



Awareness Building Video Exercise

Story Selection

Select someone outside your cultural background and film them doing one activity that is specific to their ethnic, cultural, historic background. This may be cooking a particular food, practicing a culturally specific music, dance, art form or craft making etc. Interview them about this activity and its connections to who they are now and where they have come from.

In preparation for filming the activity and interviewing your subject, research the activity and culture so that you are informed and aware of what to expect and what you want to know more about. Select a time when you can film your subject on their own without other people or distractions.

Filming the activity

1. Ask your subject to try and do the activity as they would if you were not there filming them. They do not need to talk to you or explain what they are doing. You will talk to them about the activity during the interview. You should try and film the activity without 'directing' your subject.
2. Record at least 15-20 individual **shots** of the activity being done.
 - a. Think of a shot like a sentence in a story. The shot visualizes one aspect of the activity.
 - b. Notice that most activities have aspects that repeat themselves. Take advantage of these repeats to record the activity from multiple perspectives
3. Shots
 - a. **Don't move the camera** while recording each shot except to follow the action.
 - i. Use a tripod or hold the camera steady. Don't zoom or move.
 - ii. Press record and hold the shot, counting at least to ten before you stop recording or move the camera. Hold the shot much longer if you can capture the complete 'story' of that action.
 - b. Vary your shots from wide shots that establish the location, to medium shots of the full body and activity to half-body shots with more intimacy, to detailed shots.
 - i. Make sure to capture multiple **detailed shots**, including the face, hands, actions specific to the activity, materials being worked, etc.
 - c. Composition: pay attention to what is in and out of the frame of each shot. Try not to chop important objects and keep the interesting activity of the shot fully in the frame.
 - d. Try and capture the activity with a sense of a beginning and ending

Interviewing

1. Interview your subject after filming the activity and, if possible, at a different time. This will give you time to review your shots of the activity and to reflect on the questions you would like to ask.
2. Preparing for the interview
 - a. **Prepare questions that expand the conversation from the specifics of the activity filmed to the more universal issues** of your subject's culture and identity.

Community Supported Film works to strengthen the documentary storytelling capacity in communities where the dissemination of objective and accurate information is essential for development and conflict resolution.

Michael Sheridan, Founder and Director

73 Johnswood Road, Boston, MA 02131

617-834-7206, michael@csfilm.org, www.csfilm.org

© 2026 Community Supported Film



- i. For example, rather than asking your subject, “where are you from?” ask an activity specific question, such as, “where did you learn to make Tortillas?” [or whatever the activity is]. It is likely that this question will cause the subject to speak of where they are from and to expand on their background from the perspective of the activity.
 - b. Work on questions that will expand the conversation and not lead to yes/no answers
 - i. Wrong: “Do you like making Hmong textiles?”
 - ii. Right: “How did you get interested in making Hmong textiles?”
3. Setting up your interview
 - a. If easier, you can do an audio recording only of the interview – the visual story should be told by the activity you recorded, not the interview.
 - b. If recording video of the interview
 - i. You and your subject should sit and the camera should be just to the side of your head and at the height of your eyes. This is easiest done with a tripod or other camera support.
 - ii. Fill the frame with the upper third of the subject’s body, from about the chest up.
 - c. **The interview environment must be quiet.** It is very difficult to understand or edit an interview with a lot of background noise.
4. At the start of the interview tell your subject:
 - a. To look at you, not at the camera – it will make them feel more comfortable.
 - b. The questions will not be used in the final film, so please **put the subject of questions in their answers.** For example,
 - i. How do you feel about the use of non-traditional musical instruments?
Wrong: “They are...; Right: “Non-traditional musical instruments are ...
5. During the interview
 - a. Listen. Try not to be looking at your questions. Look at the subject and make the experience conversational. If you’re relaxed and comfortable your subject be relaxed and comfortable.
 - b. Don’t make noise – since you are not in the visual story. You can give visual feedback, like smiling and laughing silently.

Editing

Use a simple editing tool to put the shots in an order that visualizes the story of the activity. Once the subject and activity has visually established themselves, start adding audio from the interview to expand the story. Try and create a beginning, middle and end.

Editing tools:

Open Shot: Mac and Windows, www.openshot.org

i-movie: Mac platform app

Windows Video Editor: Windows 10 app

Community Supported Film works to strengthen the documentary storytelling capacity in communities where the dissemination of objective and accurate information is essential for development and conflict resolution.

Michael Sheridan, Founder and Director

73 Johnswood Road, Boston, MA 02131

617-834-7206, michael@csfilm.org, www.csfilm.org

© 2026 Community Supported Film