

Video Lesson Plan Handout ... Some things to think about

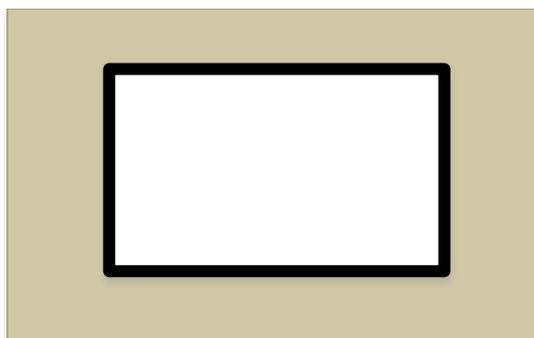
Please read through these notes and have a go at some of the exercises here before the lesson on video. They will help you learn some of the terms used when shooting a video and also give you some ideas about the best way to frame a shot and how to plan a video shoot.

Four of the most important skills of still and video photography can be learned for little or no cost, other than a bit of practice. Because our eyes and our brain's seeing system were designed for our survival and not for the archiving and storing of images, we need to learn how to see the world as a camera does.

The first tool we're going to use is a simple viewfinder. If you have a cameraphone you can use that. If not then you can make your own pocket viewfinder...

1. THE POCKET VIEWFINDER

Cut a 3.75cm x 5cm hole in the middle of a piece of card. Trim the card so it can fit in your pocket. With a black felt pen make a line around the inside of the frame.



Our eyes and our brain imaging system don't provide a frame for us. We are used to having a window, a picture frame, a TV set or a movie screen to 'frame' images for us. Artists and photographers use composition to frame a picture. Most of us have learned our own inner sense of composition (how to organise the different parts of a picture within the frame) from looking at paintings or seeing photographs taken by professional photographers. To make use of this inner sense of composition, we have to make lots of decisions in a short space of time (about where to position the frame, how to make best use of the available light, where we want the different objects and people in the picture to be in relation to each other etc) and this takes time and practice.

Whenever you can, use your cameraphone or your pocket viewfinder to 'frame' some part of your surroundings – imagine you're going to photograph or paint the scene in front of you and think about where you would like the people and objects in the picture to be positioned.

To practice for making films and videos you should always use your pocket viewfinder in the horizontal position (as shown above) as we don't usually shoot video with the camera on its side. At first use the pocket viewfinder with one eye closed. You can see a telephoto shot (a close-up shot of something far away) with the viewfinder held at arm's length, or a wide angle shot (where you see more of the sides of the picture), when you hold it closer to your eye. With a cameraphone you should be able to zoom in and out.

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Try looking at magazine pictures (especially ads and travel shots). They are usually very well composed. Think about what the photographer has chosen to put inside the frame of the picture and how he's arranged the composition.

Try these first 4 rules of composition.

1. Is the horizon level?
2. Are the frame lines "clean" (nothing peaking in or out of frame that shouldn't.)
3. Does everything in the frame belong there? (If something doesn't belong, re-frame or physically remove it.)
4. Do you like the picture? Does it satisfy your sense of composition?

2. THE SQUINT CONTRAST TEST

The second thing that has to be learned is contrast control. Contrast means the difference between the light and dark areas of a picture. Our eyes can see a tremendous range of contrast that cameras can't.

To learn how to better judge what a camera can record, squint while looking at a scene, with your eyelids almost closed. The image you will see with your eyes almost closed will be blurry, but that is OK. This is only a test.

If the scene looks OK it will probably record OK. If there are black holes, areas that are too bright or your subject looks like a silhouette, this is how it will look to a camera. The best place to start is to stand inside looking outside during the day. Notice how a white window frame inside goes black against a bright scene outside.

3. SHOOTING WITH BOTH EYES OPEN

This skill takes some time to learn but is very helpful for operating any kind of camera. Try keeping both eyes open while shooting. It takes time to learn and has to be practiced. Normally we close one eye and look through the viewfinder with the other. By keeping both eyes open you are seeing two images – the image that you see through the viewfinder of the camera plus the image that your other eye sees.

It is almost impossible to concentrate on two different images, but we can shift our concentration from eye to eye, from what the camera sees (the viewfinder) to what our unaided eye sees. This is very helpful for watching when something is about to enter our picture that we want or do not want to include in our frame. For example if you want someone to skateboard into the frame while you're shooting it's quite useful to be able to see them as they approach the frame so you can tell where and when they're going to enter the shot.

To learn this skill we merely shift concentration from our pocket viewfinder or cameraphone back and forth to what our unaided eye sees. Pointing the pocket viewfinder or cameraphone to one side helps for this exercise. Don't blink, just shift your concentration.

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4. WHAT WILL IT TAKE TO MAKE THESE PORTRAITS POSSIBLE?

Recording a person using video or photography usually takes preparation, equipment and, often, direction. For this project, you will be doing some of the preparation and providing a fair bit of direction to the artists.

When you consider a subject for this project and who they are, consider what will be needed to shoot their video portrait.

Consider time of day for lighting. Can we film in your chosen location or is permission necessary? Will noise be a problem for sound (e.g. if filming next to a busy road)? Do you think the people involved are likely to be cooperative? Will they want to try and highlight what they consider is important about themselves? What do you think is important about them? Do they have anything they might want to hide?

What location do you think might be appropriate to be used for the recording? Will it be an interior (more control over sound and lighting) or exterior (where did that ambulance come from? are those rain clouds?). Do you want a different location for each recording? Will the location say what you want to say? What if the artist doing the recording disagrees?

Is this the best location available? How about safety? If the subject is famous, what about passers-by? (We've all seen news reporters on TV having to deal with the guy walking around behind them pulling faces at the camera)? Will security be an issue? How long will it realistically take to record the subject? (Take this time then double it, it always takes longer!) How long is your chosen subject actually available for (people lead busy lives).

Will people have to be fed? Are there toilets? If you want an outside location, will people need protection from the sun, heat or cold, rain?

Think about everything you've read above and about how it relates to this project and the video portraits we're going to be shooting...

These four skills can be practiced anywhere. Looking around a potential location (or 'scouting' the location) and thinking about how you want to shoot the video can be a really useful and interesting exercise.