Video Production Basics

10 Steps to a Finished Program

In your excitement, you might be tempted to leap right into production before you've decided just what you want your program to be or do, or exactly how you plan to go about making it. This can lead to false starts, confusion, and wasted energy.

It is much wiser to clarify your thoughts and put them down on paper before rushing into production. The following steps to a finished program can be used as a guideline to keep your production moving smoothly.

1. Brainstorm
2. Research
3. Create an outline
4. Plan and schedule
5. Scout your location and reserve equipment
6. Find crew
7. Shoot the program
8. Reserve edit time and edit
9. Schedule your program for cablecast
10. Publicize your program

Step 1: Brainstorm

A thirty-minute or even an hour-long program gives you only a short time to transmit your ideas. When people watch television, they expect to be entertained. Remember, you are not just explaining. You are combining images and sounds to create a piece that your audience will experience for a very short time. First, you'll want to figure out certain things:

Ideas: What main ideas will the program include?

Audience: Who is your audience? For example, do you want to address "recent immigrants to the community" rather than "long-term residents of the community" or both? What do the people in your audience already know about your subject? What might make them want to know more?

Objectives: What are your objectives? Do you want to inform people? Stir up discussion? Increase public interest and awareness? Changes people's behavior, induce them to volunteer their time or lobby political representatives? Do you want people to laugh, cry, think about things in a new way, listen and look at things differently? Feel differently?

Resources: How much time and money are you willing to invest? How far can you travel? Do you have access to the necessary equipment? How experienced is your crew? Can you obtain permission and afford the fee if you want to use copyrighted material?

Step 2: Research

The best way to start researching a subject is to think about your own relevant experiences and ask your friends and relatives about theirs. Other research sources include:

Print: Newspapers and magazines, professional journals, books and textbooks, grant proposals, dissertations, brochures, annual reports, ads, promotional materials, and curriculum guides.

Visual: Photographs and paintings.

Media: Televisions, radio shows, other videos or slide shows, archival films, and home movies.

Interviews: Interviews with experts on the subject, or with people who have had relevant experiences.

Visits: Visits to places and events associated with the subject.

People: Who will be the most effective people to present your information and ideas? Who knows the subject well? Who can present it in a moving or entertaining way?

If you are planning your production with someone else who knows the subject, ask that person to guide your research. What are the most informative books? Who are the most informative people? Are there files you can search? Can someone help select the most important materials from the files for you? If you're not working with a knowledgeable person to guide you, try to enlist someone to fill that role.

Miscellaneous: Sources such as opinion surveys and transcripts of public testimony.

At some point you must tell yourself you have done enough research and it is time to start writing.

Step 3: Create an Outline

An outline is like a map. It helps you envision your finished program and helps you plan how to get there. An outline sets out your program's main ideas and tells how you will show them visually. An outline can include a statement of your objectives, as well as include the names of people and places to be shown in the finished video. Your outline should answer these questions:

- What is the single idea at the center of your program?
- What are the three or four main points you will make?
- What form will you use? Documentary? Drama or comedy? Animation? A studio program with an on-camera host? A public service announcement? Something completely different?
- What kinds of visuals will you use? Still photographs? Artwork, tables, or graphs? Will you need clips from movies or old TV shows?
- Will you use music or sound effects?
- Will you need copyright permission?

Step 4: Plan and Schedule

Plan and schedule what you will shoot and where you will be videotaping. You may need to obtain permission to film at some locations, such as state or national parks, or private property. Ask for permission, in writing, for more dates than you will need to shoot in case weather or other circumstances interrupt your schedule.

Step 5: Scout Your Location and Reserve Equipment

Scout the location before the shoot and talk to a contact person there.
Find out and write down:

- Will you need additional lighting? Is the electrical supply capable of supporting additional high voltage lighting?
- Where are the electrical outlets? How many AC extension cords, power strips, and adaptors will you need to bring with you? Will you need batteries or a camera power supply unit?
- What mics will work best for the event and space? Will you need mic accessories, such as stands, a boom, or a windscreen?

When shooting an event or performance you should also find out:

- Where can you put the camera for the best shots – and so you won't interfere with the audience?
- Will the sound be amplified with speakers? Is there background sound that should be minimized? Can you plug in directly to the audio board at the event? If so, remember to check out our "direct box."
- Will you be allowed to bring in more light? If not, could you record a full rehearsal instead with added lights?
- Can you get into the building or space to set up one or two hours before the event begins?

Remember to reserve all equipment at least two to three weeks in advance, if possible.

Step 6: Find Crew

Before you jump in and produce your program, think about this first: Producing a TV show is not a one-person thing. You can't be in front of the camera, behind the camera, and in the director's chair all at the same time.

A lot of people have pulled crews together over the years and produced great shows and wonderful series.

There are several ways to find a crew:

- Volunteer on other people's productions, make contacts, and ask them to work on your show.
- Ask the staff and other producers to recommend crew members.
- Encourage people in the community who are interested in the type of program you are producing and get them involved with Napa Valley TV's training classes.

Step 7: Shoot the Program

Set up safely. Run all cords and cables along walls, to avoid trip hazards. Bring gaffer's tape and tape down all cables and stands that people might walk on, trip over, or bump into.

Shoot with editing in mind. Be sure to get cutaways.

Report faulty equipment to staff:
If any of the equipment you borrowed is not working properly, be sure to let the staff know when you return the equipment. This way it can be repaired before the next person borrows it.

Step 8: Edit Your Footage

Reserve edit time in advance, then:

- Log and encode all of your raw footage

- Edit raw video

- Add titles and credits

- Create a file with your name, the name of the show, the date and episode number

  (if applicable) and the total running time

Be sure to include credits or thanks to anyone who worked with you, helped you, or provided material or music.

Step 9: Schedule Your Program for Cablecast

Once your program is complete and fully edited, you'll want to arrange to have it shown on TV. Technical requirements include the following:

Show Format: Shows must be in MP4 or DVD format. NVTV prefers MP4 encoded video files. We will provide you a Dropbox Show Upload login that you can use to upload all completed programs.

Show Length: You must label your show with the exact length of the program in hours, minutes, and seconds so that the staff can schedule your show correctly. This must be CLEARLY MARKED on each video you submit.

Step 10: Publicize Your Program

Get the word out about your program. Tell the people who appear in the program, your crew members, friends, family, and co-workers about the cablecast. If you are willing to expend a little more time and effort, you can start publicizing the program to the community.