MediaLab

INTRODUCTION TO DOCUMENTARY



LEARNING RESOURCE



AUSTRALIAN FILM TELEVISION & RADIO SCHOOL MEDIALAB.AFTRS.EDU.AU



MediaLab

CONTENTS: INTRODUCTION TO DOCUMENTARY

SECTION 1	Introduction	3-5
SECTION 2	Analysing a Documentary Sequence	6-9
SECTION 3	Interview Skills	10-12
SECTION 4	Camera Techniques	13-19
SECTION 5	Screenwriting	20-24
SECTION 6	Pre-Production Activities	25-28
SECTION 7	Copyright and Safety on Set	28-30
SECTION 8	Sound	31-34
SECTION 9	Data Management and Saving	35-37
SECTION 10	Editing	38-40
SECTION 11	Presenting and Evaluating your own Film	41-43
SECTION 12	Conclusion	44-45

ABOUT AFTRS' MEDIA LAB

AFTRS MEDIA LAB provides accessible media arts resources to Australian primary and secondary teachers and students. MEDIA LAB will help build core creativity and storytelling capabilities that will be required for the jobs of the future. The Australian Film TV Radio School (AFTRS) is the nation's leading screen and broadcast school that delivers future-focused, industry-relevant education, research and training.

AUSTRALIAN FILM TELEVISION & RADIO SCHOOL

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INTRODUCTION



This AFTRS Media Lab Learning Resource and accompanying Teacher Guide provides a practical introduction to documentary filmmaking. It provides information, worksheets and suggested activities to guide students through the process of preparing for and making a short documentary on a wide range of subjects.

As well as encouraging students to identify the ways in which documentaries tell a story or present a point of view, this resource will help get your class thinking about creative ways to communicate information on screen.

There isn't any right or wrong way to use the resource and we hope you'll be able to tailor it to suit your students' needs. It can be used in part or as a whole, our aim is that you feel confident and comfortable teaching documentary filmmaking to your students regardless of your own experience with the medium.

We recommend that you celebrate your students' film achievements on completion. Have a screening in class, get them to watch and talk about each other's films, help them enjoy the creative process and the fact that they have made something out of nothing. Film is a powerful medium and we hope both you and your students feel a true sense of accomplishment for the work you create.

PRACTICAL PREPARATION

Before you start using this resource, decide on any parameters you will set for your student productions:

Theme or style

You could allow students to make a documentary about anything at all, or you could narrow the focus either in terms of theme (local history, healthy eating, for and against school uniforms) or genre or style (interview-based, observational, persuasive/campaign).

Even if you set an overarching theme it's recommended that students are given the chance to decide the specific focus of their film. This process could include some brainstorming and it may be best to do this after the activities in section 1, which are designed to stimulate students' thinking.

Duration

It's a good idea to give students a maximum length for their completed films. For inexperienced filmmakers, a maximum duration of 2 to 4 minutes is recommended.

You may also like to set a total limit for the quantity of footage to be shot. If students record four hours of interviews or observational footage, editing it will be an extremely time-consuming process, whereas working with 20-30 minutes of total footage will take less time.

Team size and roles

It's recommended that students work in teams of at least two to produce a documentary. You could assign the roles of producer/director, camera, sound and editor to specific students or alternatively students could share or rotate through these roles. Depending on the equipment you use, one person may be able to operate the camera and sound equipment simultaneously or two people may be needed. (The FAQ section online provides a suggested list of equipment.)



INTRODUCTION



ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

When making a film there are several things a filmmaker must consider in terms of the ethics of storytelling. Ethics is "doing the right thing" and means that you must take into consideration other people's perspectives, how you handle the subject matter and the impact the documentary may have on the people in your film.

Activity 1

The questions below give you an idea of the sort of ethical issues you need to be aware of when making a film. Take the time to answer these questions, and share your thoughts with another documentary maker in the class, to gain their perspective on the story you wish to tell.

- What is your connection to the subject, whether it's an individual or community? Do you have a relationship with the individual or do you belong to this community? If not, are you the right person to tell this story? How do I know if I am the right person? Ask the following questions:
- What is your intention when telling this story? When answering this, consider what you hope to achieve from making this documentary. Do you want people to have more empathy for the subject, are you hoping to achieve a change? What are the positive and negative outcomes of this change? For example, will it get the subject of your documentary in trouble with their friends or family? Will they find themselves the topic of ridicule?
- Is it done with the permission of the person and/or community? This is beyond getting them to sign a release form. To truly gain permission, it is important that you sit with the subjects and explain your intentions, and the possible outcomes of telling this story. Remember if you are sharing a story about a particular community, it is very important to consult with diverse voices within the community, as a way of seeking permission from them to tell the story. Make sure one person's perspective is not skewing the representation of an entire community.

Remember, documentary making is a learning process, and unlike fictional work where you can write exactly the narrative you want to and make actors do as your see fit, you cannot control the subjects in documentary as much. The characters in documentaries will live their lives long after you've finished working with them, so it is important to consider how you represent them.



INTRODUCTION



Activity 2

Once you have run through the ethical considerations with your class mate, list down your most significant ethical dilemma you have and share it with the class, if you are comfortable.

Now as a class, discuss if it possible to resolve this dilemma and if so, then how would it be done.

INDIGENOUS PROTOCOLS

Australian storytellers who want to make a film with Indigenous characters, direct a documentary focusing on the Indigenous community, or write a script with Indigenous material needs to be familiar with specific filmmaking protocols and practices. AFTRS has collaborated with some of Australia's most experienced filmmakers to offer some insights and advice on best practices in this video.

http://www.aftrs.edu.au/indigenous/consultation



DOCUMENTARY

Noun: A film or television or radio program that provides a factual report on a particular subject



To **DOCUMENT** something, means to capture it. To write it down, photograph it, record it or video it. You are taking a small piece of real life and keeping a record of it. This may be just for yourself – the way we do with diaries. It may be to share with others – like on Facebook or Instagram. Or it may be to share information with a much wider audience – the way film and television documentaries do.

Documentaries usually have a similar intention – to **INFORM** the viewer about something they might not already know. Sometimes they also want to **PERSUADE** the viewer to have a particular point of view.

For example nature documentaries will often go into great detail about the life of a particular animal species – this is simply to **INFORM** the viewer about the details of that animal's life. But sometimes they might also want to raise awareness about the fact that an animal is endangered and to **PERSUADE** the viewer to donate money or change their behaviour to help save the animal.

Documentary is broadly defined as non-fiction content however generally a documentary film is seen to be different from news and public affairs, magazine and talk shows, real world events, docu-dramas and reality television.

There are many different techniques used in documentary. Each will have a different effect on the way the story reaches the viewer. Some of these ways of telling a story include:



NARRATION – A storyteller tells us the information from off-camera via 'voice-over' while we watch the visuals. This style helps the filmmaker to share a lot of information while still allowing them to use visual footage.



PRESENTER – One person is the face of the documentary, talking to the camera and sharing information as the film progresses.



INTERVIEWS – People may be interviewed by the presenter, or they may just be interviewed straight to camera. Sometimes the interviews are even used as 'voice-over'.



DRAMATIC RECREATIONS – The documentary will have segments of drama where people will re-enact what happened to show the viewer. These are often used in historical documentaries because no real footage exists.



STILL PHOTOGRAPHS – A slide show of still photographs will form part of the documentary and may have voice-over or music behind it.



OBSERVATIONAL – The camera rolls and we just watch it. There is no voice-over or narration of any kind – we see what the camera sees. This is often used for nature documentaries.



Before a filmmaker can make their own documentary, it is important to watch several and do two things:

- Break down the elements of the craft so that you know how to make a good documentary that does what you want it to do.
- Break down the content of the documentary so that you can learn how to decide what information to put into your film.

But how do we analyse a **DOCUMENTARY**? Well, we do a focused viewing where we ask questions as we watch, taking notes and discussing what we find with each other at the end.

The sorts of **QUESTIONS** that it is good to ask of a **DOCUMENTARY** are:

- 1 What is the main focus of the documentary?
- 2 Is it trying to inform us about something or persuade us to believe or do something?
- **3** What style is used? Is it an unfolding story, an interview based documentary, a dramatic recreation? Are there interviews, narration or dramatic recreations?
- 4 Is the documentary promoting any particular viewpoint?
- **5** Does the film making use a variety of different shots to shoot the film or is the camera usually in just one place?
- 6 Does the documentary use moving footage or still photographs or both? Which of these is the most interesting to you? Why?
- 7 What sort of music and sound effects does the documentary use?
- 8 Does the film succeed in sharing information?
- 9 Is it also interesting and entertaining? Why or why not?
- **10** After watching this documentary, think about meaning. How is it created by the shots, story, music and audio of the film?

https://youtu.be/2iz2tNiRpeY

ABC "Thunderstorm Asthma"

https://youtu.be/zluOAlsbl_l

Watch the documentaries and fill out the worksheets as you go, particularly focusing on ideas that you like and might use when you create your own documentary.

Suggested documentaries for Stage 4:



BBC News "Syrian Kids Explain the War" 4 minute (interview style, title slates)

4 minute (interview, voice-over, science)





SBS "First Contact – Elcho Island" (excerpt) 3 minute (observational, interview, voice-over) https://youtu.be/bp-9fH6NqR0



WORKSHEET NAME: **TITLE OF DOCUMENTARY** What is the focus of the documentary? Is the documentary trying to INFORM us or PERSUADE us? How can you tell? What documentary style is used? Is it an unfolding story, an interview based documentary, a dramatic recreation? Are there interviews, narration or dramatic recreations? Describe the use of different camera angles? How do they help tell the story?

Does the documentary use moving footage or still photographs or both? Which of these is the most interesting to you? Why?

What sort of music or sound effects does it use?

Is the documentary promoting any particular viewpoint?

Is it also interesting and entertaining? Why or why not?

Does the film succeed in sharing information?

After watching this documentary, what have you learned about what makes a good documentary?



GREAT INTERVIEWS AND HOW TO PREPARE FOR FILMING THEM



When you interview someone your aim is to find out the most interesting things about them. You might want their expertise on a specific topic or you might want stories from their life. Interviews can be a lot of fun and there are ways of preparing for them that will make sure you are ready and you get the best stories possible.

BEFORE YOU GO...

You are the guide in this scenario and so you need to be prepared with the right tools and a good plan. Make sure you have all the equipment you need on hand – the camera, sound equipment and any forms you might need to get the interviewee to sign. Its always a good idea to have a pack full of batteries, notepads, pens and paper too – you never know what you might need.

MAKE SURE YOU KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT

Do some research on your subject so that you can ask the right questions. Make an outline of the way you want the interview to go. Once you have done that – create a list of questions you want to ask. Its great if you can learn these by heart, but write them down just in case. Eventually, with a lot of practice, you can interview people without any pre-prepared questions, but for now – make sure you have a list. Make sure the questions ask for the right information – they need to provide you with what you need to make your documentary.

WRITING REALLY GREAT QUESTIONS

It's a good idea to make groups of questions around themes or around time (in other words, start at the beginning of their life or the story you want them to tell).

As you write your questions check if they can be answered with a simple yes or no – if so, change the question to allow for an "open" response. This means they need to say a few things to answer the questions, and if they have a lot to say, that will work too. For example – don't ask "Were you born in England?" or "Did you go to school" – ask, "What was your first year of school like?"

If you need specific information, then your questions can be specific too – "What food do chimpanzees like to eat?" This will help you get a lot of facts on the topic. If they are telling a story, you can ask them sensory questions to help make the story deeper and easier to identify with. "What did it feel like to live in the jungle for so many months?"

As your interview progresses your questions should also become deeper and more advanced. If you started with "Did you always like to cook?" you can move on to things like "What is it about cooking that makes you happy?" It also helps to give your subject a little prod every now and then.... "Can you tell me a little more about that?" That way, they know it is fine to keep talking and might give you even more great information.



ACTIVE LISTENING IS A WAY OF LISTENING AND RESPONDING TO ANOTHER PERSON THAT IMPROVES MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING. IT INVOLVES FULLY CONCENTRATING ON WHAT IS BEING SAID RATHER THAN JUST PASSIVELY 'HEARING' THE MESSAGE OF THE SPEAKER. ACTIVE LISTENING REQUIRES THAT THE LISTENER FULLY CONCENTRATE, UNDERSTAND, RESPOND AND THEN REMEMBER WHAT IS BEING SAID.

INTERVIEW ETIQUETTE

The same rules apply to interviews as they do to everyday life. Be polite, be on time and be prepared. This shows your subject that you really respect them and they will be more likely to be open with you in an interview. Make sure you really listen well, no gazing off into the distance or reading your next question over in your head. Don't forget that having an interview with someone is like having a conversation – you need to give and take. At the end of the interview, be thankful and tell them when the film is likely to be finished.

FILMING

Before you start to film an interview choose your location carefully. Is it quiet? Is it easy to see both of the participants? Do you need extra light?

If you are shooting with a mobile device, do you need extra sound equipment? A microphone on a boom will give you much higher sound quality than the regular device microphone, and sound quality is very important in film. You may also consider radio microphones if they are available. Practice with this equipment **before** the interview so that you know what you are doing and appear professional. Record the entire interview and cut it later. Don't be tempted to pause and stop and start – this makes it very easy to accidentally miss parts of the interview. You can cut out the bits you don't need later.

Label and save all your footage as soon as the interview is over, keeping at least two copies of it in different places. You can also shoot another interview, but it may not be as spontaneous.

If you want to put your film online, check with your subject and ask them to give written permission. It is not ethical to put video of someone on the Internet without asking them, and if they are a child – you may need permission from their parents as well.

The FAQ section online provides a Release Form.



WORKSHEET INTERVIEW SKILLS	NAME:		
Name of interviewer:			
Name of Subject:			
Theme of the interview?	Location for shooting interview: Describe the set, the noise levels, the lighting etc.		
Introduction: How will you introduce the subject?			
5 opening questions:	Clothing: what do you want your subject to wear? What will you wear?		
5 more detailed questions: Sound equipment: What are you using? Have you tested it to make sure it works.			
Write a permission document for the subject to sign			
What label did you use for the footage and where did you save it?			
Write a thank you note for your subject.			

CAMERA TECHNIQUES FOR DOCUMENTARY



Before you start to film any scenes, interviews or footage for your documentary it is very important to understand how the camera can be used to create different feelings for your viewer. Once you understand this – you can take better footage that allows you to make the film you want to make. You can watch our short video on Camera Techniques to understand these techniques better.

These techniques work with all cameras – from a film camera to a DLSR to a mobile device.

There are three main things to understand when it comes to camera technique:

- **1 SHOTS**
- 2 ANGLES
- **3 MOVEMENT**

And there is one rule that operates across all of filmmaking and photography:

THE RULE OF THIRDS

This isn't actually a rule, just a guiding idea that arises from the fact that the eye prefers to look at things that are divided into threes. Rather than putting everything in the centre of the frame, it looks and feels better to the viewer for them to be in one or two of the thirds.

A great time to use the rule of thirds is when you are shooting an interview. Rather than having the eyes of your subject right in the middle of the frame – they should fall into the top/side third, with the subject looking into the empty space on the other side. This feels more natural to the viewer.



SHOTS

Using a variety of different shots will make your film more interesting and give you the chance to manipulate the way your audience feels. Here are some of the main shots that a filmmaker can use to create different effects in their film.



EXTREME WIDE SHOTS (EWS)

ACT TO SHOW THE SETTING FOR THE FILM

WIDE SHOTS (WS)

SHOW THE ENTIRE PERSON OR AREA. THEY'RE GREAT FOR ESTABLISHING THE SCENE AND ALLOW ROOM FOR THE CHARACTERS TO HAVE SOME ACTION

MEDIUM SHOTS (MS)

FRAME THE SUBJECT FROM THE WAIST UP. THIS IS THE MOST COMMON SHOT AND ALLOWS FOR HAND GESTURES AND MOTION

MEDIUM CLOSE UPS (MCU)

SHOW THE SUBJECT IN MORE DETAIL AND USUALLY INCLUDE THE SHOULDERS AND HEAD OF A SUBJECT

CLOSE UPS (CU)

SHOW A PARTICULAR PART OF YOUR SUBJECT -USUALLY THEIR HEAD OR FACE

EXTREME CLOSE UPS (ECU)

SHOW ONE SMALL DETAIL SUCH AS AN EYE **OR A SINGLE FLOWER**

OVER THE SHOULDER (OSS)

ARE SHOT FROM BEHIND THE PERSON TOWARDS THEIR SUBJECT. THIS IS A GREAT TECHNIQUE TO USE FOR INTERVIEWS AND CONVERSATIONS













ANGLES

The difference between a shot and an angle is that **THE SHOT** is used to demonstrate different aspects of the characters and setting, while **ANGLES** are used to position the viewer so that they can understand the relationships between the characters.

BIRD'S EYE ANGLE

IS AN ANGLE THAT LOOKS DIRECTLY DOWN UPON A SCENE. THIS ANGLE IS OFTEN USED AS AN ESTABLISHING SHOT, ALONG WITH AN EXTREME LONG SHOT, TO ESTABLISH SETTING

HIGH ANGLE

IS A CAMERA ANGLE THAT LOOKS DOWN UPON A SUBJECT. A CHARACTER SHOT WITH A HIGH ANGLE WILL LOOK VULNERABLE OR SMALL. THESE ANGLES ARE OFTEN USED TO DEMONSTRATE TO THE AUDIENCE A PERSPECTIVE OF A PARTICULAR CHARACTER

EYE LEVEL ANGLE

PUTS THE AUDIENCE ON AN EQUAL FOOTING WITH THE CHARACTER/S. THIS IS THE MOST COMMONLY USED ANGLE AS IT ALLOWS THE VIEWERS TO FEEL COMFORTABLE WITH THE CHARACTERS

LOW ANGLE

IS A CAMERA ANGLE THAT LOOKS UP AT A CHARACTER. THIS MAKES A CHARACTER LOOK MORE POWERFUL. THIS CAN MAKE THE AUDIENCE FEEL VULNERABLE AND SMALL BY LOOKING UP AT THE CHARACTER. THIS CAN HELP THE RESPONDER FEEL EMPATHY FOR THE CHARACTER







15





MOVEMENT

Filmmakers also use camera movement to shape meaning.

Tracking shots – any shot where the camera moves alongside the people or objects it is recording. The camera can be mounted on something with wheels or hand-held while the camera operator walks or shoots from a moving vehicle.

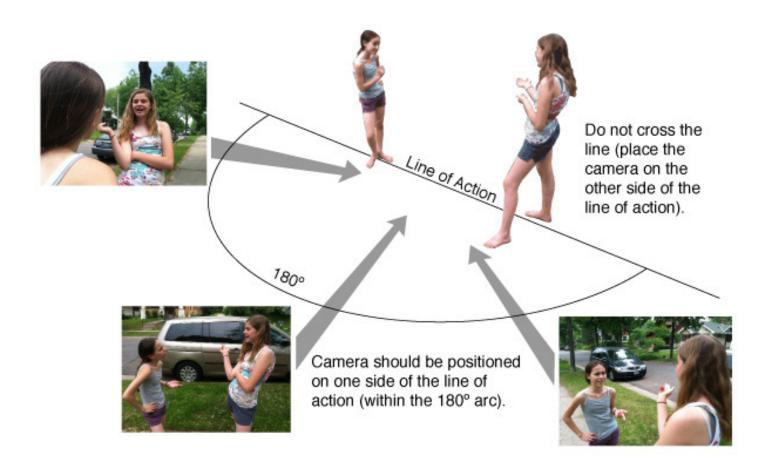
Panning – is used to give the viewer a panoramic view of a set or setting. The camera moves on the horizontal plane left or right. This can be used to establish a scene.

Tilting – the camera moves up or down on the vertical plane and this can show a viewer how high or deep something is.

The best way to become familiar with these is to try shooting them yourself. Use the worksheet to tick off each shot as you take it.

SOMETHING ELSE TO REMEMBER: THE 180 DEGREE RULE

THE 180° RULE IS A CINEMATOGRAPHY GUIDELINE THAT STATES THAT TWO CHARACTERS IN A SCENE SHOULD MAINTAIN THE SAME LEFT/RIGHT RELATIONSHIP TO ONE ANOTHER TO AVOID CONFUSING THE VIEWER. IF THE CAMERA PASSES OVER THE INVISIBLE AXIS CONNECTING THE TWO SUBJECTS, IT IS CALLED 'CROSSING THE LINE'.





WORKSHEET SHOOTING AN INTERVIEW

NAME:

ROLES

- Interviewer
- Interviewee
- Camera person
- Sound person (optional, remember for this activity you are most interested in the visuals).

ΤΟΡΙΟ

Choose a topic for your interview and write 4-6 questions to ask the interviewee.

ACTIVITY

Find a location where two people can sit quietly, either side by side or opposite one another and set up your camera to capture the interview between the two. Using the tick-boxes below, make sure you have used ALL of the camera shots at least once. You may also experiment with movement and angle if you like. Don't forget that it is completely fine to shoot the same question a few times from different angles – this is what most filmmakers do, to make sure they have all the footage they need.





WORKSHEETNAME:CAMERA TECHNIQUE QUIZ - PART ADRAW A LINE TO MATCH THE IMAGE TO THE CORRECT NAME FOR THAT SHOT















EXTREME CLOSE UP (ECU)

EXTREME WIDE SHOT (EWS)

MEDIUM SHOT (MS)

CLOSE UP (CU)

MEDIUM CLOSE UP (MCU)

WIDE SHOT (WS)

OVER THE SHOULDER SHOT (OSS)

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WORKSHEETNAME:CAMERA TECHNIQUE QUIZ - PART BDRAW A LINE TO MATCH THE IMAGE TO THE CORRECT NAME FOR THAT ANGLE









LOW ANGLE

BIRD'S EYE ANGLE

EYE-LEVEL ANGLE

HIGH ANGLE



SCREENWRITING FOR DOCUMENTARY



Documentary films are much more free-form than drama. This means that while you might have a script to start with – a lot of it will be unknown. It will depend on what footage you get, who you interview and what they say. So the script you begin with might not be the script you end with and this is completely normal.

It is important, however to have an idea of what you want to achieve, and a basic script to make sure you are on track.

THINGS TO REMEMBER ABOUT DOCUMENTARIES BEFORE YOU WRITE A SCRIPT:

DOCUMENTARIES DEAL WITH FACTS, NOT FICTION SO YOU WANT TO TRY AND CAPTURE THE MOST ACCURATE VERSION OF THE STORY THAT YOU CAN.

DOCUMENTARIES ARE FLEXIBLE SO IF THE STORY STARTS TO GO IN A DIRECTION YOU DIDN'T EXPECT – GO WITH IT.

YOUR SUBJECT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING SO REMEMBER TO KEEP THE FOCUS ON THEM.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF BEFORE YOU BEGIN TO WRITE A SCRIPT:

- WHY AM I MAKING THIS FILM?
- WHAT DO I WANT TO ACHIEVE?
- WHO IS MY TARGET AUDIENCE AND WHAT DO I WANT THEIR REACTION TO BE?
- HOW MUCH DOES MY AUDIENCE ALREADY KNOW ABOUT THIS SUBJECT?
- WHAT SORT OF TECHNICAL CONSTRAINTS DO I HAVE?

Most documentaries will have a **PLANNING SCRIPT** and an **EDITING SCRIPT**. The planning script is written before production and the editing script is written afterwards, once you have the footage and can plan what you want your final film to look like.

Once you have your head around these questions you can begin to sketch out ideas for how you want it to go. Use the template handout to help you match up the visuals you want to capture, with the potential sound and the timings for the film. The sound might be voice-over (V/O) or interview or simply music. This will become your planning script.

This template is designed around the concept of a documentary focusing on a person, but it can easily be re-worked for any topic at all. Remember that when you have shot the film you can re-use this same template to create an editing script.



THINGS TO DO:

Read the examples below and discuss the following questions in a group:

- Why are the scripts formatted like this?
- Why does the planning script include words the subject MIGHT say?
- Why write a planning script at all, if it is going to change?

Write your own planning script using the worksheet template.

Here is a sample of how it can work:

FILM: JADE LEE FOOTBALL CHAMPION – EDITING SCRIPT VISUALS SHOT TIME **AUDIO** School yard at recess, kids 00:15 sec Ambient noise of school yard running and playing. Jade and V/O Jade: "I've played carries her football through football every single day since EXTREME the group to the field I was 7 years old." WIDE SHOT Jade on football field. 00:10 sec V/O Jade: "Last year I was 2 kicking ball up the field picked for the Primary School towards the camera state team and that's when WIDE SHOT the training really started." 00:30 sec Jade on bench by the Face-to-face interview 3 field for interview with Jade. Questions: MEDIUM 1. What sacrifices have you **CLOSE UP** made to play football at this level? 2. What sorts of injuries have you sustained? 3. What do you like about football? 4. How did you find out you have been picked for the National Junior Team?



FILM: JADE LEE FOOTBALL CHAMPION - EDITING SCRIPT				
SHOT	VISUALS	TIME	AUDIO	
1 EXTREME WIDE SHOT	School yard at recess, kids running and playing. Jade carries her football through the group to the field	00:15 sec	Ambient noise of school yard and V/O Jade: "I play hockey every single lunchtime. I have since Year 2."	
2 wide shot	Jade on football field, kicking ball up the field towards the camera	00:10 sec	V/O Jade: "I was picked for the Primary School State team when I was in Year 4 and after that I had to train five mornings a week at 5am."	
3 MEDIUM CLOSE UP	Jade on bench by the field for interview	00:30 sec	I do football everyday and so I don't get to do lots of the things my friends are doing. Like going to the beach or the mall. And I have to get up early to travel to games on the weekend so there are no movies or parties or anything for me. But I love it. I love every second of it. In my second year I had a bad fall and sprained my ankle so I couldn't play for a whole six weeks. I thought I'd go crazy just sitting on the side-lines. Now I'm just more careful. I was picked for the National Team this year which means I get to represent Australia at the Pan Pacific Games in October. I'm really looking forward to it, we get amazing uniforms and we all get to travel and live together.	



WORKSHEET NAME: DOCUMENTARY SCRIPT: PLANNING/EDITING (CIRCLE ONE)

Filmmaker:

Film:

SHOT	VISUALS	TIME	AUDIO

WORKSHEET NAME: DOCUMENTARY SCRIPT: PLANNING/EDITING (CIRCLE ONE)

Filmmaker:

Film:

SHOT	VISUALS	TIME	AUDIO

NOTES:



PRE-PRODUCTION: PREPARATION FOR A SHOOT

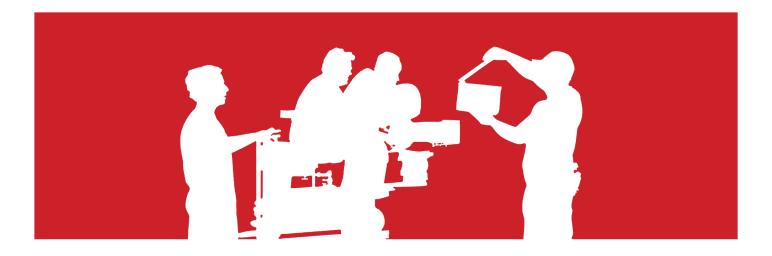


Before you begin production of your documentary it is important to be very prepared. For filmmakers every moment they are on set or on location costs money from their budget, so they try and plan every minute to make the most of the time. They plan out the shots they want to get and they have very detailed lists of what equipment they will need to take with them. They check on the locations for their shots, the sounds that might interfere with the recording and they even check the weather forecast. This means that not only are they prepared for their film shoot, they are also prepared for the things that might go wrong.

HERE IS A CHECKLIST YOU CAN USE TO MAKE SURE YOU HAVE DONE THOROUGH PRE-PRODUCTION FOR YOUR DOCUMENTARY FILM SHOOT, USING SECTIONS 6, 7 AND 8.

MY PREPRODUCTION CHECKLIST				
	PLANNING SCRIPT COMPLETE (SECTION 5)			
	LOCATION CHECK COMPLETE (SECTION 6)			
	EQUIPMENT LIST MADE, EQUIPMENT ACQUIRED AND CHECKED (SECTION 6)			
	SOUND CHECK COMPLETE (SECTION 8)			





1. PLANNING SCRIPT

Use your planning script to make a detailed list of the shots you need for your film, along with the location and how much time you can allocate to getting that shot. This will help you stick to your schedule so that you can get everything done in time.

2. LOCATION SCOUTING

Location scouting is a very important part of the preproduction stage of filmmaking. Once you have your planning script finished, make a list of the types of locations you need (try to keep this to 3-4 or less) and then go look for these locations. Things to consider:

- Noise levels is it going to be too noisy to hear your interviews? Take your sound equipment with you and do a test.
- Weather is it likely to be windy, hot or wet in this location on the day of the shoot? Do you have a bad weather option as well?
- Safety is this location safe? Roads, construction sites, underneath buildings, abandoned places may not be your best option. (see Section 7)
- Permission and costs: have you checked with the owner of the location that it's okay to shoot there?

3. EQUIPMENT CHECK

Make a detailed list of all of the equipment you will need for the shoot. This includes any food or water you might need to take with you, sunscreen, hats and costumes as well as the film and sound equipment. Make sure to check that all the equipment works before the shoot.

When you have completed the preproduction worksheets you can fill out your checklist to see if you are ready to go.

4. RELEASE FORMS

The FAQ Section online provides a range of release forms for people on screen, locations and music.



NAME:

LOCATION CHECK

WITH CONTINGENCY LOCATION PLAN IF THERE IS A CHANCE THE WEATHER MIGHT BE BAD



EQUIPMENT CHECK	



COPYRIGHT AND SAFETY ON SET



SAFETY ON SET

A film set can be a very dangerous place to be, even a simple one. There are cords and electrical equipment everywhere and there are tripods and props just waiting to be tripped over. It is important as a filmmaker to think about risks and plan to avoid them before you start production of your movie. This is called a 'risk assessment'. You think about the things that could go wrong with the film you are planning to make, the locations, the actors and the props, and then you write a plan to avoid it. It is important too, to look at how high the level of risk is, if you have something that is very high risk (like hanging out of the back of a car to capture a shot) – it might be best to change the plan entirely. It's just not worth hurting someone. Here is an example of the way risk levels work:

LEVELS OF RISK



HERE IS AN EXAMPLE OF A RISK ASSESSMENT

WORKSHEET: RISK ASSESSMENT RISK LEVEL OF RISK		NAME: ACTION TAKEN NEW RISK LEVEL	
Sunburn from exterior location	Moderate	All crew and cast must wear sunscreen and when possible hats	Low
Camera person may get hit with the football while shooting the scene.	Moderate	Extra crew member tasked to watch for the football so camera person can feel safe when shooting.	Low

AUSTRALIAN FILM TELEVISION & RADIO SCHOOL

INTRODUCTION TO DOCUMENTARY MEDIALAB.AFTRS.EDU.AU



SAFETY RISKS ON SET

1. Exits and Entrances – cast and crew may not know how to get in and out of a set in case of a fire or other danger



- 3. Tripping loose cords or film equipment
- 4. Natural hazards in the environment trees, cliffs, rocks etc. that might cause an accident
- 5. Electricity extension cords outside or low power lines might be a problem
- 6. Animals if you have animals in the film you need someone qualified looking after them
- 7. Time pressure if people rush, they make mistakes and get hurt. Have you allocated enough time to get the shoot finished?
- 8. Lifting make sure heavy items are carried carefully or are on trolleys/carts so that no one gets hurt
- 9. Dropping heavy or sharp objects could fall and land on people's feet or toes
- 10. Rules your team must know and follow the rules of the location where you are filming e.g. train station, school, park, mall etc.

Now write your own risk assessment for your film. Identify 4 things from the list that might be a problem for your film, fill them into the risk assessment worksheet and write a short plan for how to avoid these problems.

RISK	LEVEL OF RISK	ACTION TAKEN	NEW RISK LEVEL
1			
2			
3			
4			



COPYRIGHT

When making a film there are several things a filmmaker must consider in terms of ethics and copyright. The checklist below gives you an idea of the sort of copyright issues you need to be aware of when making a film.



COPYRIGHT IS THE EXCLUSIVE AND ASSIGNABLE LEGAL RIGHT, GIVEN TO THE ORIGINATOR FOR A FIXED NUMBER OF YEARS, TO PRINT, PUBLISH, PERFORM, FILM, OR RECORD LITERARY, ARTISTIC, OR MUSICAL MATERIAL

You can't just take the work of someone else and use it in your film. Particularly if you want to screen it online or want to make money out of it. This is called copyright infringement and it is illegal. It is the way that artists, writers, filmmakers and musicians protect themselves so that they can make a living out of their work.

It is important, if you are using pictures, music or footage that isn't yours that you source these legally and ethically. Here are a few links to great royalty free images and music:



Creative Commons Australia: <u>http://creativecommons.org.au</u> Purple Planet (free music): <u>www.purple-planet.com</u> Free Music Archive: <u>http://freemusicarchive.org</u>



CAPTURING AND DESIGNING SOUND FOR FILM

In a short documentary there are likely to be four main sound elements:

- 1 Captured sound
- 2 Voice-over
- 3 Music/soundtrack
- 4 Sound effects

CAPTURED SOUND

This is the sound that you record when you shoot your film – the interviews, the pieces to camera and the background sounds you pick up when you capture your footage. To capture sound well, you need to use the right equipment and pick the right environment.

First of all, think about where you want to shoot. If it is outdoors and it is noisy or the location makes it hard to use microphones (in a pool for example), it might be better to use voice-over later on. If you can control your environment, for an interview or a piece to camera, choose a quiet place and then plan the right equipment for the job.

There are two easy ways to record sound in an interview:

1 Boom microphones: These are directional microphones mounted on the end of an extendable pole. The sound person will hold this above or below the person speaking, but keep the microphone out of shot. These microphones are also sometimes called "shotgun" microphones because you need to point them at the place where the sound is coming from. These can also be connected directly to the camera by a cord, or to your phone/table via an extra device like an iRig.

2 Radio microphones: These are wireless microphones that are clipped onto the clothes of the person who is speaking and the sound is transmitted via radio waves to the audio recording equipment. The audio is matched with the film in post-production.

NOTE: Most cameras and devices will also have an in-built microphone but these are not always good at recording sound that is more than a short distance away. Make sure you test your camera's microphone before you rely on it for quality audio recordings.

VOICE-OVER

Voice-over is voice recording that is added to a film in post-production. It is recorded straight to the computer or to a recording device and added digitally to the editing process. Many computers have audio recording programs on them exactly for this purpose. (Audacity, VoiceOver and Garageband are great examples of this).

The best part about voice-over is that you can make sure that it is done well and that there are no mistakes because you can re-record it. It is also possible to record high quality sound with no back ground noise.







MUSIC AND SOUNDTRACKS

How important is music in a documentary? Does it make a real difference to the viewer's experience? Would any music at all do?



Practical Exercises

Watch the two clips below twice, once for a general impression and once focusing on the sound design.



TRAILER: THE GREAT AUSTRALIAN SPELLING BEE https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Avrl-eZBGFY

TRAILER: SPELLBOUND https://youtu.be/JOIMqo53kMM

Discussion questions:

- Compare the two trailers. Which uses music more effectively?
- Did you find any of the music or sound effects annoying or out of place?
- How is silence used in the 'Spellbound' trailer?

Now watch the following clip and write down each different melody or musical element you hear, then compare notes with your class. How many did you identify?



LET'S GO: TASMANIAN OYSTER FARM: https://youtu.be/PZueWxHfyiM

Next, play this clip with the sound off.



HOW TO PAINT AN ABSTRACT PAINTING: https://youtube.com/watch?v=IHOAG4Dxpds

Discuss in a group what kind of soundtrack would work best for this kind of footage. What do you expect to hear? Play the clip again with the sound on and then discuss your reaction to the music.

Choosing music for your documentary is an important task. You want the film's 'soundscape' to add to its impact and create a mood for the audience, but you don't want it to be distracting. Generally, repetitions of sound and rhythm create tension. A rising melody can imply conflict and a falling melody may suggest resolution.

If the soundtrack gets louder and louder, we feel concerned. If the volume falls, we may feel like something is coming to an end.

During the editing phase you can make your own soundtrack in musical programs like Garageband or Stagelight or you can find one that suits your film from a copyright-free music website. If you have a budget, you could also pay for the use of music from an artist.



PURPLE PLANET: http://www.purple-planet.com/ FREE MUSIC ARCHIVE: http://freemusicarchive.org/



SOUND EFFECTS

Sound effects are used to create atmosphere and to make it feel realistic – as though the viewer is really there. When you are standing on a busy city street, you don't simply hear the person in front of you. You also hear the traffic, the birds, the construction and the other people going by. For a film, you may only capture the voice of the person speaking, so often filmmakers will add in sounds later – the traffic and construction – to make it feel more natural. The great thing about film is that you can keep it at a low level so that it doesn't drown out the main voice. Sound effects are usually added later after the film is shot and edited.

In your editing program, you simply upload the sounds you wish to use and then place them against the visuals in your edit. It is important to then balance the volume of the sound effect with the soundtrack, any other sound effects and the voices of your characters. Dialogue is the most important thing and should always be easily heard and understood.

Great places to find free sound effects:

FREESOUND: <u>https://www.freesound.org/browse/</u> SOUNDBIBLE: <u>http://soundbible.com/free-sound-effects-1.html</u>

This short documentary gives a great insight into the work of Hollywood foley artists. Watch their techniques and be inspired to create and record interesting sounds on location for your documentary.



MAGIC OF MAKING SOUND: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UO3N_PRIgX0

Planning your sound

- Use the following spreadsheet to plan the sound requirements for your film.
- Identify the elements which are 'captured sound' items to be recorded during the shoot and which are elements that will be sourced and added during the edit.
- Remember that you'll have a chance to review and update these plans after the shoot.



WORKSHEET SOUND BREAKDOWN

NAME:

Filmmaker:

Film:

AUDIO: PIECE TO CAMERA AND INTERVIEWS	SOUND EQUIPMENT REQUIREMENTS
AUDIO: VOICE-OVER	SOUND EQUIPMENT REQUIREMENTS
AUDIO: LIST OF REQUIRED SOUND EFFECTS	SOUND EQUIPMENT REQUIREMENTS
AUDIO: REQUIREMENTS FOR SOUNDTRACK	LINKS TO DATABASES OR PLAN FOR RECORDINGS
Length, idea for sound etc.	
	AND INTERVIEWS AUDIO: VOICE-OVER AUDIO: VOICE-OVER AUDIO: LIST OF REQUIRED SOUND EFFECTS AUDIO: REQUIREMENTS FOR SOUNDTRACK

DATA MANAGEMENT, SAVING AND PREPARING FOR AN EDIT



Once you have recorded your vision and your sound, it becomes very important that you manage your data carefully. It is very easy to corrupt or lose footage that took you hours to record and might actually be impossible to replace.

The first thing you need to do is download your footage from your device to the computer you are planning to edit on. The process varies for each type of software but usually involves attaching your camera to the computer and following prompts. As soon as you have done this save it, and create another copy somewhere else as a backup. You can backup to an external hard-drive, to a USB storage device, to a DVD or you can save to an online storage site like iCloud, Dropbox or Google Drive. This will make sure that you have a back up in case something happens to your original footage. These sites all have a free version of the service that you can use for small projects.

For more information on managing video files, see the FAQ section.



DRIVE: https://drive.google.com/drive/# **DROPBOX:** www.dropbox.com **ICLOUD:** www.icloud.com

THE IMPORTANCE OF LABELLING

It can be very time consuming to sift through footage for the bits that you want. As you upload your interviews, pictures, music and sound effects, put them in folders and label them very specifically so that they are easy to find later on. Once you have done this – save this to your secondary source as well.



PREPARING FOR AN EDIT

Take out your original script and shot list and compare these with the footage you have taken, the pictures and images you have collected and the audio you have. You can now create an editing script (see pages 20-21) with details of your footage. This may be enough preparation for your edit, or you may like to complete a paper edit too.

You can do this as a basic timeline with three layers:

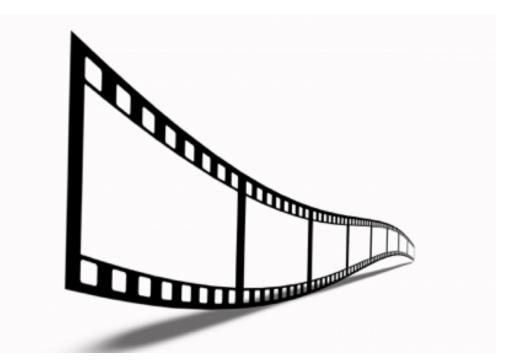
- Visuals
- Audio: music + sound
- Slates, graphics and transitions (slates are plain screens with words on them it may be part of your film or your credits, etc)

Once you have your editing map, it will be time to get started on your digital edit.



FILM: JADE LEE FOOTBALL CHAMPION - EDITING MAP

TIME IN SECONDS	VISUALS	AUDIO	SLATE + TRANSITIONS
0:01 – 0:04	Black	Football sounds + soundtrack	Title Slate Dissolves to footage
0:05 - 0:010	Jade playing football	Voice-over 1 – Jade	Jade's name at bottom of screen
0:10 – 0:30	Jade interview	From interview	Dissolves to montage
0:30 - 0:40	Jade playing football, training, photos of her as a kid – montage sequence	Soundtrack	





WORKSHEET EDITING MAP		NAME:	
Filmmaker:		Film:	
TIME IN SECONDS	VISUALS	AUDIO	SLATE + TRANSITIONS

EDITING



Once you have shot your film, collected any still shots or animations you are planning to include and have recorded all the sound you need – it is finally time to edit your film. But before you do, there is a whole language around editing that it is important to understand. Here are the basics of editing grammar.

THE 'GRAMMAR' OF EDITING

Cut

The change from one shot to another. Cutting may:

- Change the scene
- Compress time
- Vary the point of view; or
- Build up an image or idea.

There is always a reason for a cut, and you should ask yourself what the reason is. Gradual transitions are achieved with the fade, dissolve, and wipe.

Matched cut

In a 'matched cut' there is a smooth transition between shots.

- Continuity of direction
- Completed action
- A similar centre of attention in the frame
- A one-step change of shot size (e.g. long to medium)
- A change of angle (conventionally at least 30 degrees).

Jump cut

An abrupt switch from one scene to another which may be used deliberately to make a dramatic point. A jump cut is sometimes boldly used to begin or end action. Alternatively, it may be result of poor pictorial continuity, perhaps from deleting a section.

Cutting rhythm

A cutting rhythm may be progressively shortened to increase tension. Cutting rhythm may create an exciting, lyrical or staccato effect on the viewer.

Cutaway/cutaway shot (CA)

A bridging, intercut shot between two shots of the same subject. It represents a secondary activity occurring at the same time as the main action. It may be preceded by a definite look or glance out of frame by a participant, or it may show something of which those in the preceding shot are unaware. For example, when interviewing a person about their interest in cooking, you could include a close-up cutaway shot of them cutting vegetables.



Fade, dissolve (mix)

Both fades and dissolves are gradual transitions between shots. In a fade the picture gradually appears from (fades in) or disappears to (fades out) a blank screen. A slow fade-in is a quiet introduction to a scene; a slow fade-out is a peaceful ending. Time lapses are often suggested by a slow fade-out and fade-in. A dissolve (or mix) involves fading out one picture while fading up another on top of it. The impression is of an image merging into and then becoming another.

Wipe:

An optical effect marking a transition between two shots. It appears to supplant an image by wiping it off the screen (as a line or in some complex pattern, such as by appearing to turn a page). The wipe is a technique which draws attention to itself and acts as a clear marker of change.

ANALYSING AN EDIT

Watch these two clips once or twice and answer these questions:

- 1 How would you describe the pace of each clip?
- 2 Estimate how many cuts there were in each clip.(It may be interesting to check actual numbers after everyone guesses).
- **3** In clip 1 were there more cuts in the music or the vision?
- 4 What type of transitions were used in clip 2's vision?



CLIP 1: WAR ON WASTE: EXTENDED SNEAK PEAK https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aCUdU6zRyZc



CLIP 2: THE AFGHAN GIRLS ALLOWED TO SKATE BUT NOT CYCLE https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WNKNFAJ6Ltk

The choices made in post-production will have a massive impact on your documentary. What can you learn from these examples as you prepare to edit your own film?

Remember too that the edit can sometimes be a time to completely re-invent your story. Ideas and unexpectedly engaging moments may have been captured during the shoot and you may decide to include these in your story. If you have time, don't be afraid to experiment during the edit and leave your initial plans behind.



EDITING YOUR FILM

The edit will probably be the most time consuming part of your filmmaking process so it is important to be organised and prepared so that you don't waste any time. Use the editing map you created to guide you, and work through the following steps to stay on track.

TICK OFF AS YOU GO	STEP	WORKFLOW
	1	Ingest your footage onto the computer from your hard drive/ camera and begin organising the rushes into bins or folders. Label these clearly. Throughout the edit, make sure you save your work regularly and back up your files to a second location in case your system crashes.
	2	View and analyse your clips. Mark or note the best takes. If any clips are completely unusable, delete them, but retain anything else.
	3	Create a rough cut by assembling your chosen footage on the timeline. Don't worry about getting cuts running smoothly together at this point.
	4	Begin refining your edit. What works? What doesn't? Which moments convey the emotion of the story? Which moments are flat? Add reverse angles, cutaways or alternative coverage and see what works best. Then trim shots so the story flows well. Take a break now and then and come back to it fresh.
	5	Now pay close attention to the audio and identify poor quality dialogue. Brainstorm any ideas to fix any audio issues using foley, voice-over or effects.
	6	Add music and sound effects to the timeline as well as any additional atmos. Remember, good sound effects help tell the story without being obtrusive.
	7	Show your rough cut to people whose opinions you trust. What did they understand? What confused them? Were they emotionally moved? Listen to the feedback of others, but also listen to your gut instinct and make the film you want to make.
	8	When you are satisfied with your cut, add titles at the start and credits at the end. Check the spelling of all names and make sure you have thanked everyone who helped you make the film. Export your edit as a QuickTime file and save it, both in your editing program, on your computer and to your hard drive.



PRESENTING AND EVALUATING YOUR OWN FILM



Films are designed to be shown to an audience and when you have finished your film, as terrifying as it can be, it is time to share it with your class. Your teacher will have planned a première for your films and you will need to present your film before it screens.

This is your chance to tell your audience about your motivations, process and to help them understand the story around the film. Here a few questions to ask yourself before you write your introduction.

- 1 Why did you make your documentary about this specific subject? What is it that interested you?
- **2** What challenges did you face while filming? Is there an interesting or funny story you can tell about the production?
- **3** What do you want your audience to gain from watching this documentary?

Your introduction to the film is also an introduction to you – the filmmaker, so start by introducing yourself and explaining briefly your film experience before this film. Then answer the questions above and finish with a short statement about what you have learned through the process. Then... let the film say the rest.

FILM INTRODUCTION (ABOUT 100-150 WORDS)



WORKSHEET REVIEWING YOUR FILE

NAME:

It is an important exercise as a filmmaker to look at your finished film critically. This means you look at what you are happy with and what you think you did right, but also at the parts of it that didn't measure up to your original vision, the parts that didn't resonate with your audience and anything you just didn't know how to do technically.

After you have screened your film for a few people and asked for some feedback, watch it again yourself, taking careful note of all the elements and answering the questions below.

EVALUATION OF MY DOCUMENTARY

Did the planning script work well for the film? Did it capture all of the information and ideas that you wanted it to? If not – why not?

Is the documentary interesting? Does it tell an entertaining story or present an idea clearly?

How do you feel about the camera work? What are you most happy with? What would you like to change or add?



Are you happy with the sound quality of your film? What would you change
or improve about it? Does the soundtrack work for the film?

Does the edit enhance the film? What would you change if you could do it again?

What feedback have you received about your film from the people who watched it and the people who were involved in making it? What suggestions did they offer?

What have you learned about filmmaking from the process of making this film? What will you do differently next time you make a film?



CONCLUSION



Now that you have made your first documentary, and had the opportunity to analyse it and learn from it, it's important to keep up the momentum. If you are interested in making documentaries as a profession and/or a passion, then now is better than ever to start making content. As a young person, you have insight, knowledge and a perspective that is unique to the majority of filmmakers out there. You also have a wide audience available at a click via sites such as Youtube.

With the knowledge you have acquired in this course, we encourage you to go forth and make more documentaries.

Ask your teacher if you can make photocopies of the important sections of this course, or if you can access the course material online then you can print it yourself.

Make a couple of more documentaries, and follow the process using the course material. This will ensure you fine tune these valuable skills. Make sure you are safe and ethical in your work, and soon you should find yourself a good audience.

You should also watch as many documentaries as you can. If you are hungry to consume documentaries to support your own development, here are some of our favourite Australian feature documentaries. Some of these are available via streaming services (eg. Netflix, SBS On Demand and Youtube) while some will need a trip to the library or DVD store.

CANE TOADS: AN UNNATURAL HISTORY (1988) by Mark Lewis.

Duration: 47 minutes.

Australia is famous for its dangerous, destructive wildlife. This hilarious doco dissects the cultural significance of the ugly beast called Cane Toad.

YEAR OF THE DOGS (1997) by Michael Cordell

Duration: 1hr 26mins

A fly-on-the-wall doco about AFL football club Footscray that captures every ugly, shattering, and often hilarious moment with the team. Not only for lovers of sport.

MOLLY & MOBAREK (2003) by Tom Zubrycki

This fly-on-the-wall feature explores the burgeoning relationship between two very different people: Molly, a young woman living in regional NSW town and Mobarek, a refugee from Afghanistan.

BRA BOYS (2007) by co-directors and Bra Boys Sunny Abberton and Macario De Souza.

Duration: 1hr 23mins

This doco explores the sub-culture of Sydney beach suburb Maroubra and the Bra Boys, a collective of local surfers, known for their "anti-social behaviour".



FIRST AUSTRALIANS

Duration: 50mins x 7 episodes

This landmark DOCO series chronicles the birth of contemporary Australia as never told before, from the perspective of its first people.

NOT QUITE HOLLYWOOD (2008) by Mark Hartley

Duration: 1hr 43mins

Not Quite Hollywood, details the garish, full-tilt exploitation movies that were churned out by Australian filmmakers in the seventies and eighties.

THAT SUGAR FILM (2015) by Damon Gameau

Duration: 1hr 42mins

This entertaining doco explores the prevalence of sugar in our society, how it's been sold to us, and the myriad and surprising ways that it affects our minds and insides.

GAYBY BABY (2015) by Maya Newell

Duration: 1 hr 25mins

This doco follows the lives of four different kids – wrestling fan, Gus; Sydneysider, Ebony; erudite Matt; and Fiji-based Graham – whose parents all happen to be gay.

SHERPA (2015) by Jennifer Peedom

Duration: 1 hr 30 mins

After an ice slide kills 16 Sherpas on Everest, they unite in grief and anger to reclaim the mountain.

NATIONAL FILM AND SOUND ARCHIVE

You can also explore a wide variety of feature and short documentaries online at the **National Film and Sound Archive** <u>https://www.nfsa.gov.au/collection/curated</u>

