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Video Production Guide

This page is intended to be a resource for anyone planning to write and record a video project. Most of the information is based on the experience of working on the videos for the 2020 Accessible Publishing Summit; which included a series of tester demonstration videos, as well as recordings of the panel discussions.

This guide will continue to be added to as we continue creating video content and learning more about the process.

Writing and Pre-production

A detailed and organized plan can help ensure that everything runs smoothly throughout the rest of the production process. While there does not necessarily need to be a verbatim script written out beforehand, it is highly recommended that there is at least a detailed outline of the format and content of the planned video. This will be useful for the filming and editing of the video and help to ensure that everyone working on it is on the same track.

The following is a list of tips to keep in mind when planning and writing for a video project:

Clear and concise

Try and keep the message clear and concise when planning your project. It is important to not overwhelm the viewer with more information than they can absorb, so try and focus on the most relevant information you are trying to convey.

Collaborate on a Script

While planning and writing your video, do not hesitate to share the draft with anyone and everyone who will be involved in filming later on. This can help prevent any surprises down the road, as well as give everyone the chance to flag anything that may be difficult or not possible to achieve during the filming stage and allowing some time to come up with alternatives.

Piece by Piece

When writing and planning for a video of this nature, it can be very useful to break it down into several smaller segments. The videos should have a clear introduction, middle, and conclusion, with space to add breaks and title cards between each. Ideally, the script will have a number of natural breaks in it which will allow for the performer to pause and rest, rather than trying to perfectly read out a twenty-minute script in a single take. Choose a Run-Time In general, shorter videos tend to be more successful at holding a viewer's attention. Videos that are two to four minutes long have the

highest levels of engagement, whereas anything longer than twenty minutes tends to lose a number of viewers. As we are often making videos for a more targeted audience they will be more likely to engage in a longer video, but it is still best to keep it as short as possible while still conveying the necessary information.

Make a Production Schedule

Along with a script, a detailed schedule of what will be required for each day of filming will be very useful. Since many of our videos involve only one filming location and can often be completed in a single day, this schedule can be very basic. However, if we are cutting together a more complex video with different filming locations, this will prove to be a very important tool.

A production schedule should include information on details such as locations, scenes, equipment needed, people needed, contact information, and dates and times for filming. It is also useful to include information on various production timelines such as deadlines for the final project. Overestimate the Time Required As with most things creative, things can often take much longer than anticipated. When planning for your video always be sure to give yourself a large buffer of time to account for any unforeseen issues that may occur. You may find that once you start editing a video together that you actually need to go back and film certain sections again. Creating a video is a complex, multi-stage process, and it is important that you allow yourself enough time to not rush through any one aspect.

Determine Equipment Needs

A lot of our videos will be filmed by testers in their own homes and in many cases using their own audio and video equipment. Since most of our videos will be of a tester in one location and won't require a lot of movement and action, we should be able to get fairly high-quality video and audio from people's personal devices.

A good microphone is important, however, this doesn't mean you need to invest in an ultra-expensive, professional microphone. Gather all of the microphone options in your house, test them all out by recording yourself speaking on them or with a colleague over a video call, you may be surprised with which has the best microphone

The most useful piece of equipment would probably be a high-quality condenser microphone. Good audio quality could definitely be the one factor that pushes the quality of a video like this from "good" to "great".

Video is quite similar to audio – we suggest trying all your webcam/camera options to determine which gives you the best quality camera. What will help significantly with your camera is your lighting. Natural daylight is the absolute best option for lighting but may not be possible, the next best thing is soft lighting and much like audio and video, take a look at your lamp and lighting options in your office and home. It is best to have the lighting source either in front or beside you but never ever behind you. For positioning, ideally, you are looking into the camera straight on (so no one is peaking up your nose), and you are visible from the chest or shoulders up (think something like a headshot).

Rehearse

This can be one of the most important things you can do before officially starting to film your project. This can help flag a lot of issues and save a lot of time in editing and post-production. One method we have used to film demonstrations is via Zoom call, so it can be valuable to have everyone get together for a rehearsal Zoom call where you run through your demonstration.

It is good to try and do this as early as possible as it can then allow you the time to make any adjustments to the script and planning before jumping into the filming.

Recording and Producing

Once you are finished with the planning stage, there are a few different approaches to filming the project. One method that we have used successfully is to record a Zoom meeting of a tester demonstration. This can be a very effective method when filming someone with a visual disability, as there can be a sighted person in the meeting to act as a sort of “director” to help with things like camera framing and lighting.

Some of the demonstrations can be recorded by the testers on their own, in these cases it is important that they are in close communication with the person editing the videos. Footage should be sent over to the editor as soon as possible to allow enough time to make any edits or reshoot any footage if necessary.

An important thing to remember when filming digital content is that you do not worry about running out of film. When recording, do not hesitate to record as many different takes as you feel you need to get it right. As long as the files are well labelled, the editor will prefer to have too much footage rather than not enough.

When recording videos in multiple takes it can be useful to do something to signal to the editor that a take is starting or ending. One useful method we used was to have the tester say “begin take” or “end take”, followed by them doing a very pronounced hand clap as a visual cue to the editor. When using this method, be sure to leave a fairly long pause between these cues to allow the editor to cut around, it is easier to remove empty space in a video than trying to cut around something that ends abruptly.

Whichever approach you take, the recording stage should be done fairly early on to allow enough time for reshoots, editing, and post-production. These final stages are often the most time-consuming in the entire process, so it is important to give them enough space to be done effectively.

Post-Production

Once you have completed filming it is time to edit the footage together into one complete video. This is where all the planning you did in pre-production can really pay off, as things can get fairly complicated in this phase. Ideally at this stage, you will have some clearly labelled audio and video files which need to be loaded into video editing software to be cut together.

The software used for the NNELS tester demonstration videos was Adobe Premiere Pro 2020, it is an industry-standard software that comes with a number of complex editing features. While it was certainly nice to have all of these extra features, cutting together these demonstration videos only required some of the more basic features, most of which could be found in many cheaper and free video editing tools.

The following is a list of tips to keep in mind when editing a video project, they are based on experience with Premiere Pro but most of them could be applied to any video editing software:

Label Everything

You will likely be working with a number of different audio, video, and image files, so it is very important to clearly label them all to prevent confusion while editing. It can be very handy for the video editor to have everything broken down into segments, but less so if they all have generic file names that do not describe the content.

Putting the Pieces Together

Once you have all your clearly labelled media files, you will want to load them into your editing software and begin piecing them together in their logical order. Once you have everything arranged in the proper order you can begin trimming out any of the “dead air” from sections of the video. The last step you will want to do at this stage is to cut the video at any section where you are going to want to place a title card or transition effect.

Title Cards and Transitions

These videos will often be broken down into different segments, and title cards and transition effects are great ways to move between them. You will want to make title cards that are at least 1920 x 1080 resolution so that they will match the quality of your final video. The title cards should be properly labelled and in the same folder as the audio and video files being used for your project.

Along with the title cards, it is useful to add a basic transition effect between sections of your video as it can make for a much smoother viewing experience. A commonly used effect that is used in the tester demonstration videos is the crossfade, which slowly fades one scene out while fading the next one over top of it. It is a fairly standard effect that should be included in most free video editing programs.

Editing and Mixing Audio

Ideally you will want to work out any audio issues in the pre-production phase, however, there are still a few things you can do in the editing stage to help with any audio issues. For example, Premiere has a number of noise-cancelling and compression filters that can be applied to the audio that can do things like clean up background noise, remove clicks and hums, and adjust the volume.

It is also important to maintain a level of consistency in the audio of a video. If you are working with something that has been filmed in many different recording sessions, there may be a jump in volume from one section to the next. A useful step can be to highlight all of the separate audio files in the video project and adjust the gain to be the same in all of them (usually something like -6 dB or so).

You may also be working with audio that was recorded on a different source than the video, for example, a condenser microphone. In this case, you will want to ensure that the audio files are all properly labelled to match their corresponding video files. Much like having a hand clap to signal the end of a video cut, it can be useful to have some sort of audio signal to help line up the audio and video files. One effective method we used was to have a loud beeping that was picked up by both the microphone and camera, this made it very easy to edit later on as all that needed to be done was to line up the corresponding beeps.

Rendering

The final stage of the video editing process is to render out the finished version that contains all of the edits that have been made to it. This process is usually very resource-intensive on your computer and can take as long as 45 minutes to an hour to complete for a 20 minute video. You will want to ensure that you have completed everything you want to be done to the video because if you need to go back and make even a very minor change, you will still have to go through the entire rendering process again.

You will also want to ensure that you are rendering the file at a suitable resolution. 1920 x 1080 should be the bare minimum, as anything lower than this can result in low video quality.

Subtitles

Subtitles should be one of the last things you add to your video as they are very dependant on timing, so you don't want to be making additional edits once the subtitles are finished. Depending on the length and complexity of the video, they can also be one of the most time-consuming elements of the entire process. You will definitely want to use some sort of software that can automatically generate subtitles for this process, as doing them entirely by hand can be a very long and difficult process. There is lots of software available that can do this, but a free one which we have used successfully is the automatically generated subtitles on Youtube.

When you upload any video to Youtube, it uses AI to automatically generate subtitles in your preferred language. It can take up to 24 hours or longer to generate the subtitles, so you will want to give yourself the time to let Youtube do its work. Once these subtitles are generated, you can either download them in a variety of different file formats, including as a .txt transcript. While the subtitles generated are decent, they will still require quite a lot of hands-on editing to bring them up to our preferred level.

AI can generate fairly accurate subtitles, but they have almost no grammar or punctuation. They also have a difficult time recognizing features such as acronyms, slang, and proper nouns. Youtube has a very convenient subtitle editing interface built right into its website, so you will be able to make most of the necessary changes right from this screen.

Editing subtitles is a very time-intensive task, you watch the video on one side of the screen while proofreading the text on the other side to make sure it matches up and is at the proper time. Depending on the complexity of the video, you might need to look closely through the text for things such as acronyms and proper names. If there is more than one speaker in the video, you will also want to signify who is speaking by putting their name in brackets followed by a colon.

When using Youtube's subtitle editor, there are a few handy features that can save you a great deal of time. One is the playback speed, there is a setting on the video to adjust the speed of the video playback to as high as 2 times normal speed. It is also useful to familiarize yourself with all of the hotkeys in the youtube subtitle editor, for example shift + space bar allows you to quickly play and pause the video so you can make an edit to the text.

Good subtitles are going to take a lot of time. In general plan for around two to three hours for every one hour of video footage, potentially even more depending on how complex the video is.

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Last update: **2021/04/14 19:20**

