

Special Considerations for the Cameraperson

1) Become familiar with the camera Know how to set the white balance for proper color; how to zoom and adjust focus. Although at first it's trickier to learn how to use the manual focus instead of the automatic one, it will give you better pictures later on when you are shooting. When setting focus, zoom in on something that has a lot of detail, adjust the focus, and then zoom back and the clear picture should hold.

2) Put a tape in the camcorder, do a practice recording and play it back to make sure everything is connected properly. (On most cameras you need to have a tape in the machine to be able to trigger the "record" function anyway (so you can see what you're shooting,) whether or not you actually videotape anything.

3) The range of field for a camera is like having the camera at one point of an equilateral triangle. As people get closer to the camera, they need to angle in more towards it, so they are still in the shot. One helpful exercise to show this is to have students line up in a straight line across the back, with the camera in the center in the front. The row moves forward, looking at the monitor. When each individual can no longer be seen, he/she should stop. The resulting picture will be a triangle.

4) Practice shooting with the camera at different levels and determine what is best gained from each angle.

low (on or near the floor)

waist high

shoulder height

high (held above the head or on a ladder).

Nancy's Personal note: I prefer to use the monitor in the studio as my viewfinder, because it allows me more freedom of movement than if I am shooting while constantly squinting into the camera's little viewfinder. Try both and see which you prefer.

5) When moving while holding the camera, move with slightly bent knees and a sideward crab walk to minimize unsteadiness.

6) Sometimes when the camera moves too much, the viewer on the other side gets "motion sickness" and can't decipher where in space the movement is happening. The viewer loses his/her sense of orientation — which can be useful in capturing the spirit/energy of the movement but not necessarily to replicate it. This is in direct contradiction to one of the most effective ways of "artistic" shooting, which is to take the object/mover/participant out of specific, perimeter limiting bounds. This ability for giving an "anchor" of a space is important for shooting in an interactive event.

7) How do you make movement look more powerful and energetic? Generally movement towards and away from the camera, or with the camera at an angle instead of straight on, helps to make the movement look more powerful/energetic. To cover lateral movement the camera can either pan (move from side to side) to keep the movement large in the frame, but then you give up the sense of space covered. The other possibility is to stay with the shot wide, but then the figure is smaller and less powerful.

8) When the coach is explaining something, or someone is asking a question, try to get a closeup on the face. It makes for a more intimate and immediate presence.

9) When shooting a step or combination the first time, past participants have stated that it is helpful to have the sequence shot from behind, as though learning in a usual classroom situation. Then you don't get into problems with figuring out (and reversing) left and right, which is always confusing. When direction IS important, we have put a blue box to the right of our space and had the other group do the same in their space, and then give directions using THAT as the point of reference ("move towards the blue box").

10) Attention should be paid to the space so it is as clean and free of distractions/ clutter as possible. This results in clear, communicative images.

11) When the mobile camera is but one of two or three cameras, keep your eye on the monitor to see what the other camera is shooting so that you can best compliment the shot (with a closeup, shot from a different angle etc.) A rapport and communication needs to be established with the assistant coach, the person doing the switching of the cameras.

12) When shooting the coach while they are making a correction on the screen of the distant group, position yourself behind the teacher so you can see his/her hand as well as the picture on the screen.

13) Don't stop when you're trying to find the best shot and way to convey the movement until you've found it...

14) Remember to document your shooting during an interactive event. It is very important that there be a tape in the mobile camera that is recording all of the cameraperson's shooting. This video is often used for various purposes after and exchange or within as series of exchanges including: evaluation, archival footage, promotional materials for TPL, and additional learning tools for the coach and participants. We have found that most cameras using miniDV tapes need two tapes on hand to capture a full event.

15) One way of shooting a 3-dimensional object in a 2-dimensional format is to travel around the object. Keeping knees bent a little and mastering a foot crossing behind step can help maintain smoothness of the move.

16) When shooting a close-up be right in front of the person speaking so they can talk directly into the camera, which creates an image of them talking directly to the far site. Also be aware of your position in relation to the monitors. If the coach has to look one direction to talk into the camera and another direction to look at the monitor/ see the response, it detracts from a sense of intimacy between studios. In general, close-ups create a sense of intimacy and help to break down the feeling of distance.

17) Nurture yourself by studying photography books and going to photography exhibits. You will find new ways (perspectives) of shooting.