How to Create a Shot List

1. Begin by reading the script thoroughly and taking any notes down as ideas pop into your head.
2. Imagine how an individual scene within the script will be filmed shot by shot.
3. Watch movies or look at any form of visual medium to get ideas for shot selections.
4. Using Word or Excel create a document with three columns. Title the document by the name or number of the scene.
5. Label each column in the following order: shot number, action description and shot description.
6. Label the shot number in the first column.
7. Describe in the second column the action that occurs in the script during the shot.
8. Describe how the shot will look as the action occurs. E.G., profile medium shot that tracks in or straight close up that pans with the subject.
9. Repeat steps 6, 7 and 8 until the scene has been broken down into all of its shots.
10. Repeat this entire process until a shot list is created for every scene.

Shot List Example One

A student wants to shoot a scene of a family eating dinner. A typical shot list might look something like this:

a. Close up of an empty dinner plate being filled with food
b. Close up of a tuna casserole in a serving dish
c. Close up of steam rising from a plate of asparagus
d. Medium shot of a person sitting down to eat
e. Another medium shot of a person sitting down to eat
f. Wide shot of several people sitting down to eat
g. Medium shot of a person picking up a fork and serving food
h. Medium shot of 2 people eating
i. Long shot of family eating dinner

Shot List Example Two

A student wants to do a documentary video about a person who walks dogs at the SPCA as a volunteer. A typical shot list might look something like this:

a. Interview of the Volunteer who walks dogs
b. Close up of a dog
c. Medium shot of a dog
d. Long shot of the halls in the SPCA
e. Exterior shot of the SPCA
f. Exterior shot of Volunteer walking down street
g. Exterior shot of Volunteer walking into SPCA
h. Interior shot (medium) of Volunteer entering SPCA
i. Interior shot of Volunteer checking in at reception desk
j. Medium shot of Volunteer walking down hallway
k. Medium shot of Volunteer walking up to cage with dogs
l. Medium shot of dogs being excited, and leaving cage
m. Close up shot of dog being excited
n. Close up shot of cage being opened

Coverage: The purpose of getting all these shots is to make sure there is enough footage (coverage) so that when the editing begins, the editor has enough material to work with and cut with. This allows for much more creativity when editing to tell the story. Do not limit yourself to just one shot.

If you only have one shot to use when editing, it doesn’t allow for very much room to cut and play with the edit. You’re forced to use the one shot you got.

B-Roll: Shots b through n in the 2nd example above are examples of B-roll. This is footage that the editor can use to cut to while the interview subject explains what they are doing. This makes for a more dynamic and interesting video than a simple long take of a person on camera talking (“talking head”).