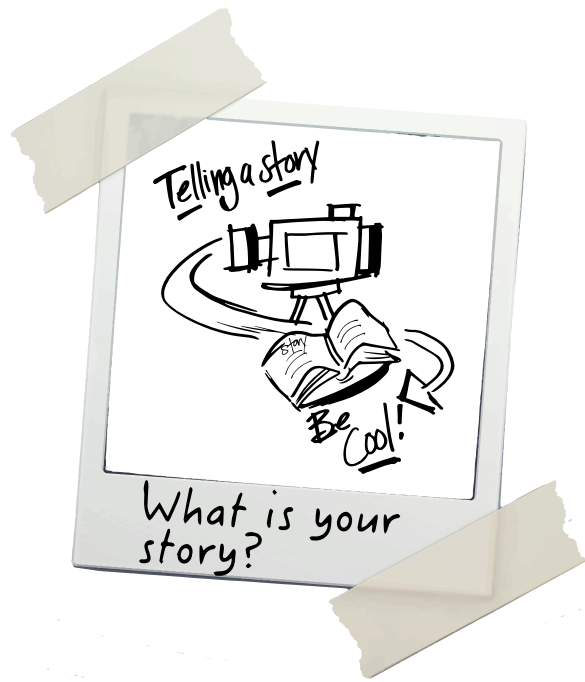


## 7. Video 101: Top tips for your short docs

Becoming an effective filmmaker will take a little practice, but the process will also be fun, you'll get some awesome skills, and will have a great film in your hands by the time you're done.

### Step #1: What's your story?

All journalism tells a story. Having a rough idea of the story you want to tell before you hit the streets with your video camera will make it easier to shoot. You don't need to know what every scene will look like. In fact, in documentary filmmaking you cannot always control what happens on camera, so you do need to keep an open mind, and often change your angle on the fly. Be cool.



**Some questions you might want to ask:**

- ✓ **What's the problem?** Green journalism is about creating awareness about environmental problems, and informing viewers about possible solutions.
- ✓ **What's the solution?** Since many environmental solutions don't exist yet, you may need to use a little visual imagination. Be creative but keep it realistic. It's not sci-fi.
- ✓ **Visualizing the invisible:** You will need footage (called **coverage**) for every single second of the story you want to tell. The longer the story, the more coverage you'll need. Make sure you account for that!

✓ **Who can you talk to?** People connect more to other people than to issues. Most good stories are, therefore, about interesting and engaging people.

✓ **Remember the basic rules of journalism!** Cover your bases: Who is this about? What's happening? When did it start? Where? Why is it happening? How is it happening? (And how can we fix it?)

## Step #2: Write a script

As the saying goes, you can make a bad film out of a good idea, but you can't make a good film out of a bad idea.

Make a list of things that must happen. Then write a draft script. Then rewrite it once or twice. Spending time sketching out what you'll need, will make your job easier, will help you get the right footage, and will keep your story under 3 minutes.

***You can't change your plan if you don't have one.***

## Step #3: Design a production plan

A draft script helps you organize your thoughts and figure out *how* to tell your story. The production lays out everything else.

## Storyboarding Tips

**Make it current.** With short attention spans, short news cycles, and gazillions of media outlets, viewers care about what's happening now. Find a recent inciting incident, or hook. (i.e., what inspired you to tell the story now).

**Keep it short.** As a rule of thumb, 1 page (Times New Roman, font size 12, double spaced) translates as 60-90 seconds on screen. Don't get side tracked.

**Keep it local.** Even if you're focusing on a global issue make sure your story and focus is relevant to your own community.

**Keep it simple.** Selective information is easier to understand. In other words, less is more. Don't try to do it all.

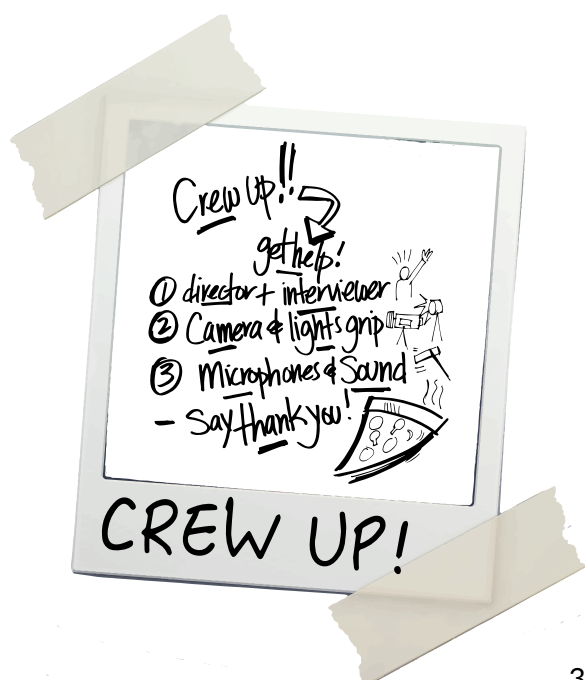
**Show, don't tell.** We remember things we see on screen more than things we hear on screen. Memorable facts are often told through visual means.

Having a plan will streamline your work, boost your confidence level on set, and reassure your crew and guests that you know what you're doing... even if you don't.

Use the storyboard and shot list to pre-determine the positions of subjects, crew, cameras, and lights on set, and share them with your crew for easy reference.

#### What you should include:

- ✓ **Production times;**
- ✓ **Storyboard it,** so you'll grasp your own visual concept;
- ✓ **Interviewee list:** List the individuals you hope to interview, and define your access strategy;
- ✓ **References:** Research, and get your facts right;
- ✓ **Resources:** Required crew, equipment;



## The ideal crew size for YRE projects is one (you) to 3 people:

Director and interviewer (you);  
Camera and lights/grip;  
Microphones and sound;

- ✓ **Shot list:** Directorial notes on angles, camera placements, and scene descriptions can be useful.

And a final tip:

**Keep it safe.** We don't want you getting hurt (or getting into trouble). Run your production plan by an adult.

### Step #4: Crew up!

Filmmaking is seldom a solitary endeavour. Be realistic about your goals and your story's needs. It's difficult to be a competent producer and director, while simultaneously running a camera, lights, and sound, doing a good interview, and perhaps watching for traffic, if you're shooting outside.

Don't try to do it all! Enlist your friends into your crew and assign them clear, well-defined roles.

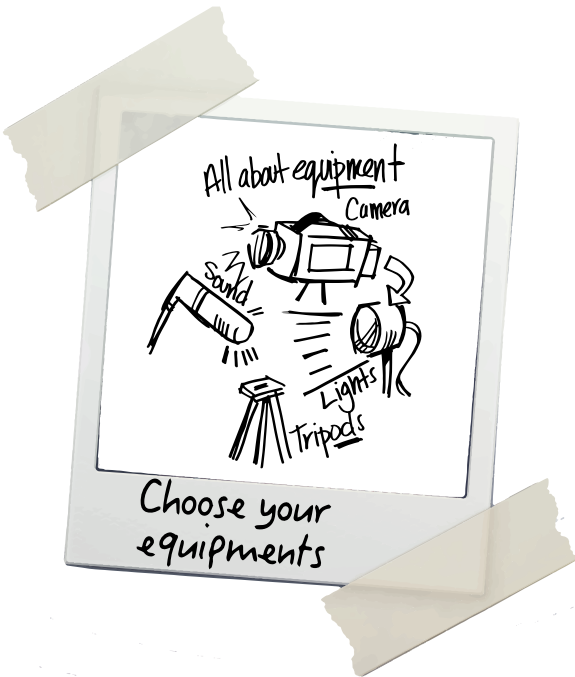
Your friends won't expect a Hollywood salary, but thank them by giv-

ing them on-screen credit! And, insider tip: pizza! It's always a good idea to get them pizza...!

### Step #5: Choosing your equipment

Carefully consider your equipment. How many people are in your crew? What can you easily carry? Will you be filming inside, or outside? How much space is available, and how much time will you have to set up? What equipment can you get?

**Camera:** If your school owns one, and you have had the time to familiarize yourself with it, use a broadcast-quality camera. You'll absolutely need a second crewmember.



Alternatively: most recent DSLR cameras shoot high quality HD these days. They are easier to operate, and more discrete.

If none of these are available to you, resort to your iPhone or any other smartphone. Research specialized filmmaker apps available for your phone, which will enhance its capability (e.g. *KitCamera* and *MoviePro* shoot in HD, have auto-stabilizing options, levels, and in-camera colour grading).

Finally, if you have access to a GoPro camera, give it a go! The newest models perform outstandingly in low light (sunrise, sunset, dusk), and produce surprisingly high quality footage. The learning curve is also minimal. Just

## Frames Per Second (fps)

Rule of thumb: 1 second of footage = 24 fps. Since the human eye interprets way higher frame rates than that, shooting at 24 fps will give your video a beautiful cinematic feel. With the advent of digital film, 30 fps has become the standard TV look, with higher rates in blockbuster films. But nothing beats 24 fps.



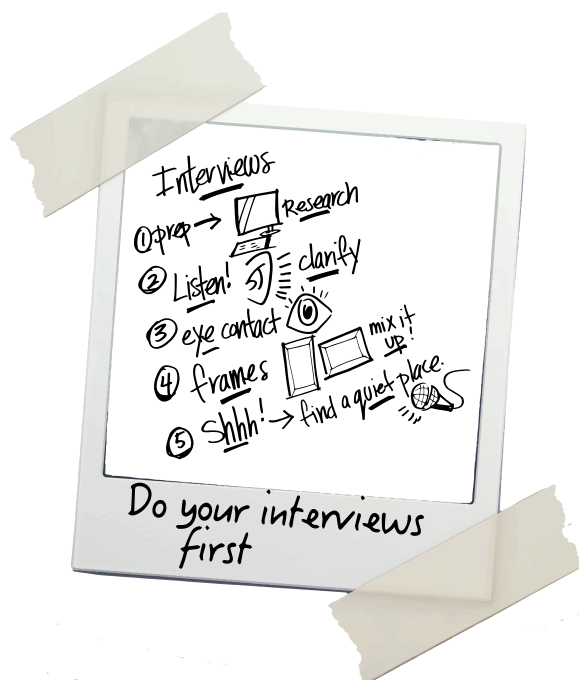
beware of overusing it — remember the lens creates a fishbowl effect. This camera is best used for b-roll, cutaways, and playful angles.

**Light:** Plan the lighting conditions carefully, and try to ensure they are consistent throughout. Correcting bad lighting is extremely annoying and work-intensive in post-production.

Check out these awesome lighting tutorials for some tips:

[Outdoor Lighting Skills with Stephen Schweickart](#)

[Lighting People's Faces with Stephen Schweickart](#)



**Sound:** Often overlooked, sound is *the most important* element of any documentary. Viewers will forgive your shaky footage, if the story is good. But no one likes terrible sound. Your camera's internal microphone might be enough. But if you have access to Lavalier/lapel mic for your interviews, that's even better. If not, just use the Voice Memo function on your smartphone.

**And finally:** Tripods exist for a reason... Use one!

## Step #6: Do your interviews first

That's right! Speak to people before you capture the video, because they might give you ideas of what to film, or how to film it. Since you'll be covering their words, use them as visual cues. Here's a list of do's and don'ts:

**Don't call it an "Interview".** People sometimes freeze when you turn the camera on. Keep things relaxed: refer to it as a "chat", not an interview.

**Ask open-ended questions.** If someone can answer something with "Yes" or "No", the question isn't very good. Phrase your questions to get the soundbites you need.

## Interview Like a Pro!

### Be prepared:

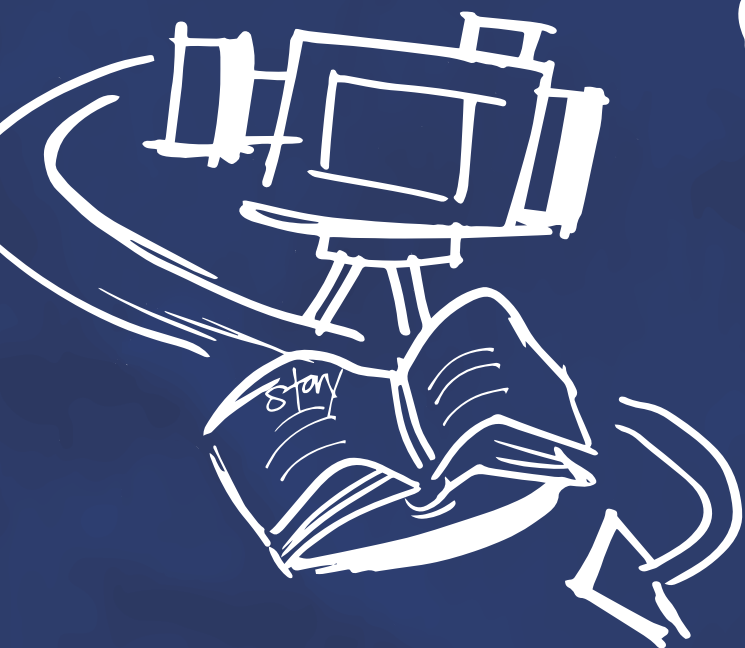
Do your research, and come up with a list of questions, and a few possible follow-up questions.

### Focus on your interviewee's angle:

Any documentary filmmaker will tell you that everyone's favourite subject is himself or herself. Ask about their view.

### Listen up!

An interview is more than just reading a laundry list of questions. Listen to the answers, and react. Don't be afraid to ask for clarification. Be ready to wing it!



**Focus on feelings, not facts.** It's better to ask someone why toxic waste worries them, than why is toxic waste bad. The more human interest in your story, the more viewers will relate.

**Get them to look at you.** Interview subjects should never look straight into the camera. That looks off to the viewer. Stand just beside the lens, and ask your guest to look at you.

**Try different frames:** Use different angles for some variety. E.g., shoot a wide shot for general questions, a medium shot for more specific questions, and a close-up for dramatic effect.

**Do it in a quiet place.** Make sure you can hear the person clearly. Background noise like traffic is very distracting.

**Capture some B-roll.** Try to capture your guest doing something: walking down a street, answering the phone, or looking out the window. Don't forget this!

### Step #7: Get Your Pictures

Making a video isn't the same as taking a picture, but some of the tips in the *YRE Photography 101* will definitely help. Check it out [here](#).

## Pro Tips

**Shoot moving pictures.** It's called "motion pictures" for a reason... Nobody wants to watch a video of something perfectly still. Show some movement on screen.

**Shoot with 5-second book-ends.** Start your scene 5 seconds after turning the camera on, and keep rolling for 5 seconds after you switch it off. This will give you a solid chunk in the middle.

**B-roll and Cutaways.** Some of your video will be used over an interview soundtrack. If you are shooting an interview about litter in front of a recycling plant, get a few shots of the building (this is

called **b-roll**); then get a few shots of your interviewee from a different angle, close-ups of their hands, etc. (these are called **cutaways**).

**Move your camera.** Not up and down, or around in circles. If you want to show a stationary object, move the camera slowly from left to right to get a pan motion effect, or from the sky to an object to create a tilt effect. Or have your parents drive by, so you can shoot through the car window. Or place the camera on an escalator. Be creative.

**Beware of moving the camera too much.** That will just make the viewer dizzy...

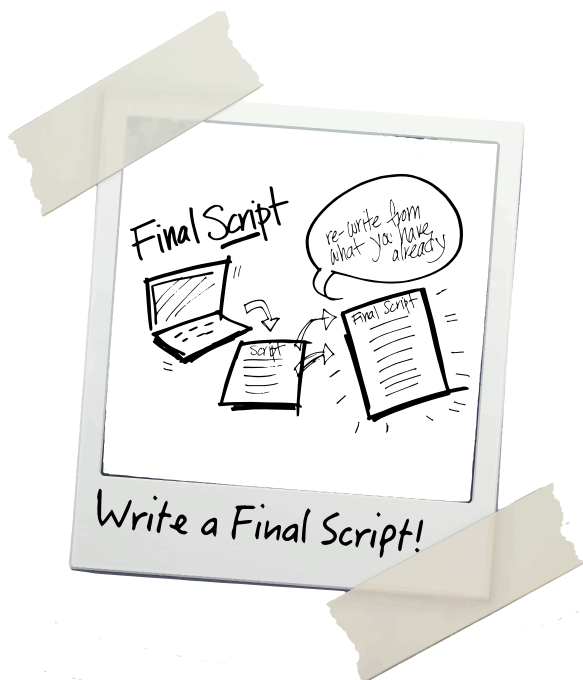
## Step #8: Write your final script

The difference with video is that things move. Cars, animals, the passing countryside, a recycling plant all move, even if it's just with the wind. And your camera can – and should – move, too!

You're going to edit things down, so you don't need tons of video, but you do need to get different shots and angles. And you need to ensure you get a solid 5-10 seconds per shot.

After you're done filming, you're almost ready to edit. Revise your script one last time to reflect what you actually shot. This is called an **assembly script**, or a **paper edit**, or **editing script**.

Writing a paper edit starts with a thorough revision of everything you shot. Sit down and watch everything. Transcribe the important parts, take notes of where things happen, and



log the **timecodes**. Once you have these notes done, you'll know exactly where to find each shot.

If your film and your script include narration, ensure it contributes to move the story forward. Keep it short and to the point, use short sentences, and action verbs.

## Step #9: Editing

It's time to get cracking! Pull the chunks of your film together into the timeline of your editing software, in the order you have on paper. Record your narration before you get to this stage.

Lay it all out. It's going to be messy at first, but that's fine. Editing is about

cutting out the boring parts so that your story is short, succinct and interesting.

You'll find that you need fewer words than you expected. That's because a picture is worth a thousand words. A good shot of litter on the street or a waste incinerator will say more than many lines of narration about it.

Not everyone loves this part, editing really is where a film comes together, so give yourself some time, and take frequent breaks. A fresh eye really helps. It's not uncommon for a film's shape to change in the editing room — the shots you filmed for the beginning end up at the end, an interview gets dropped, and something you got by accident turns out to be the best part.



## Step #10: Do you need some tunes?

Music can make or break a film! Remember you are producing a (very) short documentary on a serious issue, so any choice of music will have to respect the theme. You may find music is useful for the opening or closing scenes. But don't overdo it.

You should also make sure that you are allowed to use the music you chose. There are plenty of free tunes out there on the Internet. Do not use commercial music, which is copyright-protected. Check out free music and sound FX (Foley) on YouTube Audio Library.

Finally, when adjusting sound levels in your editing software, bring music levels down when people are speaking. Few things are more annoying than not being able to hear a speaker.

**For more filmmaking advice, check out these amazing links:**

[Top 10 Videography Tips \(Video\)](#)  
[10 Tips for Young Filmmakers](#)  
[10 Big Mistakes Documentary Makers Make](#)





# Videography Case Study I

International YRE, 2013

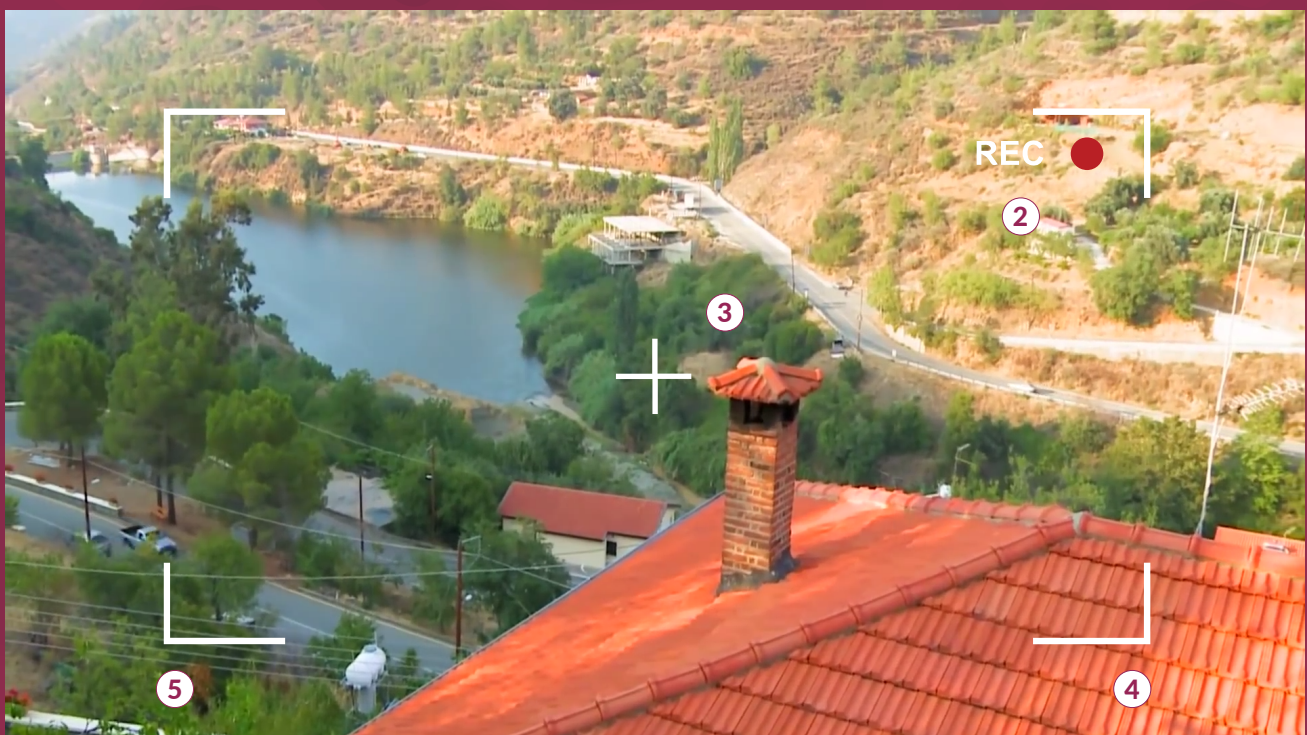
1<sup>st</sup> Place Winner

Cyprus

## EXPERT ANALYSIS

- ① **What's your story?** With a vague title like this one, the reader will wonder what the video is actually about.
- ② **Write a script and design a production plan:** Your script should include sound references and visual cues, so you know what to shoot later.
- ③ **Get your pictures — Perspective and Rule of Thirds apply to video as well:** When capturing B-roll in a moving shot, practice ahead of time. Be sure to follow your shot, and break it only once stops. Your final, stationary shot should now respect the Rule of Thirds, and other composition rules.
- ④ **Crew up!!!** When shooting a video outdoors near roads, you need at least an additional person. But you could use more (if you had a third person for this shot, s/he would do sound).
- ⑤ **Choose your equipment:** The author definitely needed a tripod for this diagonal tilt. A small GoPro Hero4 or a smartphone application might facilitate the capturing of this moment.

### ① Renewable Energy in Cyprus (click here)





# Videography Case Study 2

International YRE, 2014

3<sup>rd</sup> Place Winner

Israel

## EXPERT ANALYSIS

- ① **Snappy headline** = great, clear story!
- ② **The YRE student** is right to do **interviews** early on. Try to include them as much as possible.
- ③ **Perspective:** The focal point of this room is a white dot on the wall. An ideal framing would possibly have kept the YRE student out of the camera...
- ④ **Useless text:** Remember, keep your video as short as possible. No need to thank an on-screen guest. Go straight to the point!
- ⑤ **Avoid nervous guests:** Tell your interviewee it's a "chat" not an "interview"; ask open-ended questions; focus on his/her thoughts about a subject; get them to look straight at you.

① Onshore Gas Plant ([click here](#))

