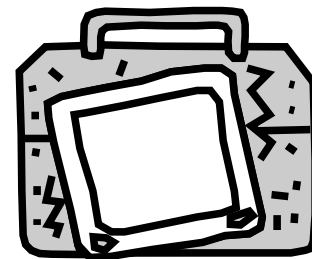


SKILL SHEET:

Shooting Your Videos



Have you ever sat down in front of the television to watch your own videos and been disappointed with the results? Most people new to a camcorder have. Here are several tips to help you improve the quality of the videotapes you shoot.

Planning

Think through your goals and what you want to have on tape. Shoot only those scenes that you really want or need. Shooting miles of wild footage that no one will ever want to watch is a waste of time and money. Be selective and resist the temptation to turn the camera on and record *everything* that's happening.

Lighting

The single most important thing you can do to improve the look of your videos is to improve your lighting.



A video shot in poor light looks dark and grainy. Pay attention to the light source (Is it from overhead? Lamp? Sun?) and try to place your subject so that the light falls evenly across it. Never shoot into the sunlight or into a window unless you're trying to make a dark silhouette of your subject. Shoot so that your back or side is to the light source and your subject is facing the light. Use a lamp or other filler to shed more light on your subject, if possible.

Sound

In most shooting situations, the audio (sound) is just as important as the video (picture). Most camcorders have built-in microphones that work fine for recording room or ambient sound. They're also acceptable for recording subjects if the subjects are no more than 9 to 12 feet away from the camera and if the room is very quiet. You can greatly improve your audio quality by using an external microphone. You can buy or lease hand-held (like news reporters use) or lavalier (clip-on) microphones from stores that sell video equipment. Remember, if you really want the sound on your tape to be good, you need to pay attention to where the microphone is in relation to your subject. It's also important that you eliminate distracting room noise (such as blowers, voices and equipment).

Camera Technique

The biggest mistakes people make when using camcorders are overusing the zoom function and moving the camera erratically. Use the telephoto (zoom) lens only when you really want to get close and intimate with your subject and to create dramatic effect. But be careful. It's nearly impossible to get a stable shot without a tripod when you're zoomed in close. If you have a tripod, use it. If not, you may want to stick with medium and wide shots. When shooting without a tripod, hold the camera with two hands and plant your feet firmly, shoulder-width apart. Keep the camera as steady as possible and turn your whole body with the camera when you want to "pan" or move the camera left or right.

Have Fun!

Now that you know some of the basics of video production, go out and play with your camera! It's the best way to learn. Shoot scenes in a variety of situations and then play back and critique your results. Experiment with some of the tips given here – and then try *breaking* the rules to see what you can learn from that experience. (For example, someone decided awhile back that shaky camera movement is "in," so now we see it all the time on national television advertisements and programs.)