

Highland Lives

“One year, many lives, many stories”

Deciding On Your Story

Whether it's an audio slideshow or a video you want to make, deciding on the story you want to tell is absolutely crucial. There are lots of different types of story for you to choose from: you could relive a favourite memory, or tell the story of an experience that changed you, or even a favourite journey or place. It's up to you to choose, but it's always better to focus on an experience, rather than an abstract theme.

If you're struggling to come up with something, here's a game you could try to prompt some ideas: you'll need an egg timer and a friend to do it with. Turn over the egg timer and talk about something you really love. You've only got the length of time it takes for the sand to flow from top to bottom to come up with something and talk about it. Then get your friend to do the same. Once you've done one each, start again but this time talking about a place you've really enjoyed visiting. Take it in turns again, and keep doing this for lots of different types of story. You'll end up with loads to think about, and hopefully some good ideas for stories you could tell.

Once you've decided on your story, it's a good idea to plan and research it: discuss your idea with friends and family, go through old letters or photos, go and visit relevant places to help you get inspired. Have a think about what elements you should include to make your story interesting to people you hope will watch it.



At this stage, you should also start to think about whether or not you want to include other people in your story: you might be focussing on your own personal experience, in which case you should be the main person telling the story. Or you might be telling the story of a particular place or event: think about the different kinds of people who go there, or the people who run it: it would make sense to hear their views in your story. If your story is based on some favourite memories, would it make sense for you to ask other people who might have some other memories to offer?

Once you've worked out who are going to be the best people to help you tell your story, go and ask them if they're happy to join in. It can be quite tricky to turn up and just expect people to take part, and even if you can only give them 5 minutes notice they'll appreciate that you asked.

Having a good story in the first place really is the key to making your video or audio slideshow a success. If you can get that right, actually going out to make it will fall into place much more easily.

Planning Your Video

Once you've decided what story you want to tell, preparation is the key to making sure your filming and editing goes well and that you end up with the film that you really want to make.

First off, you need some locations to film. Which places are going to best show your audience what your story's about? If your story is very straightforward you might only need to film in couple of places. If it's more involved, you might need to show a variety of different locations. Again, it's a good idea to ask permission before you press the record button!



It can really help you plan your story if you either draw a basic storyboard or write a shooting script. If you're feeling artistic, have a go at a storyboard. It's a sequence of drawings, however basic, which illustrate how you would like your film to end up. You may find that you don't film it all in that order, but it will give you a really good idea of the different elements you want to include.

If drawing is not your strong point, you could write a shooting script. This does the same job as a storyboard but instead of drawing you write down what you would like for each sequence.

For example, if you've planned in advance that you want some "shots of Dad going through old letters", it'll really help to have the shooting script so that you don't have to think about it what shots you need while you are filming.

When you're out filming, there isn't always time to plan on the spot, and that's why it is really important to think about your film in advance. That way, you can be sure that you'll be telling your story in exactly the way you want to.

Before You Go

There are some essential bits of kit that you'll need with you every time you go out filming. First off, you need your camera and microphones! Without them, you'll be really stuck!



When you go out filming make sure all your batteries are fully charged, and always take them all with you. You'd be surprised at how often people get caught out running out of power when they're on location.



Take an extra tape, even if you're only planning to film a little bit that day. There's always the very small possibility that there's a problem with your first tape, and something unexpected might crop up that you want to capture.

Finally, take all your filming plans with you. It's the best way to get the most out of that day. It's also really handy to have a notebook and pen with you in case you want to make a note of something while you're out... and then you just have to take a deep breath and go!

Filming Your Video

If you take a bit of time to think about how you're going to shoot your story, you'll really see the benefits in the finished piece.

The composition of your shots has a really big impact on how you tell your story, and if you get the hang of some of the basics you can start to get creative with your film.

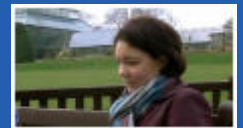


Wide shots are very good for establishing a scene: they show exactly where you are and what's going on. For every scene you film, get a couple of wide shots.

Mid shots show more detail of what's happening. For example, you could get mid shots of all the people who will feature in that particular sequence to allow the audience to get a better look at who's there.



Close ups are invaluable for showing very close detail and emotion. They're excellent to use when someone is telling a very personal story for example, or when you need to get a really good look at something



It's also a good idea to get plenty of cutaways. These are individual shots of things that are happening in the scene which aren't necessarily the main action.



For example, if you're filming someone driving a car, make sure you get shots of the road in front as well as the person driving. These shots allow you to tell the full story of what's happening, and are really useful in the edit.

Lighting is crucial, and there are some straightforward guidelines: as a general rule, you need as much light as possible. This means no filming in the dark!

And if you're inside, turn on all the available lights. You should also never film anyone in front of a window: they will end up being a silhouette and you won't see them properly.

Recording Sound

It is absolutely essential that you get good sound for your film. You can get away with a few shaky shots on the camera, but bad sound quality means that your audience will find it extremely difficult to follow your story.

The golden rule of getting decent sound when you're shooting on a DV camera is to use an external mic that you can fit onto the camera. They always give much better results than a mic that is built into the camera. You can go for either a gun mic or a personal (or radio) mic. If you're out filming on your own and you have a gun mic, fix it to the top of your camera. It'll then record the sound in whatever direction the camera is facing. If you have someone with you, you can also fix a gun mic to the end of a pole for them to hold. This means that you don't necessarily have to have the camera pointing the same way as the microphone, which will give you more flexibility, but it does need someone else to hold it.



You can use a personal (or radio mic) if you're going to be interviewing someone, or if you're going to be talking either in front of the camera or if you're holding it and want to narrate as you film. Personal mics are very simple to set up, just clip one onto whoever's doing the talking, plug the other end into the camera and away you go.

Regardless of which type of microphone you choose to use, it's always a good idea to wear headphones while you're filming. You will be able to monitor the sound that's being recorded, and there will still time to correct it if there's a problem. Don't wait till you get to the edit to find out there's something wrong.

Audio Stories

It may sound obvious, but an audio slideshow is a very different medium to video. Essentially, an audio slideshow is a soundtrack that is accompanied by photographs. Audio slideshow tend to be more immediate, personal and emotional than video stories. It can be a very powerful way of telling a story.

When considering what story you want to tell, keep in mind that the more visual your story, the easier it will be to illustrate with photographs. For example, 'A Day in the Life of'... pieces work well here. You will need to collect photos to illustrate every part of your story: high quality images are a must and try to include a wide range of photos including close ups and distance shots, but remember to keep your topic focussed. Keep asking yourself: 'what's my story about?'

Before you start, it's a good idea to plan your slideshow. A storyboard is a useful device and will save you time later. As well as the photographs, think about what audio you need to record and the atmosphere you want to capture: music can make a big difference to your story, and atmospheric sound is vital – for example, recording your footsteps on a wooden floor, the sound of birdsong, or background chatter. Try and record around 30 seconds for each different location; it'll be very useful when you finally come to edit your piece. Keep a note of where all your photos come from: whoever took them in the first place still holds the copyright so you should always ask their permission if you want to use them in your slideshow. Music copyright can also be a minefield. You can get more information on this from the MCPS website (<http://www.mcps.co.uk>) When interviewing someone, a good tip is to ask them to repeat the end of your question at the start of their answer, so that they talk in whole sentences. Remember also to ask open questions, eg Tell me about... , How do you feel about...

If you do interview someone, then make sure you have photographs of what they are talking about and of the speaker also.

It's essential to have a decent quality audio recording device with a separate mic. An omni directional mic is a good general purpose mic and is useful for interview work and also for recording atmosphere.

Microphones will also pick up sounds our brains tend to filter out, so it's a good idea to wear limited headphones (and proper ones that cover your ears) so that you can monitor what you are recording and watch out for distortion or 'popping'. 'Popping' happens when the mic is too close to a speaker's mouth and tends to occur on the 'b' and 'p' syllables. If this does happen, position the mic to the side of the speaker's mouth. Generally, a good guide is to position the mic 6-8 inches from the speaker and always use a windshield on your mic.

It's also important to carry spare batteries for your audio recording device and check your mic too, as some need to be powered by a small battery.

Good luck!