



The Digital Documentary Project

Working alone or in a group, you will develop an original digital documentary. This documentary should tell a compelling story based on reality, and it should make imaginative use of digital technology. You have a lot of freedom in determining the subject of your documentary; it can look at a past event or current issue, and can focus on a place, a person, a problem, a process, or an event.

Although the documentary should reflect substantial effort, it should also be focused and coherent — avoid tackling a subject that's too big, too one-sided, or too dull. Your final cut should be 3-10 minutes long. I need to approve your topic before you can shoot it.

An outline:

Form a group around a topic of mutual interest. (Or work alone: documentary is that rare form of film that a single person can do... since you are recording the “real world”, one person can do all the shooting and editing.)

Write a **prospectus**: a brief summary of your digital documentary, any necessary background information, an explanation of why the documentary is worth making, and who (beyond class) would be the intended audience.

Plan the elements of the film. For example: people to be interviewed; locations/actions to be shot; archival images to be researched. Remember that a film of just talking heads is usually a bore.

Contact the people you wish to film to get their permission & set up shooting times.

Write a **treatment**, the documentary version of a script. Since you can't storyboard a documentary or plan exactly what your subjects are going to say (it's “real life”, after all, which is unpredictable), your treatment will describe the general flow of your film from segment to segment. Treatment includes all the planning done above.

Gather the footage and sound you will need for the documentary. Since a documentary rarely gets shot in one shooting (unless you are documenting a single event), I'll expect you to shoot film, review it, and log the footage on a weekly basis. Logging the footage means a written record of what's on it, to save you time later in editing.

Editing documentaries can take considerably longer than well-planned fiction films: the ratio of footage made to footage used is usually much bigger, since you aren't using actors and don't have control of what's going onto film.