

**Better Angels Society -- Student Film Festival
October 28, 2020**

Unanswered Questions from Audience Members

General Questions:

Question 1: *What inspired you to create the Ken Burns effect?*

Allison	Rishit	Caroline	Summer	Sophia	Giuliana
<p>Before making a documentary, I had no idea what the Ken Burns effect was. It simply seemed natural while I was making the documentary to zoom in on the pictures, etc. The ability to create the effect was on the software I used (WeVideo). I think that using the Ken Burns effect is crucial to making a great documentary that informs and entertains the viewer.</p>	<p>Not quite sure what you mean by “create” the effect, but the Ken Burns effect is one that is able to be applied on editing software such as Imovie. In a sense it allows the editor to zoom in on certain parts of a photo that they want to emphasize.</p>	<p>I used the Ken Burns effect to make my documentary more interesting. If your images are still, and don’t move at all, your documentary will not be very interesting to watch.</p>	<p>I made my first documentary in 6th grade. I had absolutely no training or experience. I thought that using transitions (slide-in, flip, dissolve) were the pinnacle of filmmaking. After the regional competition, one of the judges told me—in the kindest, gentlest way—that I could benefit from using the Ken Burns effect because the average person loses interest after 4 seconds or so looking at a picture. I had no idea what the Ken Burns effect was—or who Ken Burns was. I was focused on not forgetting what the judge said just long enough to get home and Google it. The following year, I turned in a much-improved film ;-)</p>	<p>I did not create the Ken Burns effect, but I used the effect a lot during my documentary. It gives the film depth and allows the viewer to be captured by the image shown. This effect is on iMovie, which I used to edit my entire documentary.</p>	

Question 2: *For documentaries with voiceovers, how many tries does it take to nail a bit? How long of a section do you record at once? Do you go all the way through or chop it up into easier small parts?*

Allison	Rishit	Caroline	Summer	Sophia	Giuliana
<p>I broke my recording into dozens of small pieces, some only sentences long, yet it still took me hours upon hours to record the voiceover. I took literally hundreds of recordings. The key is not giving up. The longer you try at it, the better it will turn out.</p>	<p>I always break my script into paragraphs and record them separately in order to piece them together, I went through 30-40 voiceover takes while making and revising my documentary.</p>	<p>I usually tried to do my recordings in one or two takes, and it always takes me at least ten tries per recording to get things the way I want them. One thing I do is if I make a mistake, I will pause, and read the paragraph again, and cut out the paragraph with the mistake later.</p>	<p>I have never been able to do it in one take; like everyone else, I have to do it in multiple takes. I live in the densest part of our state, close to the major trauma center, and our house has no closable windows. Our front door is a storm gate, so every car that drives up the street, every dog that barks, every ambulance or helicopter that zooms by forces me to redo the scenes until I am blue in the face. One of my documentaries has my cat's meow in the background of the final cut, because I just could not re-do it anymore. This year, I literally built a tepee with my mattress, clothes rack, and blankets to muffle out as much of the neighborhood as possible.</p>	<p>Sometimes it takes a long time to get a part of my script down. I tend to laugh and trip up on my words. I usually take on pretty small parts of my script, but sometimes I'm able to get a lot done at one time. In my opinion, it's a lot better to chop it up because you're able to line up pictures for your film with the clip of audio.</p>	<p>I definitely had to record my voiceover many times. I would try to do as big of a section at once as I could. However, I found that I would have to record stuff all the time because while putting together videos and pictures I noticed that I wanted to add something to the voiceover. I would say try and do it in small parts but I think it differs from person to person.</p>

Question 3: *What was your favorite part of creating your documentaries?*

Allison	Rishit	Caroline	Summer	Sophia	Giuliana
Sharing the story of an unsung hero with the world. I think that Martin Couney's story is a testament to the beauty and inherent worth of every life, and being able to share that story with hundreds of people has been a joyful and humbling experience.	Being able to meet people who share the same joy of history and filmmaking that we have, and being able to talk to experts who are just as interested about our topic as we are.	I really enjoyed the writing portion. I liked being able to revise, make edits, and see my script become better. I also enjoyed experimenting with different ways to tell the story.	I didn't realize that my topic resonated with so many adults who lived through the 60s. I was really moved by women walking up to me telling me that the film brought back memories of marching with Betty Friedan or dreaming about becoming an astronaut.	My favorite part of creating documentaries is the research. I love learning about a topic that I'm very interested in. I found out a lot about my country's past and current issues through researching my topic. I also learn important skills that are very helpful in school which is convenient.	I loved being able to talk to people about what I was studying. I met a lot of great people in the process. I also learned a lot about filmmaking and what works and what doesn't. So not only really cool history but also really cool stuff about film.

Question 4: *Should you keep researching after you start on the documentary itself?*

Allison	Rishit	Caroline	Summer	Sophia	Giuliana
Yes. The researching process doesn't end until you turn in the "final product" (which will probably still feel incomplete). The research is the foundation of the documentary; the more you build your research, the more powerful your film will be.	In a word, Yes. Your photos and videos that you find always lead to other pieces of valuable information. As I said before no part of the documentary is ever truly finished.	Yes! There was plenty of research done while creating, and after I created each version. Sometimes there were things I wanted to add, or I was just curious, and wanted to learn more about certain parts of my project.	Personally, I cannot stop; I get so engrossed, so consumed by research that I am only done when the competition ends. I really wish that I had it in me to stop because I see this habit as a trap. It's not a good idea to pull apart a solid documentary last minute for a minute detail--and risk leaving in a typo or cramming too much into the 10 minutes.	Yes!!! I added so much to my documentary after I started putting it together. I found so much information that made my documentary so much better after initially starting the film.	For me, I did a lot of research after starting on the documentary itself. I think once you start putting your script into visual form, you'll find things that you want to include more of, which entails more research. So definitely don't feel the need to stop researching.

Question 5: *You started off with a hook. How did you come up with an idea to grab the viewer's attention?*

Allison	Rishit	Caroline	Summer	Sophia	Giuliana
I wanted the viewer to be drawn to the story both emotionally and to be curious about the topic. I decided there was no better way to do so than to tell a real story.	Similar to how you write a good essay, a good hook is essential to having a great documentary.	I started off with a brief summary of some of the main points of my documentary to catch the attention of the viewer.	I spent years in theatre, so I tend to ease viewers into my topic. Admittedly, I have been criticized more than once for using up too much time setting up my topic.	I started off with one of FDR's radio addresses from after the REA was put into place because I felt that it set the stage for the entire documentary.	I found an interview with Leon Sullivan and it really captivated me. He also talks about why he decided to become involved in Civil Rights issues, which I think set up my documentary well.

Question 6: *How do you start your research without feeling overwhelmed?*

Allison	Rishit	Caroline	Summer	Sophia	Giuliana
Try to find books or films that are general overviews of the topic. They usually include more details and also provide rather comprehensive lists of good sources in their bibliographies.	Start with background reading, (don't be afraid to use Wikipedia for this step) after finding key subjects and events gradually grow the scope of your research larger and larger.	I always look at different books or websites to just learn as much as I can about the topic. Later, I started my notes, but at first, I just looked at different sources, and what sources they used to start me off.	I agree with Rishit and Sophia that it's best to start with a cursory overview and work our way into the details from there, not the other way around. For me, it's "stopping" that's overwhelming, not "starting." Each book refers me to 5 others, until I have an overwhelming stack of books to digest.	In the beginning of my research process, I just look at the big idea of what I'm researching. I always choose a topic I'm passionate about and want to learn everything about, so it is very easy to want to learn more.	I did feel overwhelmed at times but just trying to do general research at first (no notes or anything) was helpful. Then later I could really dig into the specifics.

Question 7: *If you had the chance, would you make your documentary longer?*

Allison	Rishit	Caroline	Summer	Sophia	Giuliana
<p>Yes. Many interesting details have to be left out of the documentary for the sake of time and brevity.</p>	<p>Yes. There's so much interesting information that you have to cut out in order to stay within the time frame.</p>	<p>Yes! There was so much interesting information that I really wanted to include, but due to the time-limit, I was unable to put it in.</p>	<p>YES!!!!!!!!!! I would absolutely love to start a change.org petition to request 15 minutes, pretty please.</p> <p>One year, I compared my script's word count to the paper category, and realized that we have LESS words to work with.</p> <p>Judges will often say "well, that was nice, but I wish that you would have also talked about [fill in the blank]."</p> <p>The shortest program on TV is 20-22 minutes. 10 minutes are just not enough for a novel thesis and a quality documentary.</p>	<p>Yes, it is very difficult to communicate the idea to the audience in such a short amount of time. It was also very hard to cut my documentary down because there was so much interesting information I wanted to show but didn't have enough time to.</p>	<p>Yes. The time limit was actually quite an issue for me and I definitely cut stuff out that I would have kept if I had more time.</p>

Question 8: *If you could meet the subjects of your documentaries, what would you say to them and why?*

Allison	Rishit	Caroline	Summer	Sophia	Giuliana
<p>I would ask Martin Couney for more details about his work with the babies; what did his schedule look like? What kind of people did he see coming to observe the sideshow? Who was the smallest child he saved?</p>	<p>I would probably ask Dr. Wiley what was the moment in his career in which he knew he had to fight for food safety. He was offered a number of jobs all over the nation, and in many ways he missed out on opportunities that could have been more lucrative for a job that would give him the power to help people.</p>	<p>I would ask Dr. Fleming what kinds of tests he ran when trying to purify penicillin. I know he tried for six months before sending penicillin to chemists, but I am curious about what he did, since his field of study was bacteriology, not chemistry.</p>	<p>I would thank Valentina Tereshkova for not just her bravery going into the great unknown, but for being (and remaining) a role model throughout her whole life. She never for a moment forgot that millions of people looked up to her. She got the highest degree in academia, raised a child in an exceptional manner, taught every cosmonaut following in her footsteps, and instead of retirement, she entered civic service by becoming a legislator. In a world of constant celebrity mea culpa pleas, she stayed humble and impeccable.</p>	<p>If I could meet FDR I would probably tell him that he is still being celebrated as one of the best presidents in history and that everything he did for the everyday people of America is still being appreciated today.</p>	<p>I would ask Leon Sullivan that if he could go back and do things differently, what would he have done and why? He is a very accomplished man who has fought for a lot of different things throughout his life, and I would just be curious as to what he might have done differently.</p>

Question 9: *What are some of the key steps in making an NHD documentary?*

Allison	Rishit	Caroline	Summer	Sophia	Giuliana
<p>Firstly, find a good topic that interests you, something that you wish to educate others about. Research until you feel prepared to write an overview of the topic. Then create the documentary script with the theme and your desired message in mind. Finally, add pictures and “touch up” your documentary until it is effectively concise, informative, and appealing to the viewer.</p>	<p>Planning is key, make sure you know what you’re working on and what your end goal is. And revision is very important to your documentary.</p>	<p>Finding a good topic is very important. If you do not enjoy your topic, then you will not enjoy making the project. Making a schedule to follow is also important, because it will save you a lot of time later on.</p>	<p>The only thing I can add to Allison’s step-by-step guide is to show your documentary to someone who is completely unfamiliar with the topic. It has to make sense to them. Ideally, this person should be outside our friends & family circle for brutal honesty.</p>	<p>I think the most important part of making any History Day project is finding a good topic. You have to want to learn every single little detail about your topic (because you probably will by the end of your project).</p>	<p>I think being timely is very important. I definitely struggled to meet my own deadlines but that’s just planning. Also getting feedback. I showed my entire history class my documentary and it was so helpful.</p>

For Caroline:

- *A: Why did The Nazis need the penicillium?*
- *B: If 9/10 survived when treated with penicillin, what happened to the 1/10 besides dying?*

Caroline
<p>A: The Nazis wanted penicillin so that their wounded troops could return to fight later.</p> <p>B: The mouse treated with penicillin that died did live longer than those in the control group, but died after a few days. Unfortunately, Florey and Chain’s notes do not mention exactly what happened to the mouse.</p>

For Rishit:

- *A: Did anyone in the poison squad die?*
- *B: Did they inspect all types of meat for the meat inspection act?*
- *C: How long did it take you to research this information?*
- *D: What software did you use?*

Rishit

A: No one passed away during the trials, as the number of participants was fairly small for a clinical trial. That's the reason why Wiley got hundreds of applicants, because his diners had trust in him that what they were eating wasn't lethal, and the fact that the food would be similar to meals fed to royalty. (There's a whole story of how Wiley tracked down chefs in order to entice people into joining the trials that I sadly had to cut from my documentary.)

B: Not exactly, the meat inspection act applied to specific meat processing plants instead of meat in general. Over time it was expanded to include all of the United States but the original act only involved meatpacking plants in Chicago that mainly processed tinned beef and pork.

C: I started my project roughly at the time of the national competition last year, all in all the project took about a year to develop. The initial research phase took up to 5 to 6 months, though I still kept researching while developing my documentary.

D: I used the adobe suite, of premiere pro, adobe illustrator, photoshop, and aftereffects. Our county provides us these programs for free because otherwise a subscription can be very pricey.

For Allison:

- *A: How many babies died until they started to realize they needed these machines to save many lives?*
- *B: Did they find out the babies were premature when they were born, or was there a way to find out before?*
- *C: Where did you find the sound recordings and music?*

Allison

A: I was unable to find any numbers on how many babies died; however, before the incubator, the survival rates for premature babies were extremely low -- so low that hospitals didn't even attempt to save them. Most premature babies born before the incubator was used likely died.

B: In the early 1900s, there was no technology to suggest that a baby would be premature. The only way to know that a baby was going to be born prematurely was when the mother went into early labor.

C: The video recordings and music came from YouTube. The sound recordings of my own narration were of course recorded and uploaded by me. The audio of Dawn Raffel speaking came from a personal phone interview which she allowed me to record, and the audio of Beth Allen speaking came from an interview which had been posted on a website.

For Giuliana:

- *A: How long did it take you to finish the documentary?*
- *B: What drew you to this topic?*

Giuliana

A: It took me a long time. I wrote an essay on the Selective Patronage Campaign (one of Leon Sullivan's projects) in the fall, and then I started working on the documentary from December to about the end of nationals in the summer.

B: I really wanted to study local history. I felt like studying a topic close to home would make the topic more interesting and I would be more passionate about it. After reading a bit about Leon Sullivan I was so interested in his life and knew I wanted to learn more about him!

For Sophia:

- *A: How did you sync the voices with the clips?*
- *B: What was your favorite part?*

Sophia

A: I used iMovie and I dragged the audio clips under the photos in iMovie.

B: My favorite part is learning about my history and showing people problems in our country that we need to face.

For Summer:

- *A: What did you use to animate the sections like the Space Race or did you find it from somewhere else?*
- *B: If you could meet Valentina Tereshkova, what would you say to her (provided she understands English or you understand Russian)?*
- *C: How did you make the visuals?*

Summer

A: I animate my documentaries using transitions. Every frame is my own work. After six years, I know these transitions quite well. I would be completely remiss if I didn't mention that not all judges like this type of documentary filmmaking. Some feel that it takes away from the historical content. There are different perspectives, it's a matter of personal taste, and I have been on the receiving end of criticism for the use of graphics more than once.

B: Please also see Question 8's answer. Unfortunately, Valentina Tereshkova does not speak English. I tried, very hard, to get in touch with her, but I couldn't get past the Russian Duma's very strict email monitoring apparatus. She is a very private person with not a trace of online presence. She is also very patriotic; she is a huge supporter of Vladimir Putin, so it's not likely that she would entertain opening a line of communication with an American person. I haven't given up hope on contacting her, but my prospects are not looking good.

C: I learned to get as much out of transitions as possible. I have also made good use of a wall that I painted green years ago, for green screen effects. But, as I mentioned in an earlier answer, using graphics and animation is a hit-or-miss, unorthodox approach, as traditionalist documentary film judges will not always appreciate graphics for various reasons (it takes away from the historical content; it is perceived as disrespectful; it may appear as a cheap ploy.)

For NHD:

1. We received several questions during this program about conducting interviews, such as:

- *How did you decide whom to interview?*
- *How did you contact the interview subjects?*
- *How did you decide what to ask the subjects?*
- *How do you find out if recorded interviews exist for a subject of interest?*

Answer: We have a web page devoted to this subject. We encourage you to start here to learn more about our guidelines for conducting interviews.

<https://www.nhd.org/guidelines-conducting-interviews>

2. *Is Wikipedia a good source?*

Answer: Here's a great short video about using Wikipedia to find other sources:

<https://youtu.be/hpAvYcISyy4>

3. *Where can people find these documentaries?*

Answer: <https://www.nhd.org/2020nextgenerationangels>