Making an Audio-Visual Sequence

Theme

Originality & Interest

Grab your audience's attention and tell a story.

Is it absorbing? Will it produce an emotive reaction from the audience? Will the sequence work in its entirety? Is it different? Humour is rarely successful for critical work but don't let that stop you being entertaining.

Your idea, your images and the audio must work in harmony. You can work with another person as joint entries are usually permitted.

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, clothing and other appropriate objects.

Do you need images to 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 oversharp) 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 should be adequate. If yo plan on zooming you will need larger images too.

Are most or all of the images 'landscape' orientation? Do all the images have 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 that you have copyright clearance. Whilst is permissible to photograph artwork, maps and diagrams in books and magazines, 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 good microphone technique. Record where you can ensure either silence or an appropriate background noise at an appropriate level.

Editing & Mixing

Is the volume loud enough without clipping. Don't cut music. Fade in and out delicately. Don't let music overpower speech. Remove any trace of 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.)

Copyright

Ensure you, or your club, have all the correct licences and copyright clearance.

Crediting the composer and performers of the music is usually to be avoided.

Blending it all together

Software

Is the software easy for you to use? Is is flexible enough to do what you want? Are the transitions smooth enough on your (or the intended) computer? For only a couple of sequences a year, is it value for money?

Turn off any start-up images, menus and navigation. Set all 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 whole AV. In your sequence are similar images grouped 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 which is usually longer than you think. Avoid 'The End'; the sequence's completion should be obvious.

Transitions

Aim for simplicity. Avoid Landscape to Portrait changes. You can imply motion. Avoid gimmicks. Look for the "third image" as two images fade together. 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 and move at the right speed?

Resources

AV Preparation Software

WnSoft PicturesToExe, Photodex ProShow, Boinx FotoMagico (Mac only)

Image Processing Software

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

Sound

Editing: *Audacity, Adobe Audition*   Converting from CD: *Apple iTunes, Windows Media Player*

Advice & Music Copyright

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