

8 CAMCORDER TIPS.

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1. KEEP STEADY! Avoid shaky footage.

TRIPOD - whenever possible use a tripod (with a spirit level to check it's level on the ground, and with 'fluid' pan and tilt for smooth movement).

MONOPOD - using a monopod resting on the ground can be a good compromise. Alternatively, an unextended monopod can help to hand-hold the camcorder steadier, with one hand on the monopod and the other on the camcorder.

HAND-HELD - stand 'solidly', feet apart, leaning on something solid if possible. Hold the camcorder close to the body, with elbows tucked into your sides.

STEADICAMS & BRACES - various equipment for holding camcorders steady is available.

2. KEEP STRAIGHT!

LEVEL - the horizon must be horizontal (especially if it's water!); door frames, lamp posts etc should be upright!

CONSTANT - when panning across, the horizon should stay at the same height in the picture (unless deliberately tilting while panning).



3. COMPOSITION. Spend time walking around and looking for the best angles before you start shooting.

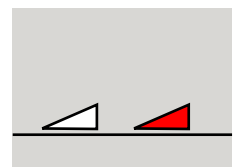
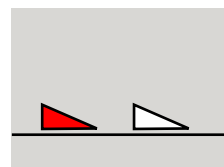
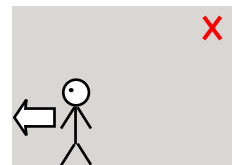
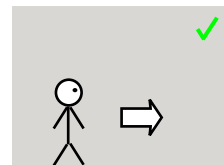
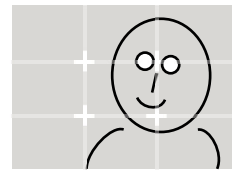
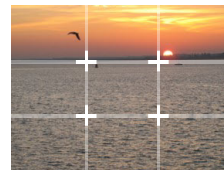
RULE OF THIRDS - subjects often look best at an intersection of a grid of thirds (including e.g. a person's eyes).

LOOKING / WALKING SPACE - if someone is looking or walking at an angle to the camcorder, frame the shot to see more in front of them than behind them, to look more natural, better framed, and less claustrophobic.

Subjects often don't look right in the middle of a picture - unless (a) it fills the frame; (b) you really want to highlight it; (c) it is symmetrical; or (d) it is someone presenting direct to camera, or a monologue or presentation speech on stage. The horizon should not usually be in the middle of the shot.

FRAMING & BACKGROUNDS - use backgrounds and foregrounds (e.g. tree branches) to frame the subject and give it depth, but beware distracting backgrounds (overly busy, or a lamp post sticking out of the middle of someone's head).

DON'T 'CROSS THE LINE' - when filming action from different angles, don't confuse the viewer by e.g. filming a car chase (or someone walking) from left-to-right from one side of the road and then crossing the road further up and seeing it continuing in the same direction right-to-left!



4. KEEP STILL! Move the camcorder far less than you think you

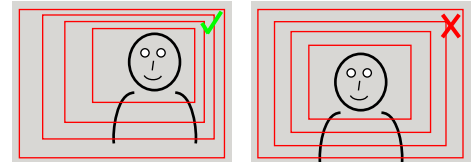
want to - let the subject move, not the camcorder. A still landscape with leaves blowing in the wind can be very effective.

PAN & TILT - when panning (horizontal left/right) or tilting (vertical up/down), start and end with a planned, well composed shot that would work well on its own. Start and end with a 5-second pause on those shots, and pan/tilt between them at about 1/2 - 1/3 of the speed you think you want to. Don't pan and tilt in the same sequence, unless you're sure it's going to work for what you want. If panning hand-held, move from your waist, not your arms.

TRACK & DOLLY - tracks and dollies and jibs (and trolleys, skateboards and cars, and walking very smoothly) can be used to follow moving subjects, or to move around a still subject - and as a more cinematic alternative to zooming. Tracking (moving forwards or back), changing the distance between the camcorder and the subjects, changes the 'size relationships' of the subjects and the 'perspective of mass' (the apparent size of subjects relative to each other and how close they appear to be to each other). Moving left or right is called 'crabbing', and the direction to move up or down is 'crane' up or down.

ZOOM - use zoom sparingly while filming. Use zoom to compose a shot before you start recording, but don't overdo zooming while recording. Don't keep zooming in and out in one sequence, but zoom in to focus on detail or zoom out to reveal context. Fixed zoom speed settings can be useful for very slow zooms, as can LANC (and infra red) remote controllers.

Don't zoom straight ('tunnel vision' effect), but use a sweeping pan while zooming, e.g. keep a person's eyes at the top-right 1/3-point (using that as a 'hinge point') throughout the zoom. Again, start and end the zoom with a 5-second pause on a well composed shot.



5. PICTURE. Learn how to use your camcorder's settings before you arrive to start filming!

LIGHTING - think carefully about the lighting conditions before every shot. Try to avoid: high contrast, e.g. a dark room with a bright sunny window in shot (to see the limited range of contrast that your camcorder can 'see', squint at the view you want to shoot); filming towards the sun or bright lights (subject will be silhouetted - the 'Backlight' exposure adjustment button can help); filming people who are looking directly at the sun (and squinting). Use a large reflector to 'fill in' directional light from the opposite side. Use extra lights (mounted on the camcorder, hand-held, or stand-alone setups) for indoor filming.

EXPOSURE & WHITE BALANCE - depending on the situation, use Auto Exposure (AE), or occasionally special 'AE modes' (e.g. 'Sunset & Fireworks', 'Spotlight' for theatre lighting, etc), or set shutter speed and iris aperture (and electronic gain) manually. Similarly White Balance (Auto WB, Sun, Overcast, Indoor, Tungsten, Fluorescent, or set manually).

FOCUS - auto focus (AF) can struggle in low light or fast zooms - consider using manual focus, and especially for interviews.

6. SOUND. Take audio seriously - viewers are always able to be far more forgiving of poor quality pictures than of poor quality sound (unclear, noisy or distorted). The microphone should be as close as possible to the sound source (e.g. person talking), and try to avoid background noise (traffic, air conditioning) that you may not be consciously aware of while you're filming but that sounds distracting or intrusive on the video.

EQUIPMENT - an external microphone plugged into the camcorder (or plugged into a MiniDisc recorder etc for later editing) will give better sound than the built-in mic. A range of video mics, as well as vocal mics and clip mics (lavalier) are available, with different pick-up patterns and sensitivity. Foam or fluffy windshields should be used on mics to minimise often problematic wind noise. Take care not to pick up noise from handling the mic, use manual audio levels rather than auto when appropriate, and always use headphones to check the sound while recording.

NAT SOUND - always record an extra minute of background noise ('natural sound' or 'wild track') which can prove invaluable to cover up other bits in editing.

7. ACCESSORIES.

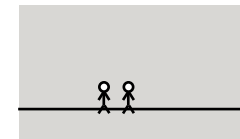

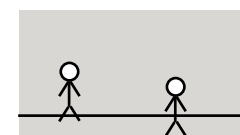

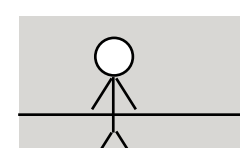
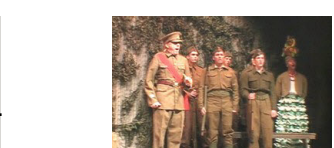
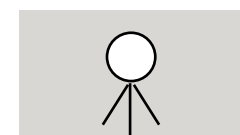
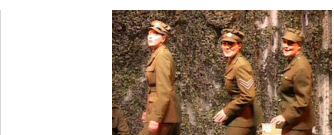
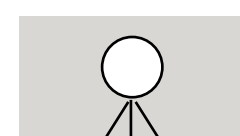
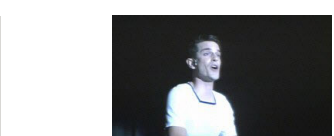
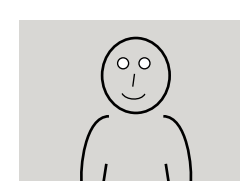
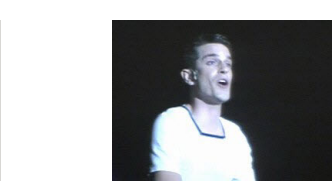
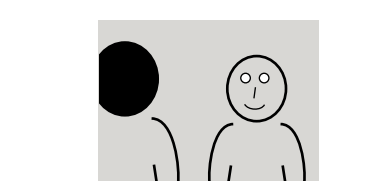
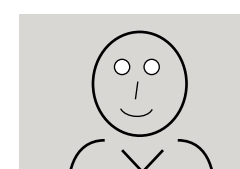
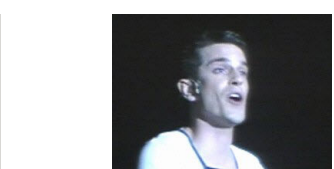
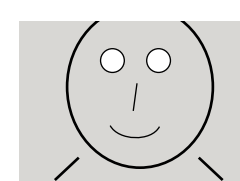
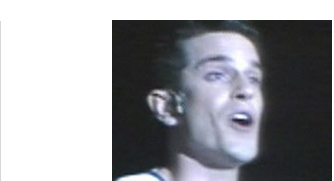
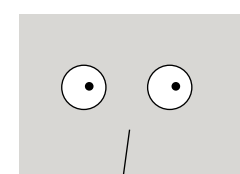
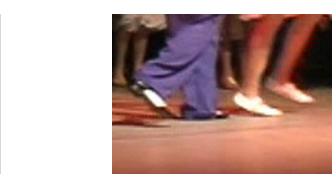
BE PREPARED! - make sure the battery is fully charged and always carry a spare (also fully charged!), also take spare tapes, memory cards or discs.

POSSIBLE EXTRAS - (see above) tripod / monopod / steadicam / brace; remote control (LANC); light(s); reflector; microphone(s) and windshield(s); also bag or case to carry the camcorder; rain cover; special lens & LCD cleaner cloth or tissues; wide angle lens; UV (or neutral) filter to protect the camcorder's lens; polarising filter; matte box; separate monitor; audio mixer; ...

8. GET THE SHOT!

Plan a narrative / story for the video before you start recording. Get an establishing shot and end shot. Get a mixture of wide landscapes, close-up detail, and everything in between. Get the 'money shot' that you're after, plenty of cutaways, and 'noddy shots' of the interviewer in an interview.

CAMERA SHOTS.

<p>WS WIDE SHOT full scene, establishing shot</p>			<p>FULL STAGE</p>
<p>ELS EXTREME LONG SHOT context, part scene</p>			<p>HALF STAGE (1/3, 1/4 STAGE etc)</p>
<p>LS LONG SHOT = FULL SHOT of person</p>			<p>FULL SHOT (full height of all cast up & down stage)</p>
<p>MLS MEDIUM LONG SHOT head to knees</p>			<p>3-SHOT</p>
<p>MS MEDIUM SHOT head to waist</p>			<p>2-SHOT</p>
<p>MCU MEDIUM CLOSE UP head to armpits / breast pocket (std interview shot)</p>			
<p>CU CLOSE UP head & shoulders - to knot of tie</p>			<p>O/S 2-S OVER THE SHOULDER 2-SHOT</p>
<p>BCU BIG CLOSE UP = TIGHT SHOT on face (mid forehead to chin)</p>			<p>BIG CLOSE UP soloist</p>
<p>ECU EXTREME CLOSE UP part of face, hand etc</p>			<p>CLOSE UP dancing feet</p>