Three Stage Organising – a 'paper edit', time saving method for organising a short video series from interviews with experts

A classic approach to organising documentary material is to view each clip, give it topic markers in the metadata (or in the title) eg: 'flower seller, Kathmandu, street 2', mark with I/O and some kind of rating.

However this takes a lot of time.

Is there a faster method, more appropriate for one-take, one location interviews with experts?

Can transcripts be used to help group and optimise content across multiple interviews in making short video series?

The answer is yes!

Particularly if your experts are experienced and are able to generate grabs, talk with both nuance and brevity, and your questions follow a logic that can flow into the final videos.

Using transcripts to save time in organising material

Working with transcripts for organising multiple videos saves time, but can generate an overwhelmingly large first timeline, working then in the editing program then shuffle and slim down in a subtractive process.

It may be better to several more rounds of paper editing before creating the first timelines - let's call this an additive process, as it is likely that it will be necessary to go back to the source folder for optimum results.

Either way, this process is still very much faster than the classic log, mark up and create a formal documentary script approach.

Paper editing method

Make transcripts
Place your footage on individual timelines and generate transcripts.

Label by topic in your google doc instead of using marker colours in your timeline
Then export transcripts from your footage and pop them in a google doc. And for each interview, use the headline functions (say H3 or H4) to cut the interview into segments by topic. You can also bold really good bits that might be suitable for zingers for the front or create a meaningful conclusion.

Organise your material by topic into sections in your document
Then thread segments together into another document, organised by topic in this instance. These will become your individual videos. Shuffle the sections within each topic into a satisfying logic. You are making what used to be known as a 'paper edit', and unlike the good old days, where the text was organised with scissors and sellotape, we now have the luxury of search functions, side bars and word counts.

Block up following your paper edit
You can now proceed to the block up stage, placing those segments straight onto a wtimeline, particularly if you have knowledgeable interview subjects who speak well (the first subtractive method). If there is a lot of footage, and the interviews were not concise at all, or if time is very short, go through further rounds of paper based editing before block up (the second additive method).

Now you have material either roughly or more concisely organised on your timeline, and you can proceed finding a good start and finish, with shuffling - conversational style back and forth between speakers - and further slimming down the material so it is tight.

Organising Stages in more detail

The next few pages offer a blow by blow description of all these stages, including the role of research, a guide to prioritising and finalising topics/videos and a look at final editing for a powerful, engaging series of short videos where the content from your experts is clearly organised, creating a compelling message.

Initial decisions - what about using a script?

But what about if one of your interviewees is going to help create a short promotional video, or if the series format has to conform to strict time constraints? Maybe including a scripted portion of your interview would be beneficial in getting through the content quickly.

Flow Chart

Check out the flow chart on the final page for guide to these initial decision points.
It is possible to run your content through a traditional work flow side by side with a paper edit transcript based process for collated unstructured material and other interview into other topic based material.

Three Stage Organising method – subtractive

- Longest method, trial and error approach to optimising logic, structure and impact
- Useful for relatively unstructured interviews with knowledgeable subjects, especially if you can't go back

Step One – Transcript topic bins

- Make transcripts from interviews
- Put in Google doc
- Make sections according to topic
- Bold best bits
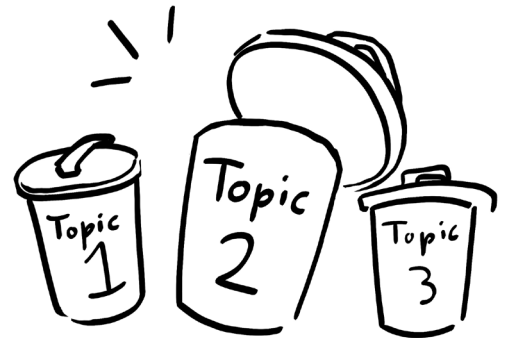
Step Two – Initial maxi 'paper' block up

Organise One – create, order and tidy maxi blockups

- Make Google doc text topic areas/bins for the videos you would like in your series, by natural or desired topic areas
- Look at material and make a preliminary logic for each topic area and reorder the transcript material according to this logic
- Block up the material onto a timeline for each area/potential video
- Listen through the material and eliminate obvious duplicates, fluffs, etc

Step Three – Research topics

- Research material for source quotes, graphics
- Examine available B roll footage, consider which topic areas it would best suit
- Consider topic areas:
  - Are some of them difficult to do without further interviews or is the material thin and perhaps these topics could be postponed or combined?
  - Are some of them far too long and should be divided up?
- Firm up topics/videos and consider titles

Step Four – Finalising video logic and clip order

Organise Two – Shuffle

- Start work on the most secure topics/videos, listen through and identify any zingers for the front and suitable conclusion material
- Listen to each interviewee in the subsections critically (try with speech editing):
  - Is any material weak or repetitive?
  - Could the material be shuffled into a more conversational ABAB style to improve impact?
- Listen through critically and note weaker sections:
  - Are they necessary? Have the ideas been covered elsewhere?
  - Could they be bolstered by raiding some of the weaker topic bins?
  - Do they need strengthening through B roll or outside material?
- Shuffle and edit out the weaker material
- If the video order feels strong start placing obvious B roll on top
- Repeat with other videos, leaving the topics that are the weakest at this point

Three Stage Organising method – subtractive, cont

Step Five - Comparing the videos, finalising series
- Listen through the shorter videos and note down topics, logic and impact
- Listen through any weaker maxi blockups to see if they can be used, postponed or raided
- Finalise video series, topics, overall logics and text of titles and intertitles
- Consider curiosity. Why would the viewer want to continue?
- Consider the graphic and editing syntax:
    - Does the graphic and editing style complement the subject matter and help create a personality for the video series?
    - What about a simpler look with more basic title style, fade to blacks, the odd simple montages or clip under titles or in between speakers, use of screen shot quotes?
    - Would some animations in the graphics, more complex interventions from existing media footage or more complex montages help convey meaning and personality?

Step Six - Finalise length and proceed to fine editing
Organise Three - Finalising and fine editing
- Is your series constrained in individual video length?
    - Either reduce down to stated length by degrees or consider dividing and spinning out other videos if there is a lot of strong material
- Proceed to fine editing, considering available B roll and music choices, listening for pace, impact and peaks
- Consider publication setting - blurb, website, articles, explanatory resources

Step Seven - Fine editing, review and publish
- View and do final editing on speech, transitions, B roll, graphics, music
- Audience test views
- Final adjustments
- Publish and launch

Three Stage Organising method – additive

- Shorter method, risks slightly less optimal result if not prepared to go back to the original footage to optimise or fill out structure
- Suits slightly more structured interviews with knowledgeable subjects, or voluminous amounts of interviews
- Working on text is faster, but may miss nuance

Step One - Transcript topic bins

- Make transcripts from interviews, put in Google doc
- Make sections according to topic, bold best bits

Step Two - Initial maxi, then midi 'paper' block up

Organise One - create, order and tidy text blockups

- Make Google doc text topic areas/bins for the videos you would like in your series, by natural or desired topic areas
- Look at material and make a preliminary logic for each topic area and reorder the transcript material according to this logic
- Bold the best bits, eliminate obvious duplicates
- Read through and eliminate until the text feels optimal
- Reorder the text, aiming to break up large sections from each speaker into a more conversational ABAB approach
- Place less desirable material in a "spare parts" section at the end
- Read through for impact, read through and compare the different potential videos

Step Three - Research topics

- Research material for source quotes, graphics
- Examine available B roll footage, consider which topic areas it would best suit
- Consider topic areas:
  - Are some of them difficult to do without further interviews or is the material thin and perhaps these topics could be postponed or combined?
  - Are some of them far too long and should be divided up?
- Firm up topics/videos and consider titles

Step Four - Finalising video logic and clip order

Organise Two - Midi block up and final shuffle

- Block up the shorter, pre shuffled transcripts including the "spare parts" clips at the end, starting with the most secure topics
- Is the video order impactful and support your logic? Are the zingers/conclusion good?
- Listen to each interview subject in the subsections critically
  - Is any material weak or repetitive? Is any material in spare parts better?
  - Check the ABAB shuffling - could it be improved?
- Listen through critically and note weaker sections:
  - Are they necessary? Have the ideas been covered elsewhere?
  - Could they be bolstered by raiding some of the weaker topic bins?
  - Do they need strengthening through B roll or outside material?
- View repeatedly and keep cutting out (can be done with speech editing)
- If the video order feels strong start placing obvious B roll on top
- Repeat with other videos, leaving the topics that are the weakest at this point

Steps Five to Seven as above

Three Stage Organising hybrid method, partially scripted

Text based organising can be used as an adjunct to regular scripted interviews

- Suits endorsements from experts, particularly if they have experience in talking from scripts, or a video series that is based around prearranged topics or people
- Needs discussion of aims of video/video series, and how and why the experts or officials can effectively endorse idea or program
- Suits shorter videos (eg 2 minute promos) as part of a campaign, or when asking an expert to talk to a report or guide they have made
- Will need some rounds of meetings/emails with your client and speakers so the content is agreed before
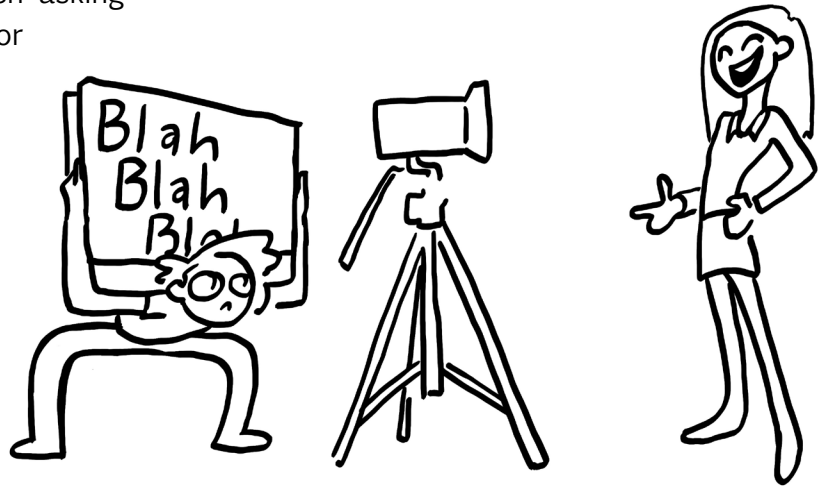
Step One - Scripted Interviews, initial block ups, transcripts

Shooting

- Bring large text copies of the script and any props needed
- Move into interview with some empathetic small talk, then ask the subject to identify themselves, their role and briefly talk about their experience - a couple of takes if necessary to make sure it is positive and brief
- Move onto the scripted part of the interview, with several takes if necessary
- Quickly move onto supplementary questions, then B roll involving subject, emphasizing the role of the speaker, finally B roll of the local itself
- Using at least two cameras (and recorder) making editing a lot easier, particularly when swapping between takes

Post production - scripted interviews

- For each interview sync Camera A, B footage on a timeline and sound if available
- Play through and elevate selected Camera A/B footage onto higher vision tracks and sink audio onto lower audio tracks for the scripted part of the interview
- Create a separate timeline from the synced selected - consider using the pancake method if your gear is up to it
- Export draft 1 from this timeline from key scripted interview or promo, repeat with other other scripted interviews, make timelines, and add them to the 'paper edit'

Post production - unscripted interviews or parts of interview

- Sync footage of any unscripted interviews or parts of interviews if needed
- Put in unscripted interviews in Google doc
- Read through, strike out any redundant bits and bold key text
- Add in text from scripted drafts as above, work out available topics

Three Stage Organising hybrid method – partially scripted, cont

Step Two – Working on scripted material followed by text block up process

Master list
- Make a master list of your key scripted interviews/promos, and other topic areas available from unscripted material

Scripted videos/promos
- Finalise order and clip choice in your scripted videos
- Add any key phrases into the scripted interview/promos from unscripted areas (eg initial zingers, supporting phrases, interludes)
- Proceed to final editing, adding music, titles, B roll (through to Step Seven above)

Unscripted Videos – Organise One – create, order and tidy text block ups
- Make Google doc text topic bins for these additional topic areas from master list
- Look at material and make a preliminary logic for each topic area and reorder the transcript material according to this logic
- Bold the best bits, eliminate obvious duplicates
- Read through and eliminate until the text feels optimal
- Find good quotes for the front and material for a satisfying conclusion
- Reorder the text, aiming to break up large sections from each speaker into a more conversational ABAB approach
- Place less desirable material in a "spare parts" section at the end
- Read through for impact
- Refine the master list: Read through the whole series comparing the value and impact of the different topic areas via the organized transcripts

Follow steps three to seven additive paper edit method for unscripted material

Publish your series!
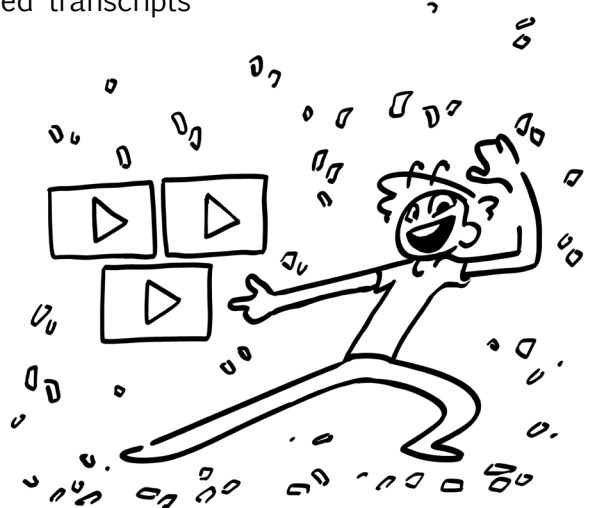
Flow chart: shooting with scripts & text based editing approaches

The flow chart below looks at decision points and factors to consider when choosing a shooting and organising method or methods.

When would you use a script?
- Endorsements, condensiing pre-published material, hard constraints on video length

When would you use a second round of paper editing in working with transcripts?
- Lengthy or repetitive interview, huge volume of content, when speed matters

Flow chart: shooting with scripts & text based organising approaches

1. Research your topic

I have to shoot and edit a series of short videos from interviews with experts on related subjects

Research overall topic and presenters. What are the big questions?

Divide overall topic into individual topic areas for videos

Generate a list of questions in a good logical order, plus a few extra ones relevant to individual presenters.

2. Decide if you need a partially scripted shoot

Very knowledgeable presenter? — No / Yes

Experienced presenter? — No / Yes

Do the videos have a strict (short) timeline? — Yes / No

Is there a promotional component? — Yes / No

Will the presenter offer an endorsement? — No / Yes

Unscripted Interviews

Shoot interviews following questions in logical order with others as time allowed. Dont forget some B roll with presenter (looking down, laptop, smiling, walking) and other B roll

Semi Scripted Interviews suitable for promotional or very short content.

Shoot interviews, scripted part first, then some other questions, B roll with presenter, plus other B roll of location

3. If you are using some scripted shooting then follow this path

Hybrid Scripted and 'paper edit' method

Standard post shooting method - sync footage, relabel with meaningful name, markup (I/O) and grade each clip

Follow script to block up on timeline. Elevate selects to higher track Create new timeline

Finalising content, B roll, music, pace, titles, then fine editing, adding any unscripted material

4. Should you use a second round of paper editing?

Experienced presenters? — Yes / No

Each video is a strict length? — Yes / No

Large amount of material? — No / Yes

Subtractive Three Stage 'paper edit' method

Additive Three Stage 'paper stage' method

Organise Stage One

Create transcripts of unscripted parts of interviews, place in Google doc, use H3/H4 to subdivide by topic

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Create topic based **text maxi block ups** for each video topic, organise internal logic per topic

Create topic based **text maxi block ups** for each video topic, organise internal logic per topic. Cut down and shuffle content in a **second** paper edit round to make a **midi block up**

Create topic based **text maxi block ups** for each video topic, organise internal logic per topic. Cut down and shuffle content in a **second** paper edit round to make a **midi block up**

Research individual topic area, look for overlay material, assign key B roll assets per topic

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Research individual topic area, look for overlay material, assign key B roll assets per topic

Organise Stage Two

For each tcpic: cut out weaker material, identify zingers, Reorder material within each video, shuffle into ABAB conversational approach.

Reorder material within each video, shuffle into ABAB conversational approach, cut out weaker material

Reorder material within each video, shuffle into ABAB conversational approach, cut out weaker material

Grade each video topic - could be some be postponed, merged or raided? Finalise video list.

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Organise Stage Three

Finalising content, B roll, music, pace, titles, then fine editing

Finalising content, B roll, music, pace, titles, then fine editing

Finalising content, B roll, music, pace, titles, then fine editing

Publish series

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Merge scripted and unscripted videos into series - publish