



## HANDHELD SECRETS OF THE PROS

### Forget the Tripod and Go Handheld

Handheld shots can add some real energy and a more subjective point of view to a scene when tripods aren't practical or desirable. The basic technique is simple, but it takes practice to master. You can also use a camera stabilizer such as a Steadicam Jr. or Glidecam (pictured bottom right), which takes even more practice. There are several important things to consider if you want to shoot handheld like the big girls and boys.



#### How to Shoot Handheld

1. Brace your camera elbow against your body. Use your free hand to steady your camera hand or to steady the camera by gripping the lens.
2. Keep your lens zoomed out to its widest setting.
3. Assume comfortable footing and lower your center of gravity slightly as you twist left or right to follow the action.
4. Avoid zooming. Move in closer or farther away to adjust your frame.

#### Handheld Editing Considerations

Handheld shots often won't intercut well with tripod shots *in the same scene*—it's like stepping on a boat, then back on the dock, then back in a boat—the audience will accept either shot, but the two probably won't match smoothly. The steadier the camerawork, the more likely you can juxtapose shots in editing.

#### Motivation and Style

Handheld footage should be a *motivated* stylistic choice that fits with the subject matter. Look at other documentaries and try to analyze when and why they go handheld and what effect it has on the viewer. Is it all handheld or just some scenes? Is the camera movement helping to tell the story? How does it affect viewpoint? Ask yourself these important questions *before* you go handheld.



## HANDHELD CAMERA POSITIONS



#### Standard

- Elbows braced against body
- Slightly bent knees
- Best all-purpose handheld position



#### High Angle

- Arms extended overhead
- LCD screen angled down 45°
- Use to shoot over crowds/obstacles



#### Low Angle

- Hold camera near ground
- Walk smoothly with bent knees
- Mostly for POV and following shots



#### Cradle

- Cam at waist level with braced elbows
- Ideal for long handheld takes
- Good for "roving" high-energy shots

## USING TRIPODS

### Introduction

When you need a steady image such as zooming in to shoot something far away or you're doing an interview, put that camera on some "sticks" and join the Rock Steady Crew. Smooth pans and tilts and nice even zooms are best accomplished with a good professional-quality tripod. Be warned if you're serious about this DV thing and you're buying a tripod: Cheap consumer-level tripods are far more trouble than they're worth. They simply won't do the job and you'll eventually end up spending more to buy a professional-quality tripod or suffer through one botched camera move after another.



### What to Look for in a Tripod

- 1. Weight Capacity:** Make sure your tripod is rated to handle your camera's weight.
- 2. Fluid Head:** Any tripod that you shoot with should have a "fluid head." Fluid head tripods are made just for film/video work. They are more expensive, but necessary and worth it to pull off smooth professional-quality camerawork. (If you prefer whack amateur moves just stick with the rickety plastic consumer models.)
- 3. Pan and Tilt Tension Knobs:** Another feature to look for in a professional-quality tripod are knobs to adjust the pan and tilt tension, which will allow you to adjust the tripod to move as fast or slow as you like up and down and left and right.
- 4. Quick Release Plate:** A good tripod head will have a quick release plate that will stay attached to the camera during shooting. This will allow you to easily remove and replace the camera on the tripod whenever you need to quickly go handheld or move the camera. This item is a *must* for unpredictable documentary production.

### General Tripod Tips

When performing camera moves, be careful not to end up in an awkward yoga-like position. Always start in the least comfortable position, then end in the most comfortable position. Also, don't use your pan or tilt tension knobs to **lock down** shots. Don't use your pan or tilt locks to adjust tripod tension. Doing either will eventually shorten the life of your tripod. If your tripod has one, use the spirit bubble (a.k.a. "level bubble") to make sure you are even with the horizon, but when pressed for time, just check your frame line against the horizon line.

## PRE-ROLL AND END-ROLL

### Record Pre-Roll and End-Roll for Each Shot

DV cameras don't just go from stop to record instantly when you hit the record button. It takes your camera a few seconds to get up to recording speed, so allow yourself proper room for editing by padding the start of each take by a few seconds. (Even a Porsche takes a few seconds to get up to speed!) On DV cameras this is called **pre-roll**.

When the record button is hit on most cameras, the record indicator (typically a red light or the letters REC) will appear on-screen as white or flashing text then turn to red or nonflashing text once the camera has reached **speed**. This is the point at which the camera actually begins recording a stable image.

Likewise, you want to allow a few seconds of **end-roll** on each take. Otherwise, you may find yourself cursing in the edit room because you inadvertently cut off the end of a great moment or line. Remember, edit decks, just like cameras, require a certain amount of pre-roll to get up to speed. Padding the start and end of each shot will also make editing considerably less painful, since you will be able to avoid the time code errors that are common with footage shot without any pre- or end-roll. (See also "Time Code and DV Tapes" on page 226.)

✓ *Record a few extra seconds at the start and end of each shot to reduce time code problems when editing.*

## HOT TIP

## CLEANING YOUR LENS

Lens Cleaning Kit:

1. Lens tissue
2. Liquid lens cleaner
3. Blow bulb/brush
4. Optical lens cleaning cloth (optional for dry wiping)

If the hallmark of a pro shooter is a sharp focused picture, the first hallmark of a crisp picture is a clean lens. This is one of those lessons that might still escape you well after you've learned and adopted many of the other professional practices in this book. It will escape you that is, until the day it comes roaring back to bite you on the butt. (Do I sound like a man with experience here?) It's very easy to get caught up in the heat of the moment and not notice or completely forget about regularly checking and cleaning the camera lens, especially when shooting solo.

The dangerous thing about not developing a lens cleaning habit early is that often a dirty lens won't really show up in your footage depending on your lighting, camera angle, and focal length. But whenever the sun or a light shines in the lens, from the right angle—at just the right focal length—a thousand little specks of lint, fiber, fingerprints, and smudges will magically appear in front of your image then disappear again as soon as you change the camera angle or focal length.

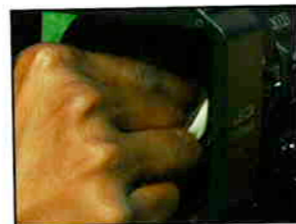
So, even if you're looking for dirt, 90% of the time it won't be visible on the LCD screen. Your viewfinder and flip-out LCD screen are just too small and have too low a resolution to catch these tiny details. You have to check the *surface of the lens* itself. (**Note:** Never use Windex, tissues, toilet paper, paper towels, shirt sleeves, etc., to clean a camera lens unless you're actually *trying* to scratch your lens.)



Remove dust using a lens brush/blow bulb.



Lightly moisten wad of lens tissue with lens fluid.



Wipe gently in small circular motions.



Follow with a dry lens tissue to wipe smears.

## CHAPTER 4

## LIGHTING

