

# THIMUN

# QATAR

# FILM

# FESTIVAL

# HANDBOOK



NORTHWESTERN  
UNIVERSITY  
IN QATAR



Adapted From The Book:  
*WITNESS: Video for Change:*  
*A Guide for Advocacy and Activism*

MAKE A DIFFERENCE.....

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE ABOUT  
USING VIDEO TO SUPPORT YOUR ADVOCACY WORK,  
SEE WITNESS' INTERACTIVE PLANNING TOOLKIT AT  
[VIDEOPLAN.WITNESS.ORG](http://VIDEOPLAN.WITNESS.ORG)

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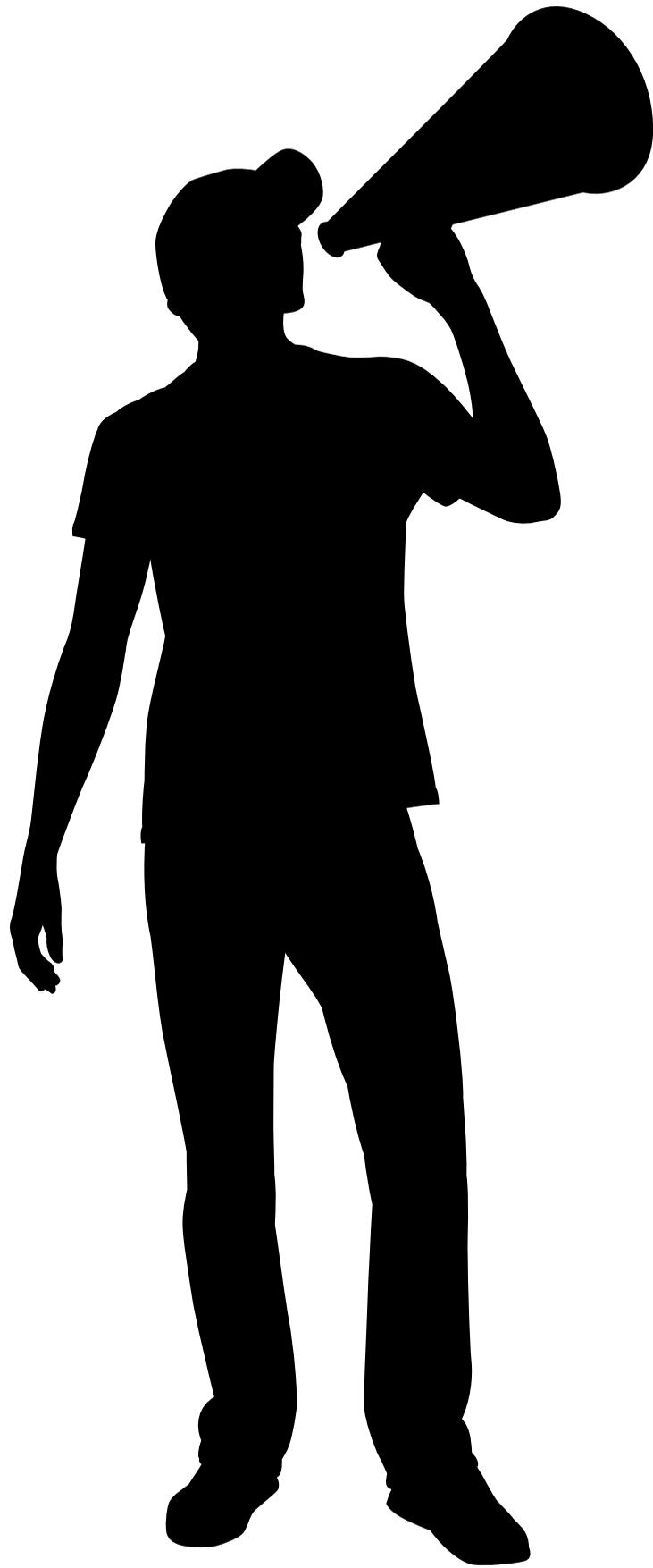
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This handbook is possible due to the cooperation and efforts of a large community.

Thank you to the Witness organization for their help in supporting this handbook and our Film Festival. Specifically we would like to thank Chris Michael for helping us in the construction of the handbook. We are thankful to Witness for granting us permission to use their resource *WITNESS: Video for Change: A Guide for Advocacy and Activism*.

Extracts from this resource make up the vast majority of information contained in this handbook. If you would like the full version, please note that Video for Change is available for free in seven languages at <http://www.witness.org/training/video-for-change>. If you are interested in learning more about using video to support your advocacy work and to create change, see WITNESS' interactive Video Advocacy Planning Toolkit at [VideoPlan.witness.org](http://VideoPlan.witness.org)

We would also like to thank Northwestern University in Qatar for their financial support and being our knowledge partners. Emily Wilson and the Community Outreach department are in large part responsible for making the festival possible. Northwestern's outstanding support of high school students is a great example of a community minded organization who is dedicated to making a difference.

We trust that you will find this handbook helpful and we look forward to seeing your films in the THIMUN-Northwestern Film Festival.

Cameron Janzen  
Head of THIMUN Qatar Regional Office



## INTRODUCTION

### MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the THIMUN Qatar Film Festival is to encourage a better understanding of and appreciation for cinematic arts, to help to put a human face on the contemporary issues facing the world today, to support learning in Model United Nations programs by encouraging students to become advocates on global issues and to celebrate the power of the collaborative human spirit and intellect to prevail. THIMUN Qatar aims to provide venues and distribution support for high school students to showcase their work to a wider audience. The THIMUN Qatar Film Festival also strives to provide support to students by featuring workshops with industry professionals offering educational opportunities for both filmmakers and film enthusiasts to encourage the art and appreciation of film.

### MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Model United Nations programs are designed to simulate the working of the United Nations. Conferences are designed to recreate the work done at the United Nations. Students have the responsibility of representing their assigned country's political views on a variety of issues. The conference experience allows students to discover the various political bodies and mechanisms of the United Nations. They also learn the value of informal meetings and the importance of relationships in order to get things done.

MUN conferences tend to focus on the political and policy work of the United Nations. However, the other aspect of the United Nations is the implementation of the policies of the United Nations; its humanitarian work. Every day United Nations programs and their partners provide education, food, shelter, and protection to millions of people. The THIMUN Qatar Film Festival is designed to encourage students to get involved in this other key aspect of the United Nations. Students who participate in the THIMUN Film Festival will no longer be talking abstract policy points but become direct advocates for issues. MUN programs are only successful if they help facilitate meaningful changes in our actions and choices. As MUN directors, we hope our students will do more than just talk about the issues but to get involved and help make a difference.

## WITNESS

The THIMUN Qatar Film Festival training manual would not have been possible without the support of the Witness organization. This handbook is an adaptation of their training handbook *Video for Change: A Guide for Advocacy and Activism*. Their generous support and encouragement is the main reason this handbook can be presented. If you are interested in downloading the original version of the guide please go to <http://www.witness.org/training/resources>

## WHY FILM?

Film has several strengths that make it worth the considerable time, energy and resources required to integrate it into Model United Nations and advocacy work. Video could elicit powerful emotional impact, connecting viewers to personal stories. It can illustrate stark visual contrasts and provide direct visual evidence of abuses. It can be a vehicle for building coalitions with other groups working on an issue. It can reach a wide range of people since it does not require literacy to convey information. It can help counter stereotypes and assist you in reaching new, different and multiple audiences. At the same time a video is only as powerful as its ability to touch the people that watch it, to connect them to the experience of the people portrayed in the film, and to motivate them to get involved to make a difference.

So, to begin with, when we talk about “video advocacy,” what do we mean? “Video advocacy” is the process of integrating video into an advocacy effort to achieve heightened visibility or impact in your campaign. Advocacy” is the process of working for a particular position, result or solution. For example, in an environmental context, you might advocate to prevent the construction of a sewage treatment plant in a poor neighborhood. In a human or civil rights context, you advocate to stop migrant workers from being denied entrance into public places. In a community context, a group may mobilize support for the construction of a new school. All these efforts represent different kinds of advocacy, and each advocacy campaign requires its own analysis of several important factors to lay the groundwork for success. For example, who is in the best position to help you get what you are looking for? How can you be most influential with that audience? What arguments, stories or evidence should you present? At what time and in what place?

## INTEGRATING VIDEO

When considering whether or how to integrate video into your advocacy work, the process can be broken down into five key steps:

### STEP 1: DEFINE YOUR GOALS AND ISSUE

The first question to ask, then, when thinking about a video advocacy strategy is: What problem are we trying to resolve, and what solutions will we be proposing? In most cases, there will be national as well as international laws, treaties and conventions that prohibit the abuses you have identified, and the focus of your campaign will be on documenting and highlighting the violations taking place and pressuring the responsible parties to take action to stop the abuse. In other instances, the solution to your problem may not lie in the legal system but in community solidarity or collective action, or in persuading particular individuals that it is in their best interests to behave or act in a different way. It is in the process of bringing the human experience of a situation or problem to life, and in presenting it powerfully to key audiences, that video can play an important role. Film Festival guidelines require that your film be issue based. This simply means that the film must tackle something that is controversial or problematic. There needs to be a clear and identifiable problem/issue in the film. However, the film does not need to focus only on the negative aspect of the issue (what is not being done). Great films can be produced that show solutions or people who are working at discovering solutions to the issue. All films should directly or indirectly offer a challenge to the viewer about the issue(s) being presented.

### STEP 2: TALK TO OTHER PEOPLE

Talk to other people who have worked on the issue you want to tackle. What has worked, what hasn't, and why? It is very important to get a sense of the “landscape” surrounding the issue you want to address. Very few successful advocacy campaigns occur in isolation—many individuals and organizations, often from different parts of the world, play a role in influencing the course of events. Wherever possible, learn from the work that other advocates are doing and find ways to reinforce each other with the video material you produce.

### STEP 3: ANALYZE YOUR OWN STYLE AND STRENGTHS

It is important to be as objective and clear-sighted as possible in analyzing your style and strengths. It is very important at this stage of your thinking to assess where your strengths lie. Questions like: Are we a formally organized NGO or a people's movement for change? Do our strengths lie in our access to grassroots communities that can be mobilized, or do we have credibility and access to the “halls of power”? Do we use a litigation based approach, a popular protest strategy, a lobbying strategy, or some combination? Do we work best in coalitions or independently? Who are our key allies?

### STEP 4: DEFINE YOUR AUDIENCE

Define your audience and think through how to communicate your message to them. One of the basic premises of communications strategy is that you need to have a clear, concise message, and you have to identify your intended audience before you can craft the message. Having a clearly defined audience makes it easier to shoot and construct a compelling argument using video. But remember that some of the most powerful video advocacy campaigns successfully speak to multiple audiences at once, or in a sequence using a variety of materials for different settings.

So, how to define your audience? You must decide which audience has the most influence on the change you seek, and whether that audience is accessible to you, or whether you will first need to seek alliances or work with an intermediate audience. Once you have identified your audience you need to be sure you know what you want them to do, and how they will be convinced to join the effort. If there is a direct appeal to get involved, decide who should encourage them to take action. Recognize what will be appealing, persuasive or intriguing to them—in terms of factual information conveyed, the people interviewed or featured, and experts you may include for commentary. You also need to understand who you'll alienate and repel as you make these choices.

### STEP 5: LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT TO DETERMINE PLANNING

Making a documentary-length film is an immense undertaking in terms of time and financial resources, even though the cost of production has been reduced by the development of digital video and laptop editing technology. Organizations and individuals new to making film are taking on the task of learning about filmmaking as well as the task of furthering their knowledge of the issues they choose to cover. It is strongly advised that groups or teams are formed rather than attempt to make a film as an individual.



## SAFETY AND SECURITY

*Original chapter edited by Sam Gregory,*

*Gillian Caldwell, Ronit Avni and Thomas Harding*

<http://www.witness.org/training/video-for-change>

### INTRODUCTION

*"I think being a human rights advocate goes with the reality that you may offend others. I always think that whatever I can attain in the field, no matter how little, would be of great help. This optimism keeps me going. I always share this kind of perception and optimism with those I work with.*

*By sharing a common vision, we draw strength, inspiration, and courage. The longer we live, we always say, the more we can accomplish. We become stronger when we think as a single group, not as separate individuals."*

Joey Lozano, a veteran WITNESS partner, member of its Board of Directors and Trainer.

This chapter is going to cover the most important aspects of making your documentary. Keep in mind as you read that the laws, rules, and cultural practices of your home country and school have greater authority than anything written in this section. This chapter is intended to be a starting point for discussions and to provide comparative examples that can help you make the best choices for your own circumstances. It provides some common sense practical safety measures. While you may not be able to eliminate risks, you can anticipate and minimize them.

## PREPARATION

Preparation is crucial for advocacy work and to getting good footage, as well as to staying safe and ensuring the safety of those you film. Perhaps the most important factor to consider is whether you and your team will be going into an area to film, or whether you will be filming within your own community. This distinction will affect many of the safety and security decisions you make. While going into an area may present immediate and critical dangers to you and your team, ultimately, you most probably can leave the area and resume your life. Filming within your own community, however, may create risks for you that last for months, sometimes years. Both situations may have long-term impact on community members—those who chose to participate, and even those who have nothing to do with your video project.

### KNOWING YOURSELF AND YOUR ORGANIZATION

Before you examine risks and how to avoid them, ask some key questions of yourself and your school.

How much risk are you and your school willing to take, and have you really considered why you are doing it? It is vital to know your own limits, and assess what you are willing—and not willing—to risk. Who else could be affected by your actions? What about your family, friends, or school community? What about the community where you will be filming? What about the possibility of short term or long-term damage to a cause you are fighting for?

Be very clear about your objective, what you wish to achieve, and what you may risk or lose in the process, using the “Risk Assessment Checklist”. Discuss in detail within your family and school what the boundaries are and how each member will fit into the picture. Decide what the proper safety protocols are before you start filming. Anand Patwardhan has been making political documentaries in India for nearly thirty years. He warns: “Never begin to “enjoy” danger. Danger is sometimes a necessity imposed by circumstance; it is certainly not something worth seeking out for its own sake. There is no shame in wanting to [be safe]”.

### RISK ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST KEY QUESTION:

Do you even need to use video at all? Is video the best strategy? Consider using other forms of media: print, still photos, or audio only. Video can present dangers that may not be worth the risks. Preparation for ANY filming should include a risk assessment. This develops an initial awareness of likely hazards and the precautionary measures needed to avoid or reduce them.

Likely hazards can include:

- Threats or violence against filmmakers or people filmed, either during filming or at a later date
- Being discovered while filming without official permission
- Detention/arrest/kidnap of people filming, being filmed, or people transporting footage
- Failure of security arrangements for information and material during filming and at later point
- Inadequate communication around consent and safety issues of those filmed

Precautionary measures:

- Planning and research
- Suitable equipment
- Clear protocols for consent
- Personal security
- Information security
- Competent people
- Communication arrangements—before, during, after filming
- Emergency arrangements for yourself and people filmed—during and after
- Clear exit strategy

### KNOWING THE SITUATION

There are always many sides to a conflict. Know the terrain, and think carefully about the situation in which the filming will take place. If you are not from the community where you are filming, getting as much information about the players, the relationships, and conflicts is key. Sensitize yourself to complicated relationships within a community, some of which may seem counterintuitive. Ronit Avni, who works with Palestinian and Israeli peace workers and filmmakers, argues that it is vital to view any filming situation from the vantage point of everyone in the community and to pay special attention to implicit assumptions. When filming in Palestine, he tries to view the situation as an Israel soldier in order to reduce his own personal risk: “Equipment could be misunderstood as weapons in places where suicide bombers operate. Understand the place and time you are working in. For example, a Palestinian-rights activist should be cautious strapping hidden camera equipment to any part of their body, as it could be misconstrued as a bomb”. Sam Gregory of WITNESS recommends doing a “worst-case analysis” before embarking on any potentially dangerous project. He suggests a systematic approach to identifying what could happen: “You assume the impact if your worst enemy saw this material. Determine the boundaries of what can and cannot be said. It’s important not to scare-monger, but it’s crucial to be aware of all potential risks.”

You need to understand the law and the authorities of the region you are filming in, as well as the general attitude towards journalists or human rights advocates. What are the regulations concerning photographic and video equipment? What is illegal to film? Are journalists respected or are they a target for violence and harassment? How free is the press? What risks do film documenters or social justice campaigners face?

### COVERT OR UNDERCOVER FILMING

Going undercover involves taking on a false or alternate identity and essentially deceiving the people you film and/or others around you, with the goal of extracting evidence or information. It can have very serious consequences. Choosing to go undercover requires making a very careful assessment and should only be undertaken by

trained professional. There are also serious legal risks for filming someone or something without consent or permission. Therefore, students involved in the THIMUN Qatar Film festival are not permitted to engage in covert film and any film deemed to have engaged in this action will not be distributed and will be disqualified from any THIMUN Qatar competition.

### SURPRISE AND AMBUSH INTERVIEWS

You may encounter times when the person you seek to interview is not accessible. Some filmmakers feel they have to resort to surprise or ambush interviews. A surprise interview is if the subject is a public figure, and you use one of their public appearances as a platform to conduct a surprise interview. For example, a politician may appear at a school opening and you are able to get close enough and ask a question or two. An “ambush” interview is when the subject is not in a public setting and is unaware that you are going to conduct an interview. Michael Moore’s films use the ambush tactic repeatedly in his documentary films. The interview occurs while the subject is leaving their office, home or at the airport, or the street. In both types of interviews you will probably not get many answers to your questions. Rarely do hostile interview subjects stop and talk to you if they have already declined an interview in their office. The main reason filmmakers engage in these interviews is to create a visual imagery that clearly says “This person refused to talk to us, even though we tried!” This objective can be achieved by a simple narration or B shot or recordings of the person who declined the interview. As this type of interview is highly controversial and intrusive, surprise and ambush interviews are not permitted in films submitted to THIMUN Qatar.

### REMEMBERING YOUR MISSION

Only film when necessary. As Simon Taylor, of Global Witness says: Don’t document everything. You can waste a lot of time. Know what you need. The key lesson is to understand what is worth documenting and what to do with it”. Don’t take unnecessary risks. For example, in certain countries simply filming military personnel or even government buildings can be against the law. Why jeopardize a mission with footage that is not relevant or useful?

## PROTECTING THE PEOPLE YOU FILM

Working in partnership with your subjects to ensure their security is the most important consideration in any kind of advocacy documentary.

### CONSENT

You must ensure, first and foremost, that the subject understands fully what you are doing and how you plan on using the material. Are they comfortable being associated with the issue, or any issue that may appear on the raw tapes and in the final edited version? It is a good idea to do a “worst-case analysis” in which you discuss the implications of the filmed material being seen by a range of people.

### INFORMED CONSENT

Informed consent is critical to responsible video documentation, especially for people who will remain in positions of vulnerability. The key issue in most human rights-related situations is that informed consent protects not only the person filming—i.e. that you have the legal releases to protect yourself against future legal action—but the person filmed, particularly in cases where this person has already been victimized. Informed consent is not a matter of forms and paperwork, but a question of whether someone filmed truly understands the potential impact on them, and consents to the filming and distribution with this knowledge.

### OBSCURING AND CONCEALING IDENTITY

Some people may agree to be filmed, but ask that you conceal their identity or location. The identity of people on film can be deduced from a number of indicators:

- Their face is visible
- Their name is provided in the dialogue or on-screen
- Their clothing is distinctive
- Their voice is recognizable
- They refer to places, locations, or people who are identifiable and specific
- They are seen in the company of people who can be identified

### POSSIBLE QUESTIONS FOR ON-CAMERA CONSENT

On-camera consent can include the answers to the following questions:

*See Appendixes III and IV for sample personal release forms.*

1. Please state your name and the date of this interview.
2. Do you understand what we are doing? Please, in your own words, explain.
3. Do you consent to your interview being included in this project, including video and (state various forms of media you may use, including print, photos and Internet)?
4. Do you know who may see the final video?
5. Are there any restrictions to using the information you provide us with or video itself that we need to be aware of?
6. Are you aware you can stop the filming process at any time, in order to ask questions or have a time-out?

There are usually two points at which you can hide the identity of someone who you have filmed—when you are filming, and during the editing process. In general you have more options if you shoot in the field, and then alter it in the editing room. However, security should always be your paramount concern.

If the threat of viewing or confiscation of original material is present—either in transit or from an archived location—is high, it is a good idea to conceal identity during the filming process, and it may be unwise to have subjects identify themselves on camera. Some subjects may also specifically request that you obscure their identity during the shoot, and not wait till the editing stage.

To do this you can:

- Ask the person not to mention specific names or places
- Ask them not to wear distinctive clothes
- Use strong back lighting to turn the person’s image into silhouette, with them either facing the camera or in profile

- Film out of focus so that the person’s face cannot be recognized
- Not light the person’s face in a scene
- Film their hands or other part of their body rather than their face
- Film from behind them so that their face is not visible, or film them in profile.
- Film them with a cap shading their eyes: eyes are the most recognizable part of someone’s face

Be conscious of asking sensitive questions. Offer to stop the camera at any time, and to replay interviews once you finish filming to give vulnerable subjects a chance to review the material.

In the editing process there are other alternatives.

These include:

- Obscuring faces in the editing process. This can be achieved either by a digitized effect over the whole face or other identifying marks, or by placing a digital bar over the eyes only.
- Obscuring identifying marks in the foreground, background or on the interviewee, e.g. a logo on a shirt.
- Using sound edits to remove names and place locators.
- Distorting voices to make them less identifiable.
- Using only an audio track.
- Not showing faces or identifying characteristics, but using other shots of hands or of a non-identifiable interview location (sometimes with the interviewee seen in extreme long shot), alongside the audio track of the interviewee.

### CONDUCTING A HOSTILE INTERVIEW

In some cases you may be filming interviewees who are hostile to you, your project or your community. In these cases you should take extra care with:

#### Timing

- Will the rest of your filming be compromised after you request this interview? (Perhaps you need to do this interview last.)
- Could your interview interfere with other decisions affecting the community?

### Language and respect

- What language do I need to use when conducting this interview?
- How can I show respect for the subject even if we may disagree on a particular topic?
- I am able/willing to listen to alternative evidence and viewpoints even if it may contradict my personal opinion or other evidence gathered?

### Confidentiality for other interviewees

- Can you ensure you will not reveal information about other interviewees to your hostile subject?
- Will you be under surveillance after you request/conduct this interview, and might you endanger others?

### Legal consents

- Ensuring you have the proper, signed release from your subject is key.
- Ensure that you can stand behind the description of your project that you give to the interviewee. Remember they may be taping the interview so that they have a record of it too.

Securing the interview itself could well be your first problem. There may be limited access to the subject, or you may have to go through others—even public relations departments—to request the interview. You may be faced with delays and silence.

Once you have access to the interview subject, you need to consider:

- Signing the legal release/consent form before you begin the interview.
- Prioritizing your interview questions—start with easy questions, but don’t wait too long for the tough ones, because the interview could end at any time.

There is essentially one key question in any interview—the one you want the subject to answer. Do not be afraid of rephrasing your question and asking it again if you feel their answer is not complete. Do not be afraid of repeating it, again and again.

## IMPACT OF BROADCAST DISTRIBUTION ON PEOPLE FILMED

As Eric Rosenthal, who documents human rights abuses of people in psychiatric institutions around the world, puts it: “Victims of human rights abuses are in danger. Often, whomever did it to them the first time—once you release an image of that victim—can do it a second time.” Avoid using any images if there is a fear of reprisals on the subjects. Beyond safety, other dangers can seriously affect subjects long after images have been used. Eric Rosenthal notes: “Some subjects fear social stigma once the public has seen them in compromising and dehumanized situations, such as being institutionalized.” For example, women in Kosovo who have been institutionalized may be disowned by their families, simply for the shame they cause the family for being placed in an institution.

A similar danger exists with using sensational or graphic images—you may induce a fatigued reaction of impotence from the viewer, or the need to shock may have a human cost on the person filmed. You need to evaluate whether this kind of imagery is helpful or harmful, and you have to weigh up and consult with the survivor or victim on the potential damage. However, Eric Rosenthal also says you need to evaluate who is doing the criticizing: “Most individuals with disabilities detained in institutions want their photographs used. It is much more often the mental health authorities who object to our use of photos, and their use of “privacy” arguments are usually a cover for their desire to cover up abuses at their facility”.

It is important to remember decisions are not always clearly right or wrong, but your choices always send out messages that affect people’s lives and reputations in concrete ways.

## TOP TWELVE TIPS FOR SECURITY

1. Determine the uniqueness of your story. Has your story already been told by national or local media. The less unique your story the less risk you should assume in telling the story.
2. Be clear about what information you are looking for before you start to film. Poor planning equals poor personal security.
3. Take seriously your own safety and that of the people working with you including your family and school. Accept the security recommendations of your teachers, parents and school.
4. You are not Superman, out to liberate people. Recognize that you are a mortal, with your own limitations. When you do that, the art of being safe becomes a normal part of planning.
5. Understand the risks and rights that you have within your country and community. If you are an ex-patriot, understand that the rights you may enjoy in your own country may not be present in the country you are currently residing in.
6. In many countries you have the right to shoot on public property, but know the local and national laws. Know where public property stops and private property starts. Avoid shooting any military or security buildings or persons in any country.
7. Be culturally sensitive.
8. Always get informed consent.
9. Avoid being an additional burden on the people your film is supposed to be helping. Take their safety and needs into account as much as your own.
10. Be discreet. Don’t say anything that would compromise your mission or your support community. Be aware that film is a public media and can be viewed and examined by anyone now and in the future and therefore, act accordingly.
11. Legitimize yourself and your mission. Carry a letter of introduction and permission from your school which states the purpose of your film. If issued, always carry your film permit when out capturing footage.
12. Don’t go anywhere alone, ever.



## STORYTELLING FOR ADVOCACY: CONCEPTUALIZATION AND PREPRODUCTION

*Original chapter By Katerina Cizek*

*<http://www.witness.org/training/video-for-change>*

### THE IMPORTANCE OF STORY

Here, we discuss how to develop your most powerful tool: the story. We also emphasize the importance of characters, point of view, and genre, and then address the need to clearly define your audience.

Filmmaking is the art of weaving together a good story. A good story grips our imagination and takes us on a journey of discovery, through emotions, places, facts, and realities. A good story makes us care. It opens us to new ideas and challenges our ways of understanding the world. A good story gives structure and meaning to a film.

Finding the right story is an essential part of the whole filmmaking process. Peter Wintonick, a Canadian filmmaker, is currently working on a film about storytelling, and says: "I believe we are genetically wired, psychologically wired, from the time we are children, when we are sung or read bedtime stories, to look for completion. We need to attach stories to personalities, to humans. Especially during editing, both emotion and logic flow back into the construction of a story. The same material can be edited 1,000 different ways". "In any story, you want to create drama so that people care," says Amy Bank, who produces for Nicaraguan television, "portray the messy things that are not neatly tied up. Storytelling needs doubt. Doubts are what you overcome. Conflict makes a good story, people overcoming problems makes a good story, when the hero overcomes obstacles, comes out triumphant. Not that every ending needs to be happy, but audiences want to see a transformation in the protagonist."

## STORYTELLING FOR ADVOCACY

What is storytelling for advocacy? What makes storytelling different when you are doing it to campaign for a particular social, legal, cultural, political, or economic change? The key difference is that in advocacy, storytelling is at the service of your goal for change and your message, rather than just the story itself or the ideas of the filmmaker. Advocacy storytelling is about effectively communicating this message to the audience and encouraging them to act. A good story is not simply making films for entertainment, which tends to create a passive response; entertainment for entertainment's sake. But when you are using video for advocacy, you want to move your audience to action. A good advocacy filmmaker turns things over to the audience and communicates how you want them to act.

Often, advocacy videos will end with a direct request to viewers from a character or subject in your video, or with an individual within the video framing an analysis of why a situation is occurring and what an audience can do about it. At other times, a video will reference opportunities to learn more and further material available for offline organizing at screenings, or distributed via the Internet. Always make your request concrete and specific, and offer an option, not just a complaint, about the status quo.

## BEGINNING, MIDDLE, AND END

In the conventional, Western storytelling tradition of North America and Western Europe—and particularly Hollywood—the most standard way to construct a film story is in three acts.

- **Beginning:** Set up your story (who? what? where?), and make the audience curious. In an analytical film or advocacy-driven film you may set the stage for your argument or pose a question.
- **Middle:** Tell the bulk of the story; go through the arguments or evidence. Engage your viewers with a reason to care and to act.
- **End:** Conclude it, or “hand it off” to the audience

Fernanda Rossi, a story consultant known as the Doc Doctor, suggests that another way to analyze story structure is in terms of whether a film is conflict- or non-conflict-driven. In a conflict-driven film, two opposing forces create drama and move the action forward through a dramatic curve. The

conflict may not necessarily be actual physical conflict on screen. It may be a conflict of interests, of personality or of ideas. These films are also often character-driven. A conflict-driven model is not necessarily dependent on the audience's interest in your particular subject/ theme because it creates natural curiosity. Conflict-driven films begin with a first exposition of conflict between two opposing forces or motivations that can both be observed, and conflict escalates during the film. During the film there should be smaller conflicts and tensions, combining to help build a sense of mounting urgency. In a human rights film, these conflicts could be facets of the everyday relationship between someone who is oppressed and the oppressive force—for example, the struggles of an ordinary man to feed his family, educate his children, secure adequate housing, etc. Ordering is critical to reaching a climax and resolution. This kind of dramatic curve is often easier to create when the film is centered on an event. The non-conflict or narrative model is based on logical cause and effect, or on a series of self-contained events or segments that relate to different themes in your film. Here you are more dependent on how interested the audience is in the issue, and on the chronology you employ.

## ROLE OF CHARACTERS

Real people are what people who see your film will care about—whether they agree with your analysis or not. These “characters” (the term often used in documentary filmmaking) will give audiences someone to hang on to in your story. “The message in your video comes from the characters, with whom one hopes to be working in solidarity,” says Peter Wintonick. Liz Miller, a political filmmaker and teacher, also believes that Character-based stories have the most impact. Audiences want to know what happens to them. They want to see transformation. You can have compassion and empathy for characters that go through a process of change in your film.

In a documentary, we often meet characters through interviews. Liz suggests that during editing (and filming) it is a good idea to look for material that isn't overly distanced. Not just talking heads, or characters talking. Look for moments when characters aren't just describing themselves, but being themselves. How do they interact with other people? What do they say versus what they show?

Film maker Sam Gregory comments that a lot of film advocacy work is testimony based, “where the

subjects are speaking to someone and there is real intent in that communication. They are very focused on communicating what has happened to them and what they are doing about it. It's the power of that intent that can be very moving and very strong”.

Don Edkins, whose films focuses on HIV/AIDS in South Africa, emphasizes the power of relationships in storytelling. He describes a film that looks at a relationship between people—rather than the “facts and figures”—around a story of HIV/AIDS.

## ACTIVITY

This exercise challenges you to think about the key elements and people in a story, and consider how these would translate if you were to document the story using video. The exercise is best done in a small group. Start by picking a recent newspaper article or editorial that relates to the central theme of your advocacy work.

1. Highlight the key sentences that explain the story. What are the key elements of this story? Often you will find that in a newspaper article the title and first three paragraphs give a synopsis of the story, and then the first sentence of each paragraph following and the final paragraph fill it out and summarize the article. If you use an editorial you will also see here the point of view, argument and conclusion of the writers.
2. Go through the article and highlight the names of the people featured—these are your potential “characters.” In Exercise 3.2 we will look at how to pick central characters if you have many people involved in the issue.
3. Go through the article and highlight in a different color the key images that are described—these could be activities, locations, or inanimate objects.
4. Think through some of the challenges you will face in taking this story from print to screen. Take the opportunity in a group to brainstorm together. It will be helpful to have someone facilitate the conversation, and pick some of the following questions to discuss:
  - a. Where is the story taking place? Is this somewhere you can film or would you need to find other ways to show/tell the story without going to this place?
  - b. Who are the people in the article? Are they people you could film?

- c. How could you film the images you've identified? If they are inaccessible, what are your alternatives?
  - d. How much is taking place in the present day? How much in the past? How will this affect the way you tell the story?
  - e. What might you be able to express through writing that would be difficult to show in a movie? And vice-versa?
  - f. Does the story have a beginning, middle, and end? Is it self contained or open-ended?
  - g. In an editorial, what is the argument of the editorial—what is it asking for or arguing for? How could you express this in video?
  - h. How would you tell this story if it had happened 25 years ago?
  - i. How would you find a way to tell this story if you had no money? No ability to interview anyone?
5. If you like, choose one potential interviewee from the story, and draft a set of questions to ask them. Role-play the interview with a colleague.

## WHO TELLS THE STORY AND HOW: POINT OF VIEW, VOICE, AND NARRATIVE FORM

Point of view describes the perspective from which a video story is being told. For example, is it told through the perspective of the lead character, or an objective journalist, or the sister of a murdered opposition leader? Point of view is not just about the voice we hear, it is about the entire way a film is framed. Through whose eyes do we understand the events? Visually, from what vantage point do we see action unfold?

One key decision on point of view is whether to use narration (voiceover) or not. If you are going to use narration, who will be the narrator and what will be the tone of the narration? “People underestimate how much the choice of the narrator influences how people react consciously and subconsciously to a film,” says Sam Gregory. If you decide to use a narrator, whom will you choose? Will you choose a subject in the film, the filmmaker, someone with a good voice, or perhaps a celebrity? A man or a woman? Young or old? A person with a regional accent or a standardized, “official” accent? Do they sound like a professional or like a “regular” person? Is it the filmmaker herself speaking? Is the tone cynical or optimistic and upbeat? All of these factors will have implications for how your audience responds to the film.

### ACTIVITY: REWRITE A NARRATION

This exercise is best done in a group, and is designed to help you see how your choice of narrator and narrative style affects the way your audience responds to a film. Start by choosing a video that relates to a subject matter with which you and your colleagues know well (perhaps the advocacy focus of your work). It is best if the video is not one that you have watched before. Look for something that is short and aimed at the general public.

Next, each person watching the video should select a narration point of view from among the following:

- Voice of someone in the film
- “Voice of god,” third-person narration
- Their own point of view
- A popular celebrity

Now sit down and watch the video with the audio off. As you watch the video each person should note down in shorthand the narration or voiceover that they think is necessary to explain the film narrative. Each viewer has a choice about how much narration they think is necessary. Each viewer should then present their narration and participants compare notes.

### NARRATION-DRIVEN FILM

This uses a narrator and/or title cards (text on the screen). A voiceover narration or title cards explain what is happening, and the film often takes for granted the narrator’s credibility. How you choose this person (age, language or accent, gender, celebrity status, relationship to issue, etc.) will affect the film’s impact on the viewer. In the classic “voice of god” narrative style you have a third-person narrator, off-screen, guiding us through the film, explaining what we are seeing. It is assumed that we can trust the voice and that it is objective. The narration can also be more personal and subjective, told through the voice of someone in the story. Narration-driven film can be the easiest to make. You write a script, shoot, and then voiceover. It is easier to change and fix too—simply change the narration in the studio. Where you don’t have enough or the right interview material or visuals, you can add explanatory narration.

### INTERVIEW-DRIVEN FILM

This is driven by a character, or multiple characters, interviewed within the film. This kind of film is sometimes referred to as a “talking head” film, particularly when the interviews are filmed in a traditional Q&A style. Interview-driven films can take longer to make than narration driven films, because you will need longer to film (interviews can last hours). Logging, and transcribing, and then piecing together the logic based on your interviewees’ words can be time-consuming. Changes are harder to make because you need to find solutions within the interview material itself, rather than simply rewriting narration.

### OBSERVATIONAL-VERITÉ

This is centered on filming “life as it happens,” especially situations and events that occur in a particular place, process, or situation. This is the most difficult and time-consuming kind of film to make. The observational mode suggests that we should let people and their observed actions speak for themselves. The action or the narrative will evolve in front of the camera. The filmmaker should not be intrusive or interrupt the natural process of filmmaking. The underlying assumption is that people behave as normal when the camera and the crew are simply a “fly-on-the-wall,” filming whatever happens in front of the camera. Observational-verité films can take the longest to make, as life (especially in front of the camera) changes unpredictably. Getting subjects comfortable with observational cameras can take time and trust (and often involves safety and security issues). Once shooting begins, you may not know how long your story will go on, and what direction it will take. It could take weeks, months, even years. Observational-verité footage can have a very strong and emotional impact, because it transports audiences most directly to ‘real-life’ situations. It is important that you analyze which people to include in your video. Below is a sample situation to help you in determining the characters for your film.

### ACTIVITY: SELECTING CHARACTERS

It is early evening in the city and a man, Carlos, is walking home from work with two close friends. Carlos is a married father of two who works in a local factory. A police van pulls up and three police officers jump out and pull him inside, saying they are arresting him for involvement in a robbery. According to them, John, Carlos’s former schoolmate, has told them that he committed a robbery with Carlos the night before. Carlos knows this is untrue, as he was at a family party then. When he arrives at the police station Carlos is put under increasing pressure by the police, and is eventually tortured until he confesses that he was involved, and that his two friends, Jane and Khan, were also involved in the robbery. The police leave Carlos in a cell and the next morning they say that he was found dead from a heart attack. For fifteen years, one party has governed Carlos’s country. This party has won a series of nominally democratic, but institutionally flawed, elections. Torture in police custody is common, and is almost an accepted part of investigative procedure. For the past ten years a campaigning human rights organization with a small staff and a strong volunteer core from all sectors of society has been confronting torture in this society, and challenging the police and judiciary to be more effective and accountable. This organization takes up a legal case against the police as part of its work to challenge torture in society, and to secure compensation for Carlos’s widow, Stephanie. They also try to engage the media in a discussion of the case.

### Possible characters

Select your top choice and your top three choices as characters for a potential film. Think of the reasons behind your selecting an interviewee.

Examine your top choice and your top three choices. Could you tell a story with just three of these characters, and if so, would there be any missing story elements? What do you notice about the people you have chosen to tell your story?

Carefully discuss the people who have a stake or a perspective on the situation in which you wish to film. Some things that you might want to consider:

- **“Perpetrators and stake-holders”:** What are the causes of the problem or conflict and who is responsible for this situation?
- **“Experts”:** Who are the experts? Are they experts because of depth of knowledge or societal position, or because they have direct personal experience? Remember experts don’t have to be academics; they can have a life experience that makes them an expert.
- **“Protagonists/change-makers”:** Who are the protagonists? Who is trying to change the situation?
- **“Victims/survivors”:** Who is affected by this situation? Who has experienced the situation and survived it?

Looking at these different categories of people, who will be effective as a spokesperson or character with the target audience you have envisioned?

Possible Characters	Perspective	Comments on potential as an interviewee
“Stephanie”	Wife of torture victim, very strong personal involvement with particular case	Still very grief-stricken; able to share her own experience and loss with the audience
“John”	Carlos’s friend, tortured in same police station	Experiences some guilt about his role in implicating Carlos
“Joe”	Survived torture, very critical of the government’s lack of action	Articulate, a little distant
“Anita”	Worked in the government; now part of a leading NGO coalition against torture	Sticks to party-line
“Rita”	Worked in prisons under current regime, when torture practiced; accused of involvement	Worked in prisons under current regime, when torture practiced; accused of involvement

## GENRE

Style or genre will also shape the telling of your story. The following are only a selection of common genres.

- **Personal point of view:** A personal essay or perspective on an issue, often from a person directly involved, or from the filmmaker or activist. Sometimes the filmmaker will appear on camera, or the camera will follow a character through whose eyes we understand the story. Sometimes, the point of view will only appear through narration. Personal point of view is also expressed visually, through the camera work. From whose eyes are you seeing events unfold? In a “reflexive” film, the presence and involvement of the filmmaker is made clear in the actual film—he or she is not a neutral technician.
- **News-journalistic:** A news style follows the rules of mainstream journalism to represent factual information. This style prioritizes notions of objectivity, balance, presenting “both sides of the story” and neutrality. The story is often told through a “third person”—the journalist—who has collected information from a variety of sources, and interviewed all opposing sides. Facts, opinions and information are sourced directly, and information is presented in a dry, punctual format. Formats can vary from short news reports and bulletins (as short as 20 seconds), to current affairs reports (anywhere from three to 15 minutes), to longer investigative documentaries unraveling a “mystery” or conflict.
- **Journey film or central character:** Tends to involve a central character who experiences a series of encounters: filming the process of the journey is as important as reaching the final destination. This kind of film is more likely to be an observational film, although someone’s journey can be reconstructed through the use of interviews, narration, and creative visuals as well.
- **Location-centered film:** Here we are in one specific location from which we do not shift. The location itself is the defining characteristic or voice in the film.

- **Survey film:** A survey film reviews an issue, and presents a thesis. Several examples, multiple interviews, experts, and situations are presented to support and/or contradict the case. For example: *The Corporation*, a three-hour Canadian documentary about the rise of the most influential institution in our times (the corporation) uses interviews with more than 40 people, case studies, reels of archives and animation as well as a narrative voice to bring together a thesis about the nature of corporations, having surveyed the world for evidence.
- **Music video:** Video that is edited and even based on music or a soundtrack for its structure and length. This genre tends to reflect the editing techniques developed by MTV. Video makers can collaborate with musicians to write lyrics and music before shooting begins. A pioneering organization in the use of music video formats for advocacy video is Breakthrough TV (<[www.breakthrough.tv](http://www.breakthrough.tv)>).
- **Public service announcements:** These are short, punchy, to-the point videos that “advertise” your advocacy issue. For example, WITNESS, along with Coalition for an International Criminal Court, created a 60-second “advocate-ment” for the creation of the court, drawing on the imagery of the genocidal twentieth century. Using title cards, dramatic music, and powerful images, they made a powerful case for a renewed commitment to a successful and effective International Criminal Court.

## DRAMATIZATION/USES OF DRAMA

Much—but not all—advocacy video tends to be made of documentary material, with real people telling their own stories, with life unfolding before the camera. But sometimes, filmmakers turn to evocative imagery and dramatization to tell the story in a creative way or because they have no other choice in order to cover an issue they want to film. Filmmaker Ronit Avni says: “One of the hardest questions when creating advocacy video is how to reconstruct or evoke a violation that’s already happened or one that is too emotionally sensitive to show. There are several further options for this kind of evocative imagery—including using archival material, photos, artwork, the appearance and disappearance of people or objects in the frame, blurred imagery, and symbolic imagery. An additional benefit is that many of these decisions can be made in the edit room.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF AUDIENCE

Who exactly is your audience? As discussed in Chapter 1, understanding to whom you are telling your story will change how you tell your story. More importantly, defining what you want your audience to do once they’ve seen your video will also identify the story you need to tell. At the most basic level, Howard Weinberg suggests you ask yourself: “Are you stirring up the troops, or talking to the unconverted?” Similarly, Martin Atkin, producer at Greenpeace, also starts by dividing his audiences into two main categories: “The first is a broad, general audience outside the NGO community—a general public that knows little about the issue—and the second is other NGOs, people ‘within’ the community, who already know a little”.

## MAKING A STORY A REALITY: PREPRODUCTION

The stages of filmmaking include:

1. **Conceptualization and research:** Here you build the idea and clarify the advocacy goal (why am I making this film?), the audience (for whom am I making this film?) and the elements of film to be included (how will I make this film?). Also ask yourself, what other films have been made on this issue? What perspective do these take? How is my film different? What information do I need to research to make an informed film?
2. **Preproduction:** This stage includes preparing and researching an outline, initial script and a shooting plan, logistical planning, and fundraising.
3. **Production:** This is when the film is shot bearing in mind all the available elements including interviews, verité footage, B-roll, cutaways, interviews, graphics, archival needs, music etc. (For more detail and an explanation of these terms, see Chapter 4 and the Glossary.)
4. **Postproduction:** This stage includes the production and review of a series of versions of the video, on paper and then on screen. For more detail, see Chapter 5.

## WHAT IS PREPRODUCTION?

Preproduction is the stage at which research is collected and questions are asked that help to shape an investigation and story. It is best to draft an outline to clarify your story and messages. You need to pay attention to the budget, resources, and timeline. From your video outline, you can then create a shot list, schedule, and a call-sheet. The basics of a story: what, where, when, who, why, how?

During preproduction, you should ask yourself the following questions:

- What story are you trying to tell? What story are you leaving out? And why?
- When did the incident, event or violation happen?
- Where does the story occur?
- Who will appear in your story?
- Who will tell the story?
- Why are you telling this story?
- How will you tell the story?

You may find that you will have more than one answer for each of these questions.

## WHY ARE YOU TELLING THIS STORY?

For advocacy-oriented video you should be absolutely clear from the outset why you are telling your story, as both a filmmaker and as a social justice advocate. You also need to determine clearly who your audience is, and what they will find persuasive or compelling. On the basis of this you should choose the most appropriate story to tell.

## HOW WILL YOU TELL YOUR STORY?

How will you tell this story? Will you be following a particular chronological order or sequence? Will you concentrate on a character, an issue, or a place? How can this story most effectively be told, and how can you ensure that it will be interesting to watch and responsible to the people who participated?

## HAS YOUR STORY BEEN TOLD BEFORE?

At this stage, you may also need to do some research about other videos, films, books, websites, and other forms of media on the subject. There's no sense in reinventing the wheel, and these sources may also help develop your own project.

## PREPARING AN OUTLINE FOR YOUR VIDEO

You now have a clear goal and audience, and are developing the most effective message and messenger for this audience. At this stage, you should prepare an outline or working script. An outline is the architecture of your proposed film—a sketch of the audio and visual elements that will make up the finished film, arranged in order, illustrating the storyline of your film. From your outline you will work out what shots you need to shoot in any given location, interview or activity. A well-thought-through outline is particularly crucial in the case of human rights and social justice filming, where there is not always the opportunity to go back and get reshoots of the material. Preparing an outline will help you to think of what you need to tell your story in a compelling and dramatic way. You do not have to stick to it once you come to film and edit but it can act as a guide to help you think about creative ways to tell your story.

## WHAT AUDIOVISUAL COMPONENTS WILL HELP YOU TELL THE STORY?

All video is made up of combinations of visual and audio elements. Think creatively and expansively about different kinds of sound and images. What will make this story visually interesting? Can you tell your story using different combinations of visuals and audio components? What will have the most impact on your audience? What do you have access to given security, budget, and time constraints? Can you make a virtue out of necessity?

Some kinds of visuals and audio to think about:

### Visuals

- Visual and audio documentation of events happening—people doing things, without commentary.
- Landscapes, locations, and inanimate objects that are part of the story.
- Interviews—one or more people answering questions, posed to them by an interviewer on-or off-camera who may be edited out of the final film.
- Conversations observed—people aware of the presence of a camera, but not being interviewed directly.
- Conversations or people talking to each other, with the camera unobtrusive or hidden.
- Re-enactments—factually accurate recreations of scenes that could not be filmed, or are in the past. Remember that there may be credibility problems with this in the human rights context, particularly if it is not clear why a scene could not be filmed, or needed to be re-enacted.
- Expressionistic shots—often symbolic or artistic, to represent a concept or provide visuals where you do not have access to the location, e.g. in historical interviews.
- Manipulation of imagery via slow-mo, fast-forward, motion capture etc.

- Still photos or documents—either static or shot with the camera panning/tracking or zooming in or out.
- Text including on-screen titles, headlines, and graphics—used for creative and informational purposes, including subtitles for foreign languages. These are usually added in the editing.
- Library, news, and archive footage – this could be from a professional archive, but also personal memorabilia, and possibly material from other films. Remember footage from a commercial source is usually expensive and complicated to get permission for.
- Blank screen—causing the viewer to reflect on what they have just seen or heard, prime them for what is next, indicate a change of sequence or location, or to emphasize sounds.

### Audio or sound elements

- Interviewee—you can use audio only, or audio from a picture and-sound interview with audio only used, or both picture and audio used.
- Conversations—either recorded with the participants' knowledge or unobtrusively/secretly.
- Narration—could be a narrator, the filmmaker or a participant.
- Synchronous sound—sound shot while filming.
- Sound effects—individual sounds shot while filming, or at a later point.
- Music—this is usually added in editing.
- Silence—the absence of sound can indicate change of mood or place, or cause the viewer to refocus on the screen.

Notice that in many videos the sound and visual elements are not from the same source—in editing you will make choices about how to combine different audio and visual elements.



## FILMING A STORY

*Original chapter titled: Video Production: Filming a Story  
by Joanna Duchesne, with additional writing by Liz Miller,  
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<http://www.witness.org/training/video-for-change>*

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter invites you to start filming with your camera as soon as you can—the more you practice, the easier it will become. You will learn about technical aspects of your camera and equipment, different types of shots, and tips on how to film stable, well-composed, and compelling images. The chapter will steer you towards preparing your own video project, and show you how to film sequences and interviews, develop characters, and build a story. There are also exercises designed to help you try out what you have learned. Don't wait until you are confident—your skills will develop as you work.

Your basic kit should consist of a video camera, batteries, a battery charger, headphones and relevant leads to power your camera. Try to include an external microphone and a tripod for steady filming. If you use an LCD screen or an external mike without its own battery, you will use more power. Always make sure your battery is fully charged when preparing to film, and take an extra charged battery. Most batteries are now lithium/ion batteries. They do not need to be completely discharged before recharging.

## THE TECHNIQUES

All videos are made up of shots, sequences, and scenes. In this section we look primarily at developing a solid grasp of the key shot types, and developing elementary sequences. One way to think about how shots, sequences, and scenes fit together is to imagine them paralleling the structure of a book, as demonstrated in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Shots, sequences, and scenes

Shot	Sentence
↓	↓
A series makes a... Sequence	A series makes a... Paragraph
↓	↓
A series makes a... Scene	A series makes a... Chapter
↓	↓
A series makes a... Video	A series makes a... Book

## COMPOSING AND FRAMING YOUR SHOTS

Framing is the way in which a scene, person, or object is placed within the image you record. Viewers are familiar with certain conventions, and it is important to realize what effect different shots have on a viewer. If you film a close-up of somebody's face, you pull the viewer into their thoughts, emotions, or words; if you film the same person from a distance, you help the viewer understand the person's context. Remember that none of these are hard-and-fast rules that you must stick to—once you understand how they are used, then you have the flexibility to know when it will be effective to break them. You have many options to choose from but the following are the main types of shot size to be aware of (see Figure 4.1):

- **Extreme Long Shots (ELS)** (abbreviated to ELS, also called Wide Shots, WS): These shots are often used as an “establishing shot”; they orient the viewer not just to one location, but also to an overall atmosphere, context, and situation. Whenever the scene changes think about reorienting your viewers with a new establishing shot.
- **Long Shot (LS)**: This shot shows a person from head to toe. Be careful with headroom: too much space above a person's head will look strange, as will too much space at the person's feet.
- **Mid-shot (MS)**: This shot shows a person from just below waist level to just above the top of their head. This shot is often used in interviews.
- **Close-up (CU)**: This shot shows a person from mid chest to just above the top of their head, and is ideal for important or emotional parts of interviews. You can go closer but if you are subtitling your interview, leave enough space under the person's chin to allow for text on the screen. It is better to lose the top of someone's head in a frame than their chin, especially if they are talking.
- **Extreme Close-up (ECU)**: This shot shows detail. An extreme close-up shot in an interview might just show a person's eyes or mouth.

Figure 4.1 Different shot sizes (Taw Nay Htoo)



## RULE OF THIRDS

A good guideline for composing your shots is the rule of thirds. This means that you should imagine your frame (the image your camera takes) divided into thirds, with actions and objects placed at the intersections of the vertical and horizontal thirds. This is far more interesting to the eye. Don't place people you are filming in the middle of the frame simply because they are important. It's far better to have the horizon either two-thirds from the top of the frame or two-thirds from the bottom. And if you are filming someone standing in front of a wider scene it's good to have him or her standing slightly to the left or to the right of the frame. This permits the person to speak into the empty part of the frame—it gives them “nose-room.”

## GETTING A GOOD-QUALITY IMAGE

### Focus

Creating the sharpest image possible is critical. Almost every camcorder is fitted with an auto focus facility. In most situations this will ensure that what you are filming is sharply in focus—very useful if there is little or no movement in your shot. Move your camera slowly to allow it to focus.

### White balance

Different sources of light produce light of different “color temperatures.” Artificial lighting, such as indoor light bulbs, produces an orange tinge. Daylight is bluer in color. The human brain adjusts to these variations better than a camera can. What looks perfectly fine to your eye might look orange or blue to the camera.

### Remember

- Auto focus is best where movement is limited and the light is good
- Manual focus is best with multiple moving subjects and low light
- Wide shots are almost always in focus

Most camcorders have an automatic “white balance” facility, which will register and adjust the color temperature of the prevailing light source. In most situations you can use this. Some camcorders also have pre-set white balance positions to cope with different types of lighting. If your camcorder is like this, remember to reset these positions if

the lighting conditions change. You can also set the white balance manually for any location by zooming in on a piece of white paper or other white object so that it fills the screen; and then pressing the manual white balance button. Setting the white balance manually is a good idea for interviews and in situations where there is mixed indoor and outdoor lighting, but generally it's safe to stick with the automatic white balance.

### Lights and lighting

Lighting is used to illuminate a subject and to create a mood, or to shape and define your subject. Hard directional light—sunlight or flashlight—will illuminate with precision but may also create harsh shadows.

### Outdoor/natural light

The sun is your primary “key light” when you are working outside. Pointing your camcorder directly at a light source, especially the sun, can damage it. In general you want to keep your back to the sun or your primary light source. At the same time you don't want to position your subject so that they are squinting while looking at you or the camera. If you position your subject in front of a strong light source the contrast may be too extreme. Especially when shooting with consumer cameras the camera may adjust the exposure to the light level in the background instead of on your subject, creating a silhouette around them.

### Low and limited light

A useful technique when you have limited light is to reflect light sources by pointing the light at the wall or ceiling and letting it bounce onto your subject, or working with the reflection of a primary source of light. One simple technique is to line a piece of cardboard with tin foil and reflect the light from the sun onto your subject. You can also use any piece of white paper or cloth, or an inexpensive reflector board. Black tends to absorb color while white tends to reflect color.

“Lighting can be used to great effect,” says lighting cameraman Steen Eriksen, who has filmed in most of the world's trouble spots. I recently filmed some interviews with some relatives of the “disappeared” in Iraq. I used a black background and shone three small lights onto different parts of the frame, so that the interviewee's face was illuminated. The effect was quite arresting and helped to convey the haunting pain of the subject matter. The use of three lights helped to diminish any potential

shadows on the subject's face.

### Tips

- In low light, pictures will be of poorer quality
- Backlit pictures appear silhouetted
- Softer light is better for portraits

## HOLDING YOUR CAMERA AND KEEPING IT STABLE

One of the best features of camcorders is that they are so portable and lightweight, but this can cause problems when trying to film steady shots. The smoothest shots will be made using a tripod or monopod, but remember that it is only a tool to stabilize the camera. Where possible use a tripod to enable you to film stable, fixed shots and movements.

If you don't have a monopod or a tripod, some simple techniques help make your camera stable.

### Grip

First, get your grip right: hold the camcorder firmly with the grip strap tightened over your right hand and use your left hand to steady the camcorder.

### Stability

Whenever you can, brace yourself firmly against something solid like a rock, a tree or a parked vehicle. If you are standing, support your elbows tucked-in against your chest to keep your hands stable. This may feel uncomfortable but it will soon be second nature. Keep your footing secure and your feet slightly apart.

### Remember

- Avoid camera shake
- Grip your camcorder firmly
- Support your elbows

## MOVING YOUR CAMERA: PANS, TILTS, AND ZOOMS

### Basic camera movements

There are some basic camera movements, which imitate the way we move our head and eyes. “Panning” shots are where the camera moves from one side to another, and “tilting” shots are where the camera moves upwards

or downwards. Do not zoom. It is not natural, human eyes do not zoom in and out.

### Panning and tilting

Try to hold the shot for 10–15 seconds before you pan or tilt your camera sideways or vertically. This helps the viewer establish what he or she is supposed to be looking at before the move begins. When you stop, hold the shot for 10–15 seconds again. This may seem like a long time, but you will end up using the static shot at least as often as the move itself. By getting the three shots—the initial still shot, the pan, and then the final shot—you offer yourself and your editor choices later in the production process.

## MOVING WITH YOUR CAMERA

### Walking

Keep your legs bent at the knees and your body lowered all the time. This will help you avoid the rise and fall of normal walking. Create a slow motion, gliding feeling. Put each foot down softly and close to the ground. Do the same if you walking backwards. Have someone walking with you to clear the way.

### Tracking and Dollying

“Tracking” is when the camera moves or follows a character or object. Dollying is when the camera is moving (usually on a dolly) not the character and not by zooming.

### Remember

- Keep your knees bent
- Move slowly, in a gliding manner
- Use wheeled vehicles for tracking and dollying

## MOVING WITH PEOPLE YOU ARE FILMING

If people are walking in your shot and you are following them as they move, try to make sure that you leave enough space in your frame for them to “walk into.” If they are walking from right to left, you should keep them more to the right of the frame so that they have space on the left to walk into.

Waldemar de Vries has filmed human rights stories all over Africa. “I once filmed a nun who went back to visit her church that had been destroyed by rebels in Guinea.

I followed her walking into the church, keeping her face in the frame to the right, and moved the camera upwards as she looked up at the light shining through the bullet holes in the roof in the left of the frame. When I played back the material later, the footage really conveyed the destruction and the effect that it had on the nun”.

## DIRECTION AND CONTINUITY

Aim to collect images that when edited together will create a logical and credible continuity of events or a sense of direction that the audience will be able to understand. For example, if you are filming people walking from one place to another, you should make sure that they are always traveling in the same direction. If you don't, it will seem to your audience that they are first walking in one direction and then another. If you do decide to switch the direction from which you are observing an action make sure to use a wide shot to re-orientate your viewers. The same is true if you are filming two people talking to each other. One person will have the left side of the face favored in the shot; the other person should have the right side of their face favored. This will mean that they appear to be facing each other while they are talking.

## 180 DEGREE RULE

A central convention of the continuity system states that the camera must stay on one side of the axis of action (also known as the 180 degree line) -- an imaginary line running through the space of the scene (often between two key actors). When the camera stays on only one side of this line, the shot will have consistent spatial relations and screen directions. That is, characters and objects on the right side of the screen remain on the right from shot to shot, and those on the left will always be on the left (at least, until they move and a new axis of action is established). We consistently see the same side of the actors. Sightlines obey the axis of action principle. An actor looking from the left side of the screen to the right will not suddenly, in the next shot, appear to be looking from the right to the left. Beyond maintaining consistent spatial relations and directions of movement and looking, the 180 degree rule also insures that the space in each shot will be immediately legible, since there will be more or less consistent and recognizable background from one shot to the next.

## 30 DEGREE RULE

A convention in Hollywood editing holds that the camera must move at least 30 degrees between shots.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF SOUND

Remember, sound is at least half your story. In an interview, where the success of your footage depends on the clarity of what the person is saying, sound is more than half the story. It is the story.

### Your camera's microphone

The built-in microphone on most cameras is omnidirectional, which means it will pick up sound from all around, favoring the loudest. This may be sufficient for a street demonstration or other general activity. If you have no additional microphone and you are filming an interview, move your camera as close to the interviewee as possible. The built-in microphone is highly sensitive to surrounding sound, so you want to be in as quiet a place as possible—away from the crowd or multiple noise sources.

### External microphones

If you are working with a camera, you will usually have an external mike input that will automatically override the built-in microphone.

Hand-held microphones can be very useful because they enable you to get the sound source very close to a person while giving you some freedom to move your camera.

### Directional or “shotgun” microphones

If you have a directional microphone, it will pick up sound in the direction you point it, so you can pinpoint exactly what source of sound you would like.

### Wireless microphones

In recent years, a number of relatively inexpensive high-quality wireless microphones have become available. These battery-powered microphones /transmitters, which have a matching receiver that attaches to the camera, are very useful because they allow you to pick up sound without the need for a cable or lead, and allow the camera to operate freely separate from the sound recording. When worn by a person you are following, a wireless will pick up their voice and the voices of people around them even though the camera is dozens of feet away.

### Remember:

- Learn the characteristics of your mike
- Omni-directional microphones favor loudest sounds
- Point uni-directional mikes directly at sound source, and use them when the sound source is rapidly changing
- Clip-on mikes are best for interviews
- Combine different mikes for maximum flexibility and coverage

### Wind noise

There are a few ways to minimize the sound of the wind when it buffets your microphone. Stand with your back to the wind to shield the microphone or stand next to a natural windbreak such as a wall. External microphones can be equipped with wind-gags to help reduce wind noise.

### Acoustics

If you are filming indoors, always be aware of the acoustics of the room or how the sound bounces from the walls. Places like tiled bathrooms tend to reflect sound and will echo very badly. Rooms with sound-absorbent materials in them such as carpets, curtains, or soft furnishings are far better.

### Common mistakes with sound

- Don't forget to wear headphones when recording an interview. Good interviews have been ruined because no one was paying attention to the sound levels, and didn't hear sounds like a person vacuuming in the background or air-conditioning.
- When using a uni-directional mike, always make sure that the microphone is pointed towards the person you want to hear. Some interviewers can be so concentrated on the interview itself that they wave the microphone around or in the wrong direction. If the person recording is not wearing headphones, or watching the sound levels, this may not be noticed.
- External microphones can be useless if you don't turn them on! As they override the built-in microphone, people have recorded interviews with no sound at all.
- Check your microphone battery. If possible, carry an extra battery.

### Remember:

- Consider acoustics
- Be aware of background sounds
- Always monitor your audio

## FILMING THE STORY

### Keep your audience interested

The most important job of any storyteller is to keep the audience interested, and avoid disorienting them in terms of time, space, point of view, or in the narrative thread. No matter how compelling we think an issue or story is, it is our job to present that story in a way that engages the audience's intellect, their emotions, their senses of humor and justice, while not oversimplifying the issue or irresponsibly representing people or situations. To keep them engaged, the audience should know where they are, what they are seeing, and who is involved. They should know whom they are listening to and what the story is. The most basic building block you have that will keep your audience oriented is the sequence—a series of shots that show the context and details of an action, person, situation, or location, presented in a way that makes sense to your audience. Your complete story is a series of different sequences, often structured with a beginning, middle and end.

### Filming a sequence

Always keep in mind the story you want to tell, how you plan to establish it, and how you will introduce an issue or character. Be aware of developing the issue or the character, what has happened to them, and how you can illustrate this. For example, if your story is to follow a forensic team sifting through evidence of a mass grave, think about beginning with establishing a shot of the area, then an introductory shot of the team and a close-up on the member of the team you will follow. Show him filling out a form, picking bones out of the soil, and trying to identify a corpse. Be sure to shoot close-up and wide shots and each step of the process.

For example, if you shoot a close-up of the bone being carefully removed from the soil, follow it with the bone being cleared of excess dirt, then the bone being placed into a plastic bag and, finally, being labeled. Sequencing your shot, and varying your angles makes the images more compelling, contextual, and realistic. You could then film an interview with the forensic scientist, asking him about what he was doing during this process, or what this evidence points to. In the editing process you could choose whether to include the sound of his voice over the images of him carrying out his work. You can tell a very different story from filming

the same event from different perspectives or from what you decide to favor and what you choose to ignore. It's always important to be thorough when filming people doing something. Take, for example, officials registering refugees at the entrance of the camp. You will want to film a variety of shots to explain the scene.

First of all, you will need an establishing shot to set the scene followed by a close-up of a sign showing the name of the camp. You may then decide to film a long shot of a refugee waiting in line. Next, you might film a mid-shot of an official sitting down and writing down the name of a refugee. You might then go behind the official and film the refugee being registered, looking at the official, then a close-up of the refugee's expression. You might then come around to stand on the same side of the refugee and shoot a close-up of the official writing. You may then think that a long shot of the two together will help to tell the story. Try to capture the interaction from the points of view of the people involved. For a good sequence you want to capture the registration experience from the points of view of both the refugee and the official. Remember, you don't always have to shoot "in sequence" if activities are repeated, or if it will be easier to film one aspect of a scene at one time.

### Filming to edit

It is at the editing stage, otherwise known as "postproduction" that your story will come together, so thinking about what an editor needs is vital.

When you are shooting you may think you are repeating the shot too many times, but remember, an editor needs many shots to choose from. Use a variety of shots, including wide, long, mid-shots, and close-ups, as well as different angles.

The other key thing to remember is that effective editing and filmmaking is about compression of time and space. In any film we do not see every moment of an action, just the key moments that will keep us orientated. Events that take place over 20 minutes in real time can be shown in 20 seconds in a video, and we will accept the compression. When shooting to edit you are looking to provide your editor with all the components he or she needs to compress a sequence without jarring an audience.

### Activity: Practice with your camera

In this exercise you will learn how to shoot a short, repetitive activity, making sure you get all the shots you need to edit a short sequence, as well as give a sense of the story. For this exercise you need: your camera, a tripod, a microphone. Your objective is to film a person doing an activity related to your video's theme, and film this person and their environment. Choose the person you want to film carefully, as you will conduct an interview with them.

You want to convey:

- Where am I?
- Who is the person?
- What are they doing?
- How do they feel about this work or what is their motivation for doing it? Can I understand why they are doing it? It may be best if the person you are filming is carrying out a repetitive action, as this will allow you to film it from multiple angles and shot-sizes. Each shot should last 15 seconds and if you pan, tilt, or zoom, use only one move per shot and start and finish with a still shot held for 10–15 seconds.

There are multiple aims to this exercise. You need to make sure you have all the shots you need to ensure you can edit together a sequence (this is called "coverage"), and you also want to have a sequence that does more than this—that tells a story. For this, you need shots that convey context, and shots that convey the action and telling details.

Take your camera and shoot the following shots:

1. **Establish the context:** Exterior extreme long shot of the building where person is, or the place where they are working, or an exterior extreme long shot with a tilt or pan. Try a pan from the street or sky to the building/location.
  - Rehearse the shot before you record so that the shots with which you begin and end are well composed.
  - Don't forget to hold the shot for 15 seconds at the end of every camera move. Or try an Exterior/Interior—Long shot—looking through a door or a window to an interior space. If you are working outdoors, move in closer for the LS.

2. **Get the action:** Medium shots of the person doing something— sitting at desk, washing dishes, cooking, selling items, writing, watching television etc. Search for a variety of angles, and try to capture different stages of a process.
3. **Get the emotion:** Close-ups of the person's expression to convey how they feel about what they are doing. Remember that the story often comes through most powerfully in the expression on someone's face.
4. **Get the telling detail:** Close-ups of details of what the person is working with or engaged with—you might ask to get "into the shoes of that person" so that the object is shot from their perspective (e.g. in a kitchen, this could be the dishes they are washing— so ask them to move to the side and shoot the dirty dishes in a pile. Alternatively you could film over their shoulder, etc.).
5. **Re-establish the context:** Medium shot of the person still doing the same activity and finishing the task. Follow it with a long shot of the person finishing the task, and if possible walking out of the frame.
6. **Review your footage:** Congratulations! You have shot your first scene. What you might have discovered is that there is often some "directing" in documentary footage and on occasion you might set up or adjust a situation slightly. When you have finished shooting, take a look at the footage. Now edit the footage to tell the story.

### Things to consider when filming

- What is the composition of the frames? Consider the rule of thirds, headroom, and nose-room.
- Did you remember the 15 seconds rule about holding moving shots at the beginning and end, and for sticking with still shots?
- Are shots stable? Do you notice how instability is magnified with a zoomed-in shot?
- Are there any distracting elements in the frame?
- Do the foreground and the background work together or not? For example, does a potted plant in the background look like it is growing out of a person's hair?
- Is the horizon line straight?
- Where is the light source in the frame—is the light even throughout the shot?

- Did you control the filmmaking environment where you could? If there were noises disrupting the shots (dogs barking, repetitive alarms) did you either find a way to film away from them, stop them (ask to switch off the television or radio) or did you incorporate them into the story by filming them or making them into cutaways?
- Conceptual
- Do you see both the context of the scene and the details?
- Try turning down the sound—is it still clear what the person is doing?

### FILMING CHARACTERS

A dramatic and powerful way to tell your story is through one character, or a series of characters who represent an abstract story idea: for example, health care of refugees, election fraud, the "disappeared."

If you interview someone, you should always strive to go beyond the interview with your camera. Often the difference between an expert interview and a genuine character with whom people can empathize is the context you provide through additional sequences around that person. Character-driven stories depend on good action sequences showing the person doing things, and interacting with their environment. They give a character depth because we see that character in many different situations.

The method for developing character is straightforward: once you find captivating characters, stick with them. Follow them through the day, interview them, shoot their reactions to situations, shoot personal belongings, and other details of their personality. If they go between places, film their journeys. If they cry, if they speak, if they interact with others, shoot it all. By doing this, you create character; someone who is not one-dimensional and whose individual story can ultimately tell the big story. With video, many "little pictures" can create one overall big picture. That big picture is what you want your viewers to remember, long after they have finished watching.

Remember, a character need not be a person. A character can be a physical place or event as well: a polluted lake, a deserted village, a refugee camp, or a political demonstration. These things may not be human but they still have "personality." That personality or ambience is what you should look for.

*Case study:* A personal experience developing a film around a character. “Once I was filming a human rights lawyer called Alirio Uribe in Colombia. He regularly receives death threats but continues to work to defend others who had been targeted or killed by illegal paramilitaries in the country. It was important to film Alirio in as many different scenarios as possible to give a sense of how he perseveres with his life despite everything. In the video Alirio first appears in the back seat of a car, giving the voiceover a chance to introduce him. The video then cuts to a wide shot of him getting out of the car, walking into court, and in the courtroom. The viewer finds out about the case he is working on. Driving home, Alirio talks about the death threats he receives. We then see him the next morning having breakfast with his family. His voice over these images explains who these death threats come from and why. The next scene shows him at a market with his wife and heading to a park with his family. His wife talks about the reality of having a husband who works as a human rights lawyer, living under the threat of death, and how this affects their family”.

## FILMING AN INTERVIEW

Interviews are often the building blocks for documentary film. Some simple steps can ensure good interviews:

### Choose a location

Remember that there are many options for where you do an interview. Traditional news programs often rely on mid-shots of interviewees in offices, or neutral surroundings (i.e. backdrops of curtains, potted plants etc.). Think about filming people in the location what they were discussing took place, or in their home, or walking around. Often people are more relaxed when they are doing something rather than in a formal sit-down interview setting. Others will find having photos, or other objects related to their interview, near them will help them talk.

The Dutch filmmaker Heddy Honigmann does this very effectively in her film *Good Husband, Dear Son*, where she interviews the mothers, wives, and daughters of men killed in a village near Sarajevo. A woman holds a photo of her husband, another sits with the tools he used to work with, another stands in the home they built together, and this makes their ability to recall painful memories and the viewer to empathize that much easier.

### Relationship building with characters

Establish a relationship with your interviewee and ensure they are making an informed decision about appearing on video.

Always try to make your interviewee feel at ease before you start. Many of your interviewees may be reluctant to talk on camera, so it is your job to relax them.

Always maintain eye contact and give the person your fullest attention. People often need to warm up, so start with a more general question to get the interview going. Ask each person to say his or her name at the beginning of any recording. This may seem obvious, but there may be confusion later on, especially if you are interviewing many people in a row on one tape.

### Frame your interview

Always remember the rule of thirds when filming interviews. In close-up shots, keep your interviewee’s eyes a third of the way down from the top of the frame. Make sure your interviewee has enough talking space. If they are looking over to the left of the frame you should move them further to the right of your viewfinder, and vice versa. If you are shooting a series of interviews, do not always shoot your interviewees on the same side of the camera. Instead, shoot some on the left third of your frame, and the other half on the right third. These variations allow for continuity and balance in the final edit of your footage. If you know beforehand that two people will be used to make contrasting points of view, shoot one looking to the left, the other to the right. That way, you can juxtapose them more effectively.

### Where should the interviewee look?

Usually you will ask them to look at the interviewer, who is placed just off to the side of the camera, close to the lens, and diagonally across from the interviewee. If you are both filming and asking the questions ask the interviewee to look towards this place rather than directly at the camera. For a more confrontational interview you may on occasion want your interviewee to look directly into the camera.

### Conducting an interview:

#### Avoid “yes” or “no” questions

Remember that you are aiming to get your interviewee to give full and complete answers that you can use to tell your story. The best way to do this is to ask open questions that do not require a yes or no in response. For example, if you ask, “Are the living conditions in the refugee camp bad?” your interviewee may reply: “Yes, they are.” However, if you ask, “Can you describe what the living conditions are like in the refugee camp?” you might get a more useful answer. Open questions like “Tell me about...?” are good for getting more complete answers. Explain to your interviewee how to incorporate your questions into their answers.

*For example:*

*Question*—How long have you worked at this center?

*Answer*—Five years.

This will be hard to edit. Instead you should ask your interviewee to say:

*Question*—How long have you worked at this center?

*Answer*—I have worked at this centre for over five years.

Avoid bias for or against your interviewee. This does not mean you cannot be sympathetic to someone who has been traumatized or suffered a human rights violation. Being fair means being impartial to the information you are seeking. Be especially careful not to ask leading questions like “Wouldn’t you say that the government is responsible for stopping the supply of food to the refugee camp?” It’s better to ask, “Can you explain who is responsible for stopping the supply of food to the camp?” The first question reveals your bias and can elicit a yes or no. The latter question invites a more detailed answer.

Always keep silent during the interview. Interviewers who continually give encouraging sounds to their interviewee like, “Aha” or “I see” have ruined many answers to questions, and make it harder to edit the material. Be careful not to interrupt and disrupt their flow of conversation.

Other shots you will need: Establishing shots  
In every interview, as well as recording the actual interview you need to think about situating where the story is, or the context of an interview. Often this will involve shooting an establishing shot or sequence. This shows the interviewee

in the environment where they are to be interviewed, talking with their interviewer in long shot or otherwise doing something over which an audio narration could later be placed to introduce the interviewee.

### Remember

- Think about the sound, lighting and background of an interview
- Always try to get on-camera consent, unless there is security reasons not to
- Observe your interviewee
- Avoid yes or no answers and don’t ask leading questions
- Keep silent while your interviewee answers

## ADDITIONAL SHOTS

### Cutaway

A cutaway is a shot that the camera “cuts away” to from an interview or dominant scene, to allow for explanation of the character and the context of their story. These shots also “cover” edits and help to build a sequence. A cutaway is usually a detail of the scene—in the case of an interview it could be the character’s hands, for example, or the face of a person listening.

If someone has been doing something while you film them—for example, preparing vegetables for a stew, or sorting through papers— you will have an easy job of shooting cutaways if you take close-up shots of this activity that can be formed into mini-sequences.

### B-roll

B-roll is essentially any footage that is not interview footage, and which will serve to complement interviews and help tell your story. In any filming situation you should always be looking to gather images/ footage relevant to the story—i.e. if someone were talking about life in a refugee camp you would take shots of the living conditions, of people working, of people preparing meals, of the poor conditions in the schools. Good B-roll and visual sequences do not just provide a visual image of what a person is saying, they provide something new and complementary to the audio track of an interview, or voiceover.

### Verité footage

Verité is observational footage of activities and “life happening in front of the lens.” It is footage that speaks for itself without necessarily requiring explanatory voiceover or narration. An example of verité would be footage of police officers beating protesters at a demonstration, or a scene in which we follow someone walking to a village water-pump far from their home. Weaving general images and verité scenes of reality skillfully throughout a story gives it shape, pace, and tempo. Without them, a story seems flat and filled with the “talking heads” of one interview after another.

### For every action there is a reaction

Reaction shots are compelling because they put a situation, a person, an event, in greater context with its surroundings. When shooting an interview in a public space, be ready to film the reactions of crowds or individuals to what is being said.

### Remember

- Cutaways and B-roll are vital
- Reaction shots help to convey interest and emotion

### Draft a shooting plan

Now that you have more familiarity with the different kinds of shots and how sequences are constructed you can also prepare a shooting plan for your video.

You should draft your shooting plan based on the following:

- Which people do I need to film? Am I interviewing them or following their activities?
- What interview/dialogue, establishing shot, B-roll, verité, and cutaways will I film with each person? What additional material related to that person will I need to gather before or after filming with them? What contextualizing footage for my story and the people featured do I need to film?
- Can I break this down further into specific shots and sequences?
- Is there additional sound that needs to be recorded on-site or secured elsewhere?

### Activity: Film an interview

With this exercise you will pull together what you have learned so far about filming interviews, as well as shooting establishing shots, cutaways, and B-roll. Set-up an interview with the person you observed conducting an activity before. Try to do it in the location where they were doing the activity, and perhaps while they are still doing it. Bring along a volunteer to help you ask questions and to assist in sound recording. Your objective is to shoot a 3- to 5-minute interview, including cut-away shots, and B-roll to cover the interview and linked narration.

#### Stage 1: Establishing shot or sequence

Choose your location and possible interview activity using the guidelines in this chapter.

Start with an establishing shot. Typically this is a wide shot at the beginning of a scene designed to inform viewers of a change in location and to orient them to the general mood and relative placement of subjects in the scene. This shot is also often used for the visuals when a narrator is “introducing” the subject of an interview. You can choose the following options for your establishing shot (or sequence):

- Action shot of individual in context
- A pan from the street to your subject (interviewee) in the middle of an activity
- A wide-angle shot of the environment that slowly zooms in to your subject in the middle of an activity
- Shoot an extreme close-up of an action, and zoom or cut to reveal a wider picture
- A sequence showing the person conducting an activity

#### Stage 2: Shoot the interview

- Frame your subject, thinking about composition and lighting. Ensure there is neither too much backlight nor too much glare in the interviewee’s eyes. Find your medium shot and close-up, bearing in mind how much the interviewee moves or gesticulates while talking.
- Start your interview—aim to get 3 to 5 minutes of material. Be creative. If the person is doing an activity talk to them about what they are doing.
- Remember to ask open-ended questions that do not require a “yes” or “no” answer. Remember that the interviewee’s answers should be self-contained, as you will probably not use the interviewer’s questions in the final video.
- Five to eight questions should be sufficient.

#### Stage 3: Shoot cutaway shots and B-roll

- Shoot cutaway shots paying attention to the person’s surroundings, their body language and gesticulation and to the details of any activity they have been performing as you talked.
- Shoot B-roll and verité sequences that can complement the interviewee’s answers. If they discuss a place, person or event, see if it is possible to film this. Look at what you have from your initial exercise and then decide what additional material you will need. Go and shoot this.
- Reviewing your footage:
  - Is the frame stable, and does the interviewee remain in frame?
  - Did you use medium shots and close-ups? Are close-ups used in more emotional or personal moments? Is the transition between the shot sizes done during an interviewer’s question so that it can be easily edited-out, or smoothly and unobtrusively during the interviewee’s answer?
  - Are questions non-biased, open-ended? Are the interview responses self-contained?
  - Are the cutaways interesting in themselves, or purely functional?
  - Does the B-roll you have complement and supplement the interview, or does it just “show” what the person is saying?
  - Did you shoot additional material to fill the gaps from your initial filming? Is it a good fit?



## EDITING

*Original chapter titled: Editing for Advocacy by Katerina Cizek  
<http://www.witness.org/training/video-for-change>*

### INTRODUCTION

This Chapter is a guide to editing advocacy videos aimed at a variety of audiences, including local communities, international audiences, courts and tribunals, as well as an online viewership. Intended as a companion to more technically oriented video editing manuals, this chapter focuses on the unique concerns of editing video for advocacy in human rights, social justice, and humanitarian contexts.

Editing, or postproduction, is the process in which a film or video's component parts—visuals, sound, word, music, and text—are woven together through storytelling and juxtaposition to create meaning. It is considered the most labor-intensive stage of the process of making a video or film.

An editor's skill and creativity can make or break the quality of a video—turning amateur footage into compelling videos, or reducing quality footage into an incoherent string of imagery and sound. As there are a thousand different ways to edit any one video, no two editors will put the pieces together in the same way. Each editor strives to create a unique “whole” that makes sense.

In every case editing is a process of ellipsis. As Peter Wintonick, a media critic and one of Canada's leading documentary-makers, says: “At the basic level, editing is about time-compression, whether you are compressing an afternoon into 3 minutes, a year into 20 minutes or a lifetime of a person into 60 minutes.” Some edits stick close to the shooting script and are highly structured, while others are more organic, drawing on what has been filmed. However, it is equally important in the edit room to follow the script and simultaneously to respond to the material you have in front of you, to let the material speak to you. This is the challenge of the edit—to balance the script and the vision with the reality of the material that exists.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EDITOR

A good editor has a lot of patience. An editor must be willing to spend long periods of time in a dark space, watching footage over and over again. Weinberg identifies a good editor as a person who can “track information, organize, and will have a sense of rhythm and flow, [who] will build story emotionally.” No matter what the structure or content of the video, this ability to understand what emotional responses the video evokes at every stage is critical to the success of the project. For advocacy videos, it may also be critical to the success of the campaign or legal case at hand.

An editor has to be willing to throw weeks of work away, in the service of the video, says Franny Armstrong, a political filmmaker in the UK: “Sometimes a scene you love will have to go because it doesn’t work in the larger picture. An editor can’t have a big ego. They have to be willing to let go of their own creations.”

An editor’s work involves endless decision-making: how long to make a shot, to use music or not, what sequence to put shots in, etc. Ironically, in the end, a seamless editing job will probably go unnoticed by general audiences. Sandrine Isambert reminds us: “Ultimately, when people haven’t said anything about the edit of a video, then it’s probably a good edit.”

## ETHICS OF EDITING

Moving into the postproduction phase often means removing yourself from the tangible context of filming, of being “on the ground.” ground. It means that at some level you are distancing yourself from the concrete reality of a situation, in exchange for being able to “represent” it on video. This very process of editing presents a complex web of ethical dilemmas that may not have been present while filming. As an editor and as an advocate, one needs to address the potentially dangerous consequences of how material is handled in the edit room.

### Respect the subject

Ronit Avni: “It is critical to honor every commitment that has been made during the filming of a scene or an interview. It can become very tempting in the edit room to use footage that is off-limits. You need to be very clear about the parameters of the material. During editing, we have the tools to manipulate, to change words, to

reconfigure viewpoints without the context. It might further the goals of the video—but it might also hurt or endanger subjects. In an advocacy context, whether it is yours or someone else’s footage, you need to understand the context in which consent was obtained. If the interview was granted under the condition that the identity not be revealed, you need to take precautions that will ensure this anonymity”. “When editing,” Ronit Avni advises, “there’s a great need to be committed to the safety of everyone in the film above everything else.”

### Emotional manipulation and over-dramatization

In the editing process, an issue or subject can easily be either trivialized or over-dramatized. There can be a conflict between dramatic editing and ethical representation when making human rights video. How does the visual language work with (or against) what is being spoken? For example, when putting images over someone’s interview, what do those images convey beyond the words spoken? You need to think about the images over-dramatizing the actual words. Producers can also feel the pressure to make situations look “as bad as possible” and to focus on the graphic images rather than explaining the reasons for the situation.

The tendency in the editing process may be to boost the emotion around the footage, in an effort to make it more dramatic. For example, using heavy music with slow-motion visuals and loaded, biased narration to ensure the message is clear—that a grave injustice is being represented. While music, emotion, and drama are part of the language of filmmaking, you may need a reality check on how you use them. Are you leaning on stereotypes to manipulate your subjects and your audience? For example, many charitable organizations use images of starving children pumped up with sappy music, in efforts to tap into pity and raise donations for their missions. But what does this type of representation say about the nameless, anonymous children portrayed? What does it say about the audience?

As Sam Gregory says “There is the question of what message you are sending out: are you representing agency or plight, optimism or pessimism, victims or survivors? Are you making the subjects of the film look like hapless victims who need to be saved? Or are you giving voice to people... giving agency to a community as being capable of being part of the solution? It’s

difficult when you are looking for donors at the same time, not tapping into pity and charity. But it’s a vicious cycle that perpetuates misperceptions if you start to do that. Audiences eventually feel tired and manipulated by this imagery, and if you frame the people in your video as victims you are disempowering precisely the people whose voices you want to be heard”.

### Objectivity vs. propaganda

Whether to present the other side of the argument is a key question in advocacy video. Journalistic tradition, favors always showing the other side of the argument, and providing an ostensibly balanced viewpoint in which the different positions are given equal time. Yet in many cases, video activists feel as though the “other side” (e.g. the government, figures of authority) has had enough exposure, with frequent presentation on TV, newspapers and other media. They feel the video they are making is their opportunity to give their point of view, often for the first time. Why give more time to the other side, one may think, when they have already had their time everywhere else?

Presenting the other side can also make your own argument stronger. Peter Wintonick points out that people often “put their own foot in their mouth.” Audiences recognize propaganda when they see it. “If you use a sledgehammer instead of a button, this will usually be detrimental,” warns Peter Wintonick. Martin Atkin, a producer at Greenpeace, agrees: “Even though you are pushing a message, you need to be subtle”.

### Dealing with difficult material

Invariably, when working with advocacy video, editors will at some point be faced with graphic images of violence, torture, pain, and even death. What responsibilities do editors have in dealing and using this material? Ronit Avni suggests the following guidelines: If the graphic imagery sheds light on the situation that a certain target audience wasn’t aware of, and it doesn’t exploit the people shot in the images, if there is a context then, yes, use the image. But if it’s used, for example, in a music video (with no light shed on the context) just to shock and titillate then it’s problematic. These are hard questions, because the very aim of art is, at times, to shock and titillate. But in an advocacy context, the context needs to be provided. Will the audience learn more? How might they weigh in? Will it prompt them to do more than just watch the video?

Research has been done that shows that people react to graphic or violent imagery by not remembering the material that precedes a graphic sequence or the audio content of the sequence itself—consider how the use of this kind of imagery in your film may affect your audience’s ability to follow the story. If you decide to edit a video to include graphic material, you should also include information in accompanying screening materials that can prepare audiences for the viewing. You may also consider placing a title card warning of graphic or violent content before the film begins.

### Respecting the audience, the field, the facts

A good editor respects the audience. There is often a fine line between condescension, and generosity of information. It’s a fine balance to explain thoroughly, while at the same time not treating audiences as though they are inferior or lack knowledge. Being responsible also means respecting the facts of the case. Manipulating the facts can be detrimental to your message, the subject, and the audience. Sandrine insists: “You have to make sure your information is very accurate. You can’t be wrong. Your credibility could be endangered. It’s such an important issue and you want people to believe that what you are saying is true. You should double-check your sources.”

### Sound

If you have poor audio, there’s basically not much you can do about it. If you have an interview and you can’t hear it, even if you subtitle it, the audience won’t trust you, because they might have doubts that that is what the person is really saying. Basically, if you have bad audio it’s garbage—you can’t use the interview because your credibility is in danger. However, if the footage is intended as B-roll, audio may be less important. If you shoot an interview that looks horrible, but the audio is good—the audience will forgive you much more. And once you’ve established who’s talking you can cover it with B-roll. Even if the background is noisy, you can get by with that. But you have to make sure that the [sound] bite is very strong, and very important and essential to your movie.

## THE POSTPRODUCTION PROCESS

This stage includes:

- Viewing, logging and transcribing your footage.
- Preparing a paper edit and script.
- Producing an assembly cut of the video.
- Checking the assembly cut against script, and asking yourself if you have stayed true to the original concepts and audience/advocacy goals.
- Creating a first rough cut, by refining the assembly.
- Testing the film with a select audience for feedback, comments, and suggestions.
- Creating subsequent rough cuts as necessary.
- Creating a fine cut of the video, incorporating constructive feedback from your select audience and script revisions, and possibly adding sound elements including music.
- Creating a final cut.
- Doing the “online,” i.e. finishing the video, involves adding graphics, doing a final sound edit, digitizing the film in high resolution, and creating outputted versions.

A sample timeline for the editing process is given below

Table 5.1 How long will postproduction take?

Final length of the film	How long to edit
1-5 minutes	2-3 weeks (30-45 hours)
6-10 minutes	3-4 weeks (36-60 hours)

There are ways to keep postproduction short:

- Effective pre-production planning
- Shoot limited, efficient footage in the first place.
- View and log material with your camera in the field.
- Structure a solid paper edit before entering the studio.

## THE EDIT ROOM

### The Opening

The opening of your video is important. It will help determine whether audiences want to continue watching your video. A good opening hooks them into the video. Use a fact that becomes compelling, something that makes your audience curious to know more, think about what the audience might think, and address the other questions. Make your argument not only a strong one,

but address the additional reasons and questions. Give context. People need to feel like they’ve been there. Put people in the middle of the excitement.

Filmmaker Howard Wintonick suggests: “Never work at the opening at the beginning of the process. Openings change; so don’t waste time on the opening. Cut off your first 10 minutes. Many videos take too long to get moving.”

There are many options for video openings. Some may open with information that contextualizes the issue, others may provide a summary of facts that gives the viewer a historical perspective, others may consist of a high-impact sequence creating suspense and arousing curiosity. Often programs made for TV will have an opening that summarizes the main sound bites of the whole documentary and gives the viewer a sense of what to expect. Decisions on opening will often depend on the target audience of the piece.

### Tips on writing narration

- Think before you start writing. If you know what you want to say and what the goal for change and audience for the video is, then the narration, as with the rest of the script, will be much clearer.
- Don’t describe what is in the picture.
- Do ensure that the narration fits the pictures—think of the B-roll you have and how it is going to be used.
- Don’t overuse narration. Interview dialogue is preferable to narration. Remember that narration has to be covered with B-roll pictures. Often we do not have a lot of appropriate B-roll, and viewers quickly become bored if pictures are dull or relatively unrelated to the narration.
- Make your writing as clear as your talking. Describe succinctly what you are trying to say to someone else—you will probably be clearer, and use language more appropriate to narration.
- Revise as necessary and take advice from others—but remember not to lose the freshness.
- Make every word count and also ensure the meaning is clear.
- Avoid too many acronyms.
- Use short words and sentences and cut out the unnecessary—adjectives that describe what is in the picture, phrases that state the obvious or have no inherent meaning (“let’s face it”), words that weaken their neighbors (“perhaps, about, maybe”) and jargon or clichés.
- Make your sentences active. *The first action was taken*

*at the scene of the worst abuses: Ocaranza Hospital.*

- Remember you have the option of titles—instead of saying the name of a location on the narration, why not use a subtitle, e.g. a title, Ocaranza Psychiatric Facility, Mexico.
- Read your narration out loud. Is it clear? Do you trip over words? Is there intrusive alliteration? Is a word repeated too many times? Think about who will be reading the narration—how will it sound with their accent?
- Look through your narration before you give it to the person who will read it. Are there difficult pronunciations of names and places, or technical terms that you should sound out for them before they begin? If they are not a professional voiceover artist or used to recording narration, are there passages that require a special emphasis or pacing?

### Music

Music can give emotion, pacing and rhythm to your video, but you should be careful that it doesn’t take over the piece. The drama in your video should come from the story, not the music. Some audiences will also respond poorly to what they may perceive as emotional manipulation in overly intrusive or inappropriate musical tracks. A traditional documentary without music can become very dry, especially if you have narration. Stephen Marshall of Guerrilla News network says: “Music targets the heart, it triggers the emotional and the marriage of music and the visual can be a very powerful thing. We use the music both to drive the cuts and build the visual montage.”

Getting permission to use copyright can get very complicated and very expensive. Bearing this in mind, the decision was made that films submitted to the THIMUN Qatar Film Festival must use non-copyrighted material including music selections. If films are created with limited, private screenings, you may be able to get away without securing all permissions. However, as THIMUN Qatar Films will be used for public distribution and there is prize money involved for winning films, you place yourself at risk of being sued if you do not secure necessary permissions. If you have any desire to get your video on television, the station will require releases from you, proving that you have cleared the copyrights, or otherwise, a lawyer’s confirmation that you are in “fair use” of the material. In short, it is easier and cheaper to use non-copyrighted music.

### The ending

Just as there are multiple ways to open a video, so too there are many ways to end one. For advocacy your priority for the ending will be encouraging people to act, and giving them a concrete sense of what they can do. As we discussed in Chapter 3, this will often mean leaving the audience with a sense that there is room for change, and that the people in the film, they themselves, or people they can influence or persuade can be part of this. This “space for action” usually requires that the video be somewhat open-ended, and that it doesn’t leave the audience deflated and disempowered.

Advocacy video endings often include:

- A recap of the situation or survey of the people featured in the video, or testimony from the most articulate or representative.
- A final scene that crystallizes the dilemmas and issues illustrated in the video.
- A call to action or direct request from a person within the video.
- An analysis of the situation, and possible ways to create change, by someone in the video or another person whom the audience will respect.
- Information on other ways that a viewer can get involved after watching the video—often presented in a neutral format via a narrator or end title card.

## FINISHING AN EDIT

### The rough cut

You might want to show the video to a few trusted colleagues or partners and ask them to analyze the rough cut with these questions:

- Do you get the “message” of the video?
- What are the video’s themes?
- Which characters do you feel the strongest connection to? Why?
- Did the video feel the right length or did it drag?
- Which parts were unclear or puzzling?
- Which parts felt slow?
- Which parts were moving or not?
- Do you think this will work for the audience we have in mind? Why or why not?
- If appropriate: Do you understand what action we are encouraging the viewer to take?

### Fact and translation checking

By this stage, you will need to review your video to check the facts. Ideally, you or someone on your team will verify every fact, statement, and assertion made in the film including quotes, dates, names, agencies, figures, statistics, citations, and other represented facts. This process will help verify the authenticity, and legitimacy of every point made in the film. Fact-checking ensures you don't encounter legal and reputational challenges when you release your video. But this process is also crucial to make your film legitimate in the eyes of the audiences, whether they are community members or judges on a tribunal. A simple factual mistake may not only detract from the screening of the film, but may also put the whole film's accuracy into question.

#### Fact-checking involves:

- Collecting all facts mentioned in the film.
- Finding an original source for each fact mentioned.
- Double-checking with another, preferably independent and trustworthy source. Some fact-checkers will gather two independent sources. If you are using the Internet, be sure to check the original sources.

Fact checking is also a good process to prepare you and your team to show your film to audiences, who will inevitably have questions for you. An absolutely critical corollary of fact checking for content is to ensure that any translation you've used has been checked and double-checked. There is nothing more damaging for your credibility than a viewer identifying, and then telling others, that you have misrepresented what someone is saying.

### The Fine Cut

The fine cut is another version of your video after you've made all the changes stemming from the rough cut stage. Now it is time to review the finer details and to polish the film: the "ins" and "outs" of specific shots, perhaps the wording in the narration, or losing one or two scenes or shots here and there.

### On-line picture and sound

"A video is never finished until you decide to walk away," says Liz Miller. You've done the best you can and now it's time to create the best looking and best-sounding quality master of the video. This is called the "on-line." This might mean simply re-digitizing your material at a higher picture resolution, and mixing your sound so that it is balanced, and the volume levels stay the same throughout the piece. Or, "on-line" might mean turning to a professional edit studio for color correction (making all the colors "match" each other, and fit into the broadcast standards), and to clean up your sound etc.

#### Activity: Watch like an editor and an advocate

This exercise is best done in a group as it is primarily focused on discussing a film you have viewed. For this exercise, you will need to pick a film produced on your advocacy issue: you are trying to analyze your chosen video in terms of story, advocacy intent, and editing.

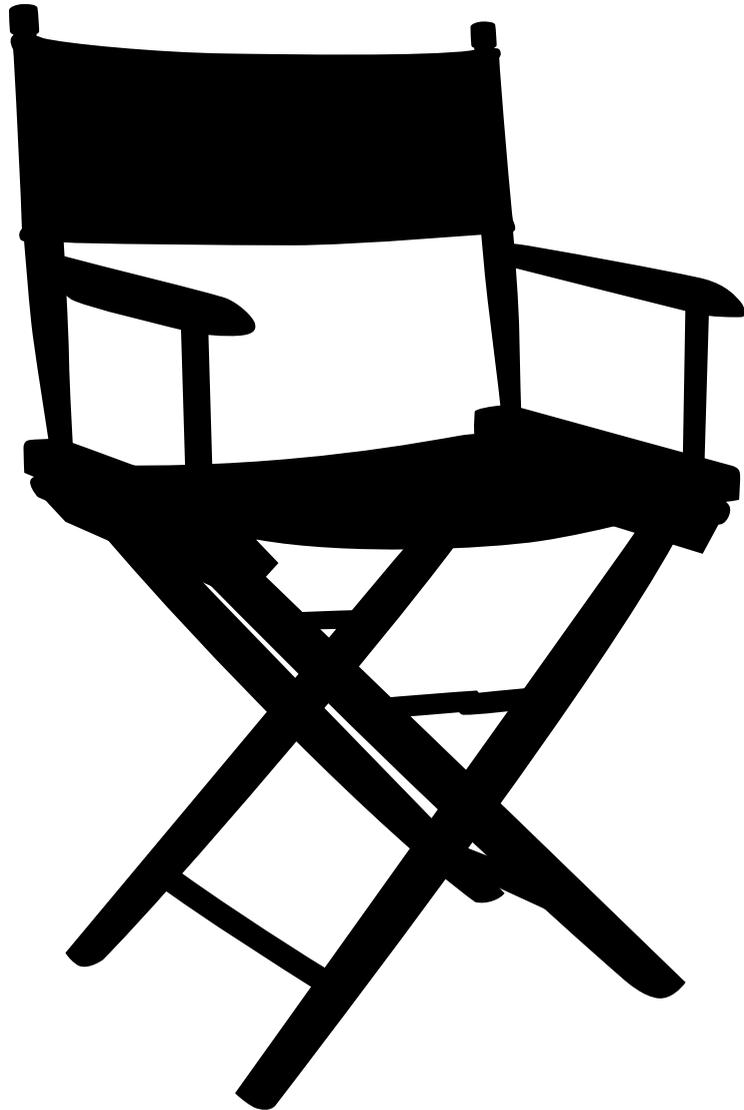
Now, as you watch your chosen film, try to answer the following questions.

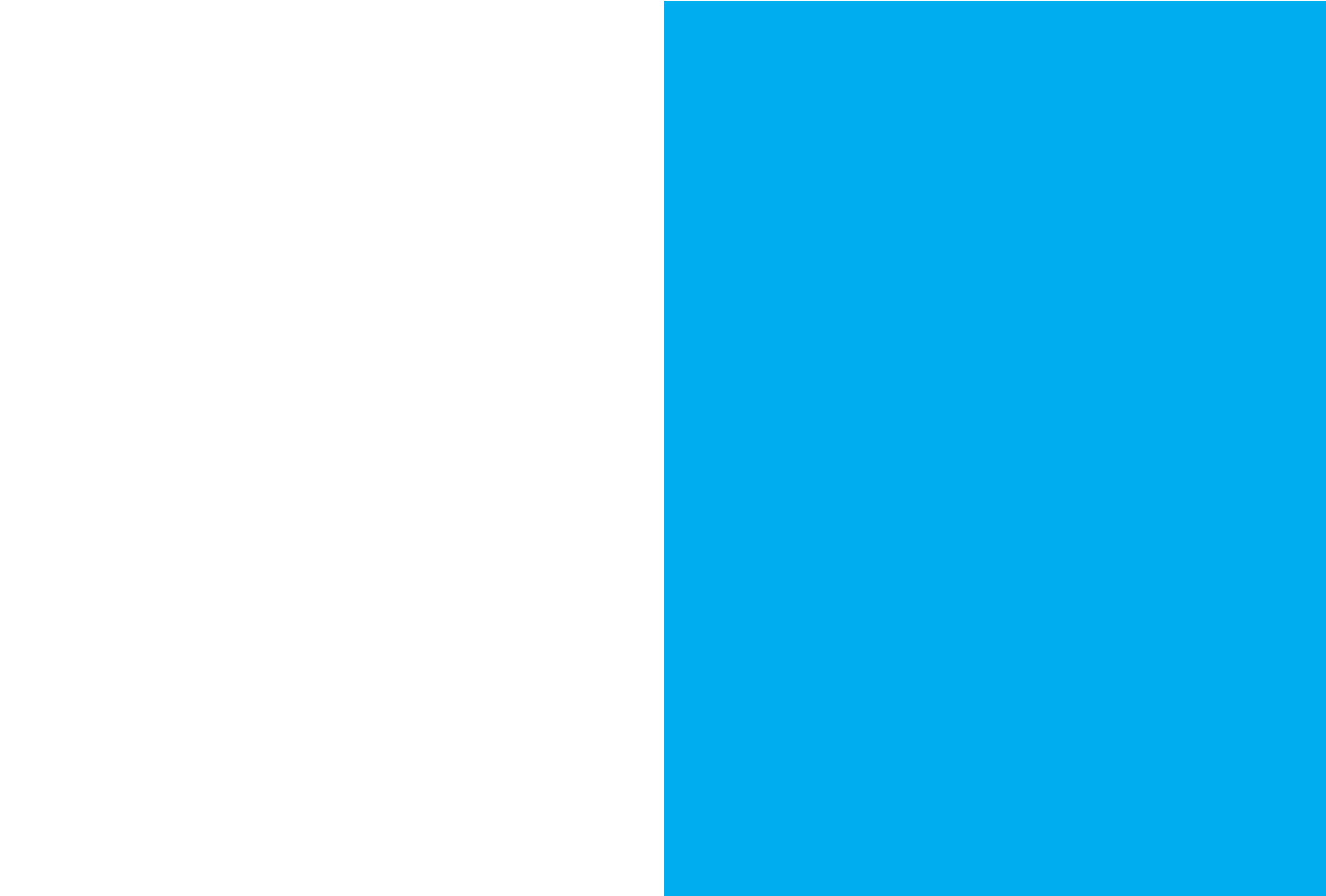
1. Is this an advocacy film? Why? Why not? How could it become an advocacy film? If so, what is the film trying to say? What is its goal for change?
2. Who do you think the primary audience is? Can you identify how the film is framed for them?
3. What is the message of the film?
4. How would you describe the editing of the film (i.e. fast cuts, music, transitions, slow, etc.)?
5. What is the structure of the film? Is there a beginning, middle, and an end?
6. From whose point of view is the story told?
7. Is there narration? Was it factual, personal, dry, or emotional?
8. What is the drama, or conflict of the film?
9. How does the film open and get you interested?
10. How does it end? Are you moved to action?
11. At any point do you feel the editing is manipulative or unethical?

## **SUBMISSION OF YOUR FILM TO THIMUN QATAR**

THIMUN Qatar strives to encourage students to create films of excellence. In order to show support for student work and provide incentive for young film makers, THIMUN Qatar offers educational opportunities and prize money for films of excellence. If you are interested in taking part in the THIMUN Film Festival, please feel free to contact us by mail at THIMUN Regional office, Qatar Academy, Al Luqta Street, P.O. Box 1129, Doha, Qatar, visit our website [www.thimunqatarfilmfestival.org](http://www.thimunqatarfilmfestival.org) or contact us by phone at +974-4454-2014.

Please read the submission rules carefully to ensure you have met all of the criteria for entry.





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