to speak directly to the audience and explain key facts and events. Some films do not provide any narration. Adding narration is a chance to help your audience understand your point of view.

NOTE: *Before you start making decisions about a narrator, now is a good time to go back and review the section on “What type of documentary will you make?” in CHAPTER FOUR. This will help you with the references to documentary types below.*

If you choose to have a narrator in your film, there are two basic questions you need to ask:

1) **What type of narrator will I use?** You have two options:

    First-person narrator. This is an actual person involved in the film. It could be you, as the filmmaker, telling the story from your perspective. It also could be your hero, narrating their own story. If you are making a participatory, reflexive, or performative documentary, you likely will be the narrator.

    Third-person narrator. Often referred to as “the voice of god,” this is an unnamed voice that comments on what is happening. If you are making an expository documentary, which is the most common type of documentary, you likely will want to use a third person narrator.

2) **Who will perform the narration?**

Title cards. Title cards are words that you place on the screen to deliver key information to the viewer. Common title cards might include the name and job title of someone being interviewed or the date and place where something occurred. But title cards can also be used to deliver short pieces of narration, either on their own or in coordination with a voice over narrator.

You. Who knows this film better than you? You are fully capable of writing out and recording your own narration, whether you narrate as yourself (first person) or as the unidentified "voice of god" (third person).

Someone you know. We all know people with interesting voices that have a distinct sound. Recruiting a friend or family member with an engaging tone of voice and speaking style can be a great idea for your third person narrator.

AI. Some film contests or school assignments will prohibit the use of AI. Make sure you understand the rules of your contest or assignment before using AI! (SEE **APPENDIX H: SHOULD I USE AI?**) As AI improves, computer-generated voices become almost impossible to distinguish from human voices. This opens a range of options for designing your own narrator with your own wish list of tone and style. As always, search around and read reviews before committing to a specific technology.

Interview audio

A quality documentary film lets us hear the interview subjects not just when they are sitting in front of the camera. When editing, you also will want to overlay audio from your interviews across a variety of other images and footage (see **CHAPTER TWELVE: DON'T FORGET THIS GOOD STUFF!**).

B-roll audio

Don’t forget that you probably have some great sound in your b-roll footage. Remember to consider including the audio elements below (see CHAPTER EIGHT: B-ROLL SOUND for more information).

a) Audio when your interview subject is walking and talking in a key location.

b) Background audio captured while filming video of a key location.

c) Specific audio you want to capture for your sound design.

Audio effects and stock sounds

These should be used sparingly, but occasionally you might want to include pre-recorded sounds or effects to augment the video. For example, you may have b-roll footage of someone shutting a door but your mic wasn’t close enough to capture the sound of the door shutting. You could go online and find a paid or royalty-free sound file and overlay the sound of the door shutting on top of your b-roll video. If you are going to use sound effects or stock sounds, be sure they match well with the images you are showing and don’t draw attention to themselves and distract from what you are trying to convey to the audience.

CHAPTER TWELVE: DON'T FORGET THIS GOOD STUFF!

[28]

At this point, you've pulled your select footage from your b-roll and interviews.

And you have a rough outline of what your story may look like (it's very likely your story outline will change as you start to put things together).

But you still need to acquire a number of valuable sounds and images to make the best film possible. Now is a good time to start thinking about and collecting some of these different elements. Try to get as much as you can, but know that throughout the editing process you will come up with ideas for sounds and images you might want to add.

All of these sounds and images are available online. But just because they are online doesn't mean you can just take them for free. Before proceeding, it's a good idea to read **APPENDIX E: COPYRIGHT AND FAIR USE**

The following elements, when used properly, can make a good film great!

[28] Tanbeen Amin, CC BY-SA 3.0 https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0, via Wikimedia Commons

Archival Footage

Archival footage is any video or still photo that was shot in the past. Some examples of archival footage include:

- Personal photos and home movies from the person(s) your film is about.
- Photos and videos of old news articles and broadcasts about your hero or related places, events, or people.
- General video and photos that help illustrate people, places, and things associated with the setting, characters, feelings, and ideas in the film.

Archival footage is a wonderful way to add visual variety and key background information to your film. Along with b-roll, it also can be essential to creating a well-edited film that doesn't have jarring edits (more on this in Chapter Eleven).

Ken Burns, one of the greatest documentary filmmakers of all time, is known for his use of archival footage. Here are some of his best suggestions for the type of archival footage to put in your film.

Ken Burns Shares 9 Useful Tips for Sourcing Archival Footage - 2024 - MasterClass

Your sources for obtaining archival footage include:

- Your interviewee(s). Don't be afraid to ask (politely) for personal photos and videos from the people your film is about. You can photograph physical photos on the wall or in albums, with the interviewee's permission, if you visit their home or office for the interview. They also may be willing to send you files or links to additional photos or videos. Be sure to request these materials EARLY in the process - they can take time to track down and hand over!
- Public archives. Public entities, such as your local library and the Library of Congress (a favorite source for Ken Burns), offer a deep pool of archival

footage. See Chapter Three: Conducting Research for additional public sources.

- News and history sites.
- Royalty-free online footage. A basic search for “royalty-free images” will generate dozens of options for tracks that you can download for free, usually in exchange for crediting the creator at the end of your film.
- Subscription-based services. A subscription-based music site can vastly improve the quality and quantity of music available to you. As with editing software, you should first check to see if your school or local library has a subscription to one of these services before paying for one.

Graphics

Your aim as a filmmaker is to both entertain and educate your audience. Sometimes statistics and other data can be very important and educational, but numbers tend to be visually boring. Enter graphics. Using design programs or AI to create pie charts, bar graphs, or even more innovative animated graphics to share data in a more visually engaging way.

Animation

Similar to graphics, design programs and AI can enable you to create animation that helps bring your hero’s story to life. If you or someone you know is an artist, there are programs that will help you animate original drawings in the tradition of classic cartoon Disney films or “flip books.” Or you might be able to use AI to build the entire animation from scratch, based on your commands.

Animation can be useful on many fronts. For example, if you are recounting an event that occurred in the past and there is little or no archival footage, animation might be a way to represent what happened. As with all design programs and AI, do a careful search and read reviews before choosing what technology to use.

Animation also can provide visual and audio variety, always a key goal in editing (see **CHAPTER THIRTEEN: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER**).

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER



Like all creative acts, there are a million different ways for you to edit your film.

The way you choose will be dependent on your editing tools, available footage, and personal taste in structure and style.

But young filmmakers should strongly consider following some basic rules. Most professionals will tell you they learned these rules and conventions before they felt free to break or bend them.

Here is a good overview of the editing process, with some key tips:

14 Video Editing Tips for Cutting a Documentary

Editing tips:

1. **Keep your story structure in mind.** CHAPTER NINE asked you to build a basic outline of your film. This outline is a good starting point for your rough cut. You always should feel free to adjust it during the editing process, but it should drive your basic organization of your footage.

2. **Vary your shots**. Minimize extended footage from your interview — a "talking head" is not very interesting visually. Find ways to cut from the person talking to a piece of footage that helps illustrate what they are saying.

3. **Cut on key facts, opinions, or descriptions that you can illustrate.** Use this approach when deciding when to cut away from an interview to vary your shots. For example, if the interviewee mentions a trend or statistic, cut to a graphic that illustrates the statistics. If they mention how much a loved one meant to them, cut to an archival photo or video of that person.

4. **Cover up jump cuts.** Not everything your interviewee says is interesting, especially given that we all speak with awkward pauses and "ums" and "uhs" and "likes." It's a good instinct to edit out unnecessary segments of the conversation, but if you simply cut out, say, five seconds of the interview to skip over one of these boring or confusing moments, you will end up with a jump cut. A jump cut is a cut where the audience can see that you cut words out of an interview. It's usually pretty obvious, as the person's position on the screen will "jump" with the cut, since we naturally move a bit when we talk. You can smooth out jump cuts by inserting b-roll or archival footage between the cuts, keeping the audio of the person talking.

5. **Use music to set the tone.**

   When your audience feels the emotion you are trying to convey in a scene in your film, it's a huge win! Thoughtfully adding music to a scene is a great way to heighten that emotion.

6. **Use transitions.**

   a. Sound transition

   b. Visual transition

      i. Cut on action

      ii. Match cuts

      iii. Dissolve to black. This technique is a useful way to show the passing of time or the transition to a different character or subject.

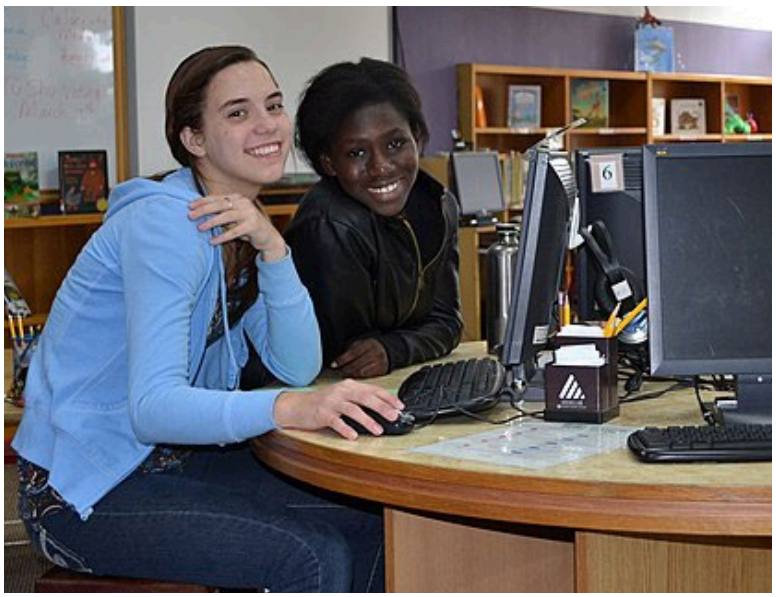
7. **Correct your color.**

   Your interviews, b-roll, archival footage, graphics, animation, and any other content are all created at different locations, under different lighting conditions, often using different devices. Color correction is needed to make these different images appear more seamless. The manual process of balancing the exposure, saturation, and color temperature of your film's every shot is technical, but search for basic guides and programs based on what editing tools you are using.

8. **Add your credits.**

   It's important to credit all people and sources who made your film possible, including yourself! See **APPENDIX F: FILM CREDITS**.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: GETTING FEEDBACK AND REVISING

[29]

As you edit, you evaluate your film and find ways to make it better.

An essential tool is showing each new version of your film to peers, teachers, friends, family, or anyone else who is kind enough to spend the time to sit down and give you feedback. There are many ways to get feedback. It can be as simple as asking someone to tell you three things they liked best about the film and three things they thought could be improved. Or you can get more structured feedback using forms like the ones at the end of this chapter.

Some important things to keep in mind when you're getting feedback:

1. **Get as many perspectives as you can.** Sometimes it can be good to get feedback from more than one person at a time. Showing your film to another group who also is completing this project can be very helpful. Or just

[29] Eggsalad77, CC BY-SA 3.0 https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0, via Wikimedia Commons

gathering a few people to watch and discuss together works too. Or just get a few different people to watch on their own. The more feedback you get, the better. You don't have to use it all (see the last tip on this list), but it never hurts.

2. **It's never personal.** Just think of people's opinions about your film as information. As long as you don't choose frenemies or other people you don't trust to give feedback, you will be getting unique, honest opinions. It's okay to disagree with those opinions, but remember that you are a beginning filmmaker and you are showing this film to a prospective audience member. Stay open. Stay flexible. Don't be defensive. This is feedback about your film, not you as a person or an artist.
3. **Consider using a form** like the ones at the end of this chapter, to document feedback.
4. **Take notes when receiving feedback**. Taking notes shows you care what other people have to say and also helps you remember their suggestions.
5. **Remember: it's your film!** You likely will find some of the feedback immensely valuable. And you likely will disagree with some of the feedback. Ultimately, you are the creative force behind your film. It's up to you to decide what changes you want to make. It's okay to ignore certain feedback, as long as you've thought carefully about it.

ACTIVITY: FILM PEER RESPONSE WORKSHEET

Follow the steps below to give/get feedback on the film. Feel free to build your own worksheets using a computer or pen and paper.

1. Watch the latest version on your own or in a group.
2. Take notes (see NOTES FOR FEEDBACK below).
3. Based on the notes you took, discuss and fill out the Peer Response Rubric (see below).
4. Have a conversation with the filmmaker(s) about what you wrote on this worksheet and rubric. PLEASE BE POLITE BUT HONEST. COMPLIMENT WHAT THEY ARE DOING WELL, BUT ALSO HELP THEM MAKE THIS FILM BETTER!

NOTES FOR FEEDBACK:

What happens in this film? Jot down 3-5 key elements of plot, characters, and message of the film:

What are 3-5 things you like about this documentary? Consider any/all of the following: audio/image quality, editing, music, b-roll, archival footage, titles and translation (if applicable), story structure (does this film have a beginning, middle, and ending?), research/information/context for profile subject and their story, creativity, and/or anything else you notice.

What are 3-5 things you learned from this documentary?

What are 3-5 questions you still have, after watching the film?

What are 3-5 things the filmmaker could improve? Try to give specific suggestions for actions the group could take. Consider any/all of the following: audio/image quality, editing, music, b-roll, archival footage, titles and translation, story structure (does this film have a beginning, middle, and ending?), research/information/context for profile subject and their story, creativity, and/or anything else you notice.

ROUGH CUT FILM RUBRIC

	Effective *The film credibly, convincingly, and compellingly depicts and develops a story about a hero. The audience is moved by the message of the film.*	**Adequate** *The film concretely depicts and knowledgeably develops a story about a hero. The audience is informed by the message of the film.*	**Inadequate** *The film offers a superficial, confusing, uninformed or unconvincing depiction of a story about a hero. The audience is confused or unmoved by the film.*
Overall			
Story	Fully developed story is informative, rich in detail, and engages through compelling characters and their range of experiences and points of view.	Story holds the audience's attention and explains the topic coherently. Characters are developed and multiple perspectives are offered.	Story is either incomplete, incoherent, vague, obvious, superficial, trite, or dull. Characters are largely flat. Points of view are missing.
Info	Film approaches the hero with well-researched information that educates and engages the audience.	Much of the information in the film educates and engages the audience.	More or better information is needed to educate or engage the audience.
Editing	Editorial decisions improve the film.	Editorial decisions support the film.	More editorial decisions need to be made.
Image & Audio	Images are meaningful, enhance the story, and reflect artistic and technical control. Audio signal is clear and suggests foresight, planning, and technical control in all aspects of the recording process.	Images are relevant, convey the story, and reflect technical control. Recorded audio does not detract due to noise, inadequate levels, or lack of quality.	Images fail to convey the story. Lack of illustrative footage, action, or technical control. Recorded audio is noisy. Levels are too high or low. Audio requires additional editing.

Music	Music emotionally moves the audience while emphasizing the film's message. Silence (no music) is used effectively to emphasize key moments.	Music and silence (no music) is used selectively to enhance the emotion and pace of the film.	Music is used indiscriminately throughout the film. May detract from the message or tone of the film.
Creativity	Subject is originally, artistically, and creatively rendered.	Standard documentary tropes are well executed and predictably rendered.	Over-reliance upon generic tropes, failure to execute technical control, or lack of creative risk-taking result in a bland or cliched documentary. Gratuitous use of effects or attempts at creativity detract from the message of the film.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: SUBMITTING TO CONTESTS, SCREENING, AND PUBLISHING



You've finished your film!

Now it's time to let an audience see it! There are a number of ways to do so.

If you've made your film using this workbook, you've created a documentary film that is ideally suited to MY HERO's Woj Youth Reporter contest. For directions on how to enter, use this link.

MY HERO holds other contests, for which your film may be suited. For a full list of contests, use this link.

In addition to the MY HERO contests, your film likely is eligible to be entered in dozens of local and national contests. You may want to do a search for local, national, or international contests or use this link for additional suggestions.

Whether you enter a contest or not, there are a number of ways to get your documentary out in front of the audience. They include:

Hosting a local screening. You should explore your local options for screening the film to a live audience. Talk to your local library, school, and/or community center to see if you can reserve a room and a projector to show your film. You might even want to do a screening at home for friends and family. It's a special feeling to sit in a room with other people and watch their reactions to something you've made.

Posting on Vimeo, Youtube, or other video-hosting platforms. Typically these platforms will allow you to post your short film for free. Make sure you read their guidelines and conditions. Be aware of any restrictions on content the host may have, in terms of language or images that might be deemed explicit. Also be aware that most of these platforms are run for profit. You'll want to know if they will be running ads alongside your film and, if so, whether or not you have the option to turn them off or get a percentage of any ad profits.

Posting on Social media. You may have the option of posting the entire film on social media or posting a link to the platform where you host it. You also can create short teasers/trailers and post on social media to promote your film.

NOTE: Posting your film on a video platform or social media might disqualify it for entry to certain contests, depending on the specific rules of each contest. Some video and social media platforms will give you the option of keeping the link

private or requiring a password if you only want to post the film on the internet but only share it with friends and family.

APPENDIX A: THE EXPOSURE TRIANGLE AND WHITE BALANCE

The Exposure Triangle

Exposure determines how light or dark your image is. With old-school film cameras, this was determined by how much light hit the film. With digital cameras, the exposure is determined by how much light hits the camera's sensor. Three factors determine exposure: aperture, shutter speed, and ISO.

For a complete overview of the exposure triangle and white balance click here.

APPENDIX B: SAMPLE SUGGESTED CAMCORDER SETTINGS

As we've established, each filmmaker has access to different kinds of cameras, from a phone to a more professional camcorder. If you are using a phone, the settings will mostly be automated and this appendix is not for you. If you are fortunate enough to have access to an advanced camera, this appendix may be helpful in locating and adjusting key features and settings in your camera.

For sample camera settings click here.

APPENDIX C: SUGGESTED INTERVIEW SEQUENCE

The goal of an interview is to get the person to share their "story." Usually this means you will get them comfortable enough to share with you one or more experiences they had that helped make them who they are today.

Key steps:

1) Identify your interview subject. If you are just practicing, this can be a classmate, family member, or acquaintance.
2) Contact your subject and request an interview.
3) Do research, if applicable.
4) Sequence your interview questions in a list ahead of time. What's something very few people know about you?
5) Interview your person.

For detailed instructions for the above steps click here.

APPENDIX D: USING ZOOM OR OTHER VIDEO CONFERENCING TO FILM INTERVIEWS

In-person interviews are ideal, but sometimes video conferencing like Zoom is your only option for conducting an interview. For a guide that will walk you through the steps to recording an interview over video conference click here.

APPENDIX E: COPYRIGHT AND FAIR USE

Many of us grow up thinking that anything on the internet is free for us to take. That actually is not the case. Writers, photographers, filmmakers, and all other types of creative people have the right to get paid for their work. Even if they post that work on the internet for you to enjoy, that does not mean you can take or use their work for your own benefit or profit. The right for creators to control their own original work is called copyright.

For more information on copyright and fair use click here.

APPENDIX F: FILM CREDITS

One of the last things you will do when finalizing your film is create the credits at the end of the film. The purpose of credits is to let the audience know who helped make the film and what their role was. Credits should appear at the end of the film and be brief but accurate.

For a guide to creating your credits click here.

APPENDIX G: SAMPLE RELEASE FORMS

Making a documentary film requires paying attention to a lot of important details. A key task you will want to complete before leaving any interview is getting your interview subjects to sign a release, granting you permission to use the recording in your documentary. You may choose from two different forms.

If you know you will be entering your film in a MY HERO contest, use the MY HERO Release.

If you are not sure if you are entering the competition, use the Personal Appearance Release.

APPENDIX H: SHOULD I USE AI?

Artificial Intelligence or “AI,” is a powerful technology that grows stronger and more useful every day. But that doesn’t mean you should use it when making your film. A few reasons not to use AI are:

- You may not be able to enter the film in contests or festivals whose rules prohibit the use of AI.
- AI remains an unreliable tool for research. If you conduct research using AI, you run the risk of getting incomplete or even false information.
- You may end up with a version of your film that lacks the character and originality of a version you could make on your own.

For more information on using AI click here.

APPENDIX I: COMMON CORE ALIGNMENT

This alignment ensures students meet Common Core Standards while engaging in MY HERO's creative, research-driven, and multimedia-focused learning through the documentary film project.

For a complete Common Core alignment document click here.

GLOSSARY

A-C

Archival Footage
Old video clips, photos, or recordings used in documentaries to show past events. These materials are usually taken from libraries, news outlets, or personal collections.

Audio Mixer
A device used to combine, adjust, and monitor sound from multiple microphones and audio sources.

Boom Microphone
A long microphone attached to a pole, used to capture sound from a distance without being in the frame.

B-Roll
Extra footage filmed to complement the main story. For example, if the documentary interviews a chef, B-roll might show the chef cooking in the kitchen.

Camera Body
The main part of the camera, where you attach lenses and other accessories. It houses the image sensor that captures the footage.

Cinematography
The art of capturing images for the film. It includes decisions about lighting, camera angles, and shot composition.

Clapperboard (Slate)
The board used to mark the beginning of a scene, making it easier to sync audio and video during editing.

Close-Up (CU)
A shot that focuses tightly on a person's face or an object to show detail or emotion.

Cutaway
A quick shot that moves away from the main action to show something related. For instance, during an interview, the film might cut away to the person's workspace.

D-M

Documentary
A type of film that tells a story about real-life events, people, or topics. Documentaries aim to inform, entertain, or persuade the audience based on real-world facts.

DSLR/Mirrorless Camera
Types of cameras commonly used for documentaries. They are portable and allow for high-quality video recording.

Dramatization
When real-life events are recreated with actors or staged scenes to help tell the story. It's often used when footage of the actual event isn't available.

Editing
The process of arranging video clips, sound, and music to create the final film. Editors decide what to include or cut out for the best storytelling.

Establishing Shot
A wide shot, often used at the beginning of a scene, that shows the setting or location.

Ethics in Documentary
The responsibility of filmmakers to present real-life events honestly and respect the people featured in the film.

Expository Documentary
A type of documentary that uses narration and facts to explain a topic. This is often the most common format in educational films.

Extreme Close-Up (ECU)
A very tight shot that focuses on a small detail, like an eye or a hand, to emphasize its importance.

Field Recorder
A portable device used to record audio on location. This is often separate from the camera for better sound quality.

Focus
Adjusting the lens so that the subject appears sharp and clear in the image.

Framing
How the camera captures a subject or scene in the shot. Good framing ensures the audience focuses on the most important part of the image.

Frame Rate
The number of frames captured per second (fps). For example, 24 fps creates a cinematic look, while 60 fps is smoother.

Gimbal
A device that holds the camera steady while moving, allowing for smooth motion shots.

Headphones
Essential for monitoring sound while filming, ensuring the audio is clear and free of background noise.

Interviews
Conversations with people who have direct knowledge or experience related to the topic. Interviews are often used to provide insights or personal stories.

Lavalier Microphone (Lapel Mic)
A small microphone clipped to a person's clothing, often used in interviews for clear, direct sound.

LED Light Panel
A portable, energy-efficient light source often used in documentary filmmaking.

Lens
A piece of equipment attached to the camera to focus on subjects. Different lenses (wide-angle, zoom, macro) create unique effects and styles.

Long Shot (LS)
A wide view that shows the full subject and some background, often used to place a person in their environment.

Medium Shot (MS)
A shot that frames a person from the waist up. It's commonly used for interviews or casual conversations.

Montage
A sequence of short clips or images shown quickly, often with music, to create an emotional impact or show a passage of time.

N-Z

Narrative Structure
The way the documentary is organized to tell its story. It could follow a timeline, focus on themes, or explore one person's perspective.

Observational Documentary
A style of filmmaking that shows events as they happen without interference. There's minimal narration or editing to give an authentic feel.

Over-the-Shoulder Shot (OTS)
A shot taken from behind a person, showing their perspective or interaction with another subject.

Pan/Tilt
Moving the camera horizontally (pan) or vertically (tilt) while filming to follow the subject or reveal details.

Reflector
A lightweight board used to bounce light onto the subject, brightening shadows.

Resolution
The quality of the image, measured in pixels (e.g., 1080p, 4K). Higher resolution provides sharper video.

Score
The music composed specifically for the documentary. The score sets the mood and supports the storytelling.

Shotgun Microphone (on-camera mic)
A long, narrow microphone attached to the camera to capture clear sound from a subject directly in front of it.

Softbox
A box-like attachment for lights that diffuses light for a soft, even effect on the subject.

Stock Footage
Pre-recorded video clips that filmmakers can purchase and use in their documentaries. For example, aerial views of cities often come from stock footage.

Subject
The main person, event, or topic the documentary focuses on. For example, the subject of a nature documentary could be tigers in the wild.

Subtitle
Text shown at the bottom of the screen to translate dialogue or clarify information for the audience.

Title Card
Text displayed on the screen, often used to introduce scenes, provide dates, or add important information.

Tracking Shot
A camera shot that follows the subject as it moves, often by using a dolly or handheld stabilizer.

Tripod
A three-legged stand used to stabilize the camera for steady shots.

Voiceover
Narration heard in the film but not spoken by someone on-screen. Voiceovers help explain or add context to what the audience is watching.

Windshield/Windscreen
A cover placed over microphones to reduce wind noise when filming outdoors.

Zoom
Changing the lens to make the subject appear closer (zoom in) or farther away (zoom out).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*Special thanks to the **Scripps Family Impact Fund** for their generous support of The MY HERO Project's Media Arts Education Programs, including this workbook.*

A resounding thanks goes to Esther Wojcicki for overseeing the production of this workbook and for promoting youth journalism and filmmaking through the "Woj" Youth Reporter Award. Her former student – now a journalism and film teacher –Jonah Steinhart is the author, and we are so grateful for his care and craft in designing this workbook.

Many individuals have contributed to MY HERO's Media Arts programs over the years. The students and professional filmmakers who have shared short films in our growing library include: Slater Jewell-Kemker, Gabriel Diamond, Tiffany Shlain, Will Parrinelo, Kitty Richardson, Ryan Coogler, Frank Marshall, Ryan Suffren, Sandi Bachon, Logan Smalley, Kayla Briet, Gabrielle Gorman, Shawn MacGillvray, Trey Carlisle, Holly Carter, Samara Huttman, Cherie Galke, Katherine Laio and more.

We are grateful for the ongoing support from The Seedlings Foundation and USC School of Cinematic Arts — their students, teachers, and alumni have helped develop our media arts resources over the years — and for Founding Film Festival Director Wendy Milette (a USC Film School Graduate). She ran the festival and media arts education programs for the last twenty years. The Film Festival team is now led by Santos Herrera, Rachel Priebe, Kitty Richardson and college interns across the USA. Grateful for the support of The MY HERO Team including Stephanie Cole, Nathan Smith, Stu Pearlman, Betty Bailey, Abigail Richardson and Naomi Gledill.

Leading Media Arts Educators & Advisors have contributed to this project: Frank Guttler, Jerrilyn Jacobs, Clarissa Ngo, Mark Cavanagh, Michelle Bernstein, Laura Nietzer, Abigail Richardson, Naomi Gledhil, Marc Ostric, St. George Thompson, Skip Blumberg, Antonio Mendoza, Cheikh Darou Seck. I am grateful for their participation in our workshops and media arts education programs.

Jeanne Meyers, Co-founder and Director
The MY HERO Project

About The MY HERO Project

In 1995, three mothers, Karen Pritzker, Rita Stern Milch and Jeanne Meyers launched The MY HERO Project online with a vision of creating an oasis of inspiration on the internet. They believed people of all ages, especially youth, could benefit from sharing stories, art, music and short films that shine a light on heroes around the world. Through MY HERO's website, International Film Festival and Media Arts Education Programs, this nonprofit organization celebrates diverse heroes from all walks of life. People of all ages are invited to participate in this global storytelling project that celebrates the best of humanity.

Thanks to donors who support our educational programs and film festival:
Eva and Yoel Haller, Esther Wojcicki, Kathy Eldon and Amy Eldon Turteltaub, Ron Kovic, Renée Edelman, Rita Stern Milch, Karen Pritzker, Barbara and Greg MacGillivray, Sandy Factor, Mark Cavanagh, Judy Anderson, Molly McCabe and more.

We are so grateful to The MacGillivray Freeman Educational Foundation, The Foundation for the Contemporary Family, The Max Factor Family Foundation and The Scripps Family Impact Fund for their support.

To read more about MY HERO, click here.

For more information visit myheroproject.org

The MY HERO Project is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.
Donations from individuals, foundations, and corporations fund our award-winning educational programs and film festival.

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This book was developed with a grant from The Scripps Family Impact Fund to support and further the work of The MY HERO Project.

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