LIGHTS, CAMERA, MEDIA JUSTICE! :
INTRODUCTION TO VIDEO CAMERA MECHANICS AND SHOT COMPOSITION

Establishing your visual technique and learning the actual mechanics of using a Digital Video Camera is the fun part of doing documentation. Its the part of production where your creativity can shine expecially once your politcal framing and your documentation plan is set. Below is couple of things to keep in mind.

General Camera Care and Introduction

Video cameras/ Camcorders

The camera you will be using is a Sony PDX10 Digital Video Camera.
To record and adjust the settings for the camera you will need to know the following:
Power Switch: this is located close to the battery and will help you record and turn the camera off and on.
Recording: This Camera will record by pressing the red button on the power switch.
If you are not recording your camera is in standby mode.
VCR Mode: Use this setting to play back footage just shot.
Video cameras are delicate mechanies. Treat them like you would a small toddler. They are sensitive to extreme, cold, heat, humidity, etc. In that vein if you are shooting in that kind of enviroment please protect your camera with plastic bags, a formal chasses, or consult your local video shot to see what protective equipment you can rent, purchase, etc.

Caring for you Tapes

Protecting your videotapes:
Any videotape has two parts: (i) the magnetic tape inside on which the image is recorded; and (ii) the cassette in which the tape is encased. The cassette literally encases the tape so that it is protected, instead of being spooled onto an open reel. The tape is very sensitive and must be protected from being torn or wrinkled, or from coming into contact with contaminants such as oil, dirt, smoke, hair, and dust particles. Always keep your tapes clean, dry, cool and away from the sun or extreme heat. Keep a list of what you record and label your tapes promptly. Make sure you label the date, location, camera person, brief description and tape's number if there is more than one. Keep extra blank tapes on you and ready to use.

Battery Care

Make sure the battery is fully charged, or you may find yourself unable to record an important event because your battery has run out. Better still, take an extra fully charged battery with you so that you will be prepared for unexpected opportunities to record footage. Actually turning the camera off and removing the battery will keep your batteries going a lot longer than having the camera on standby or off with the battery attached. Rechargeable batteries will lose one-percent of their power for each day they are not in use.

Tip: Mark your batteries clearly so you can distinguish which ones you have just used in the field

Shot Compositon

After turning on your camera there is always a three basic steps you have to go through to set up a shot. White Balance, Setting your Audio Levels, Setting your Exposure and Shutter Speed, and Focusing and Framing your Shot.

White Balance

White balancing is what sets the range of colors your camera will use in your shot. The range of color can vary radically from an outdoor situation, to an indoor environment and its is to you advantage to white balance **every** time you shoot. You do this on your camera by finding the white balance function, holding up a white item (piece of paper, wall, etc.) and adjusting it according so that the white looks natural.
.

Audio Levels

Sound is so important in good video and typically underestimated in non-professional documentation. Before your shoot plug in your headphones and listen to your audio. If you camera has a levels monitor and allows for manual adjustment that begin to adjust levels so that they are in the middle of the meter at their highest point. Lower or raise the volume as necessary, but be vigilant in watching if your sound become hot

or distorts because its is too high. Bad audio can ruin an important take. .

Exposure and Shutter Speed

The principles of light are similar for both photography and videography. In any camera light is the principle medium for the transmission of the image. You can control light at two points. One at the iris, or the opening behind the lens that lets in a specific amount of light based on the situation (which you can make bigger or smaller), and the duration of light exposed to the video tape which you can make longer or shorter). **Exposure** refers to control over the opening of the iris and is measured in f-stops. By playing with the exposure you can see the difference a bigger or smaller opening of the iris will have in your shots. Generally your want your iris bigger for dark low-light situations, and smaller in direct sunlight or intensely lit situations. **Shutter Speed** refers to the duration of light and is measured in indicators of time duration at which the shutter curtain open up and close during an exposure process. A 1/125 setting means the shutter curtain open and close within one hundred and twenty five of a second. Generally low shutter speeds are used for low light still settings, while faster shutter speeds are used for action and sports photography.

Focus

Generally because most professional videographers want the most control over their image they shoot With manual focus. But its your decision if you feel more confortable with auto-matic or manual focus. Manual focus allows you to manually adjust the focus ring on the lens and keep the subject(s) in focus. Autofocus often confuses the video camera when alot of activity is taking place. The video camera on autofocus will try to focus on one stationary subject. But since there is motion, the video camera will continue trying to achieve focus.

Composition

There is no hard and fast rule about what makes a good shot. The following are some good guidelines but this really where you artistic sense come in. The following are some suggestions feel free to use as you like.

The Rule of Thirds"

A good guideline to follow for framing your shots well is the "rule of thirds". The rule of thirds means that you should put horizontal or vertical lines, such as the horizon or someone standing in your picture along imaginary lines that divide the frame into thirds. Don't place subjects right in the middle of the frame simply because they are important. It's far better to have the horizon either two thirds from the top of the frame or two thirds from the bottom.

Building a Shot List

These shots are the building blocks that tell the story of your event. Before you get to the shoot you need to plan out ***how*** to tell that the story. Even though the event or march has not happened you can imagine the timeline of the event (or get it from the agenda). Make a list of the events and items you would like to have covered. Then once you have that list note next to each of them the kind of shoot you think is important. Once you have that done you can formalize that into a shot list that each of the documentation team people can take with them on the day of the event. This is important one so that you are thorough in yoru coverage but also so that you are not shooting tons of additional footage you wont use, this conserve time, tape, and energy.

Moving with your camcorder_____

The distinguishing mark of a professional videographer is how steady the camera is. An unsteady camera can detract with whats happening as well as make your footage unusable. So here are some techniques

Get a tripod.: This may seem simple, but this simple purchase is better than any fancy post-production fix to a bad shot. So buy one. Now.

Stabalize your Shot Through your Body

You can support your elbows against your chest to help keep your hands stable.If you are kneeling down you can use the raised knee to prop up the arm that is supporting the camcorder or perhaps there is a fence or a wall that you can sit and lean against to steady your shot, propping the camcorder on your knees.

Walking

If you are walking forwards keep your legs bent and your body lowered all the time, this will help you to avoid the rise and fall of normal walking. Concentrate on creating a slow-motion, gliding feeling. Put one foot down softly before you move the next, keeping them close to the ground. You can do exactly the same when you're walking backwards and it's a good idea to have someone walking backwards behind you so that they can clear the way for you.

Crabbing
If you are moving sideways, or "crabbing" as it is sometimes called, again try to lift your feet in a slow-motion glide with your knees bent, crossing your leg behind or in front of you, letting one foot rest firmly on the ground before you move the other.

Camera Movement

Panning
Panning means moving the camera from a fixed point in an horizontal arc sideways. Try to hold the shot for about 3 seconds both before and after the pan. Holding the shot helps the viewer establish what he or she is supposed to be looking at before the move begins. When you pan, SLOWLY pivot around keeping the movement at a constant speed. If you move too fast or do not hold the shot at the start and at the finish, the image may be blurred and your audience will not be able to take in the information that you are trying to convey.

If there is no tripod, then hold the camera closely and firmly against your shoulder or body, and keep your feet pointed in the direction in which you will end up. All the movement should come from your upper body, while your feet remain firmly in place.

Tilting
Tilting means moving the camcorder from a fixed point in a vertical arc up and down. Just like when you are panning, hold a static shot at the beginning and at the end of the tilt for about 3 seconds so that your audience can register what they are looking at before the camcorder moves.

Zooming
Use the zoom button on the right side of your camera to zoom in and out.

Camera Angles

The shot angle is the level from which you look at your subject through the camera.

Eye-level angle: One of the most commonly used shots is the eye-level shot. Why? Because it's the perspective most familiar to us - we usually see things from our own eye-level. This angle also causes the least discomfort because we're used to it. If you're shooting a person, and you want to make it an eye-level shot, make sure you shoot at their eye-level, not yours.

Low Angle: In this shot the camera looks up at the subject, making it seem important, powerful, or perhaps larger than it is to the viewer. For example, you might be sitting on the ground looking up at someone who is standing.

High Angle: In this shot the camera looks down on the subject, decreasing its importance. The subject looks smaller. It often gives the audience a sense of power, or makes the subject seem helpless. In this case, you'd be higher than the other person (maybe they're sitting, or maybe you're standing on a desk) looking down on that person.