



## Duckrabbit Training Notes

These are some of duckrabbit's top tips for collecting photos, audio and film to produce photofilms.

We can't promise that if you follow these tips you'll be producing award-winning work straight away but if you follow these simple rules you'll have a much better chance.

And please remember that we all learn from our mistakes. Don't beat yourself up when things go wrong.

### What is the story and who is it for?

It's important to have a **strong idea** from the outset, but at the same time be flexible to change. This may sound contradictory but if your idea is completely fixed then you may miss out on stories that are perhaps more interesting to your audience than your original idea.

Just as importantly you need to decide **who** the new media is for? If your work is unsuitable for your intended audience then it could end up being a waste of your time.

In storytelling as well as journalism we tend to always ask these key questions:

#### ***Who, What, Why, When, Where and How?***

But as communicators in a new media landscape we also need to apply these questions to our audiences.

**Who** is this for? **What** is their reason for watching the piece? **Why** will they be interested? **When** are they going to see it? **Where** will they see the work? **How** do you want them to respond?

### Research. Finding out about the story

Research is fundamental. Not just finding out about the story you want to tell, but also the people who are going to help you tell it.

When you go to interview someone the more that you know about that person the better.

The key to a good interview is not just asking the right questions but also having a good rapport with the interviewee. It really helps if you know a bit about them, this will make the interviewee feel relaxed and at ease. You should also have researched the area that you want to talk about as much as possible.

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## **Audio recording technical tips**

### **1: Always use a wind shield.**

Wind will destroy a recording and make the audio unusable. Wind is the sound recordist's arch enemy.

### **2: Always wear headphones that cover your ears**

If you don't wear headphones you can't hear what's being recorded. It is vital that you wear them even if you think they make you look stupid and mess your hair up.

### **3: Always make sure you have spare batteries and a spare digital card**

Your batteries and your card space will run out at precisely the wrong moment! Always have spares.

### **4: Use SD cards that are Class Four or above**

Slow cards sometimes fail to record on digital recorders

### **5: Make sure your microphone gain level (how loud it records) is set to suit the background noise.**

This means low for loud sounds, high for quiet noise. If you record at too high a level the audio will distort. At that point it is unusable and should be discarded.

### **6. Do not turn the headphone volume up too loud**

If you do this then you can damage your hearing.

### **7. Record Stereo WAV at 44.1 16 bit**

This setting will ensure that you are recording at a high sound quality. This is the same quality as a CD.

### **8. Get the microphone close to the interviewee's mouth**

The further from their mouth the less clear the sound will be and the less personality you will hear in the voice. Twenty to thirty centimeters is ideal.

### **9. Take a minute of ambient/background sound**

When you come to edit and mix your projects, background sound layered under the speech will help to make sure you don't have any gaps in the sound

### **10. Observe that the track time is moving when you start recording**

This is the best way to be certain that you are actually recording.

### **11. When your interviewee stops speaking at the end keep recording without speaking for a few seconds**

This allows you to fade the sound out smoothly rather than ending the audio abruptly

### **12. When you've finished recording listen back to a couple of minutes of recording**

To check that the audio is good quality. This also gives you a moment to think about any questions that you might have missed.

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## Interviewing tips

Remember that the art of a good interview is as much about how you ask questions and your rapport with the interviewee as the questions themselves.

If you like someone and trust them you will naturally be open and honest with them in a way that you wouldn't with someone you feel uncomfortable with.

### **1. Have a strong idea for the purpose of the interview**

This is important. Without having a clear idea for the interview how will you know which questions to ask?

### **2. Think about where the best place is to interview someone.**

If it's a noisy environment than the sound quality will be poor. Also think about how an environment might be visually distracting. It's hard to record a good interview if the interviewee's eyes are constantly wandering.

### **3: Be warm and friendly**

This will help relax your interviewee. They are likely to reflect back the way you present yourself. If you are open with them they will be open back. Leave your ego at home, most of the time it can only get in the way.

### **4: If your interviewee is sat at a table, use a stand for the microphone**

This means that you don't have to hold the microphone. You won't have any problems with handling noise and you don't have to sit so close to the person that you are interviewing. Of course this doesn't work if you want to include your voice in the work.

### **5: Get used to using lots of non-verbal communication.**

Nodding your head will really help to encourage your guest, as will using expression in your eyes. This will make them feel that what they are saying is interesting. If your interviewee keeps going off on tangents make your non-verbal communication much more passive to signal that you are less interested in that diversion.

Eye contact is important but it should feel comfortable for both you and your interviewee.

### **6: Adding movement into audio is an effective way of pushing a story along**

It can be good to walk with an interviewee. Be careful of changing sound environment (quiet to noisy), or walking on noisy surfaces (gravel). The benefit of movement is that it can add a sense of narrative purpose to the interview.

### **7: Always get your guest to describe in detail what they are doing.**

Radio is a very visual medium because the listener creates the pictures in their heads. We can't see what your guest is doing. We may be able to hear it but we also need them to be descriptive. What does something look like, smell like, feel or taste like. These are key questions. 'Tell me what you are doing', 'describe to me what is happening' are key questions.

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## Photographic approaches for photofilms

### 1: Know your story.

Know what you are saying, and think hard about how you can say it before you start. It's important for you, your workflow, your story, your editing, your client, your viewer. Do not try to shoot and then build later. It may take a while for the story to become apparent, the approach to be obvious. When it does, work it, stick to it, have confidence in that. If working with someone, discuss, converse all the time. Keep asking yourself if your approach is relevant to the story.

### 2: Break down your audio and images.

DO NOT try to do both at the same time. This is a common mistake to make.

Accept that you will miss images, and you will miss moments of audio. Use one medium to feed into the other. For example if you hear something that piques your interest visually, follow it up. Be listening for images. Be looking for sounds. You will probably enjoy one more than another but invest as much effort into each.

### 3: There is no need to literally follow what someone says with an image.

If you are getting the story across well with audio, you have room to play with the images a bit more, be more creative. If not, you need the images to tell the story more. Video has to go hand in hand with audio generally. Stills/ audio breaks that connection and, if done correctly, can be much stronger. Let the viewer visually go away, then come back. Always be looking with fresh eyes, always listen with fresh ear. Remember that you are the viewer's eyes and ears.

### 4: Remember the medium.

This is not a magazine or newspaper, or printed page. You do not need to get ALL information about the subject in the piece. You cannot. The work will most likely sit amongst other links, text, information. Less is more in these pieces. 3 minutes is a good length. A piece will have to be very good to sustain interest for longer. You are opening a door, starting a conversation.

### 5: Do not try to be clever photographically.

The audience does not care at all that you've used a £2000 tilt shift lens at f2.8. Or that you can get such shallow depth of field on your 5d that only 1% of the subject is sharp. These pieces are not for you, nor about you. Pictures are only up for a few seconds at a time., maybe 5 seconds. If the imagery is too complex, clever, detailed or messy, it won't work. Aim for clarity in your imagery. Clean backgrounds, clean subject, strong shapes/colours.

### 6: Kill your babies. How to edit.

This is a vital point. Editing is a great skill in itself, and it is very hard for the creator to do it effectively. The film's editor/producer is the best person to see how they feed the narrative. The audience won't care how hard they were to get. Story/narrative/flow is way more important.

If a picture isn't adding to the narrative, get rid of it. Get second opinions. Ask someone else to edit for you, someone you trust.

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## **7: Think about the opening/holding image, and the closing shot.**

Both are equally important. The holding image/title slide is the one that sits there, inviting the viewer to click. It has to be strong. It must invite the viewer. The closing image dictates the taste the viewer leaves with, the feeling. Consider how you choose that. The holding image could be the strongest, or one that lends itself best to titling. You can use the title image again in the piece if needed without text.

## **8: Kit.**

It doesn't matter what camera you use. It does matter that you know how to use it. You must be able to work fast, to take control. Take time to learn how your camera works.

## **9: Shoot landscape not portrait aspect.**

Remember that the format of a computer screen is horizontal. There is a greater clarity if the images don't jump all around between wide, upright, 4/3, 16/9, panoramic etc.

## **10: Shoot for the audio.**

Shoot images that will fill gaps, allow the audio to breathe. For example shoot details, colours. Use blank space in a few images to allow text overlay. You can never have too many shots as editing options.

## **11: Have a reason for every shot:**

Always ask yourself, why am I taking this? What is it adding, what does it show that I don't have? How does it relate to the story? Ask yourself what you are missing, relating that to the audio. If you have a great bit of audio from an individual, get a great portrait. That question should be nagging you all day long.

## **Software and hardware**

Its very hard to make too many recommendations in this area because it is totally dependent on budget and what you intend to use the multimedia for.

For the latest reviews of audio kit check out the excellent [TRANSOM](#).

For audio editing on the PC or Mac, without spending a lot of money we recommend using [Reaper](#).

Good basic Reaper Tutorials can be found at:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=mJqf6B6jqLE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=mJqf6B6jqLE)

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=1fpT9BuChq0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=1fpT9BuChq0)

If you want to create still-image only slideshows fast than [Soundslides](#) is excellent.

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mbXfir7mkvM>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jpm1ZVgDpCY>

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If you want to start incorporating video and have a Mac, then iMovie9 will do a reasonable job. It's simple and easy to use. If you want to do more technical work then there are a host of video editing software packages that you can use, including Final Cut X and Adobe Premiere. We use [Sony Vegas Pro](#) for all of our productions.

Remember that what's really important is how you tell the story, not which software package you produce it on!

