Video Production Course

Video has become an essential method for communication; it's unrivalled as a medium to get stories across to the widest audience.The course covered the processes of video production, from the initial idea through to a final product, providing an introduction to digital filmmaking techniques,

The course is delivered by Clive Robertson and Tom Zajac - video producers and trainers from Real Time, a locally based NGO with an international reputation for participatory video production.
www.real-time.org.uk

The course covers

- Pre-production planning, including storyboarding
- Use of digital cameras (focus, aperture, formats etc.)
- Sound recording and use of microphones
- Framing, types of shots, camera movements, cutaways and other techniques and tips
- Filming on location
- The principles of lighting, both natural and artificial
- Filming to edit
- Legal issues, permissions and copyrights
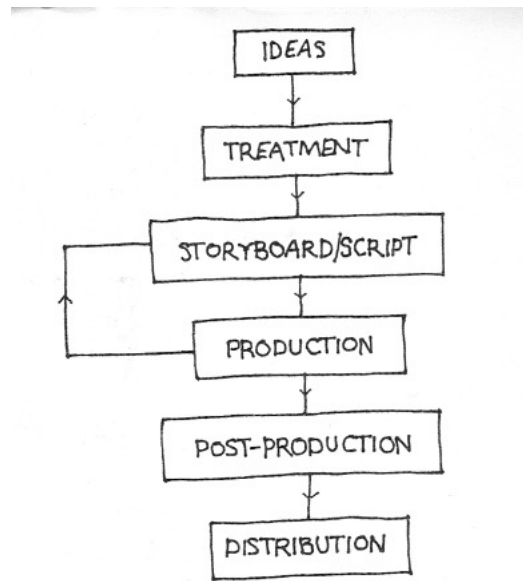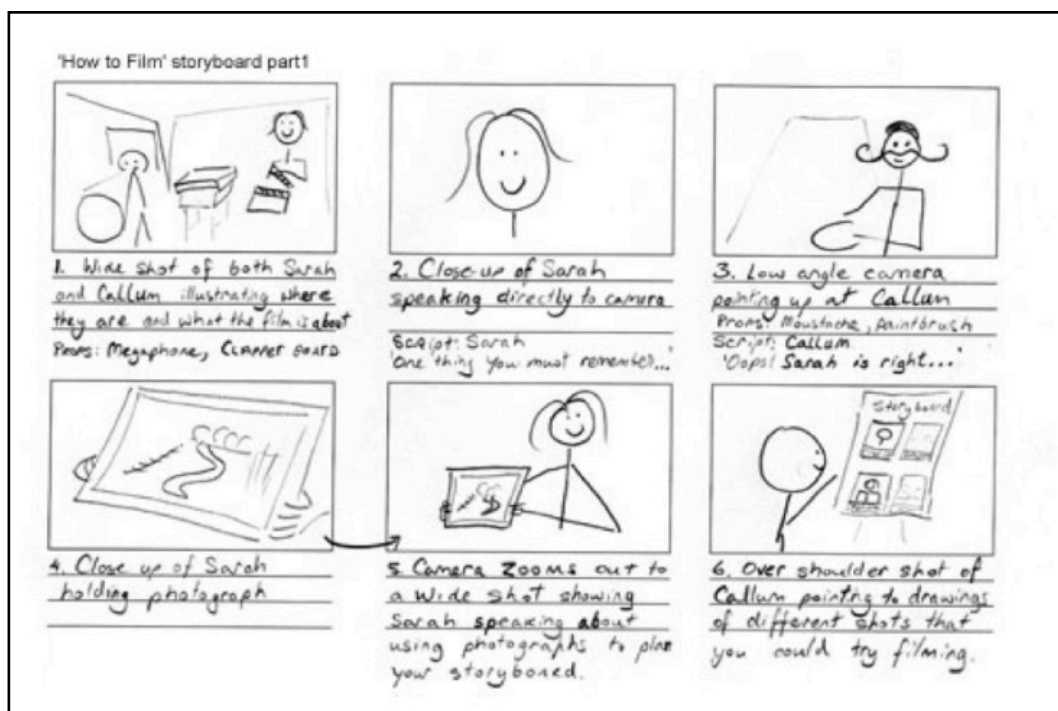
The production process

Figure 5.11 Stages of programme making

Shaw J and C Robertson (1997) *Participatory Video:
A practical guide to using video creatively in group development work*, London, Routledge.

Storyboard example
A vital component in planning your film

Interviewing tips
The course also looks at how to use video to get information - here are some tips on how to interview.

You've got a great idea for film, and it just so happens to be a true story. Best of all, the main character is fantastic and you can't wait to get him or her on camera! But once you start rolling, and sit back and wait for the magic to happen -- pfft. Your interview is a dud. What went wrong? Getting a person's story on camera is an elusive process, so here's a list of tips that might help you.

Open questions
It works to use phrases that are more like commands or instructions:

"Talk to me about...",
"Tell me what it was like when...",
"Paint a picture for me of what it looked like....", and so on.

Another technique is to go in with your own observations, to seed the interviewee's answers:

"I'm really interested to know...",
"Wow, it must have been exciting to...",
"In that situation, I'd be thinking..."

It's often the case that you have an idea what you would like the interviewee to say (keeping an evolving mental edit going in your head, about how what they are saying will cut together with other material you have, or are going to film) and these techniques work quite well to illicit those responses, so long as you can be quite sure that the answers are authentically their own.

These are all examples of 'open questions' as opposed to 'closed questions' such as: "What job do you do…".
Which is not useful for video.

Decide on the concept of your film, and therefore, the concept for the interviews
This sounds obvious, but all too often filmmakers think, "It's an interview, that IS the concept." Really? So just set up the camera anywhere and have somebody talking in front of it? This is partly why documentaries get such a bad 'talking head' rap. Different interview strategies elicit different kinds of tone to your film:

Straight to camera
Conversational 2-shot
Walking and talking
Interview during an action (e.g. during someone doing their job)

Prepare for what you want out of the interview
Sure, in documentary the content is often discovered during production, but you should still have an idea of what the story is going to be, and how it might fit into a narrative arc. Being prepared should mean knowing what role the person should be playing in your film, and what you need out of the interview. Do you need them to talk about a specific event or topic? Are they being interviewed in order to characterise another person? Are they meant to show you how they react with their surroundings? Stuff like that.

Don't lead with your toughest question
Unless you are going for some kind of court-room exposé, and are trying to reveal how a person reacts under pressure, that is. Your subject has already agreed to sit down and let you interview them. That's already very generous. It's then up to you to earn their respect and their trust, before you can expect to have a real conversation.

Watch out for runaway interviews
Sometimes when the camera starts rolling, an otherwise very normal person gets the feeling they are supposed to be talking, so they start and never stop! This is a normal reaction. Most people aren't used to being interviewed. And then there are those people who just like to dominate the conversation and go on any tangent they see fit. Be prepared to stop them – you can use visual cues so you're not talking over them.

Don't rush through awkward pauses
On the other end of the spectrum, there is silence. As an interviewer, you are working so hard to make your subject feel comfortable that the last thing you want are awkward pauses. However, there are some people who need that silence. They need it to think, and they need it to decide to tell you something that you otherwise might roll right past. I'm not saying you should purposefully leave quiet pauses during interviews, but be open to it.

Remember that people get tired
After three hours of talking, an interview subject can become so exhausted that their sentences start coming out as if they've been throwing back a few too many malty Scotches (maybe they have) or their demeanour suggests they are premeditating murder to get you out of their house. That footage isn't useable! Just like you would schedule how many scenes you can film in a day, so you have to be realistic about what you can cover in one interview session.

Be brave enough to ask about what really matters
If you're terrified, you're doing it right. It's hard! In the end, don't be discouraged if the interview bombs or you chicken out on some questions. Work up that courage for round two, and give it your best shot!
In the end, different filmmakers may have different tactics for interviewing.
(Source: Oakley Anderson-Moore)

Logging your content

Making sure you know what you have is important, here's an example of a video log:

Note: Descriptions of locations etc. are in italics, all speech is non-italic.

Blue - denotes particularly strong, concise and coherent statements.

Red - denotes other good useable material.

Time	Detail/Transcript
0	*Jo L Dee Road*
0.3	*Close up round thing! — Clive to log shots of Dee Park art etc*
1.54	*Jo L at enquiries desk (off record chat)*
2.34	*Shots of notice board — Clive to log shots*
Interview 1 — Boy *Note – some good clear comments in here*	
5.25	*Child in front of mural — St John's Primary School*
5.54	This was just one of the first projects that happened and it went on to other projects. A group of year 6 children, 6 years ago, helped design this and Steve who works for the church came and painted it, and this also stemmed on to other projects as well and we have the mural outside with the fishes and there's also a competition as well.
6.17	…to brighten up the school
6.27	eh, there was actually a competition and children entered that, and I don't know which the winning entry was but this…. (trailed off)
6.41	We've had murals painted on the walls and we've also had the grounds painted as well
6.54	There was a competition again for the grounds and first of all we had our playground resurfaced and then we painted some pictures on, and then we had a competition to (stutter) paint, eh, a small bit in the eh quiet area.
7.20	eh, we had a project, which was a lent project, and during the summer we raised money to plant sunflowers and we made a small snail with the coins we had.
7.37	eh… how long? Em — no idea…
7.48	Yeah, there was the whole school was involved, they came in at different times, so there was quite a long time actually yeah.
7.56	eh, eh, yeah — we had a lent project and we eh, I think we raised over a thousand pounds and we were able to move our fence back to make a millennium garden, and er we went to an awards ceremony and we won a hundred pounds, and that's going to go towards the millennium garden
8.27	eh, oh, well we… what did we have…..
8.35	eh, year, the school council were involved in making the decision for the school grounds being painted

Narrative Structure

Different styles of programmes and their audiences are covered. The importance of creating an engaging narrative. Rather than beginning, middle and end, Freytag provides a way of ensuring narrative has an engaging structure by focussing on the key events within the story.

The most exciting part of the story;
When we learn the outcome

Climax

Events leading
to the end of the
story

Where the
main character
faces a series
of conflicts

Rising Action

Falling Action

Resolution

End of the story

Exposition

Beginning of the
story where
characters and
setting are
introduced

Plot Diagram