

Documentary Craft & Practice I

(Background Info for BoS): Level: Intro to Intermediate (can be taken by CMP 1 graduated students as well as avid newcomers to media production)

Course Description

In this course, we look at the craft of documentary through the lens of its origins as well as the syntax of its key forms and styles. Screening materials span iconic and contemporary classics such as *Frederick Wiseman* and recent Sundance winners such as *Honeyland (2019)*. Through the robust practical aspect of the course, students will gradually build the craft of documentary through workshops in interview, B-Roll and verité footage, resulting in a mid-term in final projects (as described below in Assessments Section).

Course Objectives:

The goal of this course is for students to:

- gain critical insight into the ethnographic, political and social origins of documentary;
- gain an understanding of documentary elements, styles & formats;
- gain competency in, and appreciation for, the process of developing, shooting & completing a short documentary;
- become skilled in executing essential elements of documentary (interview, b-roll, sound, verité footage).

Course Outcomes:

By the end of this course, students will have:

- acquired technical and craft-based practice in conducting interviews, capturing B-roll & verité footage;
- conducted shoots of numerous documentary subjects;
- researched & planned a short documentary in a subject important to them;
- created a documentary production breakdown for their final project;
- edited together the various elements of documentary (interview, b-roll, verité) into a cohesive piece;

Week-by-Week Syllabus

1. Early Experiments

Screenings:

Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat, Lumiere Brothers, 1895

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Practical: Camera + Exposure Refresher

Readings: (Response Paper Assigned).

Cross Cultural Filmmaking – The Birth of the Documentary (pg. 15 – 17)

2. **Ethnographic Origins**

Screenings:

Nanook of the North, 1922 (excerpt)

Practical: Sound Recording Refresher (Lavalier Mic + Zoom Recorder)

Readings: *Cross Cultural Filmmaking – Introduction* (What does the “ethnographic” film mean today?)

3. **Expository Documentaries**

Screenings:

Night and Fog, Alain Resnais, 1955

Land Without Bread, Luis Bunuel, 1932

Practical: Interview Lab – syncing audio & picture, capturing room tone

Readings: *Cross Cultural Filmmaking – Documentary Styles 17 – 19*

Response Paper: Picking a sequence from an expository documentary, show how the critique of expository films in the reading either applies or does not to your chosen clips.

Assign Mid-term Project

4. **Interview Workshop 1**

Lecture / Discussion:

Interview framing styles & techniques; 3-point lighting

Interview Prep (Shooting Ratio, planning questions + strategies)

Shooting techniques & approaches

Practical: Interview Prep for next class (group work). **(In-Class graded Assignment)**

Reading: *Cross Cultural Filmmaking – Performing the Interview, Informal Dialogue*

Assignment: (Interview Prep for Mid-term Project, due next week).

5. **Interview Workshop 2**

Practical:

In-Class Interview Practice (Groupwork)

6. **B-Roll Workshop**

Screenings:

Projectionist, Phillip Bloom, 2012

Abstract: The Art of Design, Netflix, 2020

Practical: Cinematography Techniques Review; Shoot B-Roll (Groupwork)

7. Editing

Screenings: TBD

Practical:

Editing Interviews: Syncing sound, assembly, rough cut

Editing in B-Roll, blending room tone, sound work, music, export.

8. Impressionistic Documentaries

Practical: Mid-Term Screening

Topic Screenings:

Reassemblage, Trinh Minh-ha, 1982

Song of Ceylon, Basil Wright, 1934

Readings: *Cross Cultural Filmmaking – Documentary Styles – 20 – 22* (Response Paper Assigned).

Assignment: Final Project Synopsis + Treatment (1-2 pages, due next week)

9. Breaking down the Documentary

Lecture / discussion:

Elements of Documentary

Documentary Breakdown (creating a pre-production, production and post-production plan).

Getting Access from Subjects, Permission + Release forms

Assignment: Breakdown for Final Project – 7-10 slides / pages (due in 2 weeks).

10. Verite / Observational Documentary

Screenings:

Titicut Follies, Frederick Wiseman, 1967

Honeyland, Tamara Kotevska, Ljubomir Stevanov, 2019

Readings: *Cross Cultural Filmmaking, Documentary Styles, - 22 - 25*

11. Shooting Verite

Practical 1:

Cinematography technique review 2 (verite techniques: rack focus, handheld, pans, tilts, re-framing on-the-fly). Audio capturing on-the-fly

Practical 2:

Shoot Verite: In groups, shoot verité of each other doing a particular activity (sports, making something, ordering lunch, etc.)

12. Editing Methodologies

Lecture:

B-Roll Montage

Narrative & Continuity Editing for Verite

Practical: edit a 5-minute verité sequence (from last time's footage, previous interview & b-roll) to music.

Reading: *Cross-cultural Filmmaking, Editing Principles*

13. Post Production

Colour Correction, Titling, Sound Mixing, Trouble-shooting

Reading List

Cross Cultural Filmmaking (Ilisa Barbash & Lucien Taylor, 1997, United States)

Assessments:

Mid-Term Documentary (25 pc): Create a portrait of a person using a mixture of Interview + B-roll
Footage (3-5 min).

Final Project (30 pc): Plan, shoot + edit a documentary on any subject / style of your choice using Interview, B-Roll + Verite Footage. (5-7 min).

Response Papers (20 pc)

In-Class Groupwork & Editing: (15)

Class Participation: (10)

