

WITNESS

Basic video

production

handbook

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Points to Remember

Introduction

Congratulations on receiving your video camera! **WITNESS** hopes you will enjoy using it, and that your footage will enhance your human rights advocacy.

The most specific information about your particular video camera, or camcorder, will be found in the instruction manual that accompanies it. By contrast, this video handbook is intended to serve as a *general guide* and *reference manual*. It will cover basic information about operating your camcorder. Try to obtain a copy of the **WITNESS training video** as well for helpful information on the basics of using video. Consult your camcorder's instruction manual for details on specific technical aspects of your particular camcorder.

Above all, try to practice using your camcorder as much as possible. Although the technical aspects of videotaping are very easy to learn, they do require some practice before they become second nature. Videotaping can be an extremely relaxed activity that has the potential to yield footage that can be put to a number of important uses. The more you practice using your camcorder the more comfortable you will be using it. Additionally, by practicing with your camcorder in informal situations, you will find that you are more skilled when you are videotaping footage that you plan to use in your human rights work.

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a. Understanding your camcorder

i. International video standards

Videotapes throughout the world can be recorded on different standards: **ntsc** or **pal**. Each country in the world uses one of these video standards. A third standard, **secam**, has now been superseded by **pal**.

Bear in mind that these three standards are not compatible with each other. For example, if your country uses the **pal** standard, you will not be able to view video footage recorded using **ntsc** equipment, unless (i) you have equipment which will convert the **ntsc** to **pal** for you, such as a multi-system videocassette recorder and monitor; or (ii) unless you make a **pal** “dub” of the **ntsc** footage, which means you make another videotape of the **ntsc** footage, in which the footage is converted to **pal**. However, converting between standards can be costly and it also results in a slight loss of image quality. Nevertheless, this is the common method for viewing footage of another standard.

What do these standards mean? The different standards actually refer to the number of lines on each frame of footage on which an image can be recorded.

- **ntsc**: this standard was created in the United States. The letters actually stand for the american “National Televisions Systems Committee”, which was the committee in charge of creating television in the U.S. “ntsc” was the first video standard in the world, created in 1941 during the second world war, and setting a 525-line frame for black and white television. By 1954, the U.S. improved its technology so that colour television could also receive the **ntsc** system.
- **pal**: these letters stand for “Phase Alternating Line” system. The **pal** system was created in 1961 in England, and it uses a 625-line, 25-frame rate. **Pal** is used in many countries around the world and is considered to have a better colour reproduction than **ntsc**.

ii. Video cameras/ camcorders

Camcorders come in different shapes and sizes. Camcorder actually stands for “camera” and “recorder”. Camcorders are usually categorized by the type of videotape that they use.

Consumer Digital Cameras

MiniDV Cameras

In the last few years, digital cameras have become more and more popular. They provide high-resolution images than older formats. MiniDV tapes are small and record in a digital format.

DVD Cameras

These cameras use DVD technology with the capability of recording onto a disc or memory card. This new format is still not in widespread use.

Professional Cameras

DVCAM Cameras

These cameras provide better quality and steadier images than a MiniDV. This format is used more and more by broadcasters. MiniDV tapes can usually be used in this lightweight camera.

BetaCam SP or DigiBeta

BetaCam cameras are generally used by broadcasters, and provide a superior image quality. However, they tend to be very heavy, cumbersome and expensive. Digital BetaCam or 'DigiBeta' is a high quality broadcast and editing format.

The tape formats most commonly used by broadcasters are DVCAM, BetaCam SP and 'DigiBeta'.

Older analogue formats

VHS These cameras use the same tapes as a VHS machine. They are large and heavy to operate and the images filmed are not as good quality as more modern formats.

VHS-C These are more compact video cameras than VHS but the image quality is similar. S-VHS and S-VHS-C cameras also exist. They provide superior images and sound to the VHS and VHS-C.

Hi8 The Hi8 camera uses 8mm tapes, smaller in size, but superior in quality to VHS.

iii. Caring for videotape stock

“Stock” is the term used to refer to new, blank videotape which will be used in a camcorder to record an image and sound.

- **tape and the cassette**

Any videotape has two parts: (i) the magnetic tape inside on which the image is recorded; and (ii) the cassette in which the tape is encased. The cassette literally encases the tape so that it is protected, instead of being spooled onto an open reel.

The tape is very sensitive and must be protected from being torn or wrinkled, or from coming into contact with contaminants such as oil, dirt, smoke, hair, and dust particles.

- **protecting videotapes**

You should take care to protect videotapes from excessive heat, humidity, dust, smoke, dirt and moisture. Some tips are:

- Always carry and store a tape in its case
- Keep tapes stored in a place which is not exposed to direct sunlight, heat, or excessive humidity
- Store tapes vertically, similar to library books stored vertically on shelves.

- **archiving videotapes**

Once an image is recorded onto the tape, it is important to label the videotape immediately. In labeling, note down the subject matter which has been recorded, the approximate length of what has been recorded, and the date it was recorded. An example label may read as follows:

Tape 2, April 20, 1995, Speech by Mr. X, 27 minutes, pal.

This type of labeling will: permit the tape to be easily identified at a later date; prevent an important tape from being accidentally erased; and will permit you to decide at a later date if the tape should still be stored or if it should be erased.

iv. Battery types and battery care

All cameras can be powered via a mains connection or using a detachable battery. Camcorders have a built-in signal in the viewfinder, which will tell you if the battery is running low on power. If you use an LCD screen or an external mic without its own battery, you will use more power.

Most batteries are now Lithium/ion batteries. They do not need to be completely discharged before recharging.

Before going to record an event with your camcorder, always make sure the battery is fully charged, or you may find yourself unable to record an important event because your battery has run out. Better still, take an extra fully charged battery with you so that you will be prepared for unexpected opportunities to record footage.

b. Using your camcorder

i. Holding your camcorder

One of the best features of camcorders is that they are so portable and lightweight, but this can also cause you problems when trying to collect steady shots. The smoothest shots will be made using a tripod. When recording handheld, that is, recording with the camcorder in your hands instead of on a tripod, keeping a steady shot can be very difficult. But there are some simple techniques you can use to minimize the effects of camera shake.

- **grip**

You can start by getting the grip right. Hold the camcorder firmly with the grip strap tightened over your right hand and always use your left hand to steady and support the camcorder. The best place for your left hand is usually under the lens and this means it is still near to the other controls you may need to use on the camcorder, like zoom or focus.

- **stability**

Always keep stability in mind when shooting. You can support your elbows against your chest to help keep your hands stable. This may feel uncomfortable at first, but will soon be second nature when you're filming, and it will really help stop a lot of camera shake. If you are filming standing up, holding the camcorder at eye-level, try to make sure your footing is secure, and to help you balance, stand with your feet slightly apart. If you are kneeling down you can use the raised knee to prop up the arm that is supporting the camcorder or perhaps there is a fence or a wall that you can sit and lean against to steady your shot, propping the camcorder on your knees.

Sometimes you may want to film some very low angled shots. For this it would probably be best to lie down full-length with your elbows on the ground for support.

It is obviously more difficult to keep your shot steady when you are moving yourself. But again even if you are walking, or want a moving shot, it is very easy to minimize camera shake.

ii. Moving with your camcorder

● walking

If you are walking forwards keep your legs bent and your body lowered all the time, this will help you to avoid the rise and fall of normal walking. Concentrate on creating a slow-motion, gliding feeling. Put one foot down softly before you move the next, keeping them close to the ground. You can do exactly the same when you're walking backwards and it's a good idea to have someone walking backwards behind you so that they can clear the way for you.

• crabbing

If you are moving sideways, or "crabbing" as it is sometimes called, again try to lift your feet in a slow-motion glide with your knees bent, crossing your leg behind or in front of you, letting one foot rest firmly on the ground before you move the other.

• tracking

You can use a vehicle, some kind of trolley or even a wheelchair or office chair to get smooth moving shots. Again, as with the static shots we talked about earlier, if you are sitting in something, use the arm rests or your knees to steady the camera.

Holding your camcorder

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

Moving with your camcorder

- **Keep your knees bent**
- **Move feet slowly in a gliding manner**
- **Used wheeled vehicles for tracking**
- **Support the camcorder when moving**

c. Camera movements

There are some basic camera movements which imitate the way that we move our head and eyes to look over a stationary object or to follow some action from a static position. These are “panning” or moving the camcorder from right to left or left to right, like looking from side to side, and “tilting” or moving the camcorder up or down like looking to the sky and then to the ground.

Camera movements are ideal when you cannot include the whole of the subject in one single static shot such as a huge crowd of people or a very tall object such as a tree or building. They are also essential for covering action sequences such as people marching down a street and can be important for showing connections or contrast between subjects in a single shot such as someone giving a speech and then moving round to show the crowd watching.

i. panning

Panning means moving the camera from a fixed point in an horizontal arc sideways. Try to hold the shot for about 3 seconds both before and after the pan. Holding the shot helps the viewer establish what he or she is supposed to be looking at before the move begins. When you pan, SLOWLY pivot around keeping the movement at a constant speed. If you move too fast or do not hold the shot at the start and at the finish, the image may be blurred and your audience will not be able to take in the information that you are trying to convey.

If there is no tripod, then hold the camera closely and firmly against your shoulder or body, and keep your feet pointed in the direction in which you will end up. All the movement should come from your upper body, while your feet remain firmly in place.

ii. tilting

Tilting means moving the camcorder from a fixed point in a vertical arc up and down. Just like when you are panning, hold a static shot at the beginning and at the end of the tilt for about 3 seconds so that your audience can register what they are looking at before the camcorder moves. A good guideline in terms of speed for both pans and tilts is to allow approximately 5 seconds for an object to pass from one side of the screen to the other.

The smoothest tilt will be achieved using a tripod. If a tripod is not available, then move your upper body in the direction of the tilt, ensuring that your feet are firmly in place. If tilting up, step slightly forward with one foot before recording in order to support your upper body for the tilt. If tilting down, step slightly backward with one foot to support you body.

When you are either panning or tilting, try not to move too far. A natural arc of about 90 degrees is normally all you need. Remember to keep your feet firmly in position, with all the movement

coming from your upper body. Also, it's very easy to over-use these types of camera movements and end up giving your audience sea-sickness from watching too many of these shots in succession.

Above all, avoid **“hose-piping,”** continually panning and tilting across a subject in an effort to cover it all. It's much better to break the subject up into more than one shot.

Camera movement

- **Hold shots for 3 seconds before and after pans and tilts**
- **Keep feet stable using your upper body to move**
- **Avoid excessive pans and tilts**
- **Do not stop recording during pans and tilts**
- **Never “hose-pipe” over subject**

d. Zooming

Where panning and tilting require physically moving with your camcorder, zooms are achieved by manually adjusting the lens, or by using a motorized zoom rocker button. This zoom rocker button, which may be found on the body of your camcorder, moves the lens for you, to create the visual effect of moving closer to, or away from, your subject.

Usually the “zoom-in” is used to emphasize an intimate or emotional moment, or to highlight an important element or detail in a wider shot. As a program-maker, with the zoom-in you can dictate where your audience’s attention should be focused. You can pick out and draw them towards what you consider to be important in the scene that you are filming.

Likewise, with the “zoom- out” you can initially pick out a detail in a scene--perhaps the face of a person shouting-- and then widen the shot to show that the person is part of a huge crowd. You can use zoom-out shots to disclose information that is not evident at the start of the shot so that the audience can gradually begin to understand what is happening in the scene and why.

As with panning and tilting it is always good to hold your shot for at least 3 seconds before and after either your zoom-in or zoom-out, again to give your audience time to register the scene you are filming before the camcorder moves.

BUT too many zoom shots in succession are very difficult to watch. Again you will be in danger of making your audience sea-sick from watching your program. It’s better to use the zoom before you start filming to make sure you have your framing as you need it rather than during shots.

Another thing to be aware of, whether you are zooming in or out, is that very close-up shots taken from a camera position that is quite far away from the subject will amplify any slight camera shake that may be occurring and make the image very difficult to watch. If you want to film a subject close-up, it is better to move nearer to it if you can, to limit camera shake, rather than to stand quite a distance away and zoom in to create a closer shot. You can do these detailed cutaway shots afterwards, far more easily.

Zooms

- **Zoom in for detail**
- **Zoom out for context**
- **Move nearer to subject for close-ups**
- **Use zooms rarely**

e. Focus

Focus, or creating the sharpest image possible, is one of the most important factors that affect the quality of the video image. Even if a video image has the best lighting, the best sound, and the best composition, the video image can be ruined if the picture is not in focus.

Almost every camcorder is fitted with an autofocus facility. This means that you do not have to worry about making sure the image in your viewfinder is not out of focus or blurred. The camcorder will automatically ensure that what you are filming is sharply in focus. This is an excellent facility if there is no or very little movement in your shot. However, if you are filming a large group of people on a march or a parade, the camcorder may be confused as to what it is meant to be focusing on and repeatedly give you blurred images while it tries to rest on a subject. Here it may be preferable to use the manual focus facility.

Consult the instruction manual for your camcorder to see what steps must be taken to switch between autofocus and manual focus

- **When should manual focus be used and when should autofocus be used?**

Generally, manual focus is preferable whenever the subject is moving around or there is considerable movement in the viewfinder. For example, if a march or a parade were being recorded, manual focus should be used.

Manual focus allows you to manually adjust the focus ring on the lens and keep the subject(s) in focus.

Autofocus often confuses the video camera when a lot of activity is taking place. The video camera on autofocus will try to focus on one stationary subject. But since there is motion, the video camera will continue trying to achieve focus. The result is that nothing will be in focus.

Focus

- **Autofocus is best in situations of less activity**
- **Manual focus is best with moving subjects, but should be used only after practice**

f. Sound

Sound is an essential element in video making. Even if you have shot excellent visual footage it will very often be useless without good sound. Pictures without usable sound will only provide you with half the story.

The key to recording good sound is to be aware of the capabilities of your particular camcorder's own in-built audio system, and experiment with it to find out how to get the best results. Every time you press the record button you will automatically record sound as well as pictures.

i. your camcorder's microphone

The in-built microphone on most camcorders is omni-directional which means it will pick up sound from all around and will favor the loudest sound. It is far better to record your interview away from extraneous sound sources. The in-built microphone will be sufficient if you are trying to record events and are not concerned with dialogue. For example, the in-built microphone may be sufficient for a march of people down a street.

ii. using external microphones

- **uni-directional microphones**

Uni-directional microphones are far more specific in the sound that they choose to pick up. They are more directional and you can often pinpoint exactly which source of sound you would like to pick up with this type of microphone. They are a good type of microphone to use for recording interviews as then you can be sure that the sound from your interviewee is the sound that is favored. On most camcorders you can over-ride the in-built mic and plug in one of these types of microphones for exactly this type of purpose. If you are using one of these mics make sure it is directly pointed at the source of the sound that you want.

- **clip-on microphones**

Better still, when recording interviews, you could try to use a clip-on mic if there is one available. These are very small microphones that you can attach to your interviewees clothing near to the neck. Although it is an omni-directional microphone and does pick up sound from all around, because of its positioning, what your interviewee says will become almost all the sound that it will pick up. When you are using this type of microphone, make sure there are no objects obstructing it, such as hair or jewelry.

iii. acoustics

If you are videotaping inside, be aware of the acoustics of the room or how the sound bounces from the walls. Places like tiled bathrooms or corridors 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.

If there is music playing in the background, make sure you turn it off if that is possible.

iv. wind noise

If you are shooting outside, one of the usual problems you will come up against is wind noise as it buffets your microphone. There are a few ways that you can minimize this: either by standing with your back to the wind so that you can shield the microphone yourself or by screening the microphone using a natural windbreak such as a wall, or by using a clip-on microphone with a wind gag, which should be provided with it.

Some video cameras will have a button called “wind noise”, which should be depressed if there is audible wind noise when you are recording. If you depress the “wind noise” button, the sound of the wind will be minimized on your video-recording. If there is no “wind noise” button, an alternative is to place a thin sock, using a rubber band, over the built-in microphone of your video camera. It may look odd, but the sock will dramatically decrease the sound of the wind on your video recording. Remember, if you are using a thin sock, check the sound levels by rewinding and playing back the video tape in your video camera, and listening to the sound through earphones.

Sound

- **Omni-directional mics favor the loudest sounds**
- **Point uni-directional mics directly at sound source**
- **Clip-on mics are best for interviews**
- **Buffet mics against wind noise**
- **Consider acoustics**
- **Turn-off music in background**

g. Light

Most camcorders are good at recording in low levels of light and will automatically accommodate for it. Although the camcorder will record in low-light conditions, the definition of the pictures you collect may be poor or the colors subdued. Shooting outdoors during daylight hours, even on overcast days, or indoors in a room with plenty of sunlight will always produce good results.

If you are filming an interview in a room and there is plenty of sunlight coming through the window, sit with your back facing the window and sit your interviewee facing the light source so that the sunshine will light their face. If you sit them with their back to the window shooting into the light source, the camcorder will take its reading from the brightest image in the frame and close down its iris so as not to over-expose the shot. This will result in your interviewee becoming silhouetted in the picture, a good technique if you want your interviewee's identity to remain a secret but not if you want them to be seen!

If you are filming outside, it is always best to try and keep your back to the sun rather than to shoot into it, although this won't always be possible. Pointing your camcorder directly at a very bright light source can damage the camcorder.

If the daylight level falls while you're filming or you need to shoot at night indoors, you will need to use extra, artificial lighting to make sure the pictures you collect are of good quality.

i. hand-held lights

If you are using hand held lights with a separate power pack you will need someone with you to hold it. Because hand held lights are quite powerful, it's a good idea not to have it too close to your subjects as this lighting maybe very harsh. You should aim to have this light about 3 feet away from your subject, held above the level of the lens and angled down slightly. This will be far more flattering for your subject. Or you could try reflecting the light by pointing at the wall or ceiling and letting it bounce off on to your subject.

ii. free-standing mains lights

Free-standing mains powered lights produce a strong flood of light over a wide area, providing a good level of overall illumination. With some mains powered lights you can adjust the spread of light from a wide or flood position to a narrow or spot position. They also usually have metal flaps, called "barn doors", to control the direction of light or to stop the light spilling into areas you do not wish to be lit. But be careful with these types of lights as it's easy to burn yourself on them. The metal flaps get extremely hot, very quickly. It's best to wear gloves or use a cloth to

adjust them and pack them away. Better still, wait for them to cool down before you move or dismantle them.

Light

- **In low light pictures will be of poor quality**
- **Backlit subjects appear silhouetted**
- **Lights approximately 3 feet away are most flattering**
- **Wear gloves to handle a mains light**

h. Exposure

All camcorders are equipped with an automated exposure system, where just like your eye, the iris of the camcorder will close down or open up to let in the correct amount of light to collect good pictures. If there is not much light available, the camcorder will automatically open up the iris or increase the aperture to take in as much light as possible. In just the same way, if there is too much light, the iris will close down to limit the brightness and make sure that your shot is not over-exposed. It is possible to over-ride this function on the camcorder by switching to manual iris. If you do this, you will have to adjust the iris of the camcorder yourself and judge how much light you think you will need. The instruction manual that came with your camcorder will help you to do this.

But it's probably better to use the automatic iris most of the time as it will make using your camcorder far easier. You won't have to worry about checking on this aspect of filming good pictures, leaving you to be able to concentrate on the other aspects of videotaping.

Exposure

- **In general, use automatic exposure**
- **Manual exposure will over-ride automatic exposure**

i. White balance

Unless you adjust what is called the “white balance” on your camcorder you may end up with very orange or very blue pictures. Different sources of light produce light of different color temperatures that the white balance can adjust to accommodate and ensure that the colors in your pictures stay as real to the original as possible. Artificial lighting, such as normal light-bulbs used in the home, will produce an orange tinge. Daylight is more blue.

Most camcorders have an automatic white balance facility that will register the color temperature of the prevailing source of light and make the necessary adjustments without your having to worry about adjusting anything at all. However, some camcorders have pre-set white balance positions to cope with different types of lighting such as daylight or indoor or tungsten light. If your camcorder is like this, try not to forget to re-set these positions if the lighting conditions change. If you come from filming outside and then begin filming inside without adjusting your white balance setting, your pictures will be very orange. Likewise, if you are filming indoors and then go outside to shoot more pictures without adjusting the white balance position, you will end up with very blue pictures.

If your camcorder does not have an automatic white balance system or if there is mixed daylight and artificial light and you are unsure as to which setting you should be using, you can easily set the white balance yourself by holding a white piece of paper in front of the camcorder, or by pointing the camcorder at a white wall or white material and pressing the white balance function. This will make the camcorder lock into the correct white balance for the circumstances and ensure that you have top quality images of the correct color temperature.

- **manually adjusting white balance**

Adjusting for white balance is fairly simple. First check to see if the inside of your lens cap is white. If not, find a white piece of paper or cardboard or a white wall. Point the camera at this source of white, or if your lens cap is white on the inside then put the lens cap on the lens. While pointing at your source of white, press down on the button marked “WHITE BALANCE” on your video camera. Depress this button for approximately five seconds. Now the camera is adjusted for white balance in that lighting situation. Remember to readjust the white balance every time there is a change in the lighting conditions

White balance

- **Check white balance for color whenever changing locations**
- **Artificial light gives an orange tinge**
- **Outdoor light gives a blue tinge**

j. Composition

Whatever subject you are filming, the classic concerns of composition--what is in your shot and where it is placed within the frame-- are as important to shooting video as they are to photography and painting. Balance, perspective, shape and form should all be considered with each shot. It's good to remember that you will be telling a story with your program. Where you decide to put the camcorder, how close or wide the shot you decide to use, and what you decide to film, will all influence what your audience will understand from the pictures you are showing them. 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.

- **framing**

Framing your shot well is very important. Good framing will largely go unnoticed by your audience but a badly framed shot is instantly recognizable. Trust your eye on this as almost everyone has a natural ability to compose a well-framed shot really without trying.

- **types of shot**

As much of what you shoot will include people, it is a good idea to become familiar with the five main standard types of shot size which will be the most comfortable for your viewers to watch.

The first is a "wide shot" or "establisher" as it is sometimes called. This type of shot gives the audience an awareness of the scale and space of an area or an idea of where they are before you begin to pick out detail. If two people are sitting in a room together talking to each other, your wide shot or establisher will show the two of them in frame together in order to show their position in relation to each other before you begin to film them closer in frame.

The second type of shot is a "long shot". This type of shot shows a person from head to toe. Be careful with headroom here. Too much space above a person's head in the frame will look strange as will too much space between the person's feet and the bottom of frame.

The third type of shot is a "mid shot". This type of shot shows your subject from just below waist level to just above the top of their head. This type of shot can be used for formal interviews. It gives the viewer a sense of a respectful distance from the subject whilst still making them the prominent figure in the image.

The fourth type of shot is a "close up" and can be used to draw the viewer nearer to the action or the words that are being said. This type of shot shows your subject from mid-chest to almost the top of their head and is ideal for most interviews.

The last size of shot is the "tight close up" which can be used when you are filming an interview for the more intimate moments. The shot cuts through the top of the person's head and also part

of their chin. Remember, it is better to lose more of the person's headroom than it is to lose much of their chin from the frame. A tight close up can also be used to pick out detail within a scene. By using it you are telling your audience what they should be looking at or focusing their attention upon. A good combination of all these shots allows an editor to cut a scene or story together.

- **rule of thirds**

A good guideline to follow for framing your shots well is the "rule of thirds". The rule of thirds means that you should put horizontal or vertical lines, such as the horizon or someone standing in your picture along imaginary lines that divide the frame into thirds. This is far more interesting for the eye. Don't place subjects right 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 them standing slightly to the left or to the right of the frame.

If you are interviewing someone make sure that they have 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 so that they have space to move their head while they are talking without disappearing out of the frame. In fact, the rule of thirds applies here too. A good guideline with close-up shots is to keep your subject's eyes a third of the way down from the top of the frame.

Just as with interviews, if people are walking in your shot and you are following them as they move, try to make sure that you leave enough space 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. Without that space they will look as if they are pushing the picture along themselves. Just as when you are filming interviews, too much headroom will look strange. Instead tilt down slightly and you will get a far more natural shot when there is only a small amount of space between the top of their head and the top of the frame.

Composition

- **Frame shots properly**
- **Use the rule of thirds**
- **Interviewees should look into the frame**
- **Shoot interviews at eye level**
- **Action should move into the frame**

k. Viewpoint

The camcorder viewpoint can be very informative for your audience. Depending on where you are, you are giving your viewers very different information. Via your camcorder you are giving your viewers an insight into what is occurring. You can dictate whom the audience will identify with by the camera's point of view.

Over and above where you decide to place yourself in order to collect images, the angle at which you hold the camcorder can add another dimension to your shots. Try to find somewhere where you can be higher than your subjects. However in interviews a higher angle will diminish your subjects whereas a low angle will make your subject seem more powerful. In most interviews it is preferable to keep the camera at eye level.

1. Direction

When you are filming you should be aiming to collect images that when they are edited together will create a credible continuity to events or a sense of direction which the audience will be able to understand easily. 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, either right to left or left to right across the frame, but never both. If you don't do this it will seem to your audience that firstly your subject is walking in one direction and then that they are walking back towards where they first came from. Seeing a person or object from one side and then the other in the same sequence will be confusing for your audience.

The same is true if you are filming two people talking to each other. A good rule to follow here is that you should favor the opposite cheek of one talker to the other when filming them in a single shot. One person will have the left side of the face favored in the shot and the other person will have the right side of their face favored in the shot. This will mean that they appear to be facing each other while they are talking. If for example you film both subjects favoring the left side of their face it will seem as though they are both facing the same direction and are not talking to each other at all, but to someone out of frame on the left.

Viewpoint and Direction

- **Different viewpoints create different perspectives**
- **Try to change the angles from which you film**
- **Keep continuity of direction**

m. Safety

Almost every camcorder has a small red light that will come on every time you press the record button to verify that you are actually recording. Although this is a very useful facility while you are using the camcorder to ensure that you are actually laying images onto tape it may sometimes be necessary to disguise this facility for your own safety so that those around you are unaware that you may be filming them. You can easily do this by sticking a piece of masking tape over the light on your camera or by holding the camera in such a way that your hands obscure the light.

Again, at times, for your own safety, it may be necessary to film in such a way that those around you are unaware that they are being caught on camera. You must first make sure the camera is on autofocus and fully zoomed out. Then hold it close to your chest and pretend not to be looking in the same direction as the camcorder is pointing. This should help to lessen suspicion. Or you can do the same by holding the camcorder by your side as if you are merely carrying it. If you are trying to film a person, you may need to tilt the lens up slightly to avoid filming just their torso and to be able to include their head in the shot.

Safety

- **Cover or switch-off recording light**
- **Hold camcorder inconspicuously**
- **Look away from subject being recorded**
- **Do not place yourself in situations of danger in order to record**

n. Date & time facility

Nearly all camcorders are fitted with a date and time generator facility which when switched on will permanently superimpose the date and time over the images that you are recording. This is obviously a very useful facility if this type of information is needed as evidence of when an incident took place and should most definitely be used. However, it should not be used if the material is intended to be used as part of an ongoing documentary project or public service announcement. It is distracting for the viewer to see as it will be constantly changing with each edit when you come to make your program and will limit how flexible this footage can be.

Date & time

- **Use time and date only when necessary**

Points to Remember

Video cameras: Batteries

- Make sure your battery is fully charged before you shoot
- Bring fully charged backup batteries

Date and Time

- Be sure to check date and time settings before shooting

Holding your Videocamera

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

Moving with your Videocamera

- Keep your knees bent
- Move slowly in a gliding manner
- Used wheeled vehicles for tracking
- Support the camcorder when moving

Camera Movements

- Hold shots for three seconds before and after pans and tilts
- Keep feet stable using your upper body to move
- Avoid excessive pans and tilts
- Do not stop recording during pans and tilts
- Never "hose-pipe" over subject

Zoom

- Zoom in for detail
- Zoom out for context
- Move nearer to subject for close-ups
- Use zooms rarely

Focus

- Autofocus is best in situations of less activity
- Manual focus is best with moving subjects, but should be used only after practice

Sound

- Omni-directional microphones favor the loudest sounds
- Clip-on microphones are best for interviews
- Buffer microphones against wind noise
- Consider acoustics and electrical background noise
- Turn-off music in background

Light

- In low light, pictures will be of poor quality
- Backlit pictures appear silhouetted
- Lights approximately one meter away are most flattering

White Balance

- Check white balance for color whenever changing locations
- Artificial light gives an orange color
- Outdoor light give a blue color

Composition

- Frame shots properly
- Use the rule of thirds
- Interviewees should look at the camera
- Shoot interviews at eye level
- Action should move into the frame

Viewpoint

- Different viewpoints create different perspectives
- Try to change the angles from which you film
- Keep continuity of direction

Safety

- Cover or switch-off recording light
- Hold camera inconspicuously
- Look away from the subject being recorded
- Do not place yourself in situations of danger in order to record