

DIGITAL SKILLS FOR VIDEO AND FILMMAKING

PURPOSE

The information on this flyer supports implementation researchers to translate their findings into the medium of film, focusing on coherent narratives, setting up a scene, and post-production tools.

CONTRIBUTORS

Content is based on the workshop delivered by GACD's Ekow Tachie-Mensah in September 2023. The recording is publicly available on the [GACD website](#).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



VIDEO IS A POWERFUL COMMUNICATION TOOL

It allows for visual and auditory elements to be combined, making your message more engaging and memorable. It helps convey emotions and tone of voice – vital for complex or sensitive information. It can be easily shared and accessed online.



CREATE A COHERENT NARRATIVE

Films allow for creativity in storytelling and can be used for a range of purposes, from influencing to informing to inspiring. Be clear on your key message and story arc from the outset.



SET UP YOUR SCENES WITH CARE

Think about lightning (natural rather than artificial), orientation (landscape rather than portrait), zoom (optical rather than digital), and applying the rule of thirds.



ENHANCE ENGAGEMENT POST-PRODUCTION

Use post-production to provide explanatory text, set the tone with music and sound effects, and edit in cutaway shots and insert shots. Use these strategically and sparingly to enhance engagement with your message, not detract from it.

Create a coherent narrative

STATE YOUR VIDEO'S OBJECTIVE

Define what your film is trying to achieve (inform, influence, or inspire action).

WRITE YOUR KEY MESSAGE

State one clear takeaway you want the audience to remember.

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Be clear on who your audience is and what you want them to take away. This shapes everything, from content to tone to length.

CREATE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

Use a simple arc - for example, the AND-BUT-THEREFORE structured proposed by [Randy Olson](#).

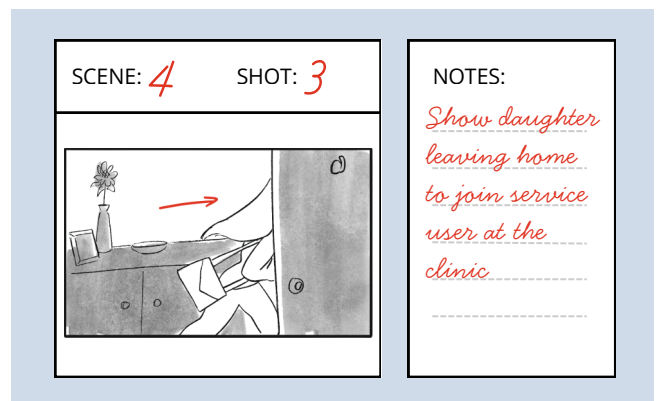
AND = your set up and your background.

BUT = your problem, conflict, or drama.

THEREFORE = your journey and the solution.

CREATE A STORYBOARD

Sketch out each scene before filming, noting visuals, dialogue, and key points for each segment. This helps ensure that all essential elements are captured efficiently.



EDIT BEFORE FILMING

Edit with intention and remove anything that doesn't support your message. Shorter, focused videos are more likely to be watched and remembered.

TIPS FOR FILMING ON A SMART PHONE

Effective video communication is not about high-end equipment. You can achieve a lot with just a smartphone.

Switch your phone to airplane mode. This will prevent you being interrupted by calls and alerts.

Start with a full battery. Filming and storing video files uses lots of power. If you plan to film for more than an hour you may need a portable battery pack.

Check your storage. Video uses lots of space on your device, make sure you have enough. This may be the time to delete some of your old apps and photographs.

Keep it stable. Use both hands, a selfie stick, portable tripod, or try attaching your phone to something solid (such as a small water bottle) with a heavy-duty rubber band.

Get your microphone close to the sound that you want to record. Most phones are supplied with headphones with quite a good microphone. Use this to get better sound quality.

Use an old phone without a SIM card as a camera and connect it to wifi to export the video.

You can also film on tablets and a range of other devices which have many of the features of a smartphone.

Setting up a scene

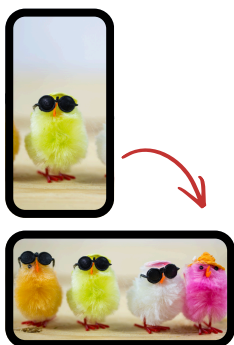
THINK ABOUT LIGHTING

Avoid using your flash in favour of natural light, which creates photos that are richer and brighter. A flash can flatten out your photo and wash out your subject. If you can't shoot outdoors, take photos near windows or in well-lit rooms.

You can brighten up a photo that is too dark with editing tools, but there is nothing that can fix a photo that is overexposed. Overexposure is the result of too much light hitting the film or the sensor. Overexposed photos are too bright, have very little detail in their highlights, and appear washed out. Prevent overexposure by adjusting the lighting on your device.

FILM IN LANDSCAPE

Filming in landscape (horizontally) is the standard orientation for videos. The human eye has a natural side-to-side view that suits the wider angle. Landscape view provides a broader canvas to capture context and movement.

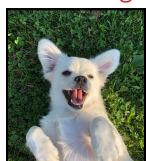


AVOID DIGITAL ZOOM

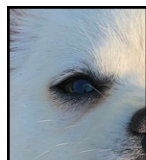
Digital zoom is a digitally enlarged image which is then cropped. Because you are working with a fixed number of pixels, enlarging the image results in a lower pixel density causing a loss in detail.

Optical zoom uses the camera's lens system to magnify the subject without reducing quality, maintaining full resolution and detail. Alternatively, physically moving closer allows you to fill the frame naturally while preserving clarity.

Full image



Optical zoom



Digital zoom



If neither option is available, it is better to capture the image without zoom and crop it later during editing. This gives you more control over the final composition and often produces a better-quality result than relying on digital zoom in-camera.

APPLY THE RULE OF THIRDS

According to the rule, you should divide your shot into a grid containing three vertical and horizontal lines placed in equal proportions to each other. The most important part of the grid is where the lines cross. These are focal points (or 'sweet spots', as those in the industry call them).

In a photograph, you might want a person's eyes or smile on such a point to help tell the story of the image. You have four sweet spots to use. With a little thought, and depending on what is going on in the image, you can show what's happening with the most impact.

It is important to note that these four sweet spots differ in their appeal to the eye, underlining the fact that going for symmetry in your design is not always the best option.

Many cameras will offer the grid overlay in the view finder or on live view so that photographers can compose their shots with this rule in mind.



Use post-production to enhance your message

ADD TEXT, MUSIC, AND SOUNDS

Explanatory text on screen adds context without taking up film time. Ensure that the audience has time to read the words.

Music and sounds effects can be used to add emphasis or set a tone. Open access repositories include [Soundbible](#) and [Freesound](#).

Use text, music, and cutaways sparingly and strategically. Too much text can be overwhelming and distracting, too much music can be overpowering, and too many cutaways can be jarring.



Example of explanatory text to identify the people on screen without taking up film time.

USE CUTAWAYS TO CONVEY CONTEXT

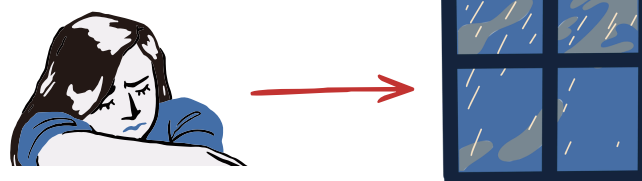
A cutaway shot is a technique that interrupts a continuously filmed scene by briefly inserting a view of something else. After the cutaway, it returns to the main scene, which is now enriched with new meaning or context. They typically last for two to five seconds. For example, you talk about a book → cut to book cover → cut back to you.

Similar is an insert shot. This highlights a tiny detail in the main scene for two or three seconds. For example, you unlock a door → insert shot of key turning in lock.

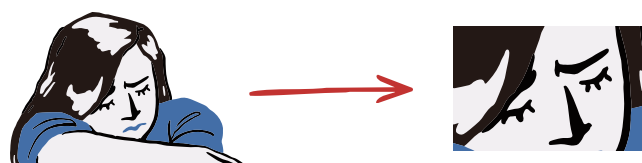
Both can be useful techniques to:

- Hide edits and ensure continuity.
- Build suspense and control pace.
- Provide context and exposition ('show, don't tell').

Cutaway shot



Insert shot



Make sure you plan for cutaway shots and insert shots during the storyboarding phase so that you capture everything you need during filming.

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