

The Ten Worse Video Camera Sins

Or, What Not to Do When Shooting Video

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Surprisingly enough, decent quality video recording is fairly easy to do. The important thing is to avoid the Ten Worse Camera Sins of shooting. No matter what you are trying to accomplish with your camera, you must start with good camera work. No amount of editing can correct for lousy shooting. I am sure you are familiar with the famous adage – Garbage In, Garbage Out! When you are shooting, pay attention to the viewfinder or screen.

I have been given video footage from other people who wanted me to edit it for them. Sometimes I get footage from the average layperson, and sometimes it is the footage from other professional videographers. Sometimes it is impossible to edit, as no matter how much work I put into it, there is only so much I can do. With this article, I am going to attempt to guide you to become a better shooter. Please follow these ten ideas, and I am sure you will be on your way to making better footage.

1. **BACKLIGHTING:** Have you ever photographed or videotaped something and the background is perfectly exposed, but the main subject is too dark? This is due to backlighting problems. This happens because the camera is not very smart. It looks at what you are shooting and sees the very bright light coming from the background and exposes for that. This causes the lens to close down and not give enough light to the main subject. Therefore, the main subject is in silhouette against the bright background. This can be a very creative technique, but under most circumstances, it is not the desired outcome.

With modern cameras having a large screen, you can easily overcome this sin. The first thing to do is to look at that screen. If the image is not clear with all the detail you want, don't shoot it. Many cameras have a setting, which allows you to correct for backlighting. I would not recommend that solution unless there is no other choice, as it can introduce noise into the image thereby degrading the quality of what you are shooting. Very often the compensation is not accurate and has a difficult time telling exactly what you want. In this case, I would suggest you consider the idea put forth in the next paragraph.

Actually, this is the easiest option (although it is not always possible). Move! Change your place. Move to a location or shoot in such a way that makes the main subject as bright as or brighter than the background. Some things you can do to accomplish this are to eliminate the sky, shoot from a higher perspective, turning away from the glare of snow or the water at a beach.

2. **BELLY SHOTS:** For some reason, a number of people like to hold the camera at waist level and shoot everything. They see photojournalists doing this and think this is how professionals shoot. Personally, I do not see why I would want to shoot someone while looking up one's nose. This might also be a result of the large screens cameras now have, and it is easier for some people who are lazy to shoot like this. The reason photojournalists do this (ostensibly) is because they do not want to shoot someone while interfering with the guests who are watching a speaker. Photojournalists also do so because it makes the subject look more imposing and important. I still see no redeeming value in shooting up someone's nose. It is not flattering at all.

3. **FIRE HOSING:** This is the act of starting the camera and then aiming the camera vaguely at one thing for a moment or two before zooming or panning off in search of something else. Then before you even focus on that second subject, you are off on the hunt for a third. And this goes on for many more subjects that are not really being shot. To be concise, this sin is the act of not knowing what you want to shoot before you are ready to start recording. I think people are doing this in the hope that eventually they will accidentally focus on something worthwhile capturing. When I see footage of fire hosing, I get dizzy. This is probably the most common of all camera sins.

The easiest thing to do is look at what is going on in front of you and when you decide what you want to capture for prosperity, then turn on the camera. Then leave the shot long enough for your viewers to get an idea as to what message you are trying to convey. Only then should you turn off the camera before hunting for your next subject. At that time, while the camera is still off, frame your next shot and then turn on the camera.

If you want to pan, zoom, or use any other camera motions between shots, here is the method you should keep in mind. Keep both shots in mind before you shoot the first one. Set up both shots and make sure the camera movements will not be too significant between the two scenes. Then, when you lay down the footage from the first shot, move slowly to the second scene while keeping the camera movements steady and smooth. This way, your shot will look well executed and enjoyable for your viewers. Also, it will require less editing work later on.

4. **FOOT FETISH:** There is no end to the number of times I have seen feet and floor on videotapes. When you are finished shooting, simply stop the recording. Stop shooting. Sometimes I will keep shooting even after the subject has walked away from the camera. I do this in order to keep the sound or for some other specific reason for the editing.

5. **JOGGING:** This is the act of holding the camera and shooting while walking or running. Most people cannot hold a camera steady while walking. People do not realize that when they walk, their body goes up and down. It is much worse when one is walking fast or jogging.

Since moving shots are dramatic and exciting, I will share with you some techniques for ensuring better video.

Make sure the camera movement is in a horizontal plane and not a vertical. This means don't move the camera up and down, but only in a forward or side-to-side motion - smoothly.

Keep the lens to the widest zoom possible. This will minimize camera-shake. Zoomed in will magnify and exaggerate any camera movement.

Imagine that the camera was an overflowing pot of scalding hot water. Now walk but do not spill a drop. You will be more ginger and careful with your movements. And when you walk, do so very slowly.

If you are shooting with the viewfinder, do not touch your forehead to the viewfinder. If you have a screen, don't worry about this one.

When you walk, bend your knees and elbows. Your bent limbs will help absorb the bouncing of any movements.

6. **MOTORZOOMING:** This is the sin where you are constantly playing with the zoom. Do not touch it. You should zoom as infrequently as possible. When you zoom in and out, it makes the viewer dizzy with the constant movements. Professional videographers will zoom very rarely. Instead of zooming, stop the camera, zoom in, and then start recording again. It looks much cleaner.

7. **RULE OF THIRDS:** Very often, people shoot and put the subject dead center of the frame. The reason we do this is because that is how we look at other people. We look at their eyes, so we put their eyes in the center of the screen. The problem is that it does not look nice and it actually is very boring.

The way this works is to imagine drawing lines on the screen. We are going to put these imaginary lines at the one-third levels. We are going to have two horizontal and two vertical lines on our screen all of them one third of the way across the screen from one end of the screen.

When you shoot a person close up, put their eyes on one of the lines, or better yet at where two lines intersect. When you are shooting a full length of someone, you can still do the same thing. Place their eyes at about the one-third line at the top of the screen.

This will work with almost everything you shoot. When shooting scenery, put the horizon at one of the horizontal lines. Look at your screen and decide which one looks better – the upper or lower third.

8. **SNAPSHOOTING:** This means making shots that are too short to make any sense. This type of shot looks good on a music video or some TV commercials, but not for most every day shooting. Someone treating one's video camera like a still camera very often causes this. They start and then stop recording too quickly.

9. UFO's: I have seen footage where someone's finger is in the very corner of the clip. This is more common with stills, but it is possible with video. Very often, I see that someone forgot to secure the lens cap to the camera, and comes along a breeze, and the lens cap blows in front of the lens. I get asked if I can remove it. I say sure, get me a scissors. I cut the string from the camera to the cap and then they have to leave the lens cap in the camera case.

10. UPSTANDING: This sin is not as noticeable as the others. This is the act of shooting everything from a standing perspective. Some things actually look better from higher or lower. For example, shoot children, pets and plants from a low angle. Sometimes one needs to hold the camera high over other people's head to see the action.

Occasionally, I will shoot from a higher or lower angle just to get a change of view so as not to get the same boring eye-level shots every time.

Just for good measure, I will add one more.

11. SOUND: Please pay attention to the sound. People do not realize that their microphone is very sensitive and will pick up all kinds of sounds. Clearing your throat, coughing, sneezing or even that whisper will all be picked up by your microphone and is nearly impossible to edit out. Also, don't use your cell phone any where near your camera as it may put static on your tape.

With these newly acquired skills, you are now on your way to better shooting. Your viewers will thank you and so will I. Now when you bring me your footage to edit, there will be significantly less work for me to do. I guess you should also thank yourself, as now you will have to pay me less for my editing services.

Happy shooting!