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12-2021

### Video 101: Video Production Basics, Visually Explained

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Flanery, Chris, "Video 101: Video Production Basics, Visually Explained" (2021). *Professional Projects from the College of Journalism and Mass Communications*. 27.

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## Video 101: Video Production Basics, Visually Explained

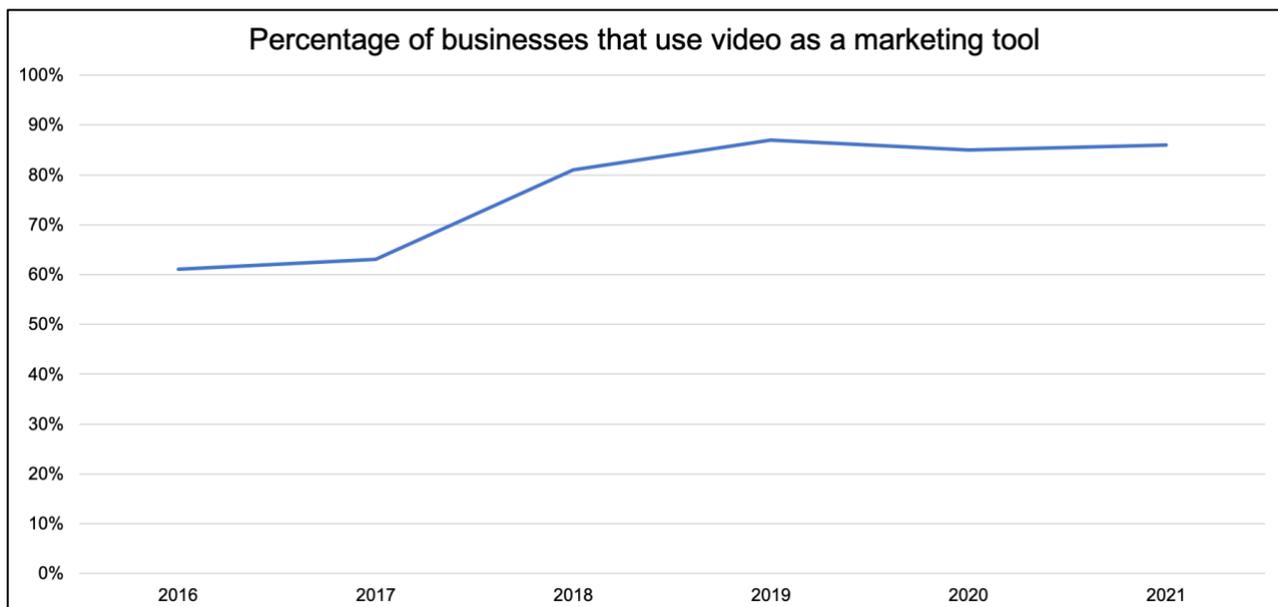
Chris Flanery

### Introduction

The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects a 29% increase – much faster than average demand – for videographers and video editors between 2020 and 2030 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). This growth is unsurprising, considering “85% of all internet users in the United States watched online video content monthly on any of their devices” in 2018, and by 2022 video streaming and downloads will account for 82% of global internet traffic – an increase of 88% from 2017 (Mohsin, 2020). As video becomes more prevalent in all aspects of life, the demand for competent video production skills continues to grow. A decade ago, it was rare to see a company or organization commit to having a strong video presence online. Now, it’s rarer if organizations *don’t* utilize video in some way. Video has quickly become one of the most efficient ways to reach and connect with audiences. It has proven a powerful tool for marketing, brand-building, news and information, education, and entertainment. As more organizations seek to expand their video presence across various platforms and channels, having the technical literacy to capture professional-level video is a highly sought-after skill.

Most notable is the rapid rate at which video has become a focal point for organizations. 86% of businesses now use video as a marketing tool, up from 61% just five years ago, and 87% of video marketers report a positive return on investment when video is used in marketing strategies (see *Figure 1*; Hayes, 2021). Video is not only limited to marketing, as newsrooms, educational institutions, and even customer support are tapping into the power of this visual medium. It is not hard to see why, as “viewers retain

95% of a message when they watch it on video, compared to 10% when reading it in a text” (Stafford, 2017). This also makes video an effective teaching tool since it plays upon the strengths of visual learning. 90% of information transmitted to the brain is visual. The brain processes visuals 60,000 times faster than text. It takes less than 1/10 of a second to get the sense of a visual scene (Shift, 2014). One study found “after three days, a user retained only 10-20% of written or spoken information but almost 65% of visual information” (Shift, 2014). Perhaps most importantly, “visuals have been found to improve learning by up to 400%” (Shift, 2014).



*Figure 1: The percentage of businesses that use video as a marketing tool since 2016, which has seen substantial growth in that time span (Hayes, 2021)*

Given all this, it is more important than ever to ensure high-quality video is delivered to consumers. This all begins with the education and training of those creating video, but this project found that the process for learning video production often misses the mark and fails to maximize on its full potential. Despite being a visual medium, most individuals surveyed and interviewed for this project who are working in the video

production industry report actual visuals are rarely used to demonstrate fundamental concepts and core competencies in regards to learning video production. This was true across most facets where education and experience are sought, from classroom settings to on-the-job training to online tutorials – visuals are lacking as a learning device in an industry that primarily works in visuals. Instead, traditional teaching methods are often employed when teaching these highly visual concepts. Lectures, textbooks, and trial-and-error are favored over visual demonstration. Furthermore, these same individuals and additional research indicate visual aids would help illustrate many of the essential concepts necessary for capturing professional-level video. This raises the question of whether the current approach to learning video production is an effective strategy. Would the utilization of visuals better aid in instructing novice learners, and what would that require and look like?

The purpose of this study is to explore if visual demonstrations would better aid in the teaching and learning of professional video production skills by surveying and interviewing industry professionals and producing a series of video tutorials to teach those fundamental skills. Data was collected through a survey and focus group of video production professionals to gain a better understanding of the ways video production is generally learned. Three trial-run video tutorials were made based on this industry feedback as well as additional research findings. These tutorials incorporate all this input to produce a different approach to learning video production basics that emphasizes the utilization of visual demonstrations to quickly and concisely provide a general overview of a video production fundamental skill or concept. These three videos can be accessed at the end of this paper.

## The Industry Weighs In: How Video Production is Learned

How do individuals working in the video production industry feel about the education and training they received? To better understand how video production basics are learned, quantitative and qualitative methods were used. A survey was completed by nineteen video production professionals with college degrees working in Ohio, Nebraska, or California asking about their experiences learning video production fundamentals. The survey began by asking, “How would you rate your overall educational experience learning video production?” on a Likert scale from *one* to *ten*, *one* being the worst experience and *ten* being the best experience. The average rating was 6.1. An open-ended question was included for them to explain. One respondent said, “Nearly everything I know related to our craft was picked up outside the educational system. 70/30 is my guess.” This was followed by asking respondents to rank where they learned the most about video production. The top answer was “in the field/on the job,” capturing 83% of first-choice responses. “Classes/educational institutions” and “tutorials/online videos” were ranked third and fourth, respectively, and were not ranked first by any of the respondents (see *Figure 2*).

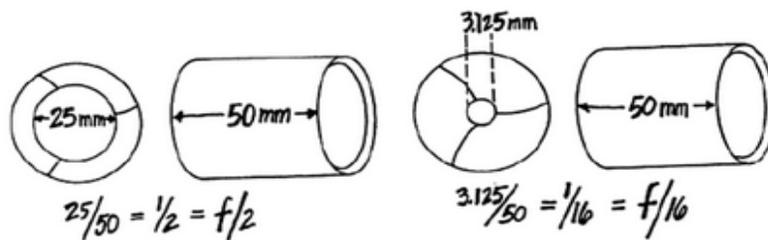
Where did you learn the most about video production?				
	In the field / on the job	Practicing on my own / trial and error	Classes / educational institutions	Tutorials / online videos
Ranked 1 <sup>st</sup> choice	83.3%	16.7%	0%	0%
Ranked 2 <sup>nd</sup> choice	5.6%	50%	27.8%	16.7%
Ranked 3 <sup>rd</sup> choice	11.1%	16.7%	38.9%	33.3%
Ranked 4 <sup>th</sup> choice	0%	16.7%	33.3%	50%

*Figure 2: Ranked-choice responses highlighting where industry professionals learned the majority of their video production skills*

A focus group of five individuals was held with those classified as videographers/editors at Nebraska Public Media in Lincoln, Nebraska. The participants have industry experience ranging from seven to thirty-nine years. They were asked to share their experience learning and practicing video production. The industry professionals discussed the contradictory nature of media-related degrees. The majority of practical production experience is gained outside of the classroom – most likely on-the-job – but to get most video production jobs within an organization, an associate's or bachelor's degree is required. Organizations seem to place emphasis on the value of a degree, yet that degree appears to fall drastically short in providing an individual with all the necessary hard skills – those hands-on technical skills required to professionally capture and edit video – to be successful on day one.

The most common issue from the focus group and survey in regard to formal education was the reliance on lectures and textbooks to teach concepts. One survey respondent said, "There was a lack of depth in learning how to shoot with a camera. It was mostly with a text book, and up to the student to go learn more about how to use the camera." Another respondent echoed this sentiment: "Lack of hands-on camera time (only so many cameras to go around) made things difficult in school. And, for me, learning about video production from a book was not very effective." A focus group member recalled his first school-based experience taking a camera out to capture video. He returned to his professor thinking the camera was broken because all of his footage was blue. The professor asked if he had white balanced the camera; the student was confused and was told there was a chapter about it in the textbook. The textbook, perhaps unsurprisingly, did not provide any visuals, only text.

The textbook most often cited by the focus group and survey respondents was *The Bare Bones Camera Course for Film and Video* by Tom Schroepel, first published in 1982 and currently on its third edition as of 2015. The book's cover includes a bullet point list of some of the topics included within, including exposure, composition, basic sequence, and lighting – all basic technical competencies that any video professional should know. The book, while favoring text to teach these concepts, still incorporates a generous number of visuals. Unfortunately, all the included visuals are black-and-white and hand-drawn (see *Figure 3*). Although this sort of visual aid is appropriate for teaching a concept like composition or ways to control exposure, it cannot deliver an appropriate visual experience when it comes to things like color temperature, white balance, or depth of field – concepts that require much more than a hand-drawn black-and-white image to fully convey their depth and intricacies.



When you look at it this way, it's easy to understand why in a dark room, you'll probably be shooting at  $f/2$  to let in all the light you can. Conversely, outside in bright sunlight, where you've got a lot of light, you'll probably stop down to  $f/11$  or  $f/16$ , to let less light in.

*Figure 3: An example from The Bare Bones Camera Course for Film and Video demonstrating the hand-drawn black-and-white utilization of visuals*

Despite the ample opportunity for both textbooks and lectures to utilize visuals, further survey results suggest this rarely happens. A primary focus of the survey sought

to better understand which video production fundamentals were taught using visuals by asking “Were visual aids used to demonstrate these topics to you?” with answer choices of *yes* or *no*. The topics chosen were agreed upon through focus group discussions and include most of the essential core technical competencies necessary to produce a professional-quality image with a camera. These topics include “shot type and composition”, “color temperature and white balance”, “depth of field”, “coverage and cutability” – that is, how to capture a scene with regards to various shots that will edit well together – “ways to move the camera”, “lens selection and focal length”, “ways to control exposure”, and “sensor size, resolution, aspect ratio, and frame rate”. The only response with over 75% of *yes* answers was “shot type and composition” at 89.5%, with the rest falling somewhere between 63.2% and 21.1% (see *Figure 4*). One respondent noted, “I usually learn these things by trial and error. It was only after making a mistake that I realized whatever I messed up was something I should even be concerned about (like setting the white balance).”

After gauging the use of visual aids when fundamental concepts are being taught, survey respondents were next asked, “If given the chance, it would have been helpful to have visual aids when being taught the following topics.” The topics remained the same as those presented in the previous question, and respondents were given a scale from *one* to *five*, with *one* being “strongly disagree,” *three* being “neutral,” and *five* being “strongly agree.” All eight topics averaged a score above *four*, with seven of the eight topics above *four-and-a-half*, showing a favorable inclination toward visual demonstrations as a helpful learning device (see *Figure 5*).

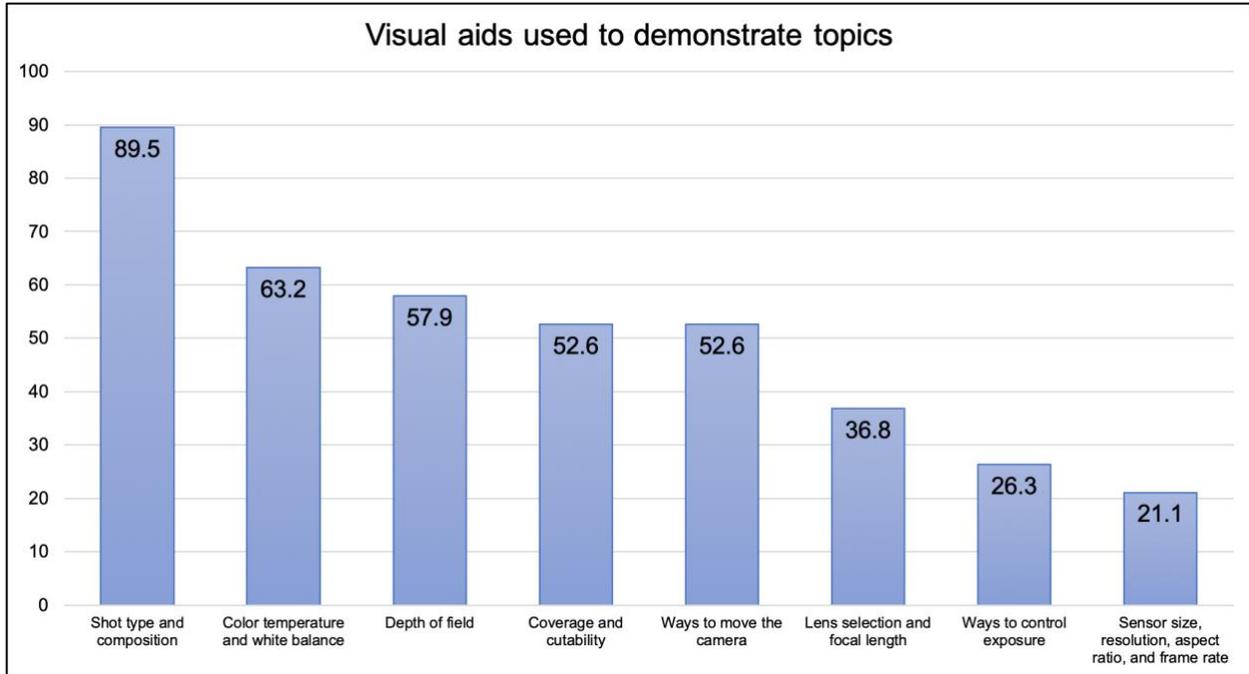


Figure 4: Percentage of survey respondents noting if visual aids were used to demonstrate certain video production fundamentals in school or in their careers

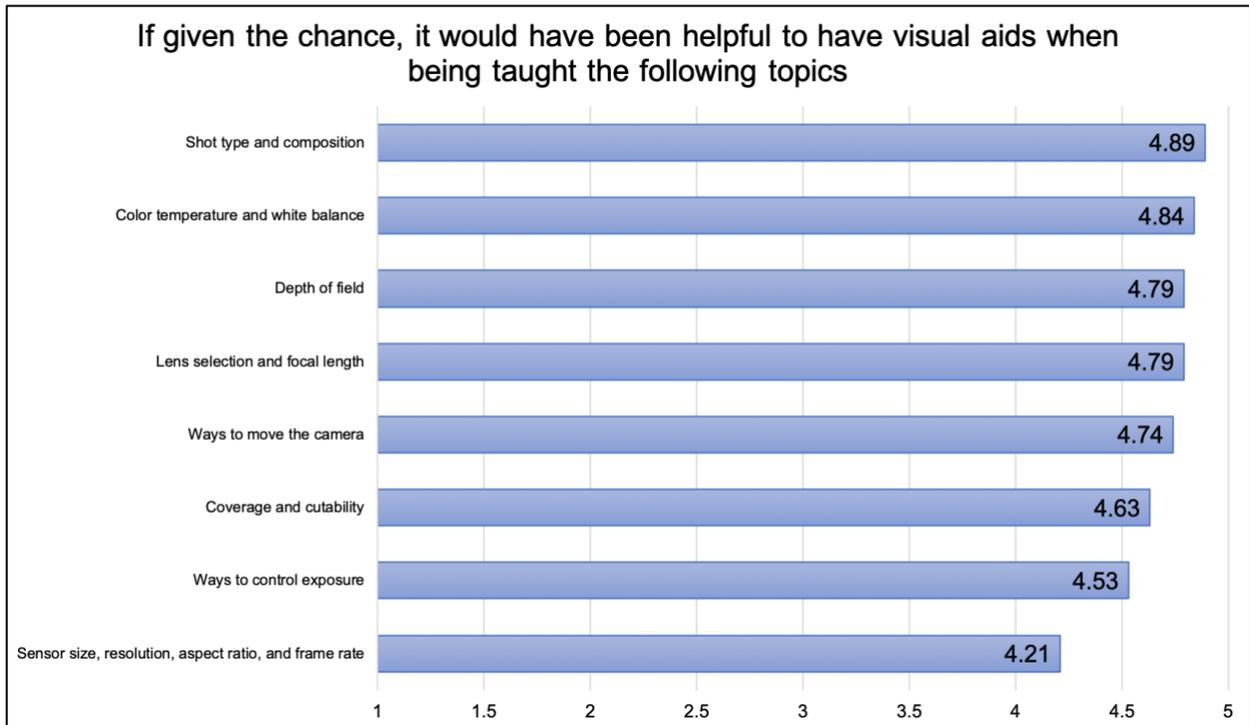


Figure 5: Average response on a scale of 1-5 noting the perceived helpfulness of visual aids when demonstrating certain video production fundamentals. All options averaged over 4.

## **The Online Video Tutorial Landscape: Does it Fill the Gap?**

Given the lack of visual aids in formal educational settings, an important question is what resources exist in other spaces – particularly with the increasing number of professionals who are learning these techniques on the job. With the advent of YouTube in 2005, the online world has become inundated with all types of videos. It did not take long for a subset of tutorial and instructional videos to emerge. Among the various topics covered by tutorial videos, several include video production concepts. However, they often fall short when demonstrating core technical competencies. The majority of video production tutorials do so from a broader, more generalized angle than from a technical one. Search results for “video production basics” or “how to shoot better video” regularly disregard the technical knowledge required to build a foundation in favor of concepts like scriptwriting, storyboarding, creative use of angles, location scouting, and how to ask better questions during interviews. While these are important, they fail to acknowledge how understanding the tool – the video camera – makes this all possible in the first place.

There is also an overall lack of one-stop-shop channels that provide foundational information in a meaningful and helpful manner. Often information is presented by a “personality” – someone with a large following (subscribers) who dabbles in all aspects of the industry and whose videos cover “jack-of-all-trades”-type knowledge. While it is possible to discover a helpful video about lens selection or resolution, it is buried among videos about gear reviews, post-production tutorials, or general conceptual ideas. Camera and image-focused YouTube explainer videos generally include: click-bait titles, run between 5-20 minutes in length, and are unscripted with the personality on camera

the majority of the time. As a result, there is a lack of visual examples to highlight the purpose of the video.

Peter McKinnon, Kellen Reck, Gerald Undone, and Saurav Sinha are a few of the bigger, more polished YouTube personalities that fill this niche. As of November 2021, Peter McKinnon has over 5.5 million subscribers; Kellen Reck over 58,000 subscribers; Gerald Undone nearly 300,000 subscribers; and Saurav Sinha 871,000 subscribers. They all have accomplished this by focusing primarily on themselves as the brand while presenting on a wide spectrum of different facets of the industry. YouTubers are personalities so it is not surprising they occupy the majority of screen time in their videos and rarely cut away to video demonstrations. For example, Sinha has a video titled, “Focal Length Explained! Why does it MATTER?” in which the video thumbnail image is three different photographs taken at different focal lengths with the focal lengths in text beneath the image. However, the thumbnail image never appears in the video. In other words, the most clear and concise demonstration of how different camera lenses render the world is never touched upon other than to “sell” the video itself (see *Figure 6*).



*Figure 6: A thumbnail from a YouTube tutorial video about focal length. Nowhere in the actual video does this visual demonstration exist.*

There are other YouTube channels focused on video production basics. Five Minute Film School offers a concise collection of technical-centric videos, with fifteen total videos that are each approximately three minutes in length. All the videos came out in a four-month span in 2014, with no new material since. The production value of each video is slightly above amateur level. The host is clearly green-screened and no consideration is given to capturing professional-level audio. The information, while concise, leaves much to be desired. Most of the videos are a broad overview with an assumption that the terms and ideas presented should already be understood, when in fact that is what the video is seeking to explain.

Videomaker has a YouTube channel with a playlist called “Premium Video Production Tutorials” covering the gamut from pre-production, production, and post-production with a mix of both conceptual and technical tutorials. Their videos are scripted and informational, and they incorporate graphics to further explain technical concepts. While Videomaker offers worthwhile videos, they heavily rely on on-screen talent and graphics to illustrate their points, giving only some consideration to actual video or real-world examples to demonstrate these concepts. The stock footage powerhouse Shutterstock also has an informative YouTube channel. Like Videomaker, most of Shutterstock’s videos involve scripted on-screen talent with graphics to further illustrate lessons with actual footage only occasionally interspersed. Both Videomaker and Shutterstock offer a mix of videos that span from beginner-level to advanced topics, but these videos are spread across multiple playlists and ordered by release date, so there is not always an easy or convenient method to logically find and work through these tutorials based on skill-level or concept – that is, beginner-level videos focused on

technical fundamentals are hidden among tutorials about post-production or conceptual tutorials like creating mood with color grading.

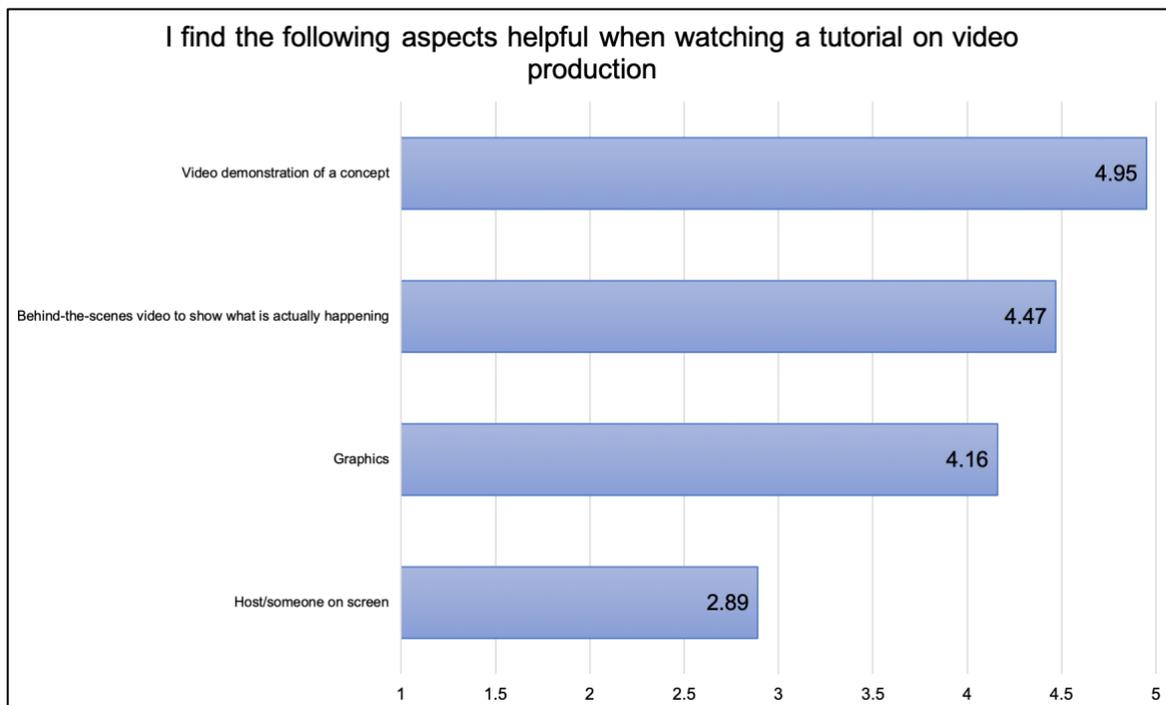
There are some clear and obvious trends that emerge when analyzing these YouTube channels. The biggest aspect is the overwhelming reliance on a host or someone on screen to provide information. Furthermore, the information appears to be mostly unscripted. Additionally, the videos tend to favor graphics over video demonstrations to highlight concepts. For instance, videos graphically show how focal length or depth of field work rather than using actual video to visually demonstrate these concepts. The video demonstrations that are provided are often short and not on screen long enough for a viewer to firmly grasp the concept. Finally, behind-the-scenes depictions are only occasionally included.

### **Key Findings: Explaining the Disconnect**

A disconnect begins to appear when looking at what is provided in YouTube tutorials versus what industry professionals actually desire in terms of what should and should not be included in these tutorials. Survey respondents were asked, "What is the ideal length of a video tutorial?" with options including "less than three minutes," "less than five minutes," "less than ten minutes," and "less than twenty minutes." 52.6% of respondents said less than five minutes is the ideal length of a video tutorial, with 31.6% favoring less than ten minutes, 10.5% less than twenty minutes, and 5.3% less than three minutes. Outside of Five Minute Film School and their tutorials averaging around three minutes, every other channel previously discussed averages videos anywhere between ten and twenty minutes. One survey respondent noted, "Even though I do use online

tutorials, they can be very hit or miss. A twenty-minute video might be full of tangents and finding up-to-date videos can be a hassle.”

Survey respondents were also asked, “I find the following aspects helpful when watching a tutorial on video production” and given a scale of *one* to *five* with *one* being “strongly disagree,” *three* being “neutral,” and *five* being “strongly agree.” The aspects respondents were asked to rank included “Host/someone on screen,” “Graphics,” “Video demonstration of a concept,” and “Behind-the-scenes video to show what is actually happening” (see *Figure 7*). “Video demonstration of a concept” was a near-unanimous favorite, while “host/someone on screen” received the most mixed feedback. One survey respondent noted, “I personally find hosts distracting during tutorials. Narration does everything a host does and does it better because narration is usually scripted and more to the point.”



*Figure 7: Average response on a scale of 1-5 noting which aspects are most helpful when watching a tutorial on video production*

One possible explanation for why YouTube tutorials are presented in such a manner, despite differing preferences from their main target audience, may be found in the rise of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). MOOCs are a type of online learning that utilizes video as its main method of content delivery and has found its own niche separate from YouTube. A few popular platforms include Coursera, edX, and Khan Academy. Multiple studies have looked into the effectiveness of MOOCs as a viable teaching method and could help indicate why YouTube tutorials are presented in formats currently used on the platform (Guo et al., 2014; Hansch et al., 2015).

Guo and colleagues (2014) used data from nearly seven million video watching sessions on the edX MOOC platform and concluded that the most engaging videos are: shorter, informal, include talking-heads, and include Khan-style tablet drawings. Of those four metrics, video length was the most significant indicator of engagement. Keeping videos under six minutes is the recommended length. Videos that include talking-heads – someone on screen speaking to the camera – as well as Khan-style tutorials, which use a presenter drawing on screen while they casually speak to the viewer, feel more personal and less like a formal lecture. Students were also more engaged with instructors who utilized a faster speaking rate; usually somewhere around 160 words per minute. Lastly, the study found that students engage differently with lecture and tutorial videos. Students will re-watch tutorials more frequently than lectures but only watch two to three minutes of tutorials on average, regardless of the overall length (Guo et al., 2014, pp. 42-48).

The study of MOOCs by Hansch and colleagues (2015) “suggested that because lectures are so prevalent in university settings, MOOC production teams were initially built upon the belief that lecture would serve as their main pedagogical format” (p. 4). When

visual strategies are included to assist with learning, the use of videos in an educational context creates cognitive value. However, this often diminishes the value of a lecture-style approach that ignores the use of valuable visuals. Essentially, the transition to using video as a learning medium replicates most university lecture settings simply because of traditional teaching methods, regardless of effectiveness. As a result, the opportunities to expand on video's capabilities with regards to learning and engagement often go underutilized (Hansch et al., 2015, pp. 5-11).

Research around the effectiveness of MOOCs begins to shed light on the approach many YouTube personalities and channels take when creating video tutorials. Given that informal talking heads are engaging, and this style of presenting information keeps audiences engaged for longer periods of time, it is logical many popular YouTube channels include hosts on camera and run anywhere from ten to twenty minutes in length. Since audiences indicate hand-drawn graphics feel more casual and personal, it is easy to see why YouTube videos favor this distinct style to visually display information. This does not mean the approach translates to an effective dissemination of information, though, as it fails to take full advantage of using visuals to create cognitive value. Further, industry professionals surveyed and interviewed for this project favor a reliance on video examples to demonstrate concepts over a host or graphics, and favor this by a sizeable margin.

### **Campaign: Using Video Tutorials as a Primer**

Considering the different ways those working in the industry prefer to learn video production concepts, more effort should be given towards an effective approach to deliver this information in a meaningful, engaging, and impactful way. What if succinct video

tutorials were used as a primer to provide a viewer a quick overview of a topic before that viewer dives in deeper? For example, class time is valuable and should maximize time spent allowing an educator to interact and engage with students. By using a short video primer to expose students to a general overview of a concept, educators now have more class time to focus on the practical applications and deeper intricacies of concepts. Learners are already primed to learn what will be taught and further demonstrated to them. As Max Bevin (2020) puts it:

Teachers can use videos to deliver course information that can be extremely helpful in opening up class time. Lectures and other introductory information can be viewed before class, which allows for more practice- and skill-related class activities. These videos are accessible at the student's convenience and can be watched numerous times to assist with coursework and skill mastery. (para. 11)

What might these video primers look like? This project attempts to flip the script of the current online tutorial landscape by creating effective video production tutorials reflecting the findings from industry professional participants. As a result, the primers are short, ranging between two and four minutes. They are scripted and provide enough information to give a novice learner a basic overview of a selected topic with the understanding that more detailed and dense information will come at a later time. They use narration instead of a host on-screen. Most importantly, they favor video demonstrations over anything else to illustrate concepts.

This project produced three videos to test the aforementioned approach before further topics are explored. To determine which videos to produce, survey results were examined. Four of the highest-ranking topics survey respondents noted would be helpful

to have visual aids for were color temperature and white balance, lens selection and focal length, depth of field, and ways to move the camera. Through an in-depth discussion with the Nebraska Public Media focus group, it became clear that lens selection, focal length, and depth of field could easily be wrapped into one video called “Lens Basics.” As a result, the three initial video tutorial primers will be on color temperature and white balance basics, lens basics, and camera movement basics.

The video series is called *Video 101: Video Production Basics, Visually Explained* and the titles of each tutorial video will follow that convention (e.g., *Video 101: Camera Movement Basics, Visually Explained*). The point of emphasis is the utilization of visuals – in this case, video demonstrations of concepts – as the primary method of teaching (the “visually explained” part of the title). This acts as the primer – or “basics” – element to indicate that this short video tutorial will provide a novice learner with a general introductory overview of a concept to further build upon.

The majority of video production fundamentals all have their own levels of difficulty and complexity. The goal of the series is to prep learners with enough basic information to begin to paint a picture of what they are getting into, allowing the more intricate and advanced details to come out in classroom settings or the field. For example, before a learner opens a book or is handed a camera, by watching one of these primers they will know that daylight falls on the cooler end of the color temperature scale and has a white balance of 5600 Kelvin or that telephoto lenses compress space or that distance and iris affect depth of field. Classroom settings and working in the field will expound on these concepts, but seeing a quick visual demonstration should connect enough dots and build a foundation so as not to confuse a learner when they find themselves in these situations.

By reading or hearing about these concepts during a lecture, the learner will have enough visual information to connect back to what is being read or heard.

### **Next steps**

The ultimate goal is the creation of an entire series of video tutorial primers covering the gamut of video production basics. The first three videos will be posted to Vimeo and shared with survey participants and the Nebraska Public Media focus group to gauge their effectiveness. Vimeo does not have the mainstream reach of YouTube and is a good host candidate for this trial-run. Collecting and analyzing this data will aid in developing best practices for future videos. With a trial-run of three videos, feedback can be more easily implemented with minimal consequences if the three videos fail to meet their intended purpose.

Even though seeing visual demonstrations of shot type and composition ranked highly, participants in the study were clear that visual aids are already typically employed when teaching that concept, so a video primer on that will be saved for a later time. Furthermore, the concepts presented to survey respondents focused solely on camera techniques and knowledge necessary to produce a professional-level image. In the future, this video series will break into post-production and editing basics as well as pre-production basics, but given the saturation of those two markets and the relative limited availability of technical-centric camera tutorials, practical filming concepts are favored for this initial test-run.

A focus group member brought up a few additional approaches to explore moving forward. First is introducing elements of interactivity to these tutorials. An example is asking viewers to close one eye and hold their thumb up to their open eye, then move

their thumb closer and further away. This forces the eye –replicating a camera lens – to adjust focus on the thumb demonstrating how distance affects depth of field. Another example is to have the viewer create a rectangle with their hands and move that rectangle – which replicates the frame two-dimensional video operates within – further and closer away from their eyes to demonstrate focal length; specifically, the difference between adjusting between wider and telephoto lenses. The effectiveness of interactivity is still open to debate, and gathering data on this will guide the future direction of tutorial videos.

Second is interviewing professors who teach video production to gain a better understanding of their use of visual aids when teaching video production concepts. The primary point of focus here would be to gain a better understanding of how higher education pivoted during the COVID-19 pandemic when classes temporarily moved exclusively online. This online-only teaching strategy must have affected countless educators who teach visual or hands-on topics and did not readily have visual demonstrations available to provide to students during this temporary pivot. It will be good to gauge their desire for something like this, but also important to see if that moment in time changed their teaching strategy.

## **Video Tutorial Primers**

[Video 101: Camera Movement Basics, Visually Explained](#)

[Video 101: Color Temperature and White Balance Basics, Visually Explained](#)

[Video 101: Lens Basics, Visually Explained](#)

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