

GCVCC Editing Workshop July 2006

It is every video maker's ambition to make a video that holds an audience's attention. Today we are looking at video editing as a creative skill - it needs to be practised and developed in your own individual style. Good editing is all about pace and timing – the idea is to keep the visual message interesting, while matching the timing of the shots to suit the style of the video.

Flow and continuity are the editor's primary concern.

The mechanical part of computer editing can vary considerably, depending on the editing equipment you have. Most editing systems do the same things, but in slightly different ways, so we all need to learn our own system. Within our Club people use many different systems – from fairly basic ones right up to semi-professional programs, and it can be a little confusing, to say the least, for a newcomer to computer editing to try to decide which editing system to buy.

If you ask a Club member for advice he will undoubtedly advise you to use the one he uses, whether it be Premier, Vegas, Media Studio Pro or whatever – a salesman in a computer shop will probably try to sell you the most expensive!

If you have never edited on a computer before – don't rush into buying a program too quickly. Most people have a computer with XP on it, and within XP there is Windows Movie Maker, which is a very simple little editing program that you can try yourself out on for a start. Although it is very limited in what audio you can add, it is quite sufficient for you to edit up a little video with different transitions and either music or voice over. Nothing fancy, but with a little knowledge of the basic editing principles, this is sufficient to get an idea of what computer editing is all about. In this program you cannot burn the finished video to a DVD, but it can be exported back to camera tape to be played, You could also download trial versions of editing programs to see what they are like, and then, when you feel a little more comfortable with the idea of basic editing, you can choose a program which will cater to your needs – whether you want to just put your holiday experiences together, do some videos of the grandchildren, or get really hooked and go on to greater challenges.

However, the basic editing principles are the same whatever program you use. The best videos of course are those that have been planned before you even start to shoot, but, more often than not, and especially if you are new to video making, the shots are taken without any planning at all.

A first try at editing is often when you've been on a holiday trip and come back with hours and hours of video - it's hard to know where to start! Cutting out the bad bits isn't really enough – you might enjoy seeing every wobbly moment over again, but if you want your family and friends to enjoy what you have taken, it needs a bit more than that.

Don't try to edit up an "epic" of your whole trip – much better to break it up into a series of shorter videos of about 10 minutes or so. These don't have to be done in any strict chronological order – plan them to cover events such as a cruise down a river – a visit to a castle or whatever. This way you can choose to show your viewers a complete experience rather than a lengthy video that becomes tiring and have to chop it off when you can see they have seen enough, with the promise "I'll show you the rest next time!"

It's a good idea to look through your footage a couple of times before you start and

make up your mind just how you are going to go about breaking up your shots. Professionals use story boards – and a lot of programs have this facility built in - but this is not necessary with a holiday video. One way to do it is to run through your footage with the counter number up on the screen and jot down the numbers of the scenes you want to use. Then you can capture just the footage you need – it may be from several different tapes.(Don't forget to turn the counter off before capturing)

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As we said at the start, flow and continuity are the editor's primary concern. This means no jarring transitions from one shot to the next, and the visual story should lead you on smoothly. To achieve this it is often necessary to be quite ruthless with your footage – you might have great shots, but that doesn't mean you have to use every bit you have taken. Always **shoot** lots of footage, nothing is worse than not having the shots you want, but be prepared to leave a lot out when you edit.

The pace of a video is important – too many long drawn out shots will slow the pace down – fine if you are looking at tranquil country scenes, but not good if you are watching car racing - this needs shorter scenes to make the viewer feel the excitement. This doesn't mean that all short scenes should be used – you come back from a holiday with, say, great shots of jet boating on a river in New Zealand taken from a few different locations. If this was shown as it was taken, it could be very confusing to a viewer, and to make this an exciting and interesting segment, you will probably need to do a lot of cutting and re-arranging of scenes.

Developing a feel for the timing of the shots to suit the style of the video is something that comes with practice

The type of transition used between shots is important too – generally speaking the faster the action in the video the more straight cuts you would use – cross dissolves are more suited to a slower paced video. Don't fall into the trap of using too many fancy transitions – simplicity is always best - simple cuts or dissolves - unless you are doing a commercial or promotional video, when you can give full rein to your imagination. Cutting from one scene to another can sometimes create a jarring effect, some scenes just do not go together and this is where a dissolve will often give a smoother effect. A dissolve can also denote the passing of time

Before we go any further – here are a few editing traps to **avoid**

One of the rules that has come down the ages in movie making is not to use “jump cuts” This is where a person, object or whole scene seems to “jump” in position from one shot to the next. It can happen if you take a wide shot, then, without changing your position, zoom in closer and take another shot. Again, when a person walks out of frame and then appears in frame in the next shot.

Admittedly you do see these sorts of shots used these days for special effects, but the best advice is to avoid them.

Another sort of “jump cut” is where the horizon jumps up and down on the screen.

If you have these sorts of shots, break them up by putting in a close up or cutaway (that's if you have remembered to take them at the time – close-ups and cutaways are some of the most forgotten shots in video – train yourself to take them, they are an invaluable tool in editing!)

If a shot of a person walking out of frame can be followed by that same person walking into frame in the next shot, this gives a very smooth transition, but of course you would have had to remember to shoot that at the time!

Another trap to avoid is “crossing the line” – that is where a person or an object is seen in one shot to be moving in one direction, and in the next is moving in the opposite direction. If you take video from a moving boat, train or bus, looking from side to side, you will inevitably end up with some of this sort of footage. The same will happen if you are videoing a street procession and cross the road to shoot from the other side.

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It can be quite confusing to a viewer, and the only way to salvage this is to have appropriate cutaways between the conflicting shots. If you have taken a shot out of front of the moving vehicle or down the street, this will allow the viewer to realise that you have changed sides.

Also **never** cut from one pan to another that moves in the opposite direction. If you must include pans in your video, and used **sparingly** they are OK, a trick the professionals use is to dissolve from one pan to another, but making sure both pans are filmed at the **same speed** and in the **same direction** - this can give a nice flowing effect, but needs a bit of practice to achieve.

The progression of your shots is not the only way to achieve a flow to your video – commentary and music play very big part. Try turning off the sound on your TV while watching some of the programs and they appear very disjointed.

Ideally, you should have had a rough idea of what you were going to say before you even shot your video, but, as we said before, this rarely happens with holiday type videos.

A good commentary can smooth the jump between two apparently unrelated scenes. Here again it is all about pace – if it is a fast moving or exciting video, your voice and delivery should match this. I always find it best to write a rough commentary before even starting to edit up a video. This way you achieve a much smoother flow to your production.

I know with a holiday video this doesn't always seem the thing to do, quite often you end up putting down the footage first and writing the commentary to fit it, and this becomes a script-writing challenge. But, try to at least get down a few notes before you start editing. They may have to be adapted later, but it does give you something positive to start editing with.

If you have a voice to camera in your holiday video – a tour guide may be explaining what happens in some sort of demonstration – put his talk down, but then overlay shots

that you have taken at the demonstration to support what he is talking about, cutting back to him at intervals to remind people who is speaking.

Music of course plays an important part in setting the mood and pace of a video.

An audience shouldn't really be too aware of the music in a video – it should complement rather than overwhelm.

Don't use the same piece of music throughout a video unless it is very short - vary your music to suit the mood, although you can return to the same piece of music quite a few times if it suits the particular footage.

A different choice of music can give a completely different feel to the same footage

Good editing comes with practice. Watch some well produced TV documentaries and analyse them – how they mix long, medium, close-ups and extreme close-ups – note the length and style of shots, what shots are used for cutaways. See how they use link shots to change locations – such as a particular object in one scene, which might appear in a slightly different form in the next scene

Sooner or later of course, you will realise that all rules in video editing can be broken – but for a good reason.

The golden rule is – if it looks good, it probably is!

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