

## Oral History – Using Video

### Setting Up

- Set up the tripod and make sure it is level
- Attach the camcorder to the tripod and adjust so it is at the interviewee's eye level
- Attach microphone (if using one) and headphones
- Turn camcorder on
- Select record mode
- If you can adjust the audio levels manually do this as it will be better than automatic

### Sound

The rule here is that good sound will save a bad picture but bad sound will ruin a good picture. In other words, sound is more important than the picture!

Usually your options come down to a tie mic (often called a lavalier) or a mic on a stand. If your camcorder is close to the interviewee then the inbuilt microphones may do an adequate job, but there is a balance between being too close for comfort and too far away for good sound, and the use of a proper microphone is recommended.

If you are using a lavalier microphone position the microphone as close to the interviewee's mouth as possible. Clip it to a tie, lapel, cardigan, shirt or sweater and run the cable inside the clothing if possible. Whoever is monitoring the sound should wear headphones – usually the camera operator – and if there is any unexpected noise which might spoil what the interviewee has been saying s/he should point this out. For example, listen for 'popping' or any unwanted sounds (often caused by words starting with a 'B' or 'P', it's the sound of air passing over the microphone). The microphone can be placed upside down to avoid this, or further away from the mouth.

If you are using a microphone on a stand position the microphone as close as you can without it appearing in shot, even when people move around in their chair.

Depending on your camera you may not be able to adjust the sound level while the camera is filming. If the sound isn't right, stop filming and make the adjustment. Too low is better than too loud with digital sound – if you're not sure, turn it down. You can always boost the volume later.

Another option is to record the sound using a separate sound recorder and then match the sound with the video using editing software. This works fine but with non-professional equipment you may find that the sound and video will not be completely in synch over a long period and adjustments will have to be made.

## **Picture**

Think about the background. While the background doesn't always need to be plain it should not take the viewer's attention away from the person doing the speaking. Backgrounds that tell you something about the person being recorded are nice, so family pictures beside someone sat in their armchair work well, or recording someone at their place of work.

### **Shoot extra footage**

This is quite important - to make editing easier it will be useful to have a few shots of the interviewee smiling, or a close up of their face or of them twiddling their thumbs.

### **Batteries**

Always carry spare batteries that are fully charged.

## **Framing the picture**

Watch television and see how faces are framed. Generally, but not always, oral history interviews will either be 'mid-shots', 'medium close ups' or 'close ups', which is to say, from the waist up, head & chest, or head.

Unless using an extreme close up always try and keep a small amount of room between the top of the head and the edge of the frame. This is called 'headroom' but there shouldn't be too much. In an extreme close up you can cut off the top of the head but not the chin as this looks odd. Try to keep the eyes about one third down from the top of the frame.

Always leave room for the interviewee to speak into. For example, if her/his gaze is to the viewer's left put her/his head towards the right of the frame so there is more room to the left than to the right. It looks very odd if there is too much space behind someone's head. It looks as if someone is going to come up and do something to them from behind!

If you are using natural light keep the light on your interviewee and avoid silhouetting faces (a common mistake). If you want to use artificial lights have a look at the Media College website (below) for advice on how to set them up.

Position the interviewer close to the camera either to the left or right. This ensures the interviewee will look towards the camera but not directly at it.

Think about the 'rule of thirds' where the screen is divided by gridlines like a 'noughts and crosses' game. Our attention naturally falls on the points where the gridlines intersect (which divide the screen into thirds). The idea is that faces, people, points of interest, look better and fit into the frame better when they are positioned at these points.

Much of this is explained at the Media College website where you will also find advice about lighting and other aspects of video production:

<http://www.mediacollege.com/video/camera/tutorial/01-framing.html>

## **Most Common Mistakes**

- Too much headroom
- Bad sound
- Not enough light on the face
- Getting carried away with special effects when editing

## **Video Editing Software**

Most computers come with video editing software already installed. Microsoft have Windows Movie Maker while Apple have iMovie. Generally, while iMovie is by far the better software, Windows Movie Maker tends to handle high definition video with less fuss. Either is good for complete beginners but Windows Movie Maker is simpler. Having used this you will very soon want to move onto software such as iMovie or Adobe Premiere Elements.

Windows Movie Maker –

<http://windows.microsoft.com/en-gb/windows-live/movie-maker#t1=overview>

iMovie –

<http://www.apple.com/uk/support/mac-apps/imovie/>

For general advice on how to edit video have a look at Media College –

<http://www.mediacollege.com/video/editing/>

## **Examples of videos**

Have a look at these community video examples from the Migration Stories project on YouTube and ask the following questions:

- How well are the faces framed and lit?
- How well does the background work?
- How good is the sound?
- How well are photos and other footage integrated into the video?
- How well is the story told in each video?

From Kampala to Leicester: <http://youtu.be/euUvGzuSBwk>

From the Warm Heart of Africa: <http://youtu.be/voLurG14VEk>

From the Lion's Mouths: <http://youtu.be/CQgvRH4hdU0>

There are other examples on EMOHA's You Tube channel: <http://www.youtube.com/user/EMOralHistory>

More oral history examples are on the You Tube 'Oral History Video Archive' channel: <http://www.youtube.com/user/oralhistoryvideo/>

See how the professionals do it with these interviews with members of the American TV industry: <http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCj4PxzfWBNV9vidEPkglrrg>

## Further information

Both Media College and the JISC website have excellent guides to all aspects of video production:

Media College – <http://www.mediacollege.com/video/>

JISC - <http://www.jiscdigitalmedia.ac.uk/infokit/video-creation/video-creation-home>

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