

Part1

4 steps: Check your filter, white balance, focus, and iris.

Identify and compose your shot before you hit the record button. Practice any pans or tilts you may do before recording. This saves tape time and makes it easier to edit.

Use time code. Record your good "takes" or shots on a script or paper if possible. It takes twice as long to find those good shots when you're editing weeks later.

Don't forget the wide shots. That may seem obvious, but your natural tendency is to get all these up-close, creative, "cool shots." It's those boring wide shots that establish the scene and fill in holes in your video.

Don't forget the close shots. These add the visual excitement to a production, even if it's just a close up of someone's fingers on a keyboard. They also make good cutaways, a way of transitioning between similar shots - two wide shots of someone typing, for example.

Use a tripod.

Record the ambient sound with the camera mic, even if you won't use it, because you just never know.

Move that camera! Whether it's high, low, close or far, get a couple of shots from a different perspective to make things interesting.

If you only need 2 minutes of footage, don't shoot 20. Before taping begins, you should already have an idea how much you want. Don't waste time or tape by overshooting.

Check your subject's background. Make sure nothing distracts or detracts from what's in front. For example, a pole directly behind someone's head. Move the camera, or raise and lower the tripod to eliminate background objects.

Clearly label your tape and tape case.

Part 2:

Always get wide shots, a few pans and a few static. As obvious as that sounds, you can never have too many to cover up voice over.

When doing a pan, start on a well-composed shot and end on a well-composed shot, don't just move a camera for 7 or 8 seconds. Speed up a bit at the beginning and slow down near the end.

Speaking of pans (and tilts) most are exclusively on axis: up-down or left-right. Yet there's no reason why, especially with a good tripod, you can't move on an angled or curved path in any direction if your subject allows for it. A good pan or tilt is worth 8 seconds or longer when taping, while a static shot gets visually boring after 4.

Move the tripod: high, low, on angle to the subject, real close or far, any of these options make drab still shots more appealing.

About "artistic" crazy shots: whip-fast pans, quick zooms, and other funky stuff; use these with a plan. Throwing one or two in "just because" won't add to the continuity or improve the program by itself. Go in with a plan, use this interesting approach throughout the show, and keep it up.

Compose a couple of scenes for graphics and keys: put the subject far left or right or far away with zooms.

Play with the focus for more visual ideas. Don't forget you have a Macro option for getting in super-close to an object.

For taping film scenes for skits/mini-movies: use the manual controls, take a monitor, watch your headroom, and tape letterbox lines on the monitor if you want to fake a letterbox look.

Always use the manual settings; automatic features are fine 90% of the time, but full control of the image requires an understanding and practice of video you won't get otherwise.

Part 3

To separate you aspiring cinematographers from the glut of camera novices out there, here are yet more things to keep in mind when shooting:

Put a frame around the world; make a box pattern with your fingers and look through it at your subject. By "framing" shots you may realize how uninteresting some of the video you take actually is.

Video is two-dimensional, but your composition effects how flat it really looks. Create 3-D space by shooting at an angle, avoiding profiles, and changing perspectives.

Speaking of perspectives, use depth of field (the range of objects that appear in sharp focus) for creative shots: place an object framed prominently in the foreground with your subject focused far away (one of our favorite tricks).

Learn to edit; the concepts in editing dictate the shots, framing , and the tone your videography will take.

And finally, watch TV- really look at it. Most news shows and newsmagazine programs have a mixture of simple and creative video. Steal ideas from the professionals, people!

AND MORE...

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