

Pre-Production

Budget, scheduling and all the legal bits...



Research

Once you have decided how you are going to tell the story, you can get on with the planning.

Learn everything you can about your subject and your characters.

Then make a 'wish list' of everything you need to tell your story: interviews, key moments, locations, permissions, archive material, actors, props, music etc.

Budget

Budgeting is one of the most important things when it comes to planning your project. It's important to work out how much money you need, and what you plan to spend it on, before you start producing your film. If you don't plan your budget properly, you might end running out of money half way through the film!

Have a look at this simple version of a production budget. You can use it to build on for your own project, just add in the extra and more detailed costs.

Always make sure you put in a 'contingency' amount (usually around 10% of the budget) to cover any unforeseen costs.

Pre-Production Research & Planning costs	1	estimate	200	200
Sub-Total				200
Production Equipment Equipment Hire	3 10	days tapes	150 5	450 50

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Tape Stock				
Consumables				
Sub-Total				550
Travel & Catering				
Travel Expenses	3	days	50	150
Catering Expenses	3	days	30	90
Sub-Total				240
Post Production				
Facilities	2	days	240	480
Edit Suite Hire	1	estimate	250	250
(including editor)	1	fee	300	300
Archive Material	3	tapes	5	15
Music (composed)				
Masters & Copies				
Sub-Total				1045
Production				
Administration	1	fee	150	150
Insurance	1	estimate	100	100
Office Expenses				
(phone-calls,				
stationery, post etc)				
Sub-Total				250
Contingency	1	estimate	229	229
(allow 10% for				
unexpected costs)				
Sub-Total				229

Scheduling

Planning your time carefully will make your production more efficient and will help you keep track of costs. Have a written schedule starting at when you anticipate receiving your money and ending with when you plan to deliver your project to a broadcaster. This schedule should clearly outline when each stage of the project starts and finishes.

Add in key deadlines, meetings, castings, recces, delivery dates and/or any other important dates and when it comes to actually making your project, your life will be made a lot easier.

For each day of your shoot, it is useful to create a 'call sheet' or schedule, which you can give to your crew. The call sheet should include all contact details for the day, addresses, kit lists, maps, information on risk assessments, phone numbers of the local police station and details on the production's insurance cover.

A handy tip to note is that the aspect ratio that the film should be shot in (16:9, 4:3 or HDV) should be noted at the top and bottom of all shoot paper work, particularly the call sheet and shooting schedule so any irregularity in rushes can be avoided.

The shoot schedule is usually issued with the call sheet and provides a plan for each day's filming, so you make sure enough time is allowed to film all material needed.

It is also of key importance that prior to any shoot taking place, all locations have a 'recce' by key members of the crew, usually the Director and a Producer, and in some cases the Camera Operator as well. This is not only to ensure that the locations are appropriate in a creative sense but also in terms of health and safety of the crew, filmed participants and members of the public.

Prior to all shooting taking place a document called a risk assessment form must be filled in by the Producer/Production Assistant. This form is usually asked for in advance if you are filming in a public area by the council or government organisation.

Copyright

Anyone who creates a film has the right to decide who views it and who copies it. This is what copyright is for, so you remain the owner of your material.

In some instances you may be required to assign the copyright to the funder of the film. Some people are paid to work on a film as the Director or Camera Operator but someone else owns the production as they have provided the finance behind it. However, if you have created the film yourself, you may want to sell the film to earn a living. For example, you can sell 'rights' maybe giving a broadcaster permission to show your film five times in a year. In most cases, everything and everyone shown in a film must be cleared. This includes any script, music, locations, contributors and products. You must also respect other creative people, for example musicians, photographers etc and seek permission to use their work and, if necessary, pay for this usage.

It is also important to note that 'creatives' may give permission for you to use their work in your film free of charge if they know you have a limited budget or they believe in the film you are making. It must be stressed that music, film clips and even photographs cannot be used in films without permission, nor can you use material that is in the public domain or has been made available under a Creative Commons License. To find out more about this please go to www.creativecommons.org.

Only when they have been cleared, can a filmmaker give the right to show the film. It is the filmmaker's responsibility to ensure that any film submitted to a broadcaster has the necessary clearances. Without these, a copyright owner can claim that the filmmaker has broken the law by stealing their rights. Please find an example scenario below:

When planning to film a contributor, Russell, driving along a road, think about whether the following things might happen:

You get into the car and Russell turns on the stereo to play some music. The songwriter, performer, and record company may all want payment for the use of that track and you did not need to use it; it is not helping to tell the story.

Next you film the car driving past a billboard. The poster is a copyright work and the owners might object to its appearance. If a company logo is going to feature prominently, get permission to use it. Copyright applies to things found on the internet too.

Get consents agreed before people are filmed. Get your contributors to sign a release before filming starts. This is the golden rule. Some people can get nervous after they have given an interview and worry about something they have said and may refuse to sign a release form. If it is signed beforehand it can stop many problems occurring.

Get contributors to state their consent on-camera if you have no release form available at the time (not recommended). Then the filmmaker knows that what they are putting into their film is cleared and the contributors know that they are being filmed and are agreeing to have their contribution reproduced. There is no need for release forms for people who just walk through shot without featuring in a film. However, trouble can start if you bump into a possible contributor in the street.

Annie, an ex-girlfriend of Russell's, sees him being filmed and comes over to start an argument. This argument would look great in the documentary but Annie runs off without signing a consent form. She might object to her contribution being used. If she does, the filmmaker may have to cut her out, unless he gets consent from her on camera. The film could then not be broadcast, and if it was the filmmaker could be sued. It is never worth the risk.

It is not only contributors who must agree to be in your film. Russell goes into a shop and the shopkeeper may not be happy about filming on their premises. Make sure you get permission with a signed location form before filming starts.

The law

In addition to copyright, you must remember the law of the land. Russell steals a bottle of wine from the off licence. The filmmaker then films himself and Russell drinking the wine. This is a really bad idea. Be careful filming criminal activity. Do not encourage it, and certainly do not get involved. You should always remain an impartial observer (this applies to documentaries, but the same rules apply for other types of films: do not do anything illegal and certainly do not film yourself doing it!)

Later on you are filming Russell reflecting on the day's events. He accuses Annie of being a drug user and a bank robber. This is unlikely to be true, and so may well be libelous of Annie.

When the facts are checked it emerges that Annie is in fact facing new court proceedings for a violent assault. However, as the case is active, Russell's comments could influence legal proceedings. The filmmaker could be in contempt of court if the statement is included.

Of course, it is always possible to keep things very, very simple. You could film a mute man in a white room and get him to provide the music. Although clearly you must balance simplicity with getting an interesting story!

Release forms

You need a Release Form for anyone who either gives you an interview or who speaks on camera. You do not need a Release Form for people on the street as long as your camera is not concealed.

You will need Release Forms for people who are identifiable in sensitive places even if they are not speaking e.g. hospital waiting rooms, gay clubs, law court corridors.

You should warn your interviewee that you will need a Release Form signed before the interview and get it signed straight away. Try not to leave it until the next day or the next week by which time they may have changed their mind.

Anyone under the age of 18 needs to have their Release Form signed by one of their parents.

It is crucial that the Release Form is not signed under any misapprehension or false pretenses. Whilst you do not need to share all your plans or thoughts for the film with the contributors, what you do say must not be misleading. It is best to communicate with your interviewees in writing before the interview

so that you have proof that you were clear about the nature of the film.

Most documentary interviews are given for no fee. However, many people do now ask for a fee – particularly if the whole film revolves around their contribution. There are no guidelines as to how much this amount should be although it is common for expert commentators such as historians or scientists to receive between £100-£200.

In recent years, documentary hoaxing has become more common – you are advised to double-check your contributor's story. You should ask to see a passport to check they are giving you their real name and request appropriate evidence of their qualifications if you are in any doubt.

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