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Video is becoming a more and more essential part of how we share stories, especially online. More and more people are able to stream videos over the internet, and have access to simple and cost effective ways of shooting and editing videos. Creating videos is a skill like anything else – there are a variety of things we can do to use it more effectively. This short guide outlines a variety of ways that amateur activist-videographers can make sure their videos are easier to watch, quicker to produce, and more engaging.

The examples used are from a variety of fields of activism, mainly from Palestine-Israel, but all have English subtitles.

## What should you film?

The first step in making a video is choosing what to film. This may seem trivial, but it's really important, since making a video takes a lot of time and energy. So when you think of an idea, a good way to check whether it's worth making into a video is to ask yourself: will a video add something that cannot be achieved by a text with a photo? Usually you'll discover that the answer is yes when you are showing “something that is happening” and we want to **see and hear it** and not just **hear about it**. Good examples are creative, visual actions, police violence and arrests, or exposing things that are generally considered bad, like racism. Video is also a strong medium for showing actions like flash-mobs and street theatre, and actions that use humour.

**Example:** this video is from a group in Belgium, who occupied a car shop during the Paris climate talks. Very few people saw the action take place at the time – the video was a key way of communicating what happened:

**Make sure people know what they are watching.** You can do this by adding a date and place title, or by explaining in a few sentences, either with voice over or with text.

**Example:** I was on the bus on the way to Jerusalem and a soldier asked the driver to check the bag of a Palestinian woman to make sure she isn't carrying a weapon. I took my phone out and started shooting this video.

I barely edited it. I only added subtitles and covered the face of the woman, because she asked for her identity not to be exposed. This video went viral, and a few of the major news channels wrote about the incident, raising public discourse around the topic. I think in this case, watching the video made the racism even more obvious than being on the bus, because when watching the video the viewer does not experience the fear that I imagine many people on the bus were feeling. And no doubt, no text article could achieve the same effect.

## Keep it fast-paced and short

Today viewers lose interest in a video (or any internet page) very quickly. Some studies say that after as little as 15 seconds. So keeping your video short and interesting is one of your main goals. Especially if you plan on spreading it through social media, where your video is competing against a lot of other content. How short it needs to be is hard to tell, but probably a good bet is no longer than a few minutes, and no longer than it needs to be.

Videos online need to grab a viewer's attention within a few seconds, so try and put something powerful at the beginning that will catch people's attention, give them an understanding of what the video is about, and make them stay for the rest of it. Preferably, start with a strong visual. If it's a part of a speech or interview, add subtitles, to make it more accessible. Make sure you constantly have something 'happening', so that people don't get bored and close it. Something happening on the visual level

might mean movement within the same shot, or a change of shots.

**Example:** you can see in this video of a joint Palestinian-Israeli animal rights protest that there is constantly something happening, and that the video is short. This is also a good example for the power of a soundtrack.

## Speakers and interviews

Interviews and speeches, both with people who agree with your message and with people who disagree with it, can help get a message across. Getting a complex idea across this way can be difficult, and long interviews may get boring to watch.

A few things to consider in terms of interviews are:

- **Language:** If you want to show someone in positive light, interview them in a language they are comfortable with, and if necessary add subtitles so that people who don't speak that language can understand. Hearing someone struggling with language and making mistakes can be distracting, and shift the focus from the content to language mistakes.
- **Where is the person looking at?** If the speaker looks straight into the camera, it gives the feeling of speaking to the viewer. This technique is often used by politicians as a way of trying to convince. If the speaker looks at the interviewer, it gives the feeling of someone expressing an opinion. This is worth considering when choosing how to conduct the interview.
- **Where is the person's head in the frame?** When interviewing, try and film at eye level, and have the person fill the majority of the height of the frame, without cutting off the top of their head. In the width of the frame, try and leave more room in the direction they are looking towards.
- **If a person doesn't want their face to be shown:** ideally, we want to see the face of the person who is speaking. But because of privacy reasons this isn't always possible. While blurring a face is not very simple to do, it is possible (and there are plenty of tutorials online that explain how to do it). The disadvantage of blurring a face can give the feeling that the person speaking is ashamed of something. Another option is to film the person while they are doing something (for example: driving, walking, fixing something, cooking, sitting at the computer) so that their face isn't visible.
- **Questions** Decide beforehand whether you want the interviewer's voice heard – if you do, make sure the question is clear on the audio recording. If not, make sure the interviewer is primed to answer in a way that doesn't rely on context given in the question. Prepare questions beforehand. Use open-ended questions that start with “why” “how” or “tell me”, rather than questions that can be answered “yes” or “no”.
- **Visuals:** film the person you are interviewing doing things other than talking, preferably things that are related to what they said, but closeups of their hands, lips or eyes can also provide useful visual cuts. You will later be able to edit these in so that a longer interview remains visually interesting. Having visuals also enables you to cover up cuts between two parts of an interview.

**Example:** In this video, made about the role of women and feminism in the struggle against the Israeli occupation of Palestine, you can see the different women interviewed in different languages, Arabic, Hebrew, and English, so that they all speak fluently and comfortably. You can also see the way speeches are shot, and see that in interviews, the women looking slightly sideways, towards the interviewer, and that they are videoed so that there is a bit more space left in the direction they are looking at. You can also see that the interviews are covered with visuals, that add to what is said.

## Equipment and filming

Spend time using your equipment beforehand – make sure you are familiar with how it works, and challenges you might face. More and more mobile phones and entry level DSLR cameras are able to shoot good quality, HD footage. You don't need to go out and buy a specialist camera, but camcorders or DSLR cameras will generally shoot better quality footage, and be easier to handle, than mobile phones.

Avoid carrying too much equipment, especially if your video is of a protest or action. If you can't move with it quickly, don't bring it!

Tripods or monopods help you get more stable footage, but can be heavy and bulky to carry around. Depending on the weight of your camera, very light tripods are available.

## Equipment checklist:

- Camera
- Kit bag
- Tripod/monopod
- Microphones
- Spare batteries and chargers (video eats up camera and phone batteries)
- Spare memory cards (video uses a lot of memory space)
- Camera cleaning equipment, like microfibre cloths
- Notepad for noting names of interviewees or other important details

## Filming

Take opportunities to shoot footage you can use to cut in between your key scenes. Film the wider area where the activity or action is taking place, especially if there are famous or relevant landmarks. Film from different angles and perspectives. Shots of people setting up stalls, raising banners, or other parts of preparing an action or event help give a warm, welcoming feel.

But... don't shoot too much! Remember, every minute of extra footage you shoot, you'll need to review in the edit. If you're aiming for a video that is 2-3 minutes, do you need 2-3 hours of footage from the action? Shoot what's necessary and important, asking yourself whether it adds to the story you are telling in your video.

When possible, use a tripod or a monopod so that the image is stable. Try and hold the camera in place for 5 seconds before moving on to film the next thing. If you need to move to follow something that is happening, try and stop on the final frame for a few seconds.

If you can, film as part of a team. You can give each other specific roles, with different videographers working with particular groups of people, or aiming to get particular interviews. Interviews shot from multiple angles provide more visually engaging content. Multiple videographers means you're more likely to get usable footage if there are equipment failures, arrests, or other issues. Remember to make sure you're using compatible settings (this will change depending on the equipment and location you're filming in.)

Try and stick to your role as a videographer – it can be tempting to play an active role in the action or event,

but this will almost certainly have a negative impact on the video you create. Don't get too involved in the action around you if you can help it. Focus as much of your attention as possible on getting good quality video and audio.

Ask for help! Ask people to move if they're in your shot, repeat answers in interviews if they weren't clear or you had a technical problem, hold banners more clearly so it's easy to see what they say, or let you know if there's something important you should be ready to film. More and more people are recognising the importance of getting good quality videos from actions and campaigns.

If you use a mobile phone, try and film in landscape (with the phone on its side) so that it fits nicely in a video player.

**Example:** A video of an arrest at a demo in east Jerusalem. You can see the video was shot in portrait, and that the camera is moving, two things that make it difficult to understand what is going on.

## Sound

The sound quality from the built-in microphone of most mobile phones and digital cameras is quite limited. If you're filming an arrest, or violence, a demonstration, or something that "just happened" when you weren't expecting it, the bad sound is understandable and doesn't matter as much – it's certainly going to be better than nothing.

If you are making a more pre-planned video, you may find that the sound from the phone is not good enough for you. There are a few ways to bypass this. The easiest is to make a video that doesn't need sound, and then use a song in the background.

If your video will rely on good quality sound, invest in a microphone. There is a wide range of advice online, depending on your camera and budget. For interviews in busy environments, a lavalier microphone (which clips onto the interviewees clothes) helps to isolate their voice and is visually discrete.

It's always worth adding a soundtrack and subtitles. The soundtrack helps hide background noises, as well as helping in creating the atmosphere you are interested in, and subtitles help make the video more accessible to people whose hearing is impaired, people struggling with language, or people watching without sound, as well as help us understand what people are saying even when they don't speak clearly, or when there is a lot of noise in the background.

If you use a soundtrack, you can change the volume as you go along to emphasise different parts, and not overrun people speaking. Also, try and have the shots change together with changes in the music.

Example: In this video, vegan activists pretended they were promoting a new product - breast milk - in order to raise awareness to the fact that consumption of dairy milk is also taking milk from someone's mother. The video was shot with a cellphone, right near a busy road, but because of the soundtrack, the background noise doesn't bother the viewer. Pay attention to the soundtrack and its synchronisation with the video and the change of shots. This is also a good example for a creative action aimed at being made into a video.

## Editing

Editing is very important in creating a good video, but it's also one of the most difficult and time consuming parts.

If this is your first time editing, you may want to start with a simple project and a lot of patience. Even experienced editors take about an hour of editing for every minute of video, and at the beginning it can take a lot longer.

For simple editing, iMovie for Mac and Movie Maker for Windows, or Youtube video editor for online editing should be sufficient. There are also some editing software programs available for free online, such as [Lightworks](#) or [Davinci Resolve](#) (both of these programs will require some time to get used to)

as well as some free phone apps that may be used. It takes trial and error to learn how to edit, and to find the right software. There are lots of guides and tutorials online that can help.

Since editing can be done from anywhere, if you have a hard time editing, you may be able to find someone elsewhere who is willing to do the editing. Editing video can be a useful way of someone contributing to an action or campaign who can't risk joining actions. Big teams of videographers hoping to produce a video quickly might want to agree a way of quickly getting footage to the editors, perhaps even as the action continues to unfold.

## Usage rights

If you plan on using music or video that you didn't create, you may come up against some problems, since most music and video are subject to copyright. It's worth checking the law in your country to see whether using things that are protected by copyright can get you into trouble. It may be that as an individual making a non-commercial video, this is not a problem.

However, if you decide to use music that is subject to copyright, you may have a hard time uploading the video to Youtube. Youtube automatically identifies if the video contains sound that is protected by copyright, and depending on the agreement with the owner of the music/recording, in some cases blocks the uploading of video. In other cases, Youtube may allow you to use the music as long as you credit the artist, but include adverts before or during your video.

If you are trying to avoid using copyrighted material, here are a few things that are good to know:

- **Music and sound effects** can be found on websites like this one [incompetech.com](http://incompetech.com) that stock free music and sounds as well as on Youtube Video Editor, that has some free music and sound effects,
- **Videos** can be found on Youtube by filtering the search only for video defined as creative commons,
- **Pictures** can be found on Google or Flickr by filtering the search by usage license as well as on Wikipedia,
- Videos and photos owned by formal national and international bodies are often free to use as long as they're credited. For example, UN news related videos, and low resolution versions of some other videos can be used for non-commercial use, as long as the UN is credited,
- Always **look at the usage license** to see whether the creator wants to be credited.

## Social media

Uploading the video directly to the social media of your choice (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr) (instead of sharing a link to an external site like Youtube) often increases the amount of views because the social media platforms promote videos uploaded directly more than they promote links. Make sure to go into the settings of the video to choose what picture you want to be shown before the video plays, and choose a good title.

Video posts often write "WATCH:" and then a short explanation about the content of the video. So it's worth considering. The short text can also be a powerful quote from the video itself.

Also, If you have a bit of money, consider the option putting a bit towards promotion of the video on Youtube and social media. It's something we often don't consider, but it's cheaper, more efficient, and more environmentally friendly than handing out fliers.

## **A few more ideas**

Here are a few ideas for what kinds of videos you can do. However, of course any video could have more than one of these components, or none of them.

**Arrest/Racism/Police Violence:** Something bad is happening and you film it with whatever you've got, probably with your phone. Try and stay stable if possible, and don't move the camera too much, so that the viewer will be able to see what's going on. Also, unless the situation is revolving around you, or you are approached directly, try not to interfere in the situation, because it makes it very difficult to follow. These kind of videos can be spread on social media, as well as used for legal reasons. If you can, get the face of the person who is acting violently, because that may help if you'd like to use the video later as evidence in court.

**Showing an action:** Filming an action or demo just to get across the feeling of what was going on. You may want to have the video answer part of these questions:

- **Where is it happening?**(for example by showing famous landmarks)
- **Who and how many participated?** (wide shot that shows the whole crowd, close ups on people, was there diversity of people who participated? Show it!)
- **What was the goal of the action?**(placards, parts of speeches, chants)
- **How did it feel?**(try and get the energy across)
- **What were the reactions to it?**(film the general public passing by, the police presence)

For this kind of videos a soundtrack can really help getting the message and energy across.

**Example:** Stop the arms fair 2013. Pay attention to the dramatic opening, the fast pace, and the use of the soundtrack. Also, you can see there is a use of photos, and that the editor put a bit of movement into the photos so that the video doesn't suddenly “go still”.

**Street Survey:** Asking random people in the street the same question in order to say something about public opinion. This can be used to criticise the public for having certain opinions without knowing the facts, or to show that public opinion is different than media is showing, or to show people's reaction to something that is happening and that isn't getting enough media attention.

**Example:** In July 2015 a flotilla tried to reach Gaza and bring in aid. In response the prime minister said that there is no siege on the Gaza strip, and most of the media was busy discussing who is on the flotilla and how the military will react to it. In this video we tried to use the current public interest in Gaza in order to draw attention from the flotilla back to the situation in Gaza.

## Shortcomings of video

With all love and praise for video, it takes a lot of time and energy to create and there are things that just work better in other mediums:

- If you are trying to bring across a complex idea, it may be difficult to do that in a short video.
- If you don't have anything to show visually;
- If your video is based on speakers, and they turn out to be not charismatic or hard to understand and generally if you think what you have to say will be as powerful in text and a photograph, by all means, do that. It takes much less time and energy.

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