

MEDIA UNIT 3 – PRODUCTION EXERCISE 1

Miss Asbury

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FORM: 12D

INTENTION:

What are you intending on focusing on during this exercise. This might include any of the following:

- *aesthetics and/or structural capacities and/or characteristics of a media product to be explored*
- *technical equipment to be operated*
- *applications used to be applied to develop particular skills to present specific ideas to achieve particular effects*

For my first production exercise I am intending to experiment with the camera equipment I will be using for my product, in particular comparing the different between Steadycam and handheld movement/stabilisation in correlation with focusing. I will be using a Canon 60D DSLR with either a 60mm Tamron Macro lens (and once I get it, a 50mm Canon Prime lens). These two lenses are set and cannot zoom – they have a very short focal length meaning that focusing will be an integral component of this production exercise I will need to work on. I will also use a Tamron 18-270mm lens for some longer shots that may require me to film something in the distance – however I am more competent with this lens and will not need to practice with it for this exercise.

The reason movement of the camera and focusing are connected is because most of the lenses I will be using cannot zoom, meaning that when I am filming a moving subject I will need to physically move the camera to follow the subject (for example an animal) or stand in the same place and focus manually, which can be a difficult task at times. To adapt to this and learn how to keep the subject in focus, especially when the subject or camera is moving, I will practice manual focusing (by physically adjusting the lens) in a number of situations and using more than one shot.

To avoid shaky filming when moving with the camera whilst recording I will be using my new Glide Gear SYL-3000 Steadycam. This will allow me to move whilst filming and still have a professional-looking product, as the camerawork will be smoother and not jolted or rough. As this is a new device I will need to practice with it and learn how to best utilise the features of the Steadycam to achieve my desired shot types.

In conclusion, the major area I will be testing is the effect on footage of using Steadycam vs. handheld on both a moving subject (I am primarily stationary), when I am walking and when I am stationary. I will test with both close-up and long shots. This will include focusing manually with a moving subject / whilst moving the camera.

MEDIA UNIT 3 – PRODUCTION EXERCISE 1

Miss Asbury

EVALUATION:

Explain how the completed exercise realises the stated intention. This should outline the extent to which the intention/s were realised. Outline what possibilities and limitations you have discovered with the technical equipment.

Handheld vs. Steadycam: Long shot, walking

After researching, purchasing and receiving my Steadycam, I had the strenuous task of figuring out how to balance it. The initial set-up was difficult to say the least! I had a great deal of trouble balancing the camera on the device, which resulted in the camera tipping and swaying whenever I tried to use it. After a week of making adjustments to the device, researching the Steadycam weight limits and watching video tutorials, I realised that the camera was a tad too heavy for the Steadycam. I went to Bunnings and purchased some additional washers/weights and this fixed the problem.

The difference between these two stabilisation methods – Steadycam and handheld – was very evident whilst undertaking a walking long shot. As seen through the test footage, the handheld method was very shaky and bumpy when walking, even when I deliberately tried to keep it as smooth as possible. Because my hands were holding the camera, each step and movement was absorbed and as a result this came across very clearly in the footage. The Steadycam footage whilst walking, however, was substantially smoother and it was much less obvious that someone was walking with the camera. There was a subtle bounce with each step on the Steadycam footage, however it should be noted that this way my first time I had shot with the Steadycam device and I was walking on a very hard surface (concrete), as opposed to something softer that absorbs the shock like grass.

From this I've learnt that I will definitely use a Steadycam when filming a wider shot that is always in focus, especially when I am moving. This may include perspective shots and a landscape shot (ie. walking through a forest).

Handheld vs. Steadycam: Close up, moving subject

I found that when trying to film with the Steadycam on a close-up, moving subject, it is quite difficult, especially in relation to focusing. The Steadycam device is not designed for you to focus the camera whilst on the device when filming, because it sways the Steadycam. Whereas when I was focusing handheld with a close-up moving subject, the focusing was substantially easier to control. This is because I can stabilise the camera with both hands and use my thumb and index finger on my left hand to focus manually whilst filming.

As seen in the footage I took of my dog, the Steadycam shot is very shaky and out of focus as I attempt to manually focus the lens. This limitation means that I will most likely stabilise the camera handheld when I have a close up, moving subject such as an animal or interviewee's hands.

MEDIA UNIT 3 – PRODUCTION EXERCISE 1

Miss Asbury

Handheld vs. Steadycam: Panning

For this shot, I adjusted the lens manually before hitting record to ensure everything was in focus – so the purpose of this trial was to test the stabilisation difference between handheld and Steadycam when panning and see if either was a viable alternative to a tripod. I found that the handheld shot was quite shaky and not very smooth. The Steadycam panning was also not smooth, but most likely because of the wind at the time. I can now say that neither are equally as good as using a tripod whilst panning, however the Steadycam could definitely be a second resort if for some reason I do not have access to a tripod (providing it is not windy!).

Handheld vs. Steadycam: Tracking

As seen in the footage of the back of the person's head, whenever I try to focus manually whilst tracking with the Steadycam, the entire structure sways from side to side. This is because when I move the camera it disrupts the delicate balance of the Steadycam device, causing it to move. While the shot was a little rougher, tracking with handheld was substantially easier to focus because, like I found with the dog close-up moving shot (which was a very similar shot to this one), it is much easier to focus the lens with two hands holding the camera. I will therefore most likely use handheld camera stabilisation when tracking, unless I know I can lock in the correct focus manually before I start and then use the Steadycam (which is more difficult unless you have full control over the subject).

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, I have learnt from this production exercise that certain camera movements and shot types can be achieved better whilst using a Steadycam, and some whilst handheld. The Steadycam is ideal for those longer shots where a subject/scene is always in focus, especially for those kinds of shots where the cameraman is moving as well – as the Steadycam will stabilise this movement well. While the Steadycam does not cancel 100% of camera vibrations, it makes the shot substantially smoother and the small movement still present in my opinion creates a more naturalistic and interesting shot type, rather than just having a completely still camera sitting on a tripod.

Close-up shots when either myself or the subject are moving are particularly hard to achieve with the Steadycam, primarily because it is almost impossible to manually focus the camera when filming, without the Steadycam swaying.

MEDIA UNIT 3 – PRODUCTION EXERCISE 1

Miss Asbury

Handheld camerawork is ideal when shooting close-up subjects when the subject is moving, such as when filming animals or tracking someone as they walk. This is because having both hands on the camera allows for easy manual focusing of the lens using two fingers on one of the hands, while your palm and the entire other hand stabilises the camera.

Similarly this is the case with close up shots where I am moving (rather than the subject), however this may make the shot prone to camera shake and bumps from footsteps. The use of handheld camerawork in such situations allows me to use a short depth of field – creating that highly desirable crisp foreground and blurred background look – and still keep the subject consistently in focus.

The only situation other than interviews when I wouldn't use either of these two stabilisation methods would be when panning, in which case I would use a tripod – as clarified through my panning test with both the Steadycam and handheld camera.