

## HOW TO TELL A STORY WITH VIDEO – Detailed shoot list by Dan Bertalan

**Note:** Although you might note several mentions of “use a tripod”, other than static or pan establishing shots, it’s fine to handhold the camera. In fact, many of the more progressive production techniques today call for “gritty” moving interactive camera work that jumps around a lot. Just be sure to use your judgment on match the type of camera work with the mood of what’s happening in that part of the storyline. Watch the movie “300” for classy camera moves that match the action – or lack of it.

**Either in a written novel or telling a story with a video camera,** here are the main components;

1. **Setting** – the place, both the big and the smaller picture
2. **Characters** – hunter, quarry, guide, partners, side players, other wildlife
3. **Time line** – begins with the intro into setting or character and ends with “the end”.
4. **Protagonist** – the hunter or main character, the person the viewer roots for.
5. **Antagonist** – the evil forces that will try to destroy or stop the protagonist.
6. **Tension or conflict** – this is the steam that drives the engine of any story and increases in a sea-saw along the timeline.
7. **Theme** – good against evil, weak against strong, transformation of character through story, revelation of some kind, discovery of something historical, scientific, mystical...

### **HERE’S HOW TO TELL THE MAIN PARTS OF THE STORY WITH YOUR CAMERA**

#### **1. Shoot list for the Setting**

- Aerial view of place as you fly in. Along the way and of camp or lodge. ELS, wide shots. Also static shots inside plane, pilot, controls, passengers, wing, prop.
- Planned pans of countryside; ELS, wide showing typical settings, take several, 10 seconds each. Each shot should begin and or end with object of significance such as camp, landmark or hunter.
- ZIs or ZOs from general setting to location or event that characters will be in. 10 seconds each, Examples; ZO from mnt top to hunter returning to camp. ZI from countryside to hunter entering woods.
- Static shots, wide angle, ELS of setting with foreground and background elements. Different locations and different times of day. Shot stats with scenery and/or people in action.
- All of above with countryside, camp or lodge, town or historic elements.
- People/faces are some of the more interesting elements of setting. Capture all that relate – in action with MS’s and CU’s. Example; guide saddling up packhorse. MS, CU, ECU.
- The setting will also be made up of smaller elements. Shoot CU’s and ECU’s of; plants, berries, mushrooms, animals, insects, rocks, water, spider webs, ferns, frost, fences, tree trunks, anything that’s small and moves like grass heads in the wind.(try rack focus, or small F-stop).
- Remember, capture setting shots that relate to the storyline and help tell your story.

## 2. Shoot list for the Characters - players should never look at the camera. 3<sup>rd</sup> person.

- If your characters are arriving by boat, plane, horseback or foot, set the stage by a LS of the water, air strip, horse trail, or path. Fancy example; rack focus of oak leaves that changes focus to hunters walking in distance.
- Shoot LS & MS of the boat, plane, horse, or appropriate stage setters as your characters arrive.
- Intro characters to setting with action introduction. LS, MS, ZI, Tilt up. ¼ past frame. Example, tilt up from trail to hunter walking past. ZI from wide woods to hunter climbing into treestand.
- Reveal characters through action – tighter shots; fixing gear, calling game, setting up, heading out, dressing, ITF/OOF. Each shot in progressive action should be tighter, and tighter.
- CU of faces to reflect thoughts, glassing, looking, sneaking, pausing, drinking, adjusting hat.
- Record “internalization” voice – *“I never imagined I’d be here doing this for these reasons”* Setup with good ambience background and record several short reflective takes. Use earphones!
- Reveal players through interaction – Hunter/guide ITF and discuss, *“Here’s our plan today.”* Videotape three times; once with all players MS, once with prime player CU talking, once with player 2 Cu talking, nodding, looking.

## CONNECTING PROTAGONIST, ANTAGONIST, TENSION & THEME – THE STORY

The difference between a cameraman and a field producer is in knowing how to recognize then capture the storyline. Here’s how.

1. **Clearly identify the protagonist**, our hero or focal point of the story. The main character who will help carry the action from start to finish. What are the hero’s goals and motivations? Examples; *“I want to help my son take his first deer because I love him and want to pass on the hunting heritage my father gave to me.”* Or, *“My beard’s grayer than my partner, but I’ve got to keep going over the next mountain because I owe to my friend, and need to show myself that I can still hunt mountain caribou.”*

**Here’s how to reveal your main character/s;**

- Through verbal interaction with other players, *“Look, son, here’s what your grandpa taught me 30 years ago...”* Shoot dad, son, each single, and cutaways.
  - Through internalization, inner voice. Shoot close-up of dad’s face watching son. Record voice of dad saying, *“I wish his grandpa was still alive to share this moment...”*
  - Through action and interaction without saying a word. Example; Dad places hand on son’s shoulder as deer approaches and nods with a smile. Or, Son sees deer coming and looks wildly at dad. Dad winks and puts finger to lips.
2. **Clearly identify the Antagonist/s** – what evil forces will try to destroy or stop the protagonist. You don’t need a dark villain or blood-thirsty aliens here, just reveal the forces at play that could prevent our characters from reaching their goal. Examples; Time, bad weather, wind, gear, other predators, fear, doubt, cold, heat, injury, the quarry, anything in a search for and hunting scenario that can prevent success.

### Here's how to reveal your Antagonist/s

- Through verbal interaction of players, *"Son, there's a big storm coming and this will be our last chance."* Or, *"dad, the wind's blowing a lot, I'm not sure I can stand up to take the shot."*
- Through internalization, inner voice. Shoot close-up of dad's face watching son. Record voice of dad saying, *"It's so cold, I wonder if he can draw his bow with all those clothes on?"*
- Through action and interaction without saying a word. Examples: Wide shot of darkening clouds – Cu worried look on dad's face looking up. Son's hands shaking from cold. Dad looking at wristwatch. Sound of wind increasing. CU of branch waving in wind.
- Use the power of CU's and ECU's to reveal antagonists – A simple example is a deer's remarkable hearing. CU of deer's head. Cu hunter anxious. ECU deer ear turning. CU hunter standing. CU feet on stand. ECU of stand joint. Squeaking noise. CU of hunter's face wincing. CU deer looking up alert.

## TENSION - THE SPICE OF LIFE AND ESSENCE OF STORY

Tension is simply the forces of the protagonist and his goals working against the forces of the antagonist. Now that you know those, capture them on video. Tension usually rises along the timeline. Example; chase in dark park. Tension is mostly produced during editing in conjunction with building storyline. But the editor needs the shots to build from. So here's your shoot list;

**NOTE** – *All shots are tripod or treepod static's unless noted different. (It's okay to handhold and move these if the mood works)*

### 1. The hunter (expand segments to fit your storyline)

- Hunter going out. Leaving camp or transportation. LS, MS.
- Hunter getting to hunting spot. MS, CU, walking, climbing, crossing creeks, over logs, rocks, MS quartering on and away shots, CU feet through leaves, water, shot of focal object (flower) with hunter passing in distance.
- Hunter reaching spot/stand. MS all action getting into position or in stand. CU feet or hands in action. CU's gear into stand.
- Hunter getting ready. MS's and CU's getting gear ready and settling in for upcoming action. Use your imagination and let the hunter do what they would normally. If you need them to redo a shot, direct them for the best angle and lighting.
- Hunter waiting for action to begin. Lots of CU's and ECU's of face looking, glassing, head moving, reacting to sounds or objects in woods, rechecking gear.

### 2. The Action/game

- Shoot all the footage you can of the game approaching. Always connect your hunter as much as possible with pans, zi's zo's, tilts.
- If you have the luxury, ZIs and get as many CU's of the game in action as possible.
- Videotape any other game that offers quality footage.
- As the shot approaches, try to re-connect the hunter and game. Before the shot, do a slow ZI to the game ½ the frame height.

- After the shot, track on the game until it leaves then zo and pan back to hunter looking. (5 secs)
- If animal is spined or goes down, immediately pan back to hunter. (1 sec).

3. **re-create the action pre-shot and shot sequence – NO waiting until later, take 15 minutes and do this now!**(or you'll regret it later)

**This is a basic list for you to build on from what actually happened or could have happened.**

- CU's and ECU's hunter's face eyes as they spot game
- All actions MS, CU's of hunter getting up or into position
- All actions MS, CU's ECU's of hunter getting gear ready, bow off, arrow on, fingers on
- All actions MS's and CU's of waiting and moving into and during shot sequence. Gear and hunter; biting lip, taking breath, bunching jaw, narrowing eyes, arrow tracking, sight rack focus, hand on bow, feet, hands, bow, ECU's eyes.
- Reaction, facial after shot, including watching game depart.

4. **Gather gear and take up trail**

- MS of hunter and guide recapping what happened and what to do now
- Re-shoot same with CU's of faces during pow-wow recap
- LS, MS of trailing, ¼ on and ¼ away.
- CU of feet, bodies passing
- Capture action – kneeling to inspect, looking ahead, sneaking forward, eyes arrow ready.

5. **Discovery or game – shoot from several perspectives and angles – match action**

- Moving camera over shoulder of hunter
- Stat tripod of hunter ITF ¼ on and ¼ away to game.
- AA zi to game with hunter
- Wide angle on ground off nose of game with hunter approaching from rear.
- LS, MS, ¼ on, ¼ away of hunter to game

6. **Recap of hunt with game – single hunter reflective only, 2 payers dialog recap**

- Shoot MS with game & players, recap relative to theme or tension, 30,60,90 sec versions.
- Shoot CU same again on hunter, again on guide or partner.
- CU's and ECU's of game parts, antlers, eyes, ears, hooves, hide with match action of hands
- Plan ending to story shot. Example; CU handshake-Cu faces smiling-CU game-ECU eyes of hunter getting misty. Or, CU of hunter looking down then into distance and nodding.
- If lone hunter, get reflective looks and voice.