

## TOOLKIT GUIDE

### 3.0 TAKING YOUR IDEA TO THE SCREEN

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**THE OUTLOOK  
FOR SOMEDAY**

Young People + Film + Sustainability

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# Introduction

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Once you have decided what your film is going to be about the next steps involve pre-production (planning and preparation), production (filming), and post-production (editing).

There is no 'correct' way to make a film – it is, after all a creative process.

These notes provide some helpful tips and cover many of the important points you will need to consider as you progress through the different phases of making your film. Various film techniques are suggested for each stage. There is also a list of filmmaking resource websites which offer more detail and guidance if you want it.

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# Pre-Production: Planning and Preparation

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TO CHOOSE A  
STARTING POINT  
TRY CONSIDERING  
WHETHER ONE OR  
A COMBINATION OF  
THESE TECHNIQUES  
WILL BE USEFUL TO  
GET YOU STARTED.

## BRAINSTORMING

Sit down and write out the story in a wild rush of enthusiasm, teeming with all the aspects that are intriguing and exciting. Just get your ideas down. Don't be critical of your ideas or worry about your writing making sense or looking right – that can come later. The purpose here is to get your creative juices flowing.

## ORGANISING

When you have ideas down, you could try a scrapbook approach and compile diagrams, keywords, symbols, images, bits of dialogue, ideas for music, moods you want to evoke etc. Try to order these ideas into a film timeline, mapping out a beginning, middle and end.

## STORY DEVELOPMENT

You may want to go through a number of stages of developing your story before it is ready to start shooting. For example, you could start with:

1. Basic idea, concept or story
2. Story outline without dialogue
3. Story broken into scenes
4. Script with dialogue
5. Storyboard

## USING STORYBOARDS

A storyboard consists of a sequence of drawn panels or frames (a bit like a comic strip) that illustrate the main camera shots to be used. It's a planning tool so it doesn't have to be art – stick figures are OK. Rather than draw the frames, you could take still shots with a camera.

You can draw arrows and write notes outside the frames to indicate camera movement. Movement of objects or characters can be shown with arrows inside the frame. You can also estimate the duration of each shot.



## USING INTERVIEWS

Write interview questions and think about possible answers. Later after you have recorded the interview, listen to it and write a transcript. Then you can choose the bits you would like to use on paper before trying them out in your editing.



## USING COMMENTARY

You can write a commentary (sometimes called narration or voice-over) to introduce your film, to fill in the narrative (story) gaps, add comments and to make a concluding statement. Read it out to yourself. Does it make sense? Does it read like a good story?

## WRITING A SCRIPT

At the first stage of writing try expressing your concept as a single paragraph stating the following:

- the principal idea(s) you want to explore
- the emotions you want to evoke
- the impact you wish to have on the audience

Then set the scene. Don't forget to include important details such as time of day, setting, and the actions of the characters in the scene. Then write the dialogue (words) to be spoken by the characters in the story.

Format your writing by skipping lines between one character speaking and a different one speaking, especially if you're handwriting it. This will enable those reading the script to distinguish between speakers more easily. And also allow space for notes.

## IMPROVISING A SCENE

This technique is often used in drama and theatre devising. Work with a group of people, imagining a situation and assigning roles. Discuss character motivations – what makes characters chose to do what they do? Try different approaches such as gesture and body language only; gesture with dialogue; actors act while other actors speak for them.

## CHOOSING A CLASSIC FILM GENRE

Choosing a film genre (such as sci-fi, horror, action, costume drama etc) may require specialised attention to costumes, special effects, settings, make-up, camera movement and lighting. To help you think about this you could watch one or more films/shows of a particular genre and make some detailed notes.

- What are the typical characters, settings, costumes, props, lighting etc?
- What dialogue, music, sound effects (or silence) etc is often used?
- Closely examine a 20-30 shot sequence (using the pause button) and draw a storyboard. Include notes about camera techniques – camera angles, shot sizes, camera movement.
- What types of stories are usually told with that genre? Does this work with your message?

## OTHER GENRE OPTIONS

A film is anything imaginable that we can play from start to finish on a screen. Each genre calls for its own production techniques. Possible choices include photo essays, animations, improvisations, advertisements, music videos, dance videos, claymations, news stories, interviews, skits, film trailers, comic strip, mash-ups . . .

Film and TV continue to develop and change. Sometimes genres get combined (eg drama-documentary) and sometimes new genres get created (eg reality TV). New elements are introduced to film language too. For example, video and stills from mobile phones are increasingly seen on TV. Digital games and Internet video (eg YouTube) may influence film style and how stories are told. You are welcome to use any style, story form and whatever creative tools you have available to you.

For more information about film genres see  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Film\\_genre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Film_genre)

## UNUSUAL APPROACHES

A clever idea does not have to be complex. But it does help to plan thoroughly what you want to do.

Here are some examples of unconventional approaches:

- A **photo montage** using only still photos. Fully explore the soundtrack possibilities by using voice-over, music, sound-effects . . . and silence.
- A complex **sound collage** of the modern world to contrast with peaceful images.
- A **point-of-view** (POV) video sequence. Create an interior monologue for voice-over and add real world sounds.
- A video **postcard** to or from the future.
- An **improvisation** in which you think of an issue or theme you could explore at a particular site, take a video camera to your chosen site and film heaps of objects, scenes, and details, and interview a variety of people. Then in the edit you create a montage of images and a soundtrack with interview comments, sound effects and music.
- **Webcam interviews** with people from around the world. The theme could be their hopes and fears for the future.
- A **video diary** in which you appear on camera and personally explore an issue or theme.

Those are just some ideas we have come up with it. Feel free to use any of them or come up with your own. Just go for it!

# Production: Ideas and Tips for Shooting Video

Consider what is required of your approach before you start. Is it realistic? Consider the time you have available to make the film, your budget and availability of equipment, props etc. You will need to be very practical in your choices.

Here are some tips for video production:

## BEFORE FILMING – PRODUCTION PLANNING

- Write up a filming schedule. Plan to film all the scenes from each location at the same time. This may mean you are filming things in a different order from how they will appear in your film – but you will save time by not having to go back to the same location.
- Plan your filming schedule around the availability of your key people, such as your cast and/or crew. Make sure everyone has a copy of the schedule.
- If you are working in a team, share the workload. Each person can take on a production role – such as camera, sound and editing.

## BEFORE FILMING – LEGAL STUFF

In order to enter your film in **The Outlook for Someday** you must have the right to use all the material in the film, so that it can legally be shown anywhere by any means.

This includes performances and interviews which you film, and music, footage, stills, artwork or written material which you haven't created yourself.

So ask permission – and you will hopefully find that people are happy to help. Many artists are generous with their material – as long as you ask – and they will sign the **Licence Forms** for you to be able to use their material.

If you want to use someone's song, for example, contact them and ask for their permission. As the saying goes, those who don't ask don't get.

**Print and make copies of **The Outlook for Someday Release & Licence forms**. And take them with you whenever you are working on the film, so you can get them signed at the time and not have to spend a lot of time chasing them up later.**

Click here for  
**The Outlook for  
Someday Release  
& Licence Forms**

**For anyone under 18 who is featured in your film you will need to get the parental permission part of the form signed too.**

All this legal stuff is not just about ownership and legal rights - it's about treating people with respect. You would want someone to ask you before they used your material, wouldn't you?

## BEFORE FILMING – TECHNICAL CHECKS

- Check all your equipment before leaving to shoot your video footage. Try recording a few seconds and then check the recorded picture AND sound.
- Have a spare fully-charged battery and plenty of space on the memory card or hard drive in your camera.
- Check the hand-held/lapel microphone. Does it need batteries?
- Don't forget to take the tripod.
- Practise some key shots – see what works well and what doesn't.

## FILMING

- Run the camera for a few (5-10) seconds before and after your chosen shot. This will give you flexibility when you come to edit the shot.
- Try to use a tripod whenever you want the shot to be still or steady. Make sure the camera is level - unless you intentionally want the world to look lopsided.
- A shaky camera frame can be a real distraction. Film without the tripod only if you want to go for a hand-held filming style.
- Frame your subject to give extra space in the direction in which they are looking or moving.

- Use a mid-shot for most interviews (frame the subject from the waist to chest up).
- Film plenty of 'cutaways' - detailed shots and wide shots of locations and interview settings, which will be useful when it comes to editing the film.
- Consider filming 'noddies' (shots of an interviewer or other people listening) immediately after an interview.
- Consider the effect of the background of a shot. Does it distract or add to the shot?

## LIGHTING

- Avoid brightly lit backgrounds, direct light or places that are too dark – unless they are giving you a visual effect that you like.
- Cloudy days can be helpful because the light is even and the sun isn't casting shadows everywhere. On a sunny day you could try shooting in the shade if shooting in the sun is causing too much contrast between light and dark.
- Try using a reflector, such as a big white board, to 'bounce' light into shadowed areas.







## SOUND

- If you have a hand-held or lapel microphone which you can plug into the camera, use it for all interviews and dialogue. Check the microphone is working and sound levels are good. Use headphones to check.
- Attempt to have the microphone close to the subject (15-20cm).
- Avoid noisy locations.
- Check sound quality on playback.

## LOW-TECH OPTIONS

People often talk about film being 'smoke and mirrors', a magician's craft. All film-makers improvise, making the most of what they've got to create a desired effect.

You don't have to use flash equipment to make a great film. For instance:

- Use a broom as your 'boom handle' – to hold the microphone close to the action, just out of shot.
- Anything on wheels can give you a 'tracking' shot – a trolley, a bike, a car, a skate board, a wheel-barrow . . .
- For lighting there are all sorts of options – lamps, torches, car lights, candles, reflector boards . . .

## INTERVIEWING

- Prepare your questions. Keep them simple and short. Don't ask questions that only produce yes and no answers. Instead use open-ended questions such as those which start with "how" "what" and "why" or "tell me about..."
- Unless you are filming and interviewing at the same time, stand close to the side of the camera and ask your interview subject to look at you, not at the camera.
- Unless you want the interview to be used in the film as a conversation between you and the interview subject, ask the interview subject to give you complete statements. For example, if you ask them what they had for breakfast that morning, you don't want them just to answer "porridge" – you want them to say "I ate porridge this morning."
- Don't speak when your interview subject is speaking – just nod or use facial expressions – unless you want your voice to be heard in the film.
- Ask your interview subject to speak simply and clearly and not to move around – unless you want to interview them 'on the move'.
- If your interview subject is holding the microphone ask them to hold it 15-20cm below their chin.



## CAMERA TECHNIQUES

The camera can be a very expressive instrument. Think about how camera movement and framing can express meaning. For example:

- A close-up of a face will cause the audience to focus on facial expression.
- A wide shot draws attention to the setting.
- A shot looking down at a character may make them seem weak or vulnerable.
- A tilted frame can suggest danger or an unstable world.
- A hand-held shot (a moving unsteady frame that draws attention to the camera) is often used to indicate the POV (point-of-view) of a character.

## OTHER TECHNIQUES

- Tracking (moving the camera) into or away from an object
- Tracking alongside a moving object
- Panning left or right
- Tilting up or down
- Framing in close-up, mid-shot, long-shot and extreme long-shot

## COMMON NEWS/DOCUMENTARY TECHNIQUES

- Direct address – presenter talks to camera
- Vox-pops – a montage of a series of short answers from a number of people
- Expert interviewee with special knowledge or status
- Noddies and cutaways to edit into interviews

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# Post-Production: Editing and Soundtrack

The post-production stage of your project is where all the material (video, photos, music, sound effects etc) which you've collected is loaded onto

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**THIS CAN BE A VERY REWARDING PHASE OF FILM-MAKING - IT'S WHERE ALL THE PLANNING AND HARD WORK STARTS TO BEAR FRUIT. IT ALSO CALLS FOR STRONG ATTENTION TO DETAIL SO YOU CAN EDIT THINGS 'JUST RIGHT'.**

a computer hard-drive and edited using video editing software.

There are a wide variety of visual effects, transitions, titles and font styles to choose from. Here are some ideas for post-production:

- Using archival or library footage/photos
- Editing techniques such as cuts, cross-fades, montage, slow motion, time-lapse, film-in-reverse etc
- Editing camera shots, photos, maps etc into an interview sequence to illustrate visually the dialogue
- Subtitles such as names, places, language translation, film-maker comments/questions etc
- Graphics such as diagrams, symbols, speech bubbles, highlighter or fudge effects
- Inter-titles ie chapters or statements between sections of the film
- Photo-montage ie a sequence of still images
- Zooming or panning across still photos

- Voice-over commentary provided by one or more people to help in story-telling, link sequences or add information to help the narrative
- Music or atmospheric sound or sound effects to contrast or complement a film sequence

You can avoid copyright issues by making your own music or using copyright-free music. See the 'Music and Effects' websites list on page 12.

**It's a good idea to put at least 10 seconds of black before and after your film. This is a requirement for **The Outlook for Someday**.**

# What Resources Do I/We Need?

## EQUIPMENT

To edit your film you will need a computer with video editing software such as iMovie (for Mac) or Movie Maker (for Windows).

Your computer will also need enough space on its hard drive for you to download and store your video footage before you edit it.

It is a good idea first to shoot, edit and export a short test film, say a film with just one 20 second shot. This will help to confirm that your equipment is adequate for your requirements.

You will need a filming tool to generate audiovisual content. For most people this will be a digital video camera. You could also use video or photo functions on a mobile phone, PDA, webcam or stills camera.

While video cameras have inbuilt microphones, many are not too good at recording clear dialogue. A hand-held or lapel (clip-on) microphone is more reliable.

A tripod is absolutely necessary to avoid camera-shake.

You could use a scanner-copier to import images of old photos, newspaper clippings, books, documents etc.

Images, video, music, sound effects etc can also be imported to the computer from CD or DVD disk, and the internet.

## TECHNICAL CHECKS

Before starting to collect material with a camera be sure to check:

- That you can easily transfer the video/photos to the computer (for example using USB, Firewire or Bluetooth connections).
- That your file types are compatible with your editing software. Do a test run of the 'import from camera/edit/export' processes to make sure it all works smoothly.
- That you are using 'best quality' settings.

Refer to **The Outlook for Someday** Technical Guide for more information.

Click here for  
**The Outlook  
for Someday**  
Technical Guide

