

Student Quick Guide: How to make video-essays



Version 1.3
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19-04-2021



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Introduction

This document will help you get started making your own video-essay/pitch and is based on a 'do it yourself' principle. This includes useful instructions on preparation like how to write a script, but also technical information on what editing software to use. Throughout there will also be many referrals to the [video-toolkit](#) of the University of Leiden. This toolkit is mostly directed at teachers for educational videos, but it also contains useful information for student video-makers. Note that the option to have a 'studio-recording' at Humanities is not (yet) available for video-essays.

Making a video-essay basically comes down to 5 steps: **Goal, Format, Prepare, Record and Edit**. If you follow these steps with care, you will be able to create some amazing work. Good luck!

Goal

Step 1: Determining the goal for your video

Preparation is the most important thing when making a video-essay or any video for that matter. In that sense it does not differ that much from your usual essays and papers.

However, now that you have many audio-visual tools at your disposal, you will need to make certain decisions to make the video as functional and efficient as possible. In order to be able to do that you will always need to keep your **Goal** in sight: What message do I want to convey with my video?

So before you even think about what *kind* of video you want to make;, write down in one sentence the essential goal of your video. Do this first, make sure it's one sentence, and don't lose sight of this goal as you progress along the process of making decisions.

Format

Step 2: Choosing a video format that serves your goal best

When you have a clear idea of what your goal is then it will become easier to choose the type of video you want to make.¹ For example, if your goal is to demonstrate the rough painting style of Rembrandt, you would probably want to do a recording of your desktop in which numerous paintings are shown in your power-point with your commentary as a voice-over (or combined with webcam video). But, if you need to pitch or argue a certain viewpoint, then you may prefer to put yourself in the forefront in a somewhat 'vlog-style' of filming. Alternatively, difficult, boring and often dry concepts can be explained and enriched by using animations or info graphs. Of course, it is also possible to combine certain formats; just make sure your imagery and content is coherent and easy to follow.

To explore what are your other possible options, check out this section of the video-toolkit: [videotoolkit formats](#) . But remember, every format has its own learning curve and some of them can be very time-consuming in the editing process!

¹ Unless you're instructed by your teacher to use a specified video format only.

Prepare

Step 3: Prepare your recording

Preparation is the key to a successful recording and for a more 'easy-to-manage' edit work afterwards. Although each format comes with its own types of preparation, there are mainly two things you will always want to prepare: i) a **script** and ii) a **storyboard**.

i) Script

Writing a script for your video-essay is extremely useful because it sets a limit to the content of your video-essay and makes it clear and well structured. Usually, a script is written to be put into a teleprompter/auto-cue, but this is mostly for studio-recordings. However, there are also numerous teleprompter apps for your smartphone. Some of them you can find here: [smartphone teleprompt apps](#). Moreover, a script can also serve as a transcript for your voice-over commentary. So, you will not always need a teleprompter app of some sort. You can just print out the script and read it while you record your desktop, for example. This will save you a lot of editing time!

When writing a script, the most important thing to remember is that you can speak on average about 120 words a minute. A script of 1200 words is, therefore, at least a 10-minute-long video. In other words, manage the length of your video by managing the length of your script.

Here you will find all the tips and help for writing a good script: [video toolkit script writing](#)

ii) Storyboard

The storyboard is the second step in your process of preparing the recording and eventually the editing work. In essence, a storyboard is nothing more than visualizing your script. Below you will find an example of a storyboard. The first column is dedicated to the visuals, the second, to the script, and the third, to additional notes. The latter might be handy when you are working with more people on a single video. Try to be as functional as possible with regards to the visualization; less is often more. Keep a 1-on-1 relation with the script. This means no excess or irrelevant pictures, bullet-points, B-footage (secondary footage to main footage), etc. Also remember, the more elaborate the visuals are (animations, B-footage, images, etc.), the more time you will spend in step 5 (editing), and the more processing power you will need from your computer.

A good template for your storyboard can be found [here](#) for download.

Example storyboard:

Visuals	Script	Notes
<p>Image of airplane https://pxhere.com/en/photo/1387417 (1)</p> 	<p>In this video I will explain the concept of aerodynamics (1)...</p>	<p>I have placed alternative images in the shared folder in case the quality is not optimal.</p>

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Below are some free-to-use resources to visualize your video. In case you need to use a copyrighted resource make sure you only use this image under the [citation exception](#) and mention the source at the end of the video (showing an URL-link to the source will suffice).

Useful storyboard resources:

- Creative Commons database: <https://ccsearch.creativecommons.org/>
- Stock photos and video: <https://www.pexels.com/>
- Icons and emoji's: https://www.iconfinder.com/free_icons
- Music & effects: <https://www.youtube.com/audiolibrary/music?nv=1>
- Historical images and files : <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Images>
- [Videotoolkit references](#)



Step 4: Record your video

If you have completed the first 3 steps with care than the recording should be a matter of 'putting it on tape'. In most cases, your smartphone and/or webcam will suffice as a camera/audio device. But in other cases, you might need an alternative tool. See below for further details on hardware & software per format that you might need to use.

Additional tips about recordings can be found here: [Video toolkit DIY recordings](#)

Tools needed for desktop screen recordings:

Hardware

- Laptop/desktop
- Webcam

Software

- [Active Active Presenter](#)
- [Kaltura Capture \(!\)](#)

Tips for recording

Make sure you record in a quiet room with few distractions, and do some test-runs first. Take off any watches or jewelry that might clatter on your desk. Record the video in segments; don't try to do it all in one take! Videos that are recorded with Kaltura Capture are stored locally on your pc at: C:\Users*yourusername\AppData\Local\Kaltura\Capture\Recordings. If you can't see the folder 'appdata' make sure that you checkmark the box 'hidden items' under 'view tab' in your file explorer.

Tools needed for vlogs (talking head)

Hardware

- Smartphone/digital photo camera/webcam

Software

- (Optional) [Teleprompter apps](#)

Tips for recording

Make sure you always face the light source head on. For example, don't film yourself with a window or other bright light source behind you. Your face will become very dark and unrecognizable. Also, film yourself in landscape mode (horizontal) when using a smartphone not portrait (vertical). Don't worry too much about the image quality of the video itself (it doesn't need to be HD!); just make sure viewers are able to see and hear you well. If you have trouble finding the words you want to say, you might want to try a teleprompter app.

Tools needed for fieldwork (interviews, scenery, action-shots)

Hardware

- Videocamera (handycam)
- Tripod
- Shotgun microphone

Software

- No additional software needed

Tips for recording

i) Make sure your subject (the person you might interview) faces the light source head on. If you feel the sun burning on your back while filming, then you're doing it right!

ii) Don't make your shots too short; the longer you keep recording the easier time you will have putting materials together in editing.

iii) Don't swing the camera around too much, and always try to get the steadiest shot even when 'panning'.

iv) When using a tripod, make sure the horizon is properly aligned and not skewed.

Tools needed for podcasts

Hardware

- Laptop/desktop/smartphone
- (Optional) Dedicated USB microphone
- [Audacity](#) (Free version, low pc specs required, and fairly easy to use)

Tips for recording

- Do a test run first and check the audio afterwards.
- Don't sit too close to the microphone or you might get a 'popping' sound. A pop-filter can solve this.
- Take off any watches or jewelry that might clatter on your desk.
- Be at ease and feel free to improvise your wording; podcasts tend to be generally longer than video anyway.



Edit

Step 5: Edit

When you have finished your recordings, it is time to edit the video into a nice coherent story. Now the storyboard again becomes very useful as it gives you an exact roadmap on what and when to show certain things during the video. If, for example, you recorded your voice separately from the desktop recording, you can easily put the sound and imagery together if you follow the storyboard in the editing process. However, you might have only filmed yourself in a 'vlog-style'. In that case, you might just want to edit out some stumbles or mishaps; but don't overdo it. A video that is too chopped up will become erratic and difficult to follow.

Tips on editing:

- Make sure you back-up your project regularly! Software crashes will happen. Usually there is an option to automatically have back-up saves in the editing program. So be on the look-out for that.
- Be conservative with sound effects and/or music. Don't put music under your video to 'enhance' it. For example, don't play a 'catchy tune' when you try to make a convincing pitch, argument, speech, etc. Most times it will only distract from what you're actually trying to say especially when the tune is too loud.
- The power of pause..... Edit in some pauses between segments or after important statements. This way your content can resonate more clearly and calmly with your audience. A body of text is divided in paragraphs so do the same with the tempo/structure of your video.
- Playback and playback again. After you have edited a few minutes of video make sure you play it back more than once to see if the edit is the way that you want it. If you're unsure, let one of your peers review it for you.
- Export your project as an **mp4**, with a video bit rate of **3000 kbps** and **720p resolution**. This will lessen the file size and processing time to export.

- vi) Playback your *exported* video to make sure it works correctly and there are no more editing mistakes.

Useful editing/multi-media tools:

Desktop and webcam recordings:

[Active Presenter](#) (Free version, Low pc specs required, fairly easy to use, and more editing options)

[Kaltura built-in editor](#)

Podcasts:

[Sonobus](#) (high quality audio stream/recorder)

[Audacity](#) (Free version, low pc specs required, fairly easy to use, and audio editing only)

Fieldwork (documentary):

[Davinci Resolve](#) video-editing software (Free version, [medium to high pc specs](#) required, needs a small [tutorial](#) for use, and a lot of editing options).

Important notice when downloading Davinci Resolve!

In order to download this software, you will need to register through their website (Blackmagicdesign). In terms of privacy do the following:

- Don't fill in your full name
- Fill in your umail (not your personal email)
- Fill in a fake phone number (for example: 555 5555)

[Vegas Movie Studio](#) (Purchase license through [Surfspot](#), needs fairly high pc specs, needs a small [tutorial](#) before use, and a lot of editing options).

Final thoughts

Video can be a very powerful tool to voice and illustrate your essay, pitch, argument, research, hypothesis, discovery, etc., as you have total control over the imagery and information flow that is otherwise not possible through text. But video can also be an intimidating and/or uncomfortable experience as you will have to record, watch and listen to yourself multiple times. Try not to let that distract you though: focus on your goal at hand (step 1!) and all will work out just fine. If you're not handy with computers and/or editing software, make sure you choose (if applicable) a video format that is easy for you to record and edit.

Good luck!