

SHOOTING FOR JUSTICE

Videotaping Crime Scenes and Other Production Tips to Assist Investigators

A Guideline Recommended by the
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I) VIDEOTAPES

- 1) Buy brand names: Higher grade, fewer flaws
- 2) Videotapes can last 7-10 years in an ideal environment. Avoid heat, humidity, dust. Keep in its case/box.
- 3) Tape slack in new videotapes can cause camera operation/videotape malfunctions. To prevent this, use a VCR or a camera (on A/C power) to fast forward tape to end and rewind fully prior to recording.
- 4) After use, **disable record tab**, label/mark tape and store in tape case.
- 5) Avoid prolonged exposure to heat.
- 6) If very hot, transport tapes in empty styrofoam cooler.
- 7) In cold or hot / humid conditions, acclimate tape and camera to environment before shooting: Power down camera. Remove tape (if loaded) and leave tape door open at least 10-minutes.
- 8) Recording Speed: SP (Standard Play) record mode best. Tape runs at faster speed getting higher quality for dubbing and freeze frames. Cameras automatically record in the SP mode. SP record mode should be used when editing/dubbing.
- 9) ALWAYS use a new and unused videotape to record different crime scenes.
- 10) If have to edit, KEEP original (clearly labeled as camera master) and give edited version to prosecutor, etc. Analogy: give prints, keep negatives. If not edited, give DUB. If audio recorded (**NOT** recommended), audio must be on dub/edited tape.

II) LIGHTING

- 1) Use portable light for illuminating dark areas.
 - a) 20 watt for close-up or shots in small area. A 50 to 100 watt lamp for wider areas.
 - b) Use a separate power source (battery belt or light/battery combination). Using light plugged into camera *significantly* shortens the camera's battery life.
- 2) Not intended to duplicate lighting conditions but meant to illuminate the crime scene enough to show what scene looks like on videotape.

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III) AUDIO

- 1) At crime scenes, insert *mic dummy plug to disable camera microphone function and avoid unwanted/distracting audio from being recorded.
- 2) The camera mic records unwanted ambient noise and a hollow sound.
- 3) Desk-type mics should be placed close to subject and also positioned to pick up investigator's questions. Subject's comments are more important to 'hear'.
- 4) Always monitor audio with earphone.
- 5) For narration, a tie-clip wireless mic is best.

* Dummy Plug: a mini-jack that, when plugged into External Mic input on camera, disables the on-board camera microphone. You can use a transistor radio-type earphone and clip off wire leaving about six to eight-inches of wire on the plug. Tie the wire around the lens handle/grip so the plug will hang there and be quickly accessible.

IV) USE OF CAMERA

- 1) To gain confidence in your camera, become very familiar with its functions.
 - a) ENSURE date/time data is accurate! Date/time stamp at start and end of crime scenes. Display continuously during depositions, interviews, interrogations and lineups.
 - b) White balance on auto
 - c) Focus: manual preferred. Auto function may cause occasional blurring.
 - d) Iris: auto function generally OK except in high contrast environments when you should use manual iris. For instance, blood splatters on a white/very bright surface may not be "seen" by the camera because the iris is adjusting (in this case, closing) to the brightest object.
 - e) Do very slow and steady zooms and camera movements.
 - f) If camera body is a dark color and used under hot, sunny conditions, put white towel over it to reflect heat.
 - g) Correctly set viewfinder focus or brightness functions. (See camera manual)

V) PRE-PLAN CHECKLIST

- 1) Camcorder
- 2) Two videotapes (minimum) appropriate labeling tools and labels
- 3) Battery Management: one in camera and at least two fully charged & ready
- 4) A/C charger and cigarette lighter adapter/DC charger or inverter
- 5) Portable light (with spare lamps) and fully charged power source
- 6) Mic: lavalier neck-type, tie-clip, desktop or hand-held. Wireless system is best.
- 7) Dummy plug to disable camera microphone function
- 8) Earphone or headphones
- 9) Fluid-head video tripod with quick-release mount
- 10) Ladder (4 or 6 ft./ 1 or 2 meter) or step ladder
- 11) Non-abrasive head cleaner tape
- 12) Protective gear for you and equipment to operate in a contaminated environment
- 13) Can of compressed air and lens cleaning tissue

VI) CAMERA OPERATION

- 1) Pan/Tilt speed - slow and even
 - a) PAN: camera movement left or right
 - b) TILT: camera movement up or down
- 2) An error message may occur if the camera is exposed from one temperature/humidity extreme to another. If so, power down camera. Remove tape (if loaded) and leave tape door open for about 10-minutes.
- 3) Insert dummy plug in mic input at crime scene recordings.
- 4) Cover tally light with tape same color as camera. Flashing tally light on the front is distracting and attracts attention. Many digital video cameras have menu function to disable the tally light.
- 5) Correct focusing method (NOT to be done while recording): Manual focus is preferred. Zoom into main object of shot, focus, zoom out and record when ready. This way, if you zoom in to that subject, it will be in focus. Zoom slow! The Automatic focus feature, while convenient, may give you blurry images as it zooms or if something passes between the camera and the subject being shot.
- 6) Hand held technique
 - a) Camera arm elbow against side
 - b) When not focusing, use free hand for added camera stability/support. Put it on wrist of camera hand, on the side or under the camera.
 - c) Feet at shoulder width and knees slightly bent
- 7) When looking through viewfinder, open other eye to scan for upcoming obstacles, evidence or unwanted scenes to avoid recording. Flip out viewfinder is best.
- 8) Stay zoomed out wide. Hand-held close-up shots are unsteady.
- 9) Can shoot up to 75% hand held. Use tripod for 360 degree pans and close-ups.
- 10) Shoot more documentary style. Avoid temptation of MTV-like angles/movements.
- 11) Unless local policies require, it is not necessary to continuously record a crime scene non-stop. It is OK to stop recording from outside to inside or room to room.
- 12) If needed, use step glide method instead of walking (ala Groucho Marx walk).
- 13) If walking backwards, have someone hold your rear belt loop and guide.
- 14) Whenever possible, rehearse shot to ensure no evidence is disturbed.

VII) AT CRIME SCENE BIGGEST MISTAKE VIDEOGRAPHERS MAKE IS RECORDING TOO SOON.

Instead: - assess scene, know what crime is and evaluate

- it's recommended video be shot before photos. It preserves evidence quicker and easier. - shoot without markers/rulers and then with markers/rulers.

- is area contaminated with hazardous material? Use appropriate protective equipment.

- 1) Clean lens (lens tissue or compressed air) and gently wipe lens in circular motion.
- 2) Operations Check: insert mic dummy plug. Record 15-seconds of non-crime scene--related video then playback to ensure functions work. DO NOT REWIND TO RECORD OVER TEST! Start crime scene recording with Opening I.D. AFTER the test.
- 3) Clean heads, only if needed, using the non-abrasive head cleaning videotape.
- 4) Opening I.D. should be recorded first written on log/ case sheet, chalkboard, etc.
 - a) Name of department, camera operator and crewmembers (if any)
 - b) Show date/time stamp from camera for 10-seconds. ENSURE data is accurate.
- 5) Generally, a crime scene video should run about ten to fifteen-minutes long.
- 6) When done recording, show date/time stamp and log/case sheet for 5-10 seconds.

VIII) HOMICIDE

Use restraint and avoid sensationalism! Do NOT record victim(s) as the opening scene. Shoot the location, etc., leading up to the victim(s). Juries need to be desensitized first. Judges have been known to throw out or disallow the video as evidence because it dwelled on the wounds/trauma.

- 1) Operations Check, insert mic dummy plug and opening I.D.
- 2) OUTSIDE: use tripod and do a slow 360 degree pan wide shot of area.
- 3) INSIDE, stand in one corner and do a wide shot 'Sweep' from left to right tilting up or down, if needed. Repeat shot from opposite corner. Do not pan across going up and down (as if at sea) because of unsettling visual effect.
- 4) Use tripod for close-ups of evidence in relationship to body.
- 5) Wide shot of body
- 6) Use tripod for close-ups of significant wounds.
- 7) Display date/time and case/log sheet to signal end of recording.

IX) ARSON

- 1) At scene:
 - a) Operations Check, insert mic dummy mic plug and opening I.D.
 - b) Using tripod, do a slow 360 degree pan wide shot of area.
 - c) Shoot hot spots, flame height and, if still engulfed, speed of spreading.
 - d) Color of smoke
 - e) Pan crowd of on-lookers faces.
- 2) After fire
 - a) Wide shot of scene.
 - b) Show devastation (include elevated shot from ladder, etc.).
 - c) Pan crowd of on-lookers faces.
 - d) Interior shots: burn patterns on wall, clocks, furniture.
 - e) If there are victim(s) remains, shoot only what's necessary. Avoid sensationalizing as it may work against the case in court.
 - f) Arson Investigator can give on-camera narration but don't have camera pointed at him/her all the time. Wireless clip-on mic system is best in this case.
 - g) Display date/time and case/log sheet to signal end of recording.

X) BOMBING

- 1) Operations Check, insert mic dummy plug and opening I.D.
- 2) On tripod, a wide shot of bombing site and zoom in to detonation point.
- 3) Stand at detonation point and on tripod, if possible, do a 360 degree pan.
- 4) Various shots of any fragments, scars or damage on buildings, vehicles, etc.
- 5) Shoot from elevated source, i.e. ladder, aircraft.
- 6) If there are victim(s) remains, shoot only what's necessary. Avoid sensationalizing as it may work against the case in court.
- 7) Display date/time and case/log sheet to signal end of recording.

XI) ACCIDENT RE-CREATION

- 1) Operations Check, insert mic dummy plug and opening I.D.
- 2) Wide shot of accident site from primary direction and others including a slow 360 degree pan wide shot standing on/near as possible to impact site.
- 3) Shoot in sequence at the location the suspected course/events leading to accident.
- 4) Shoot path of: skid marks, damaged road or property, etc.
- 5) If possible, shoot damage resulting from accident.
- 6) If accident was at night, use light from camera, car or flashlight to "see" evidence.
- 7) Display date/time and case/log sheet to signal end of recording.

XII) TIPS FOR SHOOTING FROM AN AERIAL PLATFORM

The most common problem videotaping from any aircraft is unsteady shots.

- Operations Check, insert mic dummy plug to avoid recording aircraft noise, etc.
- Keep lens cap on until ready to record. Place a clear or UV haze filter on the lens to protect the camera's lens glass from dust, rain, etc.
- To minimize unsteady shots, stay zoomed out as wide as possible keeping the subject of your shot comfortably in view. This does NOT mean you need to zoom out to the widest angle...but just enough to keep it from shaking while maintaining your shot.
- Many cameras offer an "image-stabilizing" function which gives remarkable results. This function, when switched on, enhances the smoothness of camera movements and adds exceptional steadiness to otherwise very unsteady shots.
- Aircraft vibration causes obvious shakiness of shots if the camera operator leans against the compartment/frame, especially in helicopters. It is never advisable to rest the camera directly on the floor, even to shoot from, as vibration can damage the camera's internal components.
- Secure your equipment using bungee cords or tie-downs. In a helicopter, it is suggested you fasten a two/three-foot tether or durable carrying strap between the camera and the operator to prevent the camera from falling away.
- If possible, remove doors or windows. Use extra straps for added camera operator safety but allowing for movement/leaning.
- It is strongly recommended you maintain direct communication with the pilot.

XIII) SHOOTING IN MOVING GROUND VEHICLE

- 1) Operations Check, insert mic dummy plug and can leave date/time stamp on to show duration.
- 2) Keep hood/trunk in shot.
- 3) Have driver tell you when starting/stopping.
- 4) At stop light (unless part of incident) stop camera and hold position - roll at green.
- 5) Maintain posted speed.
- 6) Use non-camera hand as brace during stops, starts, turns and on curves.

XIV) SHOWING DISTANCE

- 1) Show space/distance differences by: focus on object, zoom out, tilt or pan, zoom in to subject / other object.
- 2) Drive from Point A to B if what you want to show action that requires a long walk.
- 3) A 50-55mm lens best approximates human eyesight perspective.
- 4) Match field of view between viewfinder and open eye to show size of object/scene in correct perspective.

XV) VIDEO LINEUP

- 1) Can be used when victim/witness is not available. When the lineup video is played for the victim / witness, it is recommended that the viewing itself be videotaped.
- 2) To videotape a lineup, treat each subject the same.
 - a) Use tripod.
 - b) Available lighting only. Remove any suggestive distractions in shot, such as, a clock, picture, etc,
 - c) Operations Check of camera. Opening I.D.
 - d) Record **ALL** audio (put a clip-on mic on witness for best results). Put mic in lineup area if suspects must speak.

IMPORTANT: tell all present that audio will be recorded and may be used as evidence.
 - e) Use earphone to monitor audio.
 - f) Verbally give Open I.D. information since audio is recorded.
 - g) Wide shot of suspects as they walk in.
 - h) Zoom in to MS (Medium Shot: waist to head) of #1 and follow investigator's lead to do slow pan right to last one and then slow pan left.

IMPORTANT: Shot duration must be the same on each subject before panning to next.
 - i) Have #1 say anything, if needed, do profile then pan to #2 and continue.
 - j) After last profile, zoom out to wide shot.
 - k) Zoom to medium shot of #1 and slow pan right to end and then slow pan left.
 - l) Zoom out to cover shot
 - m) Closing I.D. with date/time stamp and say, "That concludes this recording".

XVI) DEPOSITION/CONFESSION/INTERVIEW/HYPNOSIS SESSION

- 1) Use quiet room with as few distractions as possible
 - a) Use tripod but not placed to be imposing or induce fear.
 - b) Natural lighting. Camera/supplemental lighting could be intimidating.
 - c) Quality audio is crucial. Conference table-style mics are ideal. Otherwise, use a Y-adapter to plug in two mics (the subject's and investigator's).
 - d) Audio mixer for multiple mic input to adjust input volume as needed.
 - e) If using desk-type mic, place it close to subject.
 - f) Use earphone to monitor audio.
 - g) Ensure date/time in camera matches date/time investigator will give during recording of Opening I.D.

- 2) For adult
 - a) Operations Check of camera. Opening I.D. information.
 - b) Identify all persons in room
 - c) Any formal/rights statement read (if necessary)
 - d) Wide shot of subject, zoom to medium shot (waist to shoulders) and lock shot.
 - e) Closing I.D.
 - f) If have to stop recording, do I.D. and state reason why stopping. When restarting, do opening I.D. and state you are resuming recording.

- 3) For children, (check to ensure compliance with state/local laws to record them)
 - a) Same as adult and parent(s) can be present
 - b) Operations check of camera. Opening I.D. information
 - c) Identify all persons in room.
 - d) Any formal/rights statement (if necessary)
 - e) Locked wide shot of child (because you want to record all physical reactions).
 - f) Closing I.D.
 - g) If have to stop recording, do I.D. and state reason why stopping. When restarting, do opening I.D. and state you are resuming recording.

XVII) METHODS OF PRESENTING VIDEO IN COURT

- 1) RULES OF EVIDENCE: Videotape is admitted the same as photo or audio recording
- 2) Ensure chain of custody.
- 3) In court:
 - a) Use two 19" (minimum) color monitors: one for the jury, the other for the judge and attorneys.
 - b) At least a 4-head quality VCR (so still-frame will lock up and not jitter).
 - c) Use wireless remote.
 - d) Be familiar with equipment: make, model of camera and lens power of zoom.
Be prepared to answer questions about special techniques or shots.