

Documentary Project Proposal Template

Documentary Video Boot Camp

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Adapted by David Tamés from a document by Peter Thompson based on the book *Directing the Documentary* by Michael Rabiger.

Working Title:

Producer:

Director:

Cameraperson:

Sound recordist:

Editor:

Other collaborators:

Working Hypothesis and Interpretation

What are your persuasions about the world you are going to show in your film, the main “statement” that you want to emerge out of the film’s dialectics? Write a hypothesis statement incorporating this wording:

In life I believe that:

My film will show this in action by exploring (situation):

The main conflict is between:

Ultimately, I want the audience to feel:

and to understand that:

Topic

Write a concise paragraph about:

1. Your film’s subject (person, group, environment, social issue, etc.)
2. The necessary background information the audience must have to understand and to be interested in the enclosed world you intend to present. Be sure to show how this information will emerge.

Action Sequences

Write a brief paragraph for each intended sequence that shows an activity. (A sequence is usually delineated by being in one location, one chunk of time, or an assembly of materials to show one topic). Incorporate the following:

1. What the activity is and what conflict it evidences
2. A metaphor to explain its subtextual meaning
3. The expected structure of events
4. What the sequence should contribute to the whole film and to the hypothesis
5. What facts the audience must gather from watching it
6. What key, emblematic imagery you hope to capture

Main Characters

Write a brief paragraph about each of your main characters. For each include:

1. Who (name, relationship to others in film and so on)
2. Where (where does this person fit in the scheme of things?)
3. What (what is this character's role, what makes the character(s) interesting, worthy of special attention and significant? What is this character trying to do or to get at?)

Conflict

What is at issue in this film? Consider:

1. Who wants what of whom?
2. What conflicting principles do the characters stand for?
3. Does your film put different principles in opposition (of opinion, of view, of vision and so forth)?
4. How will we see one force finally meet with the other? (the "confrontation"--very important)
5. What range of possible developments do you see emerging from this confrontation?

Audiences Biases

To make a documentary means not only using conflicting "evidence" to put forward your subject's dialectics, it also means knowing what stereotypes or expectations carried by your audience your film must deliberately set out to alter.

1. Biases (may be positive or negative)
2. What alternative views, facts or ideas does the audience need to understand
3. What evidence will you show to get the audience to see those different truths

On Camera Interviews

For each interview, list:

1. Name, role in life, metaphoric role in film's dramatic structure
2. Main elements the interview will seek to establish

Structure

Write a brief paragraph on how you hope to structure your film. When you are doing this, consider:

1. How will you will handle the progression of time in the film
2. How and at what point information important to story development will appear
3. What you intend as the climactic sequence and where this should go
4. How this relates to other sequences in terms of the action rising toward the film's projected "crisis" or emotional apex and the falling action after it
5. Sequences or interviews you intend to use as parallel storytelling

Form and Style

Any special considerations in shooting or editing style that might further your film's content. Here you might comment on narrative lighting, camera handling, type and amount of intercutting, juxtaposition of scenes, parallel storytelling and the like.

Resolution

Write a brief paragraph about how you imagine your film will end and what you would like the ending to accomplish for the audience. Comparing any intended ending with the film's beginning

also exposes what must accomplish as a story to get there. The ending is your last word to the audience and has a disproportionate influence on what the film will mean.

Unique Qualifications

Why are you and no one else in the world uniquely qualified to make this film? Do you have access to the subject that no one else has? Are you making a personal film that only you can make? Do you have a unique personal experience to share?

Budget

The following is a generic set of categories to get you started. Each production will have its own unique set of expenses.

Producer, Director, and Staff

- Producer
- Director
- Associate Producer
- Research assistants
- Copies, phone calls, postage
- Misc. producer expenses

Talent

- Voice-over talent
- Stipends for interviewees

Camera

- Cinematographer
- Camera assistant
- Production assistant
- Camera package
- Lighting & grip package
- Expendables and supplies

Travel

- Car rentals
- Gas
- Tolls
- Taxi
- Airfare
- Hotel room
- Per diems

Location Expenses

- Location fees
- Crew meals
- Misc. location expenses

Sound

- Production sound mixer
- Sound package
- Expendables and supplies

Media & Storage

- Tape stock
- Hard drives
- Media cards
- Backup/Archive media

- Safety deposit box rental

Editorial

- Off-line editor
- Off-line editing system rental (tech support, decks, storage, etc.)
- Dubs and transfers
- Assistant editor
- On-line editor / colorist
- On-line equipment rental
- Misc. equipment
- Expendables and supplies

Music

- Composer

Sound Mix

- Sound editor/mixer
- Sound editing system
- Sound effects library license
- Layback
- Expendables and supplies

Titles and Motion Graphics

- Freelance designer
- Expendables and supplies

Web Site

- Freelance designer
- Hosting fees
- Expendables and supplies

Rights and Clearances

- Motion picture/Television clips
- Stock footage
- Music rights
- Archive masters
- Legal fees

Legal and Administrative fees

- Workmen's compensation insurance
- General liability insurance
- Production insurance
- Errors and omissions insurance
- Legal fees
- Copies, phone calls, postage
- Misc. administration fees

Logistics

Briefly address any obvious problems of feasibility, practicality and so on.