

Documentary Video Boot Camp

Assignments

Assignment 1

Document a process and/or observe a person

In this assignment you are to work in small teams to observe a process or a person. Work fast to find your subject, it's more important to spend time observing, the actual topic is not critical. It can be a student, someone who works at MassArt, or someone you meet on the street in the area. Always be straightforward when people ask what you what you're doing. Think in terms of establishing context and covering an activity from more than one camera position. Cut for temporal compression in the camera. You are working on a fixed-time basis, so work quickly and diligently and be back in the classroom at the agreed upon time. The goal of this (and all of the other assignments this week) is to be as creative and expressive as you can within the limitations of time and resources. Think lightness, you are sketching, not creating a finished project. Reflect on what you choose to frame, and why you think you chose it. Record a series of shots (not too short but not too long). Select your shots carefully, don't let the camera run and run.

Assignment 2

Conduct an interview

In this assignment your challenge is to find someone on campus or the immediate area of campus who you can interview and then conduct an on camera interview. The interview should be informal and conversational. Ask two or three questions (a minimum of one per member of the group). Take turns with the camera, everyone should do some shooting. When other team members are shooting, watch what they are doing closely. Don't hesitate to offer suggestions or ask questions as you work. Make sure to shoot B-roll in order to establish your interviewee's environment and/or the context of the interview. Make sure to get an on-camera release including the complete (letter by letter) spelling of the person's name and any additional information you might consider relevant.

Assignment 3

Shoot a micro-documentary

In this assignment you are to work in small teams to conceive, pitch, plan, and shoot a sequence, or micro-documentary, which should including at least one interview (formal or informal) and some observational footage. The assignment involves four fixed-time phases. The idea is to be as creative and expressive as you can

within the limitations of time and resources. It's just as critical to work within the allotted time frames as it is to be creative in the execution of this assignment. Time is of the essence.

1. Conceive

11:30 A.M. to 12:30 P.M.

Over lunch, your group will come up with an idea and start figuring out how to shoot it in the afternoon. Make sure to schedule time with your subject or subjects for shooting in the afternoon, you will be on an ultra tight schedule.

2. Pitch

12:30 P.M. to 1:30 P.M. (10 MINUTES PER GROUP)

Each group will pitch their project to the class. Express your idea in one or two short sentences (the elevator pitch), explain what the audience will take away from the piece, explain what resources you need, what are the possible pitfalls, and why you are uniquely qualified to make this documentary.

3. Plan

1:30 P.M. to 2:30 P.M.

Take time to get your gear together, make a shot list, confirm any interviews you may have scheduled for the afternoon, etc. Make sure you have the camera set up properly (see notes below).

4. Shoot

2:30 P.M. to 4:30 P.M.

Shoot your project. Remember the goal is to create a short sequence of shots that tells a story or expresses in a creative manner your observations about something in the real world. Shoot alternative angles, illustrate with images. Improvise and explore. Have fun. Be open to opportunities in the form of unexpected twists and turns. Recall our discussion about composition, angle changes, etc. Use the time available as productively as you can. Make a log (notes on each shot) as you shoot, they will come in handy when you edit.

Notes

All MassArt gear must be returned by 5:00 P.M. We will capture and edit starting on Thursday afternoon.

While you're shooting, the Teaching Assistant and I will be available for consultation and assistance.

Shoot 60i or 30p on the DVX100b. On the VIXIA, set the frame rate to 30PF and the recording mode to MXP (best) or XP+ (good) and format the SDHC card. If using a DVX100, start with a fresh, blank tape (roll 30 seconds of black at the start), set the frame rate to 30P. For all cameras, make sure you start with fully charged batteries, and everything working as expected. Consult with me to make sure you have camera set up properly.

If you are using your own camera, please note that Final Cut Express only supports DV, HDV, and AVCHD codecs, so make sure you are shooting with one of these codecs. Work with a 16:9 aspect ratio (assumed with the VIXIA, a choice on the DVX100b). If you are using multiple cameras, make sure they are all shooting the same aspect ratio as a baseline and ideally the same recording format.

If shooting on tape, avoid time-code breaks using the techniques discussed in class. It will make capture much easier. You will need to either use your own tape or use the tail end of one of the tapes we've been using in class if you're working with a DVX100b. You can purchase a new miniDV tape from the bookstore.

Assignment 4

Edit a micro-documentary

In this assignment you will work with your team to edit the footage that your team shot in assignment 3. The basic steps include reading over the logs you made as you log and transfer (or capture) the footage. If you shot with multiple cameras, capture the footage from each camera on a separate workstation and I will show you how to merge your footage later. At the end of the capture (and merge if you have multiple cameras) phase you will end up with each person in the group with an identical copy of media in your Project Folder on your editing workstation.

Presentations on editing technique will be very brief, however, if you get stuck or want to know how to do something specific, ask me. This part of the course is designed to provide an abbreviated introduction to editing along with "just in time learning" of the Final Cut Express features you need to complete this assignment. Please read over step by step the "A Brief Introduction to Editing with Final Cut Express" handout to get familiar with Final Cut Express. This document is a constantly evolving draft, so please, I would appreciate your comments and suggestions.

1. Capture & Plan

Thursday, 2:00 P.M. to 3:00 P.M.

Groups will log & transfer (or capture) their footage and review it. While watching the footage, think about how you might organize what you have. You might cluster footage in terms of themes. The goal is to understand what you have to work with.

2. Screening & Critique of Rushes

Thursday, 3:00 P.M. to 4:30 P.M.

Each group will share with the class highlights of their best footage they have to edit with and the team that shot the footage will discuss their shooting experience in collaboration with the team that is now editing their footage. Think of this as the funders of your documentary visiting you in the editing room.

3. Editing Lab (Optional)

Thursday, 5:00 P.M. to 9:00 P.M.

Get a head start on your editing, or get extra help with editing with Final Cut Express as well as other topics covered in the Boot Camp. Highly recommended, especially for those new to editing.

4. Rough Cut

Friday, 9:00 A.M. to 11:45 P.M.

Each student will cut together a rough cut of the piece their team is editing piece. Collaborate with your team members. The technical goal for this phase is to develop familiarity with basic editing activities. Setting in and out points. Placing clips in the timeline. Trimming clips. Separating video from audio. Cutting clips with the razor blade. Understanding the difference between Insert and Overwrite edits. Video and audio tracks. Panning audio.

5. Fine Cut

Friday, 12:45 P.M. to 3:00 P.M.

Team members will review each others rough cuts and discuss how to merge their ideas into a single fine cut. You can share project files, and drag and drop edited clusters of clips from one sequence to another in Final Cut. If you have not figured this out, let the teaching assistant or David know and they will show you one on one. Don't forget to allow at least 20 minutes to export your edit master to the instructor's external FireWire drive for screening on the instructor's workstation. Screening and critique has to start at 3:15 P.M. sharp!

6. Screening & Critique of Projects

Friday, 3:00 P.M. to 4:30 P.M.

Each team will screen their project followed by a critique. Time to reflect on everything you've learned during the week.

Post-Boot Camp Assignment

Reinforce your new skills and techniques

In order to get the most from the boot camp experience, it is important to immediately go out and shoot another short documentary. By repeating the process you learned in the boot camp, you will continue to develop and hone your abilities as a documentary media maker. There is no substitute for experience, as Yoda once told Luke Skywalker, "do, or do not... there is no try."