



A QUICK GUIDE TO DEVELOP YOUR OWN  
SHORT FILMS

Produced by the University of Saskatchewan Media Production  
& the Global Institute for Water Security



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# **CHAPTER 1:**

## *Development*





# DEVELOPMENT

*Development typically involves coming up with a concept and developing your story idea (synopsis, outline, and treatment), writing a script, developing a budget, securing financing and assembling a team.*

## Synopsis

The synopsis is useful in summarizing the content and message of the film. It should briefly state WHO, WHAT AND HOW. Within the space of two to four sentences, the synopsis should set out whose story it is (the protagonist), what his or her problem is, and how they navigate the problem towards an outcome.

## Outline

The outline will define the story and structure of the proposed film, making clear:

- how the story will be told; it is a sketch of your film written to demonstrate the structure. The outline is a statement of intent. The outline can also begin to create the story structure or the breakdown of the film's sections, or acts.
- Sample outlines (simple and more advanced)

## Treatment

The treatment will show how the story will be told. It will make clear:

- who or what the film is about; the issue, characters, obstacles and goals of the film.
- the elements or approach you will use to tell the story. Narrative, interviews, animation, photography, stock footage or even poetry are possible styles or methods of delivering the story.
- how the elements or mechanisms will move or evolve through

the story structure.

## A bit about PLOT, STORYLINE AND NARRATIVE

Begin with an idea, a theme. The theme is developed into a plot, storyline or narrative. From there a script is written.

A typical three act structure:

1. Approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the film. The characters are introduced, the setting is described, the situation is explained or a problem is defined or demonstrated.
2. Approximately  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the film. The pace of the story increases, complications arise and tension increases. It is the emotional peak of the story as new information is presented about the characters, the issue or the story.
3. Approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the film. The tension continues through this act, often to the height of intensity. The tension then begins to ease and the issue moves to resolution and conclusion.

## Script

Depending on the style of film you are creating, the script could be written in the development phase (drama, performance piece) or after production is complete (documentary) when the narration is built between interviews to move the story along or provide clarification of content.

- [Samples of scripts \(website\)](#)

## Storyboards

a sequence of drawings, typically with some directions and dialogue, representing the shots planned for the movie or video.

- [Samples of Storyboards \(pdf\)](#)

### DEFINING ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

Possible roles within your production may include:

- **The Producer** – raises the money, plans the budget and ensures the project moves through the stages of development and production. The producer will help determine the key roles of the production such as Director and other key personnel.
- **Writer** (should I include this role here?)
- **Director** – decides how the film will look, bringing the script to life. The director works with actors and crew members to guide his vision into a finished film.
- **Production manager** – responsible for creating the filming schedule, hiring required crew and the equipment. It is the production managers responsibility to ensure all aspects of the production stay on course, as required by the director's vision.
- **Location manager** – scouts locations required for filming all scenes. Secures any required agreements and ensures everything is ready on location for the scenes to be filmed. This can include table or chairs, areas for crew and equipment, traffic control, garbage cans, safety protocols or sound control.
- **Director of photography** – responsible for the camera and oversees how scenes are shot and lit. His/her team often includes:
  - **Gaffer** – the electrician the is responsible for safe and efficient lighting set up
  - **Best boy**- the assistant to the gaffer
  - **Key grip** – ensures the camera and all other gear gets on set and into position
- **Location audio** – ensure that all the equipment required to gather audio is on set. Monitors the audio that is recorded on set to ensure it is of the highest quality, without disturbing noises from within or outside the set.
- **Art Director/production designer** – brings the visual aspect of the director's vision to life. The art director works with the location manager to find the right locations for every scene and works with his/her crew to ensure all props, furniture or decorations are on set.
- **Hair, makeup and wardrobe** – ensures all character are looking their best, or as they are required to appear based on the director's vision.



## **CHAPTER 2:**

### *Pre-production*



# PRE-PRODUCTION

*In the pre-production phase all schedules are created in consultation with the director and producer.*

Working backwards from your deadline, ensure that you have created a schedule that allows for all phases of pre-production, production and post production. **(ALWAYS LEAVE EXTRA TIME FOR THE UNEXPECTED).** Templates and sample call sheet may be downloaded from [letstalkaboutwater.ca](http://letstalkaboutwater.ca).

Consider the following when scheduling and filming:

- Where will you film?
- When will you film?
- How long will you need at each location?
- Have you planned to have all props and equipment on set?
- Have you secured permission to film at the location? Do you have an agreement?
  - Sample location agreement
- If filming outside, have you checked the weather?
- If doing an interview, do you have your questions organized?
- Have your actors rehearsed so that filming will be efficient?

Build a call sheet to map out the days you are filming, and keep everyone informed:

Shot lists can help you manage what you need to film and gather all of your planning into one sheet:

- [Example shot list](#)
- [Shot list glossary](#)

## Equipment

Your cell phone will provide a good quality image for this project.

If you have other camera equipment available and know how to use it, fantastic! Our training will focus on cell phone cameras and ipads, as they are most accessible and easy to use for students.

*“the best camera you have is the one you have on you”*

### Notes for filming with a cell phone:

#### SETTINGS

- Do you have enough space? (Look in settings, you need 7.5 GB per hour of iPhone video)
- Are you recording in a standard format? (Settings> Photos & Camera,>1080p @ 30fps, OR 1080p @ 120fps for slow motion)
- Put your phone in Airplane Mode while filming so you don't get notifications
- Make sure your battery is fully charged, carry a power pack if you can

#### LIGHTING

- **Exposure** - normally the iPhone/iPad will automatically and successfully try to determine the correct exposure. If the camera is confused by something like a bright background or shadows it may result in an over or under exposed shot. You can manually adjust the exposure by tapping the screen, then use sliding brightness guide.
- **Colour Balance** (to the light in your location) - note that different light sources have different colour renditions on camera. Indoor or artificial light is predominantly orange, while daylight is blue for most of the daylight hours. Again, your iPhone/iPad will automatically adjust or “white balance”

the light. Difficult or mixed lighting situations may confuse the camera at times. Healthy skin tones and white objects in the frame are good indicators of a correct Colour Balance. If you are not happy with the colour of the shot, try a different angle or location until you find a pleasing result. This can also be adjusted in post-production with most editing software.

- **Stable Light Sources** - Some light sources may flicker on camera (e.g. fluorescent, LED, mercury vapour). This is rare but always analyze the screen carefully. If you see flickering you can turn off those light sources or change your angle or location. •
- **Even Lighting** - Lighting situations with less contrast are always preferable. Avoid situations that have bright backgrounds and dark shadows unless you are going for that effect or style. Cloudy days can be helpful in achieving a well lit subject for your exterior shots. On sunny days finding a shadowy area with few bright spots can create a more pleasing result. When shooting people or other subject matter inside try using available lighting. Turn all lights on if needed or turn some off. Experiment to determine what looks best. Get the subject close to a light source or move the light closer the subject. Placing a person beside a window utilizes a great light source. Just angle the person to a position where you like how the light illuminates the face (image 2.2).

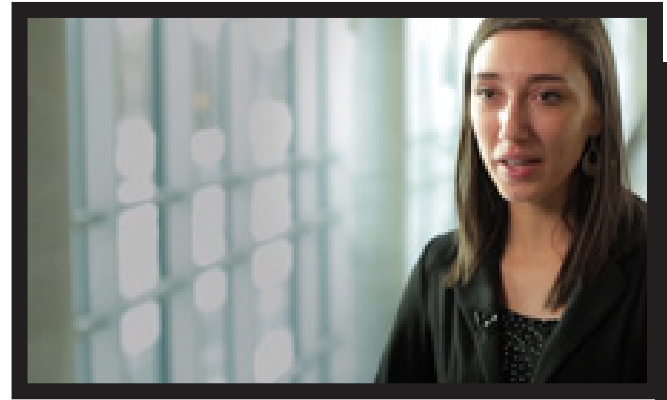


Image 2.2

Use natural light to hit the side of the face.

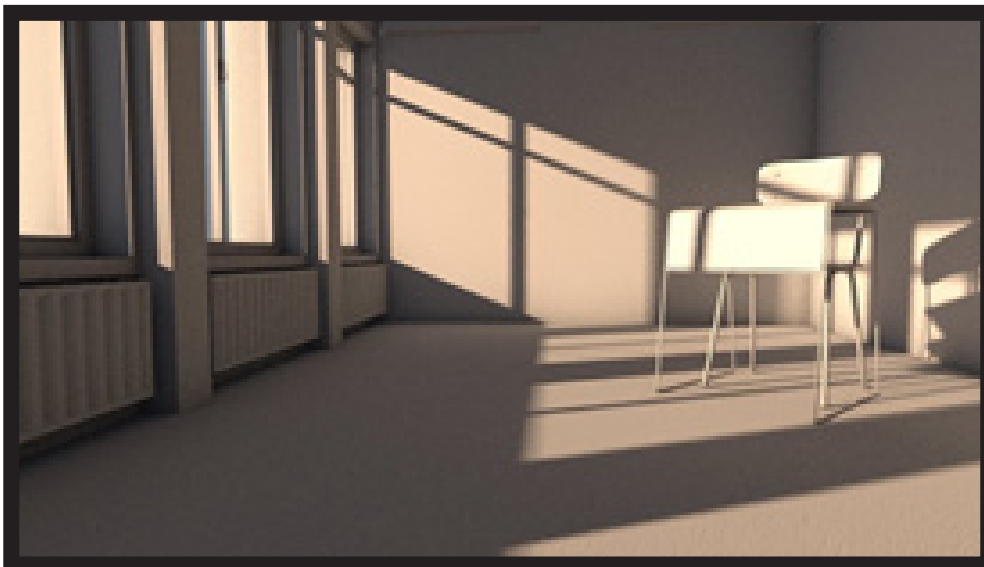


Image 2.1

Use natural light to hit the side of the face (2.2)





Image 2.3

DON'T shoot with light/window behind you

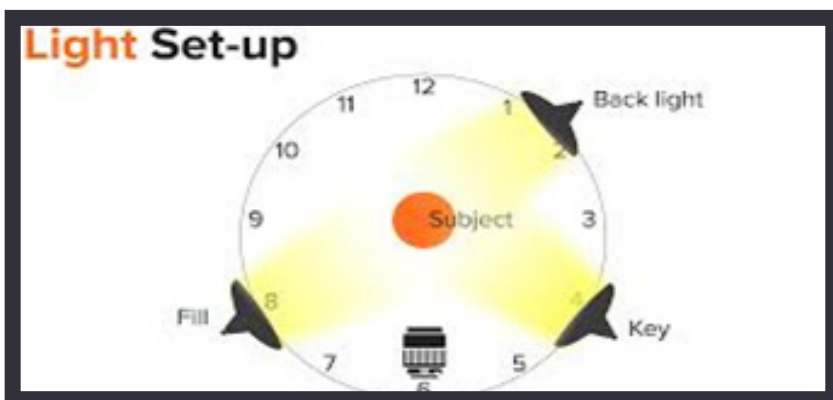


Image 2.4

[Use accent lights or any available lights to create a 3-point lighting set \(video\)](#)

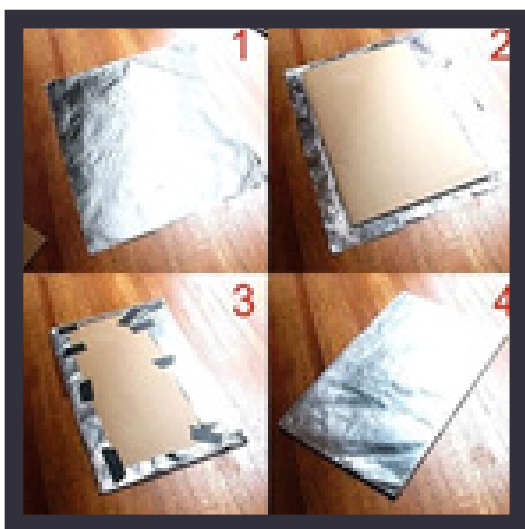


Image 2.5

Make a home-made bounce card to add or control lighting on set

- [How to use a bounce card \(video\)](#)

## AUDIO

Sound is as important as the video you capture! Do not consider audio an afterthought! A good visual story can be ruined by poor quality audio. Consider the following:

- If using your cellphone to capture audio, get the cellphone as close to the person as possible.
- If you have a second phone, use that as the audio recorder. Get it as close to the person as possible and use the voice memo to record. Sync up the audio in the edit.

## OTHER HANDY GEAR

- **iPhone to Tripod Adapter**
- **Monopod**
- **Bounce Card (image 2.5)**
- Consider purchasing a tripod for your phone (image 2.6).
- In a pinch, use binder clips for a tripod set up (Image 2.7-2.8).

Some great resources for shooting with a cell phone:

- [Shooting with your iPhone \(Video\)](#)
- [Shooting with your Android \(Video\)](#)
- [Free Guide: iPhone or Android Guide \(PDF\)](#)



Image 2.6



Image 2.7



Image 2.8



## **CHAPTER 3:** *Production*



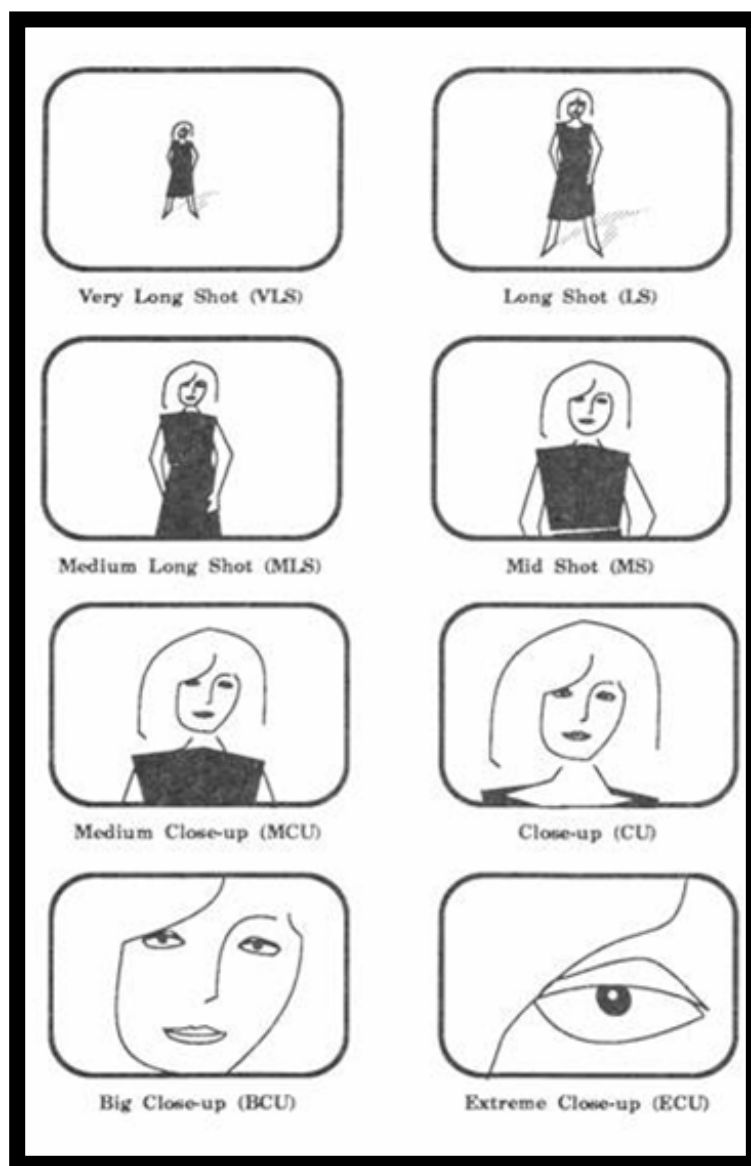
# PRODUCTION

## A GLOSSARY PRIMER:

- **“A” roll** – the interviews, dramatized parts or the scripted narration
- **“B” roll** – the establishing visual shots, the cover footage or scenery shots
- [The basics of B-roll \(videos\)](#)
- **Stock footage** - pre existing footage that you have available or purchased footage
- **\*shoot holding your phone sideways for a horizontal shot.**

## Shot Sizes and Framing:

- [Framing and composition guidelines \(video\)](#)



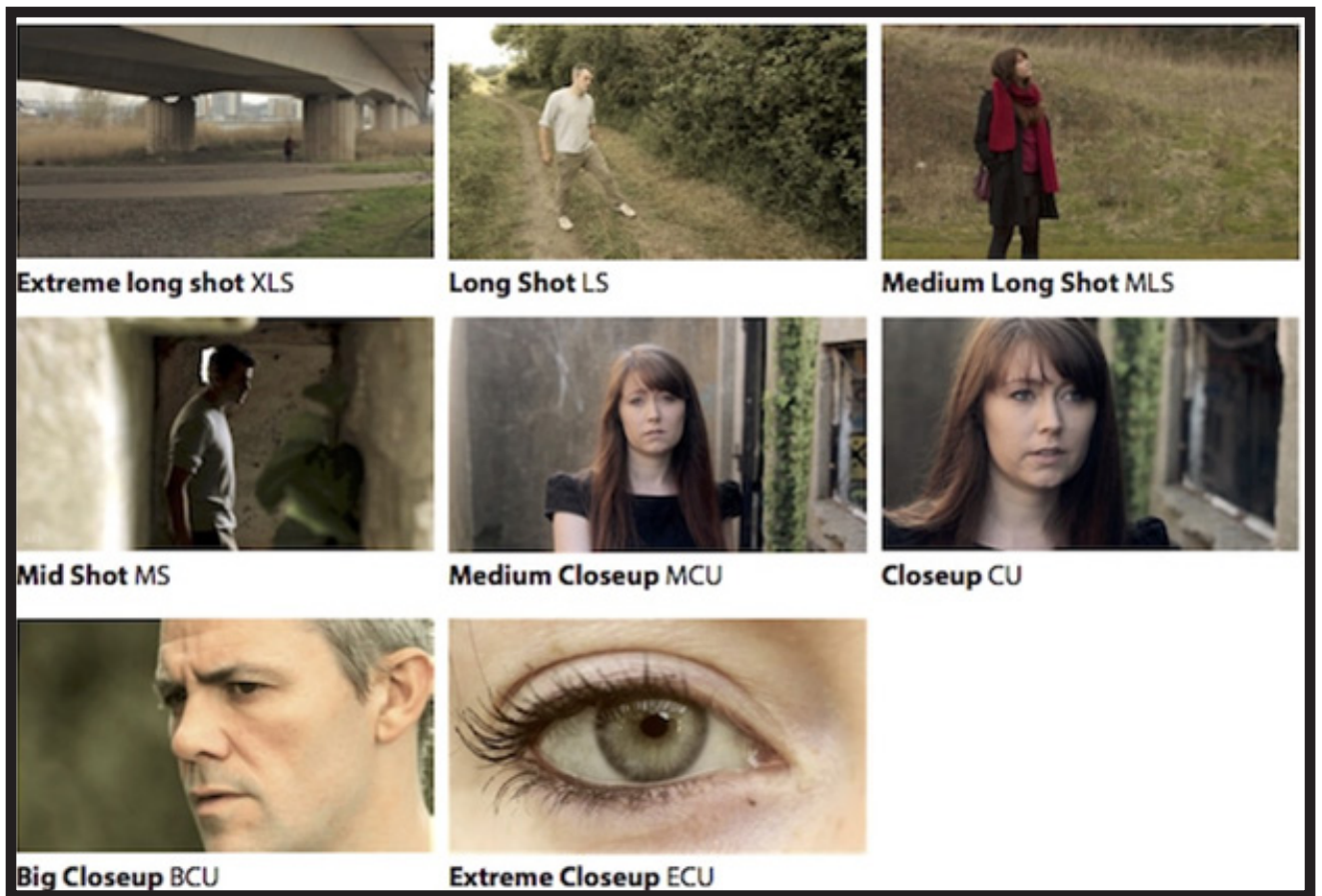


Image 2.8

## Rule of Thirds

The rule of thirds involves mentally dividing up your image using 2 horizontal lines and 2 vertical lines, as shown below. You then position the important elements in your scene along those lines, or at the points where they meet.

- [Rule of thirds resource \(website\).](#)

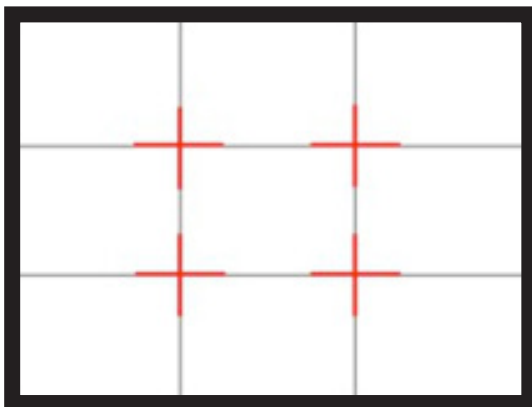


Image 2.9 - Rule of Third grid

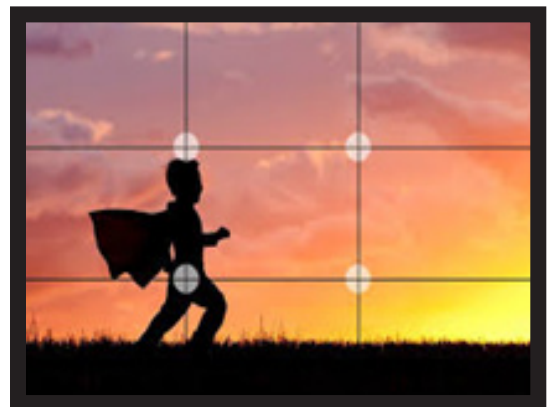


Image 2.10 - Rule of Third grid example

## Camera Angles

### RESOURCES:

- [Steemit Film School - Essential Camera Shots \(website\)](#)
- [Camera Angles - BTC Lab \(video\)](#)



Image 2.10 - Camera angles example.

## Interviews

If you are interviewing people for your film, consider the following:

- Greet interview subjects and make them feel comfortable but try not to talk about elements of your interview questions. Save that conversation for the interview.
- Remind interview subject where their eye line will be (to you or to camera)
- If appropriate, ask them to reframe the question in their response
- Do not talk or make sounds of acknowledgement while interview subject is talking
- Leave time after they finish speaking before you respond or pose another question (allows you clip time for your edit)
- Don't be afraid to follow up with questions that may not be on your list, but that come up during the interview – keep it conversational
- At the end of the interview, always ask if there is anything that they would like to add that you may not of thought to ask.
- Get appropriate releases – interview subject, location, artwork etc.

Setting up your interviews:

- Consider a location with best available light and little or no background noise
- Set up your interview with some distance between the person and the background. This creates a shot with some depth and interest. Make sure your background is appropriate, and avoid filming art work that may appear in the back-ground

- Slate each person with their name and the date you filmed them. A simple paper slate will work in a pinch.
- Avoid logos on clothing or any items that may appear in the frame.
- If doing more than one interview for your film, frame all interviews in a similar way, alternating side of screen from person to person. (opposite looking room) (image 2.11-2.12).

### Resource

- [Understanding Framing and Focus \(website\)](#)



Image 2.11



Image 2.12

### ***Production notes:***

Following your storyboards or shot list, ensure that you have completed everything you require:

- Always do multiple takes of performance scenes
- Always do multiple take of b-roll or scenery
- If you are concerned that the audio wasn't great, do it again!
- Ensure all releases for talent and location are completed
- Clean up any mess you made, furniture you used or moved and thank the hosts. It's a good idea to take a picture of the location when you arrive so you can accurately return everything to where it belongs

## **CHAPTER 4:**

### *Post - Production*



# POST-PRODUCTION

## *Post-production Workflow*

- **Ingest** - getting video into your computer
- **Rough cut** - sorting and assembling the clips you are going to use
- **Fine cut** - more precision editing of the scenes and effects if required
- **Audio** - balancing levels and adding music if needed
- **Titling** - adding titles and credits

## *Preparing for Editing*

### STORING AND TRANSFERRING FOOTAGE

- If you are using an iPad you can work completely inside the device
- No matter what you are using make sure you have lots of storage space

### TRANSCRIPTIONS

- If your video is using interviews transcribing helps you keep track of what people said so you can choose the best parts.

### REVIEW FOOTAGE AND CHOOSE TAKES (PAPERCUT)

- A papercut is a written document that lays out all the video clips you are going to use to tell your story.
  - Refer to resources on [letstalkaboutwater.ca](http://letstalkaboutwater.ca).
- Become familiar with all of your clips. Make notes of which are useful and which can be discarded
- Note which clips and parts of clips you need to use and in what order – this is your papercut or [edit decision list \(EDL\)](#).

### EDITING ON IPHONE AND IPAD: EDITING WITH IMOVIE ON IOS (VIDEO)

## *Editing Basics*

- Start adding clips to your story based on your papercut and the notes you have already taken

- Choose as much of the clip as you think you will need
- Put everything in order so you can see how your story will play out
- Next trim away and remove any parts that don't help you tell your story. Sculptors will tell you that when they are making a statue of a bison, they start with a block of stone and chip away everything that doesn't look like a bison
- Transitions, graphics etc
  - **Cuts** – are used to go from clip to clip in a real time sequence of events
  - **Dissolves** – are used to go from one clip to the next and show that some time has passed
  - **Wipes** – are used in a similar way as dissolves. If you watch Star Wars you've seen a lot of these
- **Titling** – You can put titles at the beginning of your video to tell the viewer what it is called. Name titles are used near the bottom of the screen in interviews to tell the viewer who is being interviewed and give some information about them, such as what their area of expertise is.
- **Sound** – always make sure that what the people in the video are saying can be understood clearly.
- Sound effects and music can help to make your story more interesting, emphasize a point, and help the flow of the storyline. Using different sound effects and music can completely change the story:
  - [Example: The Original Scary "Mary Poppins" Recut Trailer \(video\)](#).

## *Editing Techniques*

- The pacing of your edits and the order of the clips can determine mood or evoke emotion
- Short clips with straight cuts can create a feeling of accelerated movement
- Longer cuts with slow transitions give a feeling of calm or

peacefulness

- Drastic jumps from close ups to wide shots can create disorientation and tension
- Changing drastically between long and short cuts can be disorienting to the viewer
- 2 videos cut with same material can be very different
  - [Making Kool Aid Relaxed Edit \(video\)](#)
  - [Making Kool Aid Fast Cut Edit \(video\)](#)

eo must give their consent – the consent should be obtained in written form (release forms) or recorded

## Glossary

- [Glossary of common video terms \(website\)](#)

## More (much more) Information

- [Video school \(website\)](#)

## Stock Footage, Music ETC

- Stock footage is video that other people have shot that you download to use in your video.
- There is also music available in the same way
- You must have permission to use music and video that you have not created yourself

## Video Photo and Music Resources

- [Creative commons \(website\)](#)
- [Free Music Archive \(website\)](#)
- [Pixabay \(website\)](#) (skip past the “Sponsored by Shutterstock” video on the top row)
- [Avengers Endgame told with only stock footage \(video\)](#)
- Some items may be free but you have to give credit to the creator.

## Editing Software

- [Davinci Resolve](#)
  - Available for Mac and Windows
  - Best free editing software
- iMovie for IOS
  - Mobile device

## Outputting Your Video

- Output your video in at least 1080 p
- Use .MP4. If your software outputs .M4V you can change the extension to .MP4 for more compatibility

## Legal and Copyright

- Use royalty free music and images
- Or – content you created yourself
- If your video is going to be viewed publicly people in the vid-

