

Tips for Future Filmmakers

Some advice for your National History Documentary

Choosing Your Topic

- Your topic should easily relate to the theme
- Pick a topic that relates to your areas of interest
- If covering a large, well-known topic, focus on one particular aspect
 - Bus Boycotts in Civil Rights Movement
 - Don't cover entire war, find one part of the war like a battle or person
 - Christmas Truce, WWI
 - Code Girls, WWII
 - Home front
 - Battle of Antietam, Civil War
- If your topic is a well-known person, narrow your topic to a specific part of their life or significant event
 - Eleanor Roosevelt's time as a delegate to the United Nation's General Assembly
 - Amelia Earhart and the creation of the 99's
 - Joan of Arc being burned at the stake
 - Booker T. Washington and the Atlanta Compromise speech
 - Crazy Horse at the Battle of Little Big Horn
- Be careful of or avoid topics with known conspiracy theories
 - JFK assassination
 - Death of Meriwether Lewis

I don't think that there has been a film that I've done that hasn't been influenced by libraries and archives.

Ken Burns

Before You Film

- Think about the story you want to tell
 - It is about telling a story, not just presenting facts
- Outline the events and arguments that will tell your story
 - Have a thesis statement and supporting arguments
 - Draw conclusions and analyze the information you present, don't editorialize
- Write a script (1 page is about 2 minutes)
- Edit your script

Researching Topic

- Look at all point of views
 - Suffrage and anti-movement
 - Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and George Wallace in Civil Rights Movement
 - United States and Russia/Soviet Union in Space Race
- Look for newer interpretations
 - Historians examine psychological and biological explanations for the Salem Witch Trials

While Filming

- Avoid gimmicks or "vlog" style
 - Remember this is a documentary
- Include an opening title segment (under 10 seconds)
- Include credits at the end
 - List the sources for your images and sound
 - Include anyone whose help was integral to your documentary
- Should be between 8-10 minutes

Other Tips

- Don't plagiarize!!!
- Cite your sources

Image by xkcd.com

- If presenting a fact that is not well known or “common knowledge”



According to Roosevelt's autobiography ...

- When quoting someone



Elizabeth Smith Friedman said ...

- Use high quality images
 - If it becomes pixelated in video, don't use it
 - Ask the institution for a higher quality version
- Speak with an even cadence and pace
- When recording audio, leave a few seconds at the beginning and end to help with editing
- Look up phonetic pronunciations of words you don't know
- If you're not comfortable in front of camera, don't use on-camera narration
- Don't use audio or video of recorded interviews if either is poor quality
- Keep interview clips short (under 30 seconds)
 - Treat like a block quote in a paper
 - Should be used to present unique facts or interpretations, not basic information

Helpful Resources

- TurnItIn.com
- Plagiarism.org
- [The Dust Bowl: An Unforgettable Farming Catastrophe](#)
- [Mental Disabilities From Cursed Beings to Equal Citizens](#)
- [The Pendergast Machine](#)
- [Jeannette Rankin: Pioneer, Pacifist, Peacemaker](#)