

Chapter 2: Pre-Production

The Three Stages of Production

The process of producing a television program is generally divided into three stages.

The first stage, **PRE-PRODUCTION**, includes but is not limited to: Setting goals, writing program proposals, conducting program conferences and crew meetings, story-boarding and scripting, location scouting, gathering all equipment and supplies needed, etc.

The second stage, **PRODUCTION**, refers to the shoot itself, and includes all aspects of cleaning up afterwards and crew debriefing.

The final stage, **POST-PRODUCTION**, refers to editing the material shot during production, and should also include distributing the program and promoting it to your target audience.

All of the stages are important; but pre-production is especially important because it makes the other stages proceed that much more easily and smoothly.

The Importance of Planning (Pre-Production)

Let's be honest: Access producers have lives outside of television, and they're frequently looking for shortcuts. Many producers think that they can save time and energy by skipping pre-production and moving right into production. This is not true. You cannot avoid pre-production; you can only postpone it.

Pre-production is in many respects another word for decision-making. And you cannot avoid making decisions, only postpone the inevitable. And when you postpone making important decisions until the last possible minute (i.e. until you're just about to shoot or edit), you're putting extra pressure on yourself at the time when you are already under the pressure of the clock to get something shot or edited. Don't make this mistake.

Planning offers many advantages:

- * Planning saves time (your precious time, the crews' and talents' time, and the costly equipment time)
- * Planning makes the shoot go more smoothly
- * Planning makes for a more focused, better executed program
- * Planning keeps you sane, because it allows for you to anticipate, plan for, and deal with the problems that inevitably come up.

So what kind of planning do you need to do?

Make Fundamental Decisions:

Set Your Goals

Before you begin to produce a program, you must answer a number of fundamental questions regarding...

- AUDIENCE: Who am I trying to reach?
What is the best way to reach this audience?
- GOALS: Why am I making this production?
What is the purpose of the production?
What do I want my audience to think, feel, or do as a result of seeing it?
Is video the right tool for the job?

As an Access producer, you have almost complete freedom to do whatever kind of show you want, about whatever topic you want, in any manner that you want (subject to city, state, and federal law, of course). This means you don't have to mimic conventional commercial television. Be innovative. Be creative. Be funky. Be whatever.

But if you can do anything, how do you decide what to do? Start with a very clear understanding of your audience and your goals. If you figure those things out, figuring out the format and content becomes a whole lot easier. And it makes you much more likely to create a program that succeeds in the way you hoped it would.

Plan Your Content

To figure what information to communicate through your program, you should do two things:

- Research the topic. Know your material.
- List the most important points to get across.
 - Prioritize them.
 - Don't try to squeeze too much information into the program. Less is sometimes more.

Decide on Format

Knowing what audience you're trying to reach and what information you're trying to communicate makes it easier to figure out how to communicate that information. Ask yourself:

- What kind of form will the program take (documentary, talk show, news, theatrical, feature, live, interactive, etc...)?
- What should it look and feel like? Think visually and aurally.
- If there are other shows that it should resemble, how are those programs structured?
- What should happen first, second, third, ..., last?

Put Your Vision on Paper

Write a Treatment

In the classic days of Hollywood, when an executive first learned of a possible production, it was presented in the form of a treatment. The purpose of the treatment was to show the executive how the story would be treated - hence the term *treatment*. The person who wrote it would, of course, tailor it to be as attractive as possible for that executive. Hence, the treatment is not the original story itself, but a description of how it will look as a moving picture.

A treatment should serve as a very brief summary of who your audience is, what you want them to get from watching your program, and how you propose to accomplish that goal. Here's an example:

I plan to do a 3-minute program showing the general public how to get to CCTV's Central Square facility using public transportation. The camera will be the eye of the public and the purpose of the program is to visually show and tell how easy it is to get to CCTV.

Write a Script

While the treatment is necessarily brief, the script can be any length, depending upon its purpose and the amount of detail you include.

Scripts can serve any number of several important purposes:

- Making sure that the program keeps to its intended purposes
- Giving the director and/or camera person a clear roadmap as to the producer's intentions
- Making sure that the rest of the production team, including the talent, knows exactly what to do and when.

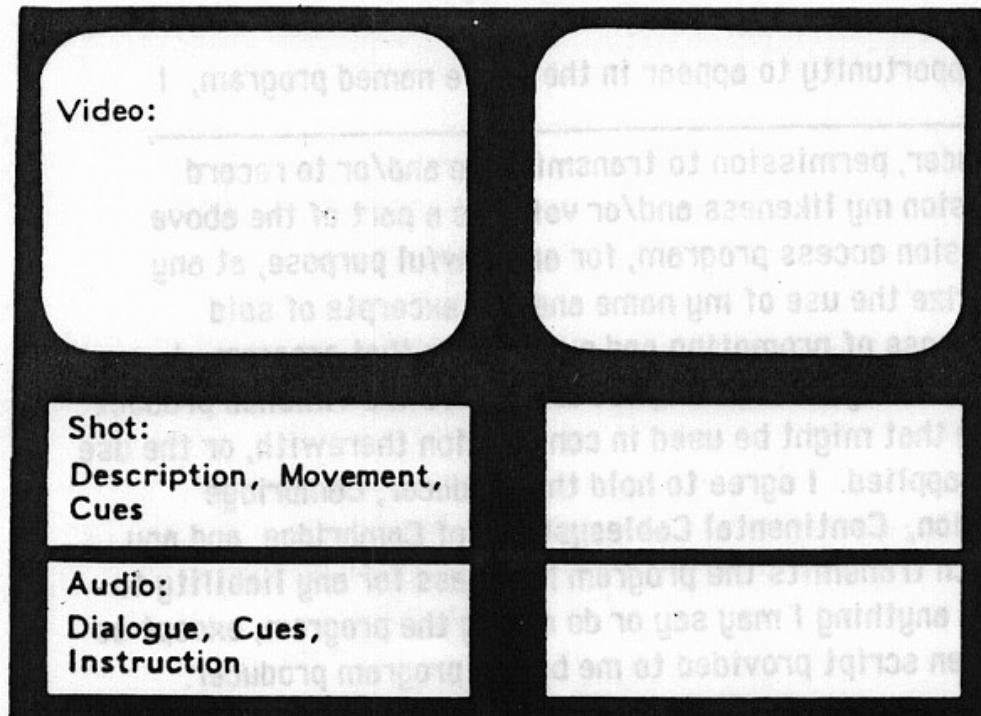
Scripts can take any number of forms, including:

- A list of points to be made, questions to be asked, and/or specific images to capture
- Side-by-side columns describing the audio and video that will be recorded during every minute of the program.

SHOOTING SCRIPT (or Shot Sheet)

| Shot # | Time (dura.) | Video | Audio |
|---------------|---------------------|--------------|--------------|
| | | | |

- A visual **STORYBOARD** which captures in quick sketches the sequences of images to be shot, with the corresponding audio written in captions underneath. Don't be put off by thinking that only artistic types should do storyboards. Storyboards aren't used to showcase artistic talent, but to help you pre-visualize your shots and identify effective, appropriate shot sequences. The video portion of the script will help comprise your list of what to shoot, your Shot Sheet.



Here are some tips about writing scripts, from [the Somerville Community Access Handbook](#), by Carol Yourman and Abigail Norman:

- Know your audience, and keep your objectives in mind.
- Write to your audience; keep your representative viewer in mind.
- Think visually and aurally.
- Keep simple, direct, and to the point.
- Be conversational. Avoid a formal, term-paper style. Avoid long, complex sentences.
- If your script has spoken lines, speak them aloud before committing to paper.
- Use a word processor if you can, and don't be afraid to revise.
- Communicate frequently with your director, producer, talent, and other colleagues.

Make A Shot Sheet

Nothing will teach you more about good camerawork than your first session editing footage that you've shot. Still, here's some good advice for anyone starting out.

Good planning and scripting is one key to successful shooting. Your editing job will be much, much easier and go much faster if you figure out exactly what shots you need to get before you ever start shooting. That's what scripts and storyboards are for! But even if you skip those things, don't leave home without a Shot Sheet. The shot sheet will remind you of all the footage you need to capture during the production, so that you come back to the edit suite with everything needed to finish your program.

And when making up your shot sheet, don't forget to include all of the "cut-aways," "cut-ins," and "reaction shots" you'll want to capture. (See Chapter 4, Fundamentals of Camerawork and Shot Composition, for more information about these kinds of shots.)

Also be sure to include audio segments in your shot sheet. Will you need extra ambient sounds to fill in those silent parts of your tape, special sound effects, or music?

Decide Shooting Locations

Your planning and scripting will probably call for you to shoot your program in specific locations. On the other hand, some access producers find that they end up making some decisions for reasons that have little to do with what the program calls for and much more to do with the realities of their limited resources of people, time, and energy.

For this reason, it may help to review the nature of working in the Field vs. working in the Studio; these two environments are very different from each other and offer particular advantages and disadvantages. Your decision on where to shoot may depend, in some instances, on these differences.

Keep in mind, however, that many programs combine elements shot in both locations, capitalizing on each environment's advantages.

| | | Advantages | Disadvantages |
|---------------|---|---|----------------------|
| Studio | <p>Convenience & Control:</p> <p>Plenty of power, lighting, audio gear Little likelihood of interruption Don't have to deal with picking up and moving lots of equipment</p> <p>Functionality:</p> <p>3-camera set-up enables you to shoot from multiple angles in one take Can be live and interactive Creative options with chroma key</p> <p>Time:</p> <p>Little or no editing time is needed for programs shot live-on-tape</p> <p>Support:</p> <p>CCTV Staff are on hand to deal with technical issues</p> | <p>Staging:</p> <p>TV stage looks artificial and may not relate to program content</p> <p>Functionality:</p> <p>Studio is a confined space What you shoot, whether live or live-on-tape, is what you get</p> <p>People:</p> <p>Need large crew, typically at least six, some of whom must have advanced certifications</p> | |
| Field | <p>Staging:</p> <p>Field footage is often more compelling, naturalistic, and related to the program content</p> <p>Functionality:</p> <p>You can shoot anywhere you want. Pre-recorded nature of the program allows you to edit it as desired</p> <p>People:</p> <p>Generally need only a small crew</p> | <p>Convenience & Control:</p> <p>Not as controlled a setting as the Studio in terms of lighting, audio, staging, and power More likelihood of interruption Have to deal with picking up and moving lots of equipment</p> <p>Functionality:</p> <p>Live and/or interactive telecasts not usually possible Cannot do chroma key or other special effects available with studio equipment</p> <p>Time:</p> <p>Your program usually requires editing after shooting</p> <p>Support:</p> <p>CCTV Staff are not on hand to deal with technical issues</p> | |

Keep in mind that while the environment of a **STUDIO SHOOT** is generally constant and predictable, the environment of the **FIELD SHOOT** is always variable. The studio provides warmth in winter, air conditioning in summer, easily controlled lighting and audio as well as many other aspects that the producer and director can always count on.

When one enters the ever-changing environment of the field, however, one should always expect the worst and hope for the best.

On the minus side in the field, expect:

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| Audio problems: | Traffic noises, phones ringing, conversations |
| Video problems: | Glaring sunlight, backlighting, color temperature conflicts |
| Power problems: | Too few A/C outlets, blown fuses, dead batteries |
| Weather problems: | Wind, rain, sleet, snow, icebergs (just the tip of) |
| People problems: | Gesturing pedestrians, uncooperative security |
| Logistics problems: | Flat tires, forgotten equipment |

On the plus side, you can shoot all those things you could never shoot in the studio: Cars, planes, trains, the ocean, a skyscraper, birds, parades, concerts, fires, to name just a few. In addition, you can present your subject, both aurally and visually, in a far more naturalistic and compelling way than you could ever do in the studio.

Crew & Time Requirements:

The most critical constraint you will face as an Access producer is probably time - your time, your crew's time, and your talent's time.

Whereas a Studio shoot typically requires a technical crew of at least six people, most single-camera productions in the field require only one or two technical people: A cameraperson and audio engineer. On the other hand, while a single 3-hour shooting session in the Studio may be all that's needed for completing a one-hour program, many single-camera productions in the field require you to spend many hours in the edit suite. Professionals allot up to one hour of editing time per one minute of finished program; Public Access producers often invest much less time, perhaps one hour of editing time for every five minutes of finished show.

So your choice of shooting location may depend, sometimes anyway, on whether your own time is limited or not, and whether or not you'll be able to get a whole bunch of people together for a few hours. If you think you'll be producing a Studio shoot in the future, you should use every chance now (including taking classes and volunteering on other people's shoots) to get to know as many people as you can who might be able to help you out later on.

Put Your Plans on Paper

There's a lot to do, and most people prefer not to try and keep it all in their head. Make a list of everything you need to do. Create a timetable: What are you going to do this week, next week, the week after? If something has to happen by the third week, what do you have to do before then? Remember that you have many other responsibilities in your life, so be realistic.

Make All the Arrangements

Do initial paperwork

- a) Submit a Program Production Contract to CCTV at least one week prior to reserving equipment.
- b) Get signed Premises Taping Release (if not shooting in the Studio). Accessibility is always an issue in the field. Before videotaping at a location in the field (at the Mall, for example), you must obtain written permission from the property owner or manager. When videotaping on public property, it is often a good idea to get the permission of the local government and police authorities.

Communicate closely with event coordinators

- a) If shooting an event, obtain a script of the program. Plan shots and transitions between shots.
- b) If you want to have input into the staging, lighting, audio, and program outline decisions, insert yourself into the decision-making process as early as possible. Don't wait til the day of the shoot, when the plans have already been made, and the group you're shooting for will be least likely to be accomodating.

Arrange for talent

- a) Prepare them for what will happen during shoot.
- b) Ask them if they have photos, music, objects that would enhance the production.
- c) Tell them how to dress for television, and what clothes to avoid. (See Chapter 7, Fundamentals of Being Talent, for more information.)
- d) Make sure they know how to get to the shoot and when to arrive.

Arrange for crew

- a) Make sure they're certified to use the equipment.
- b) Prepare them for what will happen during shoot.
- c) Make sure they know how to get to the shoot and when to arrive (early to help you set up, right?).

Scout the Location

A site survey conducted in advance of your shoot helps you anticipate all of the problems that may occur and prepare accordingly. Ideally, you would conduct the survey at the same time of day as the shoot so that you're not surprised by a church bell ringing, reflected sun, locked door, etc.

Power:

- a) Where are the outlets located?
- b) Are the sockets grounded (three-prong) or not (two-prong)?
- c) How many extension cords do you need?
- d) Where is the circuit breaker box located?

Lighting:

- a) What are the lighting sources in the environment?
- b) Can you take advantage of indirect lighting by bouncing light off walls?
- c) Will you need to bring additional lighting? Will they allow you to? If you do, will it blow the fuses? Do you have the room to set them up? Will you need sandbags to keep the light stands from being knocked over? Will your talent be uncomfortable?
- d) How are you going to match the color temperature of all the lights?
- e) Are you going to have back-lighting or reflection problems?
- f) Do you have enough AC power for the lights and the other equipment? (Here's how you can tell: Amps x volts = watts. Most places run on 120 volts, so if the circuit you're on is rated at 15 amps, then you may plug in up to $15 \times 120 = 1800$ watts of gear on that circuit.)

Audio:

- a) What ambient noises (such as phones ringing, air conditioners, refrigerators, traffic or construction noise, conversations in another room) will you have to contend with?
- b) Will it be noisy and difficult to mic? Do you need a windscreens?
- c) Is there a public address or sound system from which you can take a feed? Does it give a line- or mic-level feed? What kind of connectors does it have? How far is it to your recording device?
- d) If using wireless mics or intercoms, have you tested them in that environment to insure there will be no interference?

Set:

- a) What environment will you be shooting in?
- b) Do you need to re-arrange furniture for any reason?
- c) What will be in the background, and what can you put in the background that would be more appropriate?
- d) What props do you need to bring with you?

Cameras:

- a) Where can you put the cameras for the best shots and still not interfere with the audience?
- b) What types of shots and angles can you get from these positions?
- c) How far is it from these positions to the power and audio sources?

People:

- a) Who are the people you need to know (people in charge, people with keys, secretaries, janitors, security)?

Logistics:

- a) What time can you gain access to the location?
- b) Will you have enough time to set up?
- c) Where can you park for unloading and loading?
- d) How long will it take you to get there?
- e) Where can you run all your cables so that they won't be walked on or tripped over? Do you need to tape down the cables with gaffer's tape?
- f) Do you need to take crowd control measures - such as installing "no parking" signs, roping off areas, locking doors, or hiring off-duty police?
- g) Where is the nearest telephone you may use to call CCTV, your talent, your crew?
- h) If doing a live shoot, where are the cable drops for sending the signal upstream and watching the return signal?

Make an Equipment List

Make a list of all the equipment you'll need. You'll use this list when reserving CCTV's facilities, and later on before heading off to the shoot. Don't forget things like set supplies, raw videotape, any pre-edited (roll-in) footage you plan to use, duct tape, pen and paper, tweeker, etc.

Do the Follow-up Paper Work

- a) Reserve CCTV's facilities and equipment. You'll need an approved production contract number, which you should receive within five business days of submitting a Production Contract.
- b) Get signed talent releases from all performers and participants. If minors, get signatures from their parents or guardians.

Reconfirm All Your Arrangements.

It's not enough to recruit crew and talent, you have to get them to show up, too! Many producers have learned from experience to give their crew members and talent a reminder call a day or two before the shoot. It's also a good idea to reconfirm your equipment request with CCTV.

Get a Good Night's Rest. Have a Good Shoot!

Forms: Pre-Production Check-list

Make Fundamental Decisions

- Define Your Audience.
- Define Your Goals.
- Research the Topic.
- List the Most Important Points to Get Across. Prioritize Them.
- Decide on Program Format.

Put Your Vision on Paper

- Write a Treatment.
- Write a Script and/or Storyboard.
- Make a Video and Audio Shot Sheet.

Decide Shooting Location

Put Your Plans on Paper

- Make a List of Everything That You Need to Do, and A Timeline.

Make All the Arrangements

- Do the Initial Paperwork: Submit Production Contract, Get Signed Premises Taping Release for Owner and/or Police and government.
- Communicate Closely with Event Coordinators.
- Arrange for Talent.
- Arrange for Crew.

Scout the Location

- Do a Site Survey. Take a List of Everything to Check Out.

Make an Equipment List.

- Make a List of All the Equipment You'll Need.

Do the Follow-Up Paper Work

- Reserve CCTV's Facilities and Equipment.
- Get Signed Talent Releases from All Performers (or guardians).

Reconfirm All Your Arrangements

- Give Reminder Calls to Your Crew and Talent. Reconfirm Your Arrangements with CCTV and Event Coordinators.

Get A Good Night's Rest

Forms: Location Survey

Location: _____

Address: _____

Floor: _____ Room Number: _____

Contact Person: _____
(name) _____ (phone) _____

Name of Janitor/Maintenance: _____

Phone: _____ Location: _____

What time will space be accessible for set-up? _____

Electricity

of AC Outlets: _____ 3 or 2 prong? _____
(indicate location of outlets on diagram below)

of Extension Cords: _____ # of Power Strips: _____

of Amps: _____ Breakers or Fuses? _____

Location of Fuse/Circuit Breaker Box: _____

Audio

Is there a public address or sound system? _____

Does it have mic or line feed? _____

What type of connectors are needed to take a feed from the sound system? _____

Any ambient noises? _____

If using wireless mics or intercom, did you test them? _____

Lighting

Will you have enough available light? _____

What type of light is it? _____

Is portable lighting needed? _____

How many lights? _____

Set

What will be in the background? _____

Do you need to rearrange furniture? _____

What props do you need to bring? _____

Do you need to limit access to any doors or areas? _____

Diagram of space, including windows, locations of outlets, and possible camera and portable light locations:

Logistics

How long will it take you to get there? _____

Where can you park? _____

Loading Dock? _____ Elevator or stairs? _____

Ceiling height: _____

Width of Hallways: _____ Width of Doors: _____

Sprinkler System? _____

Type of Flooring: _____

Permits and clearances needed: _____

Location of nearest phone you can use? _____

Receive calls? _____ Phone number: _____

Forms: Equipment Inventory

Program: _____

Date of Shoot: _____ Crew Call Time: _____

Location: _____

Transportation

Vehicle: _____

Permits: _____

Parking/gas money: _____

Paperwork

Premises Taping Release: _____

Talent Release Forms: _____

Script & Shot Sheets: _____

Labels for Tapes: _____

Camera Equipment

Camera/Camcorder/AC Adaptor: _____

Fully Charged Batteries: _____

VCR/Cables/AC Adaptor: _____

Monitor/Cables: _____

Tripod: _____

Cases/Bags: _____

Videotape: _____

Audio Gear

Microphones/Windscreens: _____

Audio Mixer: _____

Fully Charged Batteries: _____

Headphones: _____

Cables: _____

Adaptors: _____

Gaffer's Tape: _____

Lighting

Light Kit and Stands: _____

Extra Lamps: _____

Reflective Cards: _____

Corrective Colored Gels: _____

Diffusion: _____

AC Power

Extension Cords: _____

Power Strips: _____

3-2 Prong Adaptors: _____

Forms: Talent Release

Name: _____

Program Title: _____

Authorization and Release

In return for the opportunity to appear in the above named program, I hereby grant to _____, cable access producer, permission to transmit live and/or to record for later transmission my likeness and/or voice as a part of the above-named cable television access program, for any lawful purpose, at any time. I also authorize the use of my name and any excerpts of said program for the purpose of promoting and publicizing that program. I waive any right that I may have to inspect or approve the finished product or the written copy that might be used in conjunction therewith, or the use to which it may be applied. I agree to hold the producer, Cambridge Community Television, MediaOne of Cambridge, and any cable company which transmits the program harmless for any liability to others arising from anything I may say or do during the program, except as set forth in a written script provided to me by the program producer.

I have read this agreement before signing and fully understand its contents.

Signature: _____

Print Name:

Print Address:

Signature of Parent or Guardian Date

if above-named person is not of legal age

Date

Forms: Storyboard

STORYBOARD

Sketch of video
goes here.

Written description of shot:
Movement, framing, cues.

Written description of audio:
Dialogue, music, effects,
ambient audio, cues.