

**Figure 3.39**

Use tripods and monopods to achieve steady footage, especially on long shoots.

SHOOTING PROCESS

Video is a sequence of still images that, when played quickly, creates motion. Video is its most effective when your story features action—athletes playing sports, construction workers building houses, doctors treating patients, and so on. Video is ineffective when your imagery is motionless or does not possess enough visual variety. Interview-heavy or *talking head* videos are boring for viewers and do not maximize the power of the medium. To tell successful visual stories, you must be able to identify opportunities for shooting motion. Once you have determined which processes to shoot, you must learn to shoot in a way that will yield enough material for editing compelling sequences later.

PART II: Production and Post-Production Techniques

Inexperienced videographers often make the mistake of shooting too much footage or shooting without planning or clear goals. To gather enough high-quality, meaningful footage for your video stories, you must:

- *Identify the real action you want to capture.* For example, a football player may talk about the challenges of being a professional athlete. You will naturally want to shoot the football game, but you must also capture the player lifting weights, working out with his trainer, working with the media, and dealing with fans. You must determine *all* the action that pertains to your story, not just the obvious scenes.
- *Determine the best time and location to shoot.* In a profile of a master sushi chef, it is may be best to shoot a cooking demonstration when the restaurant is closed to avoid crowd noise and other distractions (for you and for the chef). It may make more sense to shoot the demonstration at his home where there is more room than in his small restaurant kitchen. When possible, do a location scout of potential venues before your shoot.
- *Acquire all necessary rights and permissions to shoot at your location.* A teacher may give you access to shoot in her classroom, but she may not have the proper authority to grant you permission. You may be required to get permission from the principal, the Board of Education, or the parents of the students. Be sure you have secured all rights and permissions to shoot, or you may be denied access when you arrive at the location.
- *Make sure you have enough time to shoot.* Shooting, as a rule, always takes longer than you think. Composition takes time. Proper lighting takes time. Getting enough footage takes time. Each story and location will be different, but always schedule enough time for yourself and your source to get enough material. As you become a more experienced shooter, you will become better at gauging how much time you need for each shoot.
- *Make sure you have properly working equipment.* Be sure to have properly functioning equipment with you. Check your batteries and your camera before you leave for your shoot. Check that your tripods and microphones are working. Turn on all your equipment and record a test clip before you head out into the field.
- *Shoot complete sequences.* Once you have learned how to compose individual shots, you must learn how to shoot footage in a series that makes sense. Shooting complete sequences or processes is key to acquiring enough footage to tell your story later.

SHOOTING SEQUENCES

Life happens in real time. In video, we only have a limited number of minutes to tell our story. For example, an artist may require 8 hours to finish drawing a picture. You may only have 30 seconds in your final video piece to illustrate

his process. You must be able to shoot enough elements to give a sense of the process—the drawing of outlines, the tracing of the image with darker inks, the shading, the thoughtful looks on the face of the artist, the corrections she makes, and so on. Each of these elements may only last a few seconds on screen, but you must shoot them to give the viewer a sense of the entire process.



Figure 3.40a
Subject shot from a wide angle.

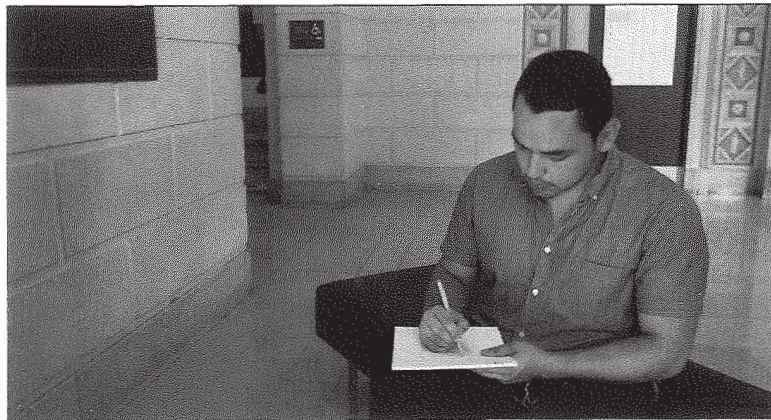


Figure 3.40b
Subject shot from a medium distance.



Figure 3.40c
Subject shot close up.

Figure 3.40d

Subject shot close up from an alternate angle.



Sequence or process shooting requires planning and discipline. You must get your shots when you are in the field. If you fail to record the action and processes you need, then that footage will not be available for editing in post-production. For example, if the artist uses a special smudging technique in her drawings and you fail to shoot her doing it, then it will be difficult for you to tell that part of the story. This is unlike writing news stories when you can recreate scenes from your notes. A videographer cannot create scenes that he or she did not shoot in the field.

THE 3 × 3 RULE

When I shoot, I follow a simple pattern to ensure that I get footage with enough visual variety. I call it the *3 × 3 Rule*. For every process or action (such as an artist drawing a picture), I identify three angles from which to shoot the subject. At each angle, I shoot the subject from three distances: far away, medium distance, and close up. This will result in three types of shots: wide shots, medium shots, and close ups.

Wide, medium, and close up are relative terms. A medium shot to one shooter may appear to be a wide shot to another. But, typically, this is how they are defined:

- *Wide shots* (abbreviated as *WS*) put the primary subject of your shot in the larger context of its environment. For example, if you are shooting a professor in a classroom, then a wide shot would show the professor, the students, the desks, and a large portion of the room.
- *Medium shots* (abbreviated as *MS*) put the subject of your shot in context of the environment, but with your subject taking up more visual space in the frame. In the case of the professor, the medium shot may feature the professor and a couple of students. The rest of the class is framed out.

- *Close up shots* (abbreviated as *CU*) fill the frame with your primary subject. In the example of the professor, a close up may be a shot with his face or a shot of a student's hand taking notes. Close ups, as discussed in the section on composition, is an important way to show details in your scenes.

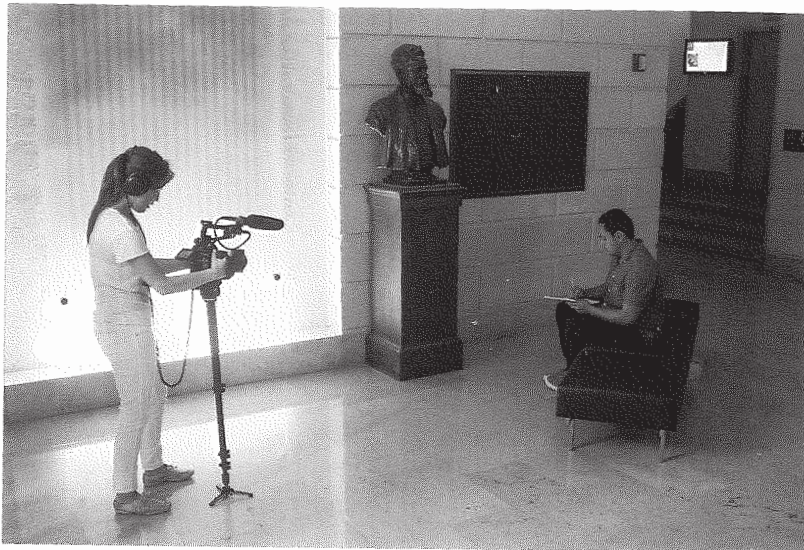


Figure 3.41a
The videographer shoots her subject from a wide angle.

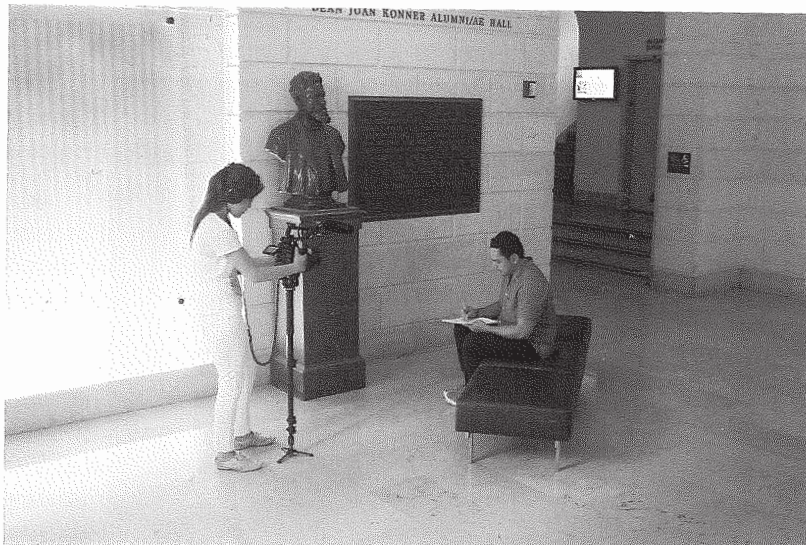


Figure 3.41b
The videographer moves in closer to shoot a medium angle shot.

Figure 3.41c

Rather than zooming, the videographer moves within a couple of feet of the subject to get a close up shot.



Figure 3.41d

The videographer shoots her subject from a different wide angle.



Figure 3.41e

The videographer moves in closer to shoot a medium shot from the new angle.



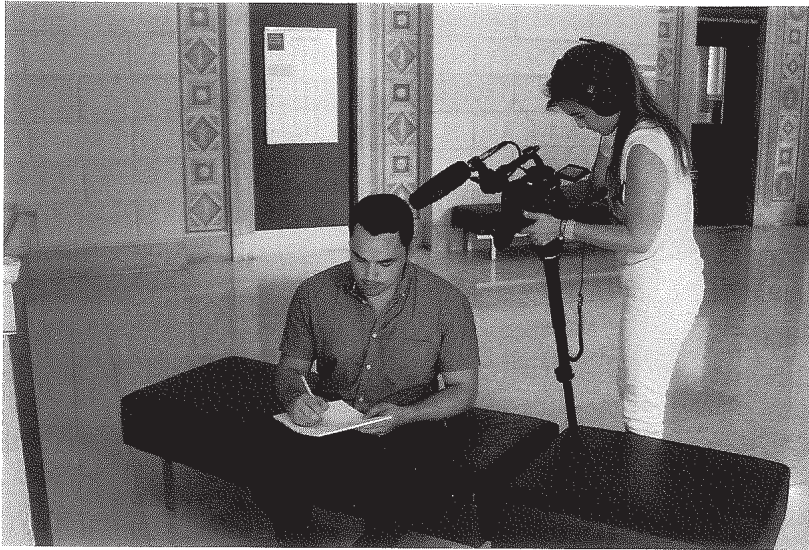


Figure 3.41f

The videographer moves within a couple of feet of the subject to get a close up shot from the new angle.

The 3×3 Rule can be applied for almost any situation. When you have established the first angle, shoot a wide shot. Hold your shot steady for at least 10 seconds. This will ensure that you have enough steady footage from that angle and distance to be used for editing. You can count silently to yourself or watch the time code on the camera's LCD screen. Once you have captured your wide shot, move in to get a medium shot. It is important that you physically move your body and camera closer to the subject, rather than using the camera's zoom function. When shooting handheld or with a monopod, zooming with your camera will result in shaky footage. Once you have held your medium shot for at least 10 seconds, move in closer for your close up shot. This may require you to come as close as within a foot of your subject. This will feel very uncomfortable to you at first. You must force yourself to get close.

Being able to hold your shot for 10 seconds takes practice and discipline. But be sure to hold your shot and resist the temptation to move your camera (even if your subject moves out of frame). Some actions will happen quickly. For example, the professor may ask a question and students will raise their hands quickly to answer. You may want to capture this question-and-answer scene. When you employ the 3×3 Rule, you will have to be patient. Your wide shot may be the first question the professor asks. Your medium shot may be the third question. Your close up may be the last question asked. You must look for repeated actions and use them as opportunities to get enough shots to satisfy the 3×3 Rule. For example, if you are profiling a chef, your chef will often make the same dish repeatedly. This is a great

opportunity to carefully compose your images and still be able to get the various angles you need.

One note about the 3 × 3 Rule: This is just a minimum guideline. If you have the opportunity and time, shoot 4, 5, 6, or more angles. Also, 10 seconds is a minimum length of time to shoot. With each angle, always shoot a wide shot, a medium shot, and a close up. You must discipline yourself to acquire a wide array of shots to be able to edit a sequence later.

Exercise

Find a person who is repeating a process. For example, a fruit vendor sells many fruits each day to various customers. Identify the three angles to approach this scene. One angle may be from the right of the vendor. Shoot a wide shot. Hold that shot for 10 seconds. Walk in and shoot a medium shot. Walk in further and shoot a close up of the vendor or some fruit. It is important to get at least 10 seconds of steady footage, whether you are shooting handheld or on a tripod. Pick a second angle. In this case, try shooting from behind the fruit cart. Again, shoot wide, medium, and close up. Then pick a third angle. Review your footage. Which angles and shots worked best?

Panning and tilting. A common mistake that new shooters make is panning or tilting their camera too much. Panning is the act of pivoting your camera left and right. Tilting is pivoting your camera up and down. You will see camera motion such as pans and tilts in amateur videography. As a professional videographer, you should avoid moving the camera during your shot, unless your pans and tilts are *motivated*.

Motivated pans and tilts mean that the motion is executed for an editorial reason. For example, if you pan slowly from one part of the room to the next, you will reveal something unexpected about the second half of the room. Do not use pans to show the different elements of the environment that you are shooting. If you have properly shot footage using the 3 × 3 Rule, you will have many wide, medium, and close ups to give your viewer a clear sense of the environment and your subject.

Tip: I highly recommend that new shooters AVOID panning and tilting. These movements can provide great editorial value to your story, but they are sophisticated and can be hard to execute well by inexperienced shooters. For now, treat each shot as you would a still photo: point at your subject, compose your shot using compositional techniques we have discussed, and hold your shot still as you record action in the shot. Your camera should not move during recording. Rather, the elements in your shot (people, cars, clouds) should be in motion.