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Storytelling for Advocacy: Conceptualization and Preproduction

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Here, we discuss how to develop your most powerful tool: the story. This chapter examines how to build solid foundations for advocacy video, before one frame of footage is filmed, perhaps even before you pick up a camera.

First, we examine “the story” itself, and how to tell stories in advocacy contexts, as well as different story models from Hollywood to the far north. We also emphasize the importance of characters, point of view, and genre, and then address the need to clearly define your audience.

With these principles in place, we introduce the planning process of preproduction, which charts how to turn your story idea into concrete video: conducting research (“recce”), creating a film outline, preparing a budget, call-sheets, and shotlists.

STORYTELLING AND GENRE

What is a story?

Filmmaking is the art of weaving together a good story. A good story grips our imagination and takes us on a journey of discovery, through emotions, places, facts, and realities. A good story makes us care. It opens us to new ideas and challenges our ways of understanding the world. A good story gives structure and meaning to a film. Finding the right story is an essential part of the whole filmmaking process.

Peter Wintonick, a Canadian filmmaker, is currently working on a film about storytelling, and says:

I believe we are genetically wired, psychologically wired, from the time we are children, when we are sung or read bedtime stories, to look for completion. We need to attach stories to personalities, to humans. Especially during editing, both emotion and logic flow back into the construction of a story. The same material can be edited 1,000 different ways. There are many different

concepts of story: In Iceland, there's a long tradition of oral stories that last four days. There are epic sagas in Kyrgyzstan. On the other hand, stories in the Western world typically have a beginning, middle and end. There are thousands of different types of storytellers around the world.

In any story, you want to create drama so that people care,' says Amy Bank, who produces an advocacy soap opera for Nicaraguan television, *Sexto Sentido*.

Conflict makes a good story, people overcoming problems makes a good story, when the hero overcomes obstacles, comes out triumphant. Not that every ending needs to be happy, but audiences want to see a transformation in the protagonist.

She adds that revealing “problems” can add to your story:

In advocacy work, we often ask how much should we portray the world through rose-colored glasses? How much to portray the messy things that are not neatly tied up? Yet storytelling needs doubt. Doubts are what you overcome.

What is storytelling for advocacy?

What makes storytelling different when you are doing it to campaign for a particular social, legal, cultural, political, or economic change? The key difference is that in advocacy, storytelling is at the service of your goal for change and your message, rather than just the story itself or the ideas of the filmmaker.

Advocacy storytelling is about effectively communicating this message to the audience and encouraging them to act. Your understanding of the people who make up your audience—and how exactly you want them to act—will define *how* you will communicate this message to them. Peter Wintonick suggests that simply making films for entertainment tends to create a passive response—*entertainment for entertainment's sake*. But when you are using video for advocacy, he says:

You want to move your audience to action. That's the difference between advocacy media and entertainment media. Entertainment is a passive experience. It's laid out by the filmmaker. A good advocacy filmmaker turns things over to the audience.

In order for your viewers to feel there is room for change, you need to leave a “space for action.” How much are you including your audience in the story and the ending? After watching, will they feel detached, removed, and helpless, or included, hopeful, powerful, inspired, or outraged? Most obviously, you will need to consider the end of your video. Is your story closed off and resolved, or is there room for the story—and real life—to change? Often advocacy video will end with a direct request to viewers from a character or subject in your video, or with an individual within the video framing an analysis of why a situation is occurring and what an audience can do about it. At other times, a video will reference opportunities to learn more, and further material available for offline organizing at screenings, or distributed via the Internet. Always make your request concrete and specific, and offer an option, not just a complaint, about the status quo.

Advocacy filmmakers often create a meaningful partnership with the people they film throughout the entire life cycle of a video. This method goes well beyond (and may even go against the norms of) most conventional forms of filmmaking, because in most documentaries subjects have little or no say in the filmmaking process. Subjects sign those rights away in the conventional release form.

Advocacy storytelling has no built-in time constraints. It is up to you to decide how long your video should be, based on your understanding of your audience. Perhaps your community has a thirst for information on a subject and will watch four different videos of two hours each, full of raw, unedited, complete testimonies. Or, conversely, a 30-second powerful video may just as easily move a different audience of people to action (consider that most advertisements on television last 30 seconds!). Realistically, many WITNESS projects range from 6 to 15 minutes. Length should be determined by audience and screening venue. Remember the adage: in general, *less is more*.

One particular danger that advocacy filmmakers should be aware of is the tendency to make documentaries longer and more involved than is necessary for their target audiences in the hope of getting a television broadcast. Be realistic on your chances of getting your material on television, and choose an appropriate length for your other audiences. If you do decide to make a longer video for television, consider producing a shorter version for advocacy audiences.

Finally, telling stories for advocacy may be a serious issue, but it's okay to have a wide emotional range. It's fine to be funny. No matter

how tragic or difficult the issue is, humor can help ease subjects, filmmakers, and audiences into a story. Humor is often an expression of resilience and coping. Humor can also help ease the pain.

Beginning, middle, and end

In the conventional, Western storytelling tradition of North America and Western Europe—and particularly Hollywood—the most standard way to construct a film story is in three acts. This method of building a story has become formulaic and constraining, but the general principles are worth a brief description. In moderation, and with a grain of salt, they can help to structure the broad strokes of a story. They also provide insight into the expectations of audiences who enjoy Hollywood-style films.

According to this formula: Act 1 sets up the story, and sets the action into motion. We learn “who, what, where, how and why.” In conventional Hollywood script manuals, this act makes up twenty-five percent of the full running time of the film. By the end of this act, the hero (the central character) embarks on a quest.

Act 2 is the “meat” of the story. This is where the emotional or physical journey of the hero takes place. Here, the hero confronts a series of obstacles and must overcome them in efforts to fulfill the larger quest. Again, formula suggests this act is fifty percent of the running time. By the end of this act, the story reaches a climax, which is the final, most important conflict.

Act 3 is the conclusion. Here, the story comes to its resolution. The threads of the story and its conflicts are wrapped up. Often in Hollywood, this is the happy ending, such as the conventional wedding scene. Formula prescribes this act make up the remaining twenty-five percent of the film.

However, Howard Weinberg, a producer and “documentary script doctor,” reminds us there are no definite rules for putting together a story:

Experienced editors will change approaches throughout their career. The only general principle would be, basically, some form of beginning, middle and end. Surprise people! Go from what they do know to what they don't know.

Whether you believe in the three-act formula or not, the basic structure and arc of a story might involve a beginning, middle, and end:

- Beginning: Set up your story (who? what? where?), and make the audience curious. In an analytical film or advocacy-driven film you may set the stage for your argument or pose a question.
- Middle: Tell the bulk of the story; go through the arguments or evidence. Engage your viewers with a reason to care and to act.
- End: Conclude it, or “hand it off” to the audience.

Fernanda Rossi, a story consultant known as the Doc Doctor, suggests that another way to analyze story structure is in terms of whether a film is conflict- or non-conflict-driven.

In a conflict-driven film, two opposing forces create drama and move the action forward through a dramatic curve. The conflict may not be necessarily actual physical conflict on screen. It may be a conflict of interests, of personality or of ideas. These films are also often character-driven. A conflict-driven model is not necessarily dependent on the audience’s interest in your particular subject/theme because it creates natural curiosity. Conflict-driven films begin with a first exposition of conflict between two opposing forces or motivations that can both be observed, and conflict escalates during the film. During the film there should be smaller conflicts and tensions, combining to help build a sense of mounting urgency. In a human rights film, these conflicts could be facets of the everyday relationship between someone who is oppressed and the oppressive force—for example, the struggles of an ordinary man to feed his family, educate his children, secure adequate housing, etc. Ordering is critical to reaching a climax and resolution.

This kind of dramatic curve is often easier to create when the film is centered on an event.

The non-conflict or narrative model is based on logical cause and effect, or on a series of self-contained events or segments that relate to different themes in your film. Here you are more dependent on how interested the audience is in the issue, and on the chronology you employ.

Respecting traditional/indigenous storytelling

There are different cultural traditions of storytelling. The three-act structure and even the concept of a beginning/middle and end are not necessarily the best or only ways to tell a story effectively.

The way a story is told—or even who tells it—can have political and cultural consequences both within the community and outside.

All communities have factions and dynamics of powers and privilege within them. Ronit Avni, the director of the Just Vision project, which works with Palestinian and Israeli peace activists, observes that “privileging certain voices might have serious implications for the whole group. It might undermine and misrepresent the community in its totality.”

Sam Gregory of WITNESS adds:

There are debates about the visual and structural language of indigenous media. We don't dictate how our partners should structure their videos—and we work with a range of groups from professional human rights organizations to community-based social movements. But we suggest to our partners that they bear their audience in mind when they film and edit, and think what will be most persuasive for them. Many WITNESS partner videos are targeted at an international audience, so that fidelity to an indigenous storytelling or visual style as such is usually less of an issue for us and for our partners. But it is an audience-based decision, provided that the decisions taken on storytelling style do not have a damaging impact in the community.

It is important to respect how a community or filmmaker may choose to tell the story. Gabriela Zamorano, who works with indigenous women filmmakers in Mexico, once witnessed one indigenous filmmaker berate another for not making “indigenous films.” Gabriela asks the question, “What exactly is an indigenous perspective? That this woman chose a more conventional way of telling her story didn't make her any less indigenous.”

A story can be local and universal. One of the most successful Canadian fiction films in recent history is called *Atanarjuat: the Fast Runner*. It is the first fully Inuit (a group of indigenous peoples of North America) film—created, produced, and edited by a team made up mostly of Inuit, with the film's dialogue in Inuktitut. The story is based on a traditional Inuit legend, yet the story is universal. The film has won awards and been seen around the world; it has spoken to audiences across all cultures and languages.

Role of characters

Video can put the “human” into “human rights.” Real people are what people who see your film will care about—whether they agree with your analysis or not. These “characters” (the term often used in documentary filmmaking) will give audiences someone to hang

on to in your story. “The message in your video comes from the characters, with whom one hopes to be working in solidarity,” says Peter Wintonick. Liz Miller, a political filmmaker and teacher, also believes that

Character-based stories have the most impact. Audiences want to know what happens to them. They want to see transformation. You can have compassion and empathy for characters that go through a process of change in your film.

In documentary, we often meet characters through interviews. Liz suggests that during editing (and filming) it is a good idea to

Look for material that isn’t overly distanced. Not just talking heads, or characters talking. Look for moments when characters aren’t just *describing* themselves, but *being* themselves. How do they interact with other people? What they say versus what they show?

Sam Gregory comments that a lot of WITNESS work is testimony-based, where you encounter individuals who are telling of abuses they have suffered:

From a filmmaking perspective, this can seem problematic, because our partners tend to shoot good testimony, but do not or cannot always shoot the context—for example, shots of “a person’s life in their community” or the devastated community from which they’ve fled. But unmediated testimony, people being given a chance to tell their story with full eye contact, on camera—often for the first time ever—can be very powerful. These are not just talking heads. These are testimonies, where the subjects are speaking to someone and there is real intent in that communication. They are very focused on communicating what has happened to them and what they are doing about it. It’s the *power of that intent* that can be very moving and very strong.

Even when we are unable to follow these individuals’ lives—for example, if they are traveling through the jungle as internally displaced people in Burma—the intensity of that moment of them talking to the viewer can compensate for our inability to follow them through a traditional arc of character development.

Amy Bank says that the characters they create on their Nicaraguan television show have a very important role to play in the lives of their audiences. She suggests:

Television creates a social relationship. Through television, people have an emotional and intellectual identification with characters. For example, statistics are not (yet) high for HIV/AIDS in Nicaragua, but there is high stigma against people who are HIV positive. One character in our television show may be the first person to admit he is HIV positive that our audiences will ever meet. If audiences grow to care and like this character, then that may influence how they think and act on HIV/AIDS issues when it becomes a real issue in their real lives.

Don Edkins, who focuses on HIV/AIDS in South Africa, a country with some of the highest rates of HIV/AIDS in the world, emphasizes the *power of relationships* in storytelling. He describes a film that looks at a relationship between *people*—rather than the “facts and figures”—around a story of HIV/AIDS.

It's story of a 50-year old woman, who became HIV positive due to a blood transfer. She was very vocal, and she went around to different communities, to go and talk publicly about her status at every opportunity: radio, schools... Now this is a great character, but does she make a good story? She makes an excellent story when you realize that she has a very difficult relationship with her daughter, who was terribly embarrassed of her mother. The mother is open and frank, and the daughter is mortified. This kind of relationship is something that anyone can understand. Now we have dramatic content. We also have humor. We have a story audiences can relate to and care about.

Case study: Interviews vs subjects/characters

Fernanda Rossi was asked to help give shape to a film called *A Day's Work, A Day's Pay* <www.newday.com>, about welfare recipients in New York City who become leaders fighting for economic justice. When Fernanda joined the project, the filmmakers had over 170 hours of footage, with many storylines and too many characters. Fernanda watched a three-hour assembly of footage and was able to help the filmmaker think through how to proceed.

“She helped us to see that we had the dramatic arc of three people's stories. The other stories and individuals fell into place only as they related to these characters' stories. If they didn't have a connection,

they were out,” says Kathy Leichter, one of the directors of the film. In this case, some individuals could function as context or ideas, making points that would move the story along, while a chosen few could help humanize the story with their own life examples. Now, with three main characters carrying the emotional drive of the story, audiences could hang on to the storyline even though there were other people in the film. Because of these powerful human stories, when watching the film, audiences connect deeply with the individuals on screen and feel moved to take action on welfare reform.

Exercise 3.1: From print to screen

This exercise challenges you to think about what are the key elements and people in a story, and consider how these would translate if you were to document the story using video. The exercise is best done in a small group. Start by picking a recent newspaper article or editorial that relates to the central theme of your advocacy work.

1. Highlight the key sentences that explain the story. What are the key elements of this story? Often you will find that in a newspaper article the title and first three paragraphs gives a synopsis of the story, and then the first sentence of each paragraph following and the final paragraph fill it out and summarize the article. If you use an editorial you will also see here the point of view, argument and conclusion of the writers.
2. Go through the article and highlight the names of the people featured—these are your potential “characters.” In Exercise 3.2 we will look at how to pick central characters if you have many people involved in the issue.
3. Go through the article and highlight in a different color the key images that are described—these could be activities, locations, or inanimate objects.
4. Think through some of the challenges you will face in taking this story from print to screen. Take the opportunity in a group to brainstorm together. It will be helpful to have someone facilitate the conversation, and pick some of the following questions to discuss:
 - a. Where is the story taking place? Is this somewhere you can film or would you need to find other ways to show/tell the story without going to this place?

- b. Who are the people in the article? Are they people you could film?
 - c. How could you film the images you've identified? If they are inaccessible, what are your alternatives?
 - d. How much is taking place in the present day? How much in the past? How will this affect the way you tell the story?
 - e. What might you be able to express through writing that would be difficult to show in a movie? And vice-versa?
 - f. Does the story have a beginning, middle, and end? Is it self-contained or open-ended?
 - g. In an editorial, what is the argument of the editorial—what is it asking for or arguing for? How could you express this in video?
 - h. How would you tell this story if it had happened 25 years ago?
 - i. How would you find a way to tell this story if you had no money? No ability to interview anyone?
5. If you like, choose one potential interviewee from the story, and draft a set of questions to ask them. Role-play the interview with a colleague.

Point of view, voice, and narrative form: Who tells the story and how?

Point of view describes the perspective from which a video story is being told. For example, is it told through the perspective of the lead character, or an objective journalist, or the sister of a murdered opposition leader?

But point of view is not just about the voice we hear, it is about the entire way a film is framed. Through whose eyes do we understand the events? Visually, from what vantage point do we see action unfold? Is the camera with the government soldiers as they surround a community, or is the camera inside someone's home witnessing the attack through the crack in the door?

In advocacy work, you should be thinking about your audience and your story. Which point of view will be most appropriate and meaningful for them, and which will also have the most impact in an advocacy context?

- Who will provide the guiding information in the film? Who or what will orientate the viewer and explain what is happening?

- To what extent will the presence and creative direction of the filmmakers and activists be explicitly identified within the video itself?
- To what extent are the people in your film collaborators in its construction, both during the filming and in the editing process?

One key decision on point of view is whether to use narration (voiceover) or not. If you are going to use narration, who will be the narrator and what will be the tone of the narration? “People underestimate how much the choice of the narrator influences how people react consciously and subconsciously to a film,” says Sam Gregory.

If you decide to use a narrator, whom will you choose? Will you choose a subject in the film, the filmmaker, someone with a good voice, or perhaps a celebrity? A man or a woman? Young or old? A person with a regional accent or a standardized, “official” accent? Do they sound like a professional or like a “regular” person? Is it the filmmaker herself speaking? Is the tone cynical or optimistic and upbeat? All of these factors will have implications for how your audience responds to the film.

Sandrine Isambert, a former editor at WITNESS, adds a practical consideration:

You can decide before you start shooting if you want to have a voiceover or not. If you don’t want a voiceover you have to make sure you have all the information in the interviews that cover all the issues you want to talk about. If you don’t have that you have to use a voiceover, because you need someone to guide you through the story. Sometimes there are subjects that are very complicated and even if you are very good at writing stories, you still need someone to guide you. You need a voiceover sometimes to provide information that you were not able to shoot.

For many filmmakers, choosing between narration and titlecards in a video is a question of aesthetics. In WITNESS’ work they often choose to use titlecards rather than bringing in a narrator, and distracting an audience with questions about who the narrator is, and their relationship to the materials. Titlecards appear to be perceived as more neutral and factual than a narrator, whose ethnicity, age, gender, and other perceived personal characteristics can be deconstructed and analyzed.

In this chapter we focus on three basic film forms: narration-driven, interview-driven, and observational-*verité*. In many cases, your films will be a hybrid of these forms.

Narration-driven film

This uses a narrator and/or titlecards (text on the screen). A voiceover narration or titlecards explain what is happening, and the film often takes for granted the narrator's credibility. How you choose this person (age, language or accent, gender, celebrity status, relationship to issue, etc.) will affect the film's impact on the viewer. In the classic "voice of god" narrative style you have a third-person narrator, off-screen, guiding us through the film, explaining what we are seeing. It is assumed that we can trust the voice and that it is objective. The narration can also be more personal and subjective, told through the voice of someone in the story.

Narration-driven film can be the easiest to make. You write a script, shoot, and then voiceover. It is easier to change and fix too—simply change the narration in the studio. Where you don't have enough or the right interview material or visuals, you can add explanatory narration.

An example of a primarily narration-driven film is available online at <www.witness.org>, where you can view *Road to Pineapple*. This video is told primarily through the narration of the filmmaker, Joey Lozano, who describes the impact of a US development agency-supported road through indigenous and Muslim communities and lands in the southern Philippines. The road was built to facilitate monocropping pineapple for export and has plunged local communities into a devastating and unsustainable cash-crop economy.

Interview-driven film

This is driven by a character, or multiple characters, interviewed within the film. This kind of film is sometimes referred to as a "talking head" film, particularly when the interviews are filmed in a traditional Q&A style.

Interview-driven films can take longer to make than narration-driven films, because you will need longer to film (interviews can last hours). Logging, and transcribing, and then piecing together the logic based on your interviewees' words can be time-consuming. Changes are harder to make because you need to find solutions within the interview material itself, rather than simply rewriting narration.

A good example of a primarily interview-driven film on the WITNESS website is *Books not Bars*, which uses interviews with affected youth and activists, as well as community organizers and academics to tell the story of the burgeoning prison industrial complex in the US, and how businesses are profiting from the incarceration of minority youth.

Another example to look at is *Against the Tide of History*, where the story of the impact of indiscriminate laying of landmines in Casamance, in the south of Senegal, is told through the voices of landmine victims, activists, and government and opposition figures.

Observational-verité

This is centred on filming “life as it happens,” especially situations and events that occur in a particular place, process, or situation. This is the most difficult and time-consuming kind of film to make. The observational mode suggests that we should let people and their observed actions speak for themselves. The action or the narrative will evolve in front of the camera. The filmmaker should not be intrusive or interrupt the natural process of filmmaking. The underlying assumption is that people behave as normal when the camera and the crew are simply a “fly-on-the-wall,” filming whatever happens in front of the camera.

Observational-verité films can take the longest to make, as life (especially in front of the camera) changes unpredictably. Getting subjects comfortable with observational cameras can take time and trust (and often involves safety and security issues). Once shooting begins, you may not know how long your story will go on, and what direction it will take. It could take weeks, months, even years. Some filmmakers will even edit alongside shooting because of the extended time frame. The films of the director Frederick Wiseman are famed for their ability to transport viewers into different institutional settings—including prisons, psychiatric facilities and schools—to show how they operate. If you plan to use an observational-verité style his films are a good choice to watch in preparation.

Observational-verité footage can have a very strong and emotional impact, because it transports audiences most directly to ‘real-life’ situations. Elements of observational-verité in WITNESS films online include:

- *The MDRI video submission to the Inter-American Commission*, which shows actuality or verité footage of inhumane living

conditions of patients in the Neuro-Psychiatric hospital of Paraguay, intercut with titlecards that provide a human rights frame. The footage shows the story through shocking and moving pictures: patients held in excrement-smearred cells, naked, without access to latrines, and wandering in open sewage and broken glass.

- *Rise*, a co-production with the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), documents life under the Taliban in Afghanistan. Parts of the video were filmed clandestinely with cameras hidden under women's veils. The footage brutally shows the tyranny in the streets of Kabul exacted by the Taliban, including morality squads and public executions.



Figure 3.1 Footage shot inside Afghanistan by RAWA (RAWA/WITNESS)

As noted, many films use a combination of all three methods listed above. For example, *Rise* combines verité footage, interviews, and narrative voiceover, as well as innovative use of text on screen.

Exercise 3.2: Select the people to include in the video

Here you analyze a situation to work out which people to include in your video. We recommend you discuss the exercise with a colleague

or friend. Below we provide a sample situation to analyze, but you could also use a story from Exercise 3.1 or your own advocacy campaign focus.

It is early evening in the city, and a man, Carlos, is walking home from work with two close friends. Carlos is a married father of two who works in a local factory. A police van pulls up and three police officers jump out and pull him inside, saying they are arresting him for involvement in a robbery. According to them, John, Carlos's former schoolmate, has told them that he committed a robbery with Carlos the night before. Carlos knows this is untrue, as he was at a family party then. When he arrives at the police station Carlos is put under increasing pressure by the police, and is eventually tortured until he confesses that he was involved, and that his two friends, Jane and Khan, were also involved in the robbery. The police leave Carlos in a cell and the next morning they say that he was found dead from a heart attack.

For fifteen years, Carlos's country has been governed by one party. This party has won a series of nominally democratic, but institutionally flawed, elections. Torture in police custody is common, and is almost an accepted part of investigative procedure. For the past ten years a campaigning human rights organization with a small staff and a strong volunteer core from all sectors of society has been confronting torture in this society, and challenging the police and judiciary to be more effective and accountable.

This organization takes up a legal case against the police as part of its work to challenge torture in society, and to secure compensation for Carlos's widow, Stephanie. They also try to engage the media in a discussion of the case.

Sit down with a colleague or a friend and discuss the different people who have a stake or a perspective on the situation. You might want to consider:

- "Perpetrators and stake-holders": What are the causes of the problem or conflict and who is responsible for this situation?
- "Experts": Who are the experts? Are they experts because of depth of knowledge or societal position, or because they have direct personal experience? Remember experts don't have to be academics; they can have a life experience that makes them an expert.
- "Protagonists/change-makers": Who are the protagonists? Who is trying to change the situation?

- “Victims/survivors”: Who is affected by this situation? Who has experienced the situation and survived it?

Looking at these different categories of people, who will be effective as a spokesperson or character with the target audience you have envisioned?

Try filling out a sample form like that shown in Table 3.1. Consider including yourself and your own voice as a possible character.

Table 3.1 Select the people to include in the video

<i>Possible characters</i>	<i>Perspective</i>	<i>Comments on potential as an interviewee</i>
“Stephanie”	Wife of torture victim, very strong personal involvement with particular case	Still very grief-stricken; able to share her own experience and loss with the audience
“John”	Carlos’s friend, tortured in same police station	Experiences some guilt about his role in implicating Carlos
“Joe”	Survived torture, very critical of the government’s lack of action	Articulate, a little distant
“Anita”	Worked in the government; now part of a leading NGO coalition against torture	Sticks to party-line
“Rita”	Worked in prisons under current regime, when torture practiced; accused of involvement	Difficult to get to talk, but able to offer an insider perspective. How to make her comfortable enough to speak out?

Now look at the top three and your top choice—could you tell a story with just three of these characters, and if so, would there be any missing story elements? What do you notice about the people you have chosen to tell your story?

Look at your top choice. Could the story be told from this person’s perception? Could this person be the primary character?

Genre

Style or genre will also shape the telling of your story. The following are only a selection of common genres.

- *Personal point of view*: A personal essay or perspective on an issue, often from a person directly involved, or from the filmmaker or activist. Sometimes the filmmaker will appear on camera, or the camera will follow a character through whose eyes we understand the story. Sometimes, the point of view will only appear through narration. Personal point of view is also expressed visually, through the camera work. From whose eyes are you seeing events unfold? In a “reflexive” film, the presence and involvement of the filmmaker is made clear in the actual film—he or she is not a neutral technician.
- *News-journalistic*: A news style follows the rules of mainstream journalism to represent factual information. This style prioritizes notions of objectivity, balance, presenting “both sides of the story” and neutrality. The story is often told through a “third person”—the journalist—who has collected information from a variety of sources, and interviewed all opposing sides. Facts, opinions and information are sourced directly, and information is presented in a dry, punctual format. Formats can vary from short news reports and bulletins (as short as 20 seconds), to current affairs reports (anywhere from three to 15 minutes), to longer investigative documentaries unraveling a “mystery” or conflict.
- *Journey film or central character*: Tends to involve a central character who experiences a series of encounters: filming the process of the journey is as important as reaching the final destination. This kind of film is more likely to be an observational film, although someone’s journey can be reconstructed through the use of interviews, narration, and creative visuals as well.
- *Location-centered film*: Here we are in one specific location from which we do not shift. The location itself is the defining characteristic or voice in the film.
- *Survey film*: A survey film reviews an issue, and presents a thesis. Several examples, multiple interviews, experts, and situations are presented to support and/or contradict the case. For example, *The Corporation*, a three-hour Canadian documentary about the rise of the most influential institution in our times (the corporation) uses interviews with more than 40 people, case studies, reels of archives and animation as well as a narrative voice to bring together a thesis about the nature of corporations, having surveyed the world for evidence.

- *Music video*: Video that is edited and even based on music or a soundtrack for its structure and length. This genre tends to reflect the editing techniques developed by MTV. Videomakers can collaborate with musicians to write lyrics and music before shooting begins. A pioneering organization in the use of music video formats for advocacy video is Breakthrough TV (<www.breakthrough.tv>).
- *Public service announcements*: These are short, punchy, to-the-point videos that “advertise” your advocacy issue. For example, WITNESS, along with Coalition for an International Criminal Court, created a 60-second “advocate-ment” for the creation of the court, drawing on the imagery of the genocidal twentieth century. Using titlecards, dramatic music, and powerful images, they made a powerful case for a renewed commitment to a successful and effective International Criminal Court.

These are only a small range of options that may help you find the “voice” and genre in your film. Many filmmakers use one or more of these techniques.

Exercise 3.3: Who will tell the story?

This exercise helps you think through how your video advocacy issue could be covered using different film forms. It may be best to brainstorm options in a small group.

Select a particular sub-issue within your advocacy project. For example, if you were documenting police misconduct and proposing alternatives, you might focus here just on arrest practices. Now consider how you would make a primarily narration-driven, interview-driven, and observational video about the subject. Use the strengths and weaknesses analyzed above (pp. 85–7).

What would you aim to capture for an observational approach? What might be the advantages of a narration-driven or interview-driven film? What kind of larger issues can you address in voiceover, with charts and text on screen, or via more formal interviews? What might be the advantages of an observational style in terms of getting insight into the situation and unguarded discussion? What will you have to shoot if you cannot use voiceover or narration? Or interviews? Consider what are the advantages and disadvantages to both styles, depending on your advocacy goals. For the purposes of this exercise

try to use one form primarily, but remember that in your videos you are likely to combine elements of all three.

Alternatively, try this exercise with the situation in Exercise 3.2. How would you portray this campaign for justice using these three different narrative forms?

Exercise 3.4: Rewrite a narration

This exercise is best done in a group, and is designed to help you see how your choice of narrator and narrative style affects the way your audience responds to a film.

Start by choosing a video that that relates to a subject matter with which you and your colleagues know well (perhaps the advocacy focus of your work). It is best if the video is not one that you have watched before. Look for something that is short and aimed at a general public.

Next, each person watching the video should select a narration point of view from among the following:

- Voice of someone in the film
- “Voice of god,” third-person narration
- Their own point of view
- A popular celebrity

Now sit down and watch the video with the audio off. As you watch the video each person should note down in shorthand the narration or voiceover that they think is necessary to explain the film narrative. Each viewer has a choice about how much narration they think is necessary. Each viewer should then present their narration and participants compare notes.

To make the exercise more complicated you can also choose to vary the audience the video is aimed at. You might want to try this on the second viewing of the video, after people have a sense of how the video is structured. You should ask people to reconsider how they might change their narration if the video was aimed at an audience of:

- Government decision-makers on the issue
 - International human rights mechanisms
 - Community groups working on the issue
 - International solidarity activism groups
 - A general public viewing it online or in a news broadcast
-

Dramatization/uses of drama

Much—but not all—advocacy video tends to be made of documentary material, with real people telling their own stories, with life unfolding before the camera. But sometimes, filmmakers turn to evocative imagery and dramatization to tell the story in a creative way or because they have no other choice in order to cover an issue they want to film.

Ronit Avni says:

One of the hardest questions when creating advocacy video is how to reconstruct or evoke a violation that's already happened. For example, *In the Name of Safety*, a film by Ain O Salish Kendra, a human rights organization in Bangladesh, uses evocative imagery of jail cells and shadows of guards to evoke abuses suffered by unjustly jailed female prisoners, rather than actually re-enacting the scene.

Ronit also cites Lilibet Foster, who made *Operation Fine Girl: Rape as a Weapon of War in Sierra Leone*. The film traces the devastating impact of a decade-long civil war on Sierra Leone's young women, thousands of whom were abducted, raped, and/or forced into slavery by soldiers on both sides of the conflict. Ronit explains:

Lilibet used some interesting techniques to depict emotionally sensitive situations—blurred imagery, symbolic imagery, shots of anonymous feet running away, etc., to evoke the fear and disorientation faced by these women. This can be respectfully and powerfully done without going so far as to recreate events.

There are several further options for this kind of evocative imagery—including using archival material, photos, artwork, the appearance and disappearance of people or objects in the frame—and many of these decisions can be made in the edit room.

In her film, *A Healthy Baby Girl*, award-winning director Judith Helfand uses her own artwork to portray her emotional state after losing her reproductive organs to cancer. The film was used as an advocacy video to demonstrate the widespread and fatal impact of dangerous pharmaceutical drugs given en masse to pregnant mothers in the 1960s.

In some cases dramatization can be a major part of the film. In *McLibel* (about McDonald's libel suit against two anti-McDonald's



Figure 3.2 Motion effects and blurring are used in *Operation Fine Girl* during scenes discussing the experiences of the young women who experienced sexual violence (Oxygen Media LLC/WITNESS)

activists), Franny Armstrong had no access with her camera to the courtroom proceedings. Franny knew that in order to get at these arguments, they would need to “recreate” or “redramatize” these arguments for the film. The defendants were ready and willing to replay what they had done in the courtroom, but the witnesses on McDonalds’ side would be another story. “Our advantage was that our script was already written—transcripts from the courtroom were available,” Franny recalls.

We decided we would try dramatic reconstructions, so we made a joke list of the directors we would want to approach. Ken Loach was on the top, and I was on the bottom, as I had never directed fiction. The trial was pretty famous at this point, and Ken Loach wrote back a fax. Suddenly, we had the top dramatic director in England to work on our film!

Franny then embarked on the arduous process of developing the film’s script from over 60,000 pages of court transcripts. Loach then shot the key fictional sequences to Franny’s film. These fictional

elements make up the crucial arguments and counter-arguments in the intellectual structure of the film.

Whenever you use evocation or reconstruction/redramatization, it is important to keep in mind that “scripted” scenes may be criticized for not having remained 100 percent true to reality or may be misconstrued as an attempt to sensationalize an issue. This could lead your video to lose credibility as an effective advocacy tool with some more critical or more traditional audiences.

Although we do not extensively discuss advocacy soap opera in this book, there is much that can be learned from the experiences of shows like *Sexto Sentido*. Another good source on using fiction to persuade and influence behavior is Population Media Center, <www.populationmedia.org>.

THE IMPORTANCE OF AUDIENCE

Who exactly is your audience? As discussed in Chapter 1, understanding *to whom* you are telling your story will change *how* you tell your story. More importantly, defining what you want your audience to do once they've seen your video will also identify the story you need to tell.

How to define your audience? You must decide who your most influential audience is, what you want them to do, and how they will be convinced to join the effort. If there is a direct appeal to get involved, decide who could most effectively encourage them to take action. Recognize what will be appealing, persuasive or intriguing to them, both in terms of factual information conveyed, people interviewed, and experts' commentary. You also need to understand whom you'll alienate and repel as you make these choices.

At the most basic level, Howard Weinberg suggests you ask yourself: “Are you stirring up the troops, or talking to the unconverted?” He believes this is a key question in order to determine how you will frame your entire film. Similarly, Martin Atkin, producer at Greenpeace, also starts by dividing his audiences into two main categories:

The first is a broad, general audience outside the NGO community—a general public that knows little about the issue—and the second is other NGOs, people “within” the community, who already know a little.

Language and literacy levels of your audience are additional crucial factors for your production. If you use titlecards, subtitles, and keys

will your audience be able to read them? What language would best suit the telling of your story?

At WITNESS, partners are encouraged to define their audiences very specifically to ensure they target and reach these distinct audiences with the videos they produce. The following is an elaboration of some of the broad categories of viewers and potential uses of video in advocacy.

Community audiences

Seeing your image or members of your community on a screen can generate powerful results. When videos are made to go back to the communities in which they were filmed, it can stimulate grassroots organizing, consciousness-raising, and a sense of empowerment. Joey Lozano reports: “When we play back our video for screening by community members, we seem to recover lost pride in ourselves. The video helps us recover self-esteem.” Gabriela Zamorano and Fabiola Gervacio built a communications division for the Women’s Commission of UCIZONI, a peasant organization in Mexico, to make advocacy videos to encourage indigenous women to join. They created three short videos and traveled to villages to screen them among the women. Says Gabriela:

The response in the communities was phenomenal. When the women saw images of women and an entire film dedicated to indigenous women, they were surprised, because usually everything is about the men.

These are videos edited to inspire, consolidate, educate, and mobilize the communities they come from. Grassroots video editing, compared to legal or policy uses, can be much more diverse in its style, structure, and composition. Joey Lozano recommends the film be made in the language or dialect understood by the people. He also says it can be longer than films intended for an international audience, as you have a “captive audience,” because they are already personally interested in the subject, and don’t need to be convinced to watch, or to keep watching. In some cases you can also present a more simple series of testimonies—if they are of people within the community, people are more likely to listen to them because of the innate interest and novelty of seeing people they know, or who share their own experiences. It is always a question of audience. If you are showing participatory video made within the community to help express and move forward their own decision-making processes, it

does not matter if it is poorly made or tedious to an outside audience, because it will be highly effective for its target viewership. However, if you are coming from outside to try to organize and mobilize a community around an issue then you may face more pressure to create a video to different standards.



Figure 3.3 An audience in Mindanao, the Philippines watches one of Joey Lozano's productions (Necessary Illusions Productions)

Audiences often feel comfortable relating to and discussing the issues in a film that presents individuals who are similar to them, although not familiar to them as real people. For example, several individuals courageously stepped forward to participate in *Operation Fine Girl: Rape as Weapon of War in Sierra Leone*, fully disclosing their identities and faces on camera, despite their difficult testimonies. People seeing it across Sierra Leone have related to their stories and responded overwhelmingly.

During community screenings of the 47-minute video in Sierra Leone, Binta Mansaray, associate producer of the film, reports:

Girls are sometimes troubled by the young women's decision to show their faces on the video. This gives me an opportunity in screenings to raise questions about stigmatizing victims and blaming the young women rather than the soldiers and rebels.

She points out how difficult it is to win justice if the men can count on women being too afraid or ashamed to make their accusations in open court. In other screenings in the provinces, there have been mixed audiences of ex-combatants and civilians attending. Binta describes how

some of the ex-combatant women were emotional, and some of them cried while listening to the testimony of the girls. It took some time for them to express themselves, and when they finally mustered courage to talk, they said they were willing to come forward and explain a lot of what happened ... but were concerned about their safety.

Activist audiences

Videos intended for activists address an audience that can mobilize on behalf of an issue or the people in a film. These videos speak to people who may already be interested in the subject, and want to learn more about how they can help, or even how they can help themselves by learning from the film. They may also engage and inform an audience that is new to the issues presented. Often they can be more partisan than videos for other audiences, as they are “preaching to the converted.” They use facts and arguments to support an activist position, but like all videos, they rely on passion, human relationships and emotion to really engage their viewers.

At Greenpeace, Martin Atkin has been working on their GMO (Genetically Modified Organisms) project and has produced two separate videos, one intended specifically for farmers around the world, the other for a general audience. The one for farmers was intended for use by NGOs to raise awareness in the farming community about the impact of GMOs on farming livelihoods and lives. It is called *Grains of Truth*.

I knew that it would be emotional before I went to shoot [Atkin recalls about traveling to canola and soya farming communities throughout North America]. The testimonies were so powerful. Basically, they were about the emotional issues of financial consequences, and court cases stemming from the GMOs. I decided to let the farmers speak for themselves, with no narration. I superimposed stylized images of the prairies, of the harvest. I had in my mind's eye to make *Grapes of Wrath*—black and white stylized, with elements that had that feel.

It was unlikely that television stations would take *Grains of Truth*, because it was so “artsy.” But that didn’t matter. This video was intended to be viewed by other farmers. It was 15 minutes long and it was translated into Bulgarian, Romanian, Czech, Thai and many other languages. It was distributed by NGOs working with sustainable farming, and it toured the world. They encouraged people to come to the screenings by poster in villages. In some cases, the subjects in the documentary were invited to come as well, to answer questions after the screening.

An artistic, emotional approach allowed immediate connection to the plight of the farmers worldwide, and made the film accessible to multiple communities with similar experiences.

Providing historical context can help frame a specific event for activists. When Indian right-wing forces unleashed communal violence in the state of Gujarat, activist Shabnam Hashmi says she and her husband Gauhar Raza “were keen to make a political film about it.” One film had already been made about the 2002 massacres at Gujarat, but Shabnam was concerned that while the film portrayed the recent events, it didn’t explain where the hatred came from. She wanted to make clear that

It wasn’t an isolated incident. We needed a film which dealt with the history of the right-wing movement, to show it was a movement founded on the principles introduced by Italian Fascists. We need to show what led to the events at Gujarat.

Using archival footage, photographs and the 20 hours of footage they’d filmed themselves in Gujarat, Shabnam and Gauhar edited the film *Evil Stalks the Land*. The film is used in activist circles in India and around the world to show the reality of, and the reasons for, communal violence between Hindus and Muslims in India, and Shabnam herself has shown it at 35 screenings to date in the US alone.

We made the film to wake people up. And the film serves that purpose. The film leaves audiences stunned. By the end, we are saying that it is the audience’s duty to the next generation to save our country.

Now, the film has become part of Shabnam’s own toolkit as she organizes a network of five-day workshops in districts throughout

the country—including within Gujarat itself—in order to sensitize activists and NGOs about the power of right-wing forces in India.

Human rights organizations producing video pay particular attention to focusing their messaging in material for activist audiences. Joanna Duchesne, a long-time producer for Amnesty International, worked on Amnesty's global "Stop Violence Against Women" campaign, producing a video that could be of use to groups around the world working on the issue. It incorporated a set of key problems including rape, post-conflict violence, domestic violence, and honor killings, and also emphasized clear goals, including building support for women's groups, and encouraging individuals to support a range of responses to these problems. To create a tool of use worldwide Duchesne featured stories from five regions of the world, all of which focused on an aspect of violence against women, letting viewers see for themselves that violence against women was everywhere, albeit in different manifestations. To create a space for action, she emphasized the role of women as dynamic and active in responding to violence, rather than as victims, and took particular care in the last minute of the 12-minute film to frame viewers' emotional understanding with analysis provided by the brother of one of the women featured, who talks about education and awareness and appeals to viewers' sense of citizenship in asking them to act.

Legal decision-makers (local, national, international), including human rights commissions, regional commissions, courts, and tribunals

Video can appear in courts and legal settings to provide background to a case, or even as direct evidence of alleged crimes or violations. It can also be presented to oversight and regulatory bodies in tandem with other materials. In some cases, it will be presented as unedited footage, and in others it may be presented in edited format, either as an existing video that is to be submitted, or as a video prepared specifically for the legal context. In either case, these video submissions are unlikely to be described as "advocacy video"—even though they may be intended to persuade a particular audience towards a particular decision.

More and more, video is becoming part of the legal process around the world. At the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, permanent video monitors have been installed throughout the courtroom, and video is providing key evidence for genocide and crimes against humanity. In one case, video evidence

clearly identified a defendant at the scene of the crime—a fact he had been denying. He was convicted and sentenced to 46 years in prison, in large part owing to this video evidence.

For a legal audience, you will be creating an evidentiary submission for a court or other legal mechanism. You should generally be very careful with your language—visual, verbal, or written—in the narration and titlecards. You need to avoid editorializing polemics or policy pronouncements. But you can substantiate a factual allegation, and develop deeper human empathy through using video.

Often it is persuasive to prepare a video that parallels and substantiates the points raised in other forms of documentation, such as a written report or another evidentiary submission. For example, as described in Chapter 1, Human Rights Alert in Manipur, India prepared a video titled *Sanamacha's Story* to accompany a written presentation to the UN Working Group on Forced and Involuntary Disappearances. Although the Working Group had already been briefed on the problem of “disappearances” in Manipur, *Sanamacha's Story* was the first time the voices of eyewitnesses to the abduction by Indian government forces, and the voices of the family grieving the loss of their son, had made their way into the United Nations, and the Working Group said they felt a newly reinforced conviction to address the case.

In other cases, human rights organizations have successfully used video to show emblematic stories and individual cases that are representative of wider patterns of abuse—in these videos, a series of interviewees discuss abuses affecting them that have also been experienced by a wider population. These figures can then be substantiated and documented in much greater detail in accompanying written documentation or oral presentation. See Chapter 6 for a more extensive discussion and examples of how video can be used in a legal context.

Policy-makers, opinion-formers, and powerbrokers

Videos targeted specifically at decision-makers can be very effective. Like videos intended for legal use, they may outline specific violations of law, but they can also go further. They may also outline possible solutions, with specific policy recommendations or suggestions, and bring personal human experience directly into the boardrooms or committee rooms full of people with the power to make a difference. In other cases you may be trying to shame them into action, or to convince them that it is in their best interests to act.

Says Joey Lozano:

These are people who survive on votes, good public image and money and profits. If one is making a video with the intention of soliciting support from these people, one must present it in such a way that makes them realize they will lose votes, have a bad public image, or lose profits. It's like hitting them where it hurts most.

In this light, *Silence and Complicity*, a low-budget women's rights film, is a powerful example of the ability of video to affect policy and decision-makers. The film was made by two women's rights organizations, the Center for Reproductive Rights (then the Center for Reproductive Law and Policy, CRLP) and the Latin American and Caribbean Committee for the Defense of Women's Rights (CLADEM), and uses the moving testimonies of women who were mistreated and abused, to expose widespread sexual, psychological, and verbal abuse, neglect, rape, and violence against women in Peruvian government-run health facilities. The video was tied to a report of the same name published in both English and Spanish. Barbara Becker, then deputy director of communications at CRLP and the co-producer of the video, chose video for its unique emotional impact:

Human rights reports are so legalistic in their language, and they have to be. We wanted to come up with a way to show the human face of women being abused in Latin America and in Peru in particular.

The video was shown to community groups and women's centers in Peru, to key representatives at the UN, to NGOs, to development professionals, and to international audiences at human rights film festivals. The film has changed the manner in which rape and sexual abuse cases are handled in the courts. The Peruvian government has also agreed to create new guidelines for doctors, to investigate the cases documented in the video, to include women's rights organizations in its reproductive health committees, and to begin talks with the Peruvian branch of CLADEM to improve public healthcare. Becker noted that the Peruvian government chose to negotiate rather than to have the film screened in public and diplomatic venues.¹

Remember that some videos can be alienating for powerbrokers. The language you decide to use, the stridency with which you make your point, or the spokespeople or music you select can all limit the audiences that will be receptive to your production, and therefore

may limit the usefulness of a video. Sometimes, you must make choices about your audience, knowing what the casualties will be.

For example, WITNESS collaborated with the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, a California-based human rights organization, and Columbia University Law School to create a video titled *Books Not Bars*. The target audience for the film were young people in affected communities in California and around the US, and the primary goals of the film were to explain the prison industrial complex (where an increasing prison population is linked to increasing commercialization of the whole process of incarceration), to connect the issues of disproportionate minority confinement and corresponding lack of investment in education to universal human rights norms, and to provide positive examples of ways to engage in activism around the issues. While the video and the accompanying action pack and lesson plans are effective tools for youth organizing, it is not an effective tool for advocacy with most branches of government. The very qualities that give it appeal for youth—the use of hip-hop music and spoken word, the rapid pacing, and the choice of youth interviewees, for example—can alienate some decision-makers. However, following the success of *Books Not Bars*, WITNESS and the Ella Baker Center collaborated on a follow-up video, *System Failure*, which was targeted, with a more sober style, using of footage from government hearings, and more in-depth interviews, at parents of incarcerated youth, and at government officials.

Internet audiences

The viewers you find online will depend on where you place the video, how much content exists on the site and its degree of specialization, and the audience size and demographic it typically attracts. You can't assume that this audience will know anything about the subject—or even care about it—when they begin watching unless you are streaming your video at a website that is focused on your issue.

Videos aimed for online viewing have specific technical and content demands. Online webcasts need to be short, clear, engaging, and have a clearly defined vision and concrete ideas on how to get involved. The advantage of broadcasting online is that you can supplement it with text, links and complementary material; while a viewership is reached that is not constricted by national borders or by the need to attend an organized screening or television broadcast at a particular time. “Our online video broadcasts at <www.witness.org> reach a broad, largely North American and Western European

audience, and there is the immediate opportunity online to respond and take action,” explains Matisse Bustos, Outreach Coordinator at WITNESS.

Online use of video is a fairly new phenomenon, so there’s little information about how engaged people remain on the web. However, in general, shorter video is likely to be more effective—WITNESS finds most viewers will spend no longer than three minutes viewing online videos. Other sites, such as OneWorld TV, <www.oneworld.tv>, use short clips and subdivide longer videos to allow people to pick and choose the parts of a longer video that interest them—or offer options for interaction and messaging around clips that interest a viewer.

It’s important to understand how people arrive at a website in the first place. Matisse explains:

We need to be honest about the challenges of online, and the need to stand out from the profusion of websites out there. That’s why, for example, at WITNESS we often use celebrities to introduce or to narrate, to help draw people in.

At WITNESS, offline activity, such as current affairs, can be a driving force bringing people to the website. For example, the RAWA piece *Rise*, a video including material filmed by women during the Taliban regime in Afghanistan was frequently viewed when it was topical and compelling because of world events. *Operation Fine Girl* was featured on the Oprah Winfrey show, which brought considerable traffic to the online webcast.

In some cases the webcast is a way to engage people who may then use video offline. Through the online webcast, activist groups, schools, and universities can learn about the material, and television producers can get a sense of the material available.

Pointers to remember for online/web video

- Avoid a lot of camera movement or in-frame action
- Use straight cuts rather than dissolves
- Subtitles/titlecards don’t work well, so consider dubbing, or voiceover
- Use interviews—they convey information, and they are stable shots that will stream well

- Keep it short, ideally 3–5 minutes. If longer, divide it into segments so the audience can see the whole, or parts they are interested in. Include a trailer if you are putting a longer video on the Internet
- Provide accompanying text information and stills
- Get good sound—with a slow connection, the quality of sound will be higher than the visual image quality

As we move towards a broadband universe, interactive video will fill the screens of computers as they become more like computerized TV sets. These changes will affect the technical and stylistic considerations for online video. However, for now and in the foreseeable future, there will still be a digital divide. The reality is that in most parts of the world, it's wireless technology that has broken through, and we are not yet seeing wireless technology deliver full-frame broadband video. Video makers are likely to continue to have to adapt their content for online audiences. For more discussion of the Internet as a distribution vehicle, see Chapter 7.

General audience

Most of the above categories of films can be repurposed as documentaries of varying lengths for a general public and the mainstream media. The secret here is to provide context to an audience that may know and care little about the subject. You may need to “sell” the subject itself. As in almost every kind of video, you will need to tell a strong, compelling story.

But Howard Weinberg warns that it is

hard to tell a passionate story. You can hurt your case by overselling; even people that are sympathetic may begin to think, “That’s outrageous.” I often see things that make one sceptical rather than supportive. A film will be full of overstatements, yet context is missing. Visually, you need to get in close for impact, but you also have to back off.

Backing off might mean not using heavy-handed narration or titlecards. It might mean including counterpoints to a given opinion rather than a series of voices that are in agreement. Weinberg says that, for a general public, “You need to locate them: The story has to connect from what the audiences know to what they don’t know.”

Sometimes, videos on the same subject can be shot and edited for two different audiences. After making the video *Grains of Truth* for

farmers around the world, Martin Atkin of Greenpeace produced and edited another video about the same subject in a completely different style. Unlike *Grains of Truth*, which was aimed at farmers in Africa or China, *Slice of Life* is a 17-minute video intended to publicize the issues in Canada and the USA.

Martin explains:

It became a conventional, standard documentary. It was scripted, with sound bites, fact by fact. The treatment was like a current affairs documentary. We got a distributor and it was to be released alongside a Greenpeace report on the issue, around the time of the Monsanto Annual General Assembly in 2003. So the big TV stations may have used, for example, only 1 minute from the film, but that's how it was intended.

Similar to Martin Atkin, the producer of *Operation Fine Girl*, Lilibet Foster, needed to reach multiple audiences. As she did not have the luxury of making multiple versions she had to think through from the start her multiple audiences, and in addition how these audiences were likely to see the film—i.e. broadcast on television, privately on home video, in group screenings etc. *Operation Fine Girl* was to be shown on international television with a première in the US and would reach a broad general public this way, and then was to have an extensive use across the country of Sierra Leone as an advocacy and outreach tool to help in the peace and reconciliation process, as the country transitioned to peace after a ten-year war.

As Lilibet says:

The essential challenge for myself and Binta Mansaray, the extremely knowledgeable Sierra Leonean with whom I worked, was to figure out how to make a film that would reach an outside audience that knew little about the history of the country and the details of the conflict yet bring to light new information for Sierra Leoneans who had lived through the war. The other important considerations were that the atrocities committed in Sierra Leone were widespread and extremely brutal, and the country is in West Africa, where there were several other countries also in various stages of conflict. For an outside audience, I therefore decided to focus on the story of only three girls and one boy who would represent every other child in their situation.

I hoped that this would personalize the conflict for an audience and not leave them with a sense of hopelessness and despair for a country and people far away, who were finally on the road to peace. On the other hand, within Sierra Leone, one of the issues they were struggling with in the peace process

was the successful reintegration of the abducted children back into their families and communities. This was especially true for girls who had been impregnated and were raising what was referred to as “rebel babies.” We hoped that the first-hand accounts of what took place would help to reveal that abduction was a calculated war tactic used by each side of the conflict and that they had not willingly joined the rebels to commit crimes against their own villages.

Lilibet knew that to fill out and contextualize the story, they had to find the right person, *within* the community, to interview about the history of the conflict and add enough to inform the outside audience, yet without turning off the internal audience. As she notes:

For obvious reasons, we carefully choose who to include because for the film to be taken seriously, it was important that they be considered good, fair, knowledgeable local and international sources. To even out the information and add credibility, I also interviewed members of the rebel factions and government to get their response, members of the community running the schools where many girls came when they escaped from their captors, and medical staff who had first-hand evidence and knowledge of the physical and mental condition of the abductees.

Broadcast media

If your campaign is of interest to the media, general audiences can be reached effectively through mainstream media. This may either be through the production of a documentary for broadcast or through the provision of story material to a news outlet. In both situations, it is good to be realistic about the opportunities (it is often difficult to get airtime on the channels where you want to be), and also about the degree of control you will retain over your story. Unless you are buying the airtime from the channel, you will probably have to work with a commissioning editor at the television channel during the production of your documentary. They will exert a degree of control over your production, based on their knowledge of their own audience, and the needs of the broadcasting channel.

If you are buying airtime on a niche channel, such as local cable, it is up to you to work out what audience is watching this channel. A number of human rights organizations in South Asia and elsewhere have effectively purchased local cable time to broadcast programs aimed at a general public.

If you are providing raw material to news media, in most cases you will find that the slant on the story will be determined by the outlet. They will take raw footage or interviews from you, and frame it within their own editorial stance. You will have to decide if the loss of control over your story, and how it is framed, is worth the potential exposure for the issue. For more information on the distribution of broadcast-oriented media, see Chapter 7.

MAKING A STORY A REALITY: PREPRODUCTION

The stages of filmmaking include:

1. *Conceptualization and research*: Here you build the idea and clarify the advocacy goal (why am I making this film?), the audience (for whom am I making this film?) and the elements of film to be included (how will I make this film?). Also ask yourself, what other films have been made on this issue? What perspective do these take? How is my film different? What information do I need to research to make an informed film?
2. *Preproduction*: This stage includes preparing and researching a outline, initial script and a shooting plan, logistical planning, and fundraising.
3. *Production*: This is when the film is shot bearing in mind all the available elements including interviews, verité footage, B-roll, cutaways, interviews, graphics, archival needs, music etc. (For more detail and an explanation of these terms, see Chapter 4 and the Glossary.)
4. *Postproduction*: This stage includes the production and review of a series of versions of the video, on paper and then on screen. For more detail, see Chapter 5.

What is preproduction?

Preproduction is the stage at which research is collected and questions are asked that help to shape an investigation and story. It is best to draft an outline to clarify your story and messages. You need to pay attention to the budget, resources, and timeline. From your video outline, you can then create a shotlist, schedule, and a call-sheet.

The basics of a story: what, where, when, who, why, how?

During preproduction, you should ask yourself the following questions:

- *What* story are you trying to tell? What story are you leaving out? And why?
- *When* did the incident, event or violation happen?
- *Where* does the story occur?
- *Who* will appear in your story?
- *Who* will tell the story?
- *Why* are you telling this story?
- *How* will you tell the story?

You may find that you will have more than one answer for each of these questions.

Why are you telling this story?

For advocacy-oriented video you should be absolutely clear from the outset why you are telling your story, as both a filmmaker and as a social justice advocate. You also need to determine clearly who your audience is, and what they will find persuasive or compelling. On the basis of this you should choose the most appropriate story to tell.

How will you tell your story?

How will you tell this story? Will you be following a particular chronological order or sequence? Will you concentrate on a character, an issue, or a place? How can this story most effectively be told, and how can you ensure that it will be interesting to watch and responsible to the people who participated?

Has your story been told before?

At this stage, you may also need to do some research about other videos, films, books, websites, and other forms of media on the subject. There's no sense in reinventing the wheel, and these sources may also help develop your own project.

Preparing an outline for your video

You now have a clear goal and audience, and are developing the most effective message and messenger for this audience.

At this stage, you should prepare an outline or working script. An outline is the architecture of your proposed film—a sketch of the audio and visual elements that will make up the finished film, arranged in order, illustrating the storyline of your film. From your outline you will work out what shots you need to shoot in any given location, interview or activity. A well-thought-through outline is particularly crucial in the case of human rights and social justice

filming, where there is not always the opportunity to go back and get reshoots of the material.

Preparing an outline will help you to think of what you need to tell your story in a compelling and dramatic way. You do not have to stick to it once you come to film and edit but it can act as a guide to help you think about creative ways to tell your story.

An outline format is shown in Table 3.2. You use note form, with the visuals on the left, and the audio on the right.

Table 3.2 Outline format

<i>Picture</i>	<i>Sound</i>
Crowds demonstrating outside government building	Sync sound** Narration on recent rights abuses, and government involvement
John B tells story of the night in the cell, c/a* Still photos: John B, tortured	Interview on-camera with John B, victim of torture
Action pictures of him doing interviews at place of work where he works monitoring rights violations	Narration on case; voiceover from interview with another human rights worker

Notes:

*c/a = cutaway (a shot of a detail of a location or of a person, or of a visual related to the story, which is used to cover cuts in an edit of an interview and to add impact to an interview. For more detail, see Chapter 4)

**Sync sound = "synchronous" sound recorded at the same time as the picture

You will also be considering issues of characters, point of view, and narrative structure—who is telling the story? How are you telling the story?

What audiovisual components will help you tell the story?

All video is made up of combinations of visual and audio elements. Think creatively and expansively about different kinds of sound and images. What will make this story visually interesting? Can you tell your story using different combinations of visuals and audio components? What will have most impact on your audience? What do you have access to given security, budget, and time constraints? Can you make a virtue out of necessity?

Some kinds of visuals and audio to think about:

Visuals

- Visual and audio documentation of events happening—people *doing* things, without commentary.

- Landscapes, locations, and inanimate objects that are part of the story.
- Interviews—one or more people answering questions, posed to them by an interviewer on- or off-camera who may be edited out of the final film.
- Conversations observed—people aware of the presence of a camera, but not being interviewed directly.
- Conversations or people talking to each other, with the camera unobtrusive or hidden.
- Re-enactments—factually accurate recreations of scenes that could not be filmed, or are in the past. Remember that there may be credibility problems with this in the human rights context, particularly if it is not clear why a scene could not be filmed, or needed to be re-enacted.
- Expressionistic shots—often symbolic or artistic, to represent a concept or provide visuals where you do not have access to the location, e.g. in historical interviews.
- Manipulation of imagery via slow-mo, fast-forward, motion-capture etc.
- Still photos or documents—either static or shot with the camera panning/tracking or zooming in or out.
- Text including on-screen titles, headlines, and graphics—used for creative and informational purposes, including subtitles for foreign languages. These are usually added in the editing.
- Library, news, and archive footage –this could be from a professional archive, but also personal memorabilia, and possibly material from other films. Remember footage from a commercial source is usually expensive and complicated to get permission for.
- Blank screen—causing the viewer to reflect on what they have just seen or heard, prime them for what is next, indicate a change of sequence or location, or to emphasize sounds.

Audio or sound elements

- Interviewee—you can use audio only, or audio from a picture-and-sound interview with audio only used, or both picture and audio used.
- Conversations—either recorded with the participants' knowledge or unobtrusively/secretly.
- Narration—could be a narrator, the filmmaker or a participant.
- Synchronous sound—sound shot while filming.

- Sound effects—individual sounds shot while filming, or at a later point.
- Music—this is usually added in editing.
- Silence—the absence of sound can indicate change of mood or place, or cause the viewer to refocus on the screen.

Notice that in many videos the sound and visual elements are not from the same source—in editing you will make choices about how to combine different audio and visual elements.

Exercise 3.5: Deconstruct the audiovisual components of a film

Choose a favorite film and watch it with a critical eye for the different audio and visual elements that go into it. Make a note of all that you see, using the lists above as a guide to potential components. You'll likely be surprised by the variety of different inputs that go into even the simplest film.

Writing a shooting plan or shotlist

Before actually shooting in any location or interview you will want to create a shotlist. This involves brainstorming exactly what sorts of images or shots may help to tell your story, so that when you are filming you have the shots that you need clear in your mind, while being open to the opportunities that actual filming will offer. You will want to go back to your outline and review the video and audio elements you thought about using, and see how you could incorporate these into your shooting plan.

We will come back to the shooting plan in the next chapter after we have presented more on shots and sequences.

Budget, resources, and timeline

With an outline and potential shotlist in hand, you can now do a budget “breakdown” to calculate how much time, money and how many resources you will need. With your outline, estimate:

1. How many people will you have in your crew? (Don't forget the editing!)
2. What equipment and supplies do you need?—camera, tapes, batteries etc.
3. How much time and money will traveling take (both for filming *and* editing)?

4. How much cash do you need for food and extra costs while filming (including “per diem” if needed)?
5. What interviews do you need to film? (How long is each one, and will you need to return for follow-ups?)
6. How many days do you need to film visuals, B-roll or verité, and record music?
7. How much research time will you need for archives, prerecorded music, and still photos?
8. How much money and time will you need for transcribing interviews, logging, preparing paper edit?
9. How much time and money will you need for editing time, and for editing equipment?

Even if you are not expecting to pay for any of the above, it’s a good idea to have a clear understanding of exactly how much time you and others will be giving to the project.

You’ll need to work out a timeline for your shoot, when and where will you be conducting interviews and filming visuals. If you are able to set times with your interviewees beforehand, now is the time to do so. Use a calendar to block out the filming time you’ll require. Always add an extra hour or even two for setting up the equipment, preparing the subject for the interview, etc. Do not forget traveling time between interviews. Everything on shoots takes longer than you expect!

During the budget breakdown, you may realize that you will not have as much time or money as you would like. Now is the time to prioritize and make decisions. For example, you may only have four days to shoot, and you have planned to film six major characters. Perhaps now is the time to decide who you most want to film, and you may decide to limit your filming to only two people (making sure to film ample B-roll, visuals, and sequences). Spending more time with fewer people may actually give you more material to work with in the editing room, and a stronger story line.

A note on fundraising

You may also need to do some fundraising during preproduction. Donors will want to see written material or hear about:

1. The message of the video
2. The outline or basic script
3. The timeline

4. The overall budget and how their contribution fits in
5. How you plan to distribute the video
6. How they, as fundraisers, will benefit from participating

They may not need *a lot* of information about what you plan to do, but they need good information, to help gain confidence in you and your project. The main question they will ask themselves, if they are interested in the project, is: how realistic is the plan?

Fundraising can be as simple as collecting coins at a community gathering, or as complicated as filling out stacks of forms and applying for production funds at international agencies. In all cases, though, you need to decide whether it is worth the time spent raising the money (do you become an administrator instead of an advocate?), and whether it's worth involving yourself with any money that has "strings attached." For example, will the local government council want to hold a veto over the film before you finish and release it? Who, in the end, will control the film?

Scouting ("Recce") and pre-interviews

Depending on funds and time available, and the security situation, it can be a good idea to visit the area where you want to film—before filming. This is known as a "recce," and can be very useful. You may need to determine whether access is difficult or dangerous for anyone involved, or identify and talk to potentially good spokespeople or interviewees.

You can also save time later on by checking for any loud or recurring sounds in the area, for good interview spots, and seeing whether electricity is available to recharge your batteries. You may also need to find a reliable translator or organize local transport arrangements. You may want to scout out where you and your team will stay the night.

Many filmmakers and researchers conduct "pre-interviews" during the recce stage. Pre-interviews can be brief, and need not be recorded. Pre-interviews help determine what people have to say about a subject, and importantly *how* they say it. If you are interviewing many people, it may be a good idea to take notes that detail the basics, for your own future review.

Securing access

As an advocacy filmmaker, there will be times when you need to negotiate access to a location or place where you need to film, and

where this decision-making power is not held by your allies on the project. Here you should very carefully consider how you represent yourself. Alongside the issues of what immediate or long-term danger you incur from going to this location, or from concealing your reasons to be there (for more on this, see Chapter 2), you should consider the ethical issues that possible deception may raise. You should also be aware that whatever you put on paper—in explanation to authorities, interviewees, or location owners—about what you are doing has to be something you are willing to endorse and explain down the line.

Exercise 3.6: Draft a project explanation

How you present yourself, your organization, and your video advocacy project to outsiders who are not allies on your project, can have a critical impact on your ability to use the material in the future. Done effectively it will avoid credibility issues with your audience, and legal or reputational challenges from people you have filmed.

This exercise is best done in a group, and is meant to help you identify the bounds within which you can describe your project. It can be done in two parts:

1. Use one of the situations below, and draft short explanations that you would give about the project to the following individuals: site director, location guard, family member of person filmed, a person in the facility, and a translator. Project descriptions must be honest and accurate, but should also be designed with the need to secure access in mind.
2. Take your own video advocacy project, and identify a set of people with whom you will have to discuss your project. Prepare similar 30-second explanations.
 - You are working to expose systematized forced labor abuses on a natural resources development jointly managed by the government and a multinational company. You plan to call on the company to withdraw from the project, and for international human rights mechanisms to sanction the government for its action. The site is in a relatively remote area far from major towns. People from the surrounding area are obliged to clear and build roads for the project—they receive some pay, but are also obliged to work additional days, and have no choice over their participation in the project. While the government has

a poor reputation nationally and internationally for human rights, there has, as yet, been no exposure of the multinational's involvement in the project or the potential rights abuses. The site is guarded by locally recruited security personnel, and by members of an army unit. The project director is a representative of the multinational, who works in close collaboration with a government official.

- You are working on a project documenting human rights abuses including denial of food, adequate medical attention and cruel and degrading treatment, against people kept in a psychiatric facility. Your goal is to secure change for the people in the facility, as well as a commitment to institutional reform. Officials at the hospital generally do not see that there is anything wrong with current conditions, or accept them as a consequence of financial constraints. The personnel at the facility are short-staffed, and lack resources. Many people have been abandoned in the facility by their families, or have lost contact with family members. Some, but not all, people in the facility have mental disabilities.

Exercise 3.7: Fill the gaps

As you develop a shooting plan sometimes you will find that a vital part of your story—either a location or interviewee—is inaccessible. At this point you have to start thinking creatively about how to compensate for this.

Imagining the two situations above—if you could not get access to the two sites how would you gather sufficient audiovisual material to tell the stories?

To give you some ideas, here is how an editor resolved an absence of images from inside California's juvenile facilities as he worked on *System Failure*, a video documenting abuses in the system.

First, he stresses the importance of ensuring there is adequate footage available to fill out the interviews that you are able to obtain outside the facility.

I can't stress enough that when you are filming talking-head interviews, the more B-roll footage of those contributors the better ... just doing daily things or walking down the streets really helps their interview. Otherwise, filming B-roll of any images that help the sentiment of the piece is just as good. If someone is talking emotively of a death, still "quiet" shots of skies, clouds, landscapes, and sunsets can help convey the impression of the

person's thoughts. In the process of producing *System Failure* we got as many photographs as possible of the people filmed and their families; they really helped the people that were interviewed become more real and relatable to the audience. They could understand them as people better.

To help provide information about events that had already happened or that had been out of reach of cameras, the filmmakers also did research into any other related documents, and obtained court records, newspaper cuttings and newspaper photographs (while being aware of copyright issues).

Looking for outside sources they combed both private and public archival resources:

We also got some footage from news stations and stock library footage of the prisons we featured but also other images like beatings and cages and shackles. Two things that were vital for us were firstly, getting access to televised public access archive of the California Senate where California Youth Authority officers spoke. This way, we were at least able to use their images and testimony there to give a sense of presence in the piece. The second material that was crucial was the California Youth Authority's own authorized review as we then structured our whole film around the review's quotes.

Preparing for an interview

When you've decided you'd like to interview someone, these are some issues to consider during preproduction:

- Where do the interviewees need to be filmed?
- Does the filming pose a security threat to the interviewer and/or interviewee?
- What precautions need to be taken to ensure their safety? (preparing consent forms, determining manner of transporting and storing tapes/transcripts to ensure safety/confidentiality etc.)
- Do you need to translate consent forms?
- If it is a government/military official, do you need clearance? How far in advance do you have to arrange a meeting?
- Does the interviewee require an interpreter?
- Will the gender, culture, nationality, or vocation of the interpreter, filmmaker, or cameraperson alter the course of the

interview or negatively affect the interviewee? How can this be avoided?

- List the questions to be asked of interviewee (see Chapter 4 for more information on interviews).
- What are your options if one of these film subjects/interviewees is not available?

Preparing a call-sheet

When preparing to film, a call-sheet (see Table 3.3) itemizes the names, with addresses, email and telephone numbers, of anyone you might need to be in contact with (see Chapter 2 on preparing for dangerous conditions). This list can include:

- The crew
- The interview subjects
- Location contacts (e.g. head of medical rehabilitation center where you are filming)
- Contacts for accommodation
- Contacts in case of emergency

Tips for preproduction

- Many people have had cameras confiscated or have not been allowed to film a particular building, place, or region. They didn't realize that they needed permission. Always check beforehand.
- Always assume that you will need permission to film, whether it be with an interviewee or in a public institution, e.g. in a hospital or a refugee camp. Have a prepared consent form (see Appendices III and IV for sample forms), in a language understood by the interviewee. For more information on this, see Chapter 2.
- Getting necessary clearances and the potential cost of using archive material is often overlooked at the preproduction stage. You may be able to negotiate free usage but remember to get written clearance for any photo, sound, and image that is not yours and you want to use in your video. You can also find "archival material" during shooting. For example, does your interview subject have photos that you could shoot with your camera? What about the neighbor? The local school?
- Filming alone can be hard going, especially when you have to interview people, and think about your sound and images. The quality of your filming can be compromised in this way, so if possible arrange to have someone to help you, checking the sound or asking your interviewee questions while you concentrate on what the picture looks like.
- See also Appendix VI for a checklist.

Table 3.3 Sample call-sheet

CALL SHEET		
Greenland: Home Rule at Work		
Shoot Dates	June 12–29, 2001	
Title:	Home Rule at Work	
Location:	Nuuk, Greenland	
Director	Anna S.	Mobile: 32-555-5555 Passport number: BL2345
Production Manager:	Karen S.	32-555-5555
Sound:	Melody R.	Cell: 32-555-5555 mroul@yahoo.com Passport number: BL2345
Camera:	Paul R.	32-555-5555 Passport number: BL2345 (penicilin allergy)
Translator:	Francis D.	299-555-5555
INTERVIEW SUBJECTS		
Tine S.		299-555-5555 Office: 555-5555 Home: 555-5555
Jacob O.		299-555-5555 Office: 555-5555 Home: 555-5555
Fixer in Nuuk:	Jakob R.	299-555-5555
Tuesday June 12, 2001		
6h00	S. and A. drive to Ottawa Airport	
9h40	First Air Flight 868 from Ottawa to Iqaluit (arrive at 12h30)	
13h20	First Air Flight 1868 from Iq. to Kangerlussuaq (arrive at 16h40)	
17h35	Gr. Air Flight 511 from Kangerlussuaq to Nuuk (arrive at 18h00)	
F. will meet S/A. at Nuuk airport		
20h00	Production meeting	
Bed and breakfast in private home reserved (cost 300 DKK/person/night)		
Wednesday June 13, 2001		
Reece in Nuuk		
10h00	Meet with T., interview subject	
14h00	Location scouting	
Bed and board in private home reserved (cost 300 DKK/person/night)		

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Table 3.3 *continued*

Thursday June 14, 2001

Reece in Nuuk
10h00 Meet with J., interview subject
14h00 View archives at Greenlandic television

Bed and board in private home reserved (cost 300 DKK/person/night)

Friday June 15, 2001

DAY 1—Shoot in Nuuk
08h00 film Jacob at home, getting ready for court case with children

Bed and breakfast in private home reserved (cost 300 DKK/person/night)

Saturday June 16, 2001

DAY 2—Shoot in Nuuk
Bed and board in private home reserved (cost 300 DKK/person/night)

Sunday June 17, 2001

DAY OFF
Bed and board in private home reserved (cost 300 DKK/person/night)

Monday June 18, 2001

DAY 3—Shoot in Nuuk
Bed and board in private home reserved (cost 300 DKK/person/night)

Tuesday June 19, 2001

15h35 Gr. Air Flight from Nuuk to Kangerlussuaq (arrive at 16h30)
17h25 First Air Flight 1869 from Kangar to Iq. (arrive 16h20)
18h05 First Air Flight 869 Iq. to Ottawa (arrive at 21h03)

drive or bus home

A call-sheet can also outline the timeline of your shoot. It includes travel information, location of interviews, and accommodation. Preparing a call sheet can help concretize your shoot, even if some elements may seem obvious, or may not be confirmed at the time.

It is invaluable to have all this information in one place during your shoot—ideally in your back pocket, for easy access!

Consider preparing this list for the rest of your team, including someone who is not going into the area with you. This could be a family member, or an international partner or ally if you are filming in your own community. If such a list is considered dangerous on your shoot, find ways of disguising information.

NOTE

1. Pat Aufderheide, *In the Battle for Reality*, available online at <www.centerforsocialmedia.org>.