**EDITING VIDEO**

Video editing is where you save the mediocre stories and make the good ones into award winners. Video editing is a sometime strange combination of visual theory and comprehension mixed with the know-how to use the technical software. Around the world we have taught people to be reasonable editors in just a few weeks, mostly because the training is focused precisely on television news.

There are many terrific capabilities in the new non-linear editing systems, such as Final Cut Express and 1Movie. But it is critical to bring back to the station enough material with which to tell the story. Enough shots—actually, enough good shots—are principal key to good editing. If you are missing the critical elements, it is very difficult to edit around the gaps in the story. But not impossible. In news we often use the spoken word to fill in for the missing video.

In the course of training you will get the basics in how to use Final Cut Express, which is a version of Final Cut Pro without some of the whiz-bang features you do not need for television news. Pay careful attention to how to use the software. The “help” function built into the software will explain most things.

But the intention in this section of the TIV handbook is to provide some theory about the how and why of story construction at the editing level. In the history of motion pictures, which came along at the end of the 19th century, the camera came first. Then filmmakers had to invent editing. They discovered that editing, which is all about time compression, worked because audience can see bits and pieces of a complete action and understand what is happening. Today because most people have seen movies and television, they have learned how to interpret what is happening from the key images that are presented and the way in which they are linked or sequenced. Editors cut routine and boring pars of the action out of the scene to speed up the pacing. The viewers’ imagination replaced the missing shots and created an illusion of continuity. We call this “Continuity Editing.”

The basic concept is to create an illusion of continuity while leaving out parts of the action that slow the film’s pacing. However, television news the sequence in which we shoot and capture material is rarely the same as the sequence of story. So, the reporter, cameraman and editor must pay careful attention to telling the story in a logical fashion so that the video can be arranged in a logical fashion, no matter in what order it was shot. For example, here is a scene of a social worker going to visit a client in an apartment building:

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| --- |
| The woman drives up to an apartment house in a car. |
| She gets out. |
| She enters the building and takes the elevator to the 5th floor. |
| She get out of the elevator |
| She walks to Apt. 502 at the end of a long hallway. |
| She knocks on the door. |

The action takes five minutes in “real time” to “screen time.” Here is an edit list that makes the action move faster but yet maintains the illusion of continuity (The number before the description or “long note” is the length in seconds and used in the sequence). Continuity editing compresses “real time” to screen time to hide the “pieces of time” missing from the sequence. As editors shorten, rearrange and inter-cut shots, they make a valuable creative contribution to the finished video project. The arrangement determines meaning, which is why it is so important to edit news video in a way that represents actuality. Imagine the alternatives from these two shots.

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| --- |
| 1. MS: A boy reacts with pain while looking into the camera |
| 1. LS: A girl firs a gun towards the camera |

Edited into 2-1 order, it appears the girl shot the boy. However, reverse the shot order (1-2) and a new meaning emerges: the boy is watching a shooting and emotionally responding. Just as you wouldn’t write a story by randomly arranging sentences, you do not the edit a video with randomly selected shots.

Let’s see what we can do with three shots. Imagine the visual effect of arranging these shot in these sequences: 1-2-3, 3-2-1., 2-1-3.

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| --- |
| 1. MS: A man jumps from an exploding house. |
| 1. MS: A fire breaks out in the living room of the house |
| 1. LS: The house explodes |

1-2-3: man jumps from a house seconds before it explodes.

3-2-1: a house explodes forcing a man to jump away from the fire.

2-3-1: a man jumps from a house after a fire causes an explosion.

2-1-3: because of a fire, a man jumps away just in time to escape.

If we can edit for alternatives with three shots, think of the infinite variations you could come up with using the material from 20 minutes of a field tape.

Every news story demands you decide shot order and length. In television news we often try to start with the most interesting or vivid visual images to capture the viewer attention. We referred to this in the “triangle approach” mentioned in how to write a story; pick the three best shots, the three best sound bites and the three key facts not covered by the video. From these nine choices it possible to gain a way of organizing the story that both explains the matter and captures the viewers attention. Remember the length of a story is not the key to its success. To be an effective television journalist you have to understand editing; how it shapes, alters and controls the flow and meaning of as tory.

**HOW TO EDIT PICTURE**

News editing is a basic approach video editors use to create stories from what is often unscripted spontaneous action. Obviously in some stories, such as a feature, you have more time to plan and organize the material you shoot. Consider the following material on a tape in from a murder scene.

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| XCU: knife on a street |
| CU: cop wearing gloves pick up knife |
| LS: Victim is loaded onto stretcher |
| MS: Man being handcuffed |
| Zoom In: Man being driven off in police car |
| LS: ambulance drives away |
| MS: cop questions witness |
| LS: crime scene |
| LS: cop car drives away |
| MS: blood pool on pavement |
| LS: crowd watches activity |
| MS: stretcher is loaded into ambulance |
| CU: crying relative of victim |

Notice there is no specific order to the footage. The videographer had no control over the situation. Events happened once and without warning. However, with the right shot choices, an editor can re-create the chronological sequence of events. Using the shots describe above, here is an example of an edited news sequence that creates the illusion of continuity:

VERSION ONE

CONTENT

|  |
| --- |
| LS: :07 crime scene |
| MS: :06 victim being loaded on stretcher |
| CU: :03 pool of blood |
| XCU: :03 knife on street |
| MS: :05 man being handcuffed |
| CU: :03 cop picking up knife |
| LS: :08 the crowd of spectators |
| MS: :06 handcuffed man put into cop car |
| CU: :10 stretcher loaded into ambulance |
| CU: :10 bereaved relative |
| LS: :06 ambulance driving off |
| CU: :07 cop questioning witness |
| LS: :09 cop car drives off |

The CU of the blood pool might be inappropriate for an evening newscast, but acceptable for the 11 PM broadcast. If the shots of the man being handcuffed show his identity, a legal issue is raised if he is later proven to be an innocent bystander. Sometimes we shoot the man from the back, or show details such as the handcuffs, his feet walking, the cop next to him, in order to keep his identity unclear.

The shots described above are in chronological order to show the event from beginning to end. For television news we would typically have several additional items to work with in telling the story. First, we would have sound bites from a policeman, from some of onlookers and from the family of the victim if we can determine who they are. Assuming we have we would ask if there are any snapshots or video (now that so many people have home video cameras) and ask if we can borrow those images of the victim.

Because stories often have multiple sides, there might be sound bites from people with very different viewpoints on what happened. It is the reporter’s job to try and understand the value of these perspectives and to make sure the story is fair.

Instead of chronological approach, let us add a few facts and see a different editing approach. In videotaped interviews, the police inspector says the arrested man is the husband of the dead woman. A neighbor says she saw a man jump from the window of the dead woman’s house just before the woman started screaming. A woman who identifies herself as the sister of the arrested man says the marriage was not a good one and that they fought all the time. The sister goes to her nearby house and brings back snapshots of the woman and her husband in happier times.

With this information, the reporter and the editor (or perhaps, in the new approach, the reporter editing his own video) decides to tell the story this way. It is still continuity editing but with some adjustments. Additional video described above is shown in boldface type.

VERSION TWO

(First we have to write the lead in for the anchor so that the story flows smoothly.)

For a husband and wife in the New Town neighborhood of Nairobi today their troubled marriage ended in tragedy. Our reporter Ken Tiven is just back from the crime scene and explains why George Smith is in jail tonight.

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| --- |
| MS: :05 men being handcuffed |
| CU: :03 pool of blood |
| LS: :07 crime scene |
| XCU: :03 knife on street |
| LS: :05 the crowd of spectators |
| XCU: :06 picture of woman and husband a few years ago |
| SOT: :20 Cop says stabbed in the heart and appears to have died instantly. She was the wife of the man we arrested. Cop says man doesn’t deny killing and says he had good reason to do it. |
| CU: :07 cop questioning witness used as B roll over cop interview |
| MS: :06 victim being loaded on stretcher |
| CU: :03 cop picking up knife |
| MS: :06 handcuffed man put into cop car |
| SOT: :15 neighbor lady says marriage was troubled and man seen leaving window |
| Zoom: :10 used to cover part of the woman’s interview as she describes window incident |
| CU: :08 bereaved relative of dead woman |
| SU: :10 standup be reporter which acts as a bridge between one side of the story and introduces the woman who claims to be the sister of the husband. |
| SOT: :15 Sister of husband says woman killed was not a good wife to her brother |
| CU: :08 stretcher loaded into ambulance |
| WS: :05 ambulance driving off |
| LS: :06 cop car drives off |

Total length: 2:29

The script matches the video. The end of the story contains the details for the funeral, if known, and when the alleged killer appears in court. The standup is safe regardless of how the story works out. The details on funeral and court appearance may not have been known while the crew was at the scene. There is sufficient video at the top of the story to weave in the basic who, what, where, why, when and how details. The sound bite with the policeman is essential because it allows you to write a hard version of what apparently happened.

There are many variations possible. There is never just one way to tell a story.

**ALTERING EXPECTED CONTINUITY**

Creating the “illusion of continuity” means editing based on what the audience expects – a logical, chronological story progression. But, good editors are masters at manipulating audience emotions. To do this, they break convention the audience expects. For example, consider this sequence.

WS: a girl is working late at night in her office. She hears ka knock at the door. We hear (but don’t see) the door open. She smiles, she screams.

Why? We don’t know. Where is the shot of whom or what just came in? What happens if we don’t cut to the expected shot?

The audience is left hanging with curiosity, fear, frustration and anger. Depending on story, the editor can reveal or hide the reason for the girl’s scream.

Here’s an example of editing in television news that frustrates viewers:

In a story about the introduction of copy-proof designs for paper currency, an expert holds up a new 100 Rupee note as an example. Viewers see him talking and holding the money, but they never get to see the bill up close or side-by-side with the old one. Obviously, they want to see the bill as the changes are being discussed. Unless you want to keep your viewers waiting for dramatic effect, show them what they want to see or they get frustrated. Good editors always remember their audience and what they expect to see next. Keep this in mind while editing, and your edit decision list (EDL) will almost compose itself.

**Controlling time**

In film and video, time is often condensed. The 90 minutes it takes a man take to get ready for a date can be shown in 14 seconds with 7 two-second shots:

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| --- |
| 1. MS: man talks on phone |
| 1. WS: man pulls cloth out of hamper |
| 1. WS: man’s shadow on glass shower door |
| 1. CU: Man blow dries hair |
| 1. MS: man pulls up his pants |
| 1. XCU: pants zipper is closed |
| 1. MS: man arrives at location |

If you want to collapse time even more you could cut from the end of his phone conversation to the man arriving at his destination. In practical terms we tend to use the dissolve of one image into another to indicate a compression of time or a change of place.

Although this edit is abrupt and destroys the “illusion of continuity,” the MTV generation easily accepts such leaps in time and space. They are TV babies raised on tens of thousands of TV commercials and music video that developed the jump cut into a new language of creative expression.

**Relational editing**

Editing not only control time but creates relationships between subjects that don’t exist in the real life. Relational editing techniques work on the human need to see a theme or connection in a series of images even if the pictures are random.

In the 1920’s Russian film makers Pudovkin and Kuleshov proved this principle. They alternated a MS of man staring blankly into the camera with a CU of a bowl of soup; a MS of a dead woman in a coffin; and CU of a little girl playing. To viewers, the man’s blank expression suddenly mirrored the emotions in the other images to the point of creating an imagined cause and effect between them.

Although footage of the actor’s face was the same, when the coffin footage came first, the audience thought the actor showed deep sorrow. When his face followed a CU of the soup, the audience thought he was hungry. And when he was edited to the shot of the little girl playing, the audience say the actor feeling parental pride.

The footage of the actor’s face has not real connection with the other shots, except the viewer’s imagination when seen in sequence. We mentally “project” our responses to the image into the actor and believe we know what he is thinking or feeling.

CONSIDER THESE SHOTS

WS: a man takes money out of safe

WS: the man gets out of a taxi at the airport

CU: the man loads gun

XCU: muzzle of gun fires three times

MS: woman covered with blood falls to the floor

The five images have nothing in common. But an editor can create different meanings out of the visual chaos by changing the order the shots. Just for the creative exercise, see how many interpretations of the action you can create by putting the shots in different order.

**Thematic editing**

A rapid, impressionistic sequence (montage) of disconnected images to communicate feelings and ideas rather than a story-telling sequence with a beginning, middle and end. This is something can often do inside of a story that has as its basic, continuity editing.

For example, in a story about a hostage situation between police and a man who has taken two children hostage inside of a school, this thematic approach is a way of creating the scene as a reporter tries to explain that for several hours there has been a standoff while some negotiations have apparently been going unseen by reporters.

This might be an impressionistic mix of all of the video of what people do why they are waiting: looking at something. Talking to each other, being apprehensive, the building, the cops, the cars on the street. Thematic editing is used in news features, music videos, feature films (especially action scene) TV commercials, and promotional production to create a mood or feeling rather than communicate specific information. Often the footage is cut to match the rhythm of a section of natural sound, and sometimes, music if it is appropriate to the story.

**Parallel editing**

Cutting back and forth between different actions or story lines, creates the illusion that all the events are happening at the same time.

Parallel editing enhances anticipation or anxiety. Intercut shots of three robbers blowing up a bank with shouts of police struggling to race the alarm warning on their computers and you create more excitement than if each sequence were shown consecutively.

When editor learned that viewers interpret parallel editing as two events happening at the same time, films were able to present more than one story at the same time. The length of the shots from each story line determines how interwoven the events appear to the audience. To make the events appear closer together in time, the editor merely shortens the shots.