

PRODUCING AUDIO-VISUAL SEQUENCES

Audio-visual (A-V) is different from most other branches of photography. Making a good A-V sequence requires expertise in several disciplines which are outside the experience of most photographers. No longer is a judge looking at individual images, but is, hopefully, immersed in a story of some kind - using "story" in the widest possible sense. A-V has more in common with film and video than with single picture photography.

A-V should use pictures and sound to create a fantasy world and invite the audience in to it for a few minutes. At the end, the audience should be changed in some way - possessing new information, feeling relaxed, laughing, feeling angry etc....

Features which enhance this process - appropriate pictures and music, carefully chosen transitions etc., - are beneficial; features which destroy the mood - happy music which doesn't match to gloomy pictures, repeated change of picture format, banal dialogue etc., -) are to be avoided.

PICTURES. As in any branch of photography, the pictures should be competent – well composed, sharp, correctly exposed, well lit, natural colour balance, etc. However the composition of a picture intended to be used in the flow of a sequence may differ from the composition of a similar picture intended to be viewed on its own.

In advanced A-V productions, a picture will be composed so as to take into account the composition of the pictures which precede and

follow in the sequence, and also the kind of transition which will be used. Getting these related factors right will enhance the "flow" of the sequence by helping one picture to melt seamlessly into the next. In some ways it's a bit like arranging prints on a panel for maximum overall effect. The relationship between pictures is as important as the pictures themselves.

A typical sequence requires many more pictures than a print panel. Some of them may seem uninteresting, if considered in isolation, but may, nevertheless form integral and necessary part of the story, such as a sign board to indicate where the action is taking place.

Ideally the images should progress logically, in the sense of showing an unfolding story, and visually, in the sense of one picture "melting" into the next, rather than merely "changing."

Skilful manipulation of images (Photoshop etc.) is encouraged - composite images, consisting of elements from two or more original images, offer the possibility of changing just part of the picture, further enhancing the flow of the sequence. Care must be taken not to overdo such manipulation.

All of the images should be of the same size and orientation - changing formats reminds viewers that they are just looking at a series of pictures rather than a movie, and can ruin both mood and flow. There are many unobtrusive ways of using portrait format pictures in a landscape sequence.

<i>TO BE AVOIDED</i>	<i>TO BE ENCOURAGED</i>
Pictures unrelated to each other.	The pictures should tell a story of some sort.
Pictures taken under different lighting conditions and/or with different colour balances.	All pictures in a "scene" should have the same lighting and colour balance so that they at least seem to have been taken at the same time.
Mixture of image sizes.	All images should be the same size and fill the screen.
Mixture of portrait and landscape formats.	There are ways of using portrait pictures unobtrusively in a landscape sequence (see "Resources.")
Shifting horizons between pictures	Consecutive horizons should align or fade via an intermediate picture with no horizon.
All pictures taken from similar viewpoint.	Mixture of wide and close pictures, different angles etc will maintain audience interest.

SOUNDTRACK. Many judges will not be as familiar with audio as they are with pictures but, for around a quarter of the cost of Photoshop, you can equip yourself with all the hardware and software necessary to make soundtracks which, **if done correctly**, are indistinguishable in both quality and content from a radio programme. Any shortcomings are down to the producer, not the equipment.

Every process to do with digital images has an equivalent process in audio and there is as much to learn on the audio side as on the picture side of A-V. Having said that, at club level, most soundtracks consist of a single piece of music, copied off a CD. With today's equipment there is simply no excuse for anything less than a perfect copy. Distortion, background hiss, etc., should be marked down, as should any fade-ins or -outs which are not smooth. *Continued on next page*

If there is a voice-over, the script should be well written, using the minimum number of words necessary to convey the information. It should be clearly spoken. There should be gaps in the dialogue for the audience to absorb what has just been said. The voice should be well recorded and sound natural. Far too often amateur voice recordings have a hard metallic edge (“space invaders” type sound) due to misuse of either recorder or software. This simply should not happen, and should be marked down, just as overexposed pictures would be marked down. In fact all audio faults should be marked as harshly as picture faults. **It follows, of course, that A-V judges need to recognise these problems.**

If spot sound effects are used, they should be relevant, sound “right” and be at an appropriate loudness. The whole soundtrack should be smoothly mixed so that it “flows” in a natural and unobtrusive way.

<i>TO BE AVOIDED</i>	<i>TO BE ENCOURAGED</i>
“This is the city of Glasgow, which is situated on the river Clyde ...”	“Glasgow, on the Clyde.....”
“....fourteen point six centimetres wide by eleven point three centimetres high....”	“....about the size of a postcard.....”
Music faded out at the end of the pictures or the sequence padded out with inferior pictures until the music ends.	Edit the music to shorten it - preserving the natural end)
Continuous dialogue.	Pauses allow the audience to absorb what has been said.
Popping “p”s.	Correct use of microphones
“Space invaders” hollow metallic sound to voice.	Use recorder and software correctly
Music which doesn’t match the “mood” of the pictures.	Pictures and music should be sympathetic to each other in all respects.

PRODUCTION. The act of assembling sound and pictures into a seamless “whole” which should be greater than the sum of its parts. This is the most important area, where sequences can be made or broken. Idea, title, story, structure, script and message can create a mood. Selection of pictures, music and transitions can match, enhance, or deliberately change, that mood. A sequence should have a beginning (setting the scene, establishing the location etc) a middle (usually the bulk of the story) and an end (wrapping things up neatly, or, sometimes having an unexpected comedic twist.) Transitions should be carefully chosen to match the “mood” of the pictures and the shape of prominent features in the pictures. Transitions, zooms, pans etc used merely “because they are there” are counter-productive.

<i>TO BE AVOIDED</i>	<i>TO BE ENCOURAGED</i>
“Two sequences in one” leading to confusion.	The aim should be clear - if two subjects need to be covered, consider if it would be better to make two sequences.
Too much detailed information.	Consider your audience - detail may be acceptable to a group of enthusiasts, but not a general audience.
Zoom onto “nothing”	There should be a reason for using any effect.
Repeated zooms.	Use special effects sparingly and always for a reason.
Repeated zooms “in.”	Zooms “out” are more interesting as new information is revealed - but not too often!
Use of effects “because they are there.”	There should be a reason for using any effect.
Pointless video.	Video should be used only if it adds something.
Wobbly video.	Use a tripod! Then video will better match the rock-steady still images.

Continuous movement making the audience sea-sick.	Use movement sparingly and only when the story requires it.
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Sequence is the final combination of pictures and sound shown to an audience.

Transition is changing one picture to the next - in the past, the only transition available was a straight fade. Nowadays dozens are available. The skill is in choosing one with the right characteristics and geometry to match the composition and mood of the pictures involved. Ideally one picture should “melt” into the next, not merely “change.”

Mixing is altering the timing and loudness of various pieces of audio so that they fade in and out of each other in a natural and convincing way. **Good mixing usually goes unnoticed - so do listen!**

Howard Gregory chairman@wilmslowguildav.org.uk