



Making Effective Videos for Dissemination with Jim Galdos Concurrent “Short Talk” Session - 2016 DR K-12 PI Meeting

My General Approach

I approach filmmaking from the viewpoint of narrative fiction and believe that one of the most important points in making any video is that video is an emotional medium. When you're producing video, you should always be looking for opportunities to engage and communicate emotionally. You can use video for many other purposes, but direct emotional connection is its most powerful attribute.

The next most important aspect in making your movie is to know your audience. I know this sounds obvious – we've all been hearing this since writing compositions in grade school. But it's very, very common for people to not first consider their audience when making a video. Many people decide the movie they want to make and then make a film around points most relevant *to them*. You have to always be interrogating how this video is going to speak to *your specific audience*. You can have multiple audiences, but the more time you spend trying to define who they are and what is important to them, the better your final video will be.

While defining your audience, you can start working on what emotional impact or change you hope the video will provoke in your target audience. Even if the video is just presenting research findings, you can still ask lots of questions about your audience: what do they know? What do they care about? What will surprise them most or challenge them? Emotionally, you should be asking: what do I want them to feel? What do I want them to do as a result of seeing this video? Should they feel inspired to take up the cause? Should they be amazed at the variety of possibilities? Should they be shocked at the depth of the problem? What is most important to this audience? What do they care about? What gets them emotionally engaged, and what do they NOT care about? The point is to start your video with these questions. Every film has an implicit emotional point of view that pervades it. For example, filming a scene of a car accident could be a tragedy, a comedy, a PSA, an urge to buy a certain car, etc. It all depends on the emotional approach you take.

The value of video. I would say right now, the value of video is as a validator and as an influencer. Video is a validator in that it's a modern currency, as websites were several years ago. Everyone is getting one, everyone is sending one around, everyone is communicating this way. Video is also an influencer. Think about advertising - when you see a video that makes you feel good about something, you cannot “un-see” or “un-feel” that experience. You may know that the ad is fake, that the company isn't so great, that they are manipulating you. However, after you see an ad, you now have the company's presentation of itself competing with your perception of the company. You are now feel more familiar with the company or product.

This is why a lot of organizations, especially here in DC, are spending a lot of money on gala

videos. These are usually short movies that take a lot of production but are primarily intended to be shown once at an end-of-the-year gala. They find value in these videos not because the organization wants to communicate a few facts to you. In these galas, you've probably been listening to several speakers, maybe for hours - there's no shortage of information. The organization produces and presents video because video provides an opportunity to create a connection to real, concrete images of the organization's work. The video can make you feel good about the work in a way that would require active effort on the viewer's part to counteract. The video creates a set of "default connections" to the work. For the next year, when you think about the organization, you aren't going to be thinking about the up-lit gala room and decent plate of chicken. You're going to remember the images. If you hadn't seen the video, the work of the organization would remain abstract, or open to the personal connections that each audience member happened to already have.

This is why what's usually called "b-roll" is so important. B-roll sounds very secondary and often it is - people picking up phones, walking down hallways. From an editor's perspective, b-roll's number one purpose is often to cover cuts. However, b-roll is so important because it provides an opportunity to attach positive or at least specific imagery and emotions to your work. Even if it's just attaching a "human face" to the work, this is a big step in connecting with your audience, as opposed to leaving them with words on a page.

There are certainly other uses of video to communicate facts and information. But in my view, we should respect the strengths of each medium. Writing is so good at communicating abstraction and subtle logical distinctions. Terminology, critique, and philosophy are all easier to communicate in writing. Film is good at communicating emotionally, at activating the parts of your brain used for empathy. When the protagonist is scared or sad, so are you. So even if your video is a tutorial, or lesson, it will be better if you approach it from the perspective of audience and emotion.

Practical Points to Consider When Making Your Video

1. Video is an emotional medium.
 - When you are doing interviews, passion is the most important thing. Doesn't mean you have to be yelling and waving your arms, but a detached corporate vibe, isn't going to reach your audience. Viewers want to see engaged, charismatic people who believe what they're saying.
 - Video is not writing. If you are going to write a voiceover or a script, it can often be better to explain it out loud, maybe even into a voice recorder, and then write that down, rather than sitting and typing silently.
2. Video is a visual medium
 - When scripting your video, it's easy to get carried away with words, facts, and arguments. However, if you aren't thinking of visuals to accompany your ideas, you will be fighting against the medium. For scripted movies, I create a table where I list what visuals I am going to acquire to accompany a given idea or voice over.
 - People may have seen the motion graphics video from a few years ago about income inequality. Yes, they are talking about lots of facts and numbers, but they have constructed the script in such a way that these numbers can be related directly to a visual interpretation.
 - You need to figure out what is visual about your work. The projects I've been on that

come out the best, have had or figured out something to film. It's not always easy or obvious to figure out your visuals, but it pays off.

- When you decide to film something in order to visually communicate your work, consider whether what you are capturing *really* visually communicates something about your work. Often people decide what to capture based on the importance of the event to their work, or because it is technically "about" their work, but the event has no visual opportunities to truly express the work.

3. Consider Audience and Final Use

- I will use very different techniques depending on what the final product will be used for. For example, it's usually impossible to both capture a presenter's every word and gesture and also get the most visually compelling shots. These are different objectives. The best way is to decide what you want to do with the video ahead of time and commit to that. If you want to use the video for too many things, the final product will suffer.
- This goes with video being an emotional medium - you have to sell your ideas to your audience. You have to make your content relevant to them - especially in the beginning of your video. And this means excluding content that might be most interesting to you, in order to include content that is most interesting to the audience.
- You have to consider your audience in a deep, deep way. What do they care about? What are they excited about? I once working on a video where they were trying to convince to teachers to adopt a certain program. The head of the project kept stating that the best argument for this was that the more teachers who sign up, the more data the organization could collect. That is an argument for why the project benefits, not why the audience of the video should go out of their way to try something new.

4. Films don't create networks so much as enhance the connections to networks you already have

- Sometimes people want to make videos that "go viral" or will get them lots of followers. Unfortunately, unless you are really bold and really lucky, the video will not suddenly create hordes or devoted followers.
- However, video can improve the quality of the connections you already have. The video itself might not get you in contact with a certain policymaker, but it could go a long way to influencing a policymaker you know how to contact.
- Videos can make your loose connections stronger. One project-lead I interviewed describes his three-minute video as his "visual business card." The video gives concrete images and emotions that can become the default for how people think about your project.
- It's like advertising - good advertising isn't about telling you the details of a particular sale or the attributes of a product. Effective advertising is about making you feel good to be associated with that product. It's also about giving you default emotions and associations for a product that you are otherwise unfamiliar with.

5. Planning and Your Role as Co-Producer

- The more you plan, the better your chances of success. People often don't realize how much planning and effort goes into even small video productions.
- Planning considerations include fighting for great locations rather than just choosing any old spot, really trying to include people who will be engaging on camera vs. who won't, thinking about how you can ask a question to elicit a great response, making sure you

plan enough time to get decent b-roll, making sure you have enough time to setup equipment for each part.

- Even if your video is “non-fiction”, you want to include a “casting process.” Who are you going to put on camera? How do they present? If you are making a two-minute video, maybe you don't want people who talk at great length. In a short video, your audience will process the impact of the personalities on camera as much as what the interviewees say. Often clients are tempted to put on camera the people who are highest-ranking, or technically most knowledgeable in a topic. However, you need to think hard if your audience will truly react to the person’s rank or credentials. This is why celebrities get so much money for endorsements and commercials – you need someone with that level of recognition to make a difference in whether the audience cares who is talking or not.
- You should view yourself as a co-producer in making the video. You know the content and probably have access to people and places that will be visually important. Any video professional you are working with should be interested in working with you to secure the best people, places, and visuals to communicate your work. If a shoot is not setup for success, no videographer or production company will be able to make it one.

6. Scripting

- A good starting point for scripting a movie, voice over, or motion graphics project is the three-act structure used in most storytelling. In the classic three-act structure, the beginning contains an inciting incident, a problem, a shock, or a question to pique the viewer’s interest. We meet the characters and get a feel for the world. The second act develops this problem in more detail while showing us how the characters make progress against it. This is the “development of the story” phase. The third act is the emotional climax and resolution. Solutions are presented and we end looking towards the future and seeing how much things have changed.
- Even interviews can be conducted with an eye towards selecting beginnings, middles, and ends.

7. Selection and Emphasis

- You can’t do or communicate everything. You need to emphasize one thing over another, especially when today’s videos are only getting shorter.
- For short videos, you want to resist the urge to pack everything into one video. Let the video breathe a little. Choose some arguments over others.

8. Filmmaking Isn’t Convenient

- You have to push; you can’t just accept whatever you get. You have to ask again, ask for a redo, be critical about the quality. One of the big things any filmmaker can work on is overcoming the discomfort that inevitably occurs while making a film. The truth is, after the moment passes, no one will ever remember the particular circumstances of making the film, they will only remember if you got the shot or you didn’t. It might be uncomfortable to keep people longer than planned, or have them repeat something five times, but this too shall pass.
- This point is also related to planning: if you cut corners or don’t push for the best stuff - no one will remember the circumstances, they will only remember the dull final product. Furthermore, when people see a successful final video, the difficulties in production often only contribute to the pride they feel in having participated in it.

9. Cost and Hiring Help

- There is a lot of great video work going on right now but also a lot of bad work. We are at a historic juncture in terms of the technological advances, increased means of distribution, and increased consumption of video. This means there is an extremely wide variety in quality of work and cost.
- I can't give a definitive price range of what a good video might cost, but I can explain some of the factors that influence price in the current market.
- One of the tough aspects of pricing video is that the evaluation of quality and the final product is partially subjective. If you like someone's artwork, you may be willing to pay a lot for that specific sensibility.
- Technology also creates wide variation in pricing – you can show up with \$10,000 or \$100,000 worth of video equipment and make a competent video if you know how to use your tools really well. But a videographer or production company using more expensive gear will have to factor that into pricing. Sometimes a production company will have fantastic technology, but little investment in the content of the video.
- There are also veteran filmmakers and crews who are used to working under an older model, where rates were higher but so was cost of technology and barriers for entry into the industry.
- When looking for a videographer or production company, my opinion is that you should look for someone who is going to make some investment in your content. You will likely still be the content experts and shouldn't expect to "hand it off" completely. But to make the best video, your production people should be interested in understanding your goals, your audience, desired emotional impact, and be willing to push you in order to accomplish those goals.
- They should also be talking about sound and show concern for audio quality. Good quality audio is not possible in all circumstance but some pay more attention to it than others.

10. Doing it Yourself

- With modern technology there's a lot you can do yourself to make video. If you don't have the budget to hire production help, you can still put extra effort into your story, understanding of audience, emotional emphasis, and scripting.
- You have to believe that there is a way of visually representing your work that is compelling to your audience, and then concentrate on how you can capture those visuals even with limited technical means.
- The tools (cameras, editing platform, microphones) you use should be ones you are comfortable using and/or have access to. For the price of buying high-end gear you could have already hired professionals who know how to use the gear. People are often surprised at how long it takes them to edit video, so you definitely don't want to add the time of learning an entirely new software just because you saw a good video that claimed to use that software.
- The most important element production-wise in making your own video is the sound. Audiences can tolerate almost any quality visual, but they will not be able to sit through bad sound. People are accustomed to hearing the quality of sound in Hollywood productions and multi-million dollar TV shows, so it's very jarring and uncomfortable to hear less-than-perfect audio.
- To achieve good sound, the most important factor is distance to source. Sound volume falls off according to the inverse square law – so every foot or inch closer you can get the microphone to your source is worth it. You also need to be highly paranoid about

extraneous noises – air conditioning hum, traffic, computer noise, breathing sounds, tapping on the keyboard, objects hitting the table, etc.

- Even in classroom video, you should do whatever you can to get closer to the sound source. Setting up at the back of the room is often not the best location. There is even a difference between the absolute edge of the room and four feet closer to the students' desks.
- The key to DIY is having the attitude of “how can I do this” rather than, “with my resources I can't possibly do this.” Filmmaking is and always has been about resourcefulness and creativity under constraint. This is true from DIY to every television show and film you watch. So embrace it, think hard about what you can get away with, what favors you can call in, and where you have access to potentially hidden talent and expertise.

Tips for the DR K-12 Community

- It can be challenging to produce high-quality videos on a limited budget. As with any endeavor, the more you know and have access to in terms of expertise, the better the product will likely be. However, given current technology, there's a lot you can do – you just have to put more into the planning and scripting stages.
- It's not always apparent how to communicate the details of a project visually. You might consider using motion graphics or voice over with stills. Check out the [NSF Video Showcase](#) for examples of different ways to portray your work.
- Due to permissions issues, it's not always possible to use the same footage you've captured for research purposes to disseminate your work. When faced with strict permissions limitations, you need to be more creative about discovering visuals for your project. Perhaps you develop a separate permission sheet and only use it for one class. Maybe interview kids under separate permissions. Maybe you know someone who can draw that can do a sketch-based representation of your work. Motion graphics is also a way of representing your work without necessarily using any live-action footage.
- Representing your work authentically is a very complex issue. There is a big area of study in documentary studies about the inauthenticity of even the most “honest” or “impartial” documentary. The second you put a frame around a scene (i.e. turn on the camera), you are by necessity excluding something and therefore creating an “inaccurate” or “selective” depiction of the experience. Every time you make a cut when editing, you are excluding some moments in order to favor others. Every time you make a juxtaposition in editing you are relating two images or ideas and creating a new meaning and association that did not previously exist. So this question is something that each community needs to develop over time. Advertising, for example, has very different standards of authenticity than documentary filmmaking, which itself has different standards than journalism. A consensus will likely develop within this community as people continue to create videos.
- Filmmaking tools (editing platforms, cameras, microphones) change constantly. The best tools for the purposes of DIY are the ones you have access to and know how to use. For example, Final Cut Pro X is good, but if you have a graduate student who is cutting their personal video blog in iMovie, then iMovie is better. When in doubt, focus on sound – get the microphone close and be highly critical of audio quality.