

## FIRST ASSIGNMENTS (January 26 - February 1)

### THE FIRST DOCUMENTARY SHOTS [*Dokumentaraufnahmen*]

- As a group, make reservations for the camera and check it out for one or two hours.
- Assign roles in the group (Who is responsible for the tape [*die Kasette*] ? The camcorder [*die Kamera*] ? The tripod [*das Stativ*] ? The microphones [*das Mikrophon*] ?)
- **CAMERA WORK:**  
Capture about 10 to 15 minutes of documentary shots outside or inside. You will later use these documentary shots to introduce your video topic, to document issues or topics talked about in the interviews, for cut-aways and cut-ins, and to end your video. Your documentary footage should be shot in good light and show a variety of landscapes and camera angles [*Kamera-Standpunkte*] (a wide shot [*die Panoramaeinstellung / die Totale*], a medium shot [*die Halbtotale / die Großaufnahme*], a near close-up [*die Nahaufnahme*].) You may want to experiment with a zoom, and some tilting and panning [*der Schwenk*]. At this point, you will only use the regular camera microphone to capture ambient sound [*Hintergrundgeräusche*]. Make sure your footage is well focused and sharp [*scharf*].
- If you have enough time, give everybody in the group a chance to work with the camera.

### 10-POINT SEQUENCE FOR SHOOTING

1. Take out the tripod and set up the camera (angle). Turn the main knob or switch to *VCR* mode.
2. Put in a tape and check that you are at the end of the last footage you shot. Otherwise, fast-forward to the correct spot on the tape.
3. Now turn the main knob or switch to *CAMERA* or *RECORD* mode. The camera is now in standby mode. Check all the camera settings and battery power.
4. Prepare the microphone(s). Make sure they are recording.
5. Take off the lens cap.
6. Frame your shot (aim the camera). You can either look through the LCD panel or the eyepiece.
7. Adjust the zoom control until the subject nicely fills the frame.
8. Get your performers/subjects and the rest of the camera crew ready by asking them whether they are ready to film. Ask *Bereit?*
9. When everybody is ready (and absolutely quiet), press the record button on the camera and say *Kamera läuft*. Glance at the viewfinder to confirm that the camera is actually recording (you should see the word REC). Now you are rolling.
10. When you have filmed enough of the scene - when you got the shot - say *gestorben* or *im Kasten* and press the record button a second time to stop rolling. Now the camera is back in stand-by mode.

# What's a DIGITAL camcorder?

## DIGITAL CAMCORDER

The camera you are going to use is a *Digital Camcorder*. This is a relatively new format and incompatible with tapes you may have used with earlier camcorder types (such as for example VHS, 8mm or Hi-8). Digital camcorders store their signal in digital format on a video-tape as computer codes (not as pulses of magnetic energy). With a digital camcorder, you will still have to rewind and fast-forward to find a particular spot in on the tape. The video only becomes completely digital when you transfer the footage to the computer using the software *iMovie*.

## MINI DV CASSETTES

Our digital Camcorder uses mini *DV Cassettes* that hold about one hour of footage. You will receive two one-hour cassettes for your project. Keep them safe at all times! Don't lose them - they are expensive to replace and you will have to re-shoot your footage for your project. Choose one person in the group who will be responsible for the tape(s).

## ASTOUNDING QUALITY

One big advantage of using a digital camcorder is that the quality of the footage is astounding. Video quality is measured in *lines of resolution* (the number of tiny horizontal stripes used to fill your TV screen). A VHS tape has 240 maximum lines of resolution - a mini DV tape has 500. You can copy digital video from a DV camcorder to a DV camcorder or to a Macintosh computer dozens of times without losing any quality.

# VIDEO BASICS

## CAMERA OR VCR?

A camcorder can function in two ways: as a camera and as a VCR. When you are in camera mode, you can record your events; the lens and the microphone(s) are activated; you are ready to film. When you are in VCR mode, the lens and the mike are shut down. Your camcorder works as a VCR with play, rewind, and fast-forward button. You will use this mode to watch the footage you have recorded. **When you rewind to watch footage and then are ready to film again, make sure you are at the end of the recorded footage. Otherwise, the new footage will erase (record over) the old footage.**

## GETTING READY...

A video shoot needs to be planned carefully. With your team, make a detailed plan on what you want to accomplish before you check out the camera. Assign roles: who will be the cameraman for that shoot? Who will be in front of the camera? Who will do the interviewing? Don't forget to scout out the location(s) where you want to film. When you check out the equipment, make sure your batteries are fully charged and that you have enough fresh tape with you. The batteries are very fragile. Keep them dry at all costs.

## SOUND OR PICTURE?

Most first-time camera users feel that the visuals, the picture, is the most important part in filming. This is true, what you film and how you film it is important. But equally or even more important is

the sound. Great footage can be ruined by bad sound. Carry with you a pair of Walkman headphones. Plug them into the headphone jack on your camera. Whenever the camera is rolling, the cameraman should listen to the sound being recorded to avoid surprises later. Watch out for external noise when filming. If you can hear a person sneeze, an airplane fly by, or a car drive by, the camera will record the sound. Be absolutely quiet when the camera is rolling. Use hand signals only to communicate with your team members.

## LIGHT!

Today's camera optics are good but they are not human eyeballs. Having enough light is very important when using your camcorder. Choose bright and well-lit areas for filming.

## ZOOMING

The zoom-in/zoom-out buttons are right on top of the camcorder, where your fingers naturally rest. They are easy to find. However, if you want to have a professionally looking video, **avoid zooming as much as you can**. Even though zooming imparts a sense of control, power, and visual excitement for the camera operator, viewers may feel nauseated watching too many zooms. **Zoom meaningfully, when there is reason to do it**. For example you could zoom in when you want to pick out a face in a crowd. Alternatively, when somebody is talking quite a bit, you could zoom-in very slowly when the speech is getting very personal or emotional.

Zooming may not be the best way to go from an establishing shot to a close-up. Instead, consider a series of successive shots each closer to the subject than the previous one. Or use the zoom function for adjusting the picture between shots to set up a new shot when the camcorder is in pause.

**TIP: Documentary makers frequently use zooms the following way: They hold for five seconds, zoom in, hold for another five seconds, zoom out again, and hold for another five seconds. This will give you enough material at the end of each zoom to cut to another shot when you edit your video. Don't use multiple zooms in a single shot.**

## PANNING AND TILTING

*Panning* refers to "rotating the camera horizontally" to take in a scene that's too wide. *Tilting* refers to "rotating the camera vertically" to take in a scene that's tall. Panning and tilting is more acceptable than zooming. However, pan or tilt only when you have good reasons to do so (for example tracking a moving target through space). Most professionals pan from left to right. Begin and end the pan or the tilt by carefully holding on a beginning or ending image. Pan or tilt smoothly and slowly.

**ZOOMING, PANNING AND TILTING ARE SPECIAL EFFECTS. PRACTICE A COUPLE OF TIMES BEFORE ROLLING TAPE. THE RESULTS WILL BE SMOOTHER AND LESS NOTICEABLE.**

## KEEP THE CAMERA STEADY

If you want to have a professionally looking video, always use a tripod when shooting. Real TV shows, movies, or corporate videos are shot on a tripod and it's impossible to overstate the positive effect a tripod can have on your footage.

Always make sure your tripod is leveled, otherwise your picture will start to tilt diagonally when you start panning. Take some time to set up the tripod correctly and make sure the legs are secure and carefully adjusted.