TIPS FOR PRODUCING GOOD VIDEO
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Time Code:

NTSC video is recorded at 30 frames per second. Professional-grade video recording equipment records an electronic counter on the videotape. This electronic counter is known as time code. This numbering system is arranged in hours, minutes, seconds and frames of video. This time code is displayed in the viewfinder on the video camera. The number is displayed as follows:

```
00:00:00:00           00:32:54:26
   |                   |
   |                   |
   |                   |
   |                   |
   |                   |
Hours   Minutes   Seconds   Frames

Mini-DV (Digital Video) tapes have about 60 minutes of recording capacity. Generally, this video is recorded in NTSC format in the United States. Time code allows you to find the beginning and end of any shot recorded on the videotape. The time code on the right means that your shot is located at 32 minutes, 54 seconds and 26 frames on your videotape.

Tape Preparation:

In editing, a good time code is essential. You will save yourself a lot of trouble if you will first, insert your new blank tape into the video camera, put the lens cap on the camera and press record. Let the tape record all the way to the end, then rewind it and use the tape for your project. Pre-recording the tape in this manner will create the time code from start to finish on the tape. If you don’t do this, you will have breaks in the time code. At each break in the time code, the counter starts over and this is maddening during editing to have duplicate time code numbers.

After striping the tape with time code, **advance the tape about 10-20 seconds before** you begin to record your project. This will leave room on the front of the first shot for editing.

Shot Log:

In order to minimize editing time, it is useful to carry a notepad into the field and make notes of your shot sequence. Before you go to do a shoot, think about what you want to portray in the final video. Do a little homework on the location, then jot some notes about the shots you want get at the location. Before you shoot each shot, make a note of the time code at the beginning and
end of the shot when you look into the camera viewfinder. Also make a note about the content of
the shot on your field log.

If you choose not to use a shot log in the field, you will spend a lot of wasted time in the editing
room scanning your tapes and logging your shots. A good field log will allow you to go to the
shot on the tape, using the time code.

**Shot Length:**

When you watch television, time the length of the segment from commercial break to
commercial break, and then count the number of times that the camera angle changes during that
segment. On a recent 4-minute segment on the Food Network, there were 70 camera shots. This
is an average of 3.4 seconds per shot.

Your project will range from 45 to 60 seconds, start to finish. Therefore, there is no need
whatsoever, to go out and shoot 60 seconds of continuous video on any one subject for this
project. You will most likely use no more than 10 seconds of continuous video on any shot for
this project.

Thus, arrange your shots so that you shoot **no more than 15 seconds per shot**. You will have
room on the front and back of the shot for editing. Most of your shots on this project will be **two
to five seconds long**, so 15 seconds of tape is more than enough for your two- to five-second
edited shot.

The introduction and wrap for your videotape will most likely be the longest segments. This will
take up about 15 to 25 seconds of your 60-second project. Your total shot count on this tape will
be between 10 and 20 shots, including opening, body of story and closing credits.

**Lighting:**

Most of the video cameras you will use for this project are specifically designed to function in
low light situations. However, without additional lighting, the video will look grainy and
unprofessional. If you shoot indoors, it is prudent to use additional lighting in order to obtain
clear, crisp images. In a pinch, you can use a handheld light with at least a 100-watt bulb as a
light source. Point the light at a white poster sized piece of foam core board and point the board
at the subject. The reflected light will be diffused and will appear more natural.

Outdoors, you can cover the same foam core board with aluminum foil and use the sun as a light
source. In bright sunlight, the white board alone may be enough to diffuse the light.

Make sure your subject is facing the sun and the sun is at the photographers back. If you try to
shoot a subject with the sun facing the camera, you will likely wind up with a dark shadow
instead of your subject.
Framing Your Shot:

When you frame a shot, think about the editing process. You may want to add a graphic at the bottom of the shot in editing, so leave room to do it. The rule of thirds applies here. When you edit, the graphic will go in the top, center or bottom third of the shot, so plan accordingly.

Typically for interviews with people, frame the shot so that there is just a small bit of space above their head. This will leave room for a graphic at the bottom when you edit. You will have to judge the space when looking through the viewfinder, but typically there is about one inch of white space above the subject’s head on the television.

Before you record your shot, look around the scene and make sure you move things you don’t want in your shot. Peak through the viewfinder and see if unwanted items appear in the viewfinder.

Using a news photography approach is always good practice. Shoot the scene wide, medium close, and then close up. You will have several interesting shots of the same subject to choose from in the editing process. Remember, keep them short! You don’t need more than 10-15 seconds of any one shot, unless it is an interview.

**WHEN IN DOUBT, USE A TRIPOD!** There is nothing worse than shaky, amateurish looking video.

**Editing Transitions:**

If you want to make a video that has a professional look, stay away from exotic transitions. Simple dissolves and cuts give your video a clean, professional look. Watch any show on television and you will see that 99% of all transitions involve a simple dissolve or straight cut between shots.