# INTRODUCTION TO THE VIDEO PRODUCTION PROCESS

What follows is an overview of the concerns and considerations you'll encounter while making your video. We use the familiar scheme of **Pre-Production**, **Production**, and **Post-Production** to help break down and talk about the stages in the process of video production, but you should realize that this scheme is more cyclical than linear. For example, during the editing process (a matter of Post-Production) you may realize that you need to go back and shoot some additional footage (part of the Production stage).

## 1. Pre-Production

In this stage, you conceive of the movie and make plans (**scripts, storyboards, shot list**). The more time you invest in the stage, the better prepared you'll be for the inevitable challenges down the road. In general, you should spend 1/2 to 3/4 of your total project time working in pre-production. *That much?* Absolutely!

**Script:** This familiar term refers to the documents actors use to learn their lines, but movie scripts can also be used with other directions to organize the entire video creation. In other words, a script that identifies shot descriptions, actor directions, and overall thematic content can be the central document that provides guidance for everyone in the group, during and after production.

**Storyboards** extend the script by incorporating visual presentation, plans for timing, and ideas for sound. You can read a storyboard much like a comic strip or a slide presentation. Each shot is presented with a sketch or graphic that represents what will be captured on film, along with other details (location, audio, camera direction, special effects, and so on).

A **Shot List** is like a grocery list: you itemize what you need so you don't forget anything. You don't need anything fancy to put together a shot list. Simply make a list of the content that you want to capture on film, shot by shot, with some description to remind you what to do when you have the camera running (Please refer to the more complete list and definitions of camera distances and camera angles in the second section, Production.)

# 2. Production

After you've done your essential, very important pre-production work, it's time to create some content. Most of the problems with digital movies can be avoided simply by paying attention to basic concerns. You want to have good lighting, audio that you can hear, and clear, intentional shots that make sense in terms of your overall plans.
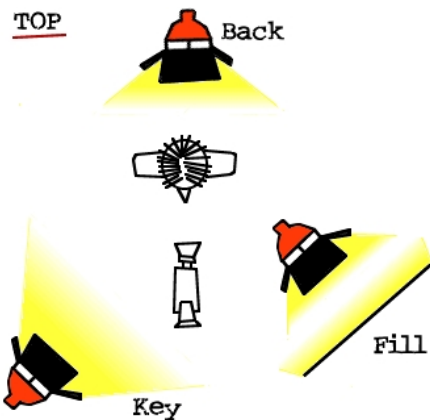


**Lighting.** Natural, solar light is usually your best bet, but is not always available. When you can work with sunlight, use it indirectly: shoot in the shade or use reflectors (direct sunlight is often too harsh and can cause deep shadows). If you have to use artificial light, your light source should be in front of your subjects, not behind them. Most cameras have different settings for different types of light, allowing you to set the camera for indoor use, nighttime shots, capturing people in motion, or a whole range of others. Use these settings whenever possible. (This is also a good time to use your shot list and make plans to take similar shots at the same time: all of your outdoor shots first, then all of your indoor shots, and so on.)

**Audio.** Most cameras have built-in microphones, and they are designed to capture nearby sound, but the quality is often lacking. If you have the option to connect an external mic to your camera, using it will give you clearer, crisper audio to work with. If you must work with the built-in mic, then try to remove ambient noise from your production work: don't shoot outside when it's windy, avoid construction sites, and listen for interfering noise (car stereos, buzzing lights, airplanes overhead, and so on).



**Clear Shots.** One of the golden rules for shooting is "steady, straight, and smooth." Although many cameras make automatic adjustments for unsteady hands, avoid holding the camera with an unsecured hand; even bracing your arm against a wall or propping up the camera on a table can make a big difference. Use a tripod if you can, and use the camera's zoom feature only to set up shots—not as a "special effect" (unless your intended effect is for your movie to look like family vacation or holiday footage).

There are many ways to compose your shots. Here are a few terms commonly used:

**Camera Distances:**



**Wide shot**: a shot taken from far away, used to represent a wide expanse of a location. People appear as small figures without distinct characteristics. Sometimes it's used for an Establishing Shot because it signals place.

**Long shot:** closer than a wide shot, it's used to show bodies in motion (people, head to toe). One variety is the **Extra Long Shots** that are taken from farther away to indicate the surrounding location as well as the bodies in motion.



**Medium shot:** frames the human subject from right below the waist to just above the head.



**Close-up:** shows only the head and shoulders of the person being filmed. Extreme Close-Ups capture images as if through a magnifying glass.

**Cut-away shot:** footage of something other than the subject. A movie about a high school teacher might include cutaway shots of the football team practicing, students milling through hallways and opening lockers, buses and cars pulling into the parking lot, and so on. It's always better to have more cutaway shots than you can use, rather than wishing you had footage that could be useful to add variety to your film.

**Camera Angle** is also an important consideration when composing your shots.



Most of the time, your shots will be **straight-on (eye-level) shots**. Here, the camera is held parallel to the ground, on the same level as the subject you're shooting.



But you might use different angles for effect. You also have the option to position the camera from a place below the subject **(low angle shot).** Here, the camera is angled **up**, giving your viewers the experience of looking up at your subject.



You also have the option to position the camera above the subject **(high angle)**. Here, the camera is angled **down**, giving your viewers the experience of looking down at your subject.

*Note: Because of the different impression each camera angle creates, make sure you choose them carefully*

**The Rule of Thirds** is another consideration worth thinking about when composing your shots. If you divide up your camera's frame into horizontal and vertical thirds, you have a grid. Place the focal point of your content along those four lines or at their four intersecting points (see fig. to the right).
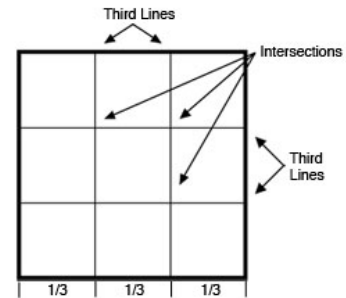
# 3. Post-Production

This part of the process, sometimes called simply "post," is where you take your footage and use a software product (Mac's iMovie, Windows Movie Maker) to edit it into a movie. It's generally a three-part development, in which you first assemble your content, edit it into a "rough cut," and then make finishing changes until you have your "final cut."

First, you will need to get your **footage** from the camera to the computer. Most cameras will come with a cord with one end that connects to the camera and, on the other, has either a USB or a Firewire (IEEE 1394) connector. The editing software should walk you through the process of importing video. It is a time-consuming activity, and it requires plenty of storage space on your computer. When you import video, you will want the footage broken into several short clips that you can work with more easily than just one long clip.

| Typical USB connector | USB ports | 4-pin (left) and 6-pin FireWire connectors | FireWire Port |
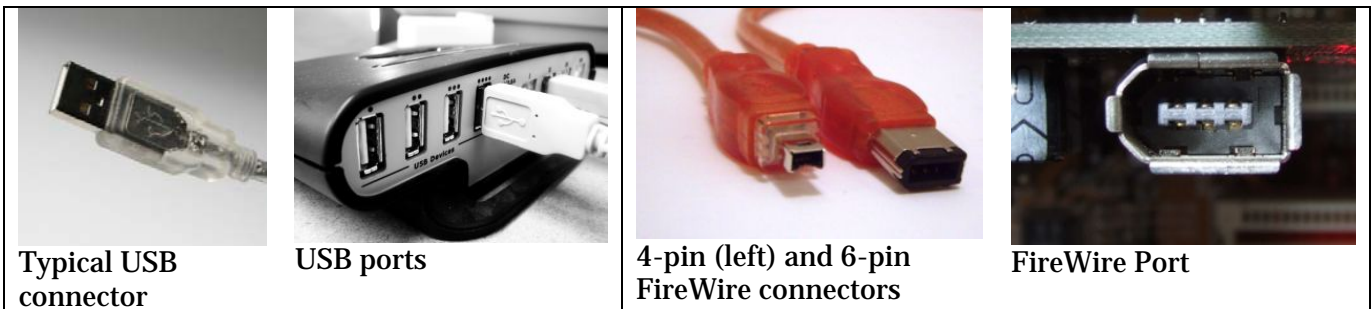
Working with video requires a **computer** that has **strong processing power** and **ample storage** (after you work with video for awhile, you will understand that the processor can never be fast enough and you can never have enough storage). For a short movie, TCU's lab computers should be sufficient. Be careful, however, if you plan to work with a personal computer, especially if it's an older model.

At this point, you can save yourself from future misery by making clear choices about files and storage. You might want to **save all of your files** on **your U:// drive** (or STUFile, FrogFile) and work exclusively from that space; however, that drive provides you with only 200 MB of storage. (Details for accessing the drive: http://www.tr.tcu.edu/STUFILE.htm ) If your drive is fairly empty, this might be the best option because it is secure and you can access it from anywhere.

A less secure option is to buy **a jump/flash drive** to store your work. Right now, a 1 GB drive costs only $15-$20 and would give you all of the storage you would need for a short video (larger, more expensive drives are also available). This option requires some expense, but you get more storage. Of course, it's fairly easy to lose or forget where you left these little drives. Whatever option you choose, be sure to store your content files and your editing-software files in the same place.

It's also important to realize that the file you create with the **video-editing software** is not a movie. The software is merely a way to **arrange** the content so you can then create, or render, a movie into a readable format. In other words, when you start working with a video-editing software program, you will create (and then periodically save) a file, but this file is only useful for the program. After you are have completed all of the design work in creating the movie, you will then make a movie using the software program.
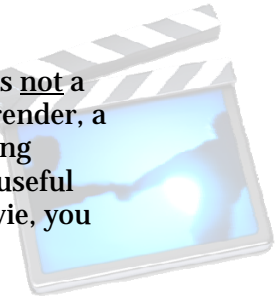
For example, while I am working on my movie in Windows Movie Maker, I will be making changes to a file called mymovie.mswmm (I named the file "mymovie" and it's in a Windows Movie Maker format). When I have completed my editing work using the file mymovie.mswmm, I will then need to create a movie called mymovie.wmv (a Windows Media Video format that can then be read by video players of various sorts).

**Be sure to create a file for your project and save periodically. If you assume that your machine will crash at least once during your movie making process, then you won't be devastated when it happens.** (It's more likely to crash using Windows Movie Maker than iMovie.)

It's important that you understand these dynamics before getting into the creative work of editing. The video-editing software you use will contain its own **Help guide** to give you direction about using the software. There are also dozens of free tutorials available online.

Most editing software programs have similar, basic components:

A **Collections** window serves as a "staging area" for displaying content items (video, audio, graphics) that you have the option to use in your movie.

A **Storyboard**—sometimes a filmstrip-style view—allows you to see the sequence of your clips and insert transitions and video effects. Often you can simply drag elements from your Collections into the storyboard, and then easily move items into different sequences. The storyboard is best for assembling the initial cut, inserting new content, and reviewing the "big picture."

In a **Timeline** view, you can see how much time each clip takes, and you can see other elements that occupy the same moments in the movie. The Timeline view is best for making detailed adjustments to video as well as working on the combined effects of video, audio, and effects.



You will most likely want to **remove/trim** parts of your video clips. This can often be done simply by grabbing an end of the clip and dragging it until the unwanted footage no longer displays. You will also need to learn how to **split** one clip into two: doing so will allow you to work with shorter units and give you greater freedom in making changes.

Adding **Transitions** and **Effects** to your video can give it extra complexity and positively affect your viewers. **Transitions** are visual features that you use *between* clips to make the movement from clip to clip more interesting, less apparent, or just simply different. **Effects** are visual features that you use to alter the clips themselves: speeding up the action, removing the color, adding artistic filters, and so on.

This overview has provided only a few considerations for you to think about before you make your movie. After you have decided which editing software program to choose, you will want to consult other resources for guidance and more detailed information about production and post-production work. Visit www.newmedia.tcu.edu/video to get started.