

Making an Audio-Visual Sequence

Theme

Originality & Interest

Grab your audience's attention and tell a story. Will it produce an emotive reaction from the audience? Is it absorbing? Will the sequence work in its entirety?

Your idea, your images and the audio must work in harmony.

Preparation

Put firm ideas together before you go shooting and write them down. Better to do this than go away for the trip and come back with only two-thirds of a great set of pictures.

Do you have a stunning set of images and try to find a soundtrack that's about right, or do you have the audio in mind before you start?

Images

Raw Materials

Bring together a wide spread of images. Consider using a wide range of focal lengths and shooting angles. Create a variety of images appropriate to the subject and avoid repetition.

Do your main subjects have suitable backgrounds? Avoid distractions on and around the subject.

Images should have impact if they will be visible for a short space of time. You may have to be creative to introduce a variety of colour.

Ensure all the gaps are filled. In addition to the general shots you will need establishing shots and images that show details. You can shoot fill-in images at home afterwards, such as maps, documents, equipment and clothing.

Do you need images that can be used as backgrounds for titles?

Image Quality and Orientation

Are your photographs good enough? Do they have good composition, accurate exposure, focus and depth of field, good colour balance? Print quality images aren't essential, however, you will still need a good range of tones, accurate colours and sharp (but not oversharped) images. Horizons must be level.

Images must be at the resolution of the projector or at least 50% larger to allow for resizing. Even images from a compact camera can be adequate.

Are most of the images 'landscape' orientation? Do all the images use the same proportions?

Copyright

Depending on the use of your work you may be able to use someone else's images; it is your responsibility to ensure you have copyright clearance. Whilst it is permissible to photograph artwork, maps and diagrams in books, is it always ethical to do so?

Sound

Appropriate Music

The recording should be high quality and fit the images perfectly. Expressive music for expressive pictures. Avoid abrupt changes unless they fit the sequence.

Speech

Ensure you have a speakable script. Pay attention to microphone technique and record where you can ensure either a silent or appropriate (but quiet) background.

Editing & Mixing

Is the volume loud enough without clipping. Don't cut familiar music. Don't let music overpower the speech. Fade in and out delicately. Remove any hiss. Be precise.

File formats

WAV is the best lossless format. (Equivalent to TIFF for images.)

MP3 is a lossy format and a high bitrate is essential, at least 160kbps; you might not be able to hear the difference but others will. (Equivalent to JPG for images.)

Other high quality formats (M4A, AAC, OGG) may not be suitable for some AV software – convert to MP3.

Copyright

Ensure you have all the correct licences and copyright clearance. Crediting the composer or performers of the music is usually to be avoided.

Blending it all together

Software

Is the software easy for you to use? Is it flexible enough to do what you want? Are the transitions smooth enough on your (or the intended) computer? Is it value for money?

Turn off any start-up images and menus and set the options for maximum quality.

Sequence

Do you have a Beginning, Middle and End? Do the images flow and tell a story? Are you holding interest throughout the AV. Are all the same type of images together? Avoid repetition.

Timing

Make the pictures fit the sound precisely. Transitions should be aligned with the music and speech must overlay the appropriate images. Does the pace match the material?

Titles & Text

Should be effective, simple and not intrusive. 3D effects work well and give a sense of depth. Basic text effects provided by AV software can be ineffective. Text must be visible for enough time to be read. Avoid 'The End'; its completion should be obvious.

Transitions

Aim for simplicity. Avoid Landscape to Portrait changes. You can imply motion. Avoid gimmicks. Look for the “Third Image”. Blend Monochrome to Colour.

Movement

Only pan and zoom if it adds something to the sequence. Does the zoom draw attention to a segment of the image? Does the pan have a defined start and end?

Resources

AV Preparation Software

PicturesToExe (WnSoft), ProShow, Boinx FotoMagico (for Mac)

Image Processing Software

Adobe Photoshop/Lightroom, Corel PaintShop Pro, Free: Paint.Net, GIMP, Hugin (stitching)

Sound

Edit: *Audacity, Adobe Audition*

Convert from CD: *Apple iTunes, Windows Media Player, Exact Audio Copy(error correction and joining tracks)*

Advice & Music Copyright

RPS (AV news), PAGB (e-News *issue 134*, Awards), Beckham Digital, IAC F&VI, MCPS, IoV, PRS.