How to Make a Documentary Step by Step
Why make a Documentary?
Because...

The best sources of knowledge, inspiration, and enjoyment may be found in documentaries, which tell important, often untold stories and raise awareness to a wider audience. They’ve also evolved into crucial parts of efforts to raise awareness about important social issues and serve as promoters for those campaigns.
It's been said that making a documentary is the most difficult and gratifying kind of filming a videographer can do. There are those who say all it takes to make a documentary is a compelling subject or concept, recording video footage, and a few people to watch it. Although an artistic eye and technical knowledge are necessary, there is unquestionably a great deal more that goes into making a film. To help you learn the ropes of documentary filmmaking, we have put together this handy guide.
Step 1: Conceptualize Your Topic and Find the Story
Consider a topic or subject that is near and dear to your heart. Your interest in making documentaries probably stems from an idea you already have. In other words, as long as there is a target demographic, the sky's the limit. The subject matter, mood, running time, and even filming style of your documentary may also be affected by the following considerations:

- What you hope to accomplish with your documentary
- Who you're trying to reach
- Location of Documentary Screening (web, broadcast, or cinema)
- Location for the Filming of the Production
- How big/popular you want the film to be
Step 2: Do Some Research
Now that you’ve settled on a topic for your documentary, it’s time to immerse yourself in research. Documentaries, as opposed to narrative features, must be founded in reality. There are possibly hundreds of other films that cover the same ground, so you’ll need to come up with a fresh perspective, collect new data, and investigate potential protagonists and antagonists. Remember to:

- Take notes as you conduct your research
- Ensure accuracy
- Organize preliminary interviews
- View related documentaries
- Choose a captivating, touching, and/or motivational stance.
- Include key points that will resonate with your audience
- researching Archives
Archives or Archival footage

Stock footage, often known as archival video, is used in documentaries to illustrate historical events or to provide more context without the need for filming new footage. This may take the form of both still photographs and old archival films. The concept of archival footage can be extended to include the photography of historical material from archives which are used to illustrate a documentary film and is also the main reason why archive footage is especially important to historical documentary filmmaking.
Types of Archives or Archival footage

manuscripts, letters, photographs, moving image and sound materials, artwork, books, diaries, artifacts, and the digital equivalents of all of these things etc.
Step 3: Select Essential Camera Equipment for Making Documentary
You'll need to put together your camera equipment before you can get started on your documentary. You can make your kit as simple or as complicated as you like, but here are some essential items:

- **Camera**: The camera can be a digital single-lens reflex camera, mirrorless camera, camcorder, action camera, or even a smartphone. Choose a camera that allows you to swap lenses and adjust the settings for maximum flexibility.
- **Microphone(s)**: You should have a shotgun mic at the very least, but lavalier mics are also used frequently by documentarians.
- **Tripod with video head or gimbal**: If you want your photos to look more polished and professional, you should invest in a tripod or other camera support.
Basic documentary Filming Equipment
Step 4: Plan The Production and Story Structure
Here's where you may get more specific about how you want to go about filming your documentary. Now that you have all the details you need, you can start planning your presentation. Establish the story's major ideas, the most interesting aspects, the main characters, interview questions, the narrative arc, and the overall plot.

You may need to capture entirely new footage and create situations in order to tell your story, or you may be able to use pre-existing footage and other resources. Keep these things in mind from the get-go so that you can organize everything you'll need for the smooth running of your shoot.
How to Prepare for a Documentary Interview

- Conduct a pre-Interview with your subject.
- Be aware of your interview setting.
- Determine your camera placement.

How to the Best Documentary Interview Questions

- Begin generally with open-ended questions.
- Remain flexible by flowing with the conversation and not your script.
- Avoid yes-or-no questions.
- Let go of preconceptions.

How to Conduct a Successful Documentary Interview

- Make your interviewee feel comfortable.
- Establish clear expectations.
- Don’t interrupt.
- Have the interviewee repeat your question.
- Take breaks.

Interview Tips
Step 5: Create a Budget
Although making a budget might not seem like a big deal for a short documentary shot by a single person, it actually helps the director evaluate how much of an improvement on the finished film they can make without going overboard. Consider the following when creating a budget for your next documentary, no matter how big or small it is:

- Studio costs and equipment
- Liability insurance
- Production crew
- Location Permits and Copyright Costs
- Props
- Catering
- Expenses in Advertising
- Funding Expenditures for Distribution

If you want a big budget, this is a good time to start looking for sponsors and organizing fundraising events.
# Budget Samples

## Budget Totsheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Budget Item</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Rate</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12:00</td>
<td>Development Staff 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>$100</td>
<td>$100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:00</td>
<td>Story &amp; Rights 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>$150</td>
<td>$150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14:00</td>
<td>Producer Staff 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>$200</td>
<td>$200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15:00</td>
<td>Director &amp; Editor 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>$250</td>
<td>$250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16:00</td>
<td>Cast 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>$300</td>
<td>$300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$1000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Production Budget

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Budget Item</th>
<th>Rate</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cast</td>
<td>Cast</td>
<td>$100</td>
<td>$1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crew</td>
<td>Crew</td>
<td>$150</td>
<td>$1500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production</td>
<td>Production</td>
<td>$200</td>
<td>$2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$4500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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*Note: Adjust rates as needed for specific projects.*
Step 6: Make a Shot List
Just like with major motion pictures, you'll need to plan out your shots with a storyboard or script. It is sufficient to have a general outline for the finished product, including the following: a list of desired story directions, a shot list, a list of locations and respondents, a list of first interview questions, and a plan for the opening and closing billboards. Make a list of the documents and resources you already have and pick which ones you want to record on video to incorporate into the digital editing process.

Do not worry about penning a screenplay for your film's story just yet. If you want to add voice-overs to your documentary to make it feel more personal to viewers, you should hold off on doing so until the finished product has been authorized, so you don't limit the filming of your documentary to a predetermined narrative.
Shot List/Storyboard Samples
**Script Samples**

**INT. CLASSROOM - DAY**

This is an example of a film script. What you are reading now is known as "action description" which describes what is going on in the scene visually.

This stretches across the width of the page, unlike dialogue. Action description should be broken into small bits, 2-3 lines in length.

Keep things like "close-up" and "long shot" out of the script. The script is about the story and the story alone. The director and the crew will decide how the story will be told in the most visually effective manner.

**CHARACTER**

My name is Character, and I am speaking dialogue.

**NEW CHARACTER**

(speaking)

It's speaking dialogue, too, and it's anything else like the line above should be kept to a minimum. These parentheticals can be used to signify emotion (angry), for clarification (he smiled), or to describe short actions that would not necessarily require dialogue action.

**CHARACTER**

Here's some more action! The Inciting Incident (a.k.a. the "Major Dramatic Question") should be established early.

The Inciting Incident is why you're writing the script; it's what the film is trying to resolve ("Will Dorothy get home?" in the Wizard of Oz, for example). For a feature length script (around 90-120 pages), the Inciting Incident will appear somewhere around page 15-17. In a short film script (around 10-10 pages), it will appear much earlier.

The length of the script determines when the Inciting Incident will be, so, the shorter the script, the earlier the Inciting Incident.

**CHARACTER**

Characters all have an objective/goal, and there will be

**NEW CHARACTER**

 Conte, CA 92645

Center for Writing & Communication

[Please visit www.filmscriptwriting.com/samplescripts.html for some examples of actual film scripts.]
Step 7: Secure Legal and Copyright Permits
Don't forget to look up the rules and regulations for documentaries before you start shooting or using stock footage. Specifically, this means securing permission to utilize footage, music, and any other content that is protected by intellectual property laws. Unless there's a compelling reason to use someone else's music, you should use your own music wherever possible to save time, energy, and money.
Copyright License Agreement

This Copyright License Agreement (this "Agreement") is made effective as of
between  

of  

In the Agreement, the party who is granting the right to use the Licensed Property will be referred to as "Licensee" and the party who is receiving the right to use the Licensed Property will be referred to as "Licensor." The parties agree as follows:

GRANT OF LICENSE ("License"). Licensor grants Licensee an exclusive license to use the Licensed Property over [insert duration]. In accordance with this Agreement, Licensee grants an exclusive license to use the Licensed Property in the following described geographical areas:

1. [Geographical Area 1]
2. [Geographical Area 2]
3. [Geographical Area 3]

Using the Licensed Property, Licensee shall create works (the "Work") in connection with the [insert purpose]. The Licensee shall own all rights to any works created or authored or adopted by the Licensee in connection with the Work.

RIGTHS AND OBLIGATIONS

Licensee shall be solely responsible for providing all funding and technical expertise for the development and marketing of the Work in which the Licensed Property is used. Licensee shall be the sole owner of the Work and all property rights in and to the Work, except, such ownership shall not include ownership of the Copyrights in the Licensed Property or any other rights to the Licensed Property, except as granted in this Agreement.

PAYMENT OF ROYALTY

Licensor will pay to Licensee a royalty which shall be calculated as follows: [insert royalty calculation]. With each royalty payment, [insert condition], Licensee shall send to Licensor a written report that sets forth the calculation of the amount of the royalty payment.

MODIFICATIONS

Unless prior written approval of [insert modification is obtained], [insert condition], Licensee shall not use the Licensed Property for any purpose that is unlawful or prohibited by these Terms of the Agreement.

DEFAULTS

If default on the part of Licensee in the performance of its obligations hereunder, including the obligation to make royalty payments when due, [insert consequence], shall have the option to cancel this Agreement by providing [insert notice period] days written notice to Licensee. Licencee shall have the option of preventing the termination of this Agreement by [insert condition].

This is a Rocket Lawyer document.
Step 7: Schedule the Shoot
There are a lot of moving parts in filming a documentary, so you'll want to make plans that will help you avoid any hiccups that could throw off your schedule or cause you to go over budget.

When planning the shoot, keep the following in mind:

- Arrangement of travel plans for on-location shoots
- Cast and crew call times and assignments
- Scheduling of responders' interviews
- Collecting the necessary permissions to record preexisting materials and documents
- Developing contingency plans
- Filmmaking and editing timeline
## Production Schedule Sample

### Shooting Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day/Date you will film</th>
<th>Scene #</th>
<th>Interior/Exterior</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Shot Description/Summary</th>
<th>Characters Cast in the scene</th>
<th>Special Equipment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday 19/04/16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Exterior Day</td>
<td>Outside</td>
<td>Combo of close-up shots and mid shots - following Gottfried on his way to college</td>
<td>Gottfried</td>
<td>Camera Tripod Voice Recorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday 19/04/16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Exterior Day</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Mid shot - addressing college life and what he aims for</td>
<td>Gottfried and maybe friends</td>
<td>Camera Tripod Voice Recorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday 19/04/16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Interior/Day</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Tracking shot - Following Gottfried around college and going to lunch, dudus and chilling</td>
<td>Gottfried, friends and teachers (few)</td>
<td>Camera Tripod Voice Recorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday 19/04/16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Interior/Day</td>
<td>Studio</td>
<td>Full body shot - Gottfried asking about his options, why he took them and what he wants to do</td>
<td>Gottfried</td>
<td>Camera Tripod Voice Recorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday 19/04/16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Exterior/Day</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Tracking shot - Gottfried leaving college then going to his friend's house</td>
<td>Gottfried and friends</td>
<td>Camera Tripod Voice Recorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday 19/04/16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Interior/night</td>
<td>Friends house</td>
<td>Wide shot - Gottfried and friends chilling</td>
<td>Gottfried and friends</td>
<td>Camera Tripod Voice Recorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday 19/04/16</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Exterior/night</td>
<td>Outside</td>
<td>Tracking shot - Gottfried making his way home</td>
<td>Gottfried</td>
<td>Camera Tripod Voice Recorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday 19/04/16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Interior/night</td>
<td>Gottfried's house</td>
<td>Wide shot - Gottfried going into his house</td>
<td>Gottfried</td>
<td>Camera Tripod Voice Recorder</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Production Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Scene Description</th>
<th>Characters Cast in the scene</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15/01/2011</td>
<td>10am</td>
<td>Opening scene</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Road side</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17/01/2011</td>
<td>10:30 am</td>
<td>Car scene/getting out the car</td>
<td>Marvin, Lewis, David and Danielle</td>
<td>In the car</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21/01/2011</td>
<td>1pm</td>
<td>Walking around the woods</td>
<td>Marvin, Lewis, David and Danielle</td>
<td>Woods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23/01/2011</td>
<td>11am</td>
<td>Couple making out</td>
<td>Marvin and Danielle</td>
<td>Woods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24/01/2011</td>
<td>1pm</td>
<td>Killer Stalking Victims</td>
<td>Killer</td>
<td>Woods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28/01/2011</td>
<td>12pm</td>
<td>Car killing scene</td>
<td>David and Killer</td>
<td>In the car</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/02/2011</td>
<td>1pm</td>
<td>Chasing scene</td>
<td>All characters</td>
<td>Woods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/02/2011</td>
<td>2pm</td>
<td>Lost in the woods</td>
<td>Marvin, Lewis, David and Danielle</td>
<td>Woods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/02/2011</td>
<td>11am</td>
<td>Editing and Re-Shoots if needed</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Call Sheet Sample
Step 9: Start Shooting
Consider your intended audience while picking out camera gear for your documentary. If you're going for high-definition footage, you'll need a camera with a high resolution, as well as a variety of lenses with different focal lengths. For example, establishing shots are essential for setting the atmosphere and keeping the audience from feeling lost in the story's timeline. Furthermore, you may wish to determine which filming techniques will yield the best results for your project.

Don't forget to talk to relevant respondents throughout filming in order to strengthen the authenticity of your message through their personal experiences. Gather all the relevant information and footage you can, from already-existing sources (like key pieces of evidence) and the real world (such as individuals going about their daily lives) to bolster your documentary.

Filming re-enactments can offer viewers a perspective of how important people felt at the time of a historical event and how much has changed for them subsequently.
Step 10: Edit Your Video
After you have collected the audio, video, and other digital media you'll need to make your documentary, you may begin editing the final video. Video editing software on a computer will allow you to input your footage in a sequential fashion. The first step in creating a documentary is to organize the footage you have collected in a timeline that makes sense. If you are going to perform the editing on your own, you might as well do it as the professionals do and incorporate both quick and slow sections to keep the viewer engaged.

After all of your material is organized, you can cut and edit it as necessary. Any video that isn't essential to the main idea and could bore the audience should be cut. Finalize your video by checking your scene order and adding transitional effects to make the cuts flow smoothly. The final step is to incorporate any additional text, graphics, old footage, current digital material, music, or voice-overs that may be necessary.
Editing Apps/software

- Adobe Premiere Pro
- Adobe Premiere Rush
- PowerDirector
- Videoleap
- Wondershare Filmora
- InShot
- iMovie
- Filmmaker Pro etc.
Step 11: Share Your Documentary
Now that you've spent so much time meticulously planning, filming, and editing, you can proudly present the fantastic end result of your efforts and creativity to the world. The next desirable dilemma you'll encounter is deciding where to exhibit your work. There will be more opportunities available to you if the quality of your final product is fairly high, but it may also depend on your budget.

You can get things started by offering a free screening to your closest friends and family. Gather feedback and have influential people write online reviews of your documentary. After that, you can promote your film for free on channels like YouTube and social media, as well as through traditional channels like newspaper ads and word of mouth. Making a teaser for your film that generates interest without giving too much away could also be useful.

With enough favorable buzz surrounding your film, you may want to invest in a professional distributor to help get the word out to a wider audience. Other places to look for recommendations and partnerships are local television stations and places that sell movies. You should also consider submitting your film to film festivals.
Step 12: Be Proud of your Work
So, you've put together this incredible movie, right? You have every reason to be pleased with both yourself and your work. You accomplished a difficult task in the form of making a documentary. Celebrate your success and look forward to your next project while also taking some time to think about aspects of the last one that didn't go quite as planned and ways in which they could be improved on in your future projects.
What have you learnt so far from this presentation?