

Quick Guide to Video

– Principles of planning, recording, and editing low-budget or no-budget videos

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Equipment, hardware & software

– don't worry: Great Video – low budget!

To record video pictures and sound: you can do a lot in good quality using your own normal smartphone. Just use it in a smart way (to be explained). And you can edit your material using a free (no pay) application that can easily be downloaded and run on your ordinary Mac/pc, stationary, or laptop.

Equipment for recording:

Of course, it would be nice to have access to a dedicated, professional, or semi-professional video camera with a tripod, microphones, light, and whatnot. But it takes some time to get to know all the features and to handle such equipment well. And advanced equipment might also take the focus away from learning the basic principles of how to communicate with video. An easier start would be to use your own regular smartphone for recording – nowadays smartphones usually have fairly/surprisingly good cameras and workable microphones – and though there are some limitations, you can usually work around this if you are creative. And you can improve your smartphone with some low-budget features:

To have a **better grip** on your smartphone while recording you can (besides practicing not to fumble too much) use a handle of some sort or a simple selfie stick (starting from less than 100 kr DK, even with Bluetooth start-stop).

To obtain a better, more **directional sound**, you can add a directional microphone to your phone (check that the connection matches). Or you can have a better sound of your own voice or that of the interviewee with a **clip-on** (wireless) microphone. Prices begin below 200 kr.

For an even smoother, more balanced grip, you can invest in a “gimbal” - this allows for smooth (“stirred, but not shaken” – like James Bond) recording while walking, etc. Starting from a simple one (I found one costing only about 400 kr, but then I had to find a charger for it myself, as that was not included in this cheap package). These gimbal devices can have many advanced features – and advanced prices.

You can also invest in a “vlogging kit” which has perhaps extra light, an external microphone, etc. Some sets can be quite advanced connecting more recording phones (different shots simultaneously of the same scene), clip-on microphones (lavalier), a headset for monitoring the sound (great, if you want to go pro), etc.

Editing equipment:

As for editing your video material: Again, of course, it might be nice to have access to a professional or semi-professional studio set-up with large monitors and comfortable chairs. But in terms of both hardware and software, this is quite an investment, licenses for an updated advanced editing program like Premiere Pro or Final Cut can seem quite expensive. However, quite a few editing programs free to download and use are now available, and they have a lot of features, they are relatively easy to use, and for most purposes, they are quite sufficient - they look and feel much like the expensive applications, and it is no problem to start here and then move on later if you find a good sponsor. And the great advantage is that some of the better free video-editing programs like DaVinci Resolve or Shotcut can be easily downloaded to both Mac and PC, so you can use your ordinary stationary computer or laptop.

(At Communications Studies at RUC we have traditionally worked with Adobe Premiere Pro installed on dedicated PCs in the editing rooms. During Covid-lockdown and later some classes had the students work (online, when needed) on the free software Shotcut on their various private computers, and the quality of the productions was quite all right. Recently it seems like the program DaVinci Resolve could now be the better choice – quite advanced, and the interface is close to that of the super professional programs. DaVinci also comes in a very advanced (more than 4K Ultra HD export resolution) paid-for Studio version).

For MAC and PC and Linux

DaVinci Resolve – (obs: the “Studio” version is not free, chose the standard)

<https://www.blackmagicdesign.com/products/davinciresolve>

or

Shotcut – free download page:

<https://shotcut.org/download/>

Lots of instructive tutorials are available, both for beginners and for the more advanced filmmaker. Often it is a good idea to look quickly through a couple of different tutorials on YouTube if you are interested in how to do some special thing – like changing the speed of a clip or applying some other special video or audio effect. There are different ways of explaining things but usually also different ways of arriving at the same effect, and some might suit you personally better than others. Go with what you like.

Planning Principles - How to communicate with a video?

To start out, consider: **Why video?**

In your case, in this context: What is it that video could be good at?

Clarify what you want to communicate **to whom** (Is it all about promoting yourself? A self-portrait – probably not).

Think impact – and choose an overall form-genre-style of your video (interview, drama, instruction, poetic, story, is there a narrator? actors?)

Consider **avoiding actors** and **avoiding being a star host yourself**. Don't depend on long-spoken dialogue, explanations, or voice-overs. Let the camera and microphone **show** what you want to convey. It is the work behind the camera and in the editing phase that is important.

Don't plan too much in detail – let the nature of the location, the event, the people you meet, and the weather, perhaps, allow for **new ideas**.

Keep it simple – and **explore**, make test shots with your camera/your phone, and check the sound too. Just because the picture is nice, does not mean you have a nice sound too.

Shoot a quick, rough version of your film – edit it quickly and roughly to see what works – then go back and do it for real.

Recording sound (typically the weakest aspect of amateur films):

Think and explore for good sounds – sound is not just a slave of your pictures: To get a nice and clear sound: go **close to the source**, e.g., a person speaking, or a coffee machine snoring.

Avoid locations with much background **noise** (machines, traffic, and even refrigerators can be too noisy on the recording).

Avoid noise from fiddling with the phone, with clothes, and you breathing heavily! Make sure your actors or interviewees **articulate** well.

Note that different rooms have different **echoes and ambient** sounds.

Note the huge difference between **outdoor and indoor** sound recording.

Voice-over: chose a room with care, and rehearse several times to get the right energy and intonation.

Make **additional long shots** (no video needed) with **ambient** sound.

Record relevant **additional** illustrative or decorative sounds on location.

Find additional **stock sound effects online** (royalty free, of course)

Music: use only royalty-free music (like online: “creative commons”)

Note that music is usually highly compressed – **decrease the volume** considerably to make it fit your editing level.

When you record sound (and/or picture or both) make sure to have **some start-up time and close-down time** - often recordings are not quite smooth when you start and when you end – because you are handling the start/stop button etc.

Recording video (images)

(of course, we often try to get both good sound and good video at the same time!)

A good video **depends on the camera work** – what you do with your phone! It is not just a matter of finding an interesting object, person to interview, nice actors or a funny cat, or a beautiful landscape – you have to show it to your audience in a clear and interesting way.

Placing the camera:

There is no “right”, “neutral”, or “objective” way to place your camera, but it all has **significance** for how we will see the motif (thing / person filmed): from what angle, what height, what slant, what light, what focus, what composition, what zoom-status, etc.

Consider: should the camera (and the audience) **look up or down** on this person/object – or be on the same (eye-)level? Should we see **front, profile, back**?

Alternate between total shots (some distance, e.g., to establish a scene) and closer shots. Also, some very close shots showing details are usually interesting. Use the camera to make us see more!

Empty space – composition of picture – long story.....

Light: there should be enough, consider also the color / warmth of the light.

Back-light: observe that if you film a person placed up against a bright window that person will look like a criminal (just a dark silhouette).

Mixing light outdoors / artificial light might give strange results.

Light and colors can be changed in many ways in the editing – but start out with nice clean well-lit shots in natural color when you record.

Moving the camera:

Moving the camera can tell a lot - but usually, you don't want to tell that you are a happy amateur who walks about in a clumsy way and just found the zoom button.

Don't make us dizzy!

Whenever there is a good reason for it (it should be **motivated**: showing more clearly what is going on, the layout of a location and persons, drawing attention to details or following the main actor – or mimicking the excitement). So, you can pan, tilt, travel, zoom, shift focus, and walk along.

Zoom-in or travel closer: usually means: look here, this is interesting. Zoom-out, travel back: often means the scene is about to end.

Hand-held or on a tripod, selfie-stick/gimbal: this communicates differently, think it through. As a general rule, the audience should not notice the camera movements or the placement / adjustment of the camera – they should just be moved or influenced by your great skills in using the camera (and sound- for that matter!).

Nice moving shots without expensive equipment: use a wheelchair or bicycle to make smooth traveling shots. If you do it handheld: Try **rehearsing to pan**, zoom, re-focus, or move several times before you take the shot.

Editing:

Gather all of your nice shots and also other files you might want to use (like music, still pictures, graphics, sound effects) **in one main folder** – and when you start working on your timeline (in the editing program), don't move any of these files to different places. You may add new material to your main folder – but **don't move** the folder.

I recommend putting **only your best and most needed shots in the main folder to start with** – to have a better overview. **Make it simple** – and make a quick and **rough first edit version** (here you do not finalize levels, transitions, titles, etc.)

I recommend also working **directly on your timeline** - don't spend a long time on setting in- and out-points in the preview monitor, because things might look different once you place shots next to each other on the timeline.

Take your best shots, the golden moment in your interview / story / expositions – in short, your **“Darling” – and place that first** – and then work on what leads up to this and what comes after. Don't be a slave of linear thinking and spend a long time doing an introduction before you know where / how your golden moment will be. So, don't “kill your darlings” but “kindle your darlings”.

Once you have the **overall content and mood** in place – **then go to refining** sound levels, and cut shots closer (we tend to have too long shots and too many similar shots when we are happy amateurs). Use filters for color / brightness etc. to make it smooth.

Transitions / wipes etc.: don't just throw in some random effects here, just because you can. They should be consistent / help the audience to understand your film. Dip-to-black usually means time / place change – scene ends. Wipes: now to something else! Cross-dissolves can cover up (for otherwise abrupt changes) and be nice, but consider having the same length / duration for your dissolves.

If you can make the film using **only hard cuts**: well, in my book that is a mark of excellency!

You can use **“bridges”** of sound (music too) to make your edited shots more coherent – a nicer flow.

When you add **music** – even low volume – it usually **speeds up** the experience of a scene but it also contributes to the mood – music is nice (conventionally) even if short, in the beginning, at the end – and for longer scenes without dialogue.

Once in a while when editing: lean back or even stand up and watch your program as it runs without interruption. **Feel it in your body / test it by moving-dancing**, to know if your cuts and the rhythm and tempo of the program are right. This is not about reading or writing: this is about creating a film experience and that is a physical phenomenon involving our senses and emotions.

More articles, slides, and videos on: <http://www.henrikjuel.dk/>

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