

The Art of Creating a Documentary

Jaleen Barr

Sport and Medical Sciences Academy

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There is a lot that goes into making a documentary. Creating a documentary is an art, most filmmakers prefer to think they are movies instead of documentaries. The same amount of work is put into making a documentary. When making a movie there is multiple things to think about including the idea, the research, the script, the camera angles, the B-roll, the lighting, the participants, the music, the audio, there's everything to think about when creating a documentary. Since I am creating my own documentary I want to understand how to really put together a strong documentary. While creating this I want to show the raw truths and struggle of Capstone and creating and executing a project like this. Choosing to make a documentary is choosing to uncover the truths behind the scene, I want everything to be real and honest. This will be my first documentary that I am making which makes it harder when most of the work falls on me. Usually when making a documentary or a movie there is a crew to help out, but I will be making this independently. Being creative is one aspect to making a documentary, the rest is the techniques used. While making this documentary I need to remember to take the audience into a different reality, but with a documentary I also want to inform the audience and be entertaining.

In order to make a strong documentary you need to make a movie. "The first rule of documentaries is: Don't make a documentary — make a MOVIE. Stop making documentaries. Start making movies. You've chosen this art form — the cinema, this incredible, wonderful art form, to tell your story." (Moore, 2014). Movies are what attract people, no one waits for the next documentary to go see in the theaters. They want to be taken away from reality

and pulled into another world. “They want the lights to go down and be taken somewhere. They don’t care whether you make them cry, whether you make them laugh, whether you even challenge them to think — but damn it, they don’t want to be lectured, they don’t want to see our invisible wagging finger popping out of the screen. They want to be entertained” (Moore, 2014). No one wants to be told how to think or feel, they just want entertainment and if there is a statement they do not want it to be shoved in their face during the whole movie. People want to come to that conclusion or feeling on their own. Michael Moore explains that documentaries are the same as movies if it is done correctly, the audience wants a mind of their own. “If you want to make a good documentary you need to make a movie, one that evokes emotions, makes you think. They want to be entertained but when they’re done watching you want them to leave with it in their mind, whether it’s anger or motivation, you want them to take something from the movie.” (Moore, 2014). The point of a documentary is to provide information to the audience in an entertaining way. Do not lecture the audience, pull them into the reality created, make them think and feel and have opinions of their own.

The biggest part to a documentary is the interview. Being an independent filmmaker can be the hardest part. There’s multiple thing you have to pay attention to and get set up on your own. The questions asked and the answers are going to dictate how the whole documentary will turn out. The movie is based off of the interview, it is used as the narration. Jourdan Aldredge explained how to get a good interview out of the person, “The art of interviewing can be a little awkward or intimidating at first. The goal of a good interviewer is to put your subject at ease and invite them into a dialogue.” (Aldredge, 2016). When interviewing someone it is important to make sure that they are comfortable, listened to and feel heard. During an interview it should be

a conversation not just rapid fire questions. There will not be desirable results from only having the participant answer the questions and not giving any feedback to what they are saying. They will start to feel more like a subject than a person in the documentary. “Any question that is not open ended gives them a quick escape and nothing for you to use.” (Aldredge, 2016). Asking a yes or no question won’t give any good answers. The interview should flow with the rest of the documentary. When making a documentary each answer to a question should tell a story, there should be in depth answers that will give feeling and character to the documentary. The interview is the whole structure of the documentary, it is the narration of the documentary from the start to the end of the film.

When making a documentary there is a lot more to add than just the interview aspect. Footage should be grabbed from what the person is actually talking about. You should get a wide shot of the actual scene of the place, show the person on site doing what they are explaining, add videos and pictures and graphics. Grab the attention of the audience. “Start with a wide shot of the whole area, then medium, and finish with a few close-ups.” This will set the tone of the film. There is more to a documentary than the interview. You should include the scenery (exposition shot); where it is set. There should be b-roll, zooms, pans, close ups, and action.. The interview should set the tone, but what is actually on screen should capture the audience's attention. “Documentaries are much more than just interviews. The real meat of many documentary films is found in the coverage and B-roll which merely uses the interviews as narration. Your subject will dictate what types of coverage are most important...” (Aldredge, 2016). The documentary should be like reading a book. When reading the book you can imagine the whole scene in your head, letting the words dictate what you think, see and feel. The book is the narration, the same way

the interview is the narration to the documentary. The interview should not be the only thing you see, the images should make the story for you also. Documentaries are another type of cinema, it should not just be a sit down video with the camera pointing at the person in the same angle and staying on them the whole time. There should be more happening, different camera angles, switching from showing the person doing what they are talking about using videos and pictures, there should be graphics to catch the audience's attention, there should be music. Documentaries are not only about the person talking, it is about what the person is talking about and that will guide the film.

There is more to making a documentary than getting the shot. Once you've recorded everything you wanted to use now comes the real part of pulling the piece together. "The real magic of documentary filmmaking doesn't begin until all the footage has been shot. In editing your documentary, you get your first real chance to explore how your subject's story is going to stack up." Editing is what sets every filmmaker apart, this is when you get to use your own style and do not need to follow any real rules. There is simple things to help keep everything under control and make sure that there is organization when editing the project. "Organize folders and label bins...Create sequences for individual interviews... Backup everything...You're going to rack up lots of footage making a documentary. You've simply got to start and stay organized. You'll want to set everything up as much as possible in the beginning or else things can take a turn quickly and you'll be looking at a mess." (Aldredge, 2016). You have everything to lose when creating a movie. You want everything backed up and organized when creating it because easily things can get messy. (Aldredge, 2016).

Once you've finished editing all of the videos now it's time for the music. Music is one of the biggest parts to any kind of movie. Music is what "determines the mood or the tone....one of the last components of a documentary film is the soundtrack...your sound and music are merely tools to help you define the mood or tone that you've already worked to develop." In all films music is what sets the audience up on how they should feel, ranging from sadness to aggression or inspiration. Music is what makes the whole film, when someone is speaking in a documentary music in the background can help. When showing the setting of a place or transitioning to a new scene there should be music instead of silence except for when the person is talking. Music is what makes the film exciting and putting together a soundtrack shows the progression throughout any kind of film. Even though there should be music in a film it doesn't mean there should not be some silence either. It's all about finding the balance between music and silence especially when making a documentary, you do not want the music overbearing what the subject is talking about but you also want to persuade the audience on what they should feel or think about what is going on. "Don't be afraid of silence. Before you go too crazy with soundtracking your documentary, consider the possibility of no soundtrack at all (or at least, very little). Emotional cues can be built in many different ways..." Some films don't need music every moment or have an 'emotional cue' that sets the tone for the scene but there is silence the rest of the scene. "The key is to understand that music is vital for your documentary film and not impossible to find." Finding music for your films can be hard especially on a budget because you can not always pay to use a certain song or pay someone to compose the music either. In many cases people are left with using royalty free music or trying to make their own music to use in their films if they know how to.

Creating a documentary is an art form. There is a lot of work that goes into making a documentary independently. The reason I chose to create a documentary over a fictional film is to show the raw truths. Capstone is a stressful year long project, along the way students make mistakes and learn. Capstone is a self growth project that breaks everyone out of their shell and force them to do what they believe that are not able to achieve. Seniors have stressed and complained about this project, but everyone goes through it and I want to document the process of all of it. I want to show to the public how rewarding Capstone can be for students before they graduate and take their next steps into the real world. Documentaries are impactful the way they provide you with information and they come from real world experiences. Documentaries uncover truths that the public are not able to see on their own, these kinds of films are eye openers for society.

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