

# How to Shoot

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**Got a New Camcorder? Here's What to Do With It.** So there it is: A brand new camcorder. But maybe you've never shot any video before. If you're just starting out, there are some tips here that will help you avoid the distractions that can ruin your video.

## **Beginner Mistakes**

First, avoid the beginner mistakes that nearly everyone makes when they pick up a video camera. The worst offender is the constant zooming and panning that pervades every shot. Before you reach for that zoom control, think about why you're doing it. If you can't think of a really good reason to zoom or pan, don't. Instead of zooming, consider stopping tape and moving in closer to your subject. Then, you can edit it later. If you must pan (moving from side-to-side.... moving up or down is called a "tilt"), ***move slower than your instincts tell you to.*** Almost every beginner video has a pan that is so fast that it elicits laughter among the initiated.

## **Shaky-Cam**

Here's another common beginner mistake: Shaky-cam. Do yourself (and your viewers) a favor. If you haven't already, invest in a tripod, so your shots will be rock-solid and your moves smooth. ***(Note from KevinD: This (a tripod) is not often practical for us unless the cattle are in a controlled situation, but you can make your body into a tripod by backing up to a pickup, a fence post or a tree. It will keep your shots steadier, especially if you are a long way from the cattle and zoomed all the way in.)***

## **Headroom**

How many home videos have you sat through where everyone's heads are cut off? When you're taping, keep in mind that there's a phenomenon called overscan in nearly every consumer TV set, where it cuts off about 10% of the top, bottom and sides of your carefully-framed shots. Allow for that while you're shooting.

## **Lighting**

Keep in mind that when you look at a camera shot (or anything else, for that matter), you're actually looking at reflected light. Good lighting makes even lame camcorders look passable. A basic lighting setup would include a key light, placed close to the camera, a fill light, aimed at the subject and set up on the other side of the camera, and a back light, behind the subject, to set him/her apart from the background.

***(Note from KD: Obviously, the above doesn't apply to us, since we have to make use of NATURAL lighting. The best conditions for us are an overcast day. But when you're in the sun, make sure it's at your back when shooting. Also, do NOT "skyline" the cattle...shooting up at them with only the sky as a background. Cattle (especially black cattle) will look like featureless blobs. Use a background of: grass, barn, hillside...anything that will make the cattle stand out. This is especially true if there's snow around.)***

## **Shooting For the Edit**

***The best shooters are always thinking about how their shots will be used in the edit session. Stay on that shot about five seconds longer than you think you'll need.*** That way, you'll have more options in the edit session. That's the key to shooting for the edit: Allow yourself as many options as you have time to shoot. Give yourself (***and your editor...that's me! KD***) some options.

***(Note from KD: For the most part, and no matter what they may say, our customers seem to enjoy seeing themselves or their kids on television. Try to take a few shots of them so I can include them in the sale tape.)***

## **Close-ups and Backgrounds**

Here's probably the number-one beginner mistake, both in still photography and videography: ***The shots are all too wide. Get in there, close to your subject.*** I'm not talking about shots that feature nose hairs. But if you'll just move in a bit closer, and eliminate things in the shot that aren't imparting any information, your shooting will be a lot stronger. Remember, you're communicating, and the video frame is limited. You get to decide what goes into that limited space. ***Don't waste it by showing us an expanse of carpet or a huge blue sky*** The best side effect of this is,

**generally, the tighter your shot, the higher the perceived video quality** -- there's usually more detail that needs to be reproduced in a wider shot.

***(Note from KD: Translated for our needs, one-and-a-half or two head filling the frame will make your video look a lot better. Also, we don't need to check the hides for fleas....so make sure we're looking at an entire animal. If you can't see the head AND the tail in the frame, with some space left over, zoom out a little or back up.)***

### **Conclusion**

Use the tips included in this article, and I guarantee you that people will be impressed with your improved video-making prowess. You'll be surprised at how just a small amount of attention to the right details can make a tremendous difference in the ability of your videos to communicate your message.

***A couple of other notes from KD:***

***- If the video looks out-of-focus in your viewfinder, it will be out-of-focus on the tape. Most of you have cameras with auto-focus. Use that setting. If it's not working properly, change the setting to 'manual focus' and make sure the cattle are in focus in the viewfinder.***

***- If you see the time and date in the viewfinder, they will be on the tape. If the time or date is in the viewfinder, remove them by pressing the "TIME/DATE" button on the camera or go through the camera's menu to make it disappear.***

***- For each lot in the sale, we broadcast 2 minutes of video. To get this amount, I need at least 2 minutes of GOOD QUALITY video. To get that, you should shoot about 5-6 minutes for each lot. You'd be amazed at how many times I receive about 1 minute of video or less for one lot. I am as yet unable to re-create the miracle of the loaves and fishes.***

***- A good percentage of the cattle in the summer video sales will be calves, which are often scattered around a field so you have to shoot individuals. Please shoot about ten seconds of each individual, stopping between each one, with no wild panning around the field. With editing, I can make the individual shots work but I need something to edit with.***

***If you have any questions about shooting or anything else having to do with video production, please give me a call. Good luck and good shooting!***

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