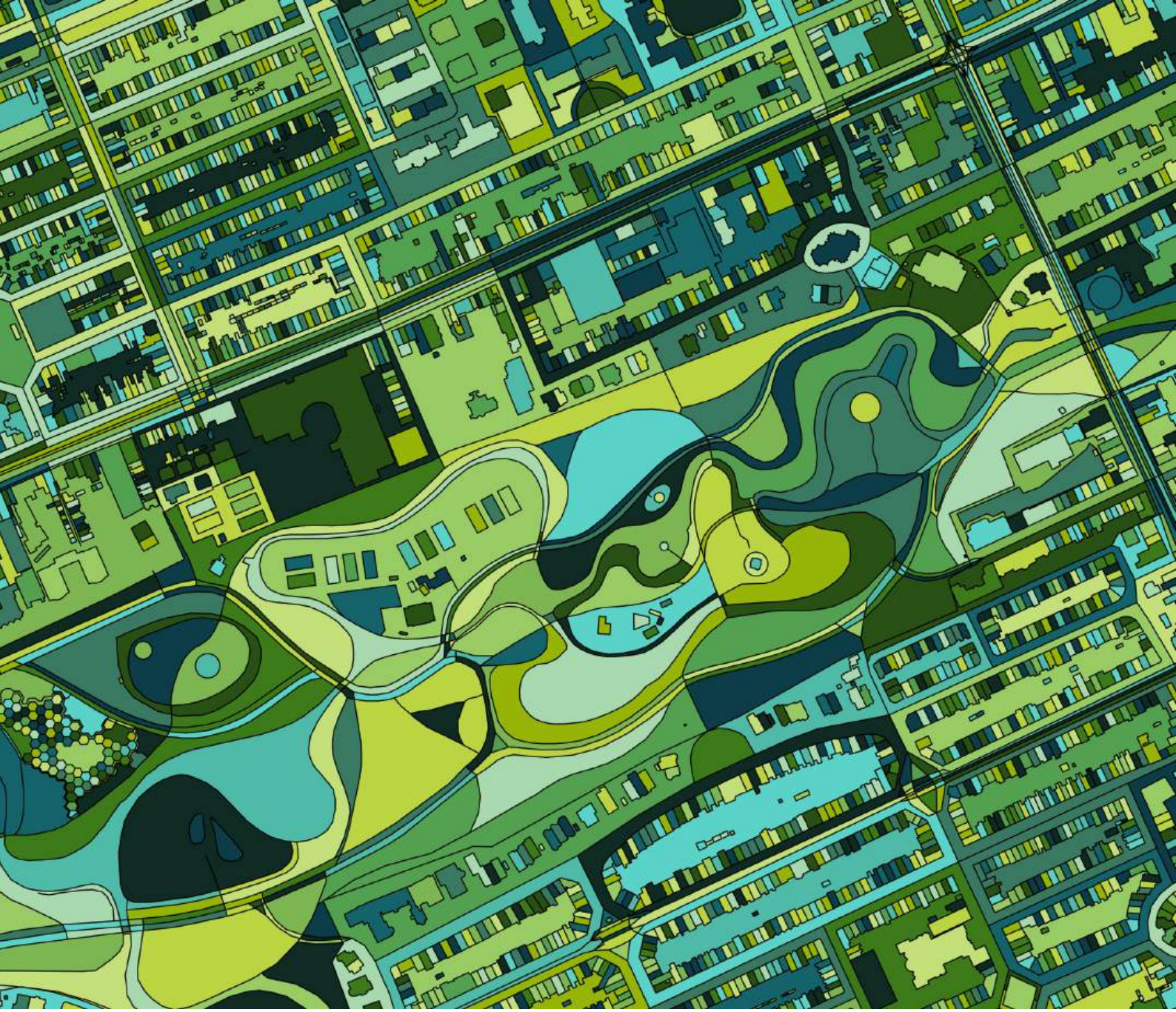

DIGITAL VIDEO STORYTELLING

• STORYTELLING FOR CHANGE •

Written and created by the Institute of communication studies - Skope, Macedonia

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Storytelling

Introduction in video storytelling

Video storytelling is an essential aspect of modern media and communication, serving as a powerful tool for conveying messages, emotions, and narratives. As an educational discipline, video storytelling combines the technical aspects of filmmaking with the art of narrative construction, ensuring that audiences not only watch but also relate with the story being told, thus remembering it for longer. This introduction to video storytelling involves understanding the fundamental principles that make visual narratives compelling, engaging, and effective. This guide aims to provide an inside look into the foundational elements of video storytelling, focusing on the importance of structure, story development, visual composition, and audience engagement.

At its core, video storytelling is about using **moving images, sound, and text to create an immersive experience** that captivates the viewer. Unlike written or spoken storytelling, video storytelling leverages visual cues to communicate meaning beyond words. This medium allows for a more dynamic and immediate connection with the audience, making it an effective tool for education, marketing, entertainment, and social change. Understanding the power of visuals and how they interact with other elements such as sound design, music, and editing to enhance the narrative make for successful video storytelling product.

One of the foundational elements **of video storytelling is structure**. A compelling video narrative typically follows a classic storytelling arc: beginning, middle, and end. The introduction sets the stage, introduces characters or places, and establishes the setting and conflict. The middle section can develop the conflict, problem or developing situations adding depth to the characters and increasing tension. The resolution provides closure, delivering a satisfying or thought-provoking conclusion. Understanding this structure is crucial for crafting narratives that keep audiences engaged and invested in the story.

The most important part of the video storytelling is the **story itself and its development**. Video story development is a multifaceted process that transforms a simple idea into a compelling visual narrative. It's more than just pointing a camera; it's about crafting an experience that resonates with an audience.

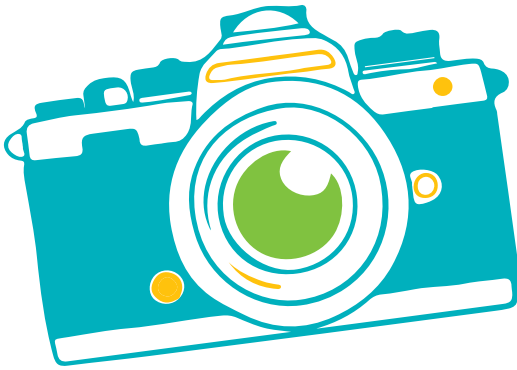
A good video story begins with a clear, concise core idea. This involves defining:

The Message: What do you want to convey?
The Audience: Who are you trying to reach?
The Purpose: What action do you want viewers to take?
These foundational elements guide every subsequent decision.

Another critical aspect of video storytelling is visual composition. The way scenes are framed, the use of lighting, colour, and camera angles contribute to the storytelling experience. Composition plays a vital role in directing the viewer's attention and conveying emotions. For example, close-up shots can capture subtle facial expressions, conveying intimacy and emotion, while wide shots can establish the environment and create a sense of scale. Understanding visual composition techniques such as the rule of thirds, leading lines, and depth of field helps storytellers create visually engaging content that enhances the narrative.

Editing is where all the elements of video storytelling come together to form a cohesive narrative. The pacing, sequencing, and transitions between scenes influence how the story unfolds. Editing techniques such as jump cuts, cross-cutting, and montage sequences help maintain engagement and emphasize key moments in the story. **A well-edited video ensures that the narrative flows smoothly**, keeping viewers engaged and emotionally connected to the content.

Emotion plays a pivotal role in video storytelling. The most memorable videos are those that evoke strong emotions, whether it be joy, sadness, excitement, or nostalgia. **Emotional storytelling** relies on a combination of compelling characters, relatable conflicts, and immersive visuals to create a connection with the audience. Understanding how to tap into universal emotions allows storytellers to create content that resonates deeply with viewers.



In addition to these technical and artistic elements,

video storytelling also requires **an understanding of audience engagement**. Knowing the target audience helps in crafting a narrative that appeals to their interests, values, and emotions. Different genres and platforms require different storytelling approaches. For instance, a short social media video may rely on quick cuts and strong visuals to grab attention, whereas a documentary may focus on in-depth character development and immersive storytelling. Adapting storytelling techniques to suit different audiences and platforms ensures that the message is effectively communicated.

Video storytelling also involves ethical considerations. As with any form of media, storytellers have a responsibility to present accurate, respectful, and culturally sensitive content. Ethical storytelling ensures that narratives do not misrepresent individuals or communities and that they contribute positively to societal discourse. Being mindful of representation, inclusivity, and authenticity helps build trust with audiences and enhances the credibility of the storyteller.

Video as a storytelling tool for change

Video, as a storytelling tool, possesses a remarkable capacity to instigate change, particularly when harnessed for educational purposes. Its power lies in its ability to transcend the limitations of traditional didactic methods, offering a dynamic and immersive experience that fosters deeper understanding and inspires action.

To effectively utilize video for change, one must first recognize its inherent strengths: its capacity to evoke emotional resonance, its ability to visually demonstrate complex concepts, and its accessibility to a wide audience. The creation of impactful educational videos necessitates a strategic approach, beginning with a clear articulation of the desired change. Define the specific issue, the target audience, and the intended outcome. Subsequently, construct a compelling narrative that resonates with the audience's values and experiences. Employ visual storytelling techniques to illustrate the problem and its potential solutions, ensuring that the information is presented

in a clear and engaging manner. Consider the use of diverse visual elements, such as time-lapse footage, animations, and expert interviews, to enhance comprehension and maintain viewer interest.

Audio plays a crucial role in amplifying the message. Utilize clear and concise narration, incorporating ambient sounds and music to create an immersive atmosphere. Ensure that the video's pacing aligns with the narrative's emotional arc, allowing viewers to fully absorb the information and connect with the story. Accessibility is paramount. Incorporate subtitles and closed captions to reach a wider audience, including those with hearing impairments. Consider translating the video into multiple languages to broaden its impact. Furthermore, the video should integrate calls to action, providing viewers with tangible steps they can take to contribute to the desired change. Include links to relevant resources, organizations, and initiatives.

Dissemination is key to maximizing the video's impact. Utilize social media platforms, educational institutions, and community organizations to reach the target audience. Encourage sharing and discussion to amplify the message. Finally, evaluate the video's effectiveness by tracking its reach, engagement, and impact. Gather feedback from viewers to identify areas for improvement and ensure that the message resonates with the intended audience. By adhering to these guidelines, video can serve as a potent catalyst for positive change, fostering awareness, inspiring action, and driving meaningful societal transformation.

Social media video storytelling

Social media video storytelling requires a unique approach due to the fast-paced nature of digital platforms. The key to effective social media video storytelling is grabbing the audience's attention within the first few seconds. Since users scroll quickly through content, videos should have an engaging hook right from the start. Using bold visuals, intriguing questions, or eye-catching text overlays can make a video stand out.

Additionally, videos on social media platforms should be concise and to the point, ensuring that the message is delivered efficiently without losing viewer interest.

Optimizing content for mobile viewing is crucial. Since most social media users consume content on their phones, videos should be formatted in mobile-friendly aspect ratios, such as vertical or square formats. Captions and subtitles are also essential, as many users watch videos without sound. Including on-screen text ensures that the message is conveyed even when audio is turned off.

Engagement is key in social media video storytelling. Encouraging interaction through calls-to-action, questions, and interactive elements can boost audience participation. Whether it's prompting viewers to comment, share, or tag a friend, fostering engagement helps increase a video's reach and impact. Additionally, leveraging platform-specific features, such as Instagram Stories, TikTok trends, or YouTube Shorts, can enhance visibility and audience connection.

Consistency in branding and storytelling style is another important aspect of social media video storytelling. Maintaining a consistent visual aesthetic, tone, and messaging across videos helps in building a recognizable brand identity. Using colours, logos, and storytelling themes that align with a brand or creator's identity ensures that audiences can easily associate content with its source.

Telling the NbS story

Video storytelling is a powerful tool for communicating the benefits and impact of Nature-based Solutions (NbS). These solutions, which leverage natural processes to address societal challenges like climate change and biodiversity loss, often require visual representation to fully grasp their complexity and potential. Here's how to effectively use video storytelling for NbS:

1. Show it, Don't Just Talk About it:

- NbS are inherently visual. Showcase the beauty and functionality of these solutions. Capture the lushness of restored wetlands, the intricate root systems of mangrove forests, or the vibrant biodiversity of urban green spaces.
- Use time-lapse footage to illustrate the growth and transformation of NbS projects over time. Before-and-after comparisons can dramatically demonstrate the positive changes.
- Utilize drone footage to provide a broader perspective of NbS projects, highlighting their scale and impact on the surrounding landscape.

2. Humanize the Story:

- Feature the voices of local communities who are directly involved in or benefiting from NbS projects. Share their stories, perspectives, and experiences.
- Include interviews with scientists, researchers, and practitioners who are working on NbS projects. Explain the science behind these solutions in an accessible and engaging way.
- Connect with viewers on an emotional level by sharing personal stories of individuals whose lives have been positively impacted by NbS.

3. Emphasize the Benefits:

- Clearly demonstrate the various ecosystem services provided by NbS, such as water filtration, carbon sequestration, and flood mitigation. Use visuals and graphics to illustrate these benefits.
- When possible, quantify the impact of NbS projects with data and statistics. Show how these solutions contribute to climate resilience, biodiversity conservation, and human well-being.
- Emphasize the long-term sustainability of NbS, highlighting their ability to provide lasting benefits for future generations.

4. Call to Action:

- Encourage viewers to learn more about NbS and take action to support these solutions.
- Include links to relevant websites, organizations, and resources.
- Highlight the importance of collaboration between governments, communities, and organizations to implement NbS.

Making it happen

Making the video – step by step process

1. Develop Idea

Brainstorm a core message or theme focused on change and call for action

2. Plan

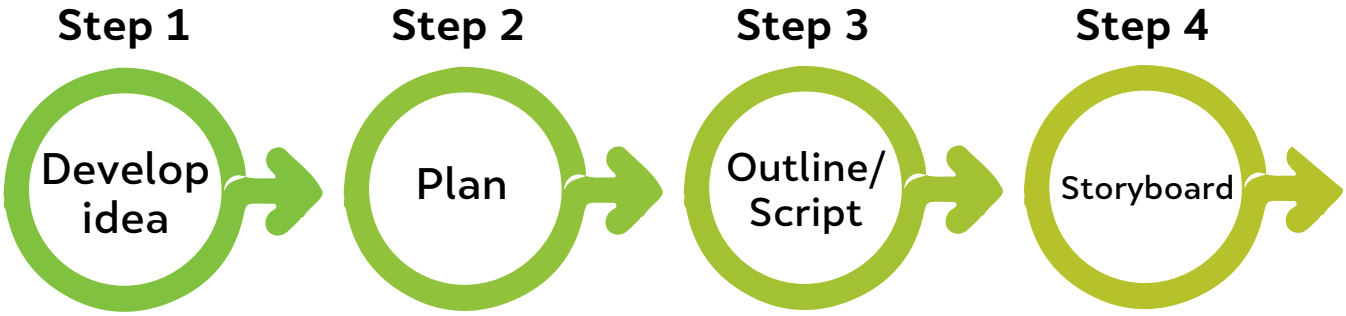
Organize your goals, audience, resources, locations, and timeline to make the idea achievable and impactful.

3. Script

Write a clear and engaging narrative that explains the problem, the nature-based solution, and its benefits.

4. Storyboard

Create visual sketches or outlines for each scene to plan camera angles, visuals, and transitions.



5. Film and Record

Capture your video footage, interviews, and voiceovers according to the script and storyboard.

6. Finish

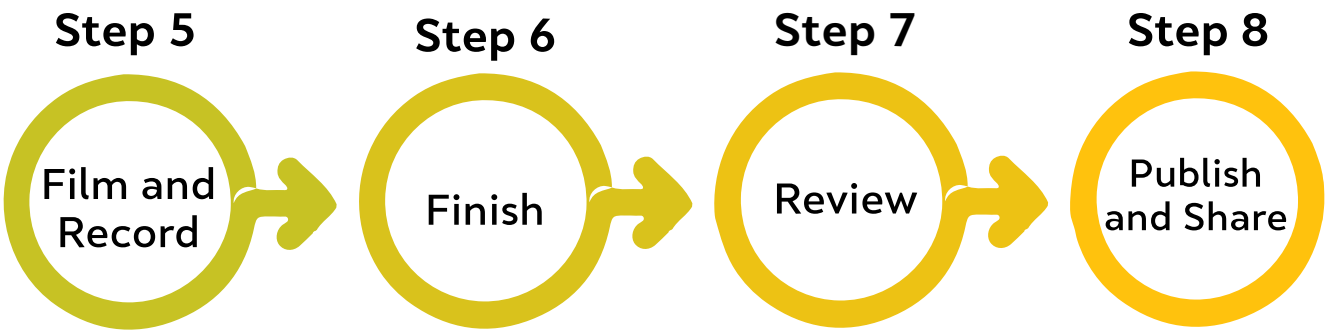
Edit the video by combining visuals, audio, music, and graphics to create a polished final product.

7. Review

Watch the video with fresh eyes or get feedback from others to ensure clarity, accuracy, and emotional impact.

8. Publish

Share the video on appropriate platforms—like YouTube, social media, or educational websites—to reach your target audience.



Story boxes

"Story building boxes" is a helpful metaphor for visualizing and breaking down the essential components of a narrative.
Think of them as containers for key elements, ensuring you've covered all the necessary bases. Here's how to conceptualize these boxes:

1. The "Character Box":

Contents:

Who is the protagonist?
Who are the supporting characters?
*In the case of NbS the location can be the character as well

Purpose: This box ensures you have well-developed characters that drive the narrative and connect with the audience.

2. The "Setting/World Box":

Contents:

Where and when does the story take place?
What is the atmosphere and environment?
Are there any unique elements?

Purpose: This establishes the context of the story and creates a sense of place.

3. The "Plot/Conflict Box":

Contents:

What is the central conflict or problem?
What are the key events and turning points?
What is the rising action, climax, and resolution?
What are the stakes?

Purpose: This box outlines the sequence of events and the driving force of the narrative.

4. The "Theme/Message Box":

Contents:

What is the underlying message or theme of the story?
What are the deeper ideas or concepts being explored?
What does the writer want the audience to take away from the story.

Purpose: This ensures the story has meaning and resonates with the audience on a deeper level.

5. The "Visual/Sensory Box":

Contents:

What are the key visual elements of the story?

What are the important sounds?

How will the story engage the senses of the audience?

What is the tone or mood of the story?

Purpose: This box focuses on the sensory experience of the story, particularly important in a visual medium like video.

How to Use These Boxes:

Brainstorming: Use the boxes to generate ideas and explore different aspects of your story.

Organization: Fill in the boxes with details to create a structured outline.

Checklist: Use the boxes as a checklist to ensure you've covered all the essential elements.

Troubleshooting: If your story feels weak, revisit the boxes to identify any missing or underdeveloped elements.

By using these "story building boxes," you can create a more complete and compelling narrative.

Storyboard

Developing a video storyboard is a crucial step in pre-production, acting as a visual blueprint for your video. It translates your script into a series of frames, ensuring everyone on the production team is aligned on the visual storytelling. Here's a breakdown of the process:

1. Script Breakdown and Key Scenes:

- Begin by thoroughly analysing your script. Identify the key scenes and moments that are essential for conveying your story.
- Focus on scenes with significant visual action, dialogue, or emotional impact.
- Divide the script into logical segments or shots.

2. Frame Sketches and Composition:

- For each key scene, create a series of rough sketches or frames. These don't need to be perfect masterpieces; their purpose is to illustrate the composition and action.

- Consider shot sizes (wide, medium, close-up), camera angles (high, low, eye-level), and camera movements (pan, tilt, zoom).
- Think about the rule of thirds, leading lines, and other composition techniques to create visually appealing frames.
- If you are not good at drawing, simple stick figures, or using online storyboard software is perfectly acceptable.

3. Visual Elements and Action:

- Within each frame, depict the key visual elements, such as characters, objects, and settings.
- Illustrate the action taking place within the scene, including character movements and interactions.
- Add notes to each frame describing the action, dialogue, camera movements, and any other relevant information.
- Consider things such as lighting, and colour, and how those elements will influence the mood of each scene.

4. Sequencing and Flow:

- Arrange the frames in the order they will appear in the video, ensuring a smooth and logical flow.
- Pay attention to transitions between shots, considering how they will impact the pacing and rhythm of the video.
- Ensure that the storyboard effectively conveys the narrative arc of the story.

5. Adding Details and Notes:

Add detailed notes to each frame, including:

- Shot size and angle
- Camera movement
- Dialogue or voiceover
- Sound effects or music cues
- Lighting and colour notes
- Duration of the shot

6. Digital or Physical Storyboard:

- You can create your storyboard using traditional methods, such as paper and pencil, or digital tools, such as storyboard software or drawing tablets.
- Digital storyboards offer advantages like easy editing, sharing, and collaboration.
- Regardless of the method, ensure that the storyboard is clear, concise, and easy to understand.

7. Review and Revision:

- Once the storyboard is complete, review it with the members of the production team.
- Make any necessary revisions based on their feedback.
- The storyboard should be a living document that can be updated throughout the pre-production process.

Script writing Guidelines for NbS Promotion Video

1. Know Your Purpose

- Define your goal: Is it to raise awareness, inspire action, educate, or promote a specific project?
- Keep it focused on the benefits of using nature to solve environmental, social, or economic problems.

2. Identify Your Audience

- Are you speaking to the general public, policymakers, students, or local communities?
- Adjust your language: simple and relatable for a broad audience, more technical for experts.

3. Follow a Clear Structure

A. Hook (0:00–0:20)

- Start with an attention-grabbing question, fact, or visual description.
- Example: “What if nature could protect us from the heat and pollution—and restore our communities at the same time?”

B. Problem (0:20–0:45)

- Briefly describe the issue: climate change, deforestation, urban flooding, etc.
- Use real-world impact to create urgency and emotional connection.

C. Solution (0:45–1:30)

- Introduce the nature-based solution clearly.
- Explain what it is, how it works, and why it's better than conventional solutions.

D. Success Story / Example (1:30–2:15)

- Show a real or imagined case study: a urban forest restoration, a green roof in a city, or a urban garder project
- Use visuals to back it up.

E. Benefits (2:15–2:45)

Highlight the co-benefits: biodiversity, health, climate resilience, beauty, etc.

F. Call to Action (2:45–end)

End with a clear message

4. Use Clear, Positive Language

- Avoid jargon. Say "planting trees" instead of "afforestation" unless it fits the audience.
- Focus on hope and possibility, not fear.
- Keep sentences short and punchy—this makes it easier for voiceover or subtitles.

5. Write for the Ear

- Read it out loud as you go. It should sound natural, not like a report.
- Use rhythm, pauses, and tone to keep it engaging.

6. Match Words to Visuals

- Think visually while writing. Each line should correspond with an image or scene idea.

7. Time It Right

- One page of script = about 1 minute of video (roughly 130–150 words).
- Keep your script tight and purposeful. Every word should earn its place.

The phone as a main camera tool

The modern smartphones have more than the minimum technical characteristics and technology to be used as a primary camera tool for creating videos. The smartphone used in combination with different camera adjustment and accessories such as: tripod, handhold, handgrab, gimble or additional lights can be as efficient as a professional camera.

1. Prepare Your Phone

- Wipe your camera lens with a microfiber cloth.
- Set your camera to 1080p or 4K and at least 30fps (or 60fps for smoother motion). This helps with framing using the rule of thirds.

2. Lighting Matters

- Shoot in bright but soft lighting.

This means that there are less shadows scattering your video foreground.

- If you can, avoid over-exposing the video image with strong light like filming at a summer's noon.
- If filming outdoors, aim for early morning or late afternoon (golden hour).
- A ring light or softbox can improve indoor shots

3. Stabilize Your Shot

- Keep your phone steady by holding it with both hands.
- Use a tripod or a gimbal if possible.
- Reduce hand shakiness by supporting yourself on a sturdy object.

5. Audio is Important

- Use an external mic, if available. If not, setup a backup phone with a concealed microphone on the person speaking.
- If outdoors, use a windscreen for the microphone.
- Reduce background noise and record in quiet locations.

6. Focus and Exposure

- Tap on your subject (focus) to keep them sharp.
- Lock exposure to prevent brightness from shifting suddenly.

7. Smooth Movements

- Pan slowly, as quick movements can look shaky.
- Follow the subject but keep movement natural.
- Use slow motion or time-lapse

8. Edit Your Video

Use apps like CapCut, iMovie, InShot, or Adobe Premiere Rush to trim, add music, and enhance visuals.

Types of video styles and positions

Using different video styles and positions can dictate the style, dynamic and the emotions of the video and the information you want to share with the audience. When choosing the style and angle, think about the story you want to tell, the image you want to share, the tone you want to use and the message you want to share.

Types of shots

- The extreme wide shot and the wide shot (also called full-shot) are shots you use when you need to show where something is located, in a wider geographical sense – such as a city, village, mountain, or when you need to show the wider environment around the subject.
- The medium shot shows the subject or subjects from head to toe, including the immediate surroundings. The subject still does not dominate the frame, but it is as important as the environment.
- The “American shot” starts at the knees of the subject and ends above their head. It is used to bring the subject closer to the audience, but also to prevent the “floating torso” effect when the subject is in motion. The movement, without at least showing the knees, often looks strange on camera.

- The medium-close-up starts at the waist. We can already clearly see the eyes, facial expressions and the movement of the subject. The surroundings do not come into the forefront as much.
- The close-up includes the head and part of the shoulders. The subject's eyes and facial expressions are clearly visible. This is the most commonly used shot for interviews because it brings the subject closer to the audience and there is enough room for captions or subtitles, if needed.
- Extreme close-ups usually focus on parts of the face, such as the mouth or eyes. This shot shows every movement of the subject, depicting what they may be thinking or feeling. If you want to capture drama, this is the shot you need.

How the audience will experience the subject you are filming also depends on the perspective, that is, the angle of filming.

When you shoot from the so-called bottom angle, then you give more importance to the subject. They look bigger than they are. They are dominant. Especially if they move their hands as well, they are given a look of authority and confidence.

If, on the other hand, you want the audience to see the subject as small, weak, powerless, or even diminish the subject, then you shoot from an upper angle.

When you shoot with an angle at the height of the subject, usually at eye level, then the viewer easily identifies, i.e., relates with the subject. They seem normal. As they are.

So, you need shots with different widths and angles so that you can ultimately capture, in editing, the spatial and temporal logical action. That is called a sequence. When you use many or more wide shots in the sequences, then the viewer gets information about both the subject and their surroundings.

But there is a problem with wide shots – it takes more time to complete the action. Everything is logical and informative but often does not look very dynamic and eye-catching. If you've taken enough shots, especially close-ups, you have a way out. The close-ups contribute to telling more or less the same thing in less time.

Rules of videography

In videography there are so called “golden rules” – set of rules that if followed, can help you create a well-composed video, that shares the message clearly, helps viewer engagement, and adds to a more enjoyable viewer experience. The end goal is to use the ensure the video quality for an effective communication. This means to use proper exposure, audio and storytelling ensure that your message is conveyed clearly and effectively.

The rule of thirds:

This compositional guideline involves dividing your frame into nine equal sections by two horizontal and two vertical lines. Placing key elements along these lines or at their intersections creates more visually appealing and balanced shots.

Why it’s important: It helps avoid centering subjects, which can often look static, and creates a more dynamic and engaging composition.

The 180-degree rule:

Especially important in dialogue scenes, this rule dictates that you maintain consistent screen direction by keeping the camera on one side of an imaginary line between your subjects.

Why it’s important: Breaking this rule can confuse viewers and create a disorienting “jump cut” effect.

Proper exposure:

Ensuring your footage is neither too bright nor too dark is crucial for clear and professional-looking videos. This involves understanding and adjusting settings like aperture, shutter speed, and ISO.

Why it’s important: Poor exposure can result in lost detail, distracting noise, and an overall unprofessional appearance.

Stable footage:

Shaky footage is a common problem for amateur videographers. Using tripods, stabilizers, or other support systems is essential for smooth shots.

Why it's important: Stable footage is easier to watch and helps prevent viewer fatigue.

Good audio:

Often overlooked, audio is just as important as video. Clear, crisp audio is essential for conveying your message effectively.

Why it's important: Poor audio can make even the best visuals unwatchable.

Understanding Your Gear:

Knowing the capabilities and limitations of your camera and other equipment is crucial for capturing the best possible footage.

Why it is important: it allows for the videographer to have control over the final product.

Video Editing Guidelines

1. Stay True to the Story

- Follow your script and storyboard closely.
- Keep the message clear: highlight the environmental problem and how nature offers a solution.

2. Keep It Short and Engaging

- Aim for 2–5 minutes unless otherwise planned.
- Hook the viewer in the first 10 seconds.
- Cut out anything that doesn't support the main idea.

3. Use High-Quality Visuals

- Choose clear, high-resolution footage.
- Mix wide landscape shots with close-ups to show both scale and detail.
- Add relevant visuals: plants, animals, people working with nature, etc.

4. Add Captions and Text

- Use on-screen text to emphasize key facts or quotes.
- Include subtitles for accessibility and clarity, especially for interviews or voiceovers.

5. Include Natural Sound and Music

- Layer natural ambient sounds (birds, water, wind) to immerse the viewer.
- Add background music that matches the mood (calm, hopeful, urgent).
- Make sure music doesn't overpower narration or dialogue.

6. Use Smooth Transitions

- Stick to clean, professional transitions (fades, cuts).
- Avoid flashy or distracting effects.

7. Show Before-and-After (if possible)

- Use comparison shots to clearly show the impact of the nature-based solution.

8. Add a Call-to-Action

- End with a clear message: what should the viewer do next? (e.g., visit a website, support a project, spread awareness).

9. Check Sound and Visual Balance

- Ensure audio levels are consistent—no sudden loud or quiet parts.
- Adjust colour and lighting if needed for a natural, vibrant look.

10. Export in the Right Format

- Choose a common format like MP4 with HD resolution (1080p or higher).
- Optimize for the platform: landscape for YouTube, square/vertical for social media.

THE EUROPEAN UNION REGENERATIVE URBAN LIGHTHOUSE

UPSURGE provides a new development model for cities centered on Nature-Based Solutions for renaturing urban space, to address the challenge of cities' carbon footprint and air pollution

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