



Avoid These Five Shooting Mistakes

The difference between professional and amateur video work is obvious to audiences but is not always so obvious behind the camera. With so many things to consider, it's easy to overlook something while shooting that may be irreparable later. Your audience will know if the shoot was handled well or not by how they react to the images you present. Professionals have often learned by hard experience the consequences of failing to plan against the following five mistakes:

1. **Bad framing.** Nobody likes to see an actor whose head is cut off by the top of the video frame, but even fewer people like to see an actor with his chin cut off at the bottom. It's important to maintain good balance in the composition of the shot, but the somewhat experienced amateur tends to go to the other extreme by putting all the subjects smack in the center of the frame. That gets boring and the audience will see everything objectively. The professional follows the rule of thirds, keeping the subjects on the lines that divide the frame into thirds, keeping eyes on the top third and movement on the third opposite of the direction in which the subject is moving in order to keep open space in front. While this may seem simple, it is not as easy as it appears once the action begins. Practice following the rule of thirds and you will be able to keep your subjects interesting to watch.
2. **Too much zooming.** Most consumer grade camcorders have few effects built in but all of them have zooms so many amateurs tend to overuse it. If you pay attention to most of the stuff you see in films or television, the actual zooming is not commonly displayed. Home videos, however, are deeply infected with over zealous zooming and it weakens the production. Picture quality and audience interest remains when you track the camera in for a closer view instead of constantly zooming. The wide shot keeps the highest picture quality so try to use that whenever you can.
3. **Lighting.** The amateur videographer is 99% ignorant of how light affects the appearance of the subject on the screen. So much amateur video is so fraught with black figures with dark faces by windows or in front of the sunlight. A word to the wise: keep the strongest light source in front of your actor or subject for the best video quality. Photographers have a flash so they can mix it up but video isn't served by having backgrounds that are brighter than the subject. When forced to video a backlit subject, increase the exposure to totally blow out the background. Better to have a clear face and nothing in the background than a beautiful background with a dark subject.
4. **Sound.** Camcorders com with omnidirectional microphones built in but many videographers continue to shoot as if the sound from the front is the only audio that the camera will pick up. What they fail to consider is the fact that the microphone is picking up the planes overhead, the trucks on the nearby highway, the children playing nearby, and the wind. Cut out all the background noise you can before you start rolling tape because once that audio is recorded, you may not be able to clean it up in post production.
5. **No tripod.** Please, just use it. Get one with quick release plates so it doesn't slow you down much when you need to hold the camera but no human arm or shoulder will ever be able to compete with the steady, dependable, and strong shots that come from using a tripod. Some videographers are cocky and think they can handle it with their hands. They obviously have never participated in the production of a major motion picture. The cinematographer never holds the camera himself, he's not so incompetent as to think he can get consistent quality shots with his own arm.

