

Video standards and best practices

Agency standards

- **Safety is my job**
All employees in WSDOT videos (including the videographer) must wear required safety gear, i.e., helmet, vest, etc. and follow WSDOT safety practices depending on the setting of the video (i.e. office, construction project, etc.).
- **Agency branding**
All videos should be easily identified as a WSDOT product and include the transparent WSDOT acronym logo in the lower right hand corner. The only exception is if it is a WSDOT contractor producing a video about a project.
- **Spokesperson name, title and logo**
The speaker's name and title should appear at the lower left bottom of the screen and disappear after a 2-3 second duration.
- **Closed captioning**¹
Captioning is required of agency-produced videos in order to be compliant with the American Disability Act. Internal videos (like training videos) and uncut footage are an exception.
- **Standard intro and outro**
Use the [standard agency opening and closing](#) or the WSDOT logo for more professional/produced videos. Exception: the standard intro and outro is not necessary for 'raw' or uncut footage and videos produced by a WSDOT construction contractor (i.e. Seattle Tunnel Partners).
- **Video credit**
Traditionally known as a video credit, the credit at the end of a video should feature the owner of the material/content used within the video (i.e. Northwest region, Alaskan Way Viaduct project, etc.) and give credit for any royalty free music or images that require credit for use.
- **Engage your communicators early in the video process**
Contact your communications staff for help with your video. Engage them early to make sure your video syncs with agency messaging and get help with planning and determining things like audience, scripting, visuals, editing, promotion, distribution, etc.

- **Signed release**
Be sure to have a [video](#) and [photo](#) release signed by video participants. If other people are filmed while in a public location, a release is not necessary.
- **Review and promote video**
Send communications staff your video to review and work with them to promote the final product.

Best practices to guide video production

- **Introduction**
Introduce the topic of the video using short, conversational broadcast copy. Visually, the intro can show a spokesperson or some other shot related to the topic.
- **Simple is best**
Video can help explain complex messages, but on screen it's best to keep things simple. The video should have one clear message to get across. Keep on-screen graphics, props, animations and lengthy dialogue to a minimum.
- **Short and sweet**
Most videos should be no more than 1- to 4-minutes long. Think of creating separate videos if it is difficult to keep it to that time frame. This allows us to make simpler videos and in the end, will give us more video content. If the message or customer drives the need for longer videos (such as a training video), discuss it with communications staff.
- **Stay up-to-date**
Keep up-to-date with video techniques, technologies and content types and what is popular with online audiences.
- **Inform, educate, entertain**
Three types of video are consistently popular on the web: informative, entertaining and educational. Informative and educational videos should be our focus. Examples would be how-to posts, video guides and FAQs.
- **Remember your audience**
Cater your video to a specific audience in terms of language and style. Communicate and engage with them in a way they would appreciate.
- **Interviews**
Interviews should be relatively short. Visually, determine if you want to show the speaker on-location or in an office environment.

¹ An exception to captioning would be instances like internal training videos intended for specific audiences such as Washington State Ferries Deck, Engine, Terminal or Eagle Harbor staff. Captioning is not necessary as employees cannot staff those positions if they are hearing impaired. As such, captioning would be an unnecessary burden on the training office.

- **Transitional title frames**

If necessary, short transitional subtitle frames can separate subtopics, locations, etc., throughout the video.

- **Sensitive Security Information (SSI)**

Videos and/or video logs should identify SSI information appropriately. Non-disclosure documents should be on file before authorization to review the video is approved. An example of this would be a training video for how to handle an active shooter incident at Washington State Ferries. This video contains SSI and staff that view the video should have non-disclosures on file.

- **Include B-Roll**

Use B-roll to add visual interest. These are simply shots of things that are visually interesting and simultaneously support and compliment the voice-over, monologue or interview.

- **Maps/charts/diagrams**

Minimize the use of maps, charts and diagrams. Use of these tools depends on the message and what is needed for effective delivery. Maps/charts/diagrams should have a standard look and palette.

- **Captions**

Courtesy of DigitalGov (Office of Citizen Services and Innovative Technologies, U.S. General Services Administration), the following provides ADA compliant captioning best practices:

<https://www.digitalgov.gov/2014/06/30/508-accessible-videos-how-to-caption-videos>

- **Conclusion**

Wrap things up by summarizing what the video is about. This should be short and written in broadcast style. Visually, show a spokesperson or B-roll footage. Include ADA/Title VI information and the agency standard outro.

Key elements that help us be better storytellers

- **Emotion**

Give our audience a reason to care and a way to connect to the story. An emotion can give us a larger palette, making it possible to show not just concrete facts, but the reality of the human experience.

- **Visual appeal**

Video stories need visual appeal. Some places, people and things are inherently more visually interesting. Find ways to discover the appeal that might be hidden. Even everyday locations and activities can spring to life with fresh perspectives, angles and composition.

- **Action and movement**

Other media can describe or hint at motion, but only video can really show it. Processes, sequences and motions are made for video. Whether it's

someone using, operating, creating or destroying something, video can reveal exactly what the process looks like and precisely how it works.

- **Audio**

Sound is a crucial element of video because audio conveys so much meaning. Interview sound bites tell us what the people in our stories are thinking and doing. Ambient or location sound creates a sense of place. Natural sound punctuates actions and important moments. Narration ties everything together. Audio often sets the tempo and in many cases determines how and when shots are edited together. Video is often edited to match audio, not the other way around.

- o From a technical perspective, when sound goes bad, audiences know it right away.
- o Audio that's recorded too high becomes distorted.
- o Audio recorded too low tends to drown in noise resulting in static and hum from other on-location sound sources.
- o Never depend on the camera microphone to record anything more than the ambient sound.
- o For interviews, always use a lavalier type microphone that is clipped to the person's clothing about mid-chest or use a boom microphone that is kept just out of the frame.
- o Whenever recording audio, use headphones. You must verify the sound that you are recording will be good enough to use in your final production.

- **Editing**

When editing, try to use short clips. The best videos keep the audience engaged by consistent short cuts that are 3- to 7-seconds long. Nothing will lose an audience faster than a video that runs for a minute and has no edits. Mix it up, use B-roll and keep the eye moving.

- **Events and moments**

Video offers an unrivaled way to document unique moments in time. We should always look for ways to capture the things that only happen once.

- **People**

The most interesting stories involve people. Use WSDOT employees to provide a point of view. Draw the viewer into our realm. Most people are uncomfortable in front of a camera. If your host/subject is uncomfortable, the audience will be too. Do your best to use humor and positive feedback to get the person to relax. Do multiple takes so that repetition removes some of the uneasiness. Make sure that you have plenty of B-roll to use as cutaways when you have to edit the interview or narrative.

- **Newsworthiness**

Give our viewers something new, noteworthy, unusual or timely. Answer the question, why should I care?

- **Settings and locations**

Establish a sense of place.

- o Wide shots — the sweeping views that establish a scene — can tell where a story takes place and convey the size and purpose of a location or project.
- o Medium shots and close-ups can reveal detail and texture providing a sense of a location's age, condition, energy and character.
- o Coupled with strong audio, shots that depict a location can transport our audience to another place and show them exactly what it's like to be there.

- **Lighting — Three point lighting**

- o Key, Fill and Back Light—three point lighting is the start, and it's easy. The main light is the 'key' light. In day-to-day informal shooting this would be the sun or if you're indoors, the main overhead light. On a controlled set the key light is your brightest light source, either emulating from the natural world (sun/ moon or room light) or basically just any good source of light falling at around 45 degree angle on your subject.
- o Fill light basically 'fills in' any unwanted shadows created by the key light. This is positioned at an angle on the other side of the subject's face to remove nose/neck shadow etc. and to brighten the eye on that side.
- o 'Back-light' is not, as is often mistakenly assumed, to light the background — though backlight can be created from an illuminated backdrop. This is to light the subject from behind, from 'the back'. Why? To separate the subject from the background. A light positioned high up, shooting down on a person from behind will give a line of light along the shoulders and a slight halo around the head to make your subject — your point of focus — stick out.

- **Focus**

Rely on a central theme to push the video forward — think of this in terms of what's happening — someone doing something. Viewers' attentions drift after a minute or two. We have only a few precious moments to establish a scene, introduce characters, advance a subject line and inform. It's essential to find — and stick to — a sharp focus.

- **Stability**

Use video camera stabilizers when necessary to minimize bumpy video. Some softwares can stabilize footage after the fact such as After Effects and Adobe Premier 6.

Once your video is complete

- **Work with your regional or project communicators to promote**

Regional communicators will review videos for audio and visual quality.

- **Post to YouTube**

Email webhelp@wsdot.wa.gov with a title and description to upload your video to YouTube.

- **Generate more views and conversation about your video**

Work with your communicators to determine how you can promote your video using the web and social media.

- **Work with your communications staff to create and/or maintain a video log**

Create or maintain a video log so that videos can be easily cataloged and retrieved in the event of audits or public disclosure requests.