

Welcome to PVTV LEARNING, from ParkerVision. This curriculum represents the most advanced and effective way to teach high school and college students the science of modern television broadcast. Until now, most broadcast curriculums focused on methodology that evolved over 30 years ago. This curriculum, however, covers basic production techniques and equipment, and then transports the students into the advanced automation technologies that are quickly becoming the norm in today's television broadcast industry.

If you have elected to download only the PDF versions of the Teacher's and Student's Editions of PVTV LEARNING, feel free to jump right into teaching. Throughout the chapters, you will see references made to additional materials in the way of on-line lessons and tests, and explanatory videos and animations.

This additional material is available to educators at a significantly discounted cost in electronic format (on a CD ROM). For more information on obtaining this additional material for your school, visit our LEARNING web site at [www.PVTVLEARNING.com](http://www.PVTVLEARNING.com) or contact us as shown below.

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# Documentary

## What's Up, Doc-umentary?

Documentaries do what the name implies, document something. A documentary is by nature a work of non-fiction. The information that accompanies the pictures and sounds is the driving force behind the documentary. Almost any topic can be addressed in documentary format, and television can bring a subject to life in a way that print can't. Selecting a topic is the hard part because there's so much to choose from. The best advice is to pick a subject in which you're interested. If you care about the topic, your audience is more likely to be drawn into the story you tell.

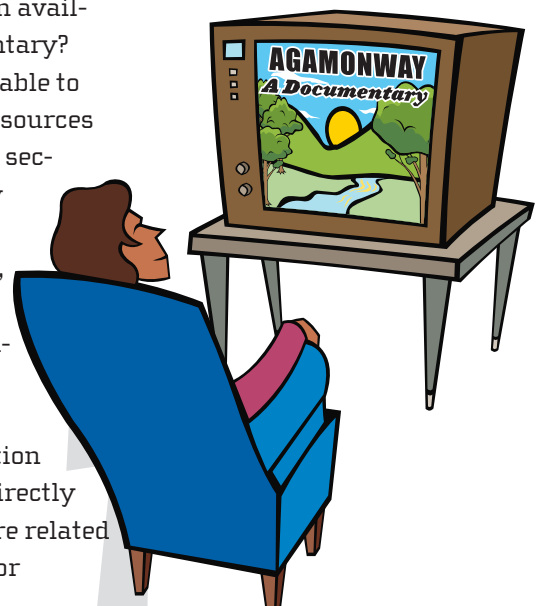
instance, someone who's done research on a given topic. First-person interviews are important, but be sure to cross-check the text of the interviews with other sources. People sometimes unwittingly—or intentionally—"shade" their perspective. Just as in news stories, there are probably two or more sides to every topic. Evaluate all your research to avoid a biased piece. After a preliminary evaluation of the data and other available information, decide if there's enough to merit proceeding to the next step. If the answer is yes, you'll need to create a preliminary

The research process begins long before the first shot is ever recorded. Gather information from as many sources as possible. Is there enough information available to "drive" a documentary? What resources are available to you? How many primary sources are available? How many secondary sources? Primary sources include original documents, photographs, eyewitness accounts and letters written by individuals closely connected to the subject. Secondary sources include information from those who are not directly related to the topic but are related indirectly in some way, for

### Objectives:

After completing this section you will be able to:

- Define the role of a documentary and its various genres
- Identify primary and secondary sources
- Organize the resources necessary to produce a documentary



# Documentary



content outline. It's sort of a rough draft of what you think the documentary will look like when it's completed. Keep in mind that your outline can change as the research progresses. You'll have to start developing a structure somewhere along the line, so it's a good idea to do it sooner rather than later. Balance the amount of narrative you use with the number of on-camera interviews. You'll need to develop a visual content outline, too. Are there photographs, illustrations or memorabilia to shoot? Do you need graphics to represent other facts and statistics? Let your shooting style and use of effects take its cue from the content. For example, if your topic is about the impact of the Internet on education, you may want your graphics and effects to have a high-tech look. If you're doing a historical piece, you may want to use only cuts and dissolves to transition between shots.

Don't underestimate the power of

natural sound. You don't need to use voice-over to cover every frame. Sometimes natural sound, even pauses in the interview as the subject takes a moment to collect his or her thoughts, can add power to what was said. It also gives the viewer time to process the information.

As you line up possible interview sources, do pre-interviews. Pre-interviews take place during the research stage and allow your subjects time to think about their responses. While you're out conducting the pre-interviews, scout possible locations for shooting, too. Often it's a good idea to place your interview subject in a space that reinforces your story. For example, if your documentary is about musicians, you may want to shoot where these musicians practice or play. Or you may decide to shoot all of your interviews with one standardized backdrop. Again, it's your project, so you decide on the look you want.

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Where you decide to shoot also affects your total shooting style. Will you use carefully composed static shots, or will you give the appearance of being “on the fly”? If your documentary is about how young people balance school, jobs, athletics, hobbies and family life, you might decide that most of your shots will be on location. Location shots lend an added sense of context that studio shots may not capture. However, as discussed in the previous unit, once you move outside the studio, you must address the technical concerns of sound and lighting, as well as other logistics. Do you have the time and means to shoot on location?

There's no specified limit for how long or short a documentary can be. Most producers think in

terms of thirty-, sixty- or 120-minute segments. That's so the documentary fits into standard broadcast television time slots.

Documentaries that run longer are often turned into series and then cut into episodes that fit into the standard blocks. For your first ven-

ture into the documentary format, aim for about ten minutes total running time. It's enough time to develop a topic but not so long as to be unmanageable.

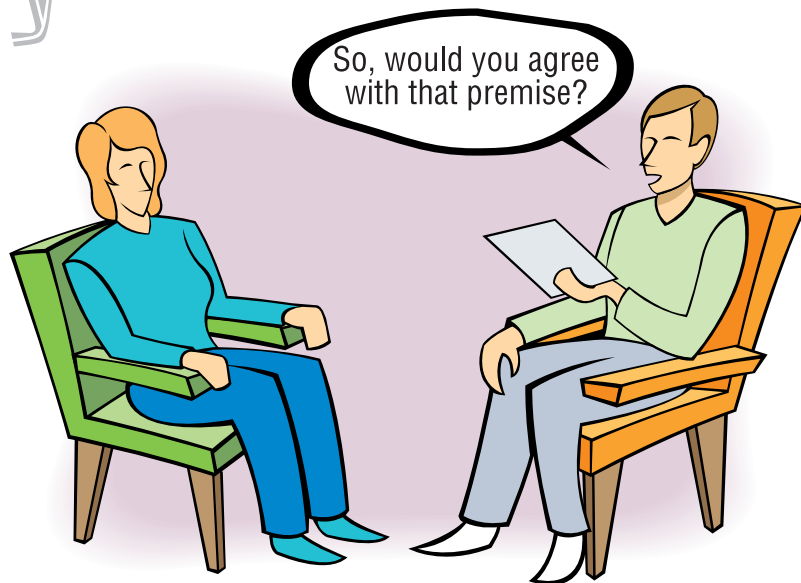
Like other types of writing, documentaries have an introduction, a body and a conclusion. The skills you've practiced for news interviews will help you conduct interviews for your documentary. Just as you have been trained to do, prepare a list of questions beforehand. Be sure to have enough background information so you can ask insightful questions. If you don't understand a response, ask your subject to clarify it.

Although it's time consuming, transcribing your interviews is an absolute must before even beginning to write narrative to accompany it. From the transcription you can select the best sound bites and determine in what order they will go. Of course, you'll want to achieve a logical flow of information. Narrative can be used to clarify or add important information that wasn't mentioned anywhere else in the interviews. However, some documentaries use voice-over narratives almost exclusively.

...so, the 5th at ten o'clock?



# Documentary



Another big decision is how to begin your documentary. What will be the first thing the audience sees and hears? Will you begin with voice-over narration to provide background information for your audience, or a montage of sound bites and video meant to draw them in? Match your writing style to the tone of the subject. You'll want to write into and out of the sound bites, as you did when producing a news show. Sometimes the sound bite itself provides a good transition, and at other times the narrative is better. Music can also be used as a device to transition between segments or to change the mood or pace of the story. Again, don't use music simply for its own sake. Consider whether it enhances understanding of the piece.

Be sure to double- and triple-check your facts. If you want to use copyrighted material, including photographs, written material or music, you must first get permission. Allow sufficient time to receive a response, typically several weeks. If you don't receive a reply within two or three weeks, try again. Be persistent, but if you still don't receive a reply, you won't be able to use the material.

If your time is limited, you may try calling to get permission to use a video clip. If it's one of the major networks, even if they do say they will grant permission, the cost to use even a clip of less than a minute could run from hundreds to thousands of dollars. Government agencies, on the other hand, may provide free video footage. For example, **NASA** has footage available for use. Other nonprofit agencies may also have video. You'll simply have to use your research skills to see what's available.

## <<ACTION>>

Watch and compare the different styles of varying types of documentaries. Make notes of techniques that you find interesting. This may help you

# Documentary

A few reminders about the actual production process: Shoot in the highest-quality format your equipment allows, and use external microphones for all of your interviews. Follow the production procedures that you have learned. The process is quite similar to news reporting; the difference lies in the amount of time you have to complete the project and the project's finished length. Just as you've done with your news stories, you'll want to create a paper edit before the actual editing process begins.



The structure of your program will be formed as you make decisions about how to edit the information. There are several different styles of editing, which you can combine to create emphasis and pacing and, in documentary editing, to editorialize. Documentaries often present and defend an editorial opinion. The way sound and images are juxtaposed can greatly change their meaning and aid in conveying your point of view.

The opportunity to produce a documentary is your chance to share information on a subject that goes beyond a cursory "did-you-know" treatment. This is your chance to explore a topic in much greater depth. Use the skills you have learned to the best of your ability. As journalists we have a responsibility to portray subjects as accurately as possible. The power to communicate ideas, to inform and enlighten, is now yours to share. Resolve to uphold the highest standards of the journalism profession. The work that you do can make a difference!

# Documentary

## <<ACTION>>

Practice shooting photographs, newspaper articles, medals or other types of shots that require macro focus. You can compose some very creative and professional-looking mixed-media shots. A scattering of photographs and medals over old newspaper headlines related to the topic can be a surprisingly effective shot. You may want to experiment with other types of items. A copy stand with adjustable lights can be helpful. To avoid glare on glossy photographs, use indirect light. Also, watch out for the reflection of the tally light in glossy pictures.