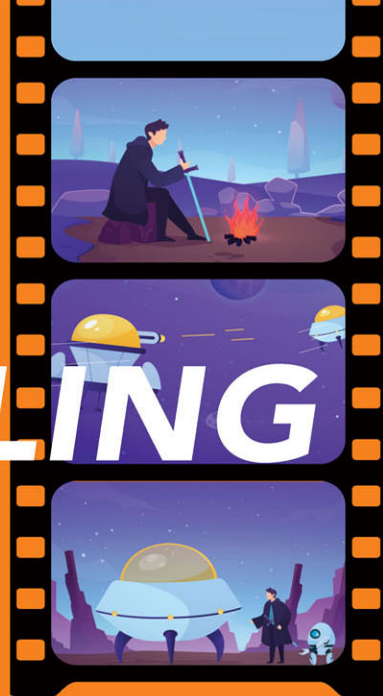


VIDEO STORYTELLING PROJECTS

A DIY GUIDE TO SHOOTING, EDITING,
AND PRODUCING AMAZING VIDEO
STORIES ON THE GO



RAFAEL "RC" CONCEPCION

New
Riders

VOICES THAT MATTER™

FREE SAMPLE CHAPTER |



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Video Storytelling Projects:

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Rafael “RC” Conception

New Riders Voices that Matter
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This book is dedicated to Daisy Concepcion and Norman Wechsler.

From Horatio Alger to Paul Simon, dim sum to Israeli politics,
Children of a Lesser God to Ernest Hemingway, I became the teacher
I am under your watchful eyes and caring hearts.

I get to do all of this because of you.



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Para mi madre, Cristela Concepcion: Todos mis éxitos son por su bendición y apollo. Es un orgullo ser hijo suyo.

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Biography

RC is an award-winning photographer, podcast host, educator, and the author of 15 best-selling books on photography, video, Photoshop, Lightroom, and HDR. He is an assistant teaching professor of visual communications at the Newhouse School for Visual Communications at Syracuse University



As an Adobe Certified Instructor in Photoshop, Illustrator, and Lightroom, RC has over 27 years of experience creating content in creative, information technology, and e-commerce industries and spends his days developing creative content for corporate clients, educational institutions, and students looking to take their creative vision further.

As a Photoshop and Lightroom expert, RC also worked with Adobe to write the Adobe Certified Expert exam for Photoshop CS6, Lightroom 4, and Lightroom 5. He has written the Lightroom and Photoshop books for the Adobe Press Classroom in a Book series.

RC is a highly sought-after public speaker, presenting to corporations and creative students at seminars and workshops around the world. He has created educational content and video productions for clients such as Intel, Dell, Epson, Nikon, Canon, Samsung, Nokia, SanDisk, Western Digital, G-Technology, Google, CreativeLive, and PricewaterhouseCoopers, among others.

Introduction

Did you know that as of 2023, 65% of all internet traffic is video-based?¹ Over the last few years, we have been quickly moving from visiting a specific webpage to research something to “going on YouTube” to find the answer. For many, YouTube is the new Google, making video more and more pervasive in our daily lives.

When students come to the Newhouse School on tours—wide-eyed at the sheer awesomeness of the place—I remind them of this statistic. To me, video is becoming the new printed word. (No, the irony is not lost on me that you have to read this statement on a printed page, although you could be reading it on a Kindle. But that’s another story for another time.)

Whether we use a printed page or a video, however, the idea that we are trying to convey doesn’t really change. The only thing that’s changing here is the language we use to share that idea. But the idea needs to take form. That form comes when we learn the words we need to speak it into reality.

I want this book to feel like a handbook for the common things that are important to understand when you’re starting out with video. To do this, I make the following assumptions:

- Books sometimes overexplain things and make what you need to learn difficult.
- Many believe bigger cameras make better video, while not paying attention to the power of the camera that’s in your pocket.
- You need to be clear about what you want to say and how you’re going to say it.
- Once you have everything organized, you need to understand how to use the tools to make it happen.
- Learning how to do video is hard with just a book.

1. “Sandvine’s 2023 Global Internet Phenomena Report Shows 24% Jump in Video Traffic, with Netflix Volume Overtaking YouTube,” Sandvine, January 20, 2023, accessed June 22, 2023, www.sandvine.com/press-releases/sandvines-2023-global-internet-phenomena-report-shows-24-jump-in-video-traffic-with-netflix-volume-overtaking-youtube.

The first part of this book is dedicated to getting the thoughts in your head organized so that they follow a specific progression. You'll learn about story formulas as jumping-off points to getting your ideas in order.

If you subscribe to my analogy of video being the new printed word, then video editing software like Adobe Premiere Pro is the new Microsoft Word or Google Docs. The video editing software is the tool that lets you organize your ideas and make them real. Premiere Pro is not a *creative* tool per se, but more of an *assembly* tool. For you to be as effective as you can at video storytelling, you're going to need to learn how to use this software in a very specific manner.

The second part of this book addresses the hardware that you'll need to make your video stand out. While the phone in your pocket is perfectly capable of recording video, you can add some things to it and change a few settings to make your video and audio that much better. I also provide some suggestions for additional gear that you can use as a foundation to build a storytelling rig.

The third part of this book focuses on moving your organized idea through a specific workflow in Adobe Premiere Pro. Rather than cramming 400 pages with step-by-step instructions for you to follow, this book covers the general concepts in the workflow and offers companion videos that you can use to follow along.

Now you might not be ready to execute an idea just yet, but might want to dive into learning how to put an idea together. To help with that, I included a project that's based on an exercise I use with students in the classroom. This project is completely organized and shot. I assigned myself the task of making a several-minute video of two people playing cards. I created the concept for the video, organized my thoughts into a series of sequences, shot all of the individual video clips, and organized them in a shot list.

This means that you can pick up the book from this section, download the project, and use the book as a reference while the accompanying videos walk you through how to build the project step by step. It's like being presented with a recipe and ingredients for a dish that you just have to cook.

Once the video is complete, I cover how to put the final product online so that you can share it with the world and track how well it performs.

The last part of this book offers another project you can cut your teeth on. It involves creating a video in a news format. Because I teach students to be journalists, it's important for me to share a workflow that I think can help you tell a story quickly and save you time from concept to creation.

At the end of this introduction, I share a couple of stories about the creative process that I think you should find helpful. In addition, the accompanying materials for this book include sample project folders that you can use for your own projects, resources for creating the videos, and templates that you can apply in Adobe Premiere Pro.

I hope that you will use this book in tandem with its video files, using it as a reference to key ideas while the videos give you the step-by-step instructions to dive in.

Each of the sections could be a book unto itself. I could write hundreds of pages about microphone patterns, best practices for capturing audio, encryption, formats, and all sorts of techno speak. I could write volumes about story arcs, characters, and the creative process. But I don't think all of that is necessary right now.

The goal is to get you started with story development and making a video quickly. If you would like to learn more about the journalism process and telling a story, you can take a class. If you find yourself more interested in cinematography, you can dive into other books. This book is part classroom and part theory, but short enough to make it easily digestible and fast.

Now, if there's anything that I can help you with, please feel free to reach out online. You can find me on Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram under the username @aboutRC. If you're in the area, you're more than welcome to stop by and visit at the Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University in New York.

The Words (Dear Mrs. Senderoff)

I grew up as one child of seven in the Bronx (that's me pretending to be superman). My mom is from Mexico. Dad was from Puerto Rico. Neither of them ever set foot in a school. My brothers and I grew up in the time when crack was really beginning to take off, ravaging families and communities block by block. Through it all, my mother plowed on, belt in hand, making sure that each and every one of us got our chance at school.



My mom looks back at these times and feels bad, often wondering what she could have provided us that would have been better than what we had. I always look at her in disbelief. Access to a school and the drive to want to get the hell out—that's pretty much all we needed.

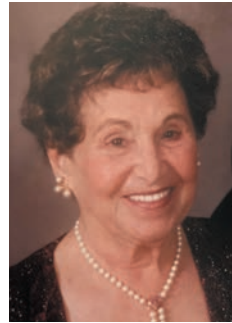
Right from the get-go I was labeled the smart kid of the unit. School came relatively easy to me, and I found myself taking on more work and reading more, even at an early age. My brothers teased me, but I think they were all really happy to see how much I was learning, and how much I wanted to learn.



There was one problem, however. Hanging out on the street didn't really go well with wanting to learn, and I often found myself very schizophrenic about the things that I *wanted* to do versus the things I *needed* to do. I was supposed to apply for all of these smarty-smart specialized high schools in New York City (Bronx Science, LaGuardia, etc.). What I wanted to do was play handball with my friends. I invariably blew off every deadline and every test for applying to those schools. The problem was that after I played a couple of games outside, I felt like I wanted to do something else.

An Angry Kid

In junior high, I was placed in an advanced English class taught by Mrs. Edna Senderoff. I remember being so angry at being there. While everyone did their work during the first day of the term, I just sat there, arms folded. I was determined to get kicked out of this class to go back to my friends' class. Mrs. Senderoff didn't make any sort of scene about this, but instead let the class run as it should. When the bell rang, she asked me to stay behind to chat with her.



"Do you want to go back to the other English class, Rafael?" Mrs. Senderoff asked.

"Yes. Yes I do," I quickly replied.

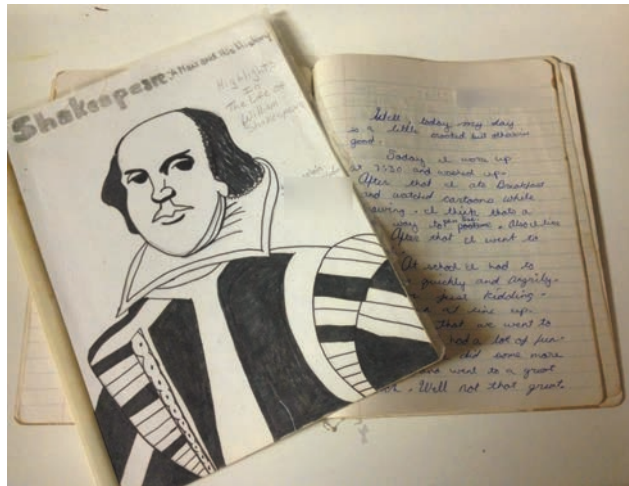
She turned away and started walking back to her desk. "That shouldn't be a problem. I can make that happen immediately."

Mrs. Senderoff then turned and spoke to me in a way that cut through everything I had inside. What she said would be the fuel for most of my careers and one of the driving principles for why I do what I do.

"Rafael, I see such incredible promise in you, but you appear to be a very, very angry boy. I believe that I know *why* you are angry, and I know how to fix it. You are angry because you have all of these different emotions running inside of you and you have absolutely no way to tell them to anyone. Do you know what an epiphany is? This is a word that can explain a feeling. You are in need of learning all of the words you can to describe all of the things that you feel. Once you do that, you're going to be surprised how much better you will feel. I want you to think about that tonight. If you don't agree, I will put you back in the other class. If you do agree, I want you to come back tomorrow and work, just like everyone else."

She was right. Absolutely right. It was one of those defining moments of clarity that I desperately searched for. And there it was, in a little old lady with a piece of chalk in her hand. I came back the next day, committed to learning every single word I could to express what I felt.

I became editor of the JHS newspaper—much to the surprise of everyone around me. I decided I wanted to take English Literature in college. I graduated when I was 15 and was in college by age 16. I also decided that I wanted to be a teacher. All of this because of Mrs. Senderoff.



Saying Thanks

After a couple of different career paths (that went very well, I might add) I did send her a note. A few weeks later, she wrote back, congratulating me. She wrote a series of vignettes of what she remembered about our time together. Her memory was spot on. I am so happy that I was able to email her and thank her for setting me on the path to success.

Some time ago, I decided to write her a letter to tell her that I—out of all people, *that kid*—actually became an author. I searched for her online, only to find out that Mrs. Senderoff had passed away several years before. Talk about a punch in the gut. Somehow, I think she still got to see all of the cool things I have done. At least, I know that if she didn't, I'm going to dedicate my time trying to learn more words and to help others in the same manner that she helped me.

This is why I am a teacher. This is also why I love it.



What Does This Have to Do with Video and Storytelling?

In photography and videography, we spend a lot of time talking about megapixels, f-stops, ISO, power ratios, cameras, and the like. Sometimes we don't spend enough time talking about what all of these things do to help us express how we feel. It sounds cliché, and I'm often made fun of for saying it, but what we do in this field *does* come from the heart, enabled by the brain.

When you go out there to learn, don't get too sucked into things that don't feed the heart or the brain. Don't get sucked into the lifestyles. Don't get sucked into the marketing. Sit down and look at shot sizes, camera framing, movements, and all of the technical things as "words" you need to learn to make a sentence. See compositional framing as a noun. See camera movement as a verb. See light as an adjective. Once you learn all of the words of this language, sit and focus on exactly what you want to say.

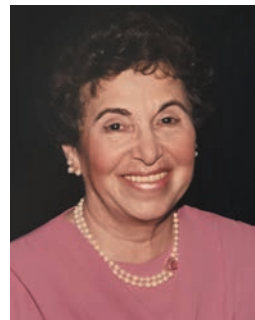
I'm writing this book—and this is *still* the hardest part for me—saying what I want to say. How we express ourselves is the journey we each go through. Some of us are farther along the road than others, and the destination doesn't really matter. It's just fun being on that road.



Like when you learn a new language, you will find yourself sometimes criticizing the way you “speak” in front of others. It happens to me all the time. Part of me always criticizes myself, wondering whether I’m good enough to be at the table and have the conversation in the first place.

But that doesn’t matter. I’ve learned the words. I’ve learned this language. I’m talking now. And I want to spend all of my days sharing how to do that.

For that, Edna Senderoff, I owe you more than I can ever say.



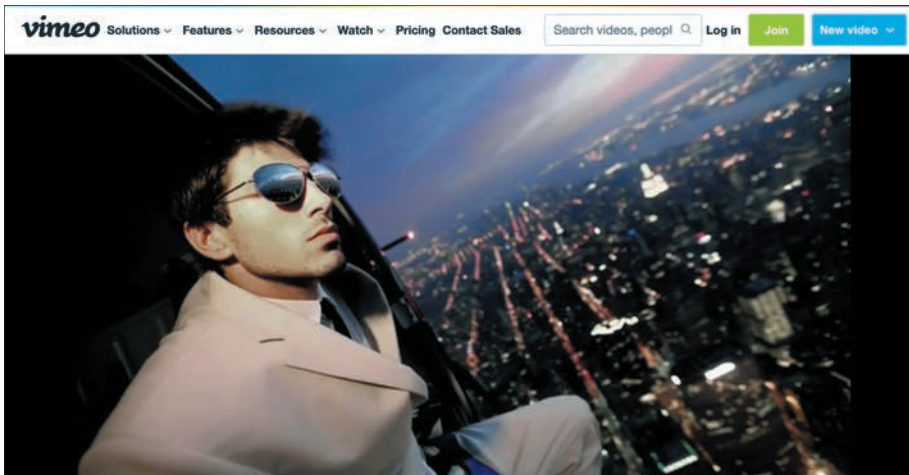
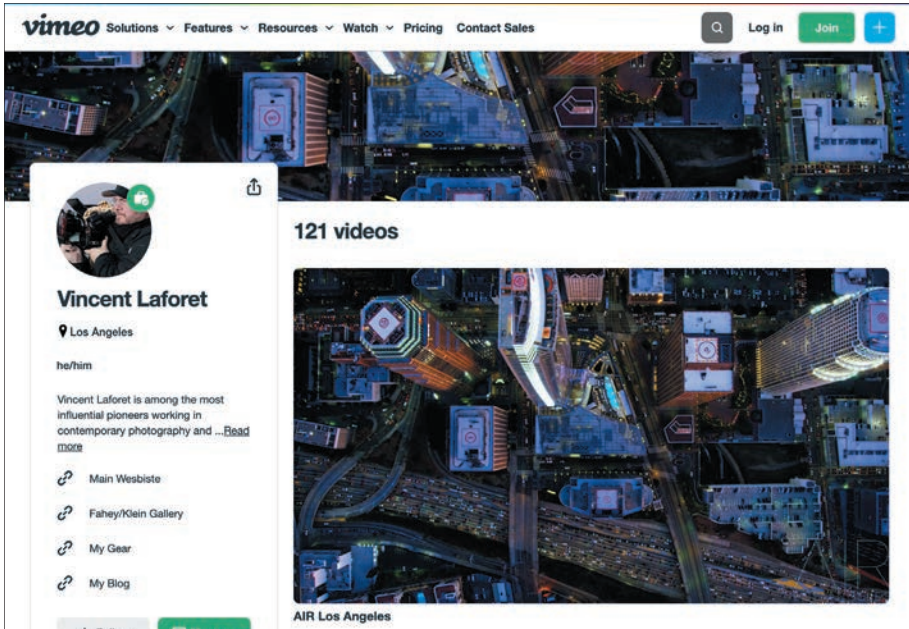
Vincent Laforet on Permission to Create

During the fall of 2011, I sat in a small bar just down the road from the B&H Photo superstore in New York City. Across from me was Vincent Laforet, a Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer for the *New York Times*. We were in New York for a trade show, and we stole away for a couple of moments of quiet when he decided to show me a quick preview of a short film he had just made, *Mobius*.



To say that Vincent is an amazing artist is an understatement. While he has made some incredible images for the *New York Times*, he is also known for his incredible aerial work over New York City. Highly accomplished in the world of photography as a journalist, Vincent seemed determined to take his visions to even bigger heights. After a chance encounter with the new Canon 5D Mark II, Vincent said he wanted to find a way to showcase its video capabilities. Armed with only one light, he produced *Reverie*, a three-minute showcase of the future of video.

Effortlessly moving through a fantastical boy-meets-girl story, you follow the protagonist from his home, into a car, and up in the air, the sound of Moby's "Extreme Ways" pulsating through the story to its dramatic conclusion. When *Reverie* was released on Vimeo, the impact was seismic. In no time at all, the 5D Mark II was being used by folks at *Saturday Night Live*, and several episodes of the TV show *ER* included use of the DSLR camera for video. I am of the opinion that the ushering in of digital video as we know it is owed to Vincent Laforet, its *original* godfather.



So I was sitting in this bar, taking a look at a master's new work, in awe of the opportunity. After watching it, I intimated to Vincent that while I loved photography and had won awards and recognition, I always felt like I saw a lot of my world through a series of these weird short scenes—images that played out in my head for different emotions. While I tried to record them here and there, I couldn't find a way to jog myself free from the still image and venture into the world of the moving picture. It always felt too fantastical.



Vincent turned to me and said, “I know exactly what your problem is. Your problem is permission. You are intent on waiting for someone to come over and tell you that you’re a [capital D] Director. No one is going to do that. Only you can do that. You have to wake up one morning and say ‘Okay, I am just going to do it’ and just go and do it.” He also shared that while photography was something that I could do on my own, filmmaking was more of a “team sport,” requiring me to put down the idea that I needed to know everything on every component. The goal for me should be to focus on the images in my head and to make sure that I can get them out as clearly as possible. Those images will then be “solved” through my technical skill.

We finished our drinks and left for the evening. While I can’t say what was in his head after this conversation (or if he even remembers it), that encounter was a pivotal moment for me and one that I will forever share with my students.

You see, the clarity of your idea depends on the honesty of your intention. If you wake up in the morning half-wondering if you are going to make a good piece of work, you too are waiting for someone to bop you over the head and say, “You are the Director now.” You are Estragon waiting for Godot.

I tell my students that before coming to class, they should stare at themselves in the mirror and say, “For the next 90 minutes, I am a Director. For the next 90 minutes—no matter what my major is—I am a Director.” While this may seem like fanciful role-play, it will surprise you to see how much clearer you are with your ideas when you give yourself the permission to make them reality. You will transform your attempts to describe your scene from “Well, I don’t know...I was thinking that maybe...I mean, I guess we could” to something far more definitive and useful.



Giving yourself permission will give clarity to your intentions. You will see the story that you want to make in all of its detail. Once you write all of that down, you can then use all of the other tools and techniques that you are learning in this book and really swing for the fences.

Give yourself permission. And if you run into Vincent Laforet at a film festival, make sure you give him my thanks.

To see more of Vincent Laforet's work, please visit www.vincentlaforet.com.

Vincent Laforet's *Reverie*

Use the QR code to go to the video. If you're reading a print book, scan the code with your mobile device. If you're reading an ebook, tap or click the QR code. To watch *Reverie*, go to <https://rcweb.co/laforet-reverie>.



The Making of *Reverie*

Use the QR code to go to the video. If you're reading a print book, scan the code with your mobile device. If you're reading an ebook, tap or click the QR code. For a behind-the-scenes look at the making of *Reverie*, visit <https://rcweb.co/reverie-bts>.



▶ CHAPTER 3

Previsualizing Your Idea

Once you create a general outline for your story, it's time to start rendering the story into better focus. A good way to do this is by constructing a *shot list*, a list of every type of video shot that you think you will need to tell your story. The shot list allows you to look at each point of the story and think about that moment in specific detail. For each moment, you can decide what kind of shot you want to use, what the overall angle should be, and if there is going to be any kind of movement. In short, the shot list enables you to previsualize what you would like to happen in the story and make purposeful choices that reinforce the emotional goal you are going for.

Working with Intention

In my classroom, I often tell students to print out examples of the different types of shots (like those in Figure 2.4 of the previous chapter), and cut them into small cards. When they work on their shot lists, I have them place all of these cards in front of them. As they contemplate the individual events in the story, I ask them to think, “What would be a move I could pull here that would totally impress Professor Concepcion?”

I'll be honest: This is not entirely meant for me; it's to motivate them to work with intention. If you've ever seen a movie and thought “oh, wow... that was pretty cool,” you can be certain that the filmmaker sat down during their previsualization and said to themselves: “How can I get my viewer—at this specific moment—to say ‘this is pretty cool.’” That is working with *intention*.

When we set out to create a story, we set out to evoke a feeling from a person for a specific person. From a commercial to a political ad to a news story, our job is to make someone feel something and inspire them to do something with that feeling. We use our available tools—our pillars of what we hear, what we see, and what we say—but each of those tools is used with an extremely specific intention in mind.

As you get better in this craft, this process becomes so automatic it's invisible. Your reward will be a smile when you see someone react at the precise moment you wanted in the story. You'll tell yourself “I *meant* to do that”—and that will be the best feeling.

The Shot List: Plan to Build. Build to Plan.

Many storytellers forgo the previsualization process because it can seem time consuming and confusing. I mean, who wants to be working on a list when you could be out pushing the red button! Reality is that these same impatient storytellers often find

themselves in binds later on when they realize they didn't get the specific thing that they needed, the shots look visually uninteresting, or the talent appeared frustrated throughout the process because of how long it took. A shot list will solve all of these problems by helping you to focus your idea and to set it up as efficiently as possible.

Use Google Sheets or Microsoft Excel

You can find tons of shot list examples out in the interwebs, all varying in their levels of color coding, complexity, and detail. While these are all well-intentioned, I think that level of complexity can turn away a lot of filmmakers that are just starting out. Instead, I recommend that you start as simply as possible in an app like Microsoft Excel or Google Sheets, and then expand from there. Download either program onto your phone, and you're on your way.

Are you ready to create your first shot list? Fire up your app! I'll use Google Sheets for the example list, but the Excel steps are similar. First, bypass the templates. Yes, they can be a great way to set up a document quickly, but we are looking for a bare

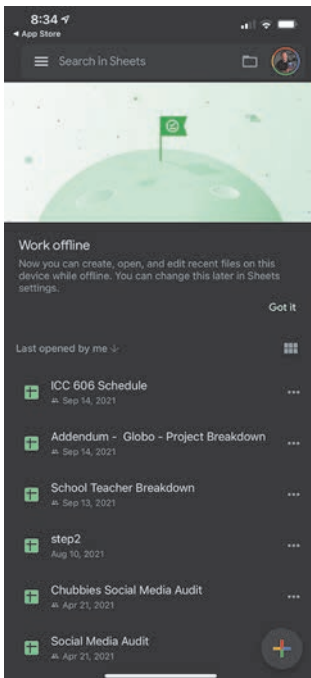


FIGURE 3.1 A file list in Google Sheets on a smartphone

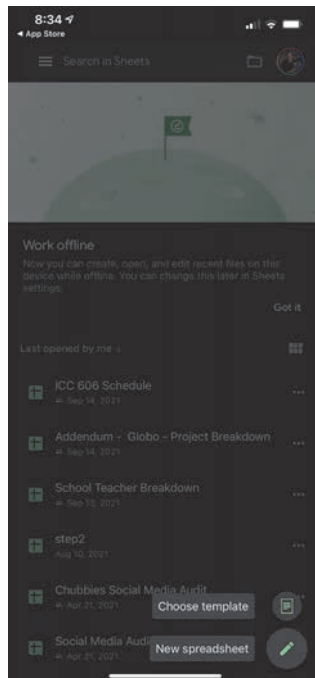


FIGURE 3.2 Tapping the plus button displays two commands.

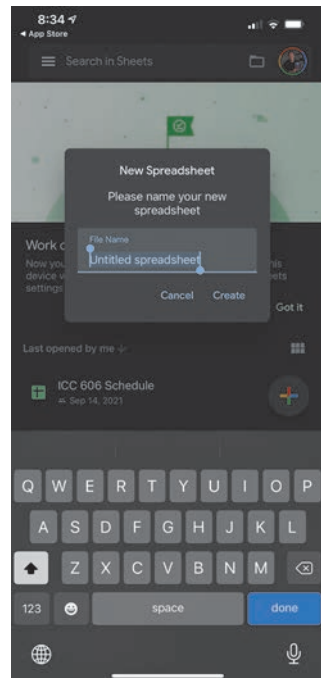


FIGURE 3.3 Give your new sheet a name.

minimum of stuff. Instead, tap the plus button in the lower-right corner and tap New Spreadsheet to create a basic sheet. Give it a more descriptive name than the default; I called mine On the One - Shot List.

Work Horizontal

While it may seem unnatural compared to how you normally hold your phone, working with it horizontally will make writing a little easier in your spreadsheet. To give yourself more room to describe your shots, you can also drag the line between the A and B columns to the right to stretch the width of column A a little bit.

At the bottom of the screen, notice the field with the pencil? This is the area you will use to enter information into the cells. To start, I would keep your file to three columns: Shot Description, Shot Type, and Shot Movement. Tap the pencil icon, and type the first column heading in cell A1. Tap the B1 cell, type its heading, and do the same for C1. Now you're ready to start filling in all of your ideas in the second row and continue down the list.

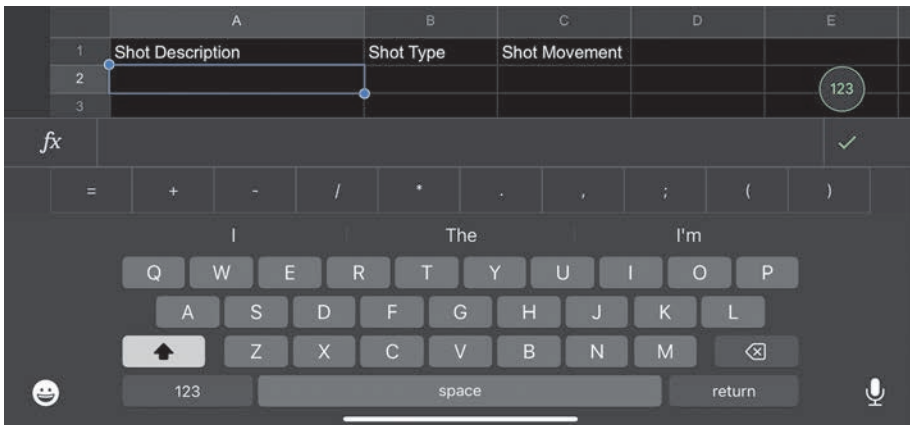


FIGURE 3.4 Use Sheets with your phone in a horizontal orientation.

Freeze Rows

When you have long or complex lists, it helps to always be able to see the column headings. You can easily “freeze” this first row in place at the top of your screen. Tap the number 1 on the left side of the sheet to select the entire first row of column

headings. With the row selected, tap the number 1 again and tap the Freeze Row command in the menu that appears. Now you can swipe down through as many entries as you have and never lose the heading row from view.

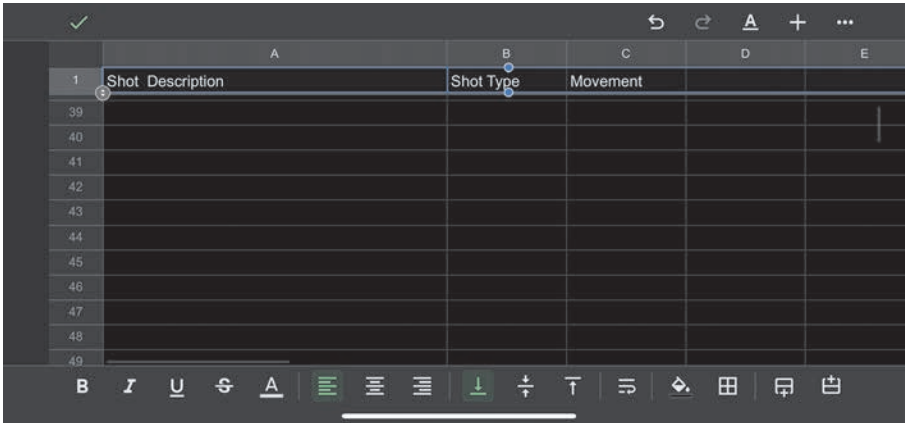


FIGURE 3.5 Freeze the row with the column headings in place.

Use Dictation

Keep in mind here that you do not have to use the keyboard to type all of your ideas. Both iOS and Android phones have really good dictation built into them and this can help speed up the process of working up your shot list. On iOS, you can enable dictation in the Settings app under General > Keyboards > Dictation.

Work in Different Languages

I am a native Spanish speaker (my Mom came from Mexico, and my Dad from Puerto Rico). However, many native speakers like me are not very confident with writing Spanish or the spelling of more complex Spanish words. We simply “spoke” Spanish and knew what sounded right. While great when communicating informally, this can give an impression you’d rather not give in a professional environment.

On iOS devices you can enable dictation for multiple languages. I have mine set to take dictation in both English and Spanish. When I need to communicate my ideas in Spanish, I switch to that keyboard and start dictating. The software is amazingly good at recognizing what I am trying to say and adding all of the accents and spelling as I need it—and it is fast!

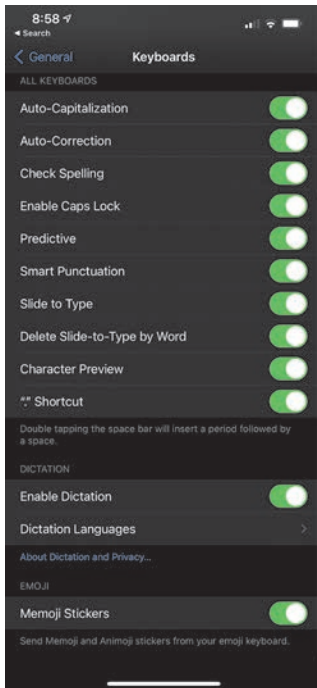


FIGURE 3.6 Keyboard settings in iOS

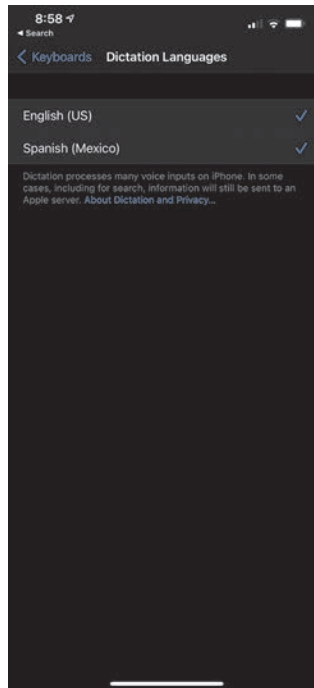


FIGURE 3.7 Selecting languages for dictation

Move to the Computer to Finish

Another common barrier to making a list that I see among creatives is the whole “Ugh, I have to sit down and work on it on my computer.” Truth is, having your list on the phone means you can work on it wherever you want. Instead of brewing coffee while waiting for your desktop app to load, you can load your shot list with ideas while waiting at your favorite coffee shop. In fact, I find myself often walking around outside with my phone, using dictation to generally fill out the shot types as I think things through.

Because all of your information is stored in the cloud (remember, you’re using Google Sheets), you can also bring your coffee to your computer later and add any additional details you may need.

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	Shot Description	Shot Type	Movement			
2	John entering the office getting ready to sit down.	Master	Push			
3	John starts to sit down- as he is sitting we see the coffee cup	MS	Static			
4	John starts to reach for the coffee cup	MCU	Push			
5	Johns hand grabs the cup of coffee - reveals keyboard	CU	Pan			
6	John looks back as he notices someone else is here	ECU	Static			
7						
8						
9						
10						
11						

FIGURE 3.8 Your shot list begins to take shape.

From Outline to Shot to Scene

After working out all of the ideas that you want to use for your story, you can flesh out your shot list with additional information. This will make capturing the content on the day of the shoot a lot easier, as well as assembling the pieces later in the edit.

Organizing into Scenes and Shots

A *scene* in your story is a collection of shots at a particular time, in a particular place. Think back to the story of John at the keyboard with his coffee. The time is that moment when he is in front of his machine. The place is inside of his office. The cameras are not really moving here into another moment of time or place; they are just covering different angles of John that add to the emotional value of what you (as the creator) are trying to say. In this case, a scene is similar to a sequence.

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	SCENE	SHOT	TAKE	Shot Description	Shot Type	Movement
2		1 A		John entering the office getting ready to sit down.	Master	Push
3		1 B		John starts to sit down- as he is sitting we see the coffee cup	MS	Static
4		1 C		John starts to reach for the coffee cup	MCU	Push
5		1 D		Johns hand grabs the cup of coffee - reveals keyboard	CU	Pan
6		1 E		John looks back as he notices someone else is here	ECU	Static
7		2 A		Dark hallways shows someone appear	Wide	Push
8		2 B		Footsteps of a person coming closer	ECU	Track
9		2 C		Eyes of the Jenna looking sad	ECU	Track
10						
11						

FIGURE 3.9 Organizing the shot list into scenes makes the list more useful.

Each of your scenes should have a distinct number, and each shot that makes up the scene should have a number as well. Because of this, it would be beneficial for you to create two additional columns in your shot list: one to keep track of the scene that you are working on and the other to identify the individual shots in that scene.

You can identify scenes by numbers, and create shots with a combination of numbers and letters. For example, the fifth shot of Scene 1 would be 1E. If the number of shots in a specific scene exceeds the letters of the alphabet, start with AA and move on.

***TIP** The letters I, O, and Z are generally omitted for shot identification, because when they are handwritten they can be confused with numbers.*

Shooting Out of Sequence

Most videos are not shot in the same linear fashion that you see them. Doing so would mean that you would have to move the camera, lighting, and talent for every shot, making the process take a lot longer than it needs to. It is more advantageous to group all of the shots of a specific type together so that you make the best use of the time when you have a camera set up in a particular way in a specific location. Once those shots are complete, you can make changes to the camera-lens-lighting setup and record the next set of shots. The result, however, is a series of clips that are completely out of order from the story. How will you know how to put all of it back together?

This is where the shot list is worth its weight in gold. Because each shot has an individual file name, you immediately have a roadmap for what shots go where and can put the story together in a snap.

Scene 1, Take 5

As much as we would like to think that production is going to go flawlessly, mistakes happen. Your talent doesn't look in the direction you want. The camera's batteries run out. Someone walks into the scene as you are recording. Every scene and shot will have a series of takes—attempts at delivering what you want correctly.

When you hear on TV shows “Scene 1, Take 5,” what they are saying is that it is the fifth time that this specific shot has been done, with four other times not being up to scratch. Can you have a take 37? You can. That's usually a start to a very long day of shooting. But if you add a column to your shot list to track the good takes, you can more easily make sense of it all later.

Expanding Your Lists for the Printout

To account for the unexpected, add a column for Notes to your shot list. You can use this area to keep track of any thoughts that may come to mind before, during, or after the shoot.

Next, fill in your scene and shot numbers, but leave the Take and Notes fields empty (unless, of course, a thought has come to mind). Your list is ready—almost.

1	SCENE	SHOT	TAKE	Shot Description	Shot Type	Movement	Notes
2	1	1A		John entering the office getting ready to sit down.	Master	Push	
3	1	1B		John starts to sit down- as he is sitting we see the coffee cup	MS	Static	
4	1	1C		John starts to reach for the coffee cup	MCU	Push	
5	1	1D		Johns hand grabs the cup of coffee - reveals keyboard	CU	Pan	
6	1	1E		John looks back as he notices someone else is here	ECU	Static	
7	2	2A		Dark hallways shows someone appear	Wide	Push	
8	2	2B		Footsteps of a person coming closer	ECU	Track	
9	2	2C		Eyes of the Jenna looking sad	ECU	Track	
10							

FIGURE 3.10 Expanding the spreadsheet for your story

On the day of the production, I recommend that you print your shot list and put it on a clipboard. I'll give you four reasons why this will be incredibly helpful:

- During the shoot, you can take a look at the list of the shots that you are working on for a quick read of what you've covered and what is left to do. Be sure to check off each of the shots as they are completed, guaranteeing that you don't miss something essential.
- You can fill in the Take field during the shoot. When you start recording and something goes wrong, you can pause the recording and start again—the next take. Once you get the take you want to keep, record its number in the Take field.
- You can access your shot list while your phone is doing the recording. How are you going to call up Excel while the line is busy, so to speak?
- You can access your list if your phone battery runs out. You know this will happen eventually, and you don't want it to stop the production.

The biggest reason I like to use a clipboard, however, is a certain level of professionalism. Phones are so pervasive these days that a person or client could perceive you as being distracted from the project because you're engaged with who knows what on your phone. Clipboards, however, still convey a feeling of "we are working here" and can make people stand a little straighter during the shoot day.

Working with Storyboards

As you start working through your idea in shot list form, you may want to dive into a little more specificity.

*I know I want John to come in and sit down in front of his camera, and I know that I want it to be a medium shot... but I want to see him like **this!***

I believe many of us have a pretty good idea of what we want our stories to *look* like. We just need to figure out a better way to articulate this to others so that we can get on the same page. This is where a storyboard comes in really handy.

What to Include in a Storyboard

A *storyboard* is a graphic layout of the shots in your story. Its overall goal is to give you (and others) an idea of character, scene, location, and movement—that’s it!

A storyboard is *not* meant to show off how awesome you are at drawing things. In fact, I think a lot of people hesitate to use storyboards because of a general fear of being asked to draw—and many of us (me included) think we’re terrible at drawing. Stop worrying: The pictures you add to storyboards can be extremely rudimentary as long as you follow these guidelines:

- Use perspective and scale to show the position of the camera.
- Draw characters in the direction you want them to face.

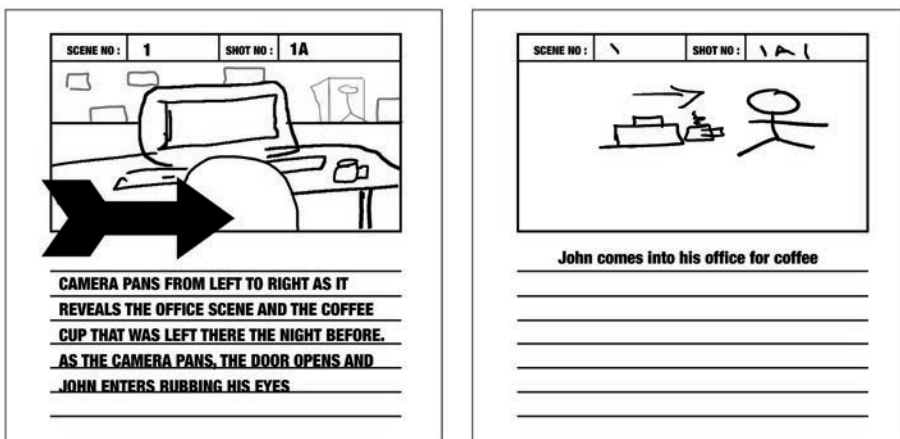


FIGURE 3.11 Even primitive drawings can make a storyboard come to life.

- Draw an arrow in the direction you want a character to move.
- Make a rough shape and label it to stand in for something you can't draw.
- Indicate specific camera motions you need with arrows.

The more information you can give to someone in terms of location, angle, character, and mood, the better it is. If you are an artist and can really add details here, that's awesome! Just know that you are adding the details in the storyboard to render the idea into better focus. If what you draw cannot be reproduced due to time, manpower, or budget, you may not want to be as detailed.

Video Storyboarding à la Robert Rodriguez

An amazing creative talent, Robert Rodriguez has shot, directed, scored, written, and produced *El Mariachi*, *One Upon a Time in Mexico*, *Desperado*, and many, many other films. Having his hand in every part of the creative process of his movies has led to his distinctive type of moviemaking to being known as “Mariachi style.” Robert has also developed a previsualizing process for streamlining the production of a scene. As he discusses in his video “Anatomy of a Shootout” (YouTube: <https://rcweb.co/anatomy-shootout>), Robert used a small camcorder and stand-in actors to record what a scene would look like while making *El Mariachi*. He then used the video to previsualize the angles and frames in the scene so that when it came time to shoot the scene on cinema cameras, he would already know what would work and what would not.

Using your smartphone, you can adapt the same technique to help keep your own productions on time and budget. If you have access to the location where you want to shoot, bring a couple of stand-ins along to previsualize your planned scene. You can record from all the angles you think you like—and even take still images from the video right on the fly. To take a still photo while recording your video, tap the small white button (iPhone) or the shutter icon (Android phone) in the lower part of the screen. The still photo will have the same aspect ratio as your video.

When you are back at your computer, you can import those pictures into a storyboard document, and you'll have a template for where you need to place your camera and talent. When it's time to go shoot the video, you won't be guessing at what you *think* will be successful—you'll know. You will be building to your preset plan.



FIGURE 3.12 The artist himself

Anatomy of a Shootout

Use the QR code to view Robert Rodriguez's video about previsualizing on the cheap. If you're reading a print book, scan the code with your mobile device. If you're reading an ebook, tap or click the QR code.



When the entire storyboard is put together, you'll have a clear progression of your idea that looks like a comic book (graphic novel) version of each scene in your story.

The drawings may not be perfect, but your overall plan will be clear.

Working with Scripts

When you need to provide even more detailed instructions for the video that you are creating, you can control what is said and heard using a *script*. While the subject of scriptwriting could fill a separate book, the following sections highlight a couple of things you can immediately put to practical use when starting out on your video journey.

Hollywood Script vs. A/V Script

Your first choice is which kind of script to use for your project. When you are producing something that is similar to a television show or a movie, you should choose a *Hollywood script*. This type of script has preset formatting rules, and the text is usually set on the page in a single column from top to bottom.

Commercials, promotions, news stories, and other types of videos often follow the *A/V script* format. This script uses a two-column, table-like format. One column holds all of the elements that the viewer hears (the A or audio) and the other column holds the description of what the viewer sees (the V or video). Each row in the table is designated for an individual shot.

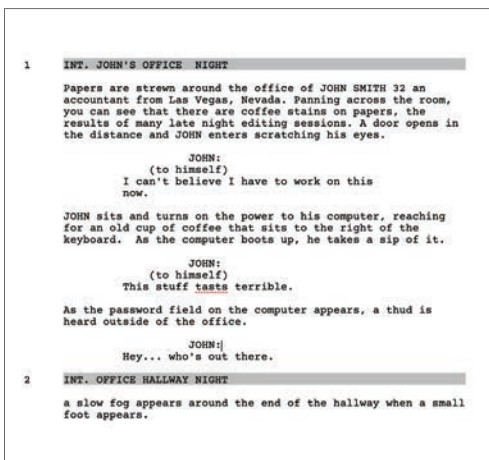


FIGURE 3.15 An example of a Hollywood script

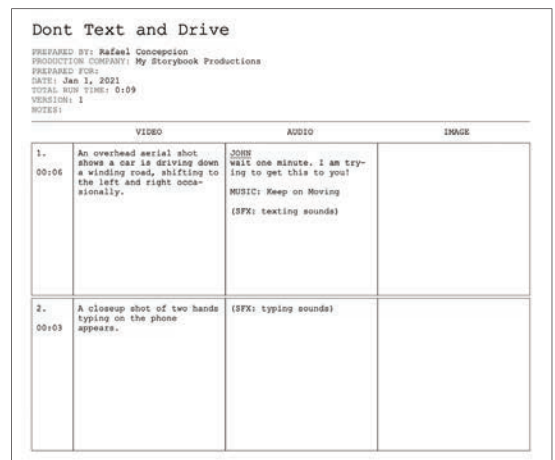


FIGURE 3.16 An example of an A/V script

Common Script Elements

While Hollywood scripts and A/V scripts are used for different purposes, they do share a bit of formatting in common. Let's look at these common elements more closely.

Master slug line: Appearing at the start of a scene, the slug line specifies whether the scene is interior or exterior (INT or EXT), the location of the shoot, and time of day.

Action line: The action line section describes the action of the scene and introduces the characters that the viewer will see. Usually introduced in all caps, characters can have a name (JOHN) or a general description (OFFICE MANAGER 1). The action is written in the present tense. Sometimes, the word *we* is used to reference the viewer.

Dialogue: Dialogue is written out whether you see the characters speaking it or it's spoken by an unseen narrator. If it is spoken off-camera or has a note describing special circumstances, it appears in parentheses.

Parenthetical: Instructions are written in parentheses and are usually verbal cues or direction given to the actor in the scene.

Shot: If a shot changes in the scene, you can use this heading to let the camera operator know that you require the camera to take a different angle or position within that scene. This would appear as a "CLOSE-UP ON ADAM" or "LOW POV OF FEET MOVING."

1	1	INT SAN FRANCISCO APARTMENT - NIGHT
2	2	A CAMERA PASSES SLOWLY AN ACROSS A TABLE SHOWING A VARIETY OF AR-15S, MONEY, AND A MAP IN A DIMLY LIT ROOM.
		ADAM So, you will take this route and drive down here.. and I will meet you at . (in a deadpan mood) 3 the corner area
4	4	CLOSE-UP OF THE DOOR. DOOR THUD KNOCKING PROF. CONCEPCION goes over to the door.
5	5	PROF. CONCEPCION Who is it?

	VIDEO	AUDIO
1.	1 INT-SAN FRANCISCO APARTMENT - NIGHT. A camera passes slowly an across a table showing a variety of AR-15s, money, and a map in a dimly lit room.	ADAM So, you will take this route and drive down here.. and I will meet you at . (in a deadpan mood) 3 the corner area.
0:00		6 MUSIC: Eerie theme II 7 (SFX: TV playing in the background)
2.	4 CLOSE UP OF THE DOOR	7 (SFX: DOOR THUD KNOCKING)
0:00		
3.	PROF CONCEPCION goes over to the door.	PROF CONCEPCION Who is it?
0:00		

- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. MASTER SLUG LINE | 5. DIALOGUE LINE |
| 2. ACTION LINE | 6. MUSIC SLUG |
| 3. PARENTHETICAL | 7. SOUND EFFECT SLUGS |
| 4. SHOT LINE | |

 **SCRIPTWRITING APPS**

While you can certainly use a standard word processor to format a document to follow screenwriting guidelines, dedicated scriptwriting software can make the process easier. Here are a few examples:

- Final Draft is considered the de facto standard in the market, but it's pricey (www.finaldraft.com).
- Trelby is one of my favorites among the many free options (www.trelby.org).
- Celtx is my preferred paid program to use for creating scripts and features three different plan options to choose from. Their Writer Pro plan adds other helpful tools, enabling you to work through storyboards, shot lists, and different types of scripts in one suite, which I really like (www.celtx.com).
- Highland 2 by screenwriter John August is also well regarded; it's available in both free and paid versions but only for macOS (www.highland2.app).
- YouMeScript works with Google Docs and is available in free and paid versions (youmescript.com).

The next scene will start with a slug line that displays the location and time and so the process moves on.

MUSIC AND SOUND EFFECT SLUGS

In the A/V script, you may see additional MUSIC and SFX slugs to describe any audio besides dialogue in a scene. Both types of slugs appear left-aligned in the AUDIO column, but the SFX slugs are in lower case and in parentheses, while the MUSIC slugs are in title case without parens.

The Day of Production

When you have all of your story's elements outlined, organized, and previsualized, you are (finally) ready to get to recording. Before you work through your first production, however, I'd like to share a couple of things for you to keep in mind.

Think Like a Duck

Even with all of the planning in the world, you will inevitably run into random problems. Expect this, and a project's curveballs won't rattle you as much. Keep calm, and handle the situation as professionally as possible. What will rattle your team or client is someone who doesn't know how to adjust to and learn from a situation. As I often tell my students, you need to think like a duck: calm on the surface while paddling your tail off underwater.

Refer to a Paper Shot List

When you are working on production day, your brain will be on executing the details of the shot you're immersed in. That level of focus tends to give you tunnel vision—perfect conditions for you to forget the specifics of *another* shot you need.

As I mentioned earlier, placing a printed shot list on a clipboard will give you a constant reminder of what you need to shoot. As you finish the individual shots, cross them off the list so you can easily and quickly see what's left to do. Even better, hand the printed list to an assistant to look after so you can focus on shooting the video.

Use a Clapper/Slate

Lights. Camera. Action! The most recognizable object in cinema has got to be the *clapper board*, but many people don't know how absolutely helpful one can be. The main piece of the board is a *slate* on which you can write scene, shot, and camera

information. You can wipe the slate off and update it every time you start recording. Above that is an additional piece of wood on a hinge: the *clapper*. When this is brought down on the slate, it makes a loud clap. If you are using multiple cameras to record audio and video or syncing with a separate audio recorder, you can use that clapping sound as a synchronization point for the video and audio from all the cameras. The top part of the clapper board may also have a set of colors that you can use to correct color and exposure of the video later in post-production.

For a small investment, using one of these boards can pay big dividends. You can find physical boards as cheap as \$17 on Amazon, as well as clapper board apps on your mobile device's app store.



FIGURE 3.17 A clapper/slate board

John's Memorable Coffee

Shot List

Rafael Concepcion

SCENE	SHOT	TAKE	Shot Description	Shot Type	Movement	Notes
1	1A	7	John entering the office getting ready to sit down.	Master	Push	Brew coffee at start of day
1	1B		John starts to sit down- as he is sitting we see the coffee cup	MS	Static	
1	1C		John starts to reach for the coffee cup	MCU	Push	
1	1D		Johns hand grabs the cup of coffee - reveals keyboard	CU	Pan	
1	1E		John looks back as he notices someone else is here	ECU	Static	
2	2A		Dark hallways shows someone appear	Wide	Push	
2	2B		Footsteps of a person coming closer	ECU	Track	
2	2C		Eyes of the Jenna looking sad	ECU	Track	

FIGURE 3.18 Jot down notes in your shot list as you complete each shot.

Stay Organized with Your Clapper and Shot List

Everything looks so simple when organized in a shot list, with its columns for scenes, shots, and takes. As you go through the shots in the field, however, your actors will need to make multiple takes of many or all of them. It just happens. You may go into a shoot with a list of 20 shots but come back with 90 video files, including all of the mistakes. How do you know which shots belong with which? If you're using two cameras, how do you know which video files belong to which cameras? Your clapper board and shot list can help!

As you start the cameras recording, make sure you place the clapper board where both cameras can see it at the same time. This way, if there is a problem with one of the audio tracks, you can use the visual cue of the clapper board closing to synchronize that track with the rest. Seeing the video information on the slate will also help you synchronize the videos with one another.

When you get a successful take in the field, immediately write that take's number on your shot list (you do have it handy on a clipboard, right?). When you get back home, you will be reminded that Scene 1, Shot 001A had a successful take on Take 7.

Log Your Footage

When you record a series of videos for your story, it is a common practice to review all of the footage that you recorded to choose which of the files to use for the final video. This process is called *logging* and can be very time consuming.

Instead of watching all of the videos from beginning to end to see which takes are the best, however, you can perform a quick review of the videos without actually opening them. To do so, open the folder containing your videos in Finder (macOS) or File Explorer (Windows). Make sure the window is displayed in Icon view, and increase



WHY REVIEW COMPLETE CLIPS DURING LOGGING?

It's pretty easy to spot the one take out of a whole series of shots of a scene as “the best,” and you can edit together a decent video using only “the best” takes.

But there are usually parts of other takes that are good, maybe better than anything in the overall “best” take. For example: That look on the actor's face in Take 3, the camera movement in Take 5, the delivery of lines in Take 7, the reaction in Take 4 may all be perfect little moments that you would lose if you chose to use only a single take.

It takes more time and more care, but if you use the best parts of multiple takes (especially if you had multiple cameras running) to build the complete sequence, you can produce a richer and more nuanced work.

the size of the thumbnails. Each thumbnail shows the first frame of the corresponding video—the frame that shows all of the information written on the front of the slate. Now, record the name of each video file into a File Name field in your shot list and move to the next shot in your list. Having your notes and the thumbnails handy will speed up the process of logging your footage enormously.

The Payoff of Previsualization

Getting your ideas in order before shooting can feel overwhelming, but it is an essential part of the creative process. Understand that not all videos will require the same level of detail. Some stories will need really elaborate scripts; some will have a list of shots on a back of a napkin. This process will expand and contract as your needs require, and you'll become more in tune with how much of it you'll need in your work as you get more projects under your belt.

The biggest takeaway here is that a lot of video production deals with the realization of a well-formed idea. The clearer you can formulate this idea at the onset, the better your results will be.

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