

Creating a Video for a Class Assignment

WARNING: Video projects may take longer than you think they should. Please plan ahead! This document will give you pointers...

Overview:

This document is for you if:

- You're in a non-film making class where the professor has given you an assignment to create a video and you don't know how to proceed.
- The professor has given very broad guidelines for the project and left the interpretation up to you.
- You're making a "live-action" video, which means you're filming actors and locations.
- You're making a documentary or "movie clip compilation"-style project, where you are using existing footage you didn't film to create your project.
- You're concerned about completing the assignment, given that you have other classes, assignments, and commitments.
- You're working with a group. If you're working on your own, you will still find valuable information here.

What follows is a general set of guidelines, divided into six phases of the project, as well as information about Whitman resources that are available to help you through completion. You *can* create a great video, even if you've never made one before.

If you're skimming this document, note that **each of the six sections starts with the *Critical Points* that are important for successful completion of the section.** *Critical Points* are followed by tips, questions, and information to help you.

Finally, consider the following: it's possible you're either nervous about this assignment, not excited to do it, or both. Here's one good reason to perseverer and make the best video you can make: your life after Whitman. Whitman is teaching you to think critically, synthesize, and be a great writer. Beyond this, however, no matter where life takes you, experience with new media (like video) is becoming increasingly sought-after in both the public and private sectors. Marry your critical reasoning/synthesis powers with your video, and you'll have something you can show people in your future (and yourself) to say, "see, I can do this too."

Phase I: Planning/Pre-Production (a.k.a "Don't Skip" Phase)

Critical Points:

- **Get together ASAP** with other members of your group. Don't overlook the criticality of planning now, at the outset of the project.
- **Work intelligently as a group.** Utilize the fact that you are a group to your advantage. You don't all need to be involved in the exact same way at the exact same time-- divide the work!
- **Keep it simple:** You have other classes and commitments. The process of making a video can be very time consuming, so be careful. As you plan, try for something that sounds incredibly simple, even simplistic. If you have time you can always enhance/ make it complicated later.

The General Process of Planning/Pre-Production

1. Brainstorm. What do you want to create? Rereading or re-watching published works can help with inspiration.
2. Hone in on key ideas, create "master" plan. Distribute workload amongst team members. Who's going to be responsible for what?
3. Script the dialogue and/or narration (and the actions of the actors if relevant)
4. Outline and write a narration (in Word or Google Docs) if you'll use one.
5. Storyboard: Outline the rough sequences of action using "stick figure" drawing or photos/video to visualize your story. Note any text (opening titles, closing credits) and music you'd like to include. If your project will be comprised only of pre-existing clips of video, your storyboard may just consist of listing of all the clips you plan to use.
An alternative to drawing a storyboard: If you have a smart phone that can shoot video, try very quickly shooting video of the kinds of shots your script is calling for. Depending on your phone or software on your computer, you can then very quickly, almost sloppily, edit these shots together to give you a rough idea of how your final project might come together.
6. Revise the storyboard and script as much as possible. Pretend this is the final assignment you need to turn in. The tighter your plan, the more time you may save later.
7. Determine any music you might want to add (begging music, end music, etc).

Scheduling and Coordination questions to ask in your group

If you're creating a "Live-action" (i.e., actors are involved) project:

- How do you divide up the work? Does everyone in your group do a little of everything, or do specific people have specific jobs/tasks? Jobs can include:
 - Script writing
 - Translation (if applicable)
 - Scheduling / job coordination
 - Prop acquisition
 - Scene location preparation / coordination
 - Acting
 - Filming
 - Video and Voice Editing
 - Subtitling
 - Music and soundtrack editing
 - DVD creation
- Figure out a schedule for what scenes you'll shoot, including when and where. (Bare in mind you don't need to shoot your project in the order of your story!)
- Who needs to be at the shoot for a specific scene? Everyone in the group?
- What props/supplies will you need? Where? When?
- If something goes off schedule (e.g. it rains), is there an alternative activity you can do then?

If you're creating a documentary or existing movie clips project:

- How do you divide up the work? Does everyone in your group do a little of everything, or do specific people have specific jobs/tasks? Jobs can include:
 - Script writing
 - Movie clip identification (what scenes, where in the movies)
 - Still image acquisition (if applicable)
 - Translation (if applicable)
 - Scheduling / job coordination
 - Narration
 - Video and Voice Editing
 - Subtitling
 - Music and soundtrack editing
 - DVD creation
- What will you do if a certain movie is unavailable for use in your project, or for technical reasons can not be brought in to the computer for editing?

- How long can you have movies checked out? Do you need to buy any?
- If something goes off schedule, what are alternative activities you can do to keep the project rolling forward?

Location preparation (for live-action projects)

Try to get a feel for the geographical area(s), people, times of day when you will be filming. It's a good idea to be looking at locations (actually go there) while you are developing your storyboard and script. Ask yourself questions like:

- Is this place easy to physically move a camera around in?
- Will people who aren't part of my project mind if I film here? (i.e. Do I need special permission from anyone?)
- Where should the camera be located? Why? Does that camera position help me tell my story?
- Is the lighting adequate? (tips later in this document)

Minimum equipment you'll need for filming live-action projects:

WCTS' Instructional Multimedia Services (IMS, contact listed at the end of this document) has equipment available for checkout, or you can use your own equipment. At the very least you will need:

- A camera. Use a "file-based" camera (meaning it just records on to an internal chip instead of video tape).
IMPORTANT: If you're hoping to use a different kind of camera other than a file-based one, such as a still picture camera or a smart phone, please consult with David Sprunger (contact listed at the end of this document). There may be key technical issues you need to be aware of.
- A tripod
- A charged camera battery! If there's an extra battery, charge that too. Do this even if you plan on using plugged-in power during your filming.
- Bring the camera's power cord and an extension cord. Use whenever possible instead of battery power.

Minimum equipment for documentary/movie clip style projects:

Most of your work will be on a computer in the the Hunter Multimedia Development Lab (MDL). For this kind of project, the key equipment will be access to the DVDs or VHS tapes from which you will gather movie clips.

Phase 2: Production

Critical Points:

- **Video cameras** are available, first-come-first-serve (plan ahead!), from WCTS' IMS. (IMS Contact info. at the end of this document.)
- **Basic instructions on filming** are available from IMS. Just ask for help.
- **Lighting is important if you don't want your video to look bad.** Read the section on the following page for tips.
- **Stop the camera in between takes; let the camera roll for a few seconds before and after your action.**
- **Narration** can be done on your camera OR in the Hunter MDL.
- **Collect music** you want to use in your project. Consider using music that doesn't have staggering procedures to use legally, like <http://dig.ccmixer.org> or <http://vimeo.com/musicstore> .
- **Collect bibliographic and other credit information** for your end titles/credits at the end of your movie.

Getting the Equipment You Need (live-action projects)

You can check out a camera and a tripod from WCTS' Instructional Media Services IMS in Hunter room 202. You can keep the equipment for up to 7 days. In some cases you can renew the equipment, but be aware that fines apply if you return the equipment late.

You can contact IMS by calling (509)-527-5257. More information is here: <http://www.whitman.edu/content/wcts/ims> .

Note that IMS can also give you a basic introduction to using the camera!

Before you start recording video (live-action projects)

- Unless you have experience or the patience/time to learn about your camera, leave your camera on “auto”, “easy”, or “green zone”.
- If you have a camera that can do widescreen filming, instead of a more “square” picture, that’s fine, just make sure you use widescreen (or square) for your ENTIRE project (same goes for standard square shooting). Do not mix and match.
- If you will use a smart phone such as an iPhone to record your footage, be sure to film in “landscape”. That is, hold the phone sideways so that the long edge of the phone is parallel to the ground.

Basic Lighting (live-action projects)

- When ever possible, use indirect natural light to help your shot. For instance, indoors, use the indirect sunlight from a nearby window to fill the room with light.
- Watch for strong shadows on your subjects. These can add unwanted contrast to your video. Move your subjects away from strong shadows.
- Avoid back-lighting your subjects. That is, avoid putting bright light sources behind your subjects. This means for example, not recording someone with a large window behind them, not filming into the sun, etc.
- Don’t hesitate to bring lamps you own or borrow to help light things up. Local stores also have very affordable lighting you may wish to buy. Always ask permission to move existing lights on a location, and don’t forget to put them back.
- The picture you see on your camcorder will be pretty close to what you’ll get on your final DVD, so as you make your adjustments at your locations/sets, refer back to your camcorder often!

Filming (live-action projects)

- When filming multiple takes of a scene, push the record button to stop recording between takes. This will help you edit the footage more efficiently later.
- Make sure you “pre-roll” and “post-roll”: start recording 5-10 seconds before someone yells “action!” and then 5-10 seconds after someone yells “cut!”. This will be important for the editing process.
- HOLD THE CAMERA STILL! Unless you are deliberately “following” something with the camera (for example moving along with a person who is walking), this is especially true if your not very experienced with cameras and/or the production process. Once you’ve picked an angle and a level of “zoomed in”-ness, stick with it. Let the subject of

your shot do all the moving, even if it's not moving at all. You should not be the one moving, unless it's absolutely vital (like filming a horse race).

- If you do decide to move the camera while shooting, be deliberate about it. If you need to pan, tilt or zoom in/out during a shot, try to do so as evenly and smoothly as possible. Adjust your tripod ahead of time so that your motion is not jerky. Don't hesitate to practice the shot a couple of times before you actually record. Also, if you decide to do these motion shots, make sure you know why you're doing this. Does it help tell your story?

Narration Recording (if applicable)

You have two options:

1. On your camera, leave the lens cap on (or point it at something neutral like a wall) and record your narration. Do so in as quiet an environment as possible (remember that refrigerators, heating vents, and even lights can make background noise!)
2. If you'd like to work in a dedicated sound recording space, contact David Sprunger (mdl@whitman.edu) to set up training and a time to do this. Schedule these appointments as far in advance as possible.

Music Collection

Collect any music tracks (if desired) you want to use during editing.

Bear in mind that if you'd like your project to play to a wider audience than just your class, unless you have cleared copyright permissions and payed royalties, you should consider using music that *can* be used, like the music found at <http://dig.ccmixer.org> or <http://vimeo.com/musicstore> .

Credits

Collect all bibliographic information for credits. This includes information about actors/actresses, music used, etc. Consider siting using "MLA guidelines for citing [movies or music]." (Google this.)

Phase 3: Post-production (Editing)

Critical Points

- Whether you use your own computer or those in the Hunter MDL, **training is available.** See below for details.
- **Editing is an involved process**, where the steps include assembling your footage, organizing it in order, re-editing to make a good film, and adding text like titles, subtitles, and credits.

Where will you edit? Do you need training?

Many people have video editing software on their computers (or smart phones), including members of your group. Another option is to work in the Hunter MDL. Whichever option you choose, the MDL can provide you with training on two popular video editing apps: iMovie and Final Cut Pro. To check on training availability, contact mdl@whitman.edu

Outline of the Editing Process:

The procedure of editing will approximately follow this order:

- Review footage while bringing it in to a computer.
- Arrange clips in the order your story is “supposed to” go, according to your script and story-boards.
- Watch the film. You’ll undoubtedly notice that it doesn’t quite look and “feel” the way you planned. Now it’s time to really “make” your project work. Cut stuff out. Elongate stuff. Re-order stuff. Etc.
- Add beginning titles, section titles, and end credits
- “Lock” the picture, that is, complete the story visually. Don’t worry about editing the audio, music, or narration yet.
- Add subtitles (if applicable) once the picture is locked.

Phase 4: Post-Production (Adding Narration and Music)

Critical Points

- **Audio is usually best done AFTER the video's picture is complete.**
- **Narration** can be done on your camera OR in the Hunter MDL.
- **Training is available** via the MDL. See "Phase 3" section for details on training.

Narration and/or Music

If applicable, refine narration that you've worked on during production, re-recording or adding if necessary. Note that appointments (via David Sprunger, mdl@whitman.edu) are required to use the MDL Recording Room.

Add and mix music (and narration, if applicable) as soon as your project is close to its final edit. It's usually best to have the video portion of your project complete before doing this phase.

Phase 5: Final editing

Critical Points:

Things will not have worked as planned. Determine why, then redefine and rework. (problem examples: clips are shorter/longer than planned narration, music was the wrong choice, missing bibliographic information, technical problems, etc) ***These challenges always come up. Beware and plan for this to happen!***

Phase 6: Distributing Your Finished Work!

Critical Points

- **Distribute or "turn in" your video via DVD, YouTube, Vimeo, or file.** Consult your professor on how they would like you to turn in your project.

- **Plan on this phase taking a couple hours.**

What format?

You have a number of options for distributing your finished work, including DVD, YouTube, Vimeo, and even CLEo. Usually your professor will dictate how they would like you to submit your work, so be sure to check with them.

DVD:

It's not as simple as simply clicking a "burn" button. Plan on this taking a couple hours.

The MDL can guide you through this process, ask about appointment availability by emailing mdl@whitman.edu. If you've edited in iMovie, your project will be burned using iDVD. If you've edited in Final Cut Pro, your project may be burned using DVD Studio Pro, via the application Compressor, or directly from Final Cut Pro.

YouTube, Vimeo, or file

In the case of online video, you will need to make sure you have an account on the service in order to upload your video. You can google "using YouTube tutorial" or "using Vimeo tutorial" to get started. In the case of file, the MDL can help you create a file that is appropriate for how your professor wants you to turn in the file (e.g. via CLEo, a USB Flash Drive, etc). Contact the MDL for help.

Contact Information for Whitman Resources

NOTE: *Both of the following resources require reservations. Resources may not be available "on demand".*

WCTS Instructional Multimedia Services (IMS):

Equipment checkout (first come, first serve), basic instruction on how to use cameras

Hunter 202

ims@whitman.edu

(509)-527-5257

<http://wcts.whitman.edu/ims>

WCTS Multimedia Development Lab (MDL):

Video editing, audio recording/editing, tutorials, help, and inspiration on video creation

Hunter 108

mdl@whitman.edu

<http://www.whitman.edu/mdl>