



Digital Documentary: a process of discovery

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A compelling
documentary can
both ask and
answer questions.



The Moral:

- Plan a strong, compelling opening to your documentary.
- Get the audience's attention.
- Don't hype it up too much because you can't sustain that energy level for the whole piece.



Keys to Success

- Persistence trumps talent.
- Teamwork: Video making is a *collaborative* effort, so *communicate*.
- *Gmail, Google Docs, E-school Builder*
- Planning: No, you do ***not*** work best under pressure.



Over-prepare

- Professional writers, filmmakers, photographers always produce **more** than they need and **cut** to arrive at their final product.
- It's **not** about producing just enough to get by.



Over-prepare continued

- *Crash Burn Love*: 81 photos
- ~5,000 photographs taken over 8 years
- Your final product should be the result of choosing the *best of the best* of your material.
- A sign that you have done your job well will be if you have to **cut** things you **really love**.



The Importance of Story

- Audiences want a **story**, not a collection of scenes *about* a topic.
- Stories have a beginning, middle and end.
- Your story does not have to be tightly structured, but it does need something to draw the audience in and keep them interested.
- How as a video maker do you accomplish that?



Conflict creates interest

- What is the major conflict in the story?
- Who is your main “character?”
- What does he or she *want*?
- What *obstacles* stand in the character’s way?
- Will the conflict be *resolved*?



Utilize Tension and Release

- The use of tension (suspense) and release is central to many art forms: music, dance, painting, photography, even architecture!
- If you can think of a way to use tension and release in your documentary, your audience will stay interested.



Voice

- What will be the predominant voice telling the story?
- Narrator?
- Captions or subtitles?
- “Characters?”
- Combination of all the above?
- *Whose* voice do you want to *remain* with the viewer?



“In Nineteen Seventy,
4,378 Americans were
killed in Vietnam.”

*From Sports in America 1970
or How we spent the Vietnam War*



Less can be more.



Sequencing:

Linking scenes in a meaningful way
visually and *content-wise*.



Crash Burn Love

Demolition Derby



Photographs and Essays by Bill Lowenburg

Foreword by Larry Fink



Frontispiece

- Provides a preview, sets the tone for a book of photos.
- You may want to provide a very quick video scene, a remark by someone, an image, to draw the viewers in.



Sequencing:

- Linking scenes in a meaningful way *visually and content-wise*.
- Storyboarding is essential.
- Try pencil and paper!



Establishing Shots

- Provide an overview: places viewer in the scene.
- Often wide-angle or from a distance.
- Could be done with extreme close-up and move back.
- Could be accomplished with blur and come into focus, etc.
- Could be a **sound** on a *black screen*.



Narrative Sequence

Series of *related scenes* that advances a story line.



Final Tips for Shooting

- Vary camera-to-subject distance.
- Be aware of camera-to-subject angle.
- Avoid using the zoom lens. Your legs are your best zoom.
- Always use a tripod when appropriate.
- Sound quality is **critical**. *Use wireless or off-camera microphones if at all possible.*



The Balancing Act

Does your documentary show both sides equally?

- Time allotted for each “side”
- Objectivity of script
- Camera angles
- Tone of narration



Remember...

- Have fun! Enjoy your work.
- This is a *process of discovery*.