

Video Tips and Tricks from Ryer Banta, MLIS Candidate at the University of Washington and seasoned film maker

It is an exciting time for making and sharing videos. Most people already own devices that have the capability to record video and audio. Lacking professional equipment should no longer hold you back from making a video. And once you have finished your video there are easy ways to share your work with the world.

Even though it is now 'easy' to make a video, it is still difficult to make a good video. I will share a few tips and tricks that will help you on the road to making better videos. These are really basic, fundamental video elements, but they are still very easy to overlook. Keeping these elements and tips in mind will help you make better videos.

1. Lighting

While this may seem self-evident, you need to have light to make images. When shooting videos pay attention to the light and dark areas of the image. Sometimes it is not a matter of filling the whole scene with light, but rather it is a matter of strategically placing lights for maximum effect. Often there is one primary light source in a natural scene. This primary source will likely produce strong contrast between light and dark. Digital video cameras do not have a very wide contrast range, so they will not pick up all the subtle gradations we see with our eyes.

Bounce

Especially with faces, you may want to lighten the shaded part to reduce the contrast, effectively lowering the difference between the bright area and shaded area. Rather than placing the subject facing directly at the light source, aim to brighten the shadow. Having the main light source off to the side will make a more interesting image with depth, but watch out for shadows that are too dark. You can see this in a lot of outdoor photography. A cheap and effective way to brighten the shadow and reduce the contrast is to bounce the light. Using a large, white foam-core board, you can easily make the shadow area on a face brighter. You will be reflecting the light onto the shaded area.

Balance

Different lights produce different light temperatures, which result in different colors. Indoor lights, often called incandescent, tend towards the yellow and orange end of the spectrum, while daylight tends towards blue. This is why cameras have white balance settings that adjust for indoor light and outdoor light. Many cameras also have a manual setting that adjusts based on what you tell the camera is 'white' under a lighting scenario. Be sure to set your camera to the appropriate setting. If you are in a setting with mixed lighting, like daylight streaming in to a room that is also lit with incandescent, consider using some daylight-balanced bulbs. Most energy efficient bulbs on the market are available in daylight - these should appear as a blue light. Florescent lights are also available in a variety of color temperatures.

Background

Lighting key areas of the background can go a long way to improve your images. Not only can certain areas become visible, but background light can help to make the subject stand out from the background. It is very tempting to pay all your attention to what the subject looks like, but paying attention to the background will enhance the image and the subject.

2. Sound

It is very tempting to focus most of your filmmaking energies on getting a good image, good performances and telling your story. While those elements are certainly crucial, it is important to give some attention to recording good sound. Try to not rely on sound from the camera microphone. Any external microphone will likely improve the sound you record. Microphones are designed to be very close to the subject, so anything you can do to get it close will help your recordings. Wireless microphones work really well to capture one subject, but be careful of picking up unwanted sounds from clothing and bumping. These microphones are very sensitive. In editing, allow time to mix the audio and adjust levels. Many editing programs have filters and options that can help your recordings sound better and more balanced. The Internet has a wealth of information and further tips on audio mixing. Doing great sound is very difficult, that's why pros make so much money, but with these tips in mind you will be on your way to getting better sound.

3. Collaborate

Reach out to your community. Likely, there are filmmaking enthusiasts who will be willing to help your project. Perhaps there are organizations that offer filmmaking workshops. Try to form alliances with organizations that can help you borrow equipment and put you in touch with people who can offer helpful advice. Not only can they help you make your video, but also your library may be able to help them in ways they haven't even thought of. You do not need a professional crew to make a great video, but finding some helping hands is always a good idea. Experience goes a long way, but interest and enthusiasm will go even further.

With these tips in mind you will be on your way to making better videos. The last piece of advice I would like to leave you with is to remember to have fun and surround yourself with others who want to make the product and the experience as enjoyable as possible.