



## *Audio Visual Consultants*

3738 Grand Ave, Oakland, CA 94610

P. 510-839-2020 F. 510-839-6464

[www.avconsultants.com](http://www.avconsultants.com)

[info@avconsultants.com](mailto:info@avconsultants.com)

## **21 Camcorder Tips**

1. A day or so in advance of your filming, record a few seconds as a test recording, and play back to make sure it is working properly.
2. Record a few extra seconds at the beginning and end of each shot; you may want that extra beat when you are editing.
3. Start your video with a wide, establishing shot; it gives your viewers an idea of the context and setting of the video. (Once you know this rule, it is okay to break it.)
4. Use an external microphone for clear audio. Camcorder mikes work only when the camera is close and there is no background noise. You'll need a camcorder with a mike input and headphone jack.
5. Shoot at your subject's eye level. If someone is sitting and talking to the camera, sit down yourself. Otherwise you make them look diminished.
6. Watch out for bright backgrounds. Filming someone against a window could result in the him or her appearing as a silhouette. If you have manual iris control, you can adjust for this.
7. Try to stabilize your camera with a tripod, monopod or steadycam-like device. Camcorders have image stabilization, but that only goes so far. This is particularly important for close-ups. Look into software that removes some shake, such as ProDAD Mercalli. (Another rule you can break, but go easy on your viewers, especially if they are viewing your video after a big lunch.)
8. Use lots of close-ups. Videos are usually viewed on a small computer screen; close-ups give your viewers a front-row seat.
9. Vary your shooting angles. Sit on the ground to get a dramatic low angle. Climb up on a table or ladder (safely) to get a wide-shot from up high. Shoot from the hip rather than your face. Hold the camera over your head. Hold it upside down or at an angle.

10. Get reaction shots. Called cut-aways in film lingo, they show reactions of people, show the surrounding area and can even include interesting details in the setting. This variety helps keep your viewers interested.
11. When walking while filming, keep the camera zoomed back. That minimizes shake and adds to a more fluid look. Careful to keep one eye focused on where you are going. If you are walking backwards, have a friend spot you.
12. Try to tell a story visually with your camcorder. Show the viewer the setting of the scene with a wide-shot or even with an identifying sign. Think of an opening and a closing for your finished video. Consider adding graphics or other images in post-production to add flavor to your video.
13. Don't expect to fix it in post. Get good shots from the get go. Thinking you can correct sound, exposure or color on the computer may result in frustration.
14. White-balance if your camera lets you. Some auto-white balance systems can create an unwanted tint as you are filming. You don't want that white wedding dress to look blue.
15. Use a light when you can, or several lights. Camera-mounted LED lights help fill in the shadows; make sure you put amber filters on them when filming indoors. Portable light kits may be rented. Get lights with diffusion filters, umbrellas or reflectors for soft illumination. Amber or peach filters (gels) can give your subject a tan without those harmful UV rays.
16. Follow some rules of composition to add a touch of artistry to your images. Frame your subject with hanging foliage. Place the horizon at the top or bottom third of the frame rather than in the middle. Try to place warm colors (reds, beige, peach) in the foreground and cooler colors (blue tones) in the background.
17. Maintain continuity of screen direction. If your subjects are moving right to left in the first shot, they should move in the same direction in the next shot, unless you establish that they turned around.
18. Watch your backgrounds. Don't let a tree or light pole grow out of your subject's head. Be careful that there is not a distracting background behind your subject when shooting indoors or out.
19. Production planning can't hurt. Sure, a detailed script is best, but just a shot list or outline, or even a written description helps keep you on track. Write what the viewers will see first, what next and how the video will end. If you can draw,

consider creating a storyboard which uses comic-strip-like frames to show your different shots.

20. Don't forget an appropriate amount of headroom – it's a little space above the head so the subject doesn't look like his or her head was cut off. This is a rule that may be broken when you go for an extreme close up (ECU). Just remember Tip #7: use a tripod for ECUs.
21. Add some "nose-room" to the front of your subject. If they are walking, give them plenty of extra space to "walk into." If the subject is looking in one direction, add a little nose room in that direction; it makes the shot more comfortable for the viewer.

**Bonus Tip:** This is not so much a tip as an option to consider. If at all possible, hire a pro to shoot your video. Then you can devote your creativity to directing the filming and talent. You can look at the overall video and tell the camera operator to adjust composition to add an artistic element, perhaps you want a little more lighting so they pop, or maybe you notice background noise on the soundtrack. There are so many things you can do to make sure your subjects look their best and perform their best. Stepping away from the camera lets you focus your vision on the big picture and create a motion picture that you will be proud to show for years to come.

Get more production tips by reading some of the free production planning guides, in the Articles and Guides section of our website [www.avconsultants.com](http://www.avconsultants.com). Be sure to also read our blog, "AVC News" where we post new guides and videos. Click on the RSS feed to see our blogs on your news page and become a fan of "Audio Visual Consultants" on Facebook. Our Twitter and YouTube account name is "AVC Video." We hope to see you there.

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