

# Documentary Film Making

## Quick Guide

### **Preparation:**

- Do research on your topic, and if possible, on your subjects. The better prepared you are, the less time you'll take and the better equipped you'll be to handle any curve balls.
- Develop a few themes and come up with 3 or 4 questions for each theme.
- When possible, do a pre-interview with your subject. They'll often reveal information you hadn't contemplated before.
- Read your questions out loud, or to a third party, to make sure they're clear.
- Scout out a location for the interview, taking sound and lighting into consideration.
- Have a basic structure for your film/project sketched out and as well as an idea of how each interview subject fits into that structure. This may change as you go along, but you should have a general idea from the beginning.
- Think about doing some group interviews – they often don't run as smoothly, but disagreement makes for good content and illustrates conflicting points of view.
- If you're interviewing several people for one project, you may find 1 or 2 questions you want to ask at each interview. It allows for varying perspectives on a single issue.

### **The Interview:**

- If the interviewer is not included in the film, make sure your questions don't need to be heard in order to understand the question. You can ensure this by teaching your subject how to incorporate the question into the answer.
- Try not to interrupt when someone is answering a question. People open up and talk when they're on camera – give this time to happen.
- Stay away from questions that can be answered with a "yes" or "no." Open-ended questions work best.
- Listen to the answers you're being given and a) make sure they can stand alone, and b) make sure they're clear. If not, ask the subject to rephrase.
- Don't be afraid to stray from your list of questions. Following up on interesting answers is the key to a successful interview.
- Wherever possible, look for anecdotes or stories. Stories make a more memorable impression than simple answers.
- Don't talk or make noises while the subject is responding.
- Start off with the easier questions, and once the subject is warmed up move into deeper areas. Don't be afraid to ask hard-hitting or difficult questions.
- At the end of the interview, you can always ask the subject if there's something they wanted to discuss that you didn't hit on. There usually is.