

Perform a Poem

Filming tips

Easy ways to get better films

With a little bit of thought and planning, you can really improve the look and feel of your pupils' videos. These simple suggestions for you or for pupils will help you to consider framing, light and sound and do justice to your pupils' great poetry performances.

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Things to consider when planning your film.
A few general principles:

Keep it simple - only include in your video anything (picture or sound) that adds to the meaning or mood of the poem.

Always assume the worst and then plan for it (so if filming outside, don't assume it will be dry – take umbrellas!).

The three stages in the filmmaking process:

1. Preproduction – the planning stage
2. Production – the 'shoot'
3. Postproduction – editing, where the final film comes together

People tend to give most thought to stage 2, but the more time you spend on planning and editing, the better your finished videos will be.

1. PRE-PRODUCTION

Planning for sound

You know what your soundtrack will be: a pupil speaking a poem. But you may decide to include some background sound effects (wind, running water etc). If you do this, avoid the background sounds playing simultaneously with the pupil's voice, unless the sounds are fairly quiet.

NOTE Pupils may suggest playing music in the background to their poems. If you do decide to do this, please be sure that you are not infringing any copyright rules. Perform-a-poem cannot advise about music copyright law.

Planning your picture

What do we see? As well as the pupil reading the poem, you may wish to include other shots that relate to the poem's content – if you are confident that you can edit different shots together at the editing stage.

You could ask your class to suggest music videos they like and analyse them together in terms of how images relate to lyrics.

Storyboard

If you want to film more than one single shot of a pupil reading a poem, and include other shots of images relating to the poem, it may be worth making a simple storyboard.

The point of storyboarding is to think visually about what you will film and make some key decisions before shooting. It is easy to produce simple storyboard sheets. [linked to <http://www.supporting-ict.co.uk/resources/literacy.htm>] You or pupils can use these to draw simple pictures representing each shot.

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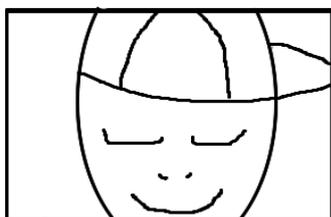
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Shot description and shot sizes

Most film shots are described in relation to the human face, as this is the most expressive part of the body.

Shots you are likely to use are:

BCU
Big Close Up



CU
Close Up



MCU
Medium Close Up



MS
Mid Shot



Other shots describe the camera position:

WS – Wide Shot

LA – Low Angle

HA – High Angle



Zoom shots

If you are going to be editing different shots together, it's good to vary the kinds of shots you use. Otherwise, you might want to try a very slow zoom in to the speaker's face as they are performing their poem.

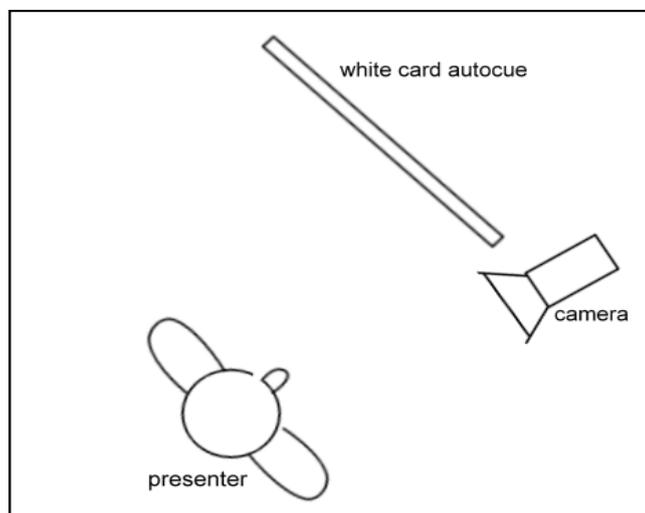
Zooming in and then zooming out quickly is a popular temptation for all new filmmakers. Avoid this at all costs. When you come to look back at your film all you will see is constant zooming, and this can have a nausea-inducing effect on the viewer! If you do want to use it, do so sparingly and know why (have a look at examples in films or TV programmes; it's used specifically to emphasise or underline a key dramatic moment, not as a haphazard gimmick).

Autocue

Autocue is the commercial name for on-screen scrolling script read by the presenter/newsreader, but unseen by the audience. Even if your performer knows their poem off by heart it is still reassuring to have the script in front of him or her to read from. You can make your own autocue by holding a piece of card next to the camera with the words written large enough for the performer to read from a distance.

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Locations

Where will you do your filming? You may choose more than one location for pupils' poems, but for each one here are some things to consider.

The most important things about your filming location are – good lighting (either electric or natural) and as little background noise as possible.

- *Is your location interior or exterior ?*
- *Is it available when you want to use it?*
- *Do you need to get permission to use it?*
- *Is it free from interruptions?*
- *What background noise or noises might you hear?*
- *Is the light constant?*
- *Is it uncluttered?*

Your production team

You will probably need a team of three for the filming:

The performer

- A camera operator (whether this is you or a pupil)
- A pupil to hold the autocue sheets

If you are lucky enough to have an external

microphone (see below), you'll also need a pupil to hold the microphone as near as possible to the performer (without the microphone being in the shot). Alternatively the performer can hold the microphone.

Equipment list

Of course, anyone can make a basic video by pressing 'record' on a cameraphone, webcam or video camera. This equipment list suggests ways you can enhance the quality of your films. You may even need further equipment, such as a boom pole, depending on how ambitious your plans are.

Autocue – large sheets of white card and marker pens.

Video camera with a battery or mains lead – plus mini-DV tape, memory card or internal hard drive to record onto.

External microphone – if your school owns an external microphone and you can plug it into the video camera you're using, this will improve the quality of sound in your videos. The other advantage is that you can have the microphone close to the performer even if the camera is further away. If you don't have an external microphone, the built-in microphone on your video camera will also do the job.

Headphones – if you can plug headphones into your video camera, it is much better to use them than not bother. Recording the clean crisp sound of the spoken poem is the first priority in making your videos. Unlike the human ear most microphones do not screen out background sound. So listen through the headphones to what the microphone picks up – you'll be surprised. The other advantage of using headphones

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is that you will immediately be aware if the camera has stopped recording for any reason.

Tripod – if you can get hold of a tripod, this will give you steady, shake-free shots, but this is not absolutely necessary.

2. PRODUCTION

Instructions to your team

During the 'shoot' you, the director, will need to give very clear instructions. It helps to have separate instructions for the performer and for the camera operator.

When you begin filming it is important to start recording for a second or two before you call for 'action' and to continue recording for a few seconds after you call 'cut'. So make sure everyone understands your instructions. You can decide on your own terminology, but how about:

1. '*Silence please, we're going for a take*' (as opposed to a rehearsal). Calling for silence is a good way of getting everyone's attention as well as making sure you don't record unwanted background noise.
2. '*Run camera*'. Ask your camera operator (if this is a pupil) to then reply: 'camera running and recording'. Only then can you go on to the next instruction.
3. After a second or two, and when ready, call '*And... action!*'. The 'and' is a final cue to the performer letting him/her know it's almost time to begin.
4. '*Cut*' at the end of the recording is an instruction only to the performer.

5. '*Stop recording*' is an instruction a few seconds later to the camera operator (you may wish to keep going in which case use an instruction like 'keep running'). Before stopping the recording the camera operator should put his or her hand in front of the lens. This records a piece of black. If you then go on to re-record the scene these black spaces are useful in finding the end of each 'take' when it comes to editing.

You could also make a simple clapperboard and write down or chalk up each 'take' on a piece of cardboard, which you record at the start of the 'take'. If you end up with three 'takes', having the 'take number' (T1 / T2 / T3) recorded at the start of each one is very helpful when editing.

Sound recording

If you are using the inbuilt camera microphone, set up your camera no further than MS – Medium Shot distance from your performer. The closer the camera is to the performer the better the sound quality will be, but you will have less flexibility in choosing the kinds of shot you use.

Lighting

Outdoors: It's best to avoid having your performers stand in direct sunlight. It creates burnt out 'high spots', casts strong shadows and makes people squint. Instead, place your performer where the light is more evenly distributed and use reflected or overcast light which is uniform and shadowless.

It is easy to convert direct to reflected light. Use white card or a styrofoam sheet as a reflector board, reflecting the sun's light, set up in front of the performer (the autocue card might double up here).

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Indoors: Fluorescent light is shadowless. Ordinary lightbulbs tend to give an orange colour cast. Your camera may have an indoor/outdoor setting option on the menu – if so, use the indoor setting to avoid this.

Other lighting considerations: In general, dark or deeper coloured backgrounds make faces stand out more. Blues and greens are often used in studios, as they are the colours furthest from skin tones.

Good luck with your filming!