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Shooting B-Roll Video Footage with a DSLR

Be more creative with your video content

Back in the days when documentaries and news reports were shot on actual film, they used to mark the film reels of interviews as the “A-Roll” and reels with additional footage and location shots as the “B-Roll.” The term “B-Roll” is still commonly used in the production business today, and generally refers to any footage that doesn't contain interviews. Good B-Roll can really enhance your productions and there are many different ways to shoot it and use it.

Lets say you were creating a movie about the history of your family, and went out and shot some great interviews. Those interviews only tell half the story. In order to make your movie more interesting, you'll also want to shoot scenes that relate to those interviews. This is your B-Roll footage.

B-Roll can be footage of almost anything you want. It can be shots of the location, scenes of the people you interviewed, either by themselves or interacting with others, details of important objects, or anything else you can think of that helps enhance the story you want to tell.

But no matter what you shoot, make sure you shoot a lot. In every situation, try to get a variety of shots ranging from wide shots to close-ups. You'll appreciate the choice of B-Roll shots when you get into the editing process. Editing is where your movie all comes together, and it usually starts by stringing different pieces of the interviews together so that they tell a story.

In the process, you'll be cutting up your interviews in order to shorten various thoughts or to clarify different statements. Sometimes you might take the beginning of one answer and edit it with the ending of another. Other times you may want to cut out long pauses or “uh's” and “um's” that everyone naturally uses in common

speech.

Editing this footage may make it sound better, but you'll end up with a visual jump-cut at every edit. This is a perfect time to use your B-Roll. Starting before the jump-cuts and ending after them, simply insert appropriate B-Roll footage to cover the edits.

B-Roll is a great way to support the dialogue of your interviews, enhance the story, and add visual interest to your movie. You can also create a movie that only features B-Roll footage and a music track or perhaps a narration track and no interviews. But no matter how you use it, B-Roll footage is the finishing touch that can add a professional polish to all your movies.

Remember to check your DSLR camera's User's Manual for instructions on its particular menu navigation and dial layout.