SMITHSONIAN
CENTER FOR
FOLKLIFE
& CULTURAL
HERITAGE

# VIDEO PRODUCTION HAND BOOK

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# VISUAL STORYTELLING

Video production is a powerful form of visual storytelling. You can tell your own stories, from your own perspectives, using your own filmmaking style. Your aim is to convey a story through visual means.

This handbook will provide technical overview and assistance so that you can use media technology to capture and present your own stories. Media can be used to preserve Native languages, document elders' life histories, investigate social issues, or portray your own experiences.

*The possibilities are endless!*

# PRE-PRODUCTION PLANNING

Before you begin production (shooting video), it is helpful to organize your project so that you know what shots you will need, who you will need to interview, and what events or activities you want to record. Spending some time in pre-production, or the planning stage, will save you time during production and the post-production (editing) process.

## Storyline

**WHAT:** What is the plot or main story that you want to tell?

## Events/Action

**WHERE/WHEN:** What activities or events will you need to include in your video? How will this action add to your story? What information will it tell the viewer about the people in the video?

## Subjects

**WHO**: Who are the people who will be in the video? Why are they important to the story?

## Theme/Message

**WHY**: Why is it important to tell this story? What will the viewer learn from watching this video? Why is it important to you as the filmmaker to tell this particular story?

## Some Useful Terms

## B-Roll

B-roll includes shots that you will need to use in the editing room to mask the cuts that you make in your interviews. B-roll is also referred to as cutaway shots. Examples of b-roll include establishing shots, images taken of items in the environment where the interview took place, shots of the person doing activities, photographs, or signs.

In general b-roll helps to give the viewer a sense of the scene where action is taking place or provide additional information about the person being interviewed. When you are filming, you will want to make sure to get b-roll shots after filming your interviews.

## Storyboard

A storyboard is a visual representation of the shots that will make up your video. You can sketch out the people and action in your video and which camera angles you will use for each.

## Shot List

A shot list writes out every shot you anticipate needing for your production. This can serve as a checklist for you while you're in production to ensure you get all the shots you need for the project. For example:

1. Establishing shots
2. Close-up shots of hands and feet
3. Wide shots of dance class
4. Medium shot of teacher instructing adult dance class
5. Two-shot of students dancing
6. Interview with dance instructor

# COMPOSITION

## Framing

Framing relates to how you will compose each shot, giving consideration to the people and activities within the scene. You will want to compose each shot so that you draw the viewer's attention and create an active frame for your video subject.

## Headroom

People's heads should be positioned about a third of the way down the frame and to the left or right of center. Avoid too much or too little headroom.
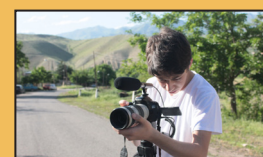
## Rule of Thirds

In order to draw the viewer's attention, divide the screen into a grid and using the "rule of thirds," position your object or person of interest slightly away from the center of the frame.

Too little headroom          Good headroom

## Nose Room

Think about the gaze of the person you are filming. You want more space in front of the person than behind, so they have room to interact with the people or environment before them.

## Diagonal or Z-Axis

Look for lines that are diagonal instead of horizontal or vertical. Think about the z-axis as the axis that goes "into" the shot, or the depth of the shot. Lines on the z-axis are dynamic and provide more energy and interesting framing on screen.

## Camera Height

Camera height and angle can dramatically affect the viewer's impression of the person on screen. If the camera towers above and looks down on the person, this can have a diminishing effect; if the camera angle looks up at the person on screen, it can give the impression that the person has a lot of power.

Camera at eye level

## Diverse Camera Shots

Aim for using several different camera shots within your video so that you give yourself a variety of camera angles and shots to work with in the editing room. You will find that different shots will be appropriate depending on the context in which you are filming.

Close-up

Wide Shot

Medium Shot

Establishing Shot

# IMAGE CONTROL

## Camera Moves

### Pan

Camera moves left to right or right to left to follow the action on screen. This can be good to use to convey events or activity within a scene. Keep the knob on the tripod loose in order to move the camera smoothly.

### Tilt

Camera moves up and down to reveal action within the frame.

### Focus

Focus is important for getting crisp images. When in automatic mode, the camera will focus for you. In manual mode, you control the focus. This gives you more control over image quality. To ensure that images stay in focus throughout filming, first zoom the lens all the way in and focus the camera. (It's helpful to use something with lettering. Zoom all the way in and make sure the letters are in focus.) Then zoom the lens out. The camera should stay in focus as you continue to film.

### Zoom

Lens moves in and out to zoom closer to or farther away from people, objects, or action. When zooming, start with a static shot and hold that shot for several seconds. Then gradually zoom in or out and end on a static shot. Hold that shot for several seconds. This will give you some extra footage when editing.

Warning! Avoid overusing the zoom. You can also physically move the camera closer to the person and/or object you are filming.

### Hand-Held Camera Work

When shooting hand-held, leave the camera in the widest angle possible for steadier shots. If you zoom in while shooting hand-held, the image will be shaky. Many cameras have a steady-shot option which should be used when shooting hand-held. You will see a hand icon on the LCD screen when the steady-shot option is turned on.

# SHOOTING TIPS

There are a few things you can do to always ensure high-quality images in your video footage:

### Manual Controls

Your camera can adjust for everything in automatic mode, but the more you can control the variables of the image manually, the better your images will look.

### Tripod

Always shoot on a tripod when you can as this leads to steadier shots. This is especially true for interviews.

### External Microphones

This will give you better audio, so use it whenever possible.

### White Balance

This greatly improves the image in your video footage.

### Long Shots

Getting nice, long steady shots will greatly help in editing.

> **Warning! Avoid these shots**

### Profile Shot

This flattens the frame and is unsettling for the viewer to see only one of the person's eyes on screen.

### Extreme Close-Up

This frame often feels too personal and reveals a lot of emotional information, so should be used sparingly.

# AUDIO

Good audio can make or break a video.

A few things to remember:

### Get Good Source Audio

When filming, you will need to respond to the acoustics of the space you are in. Scout the location for audio conditions prior to filming. If there is noticeable ambient noise, it often helps to turn off refrigerators, computer monitors, televisions, etc. To that point, never have audible music in the background when recording an interview! It will make it difficult to edit.

### Headphones

Always wear headphones and monitor audio from the camera. Be consistent about recording levels. If you need a stronger signal, it is ideal to get closer to your source than increase level setting, but always carefully monitor your audio. The camera audio levels should be near the middle but not showing red bars.
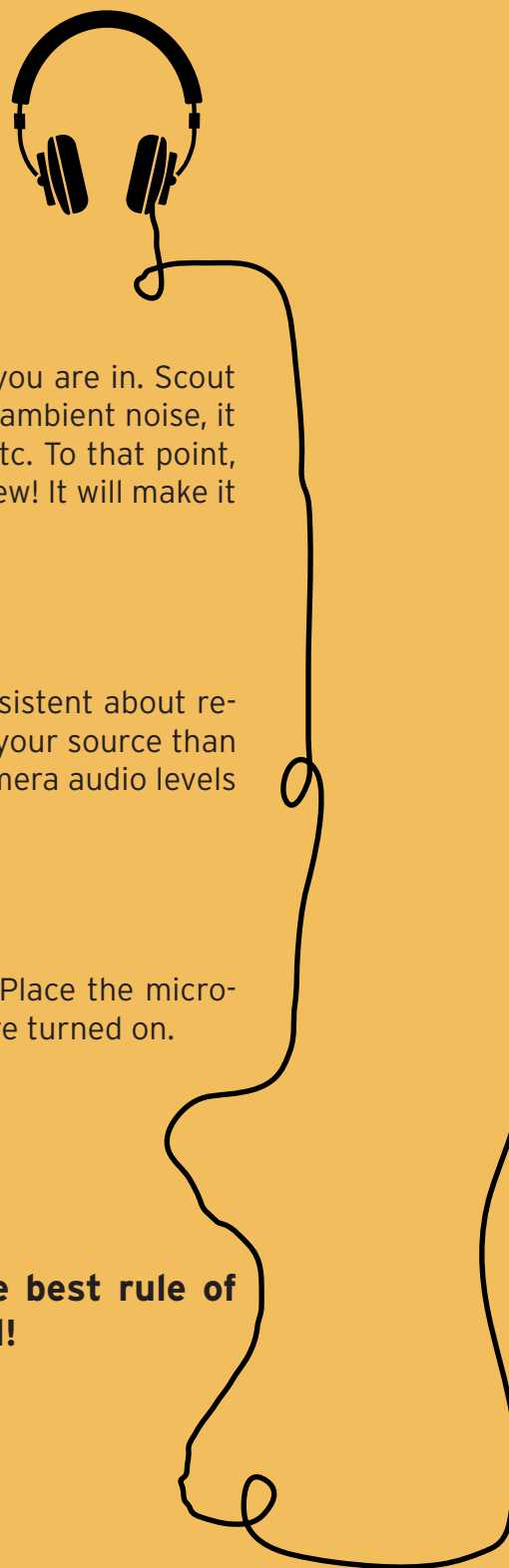
### External Microphones

Be sure to assess the best microphone setup for your filming needs. Place the microphone close to your sound source, and make sure your microphones are turned on.

### Get Microphones Close to Your Audio Source

This greatly improves the sound quality in your video footage.

**It is difficult to fix bad audio in post-production, so the best rule of thumb is to always get the best audio possible in the field!**

## External Microphones

### A Closer Look

Whenever possible, always use external microphones. Generally, cameras have one plug-in for an external mic. The on-board microphone in the camera does not record very good audio. The external mic will give you a higher audio quality. There are three external microphones to choose from.

### Lavalier Microphone (Wired)

This microphone is primarily for seated one-person interviews. This wired microphone will clip to a person's collar or some place close to their neckline, and will connect directly into the camera so whoever you are interviewing will be attached to the camera through the microphone cord. (Keep this in mind when using the camera on a tripod!)

### Wireless Microphone

There are two components to this microphone: the transmitter and the receiver. The receiver will be held by the filmmaker (clipped to your clothes or mounted on top of the camera). The transmitter will be worn by the person you are filming. This is an excellent microphone to use in situations where mobility is needed (e.g., if you are following a person doing an activity.)

### Shotgun Microphone

This mic mounts on top of the camera and is excellent for hand-held camera work and can also work well for impromptu "person on the street" interviews. It has a narrow pickup range, so make sure it is relatively close to, and pointed at, your subject.

## Headphones

**Always wear headphones in order to monitor the audio. You can adjust the audio recording levels in the camera:**

1. Press Menu and scroll to Recording Setup.

2. Scroll to Mic Level and adjust the levels using the arrow keys next to the Menu button.

3. You will see audio levels on screen. When you see too many red bars then you know that the audio levels are too high.

# LIGHTING

## Outdoor Lighting

If it is too dark inside to do your interview, consider setting up the interview outside. Natural light provides an excellent look, and conducting an interview outside can also convey information about the environment and space in which the interview is occurring. If you choose to interview outside, make sure the background doesn't distract from the interviewee.

If the light is too bright, you can manually set the iris to control the exposure. Close down the iris in bright conditions.

## Backlight

If you are filming your interview near a window, your subject may end up being backlit. This means there is light behind the person, but not enough light on their face, so you end up having their face in shadows. There is a backlight compensation feature on the camera that you can use when the camera is in automatic mode.

Another way to compensate for this is to add additional light on the person's face. You can bring over a lamp or use a white piece of cardboard to bounce light from the window onto the person's face to fill in the light on their face.

## Gain

The gain function on the camera will digitally raise the light levels when you are filming in low-light situations.
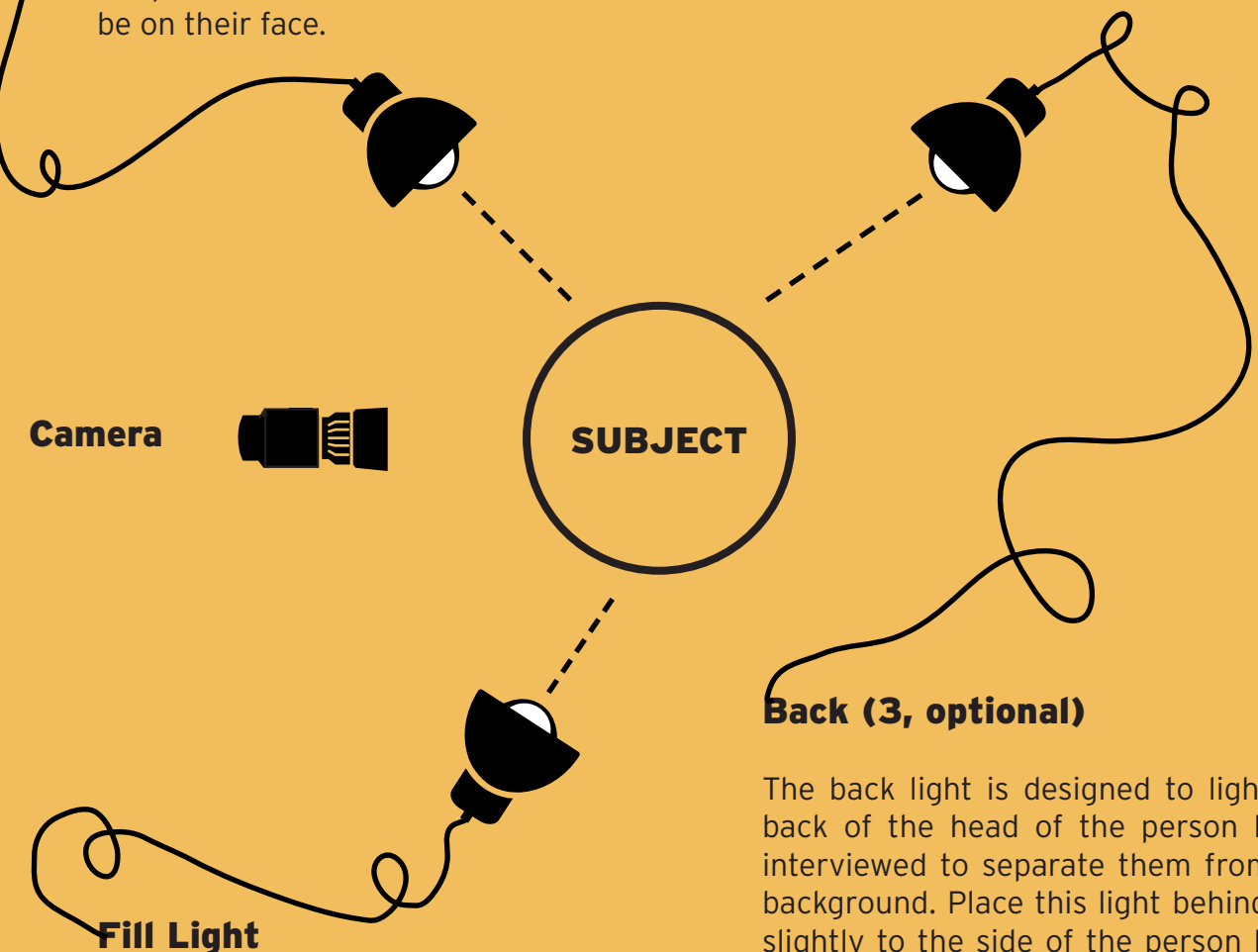
Be careful ! Too much gain will make the image look grainy.

You can control the gain by manually setting the iris and opening it up all the way.

## Three-Point Lighting

### Key Light

This is your principal source of light and should have the strongest light. It should be placed at a roughly 30 to 45-degree angle to the person seated for the interview. The closer you get the key light to the person, the fewer shadows there will be on their face.

**Camera**

**SUBJECT**

### Back (3, optional)

The back light is designed to light the back of the head of the person being interviewed to separate them from the background. Place this light behind and slightly to the side of the person being interviewed to light their head which will separate them from the background. This will be the weakest of the light sources.

### Fill Light

Used to soften the sharp shadows created by the key light, the fill light should be less strong than the key light and positioned opposite from where the key light is placed.

## White Balance

Different kinds of light have different color temperatures. Indoor light tends to be orange, while outdoor light tends to have bluer tones. It is important to white balance your camera before filming. White balancing is essentially telling your camera "this is white" under these lighting conditions. The camera will automatically white balance when in automatic mode.

To get the best image possible, you should manually set the white balance. To do so, first set up your lighting conditions. Press the Camera Function button, then use the ring on the front of the camera and scroll down to white balance. Press Camera Function again and use the ring to cycle through the different icons until you see the icon for manual white balance. Hold up the white balance card or white paper and zoom all the way in until only white fills the screen. Press and hold the Camera Function button for one second. The screen will go black and then the image will come back up and it will be white balanced.

Without white balancing, the color will be off in your video footage.

## Exposure

Exposure deals with how much light is let into the camera. If the image is underexposed, your image will be too dark; if overexposed, it will be too bright. In automatic mode, your camera will set the exposure for you. In manual mode, you control the exposure with the iris function. You can use the zebra stripes function to gauge your level of exposure. You should aim to see some zebra stripes, but you don't want to see them all over the screen or else your footage will be overexposed and too bright.



Overexposed images appear washed out.



Without white balancing, indoor images tend to be orange.



If professional lights aren't available, you can make use of the light(s) around you when positioning the person you're interviewing to maximize your light. For example, you can use table lamps or floor lamps as your key and fill lights. It is best to avoid filming someone next to or near a window, but you could use window light as a back light or fill light if you had a strong floor or table lamp to use as a key light.

Avoid fluorescent light whenever possible. Fluorescent lights have a green tone and the hum from them can create audio problems.

# PRE-INTERVIEW

### Location Scouting

Location scouting involves visiting the places you will be filming prior to actually recording them. When on location, look for what background or setting you want to use for filming interviews and listen for what audio concerns may arise in this location.

For example, if you are filming in a location where you can hear a train passing, you would want to know that ahead of time so you can be prepared during filming. In this case, after filming your interview, you would want to get b-roll shots of the train passing by. You can use this shot to tell the viewer where this audio is coming from.

### Cultural Protocols

There may be certain cultural protocols that you need to follow when filming for your project. For example, it may be appropriate to bring sage or sweetgrass to a Tribal Elder who you are filming. There may be certain topics that should be avoided during interviews. Perhaps there is a prayer that should be said before filming.  It is a good idea to consult with your family and/or community leaders about any cultural protocols that you will need to follow before beginning to film your video project.

In general, it is a good idea to provide some kind of food and/or drink for the people you will be filming. Always remember to thank the people who are participating in your video project as it is generous of them to give their time and knowledge to your project.

### Release Forms

People in your video should sign a release (or consent) form. This gives their permission to participate in the video project. As a filmmaker, you want to ensure that everyone in your video is a willing participant in the project and that they understand how you will use their image and words. Ideally, you should have a signed release form from every person. However, if you are working with individuals who are uncomfortable signing forms,you can also use a verbal consent process. Simply have the individual record on camera that they give permission to be in the video and to participate.

In the back of the handbook, there is a sample form you can use as a guide in creating your own release forms.

### Interview Questions

Create a list of interview questions before the actual interview. However, be flexible and open in the interview to ask additional questions that are not on the list.

When writing questions, keep in mind that descriptive questions (what, why, how, who) get better responses than yes/no questions.

**Always** end by asking the interviewee if they would like to add anything. This "soapbox question" can sometimes lead to the most revealing moments.

### Additional Preparations

Get to know your interviewees before interviewing them; this will help conversation flow and inform your questions.

Consider asking your interview subject to avoid wearing certain colors. Red, white, black, striped shirts can create image quality issues.

You may also want to think about whether or not you want them dressed formally or informally (which your subject may ask you about).

**Always** allow plenty of setup time for interviews. It will take longer than you will anticipate!

### Considerations When Shooting Interviews

1.  Write a list of questions

2.  Practice interviewing and listening to responses

3.  Review your location choice

4.  Prep your equipment for shooting and travel

5.  Take time to prep your subject

6.  Consider framing and background

7.  Always monitor technical problems

# SHOOTING AN INTERVIEW

## Before You Begin

Arrive **early** and allow extra time for set-up.

Greet your subject, walk through the location, and decide where to set up.

Remember to avoid shooting busy or distracting backgrounds, but do consider framing and the depth of the shot.

Reduce background noise as much as possible, and never have audible music in background.

Warm up the person you're interviewing with some casual conversation. This relaxes people to talking to you and in front of a camera.

## Getting Started

Try to get a signed release beforehand, but always get a "verbal release" on camera.

Make sure the camera height is level with, or slightly below, your interviewee's eyes. Never have the camera "looking down" on them.

When framing your interview, position the person so they are looking slightly to the right or slightly to the left of the camera; it is unsettling if the person is looking directly at the camera.

You can use the rule of thirds to help position your subject on the left or the right portion of the frame.

Have the interviewer–a separate person from the camera operator–sit diagonally across from the interviewee, on the side of the camera where you want the interviewee to look.

Give your participants instructions that will help you to shoot and edit the interview smoothly. Tell them to ignore the camera and lights and just look at the interviewer. Ask them if they would like water before you begin.

## During the Interview

Think of the interview as a conversation.

Engage in attentive listening: give non-verbal and verbal feedback and try not to interrupt your interviewee.

If there is a long period of silence, let it linger and don't rush to fill it in right away. Often the subject will fill that silence in and may open up about a different topic.

Interview to edit: make sure to cover everything you'd hoped for in the interview.

Ambient sound and visual background should remain consistent for editing.
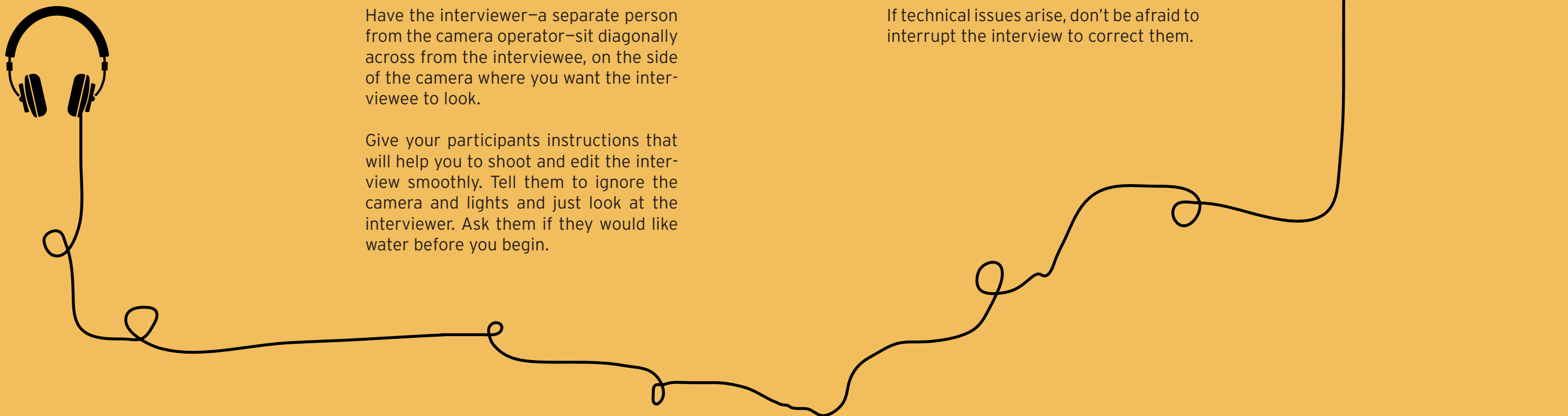
If technical issues arise, don't be afraid to interrupt the interview to correct them.

## After the Interview

Always THANK your interviewees profusely, or in a culturally appropriate manner.

Make sure to get all your b-roll and cutaways before finishing the shoot.

Always leave the location in the same or better condition than you found it.

## Sample Video Release Form

The "FILM TITLE" film project is being conducted by [filmmaker name and/or community organization]. The purpose of this film is to produce a documentary video about [specify topic/organization/community/people].

I, _____, give [filmmaker's names and/or community organization] permission:

      ___ to use my name
      ___ to use my filmed or photographed image, likeness, and performance
      ___ to use my voice

I agree that the program may be edited as desired by [filmmaker's names], and I hereby grant unconditional permission to these individuals to use the program, in whole or in part, for both private and/or public broadcasting, audio/visual, on web platforms and social media, and/or exhibition purposes.

I understand that I have no rights to the program or control of or any benefits derived there from. I expressly release [filmmaker's names] from any and all claims arising out of the use of this program.

I agree that I am over 18 years old and that I have the right to enter this agreement.

This agreement represents the entire understanding of the parties and may not be amended unless mutually agreed to by both parties in writing.

Participant's Name: _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Address:_____

Phone/Email:_____

ADDITION FOR MINORS

Parent/Guardian's Name: _____

Parent/Guardian's Signature: _____

Date:_____

# NOTES