**Understanding Documentaries—Study Guide**

**Media Studies**

Your name: Period:

## 1. Go to <http://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/learning/diydoco/>

Once the page loads, watch the very brief introduction. Do not worry about trying to answer the questions as the video is playing. It will recap at the end.

What are the five categories documentaries can be?

A.

B.

C.

D.

E.

What are four things documentaries have in common?

A.

B.

C.

D.

## II. Click on the “Style and Genre” Tab (It’s Orange) then click on “Play Intro Clip”

How do filmmakers bring their own style to their documentaries?

What is a documentary genre?

What are some documentary conventions?

## III. Click on “Observational” Near the Top Left of the Style and Genre Tab

What is an invisible filmmaker?

Click on the “Rats in the Ranks” tab at the top of the screen. View the first 30 seconds of the clip. How does the filmmaker begin his documentary? What shots does s/he use?

## IV. Click on “Style and Genre” then click on “Propaganda and Advocacy”

What is purposes of persuasive or advocacy documentaries?

## V. Click on “Style and Genre” then click on “Personal Journey”

What is a personal journey documentary?

Watch “Our Brother James” and “Dust on My Shoes.” After viewing both, explain how the filmmakers show different emotions in their films. To do this, answer what emotions you readily pick up on and what musical, visual, or verbal clues you can use to determine the feeling associated with the documentary.

## VI. Click on “Style and Genre” then click on “Using Archive”

Why would a filmmaker choose to use archived items in his/her documentary?

## VII. Click on “Style and Genre” then click on “Using Drama”

How do filmmakers show historical events if there is no video footage of the event?

## VIII. Click on the “Why Drama” tab and watch the interviews.

Why did filmmakers get “into” filmmaking reconstructions?

How do filmmakers go about creating the reconstruction?

## IX. Click on “Style and Genre” then click on “Social Issue”

What is a social issue documentary?

List some possible social issue documentaries?

What do filmmakers hope will happen from their social issue documentary?

## X. Click on “Style and Genre” then click on “Using Comedy”

How can documentaries create humor?

Click on “Rare Chicken Rescue” at the top. How does the filmmaker use humor in this clip?

## XI. Click on “Style and Genre” then click on “Doco Essay”

Describe this genre of documentary.

Watch the “Constructing an Argument Interview” and briefly describe what the filmmaker says about doco essays.

## XII. Click on “Elements of Documentary Storytelling” and play the intro clip.

What are the important cinematic elements to consider when filming a documentary?

## XIII. Click on “Camera” and watch the intro video. After viewing, click on “Timeline” at the top.

What are the benefits of small, light-weight cameras?

## XIV. Click on “Mise en Scene” at the top. Watch the three interviews.

For each interview identify and describe the following information.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Interview 1** | **Interview 2** | **Interview 3** |
| **Mood** |  |  |  |
| **Lighting** |  |  |  |
| **Location** |  |  |  |
| **Props** |  |  |  |

Click on the “Summary” tab near the top and include some notes for each of the three Mise en Scene considerations.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Setting** | **Costume** | **Figure, Expression, Movement** |
| **Notes** |  |  |  |

## XV. Click on “Lighting” and watch the intro video.

What are the pros and cons of using natural light?

Click on “Activity” in this section. You will see three different locations (Exterior Day, Interior Day, and Interior Night). Under each picture you have four options for lighting techniques. In the chart below, decide which of the lighting options presented would work best for the type of documentary listed.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Exterior Day | Interior Day | Interior Night |
| Dealing with a terminal illness |  |  |  |
| Winning a national competition |  |  |  |
| Exposing a corrupt police force |  |  |  |

Click on “Summary” and briefly describe what the following equipment is used for:

Reflector:

Scrim:

Umbrella:

Black cloth:

## XVI. Choose “Framing” and watch the brief introduction.

What is framing?

Choose the “Activity” option for this section. You are presented with 10 different frames to consider. Under each of the frames listed below, write a word or words that you think conveys the feeling or attitude of this frame. You may use one of the words provided as an example, or choose your own.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Low Angle** | **Medium Angle** | **High Angle** | **Wide Shot** | **Mid Shot** | **Tight Shot** | **Close Up (Face Only)** | **Extra Close Up** | **Looking at Camera** | **Looking off Camera** |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

Choose “Summary” and jot down some notes from each of the four framing considerations.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Going Straight** | **The Tilt** |
| **Head Room** | **Edges are Important** |

## XVII. Choose “From Story to Screen” and watch the intro clip. Then click on “Development” and watch the intro clip.

What does the website suggest is the best idea for a documentary?

What does the clip say about research?

Choose “Finding the Idea” at the top and watch the interview. What are some ways to find ideas for documentaries?

Choose the “Activity” tab in this section. You will see three scrap book pages for archival, contemporary, and social issue topics. Choose **one** of the scrapbook pages from any of these types of documentaries and in no more than five sentences pitch an idea for a documentary based on the scrapbook page.

Choose the “Summary” Tab and briefly describe how these four questions should shape your documentary idea.

A. Is the idea achievable?

B. Is access possible?

C. Are the characters interesting?

D. Is it high or low budget?

## XVIII. Choose “Pitching the Idea” and watch the intro clip. Then choose the “Activity” tab in this section. Watch the three film excerpts and choose one to write a pitch for. Your pitch must have a one sentence pitch and a one paragraph pitch.

One Sentence:

One Paragraph:

## XIX. Choose the “Research” tab at the top and watch the interviews.

## XX. Choose “Documentary Treatments” at the top and watch the intro interview.

What is a documentary treatment?

## XXI. Choose “Ethics” at the top and watch the intro interview.

Briefly describe what documentary filmmakers should and should not do

## XXII. Choose “From Story to Screen” then select “Post Production” then select “Mixing the Elements.”

How does color influence the tone of the final documentary?

Choose the “Activity” tab in this section and experiment with adding transitions, music, sound, and changing the color grading on the sample clip.