

No Scriptwriting

Here's a sneaky, snappy way to record a truly authentic narration.

By ANDREW S. JACOBS

Flashback to your last training tape production. Did it in any way resemble this?...

It took five months to make from start to finish, when you knew it should have taken only two.

You had trouble from the beginning. There were so many "experts" with whom to confer, that you spent a week too long doing research. After finishing the first draft of the script, you waited a month for the review committee's comments. When you finally had the script back in your hands, you barely recognized it. All told, the script went through four rewrites before being approved.

Then came the taping. You tried to stick to the script while coaxing natural performances from your talent. But the entertaining hams from your office parties became nervous when reading from the script.

In editing, again, things didn't go too well. In a couple of cases, you'd failed to capture just the right nuances that the script called for. In other cases, you had beautiful footage, but none of it was called for in the script. Constrained by your script, you finished your edit and completed the tape.

Sure, it was approved. But somehow it just should have been better.

If this scenario rings sorely familiar, you're probably ready for a rewrite—of your job description. But first consider an alternate picture of how videos can be produced.

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A plan for a quick, quality production

You are now beginning a new project. It's a combination introductory training tape and public information documentary illustrating the process of widgetmaking. Although the tape's primary objective is training, it also has to be interesting to a general audience. You have a limited media budget, and only 30 days to produce. You're determined to meet all these challenges and to avoid your past production pitfalls.

You consider something quite radical: doing away with the script altogether. You'd simply go into the widget factory and shoot, documentary style.

But can that really work for a training tape? Sure! The challenge is in balancing the spontaneity of a documentary with the precision of a fully scripted training tape.

No pens or paper required

On your first day of work on the project you call the chief widget production supervisor, Mr. Bloss, and ask him the name of his best and most interesting widgetmaker. You want permission to tape the widgetmaker in his shop. Bloss says his top man is T.R. Ific, but taping Ific would be a waste of time; he's too shy. You tell Bloss that's alright. Ific will do just fine.

You go to the plant and talk to Ific. (He is shy.) You tell Ific that he doesn't have to do any acting. You just want to tape him doing his normal job. Ific agrees to be taped.

The day of the taping arrives. You simply follow Ific around as he goes about his widgetmaking. At first, Ific is nervous, not sure how to react to the camera. But soon he begins to relax. After all, you haven't asked him to do anything special. Within minutes, Ific settles into his everyday routine, unaware that he's begun telling a story.

Ific moves efficiently and with great skill as he makes his widgets. His hands are marvelously expressive. Several times, a co-worker comes over to Ific's bench and asks him for advice. The two discuss details of the widgetmaking process. And you get all of this on tape.

Back at the editing room, you're tired but exhilarated. You've captured the entire widgetmaking process and the essence of the widgetmaker. Plus you got flawless "acting" from nonprofessionals. All in one day, and without a script!

Here's where it really gets tricky

For all your great footage, you're still left with the question of how to structure the final product. Now is the time when you normally would sit down at your typewriter and bang out a narration. But you want to see just how far you can go with this documentary, nonscripted approach.

You look at what you have on tape and determine what is missing. You didn't get a true overview of the widgetmaker's work. Without that overview, a general audience won't get a good sense of the complexity of the craft.

So, you ask Bloss to help you write an

overview narration. You tell Bloss you want first to show him what's already on tape. While watching the footage, he can't keep quiet. Your narration is being spoken for you! You tell Bloss to hold on a second, and you get out a microphone. You plug it into the second audio track of the videotape recorder, pop the machine into "insert edit" on that track, and ask Bloss to go ahead with his comments.

Several tapes later, you have a spontaneous, voice-over narration. No jargon, no big words. It's effective, and there's plenty. But that's not all. In addition to a narration, you have editing comments... "This part of the operation isn't really important for training purposes; you should cut this whole part out... This is the crucial part of widgetmaking; you might even want to show it again to make sure people get the point." Those comments will help when you edit.

You thank Bloss for his help. He can't believe it was so easy; all he did was talk about what he saw on the monitor.

You begin to edit; it, too, is simple. You just log all the meaty parts of the Ific footage, and match it with Bloss' narration. That matching job is a piece of cake because the narration was recorded in sync with Ific's actions.

But will the review committee bite?

You finish editing in three days, record time for a project of this length. Now for the big test—bringing the tape before the review committee. You know they'll ask for the script, the one that doesn't exist. And you know they will have a lot of criticism. They always do. But perhaps you can work their criticism into a second rough cut, still without writing a script. You think back to how you sneaked a narration from Bloss by taping his comments while watching the tape. Could the same ploy work again?

When you meet with the review committee, you bring lavalier microphones and an audio recorder. You tell the committee members that you want to record their comments for your

notes. They watch the tape and make their comments. Most of them refer to the quality of the taping. They're happy with the spontaneity of the tape, but feel that certain areas were neglected and other areas were overemphasized. They discuss the tape contents at length.

Back at the editing room, you note several useable sentences from the committee. Each of those sentences will fit perfectly into a second rough cut. You add them to the master tape, edit in more video to cover the additional narration, and your second cut is complete.

You call the committee back and tell them you've got a second rough cut for them to watch. They're not only surprised by how fast you work, but by the way you included their comments on the tape. The entire committee is pleased and the tape is approved. You're commended for creating an excellent product, and for doing it so quickly. But, they really must also commend themselves for hiring such an exceptional writer.



BUT I'M NOT A TRAINER!

Don't worry, now you or your subject experts can design instruction; write training in any media; teach classes.

- Three new courses that motivate and interest the non-professional trainer.
- Videotapes provide advice from professionals and models of effective methods.
- People learn on their own to design instruction, teach classes or write video scripts.
- Easy-to-read, illustrated texts give depth and practice.

The Designer's Shop

How to design and write training

PARTIAL CONTENTS:

What facts do I need? Who am I training? When have they learned? Where do I look for information? How do I interview people? What questions can I ask? How do I analyze facts? Why am I designing a course? Are there non-training reasons for performance problems? Is a performance test the first step in design? What are pre-tests and post-tests? What's all this about objectives?

How can I train for feelings and attitudes? How do adults think and learn? How does the brain work? Are there different kinds of learning? What instructional strategies can I use?

How do I get my design on paper? How do I write for print? How should I design questions? Can I write a script? How should I plan computerized instruction? Why should I avoid testing my course? How can I justify the cost?

The Instructor's Shop

How to plan and teach a class

PARTIAL CONTENTS:

Why not consider the learners? Why not make it easy on myself? How can I overcome my fears? What should my course include and how can I arrange it? In what order should I present it? What learning principles should I apply?

What presentation methods can I use? How do I give a good lecture? What's different about a participative lecture? How can I plan a discussion? What do I need to know about demonstrations?

How can I develop the skills I need? What must I know about speaking? What do I need to know about questioning? What do I need to know about creating and using visuals? What special skills do I need to lead a group?

What lesson planning will I need? How do I write my notes? Will any old classroom do? The first few minutes; keeping it going; wrapping it up.

The Script Shop

How to plan and write a script

PARTIAL CONTENTS:

Module 1, *The Plan* develops skills in gathering and analyzing information and writing objectives. Concentrates on planning and instructional strategy and presentation structure (treatment) for the video.

Module 2, *The Script* deals with the actual writing of the script. Heavy emphasis is placed on visualization, describing what the viewer will see and on writing effective audio component. Shots, movements transitions and electronic effects are covered.

The learner will create a plan with instructional strategy and treatment and write an original script.

The course is available for group or individual instruction.



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