

90 Second Challenge Resource: **Shoot**

There are thousands of different ways to shoot, but they all revolve around three very simple things – light, time and sound.

Light is what creates the colour and detail in any image. The brighter the light, the more control you have over focus. Sunlight has the best 'quality' in the early morning and late evening, and as it comes from one direction, working with it means placing the action in relation to the sun direction - frontal light is 'warm', sidelight creates texture, backlight creates a halo effect. To light a scene artificially requires a lot of different light sources, balanced to produce the best results.

Holding an audience is all about the best use of time - and when you have just 90 seconds to tell your story, time is crucial. Every shot will have a natural length for the action it shows. Every edit has an effect on time, and should increase the value of the content.

Sound carries 30% of the message – it conveys emotion in words and music.

The basic rules apply everywhere - our scenario below features shooting on lightweight DV digital camcorders.

DV shooting uses a semi-professional camera, with both automated and manual functions. By working carefully within the limitations of the system, you'll get the best results. There is no substitute for experience – all filming involves a learning curve – but if you constantly evaluate the project, you'll learn very quickly. Below are some simple guidelines - four on light, two on time and one on sound.

Light

Setting up

The pictures will look best in good light early and late in the day.

Try to set your people so they are side lit, this gives maximum 'modelling' of features and textures. If the sun is strong, you may need a reflector to balance the light level on the lit and unlit side of the face. In close-ups, a sheet of white A4 paper can do this job!

Avoid backlighting, as this creates flare around the subject – and DV flare is rarely 'artistic'.

Focus

The best images have the subject in sharp focus, and the rest of the shot slightly soft.

Depending on the light level, you may be able to achieve this with a short depth of field.

Unless you are experienced in focus pulling, and can work the camera in Manual mode, try to position the camera so the action is not coming towards camera. (Even the autofocus function will have trouble tracking movement.)

If you need your characters to move, maybe set a focus and left the action come through the focal point.

Exposure

The other weakness of DV is its ability to deal with bright light, so try to compose shots

without areas that are unduly bright. Inside, that means avoiding windows, outside it's worth trying to avoid shooting the sky – unless it's a lovely blue.

If you do, then set the exposure so there is detail in the sky.

Always try to work on a constant exposure setting – and rehearse the shot if you need to. If you need to work in Autoexposure mode, do be aware that anything very light or very dark moving through frame will cause the exposure to change briefly, and you will see it re-setting. So, if that's an issue, it's best to operate on manual, rehearse the shot and watch the exposure changes. So long as they are within the range of the camera, it will be adjustable in post-production.

White Balance

To the camera, daylight and artificial light are very different, so you should change the setting on the camera whenever you move from one to the other. Either there will be a switch, or you will need to set the 'white balance', which provides a reference for the different lighting. Simply zoom in to something white that has light falling on it - a Tee-shirt will do - until it fills the frame, then press the 'white balance' button.

You need to do this every time you change from sunlight to a different light source, or back again.

Time

Getting the timing of each shot right is easier if you have planned for the edit. You should always have a script, whether it's a scribbled outline of shots and words, or a lavish storyboard. It helps everyone on the teamwork to the same end, and means you won't end up hacking lumps out of your work just to get it to the right duration!

Shooting Set Ups

If you are directing the action, whether from actors or a presenter, then you have control over the quality. To get the timing right, it's good practice to rehearse moves and words, and do multiple 'takes' until you get what you want.

Whenever you ask for another take, everyone on the team must know what's different this time around. And beware that after a number of takes, the performance may start getting worse! Someone from the team should record the strengths and weaknesses of each take, as you may combine elements from each in the edit.

Shooting 'Actuality'

Actuality filming follows the action, capturing events as they happen naturally.

Ideally, the camera should be running when the 'event' happens, so it is worth carrying the camera at all times, and using it as often as possible. You may be able to get people to do things again, but that may look 'staged'.

In this mode, the length of each shot is defined in the edit.

Will you shoot hand-held, or from a tripod?

The most important consideration is how steady the camera is – DV cameras are light enough to be quite easy to hold steady. If you are shooting at the end of the zoom, then a tripod or other support is important to get steady shots, and absolutely vital if you are panning with action. The tripod head must be level - so set it using the bubble.

Remember you can rest the camera on anything – a shelf, car door or a bean-bag, Just try not to move up off the support during the shot, as it will jerk.

Keep the camera running if you are moving fast during action, and it may be best to shoot action sequences on autofocus.

- Any event will take longer than you have airtime, so it should be possible to shoot a sequence without any repetition or "direction". The most important thing is to have the

camera running before any action starts, and to try to ensure that the coverage is complete.

- Decide on the focus of the action, especially if it will be hard to get a 'pick-up' shot.
- Either during the event, or immediately afterwards, shoot faces of people reacting to the event. This will be used in between shots taken on the run, and must appear to be happening simultaneously to the action.
- If it is not possible to record these shots as the event happens, then try to ensure you shoot them afterwards to complete the coverage, even if this means "directing" action or conversation. But be aware that throughout, your contributors will be changing from how they looked in the master take.
- Also, think about what you need to set up the event. This includes scenics and weather - rain/sun/sunsets etc.

Sound

You may enhance your soundtrack with music, extra sound effects, or narration, but unless you're making an artistic point, it will look pretty strange if there's no location sound at all.

You **MUST** be able to hear what is going on. Always monitor sound through headphones, and ensure the level is high enough that you are hearing only through the headphones, not directly from the speaker.

Sound will always be better on a gun microphone than on a radio microphone, but if you are far from the speech, then a radio is essential. Radio mics will mean you can hear the words, even of people that aren't in shot. The camera microphone will only cover the action in front of camera.

Avoid using the original camera microphone unless it's absolutely impossible.

Instead, use a professional gun mic, in a rubber suspension system, and the windshield. Always try to record a background track for each set up, to help in the edit.