Lights! Camera! Action!

Crime Scene Video Techniques

Things to think about before you start;

• Do you need video?

Not every scene requires it.

• Large scene ~

Video helps to illustrate the size and scope of the crime scene (damage, level of violence).

• Large amount of physical evidence ~

Video helps the attorneys, witnesses, judge, and jury relate where items were located within the scene.

• Do you have multiple scenes ~

Video can be used to show a path of travel or movement, or the distance between scenes (combine with aerial photos).

• Ability & Resources

Can you do the video? Do your duties permit this? If not; can you get someone else to do it under your direction? (CSO, reserve, a trusted civilian)

- Do you have the equipment to shoot the video? (Camcorder, Point & Shoot or DSLR on movie mode).
- Do you have the resources to edit the video? Do you have the equipment, software, and skills to edit? If not, can you delegate the task?
- Can the prosecutor play the video in court? ALWAYS test the video before any courtroom proceeding. Murphy's Law is not exempt from courtrooms!



Who is your audience?

- The Judge and the Jury
- The Family
- People in the gallery
- Media

Who are your critics?

- Defense counsel
- The Judge
- The Prosecutor
- The Jury

Have a Plan!

Professional moviemakers create a storyboard that plans and describes each scene before its shot.

- Create a mental "storyboard" by thinking about how you will record the scene. This gives you a place to start, a direction to go, and helps you to stay organized.

Shoot Like a Pro

~ Develop your video techniques <u>BEFORE</u> you get to a crime scene.

~ If you shoot video, you <u>must</u> disclose a copy to the prosecutor.

~ Submit a total footage copy of your video to your prosecutor. Edits made for courtroom presentation can be made at their request.

~ Record sufficient footage to support your observations and the story.

"The objective for documenting with video is not to show items of evidence in close-up detail. That is the job of your still photos. The video shows an overall to mid-range view of the size and scope of the scene, the location of the evidence, and the relationship of the areas containing evidence."

Two Methods of Recording:

~ Shoot to Show means that you will be using your raw footage in court so it is best to decide what you need to document and the order in which you will record the scenes to provide a chronological order for your viewers to follow.

~ Shoot to Edit allows you to document your scenes out of order, use parts of clips, or reshoot a scene if necessary. ***A total footage copy should be provided to the prosecutor along with your edit.*** The advantage? Your video, and its message, will be shorter and more concise.

When shooting your video and when editing, keep the following ideas in the front of your mind;

• How many people will be telling the story?

- Crime Scene Personnel
- Attorneys
- Other First Responders
- Investigators
- Medical Examiner
- Witnesses

• Refrain from continuous recording without breaks.

• Keep your clips short: 15 seconds to 1 minute each.

• Ideally, you want your total or finished video to be between 5 and 15 minutes long. (although length is sometimes dictated by the size of the scene).

• Don't walk with the camera! It is unsafe, it creates the "home-movie" look of an amateur, and will make the viewers ill.

• Begin and end each shot with non movement. When you begin to record, count to three before moving. At the end of your shot, count to three before you stop recording.

• To record distance without walking, slowly zoom toward the point where you would have walked, count to three, and stop recording. Walk to a point just before that spot and start filming again, slowly zooming to the next point in the path you are following, count to three, stop recording, and so on.

• It is NEVER advisable to narrate your video at the scene. Disable your audio or disable your mouth (and warn others on scene to keep quiet) to prevent the recording of extraneous audio. It is preferable to narrate from the witness stand.

• As you shoot, think about how you or someone else will be narrating your video in court and record sufficient footage to support the testimony.

• If your scene contains a body, pan the area with a wide shot. Refrain from zooming in to, or out from, the body. The defense will surely object. Your still photos will provide the necessary views of the victim.

Using a Camcorder or Using Your Still Camera as a Video Camera

• Do your still photos of the scene first. They will have the most/best detail and resolution.

• Never consider using a video camera to make still photos. A still frame from video can be as small as 1/3 of ONE megapixel ! (Print size equals a large postage stamp…1.5 inches x 2 inches!)

• Although the image you see on the camera's screen looks bright enough, it likely is not! Color will not appear accurate, shadows will obscure detail and dark areas will appear very grainy. Use lights!

• NEVER use a flashlight to light a scene or the objects within when video recording. The area you are holding the flashlight on will be over-exposed and appear blank.

• If you are video recording indoors (or outdoors at night), turn on all of the lights you can or set up a couple of work lights. (In the doorway of the room you're going to video or outside of the camera's field of view, if outdoors). Move the lights with you from room to room or scene to scene as you shoot.

• If the lights are not LED, the light may be yellow to the camera. Set the white balance of the camera to tungsten/incandescent. Proper White Balance will render the colors correctly and make your picture brighter!

• If using a DSLR, hold the camera with both hands, tuck your elbows in, and cup your left hand under the lens to support the camera's weight. (Even better, use a tripod!)

• Set the ISO on your camera to 400 or 800 to increase the camera's sensitivity in low light scenes.

• Always choose a higher resolution over a lower resolution to record your video (the minimum should be the standard definition setting of 640x480). Very high resolution HD or 4K settings will require more disc space and may require additional processing before they can be viewed on computers with basic video viewing software.

NIGHT MODE ON VIDEO CAMERA ~ REGULAR SHOOTING MODE



Night mode introduces a good deal of grain/noise, Slows the shutter speed causing lights and objects in the video to smear, and creates a 'night vision goggle' appearance. Using the night or IR mode will result in changes in the color and appearance of synthetics, creating a false representation of the scene and your evidence.

• Resist using the temptation to use the night mode. If your camera automatically reverts to IR video in low light, override the setting or choose a different camera for crime scene video.

Pans & Zooms

• Plan your pan: Decide where you're going to start your shot, where you're going to stop, and what you're going to show in the clip, before you record.

• Moving your feet can introduce bounce in your shots. Try this: Plant your feet where your pan will end then pivot your body & camera to the point where you will start your shot w/o moving your feet. Begin recording. Pan by twisting your body rather than moving the camera or your feet. This method will allow you better control for a smooth pan.

• Use a wide angle pan follow the path of movement for suspect or victim.



Can you see the knife? Since the scene is dark, the iris in the lens is wide open. The intense light from a flashlight causes the detail in the area lighted by the flashlight to overexpose and disappear. Instead, use auxiliary lighting (camera light, fire dept lights, or even headlights to light the entire scene so that your evidence is lit by the same amount of light as it's surroundings.

• Less movement is better—do a 90°-180° sweep from L to R in a room or outdoors, then stop. Avoid 360° pans. These can confuse the viewer, are impossible to edit, and make people sick.

• Pan in the direction of the activity you are documenting otherwise, pan left to right. If you mix pan directions too much between shots, it will make your viewers ill.

• Pan slow (If you think you are panning slow enough, slow down more!) Viewing your video afterward on a computer or TV will help you determine pan speed.

• If you are panning slow enough, you won't need to zoom.

• Don't pan while zoomed in. It will make your pan appear to move a LOT faster than you think it's moving (also true for panning across large objects or close objects).

• A tight zoom while holding the camera will amplify EVERY movement of the camera. Zoom only to a point that frames your subject or zoom to the equivalent of a mid-range still photo.

• Zoom into evidence or zoom out from it (not both).

• Less zooming/slower zooming is better. Use it sparingly and with purpose. Refrain from zooming in/out in the middle of a shot or a pan.

• If documenting a small room, record the area containing the details or the evidence. Panning walls for the sake of recording them is not necessary since you have still photos of the entire room.

• Small room: start low and pan up then stop. If necessary, you can also pan over and back down again then stop. Excessive panning to and fro is aptly referred to a "gardenhosing".

• Small room or small area: Record 7-10 seconds of video without moving the camera. (Static shot)

~ What Should I Shoot ~

Establishing Shots

• Exterior shot of the neighborhood/area from more than one angle of street to show the neighborhood.

• Show proximity to other structures

• Witness location or point of view

• Suspect's path of flight

Building Exteriors

• Entrance to the structure

• Address, mailbox or street sign in foreground of shot (no tight zooms, just frame it with its surroundings)

• If its night, start on the interior and do the exterior when you have daylight unless you have access to auxiliary lighting or unless weather/other factors will jeopardize the integrity of the scene.

• Record areas containing volatile evidence with still photography first, before it's lost. (debris, footwear, tiremarks, body)

• Leave the tent markers in place if evidence is collected before video recording is complete to mark its location within the scene. Your still photos will show closer and better image detail of the evidence.

Building Interiors

• Use the video to lead your viewer through the scene

• Relate evidence to it's location within a room and relate the room to it's location within a structure.

• Back-shooting indoors ~ After the initial pan of a room from the doorway, move to a different corner of the room and film the other direction toward the door.

• Back-shooting outdoors ~ After the initial pan, move to a different location in your scene and shoot toward the area you were just at to show the side of the scene that was behind you.

• Move slow enough through your video clips to al-

• Always make time to review your video on a computer screen or TV after clearing the scene. The video will look very different. You will be able to see and judge which techniques need improvement (zoom speed, pan speed, pan technique, steadiness, lighting, etc.)

• Try editing your video, even if it is just for practice. Editing will change and improve the way that you shoot, beginning with your very next scene!