AOIT Digital Video Production

Lesson 12

Creating the Rough Cut

Student Resources

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Student Resource 12.1

Note Taking:   
Recording Effective Voice-Over Narration

Student Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Use this worksheet to take notes to help guide your narration recording sessions.

1. What are the four elements of effective voice-over narration?
2. What criteria should you use to choose the narrator(s) for your project?
3. What are the criteria for a good recording location?

1. What is the best way to set up your microphone for voice-over narration?

Student Resource 12.2

K-W-L Chart: Video Editing Techniques

Student Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

| What I Know | What I Want to Know | What I Learned |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Transitions |  |  |
| Titles |  |  |
| Effects |  |  |
| Special Effects |  |  |

Student Resource 12.3

Reading: Video Editing Techniques

Video Transitions

**Transitions** are used to move from one shot to the next. There are many kinds of transitions, but they break down into two categories: common transitions and transition effects.

**Common transitions** are the workhorses—the ones people use day in and day out. They include:

* **Cut**: This is the most frequently used transition. It’s simple, and it’s good for seamless edits. A cut transition is created when one clip ends and the next one begins immediately afterward, with no image or sound overlap or transition effect. Your favorite action movie was probably made using many rapid cuts, which add to the dramatic feel and fast pace of a film or video.
* **L Cut**: This is the second most frequently used transition. It consists of two cuts, but the audio and video cuts at different times. For instance you are watching a shot of a classroom, hearing the ambient classroom audio. Then the voice over of the teacher comes in, and a few seconds later the video cuts and you see the teacher talking in an interview. L cuts help to create an integrated natural flow to the editing.
* **Dissolve**: A dissolve is a gradual transition from one image to another. The terms *fade-out* and *fade-in* are used to describe a transition to and from a blank image. This is in contrast to a cut where there is no such transition. A dissolve overlaps two shots for the duration of the effect, usually at the end of one scene and the beginning of the next, but may be used in montage sequences also. Generally, but not always, the use of a dissolve is held to indicate that a period of time has passed between the two scenes. Use the dissolve transition sparingly and only when I makes sense.
* **Fade**: This is when a shot fades into or out from a single color, often black or white. A fade usually signals the beginning or end of a scene, or film.
* **Wipe/Push/Slide**: This is when the scene on screen gives way to a succeeding scene utilizing movement, such as when a moving object within the scene blends with a similar movement in the succeeding scene. A clichéd example is an actor approaching the camera to obscure the scene and another walking away from the camera in the next to reveal the succeeding scene.

All other transitions are grouped as **transition effects**. These include pushes, page peels, and spirals. Look through your editing system and see which transitions come with the software. Additional transitions for your system may be available online.

Go ahead and experiment with transitions, but keep in mind that overuse of transition effects may distract the viewer and can take away from the overall effectiveness of your shots and visual flow. If you choose to use a transition effect, be sure it adds to your storyline or the visual meaning of your video. For example, you may find the occasional use of a transition effect in a project that has a light, comic theme to be helpful in providing a playful quality. Don’t use a transition just to play with an effect that looks cool—always make sure there is a reason for the type of transition you have chosen. When in doubt, always use a cut.

Titles/Graphics

**Titles** are most often used to identify a person, a place, or an idea. They are also called *title cards*, *lower thirds* (when identifying a person), *credits*, *text slates*, and *text screens*. Here are some ways you may use titles:

* **Open**: Your video open can include a number of elements: video, stills, music, and so on. Most opens include some kind of title giving viewers the video’s name and a few other significant facts. While feature films often include a complex set of titles in the open, a documentary’s open usually is much simpler.
* **Interview Identification**: These titles tell the audience who they are listening to and/or watching. These titles are also called *lower thirds* (because they usually appear in the lower third of the screen) or *supers*.
* **Segment**: Some films or videos may be broken down into subsections. You may choose to create a title for each section, similar to the chapters of a book. These segment breaks are usually called *interstitials* or *bumpers* and are often accompanied by visuals or motion graphics.
* **Close (Credits)**: Most videos or films close with some kind of text screen providing information on who made the project, the copyright, and other details the audience might be interested in. Avoid scrolls or rolls, as this often has a flicker/strobe on digital video. White text that fades in and out for each new piece of information on a black background is the simplest and most common option for credits on digital video.
* **Subtitles**: Some films or videos will be designed for viewers who speak languages other than the one used in the film. Subtitles give the audience an understanding or translation of what is being said in the film’s primary or translated language. Subtitles are also used if there is a key scene in a film that is important, but it is hard to hear what the people are saying because of poor audio quality or background noise. Subtitles for hearing impaired viewers are called Closed Captions.

At its most basic, a title is text over a solid-color background (see Figure 1). However, a title can be as elaborate and interesting as the creator’s imagination and time allow (see Figure 2). The most important guideline is that the title for a video must be *very* legible. TV monitors have poor resolution, and people generally sit far from the screen, both of which make reading titles difficult.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| perfume_w |  | perfume |
| Figure 1. A simple title (Note: Lines represent title-safe/action-safe guides.) |  | Figure 2. A more detailed title (Note: Lines represent title-safe/action-safe guides.) |

Here are some general tips for titles:

* The text on a title should be white on a very dark background, or very dark on a white background. It’s possible to use colored graphics and designs around the edges as long as the text has strong contrast.
* Titles are easier to read if they are done in a sans-serif font like Helvetica or Arial. (These fonts do not have curly edges.)

Titles should be large enough to be read by anyone. It’s good to do a bit of experimentation. Make sure the font size is big enough that you can easily read the text from six feet away with regular full-screen playback. Don’t forget to use your title-safe guides so that part of your title doesn’t get cut off during playback.

* If your software offers it, add a small drop-shadow to titles. This helps separate the title from the background, especially if a title is displayed over a video clip. You can see an example of a drop shadow title in Figure 2.
* Make sure that titles remain on screen long enough to be read. For a lower-third title, this is a minimum of five seconds. A good rule is to leave it onscreen long enough that you yourself can read through it twice. Also, if you display titles over moving video, you may need to add more time to help viewers read it.
* Use a video clip with space for the title, such as a clip where dark letters will fit over the sky. You may also need a matte layer to put over the video to help the text stand out, such as a solid or semitransparent bar of color that goes on top of the video but underneath the text.
* Keep text short, concise, and to the point. Keep the number of words to a minimum.

Editing Software Effects

There are many techniques editors can use to add **effects** to a film or a video. Editing software packages vary in the number and kinds of built-in effects they offer. Check your manual to see which options your software provides. Additional effects can be bought or may be available for free as downloads from the Internet.

Remember not to overuse effects. Not only do they take a lot of time and computer power, but from a storytelling perspective, they can distract your viewer from the topic of your video. The following are a few effects that are included in most editing software packages, and details on how they are commonly used:

* **Still Motion Effects**: Many documentaries give life to still photographs by slowly zooming in on subjects of interest and panning from one subject to another. For example, in a photograph of a baseball team, you might slowly pan across the faces of the players and come to rest on the player the narrator is discussing. The effect can be used as a transition between clips as well. For example, to segue from one person in the story to another, an editor might open a clip with a close-up of one person in a photo, and then zoom out so that another person in the photo becomes visible. This is especially useful when covering older subjects where there is little or no available film, or when discussing the past and using old photos. The zooming and panning across photographs gives the feeling of motion and keeps the viewer visually entertained. This technique is sometimes (for example, in iMovie) called the “Ken Burns effect,” after a director famous for pioneering the effect.
* **Video Motion Effects**: Motion effects allow you to speed up or slow down a given shot. Beginners often record shots too quickly, moving the camera too much or bouncing it and panning jerkily. The ability to slow down or smooth out the motion of any shot or clip can add polish to your video. While you can take a very short shot and make it more usable by slowing it down and making it longer, it can appear amateur. Try using a stabilizing effect to smooth the shot instead. Speed-ups also may be created to fit an action into a specific time frame. If it takes someone longer to do an action than the narration allows, often a slight speed-up will help and go unnoticed. Motion effects are usually described as a percentage of the original speed. For example, 100% is the natural speed of a given video, 50% is twice as slow, and 200% is twice as fast. Some cameras allow for motion effects when shooting. It is always better to plan for motion effects in the field. Often professionals shoot a scene at normal speed and then again in either time lapse or slow motion. Bear in mind that if you speed up shots, they will appear especially jerky if shot handheld. If you are planning to speed up a shot, to show time passing, for example, use a tripod and do not move the camera (keep it locked down) while recording.
* **Aged Film**: Most editing software will let you add apparent scratches, dust-like specks, and other “noise” that will make footage appear older than it is. This can be useful if particular scenes are flashbacks or if you are trying to make a clip or shot seem old-fashioned because the interviewee or narrator is referencing something that happened in the past.
* **Black-and-White/Tone**: Most editing software will let you remove the color from footage you’ve shot. This is an artistic choice that can be used to enhance very emotional scenes, evoke a sense of history, or signal to the viewer that the footage is a flashback or dramatization. In addition to black-and-white, sepia (brown) or other color tones can be added for effect. Coupled with this are other color effects through which scenes can be “warmed up” or “cooled down.” The saturation can be toned down or the contrast boosted; the chroma can be lifted to enrich the look of a scene, lifted in some elements of an image, removed from all but one object in a scene, and so on.
* **Letterbox**: Letterboxing is the transfer of widescreen films to video formats while preserving the original aspect ratio. Some video creators who have videos shot in standard definition (not widescreen) choose to use the letterbox horizontal bars above and below their video project to evoke a cinematic feel.

Special Effects and Visual Effects

Special effects (abbreviated SFX) and visual effects (abbreviated VFX) are used in the film, television, and entertainment industry to create scenes that cannot be achieved by live-action or normal means. They are also used when creating an effect by normal means would be too expensive. For example, it would be extremely expensive to show the construction of a 16th century castle or the sinking of a 20th century ocean liner, but either can be simulated using these types of effects.

Special effects are visual illusions created exclusively with in-camera footage, whereas visual effects are created entirely in post-production and then integrated into the in-camera footage. Today, almost all visual effects are created using computer-generated imagery (CGI).

Special effects use either optical or mechanical techniques to film things that aren’t real. They only use elements that exist physically and can be filmed with a camera. One common technique for optical SFX is the use of multiple exposures, rear projections, and mirrors to place elements together that are not actually being shot together. For example, by using multiple exposure passes in front of a rear projection of a scrolling moonscape, the same actor could walk beside himself on the moon.

Mechanical SFX involve the creation of on-set elements that are real and filmable but did not exist prior to their creation by the filmmakers. Wind fans, fog machines, artificial rain, and other atmospherics are considered mechanical special effects, as are on-set pyrotechnics (explosions and fire), breakaway doors, prosthetic makeup, and special props and models. These techniques involve the creation of physical elements that can interact with the actors on set and be filmed.

Visual effects are techniques for creating and manipulating imagery outside the context of the live-action set. These effects can be used to enhance previously filmed elements by adding, removing, or enhancing objects within a scene. Combining footage shot at totally different locations in an optical printer (compositing), isolating elements for compositing, and inserting backgrounds behind characters are considered VFX. Insertion of animated characters into live-action settings is also a visual effect.

The use of CGI to create visual effects is built on foundations laid by matte painters and hand animators before the advent of computer graphics. While today’s techniques may be more sophisticated than hand painting, the end goals are the same: adding backgrounds and characters that never existed in the real world.

Compositing

The art of **compositing** is that of combining two or more images, or elements of two or more images, together into one seamless shot. This can be done through green screen/blue screen, optical printing, and rotoscoping. Nowadays, compositing is usually done digitally and often involves the incorporation of 3-D models. Visual effects artists can trace an object in a shot, and software such as Nuke, Maya, or Adobe After Effects will track the object throughout the duration of the clip. The object can then be extracted from the shot and placed in another shot, and the edges can be softened or the “layer” colorized to match its new environment.

Compositing is done in layers using programs such as Adobe Photoshop for still images or Adobe After Effects for moving images. Individual layers, each with some transparency, are added on top of each other to create a final image. Some of each of the layers must be partially transparent so as to blend with the other layers and not dominate the full frame.

Special Effects Animation

Also known as *effects animation*, **special effects animation** is a specialization of the traditional animation and computer animation processes. Anything that moves in an animated film and is not a character (characters are handled by **character animators**) is considered a special effect and is created by **special effects animators**. Effects animation tasks can include animating cars, trains, rain, snow, fire, shadows, or other noncharacter entities, objects, and phenomena, such as magical effects.

Sometimes, special processes are used to produce effects animation instead of drawing or rendering. Rain, for example, has been created in Disney films since the late 1930s by filming slow-motion footage of water falling in front of a black background, with the resulting film superimposed over the animation.

Among the most notable effects animators in history are A. C. Gamer at Warner Brothers Cartoons and Joshua Meador, Cy Young, Mark Dindal, and Randy Fullmer at the Walt Disney Feature Animation studio. Probably the most famous creator of special effects animation is Ray Harryhausen, known for his work in such films as *Jason and the Argonauts* and *Mighty Joe Young*. An influential team working today is at Pixar, the studio that created *Toy Story*, *Cars*, *Finding Nemo*, *WALL-E,* and *Up*.

Special effects animation is also common in live-action films to create certain images that cannot be traditionally filmed. In that respect, special effects animation is more commonplace than character animation, since special effects of many different types and varieties have been used in films for more than a century.

There are many low-budget, innovative ways to get special effects without the use of CGI or other expensive, specialized processes. To get some ideas, watch the “Matrix Ping Pong” video on YouTube. With some creativity and experimentation, there are endless possibilities.

Student Resource 12.4

Workflow: Starting the Rough Cut

Pre-Editing Checklist

Before you begin editing, check that the following items are completed:

* The outline is complete and final.
* The time codes of your best video clips are identified.
* All assets are individually prepared as needed (cropped, corrected, etc.).
* All assets are organized in bins for easy access.

Steps for Building a Timeline

Follow this step-by-step progression to build your timeline:

1. Open a new project timeline in the video editing program.
2. Bring in any interview clips. Cut and trim the interview clips according to your outline, and insert them into the timeline.
3. Bring in any other critical audio (not background music or sound effects). Cut and trim it according to your outline.
4. Bring in video and still images. Place them in the timeline to cover any critical audio. Be sure to make use of your establishing shots. Also, whenever possible use cutaways to cover awkward video moments with interviewees and to add visual interest during longer interview shots. Remember, the audience often needs a break from wall-to-wall talking, so leave a little room after big statements and conclusions in each section, and bring up the music and visuals in this “breathing room.” Consider opening your video with music and visuals before talking begins.
5. Review the timeline and begin refining the story. Adjust clips as needed. Move/add visuals to emphasize particular audio points.
6. Adjust the time that each still image is on screen. (Lengthen it to cover additional audio or to aid understanding, or shorten it to reduce screen time so as not to bore the audience.)
7. Add movement to still images for more interest (pan, zoom in, zoom out).
8. Determine what voice-over narration is needed, and then bring in the voice-over narration so that it works with the visuals to tell the best story.
9. Add transitions between clips. Use L cuts when appropriate to transition between talking heads and b-roll.
10. Add titles to identify interviewees.
11. Bring in background music and add it to the timeline.
12. Work on the opening and closing sequences.
13. Review the timeline and continue to refine. Adjust the audio levels of each clip so that all the interview and narration audio is audible and at the same level, and make sure the music doesn’t overpower the interview or narration audio. A general rule of thumb: interview or narration audio should peak around -12 decibels (DB), and music should peak around -20 DB.

Student Resource 12.5

Checklist: Rough Cut Editing

Student Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Use this checklist to make sure your rough cut editing is complete.

Story

* Are assets ordered logically, and do they help the viewer understand the topic?
* Do editing choices create a pace that holds the viewer’s attention?
* Do editing choices create a story with a clear beginning, middle, and end?
* Do editing choices help present a clear problem and solution?
* Have we used a good variety of assets?

Use of Video

* Does the footage add to the understanding of the video’s topic?
* Is the video edited so that there are no “flashes” or other visual glitches?
* Does the footage add to the visual interest?
* Is there proper coverage of each scene, including establishing shots and cutaways?
* Are the lighting, composition, camera work, etc., adequate in every shot?

Use of Still Images

* Do the stills add to the understanding of the topic?
* Do the stills add to visual interest?
* Have we used the right number of stills?
* Do the stills work well with the narration or sound bites they support?
* Do the stills look good on video (not blurry, too busy, or vague)?
* Are photos cropped appropriately for video?

Use of Graphics

* Do graphics have clean lines?
* Is all text crisp and readable?

Use of Audio

* Has the audio been edited so that it is clean and crisp, with no glitches?
* Does the narration sound natural?
* Do the interview sound bites sound natural?
* Do the sound effects and music add to the video’s overall effect?

Student Resource 12.6

Assignment Sheet: Voice-Over Narration

Student Names:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Directions: With your project group, work together to plan and implement your voice-over narration. Decide what equipment you will use, where you will do the recording, and which role you will assign to each group member. Your narrator will need to practice, practice, practice before the actual recording. Listen to your narrator practice as a group, and provide constructive criticism before the actual recording. Remember to review the assessment criteria at the end of this resource before you begin the activity.

Plan Your Narration

1. What equipment will you use for your narration?
2. Who is your narrator?
3. Who is the director for the recording of the narration?
4. Who is in charge of monitoring the narration?

Use These Tips to Evaluate Your Narrator’s Practice Runs

* Speak clearly and slowly, with good enunciation and feeling.
* Be relaxed and familiar with the topic (or get the script in advance).
* Sound conversational (rather than sounding like you are reading).
* Practice in advance, with a focus on any difficult names or other words.
* Don’t interrupt the recording (additional takes can be done after the initial one to deal with minor reading mistakes).
* Ask for directions at the beginning about the type of “read” the director is looking for (friendly, serious, dramatic, lighthearted, etc.).
* Make sure you are breathing in an easy manner and are comfortably seated or standing, with water handy.

Make sure your narration meets or exceeds the following assessment criteria:

* Script is interesting and engaging.
* Script matches the content of the footage, doesn’t repeat information already in the project, and conveys the desired point of view of the filmmakers effectively.
* Script is read clearly and slowly, with good enunciation and feeling.
* Speaker sounds relaxed and familiar with the topic.
* Speaker sounds conversational, not as though he or she is reading.
* Speaker shows facility with the vocabulary and phrasing in the script. He or she seems to have practiced before recording.
* Voice-over recording seems seamless, without unexpected pauses or interruptions.
* Speaker’s tone matches the content of the video and script.
* Script is well written and free of grammatical errors, and features appropriate vocabulary.