

## 7 Guidelines for Making a Great Video Story

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1. **Start With a Story** – Planning ahead will save you time and headaches when it comes to editing. Write a paragraph (often called a “treatment”) that describes the story, setting, characters, and how you’re going to tell it. Then come up with a shot list of scenes or images you know you want. Of course, you should also be flexible enough to catch great shots that pop up unexpectedly.
2. **Sound Rules** – We think of video as a visual medium, but audio leads you through the story and sets the tone. So be sure to get good crisp sound when you do an interview. Use an external microphone if possible, or get close to your subject and try to minimize background sounds. The on-camera mic. will pick up *all* sounds; not just the sounds you want. Use headphones to hear what you’re actually recording and always check your recording levels to make sure your settings are right. Be careful with music because, more than any other element, music dictates the mood of the video and can easily overwhelm your story if you don’t choose wisely.
3. **Look at the Light** – Shooting outside or in lots of natural light almost always makes your job easier. But watch out for sharp contrasts. Most basic cameras have auto exposure, which means they’ll adjust everything according to the brightest spot in your frame. So if you’re shooting an interview with a bright light (like a window, sky, or sun) behind your subject, they’ll look dark and murky. Try to find even light. On a bright, sunny day, this might be under a tree or porch.
4. **Show Us What’s Important** – Remember that everything in your video frame is part of the story – people, objects, landscape. Think carefully about how the way you place people in your frame helps tell the story. For example, an interview subject should be fairly close, just off-center of the frame (the rule of thirds), and looking forward. When someone looks distant in the frame, it doesn’t command our attention and the person becomes visually equal with objects that don’t matter.
5. **Hold Steady** – Most handheld footage is shaky and hard to watch, even when you think you’re holding the camera steady. Use a tripod whenever possible to keep your camera free of shakes and dips.

6. **If It's Not Helping, It's Hurting** – When you get to the editing stage, ask yourself how each and every shot is helping tell your story. If a shot isn't helping, be ruthless and get rid of it (even if it's a shot you love and worked hard to get). This is the stage where your earlier story planning can help guide you through what shots to keep and what to dump.
  
7. **Will your audience understand what's going on?** – Be careful not to fall into the trap of looking at your story from an insider's perspective. Of course you know what's happening in the story, but you want your story to be understood by a broad, general audience who may not know anything about the subject. Be sure you have explained it plainly and clearly.