



tools  action

# Learning Docu ment ation

Capturing images while  
supporting the struggle:  
A guide to making  
documentary images



# INTRO

**In 2022 EYFA carried out the programme Learning documentation, which focused on how to document different actions, realities and struggles, amplifying voices that are often not being heard.**

**This guide is an attempt to organize the idea that videos captured by young activists can be instrumental in drawing attention to human rights abuses and to the budding activist movements that fight against them or even to starting the movements themselves.**

**The aim of this guide is to provide methods for young activists to use so that their videos can be as valuable as possible in visibilizing grassroots struggles as well as exposing abuse, both aiding in the bringing about justice. This resource will help ensure that more cameras in more hands can lead to more exposure, stronger movements and greater justice.**

**Because above all, a documentary images must have the capacity to denounce real situations of oppression and injustice and to have content that invites the viewers to reflect about the images they are being confronted with.**

# Audiovisual Language

The purpose of this segment is to describe the basic elements of audiovisual language in order to better understand the tools it provides us when recording protests and rallies. The knowledge of the resources of visual language puts us in better position for the production of audiovisual materials that could be helpful in documenting these spaces.

Let's start by saying that the shot is the basic spatio-temporal unit, from which the audiovisual discourse is articulated. We will concentrate exclusively on the analysis of the shot as a result of the capture made by the camera.

Every shot is made up of a set of elements that determine its meaning. It is worth clarifying that this is not exhausted in the interaction of these elements, but is also conditioned by the place that the shot occupies in the editing process.

The most important elements of the shot (and of the language) are:

- \* Framing
- \* Field
- \* Angle
- \* Lighting
- \* Movement
- \* Duration
- \* Sound

These elements form a complex unit in which they maintain relationships of dependence. If we proceed to deal with them in isolation, this responds to the needs of the analysis. In this segment we will examine some of them.

# FRAMING

Framing is the selection of a fragment of space in front of the camera.

The act of framing requires arranging the visual elements within the limits imposed by the frame of the viewfinder; this operation refers to a point of view, understood as the optical location of the camera, that is, the place from where one looks. In turn, the frame communicates a vision of the world, it reveals the gaze of the person who makes it and his, her or their decision regarding the cut-out of the reality desired to be shown. The arranging of the frame is central to the construction of meaning. At the same time that we guide the spectator's attention towards the most significant aspects, we create the conditions of perception of the image, we propose a way of seeing, a way of transmitting reality.

We find it necessary to know the basic principles of composition in order to produce images that best capture social action and social movements and the arbitrary police intimidations and abuse that usually accompany them. This will also help us avoid the order of the visual elements distracting or hindering the viewer's attention, in contradiction with our intentions. Framing establishes a distance between the viewer and the subject in focus, the viewer may feel far away or close to what is represented on the screen. The ratio between the area of the frame occupied by a given object and the total area of the frame.

The frame defines the scale of the shot, which is determined by the size of the object, the distance between the object and the camera, and the lens used. The classification of shot sizes presents innumerable variants, but we propose to take the human figure as the axis of composition as a reference.

# Extreme Long Shot (ELS)

This shot is used to show the subject from a distance, or the area in which the scene is taking place. This type of shot is particularly useful for establishing a scene in terms of time and place, as well as a subject's physical or emotional relationship to the environment and elements within it. The subject doesn't necessarily have to be distinguished in the shot.



Wide Shot

This type of shot shows the subject from top to bottom; for a person, this would be head to toes, though not necessarily filling the frame. The character becomes more of a focus than an Extreme Long Shot, but the shot tends to still be dominated by the scenery. This shot often sets the scene and our subject's place in it.

## Long Shot (LS)

This sort of shot frames the subject from head to toes, with the subject roughly filling the frame. The emphasis of the shot tends to be more on action and movement rather than a subject's emotional state.



## Medium Long Shot (MLS)

(aka 3/4 Shot) This is the intermediate shot between a Full Shot and a Medium Shot. It shows subject from the knees up.



## Medium Shot

This shot shows part of the subject in more detail. For a person, a medium shot typically frames them from the waist up. This is one of the most common shots, as it focuses on a subject (or subjects) in a scene while still showing some of the environment.



## Medium Close-up Shot

This shot falls between a Medium Shot and a Close-Up, generally framing the subject from the chest or the shoulder up.



## Close-up Shot

This shot fills the screen with part of the subject, such as a person's head/face. In this type of shot it is the emotions and reaction of a subject what dominate the scene.



## Extreme Close-up Shot

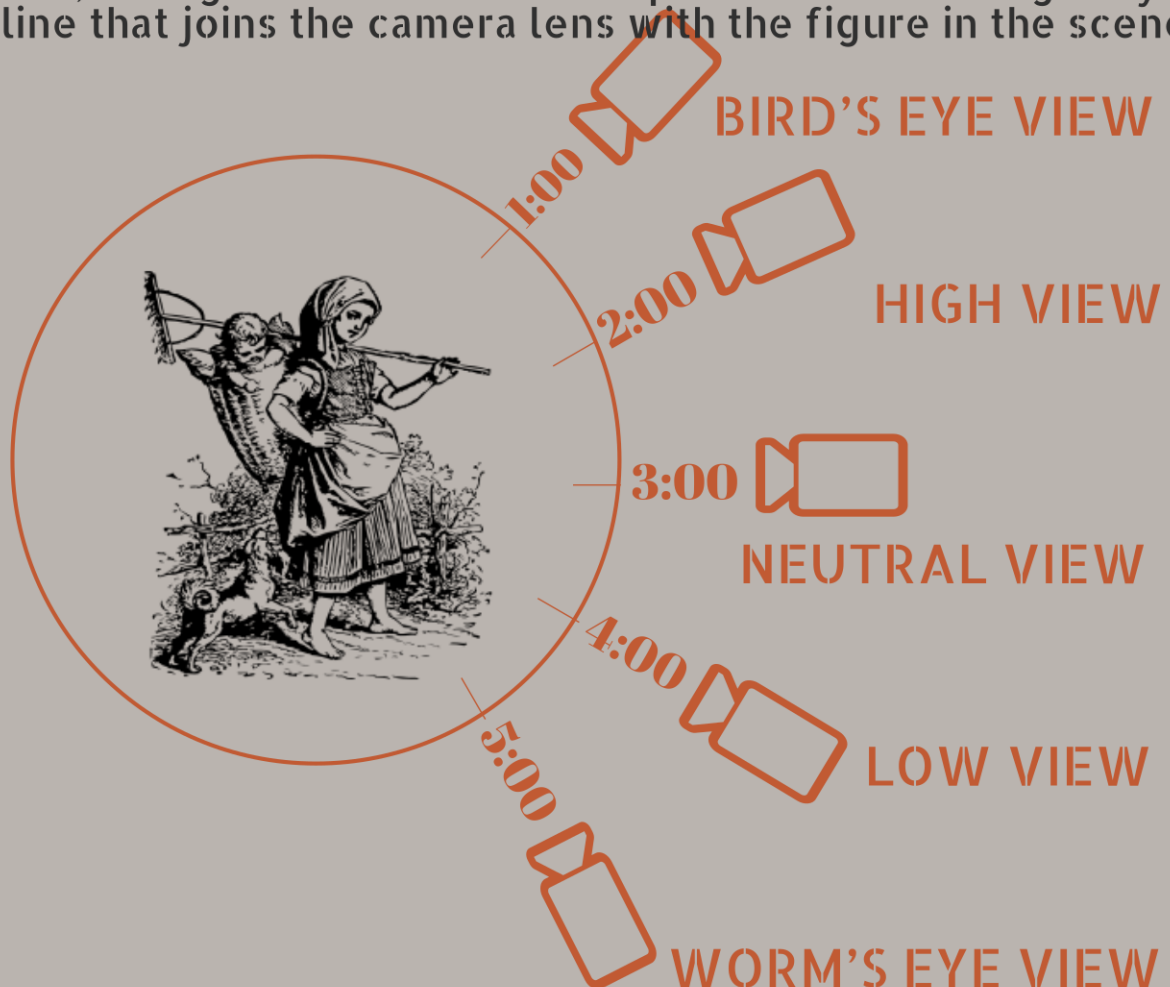
This shot emphasizes a small area or detail of the subject, such as the eye(s) or mouth, or hands.



# Angle



Framing implies a point of view; the camera is positioned in a certain place in relation to the subject. The framing angle is the position of the camera in relation to what we see, taking as a reference the optical axis: the imaginary line that joins the camera lens with the figure in the scene.



# How to record video during a protest



So now that we know some of the basics of audiovisual language we can continue by providing you with useful tips on how, who and what to record during a protest, getting and sharing useful footage, and keeping people safe while doing so.

Several recordings of activists and citizens in various countries worldwide have sparked social uprisings or fuelled their discontent when these images recorded the police abuses that try to contain such movements. It was, for example, the recording made by a 17-year-old teen with her phone of Minneapolis police officers killing of George Floyd what sparked demonstrations against structural racism and police brutality across the USA that led to the worldwide movement know as Black Lives Matter. This events show what a powerful tool our recordings can be in situations of social injustice and as a defence towards them.

People willing to use their own phones to record events such as social movements' protests or rallies or the social uprisings in Chile and Colombia in 2019 and most recently in Iran in 2022, play an important role within this movements. Witnessing and documenting police activity is a very important role for everyone, and especially for those who face less retaliation from the armed forces due to not being target of racial profiling and want to provide support.

It's crucial for people to see and experience what's happening from within the social movement itself, it is in these way of documenting that takes control of the narrative from hegemonic media outlets, allowing the people outside if the movement to see the truth.

There are certain things to take into account in order to do this effectively and safely. On the one side, the use of a mobile phone during a protest puts one at risk of digital surveillance, and not being fully aware of the legislation regarding the recording of video materials and/or taking of photos during rallies and manifestations could also lead to police retaliation.

But when you choose to take this challenge responsibly you can break a technological paradigm, and instead of your phone helping others monitor you, you can use your phone to monitor the state armed forces.



It really comes down to responsibility, because it is thanks to the presence of many cameras that countless acts of police brutality and abusive behaviour of state armed forces have been exposed in recent years all around the planet.

Here we will provide you with how to use a camera or your phone camera to be an effective witness and stay safe while doing so. We will also provide you with tips to filming in a team, to make your material even more useful, should it come to defending activists in the judicial system

# What and how to film?

The first question you should ask yourself is what you will use this video for. If you think your video could provide important evidence in a trial, context is important. Capture at least 10 seconds if you're filming something important and move slowly. Even if this seems unnatural, remember you are not capturing video at a birthday party. But the goal is to capture as much detail as possible. Also, be careful when adding narration. You can describe what you see, but try not to provide strong opinions, this could make the video less useful if chosen to be used as evidence in a process against police brutality.

It's not always easy to know what should be captured. A general rule of thumb, according to civil rights activists, is to avoid videotaping or photographing peaceful protesters in such a way that their faces are visible, as this could make them targets of police and judicial prosecution, a tactic used to intimidate and reduce social movements.

If you are documenting the details of an arrest or police violence, film the identities of the individuals involved, the surrounding crowd, injuries, bullet holes or nearby vehicles. Contextualize details by narrating the incident as you film. Here your duty is to make it easy to identify those responsible for abusing their power. Film the action as close as possible, focusing on details of the protest and any incidents of police or military violence.

Capture details and identifying information such as faces, police names, badges, vehicles and license plates. Aim to capture any type of identification that police forces may have in the country you are filming. If the badges aren't visible, point the camera at their helmets or vests, police officers' numbers are also printed there in some countries.

Another detail that is very important is to capture the weapons that police officers are using and how they are using them: many police departments have specific rules, and if those rules are broken, your video can document that. It is also useful to record the instructions police give to protesters, to help resolve later disputes about whether force was justified.

If you are filming a protest, a manifestation or a rally, contextualize events through wide and medium shots. Use close-ups to capture details. Use various angles and elevation to capture the size and behaviour of the crowd. Capture footage of the presence and formation of authorities. To maintain identities anonymous, film crowds from behind and only record the backs of people's heads or their feet



If you are filming in a team, the instructions provided above could be done simultaneously while a second camera films within the crowd to get a sense of the action. Try to keep the first Camera (the one focusing on state armed forces) in the shot to maintain context and provide additional angles. Before filming, Camera 2 should determine whether or not to replace Camera 1 if arrested or detained.



A third camera could be recording establishing shots at a distance to capture the full scope of the event. If safe, document the location and movement of police or military. Consider filming from a window, balcony or roof to get an aerial perspective. Camera 3 should communicate any major developments to teammates, such as approaching military vehicles, a new formation or acts of violence.

Filming with a partner or team allows you to capture multiple angles and perspectives. This can lead to more compelling video and may provide better evidence in a court of law. It's also generally best to shoot in landscape or horizontal mode, since this provides a better image, but you also fit more information within the shot, which is very important if you're trying to document evidence.



Finally, stay true to reality, even if your goal is to post your video online rather than see it appear as evidence in court. Try not to manipulate the photo after you take it. You may see beautiful things, possibly turning into art, and that's great. But the main goal is documentation and truth. A Final pro tip: clean the camera lens periodically, otherwise, dirt and smudges could get in the way and ruin your shots

If you have a digital camera, you may want to use it instead of your phone, and not just because it can take better pictures. A camera with a new memory card contains much less personal information than a cell phone, and doesn't expose you to digital surveillance like a phone would. If you chose to bring a camera, don't forget to bring additional charged batteries and empty memory cards. If you don't have access to a camera and are filming with a smartphone, maximize battery life by turning off apps and the wifi locator, and lower the brightness on your device's screen. Below you will find more information that will keep you safe while using your personal phone for filming.

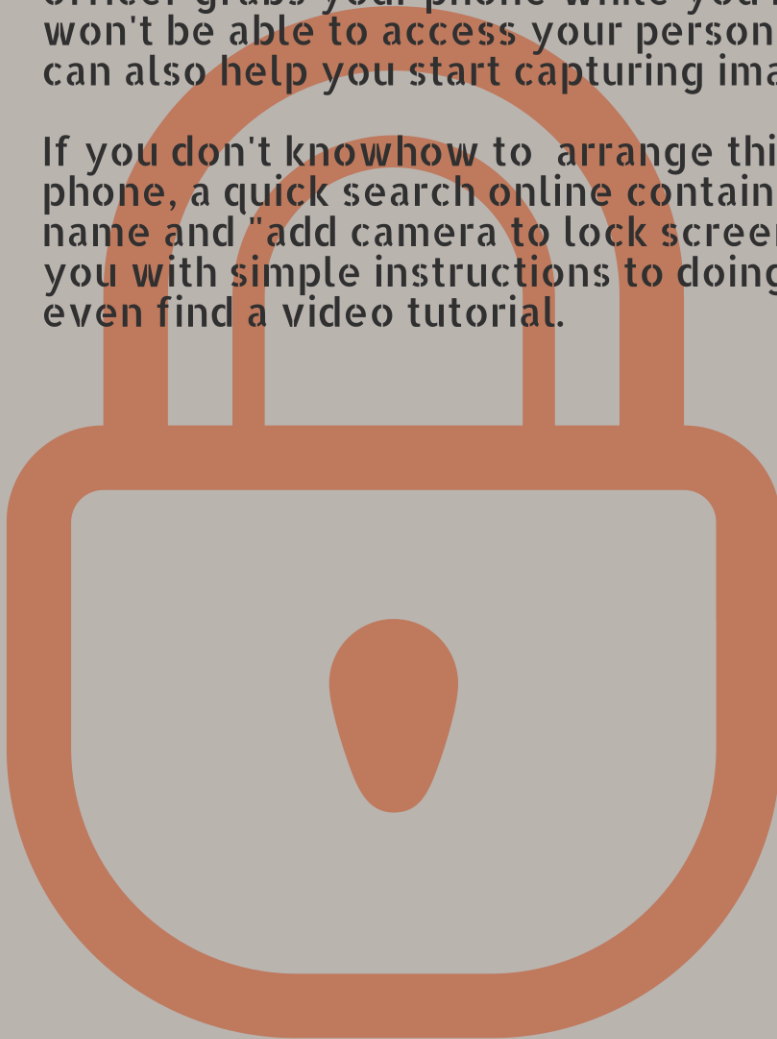


# How can you protect your phone?

In general, there are laws that protect you and your phone from arbitrary searches. However, police have arbitrarily confiscated or searched mobile phones in past protests, according to many organizations in various parts of the world. A way of protecting your videos, and your personal data, such as your contacts, text messages and social media posts, is by overloading your lock screen. Use a secure PIN and disable Face ID, fingerprint unlock, or any other biometrics. This is in general a good idea, not only while documenting social movements.

Most smartphones will allow you to open the camera app without unlocking the phone. Always use that feature while documenting a protest, this way if an officer grabs your phone while you're recording, they won't be able to access your personal information. This can also help you start capturing images faster.

If you don't know how to arrange this setting on your phone, a quick search online containing your device's name and "add camera to lock screen" should provide you with simple instructions to doing this, you might even find a video tutorial.





# What the law says

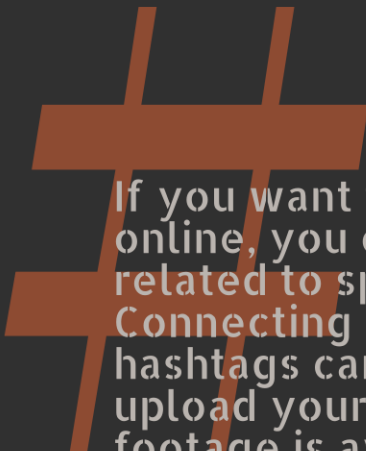
The best way to protect yourself here would be to check state and federal laws of the place you are in to make sure what your rights are. This may vary drastically from place to place, so having a printed document with them might also help you if state armed forces are intimidating you by questioning the legality of your image or audio recording.

In general, you have a legal right to take a photograph or video of anything in a public space, including police activity. Police cannot legally demand your phone nor force you to show them your images without a warrant. Audio is a more complicated story, including sound captured during a video. In some jurisdictions, it is illegal to record someone's voice without their consent. However, making audio recordings of police are legal in almost all cases.

However, your cell phone camera does not give you a free legal pass to do whatever you want. You are not allowed to physically interfere with law enforcement operations, and police have discretion about what counts as interfering. If a police officer orders you to back off, do so.

If you are holding a camera openly try not to make sudden movements as to demonstrate that you are not a threat. If an officer stops you or directs you to stop filming even though you know it is allowed, you should calmly ask for a reason for such actions. It is difficult to predict how police officers will react to civilians using their cell phone cameras.

# How do you share footage?



If you want to post videos and photos you've taken online, you can get more attention if you use hashtags related to specific protests, events or movements. Connecting online with like-minded people using those hashtags can also help spread the word. If possible, upload your videos as soon as possible, because if the footage is available, many can find it and then share it more widely. It's smart to use more than one platform, but be sure to include Twitter, where journalists and activists are more likely to see the footage.

Even if you're not displaying your photos publicly, it's smart to quickly upload your images to your own cloud storage account to preserve your work in case your phone is lost, stolen or confiscated by law enforcement. This is easy to do with both iPhones and most Android phones.

Sharing your images can support an important cause, but in some cases it can also put people at risk. As mentioned above, it's best to avoid posting recognizable photos of protesters. That could make them targets, not only for prosecutors, but also for online trolls who can identify people and target them with harassment or threats.

One option is to blur faces. Beware: it is easy to reverse certain types of photo manipulation in some editing applications. However, some programs are designed specifically for this purpose. The free encrypted messaging service Signal has just launched a new feature that makes it easy to blur faces in photos you're sending to a contact. You can then download your blurred photo and post it elsewhere. If you're sharing a video, YouTube also has a tool that makes it easy to blur parts of the image.



One more technical note: Camera apps generally capture Exif data along with still photos, which is metadata that can identify what type of device took the photo, and exactly where and when it was taken. Cell phones can capture similar details with video files. Most social media platforms remove this information when images are uploaded, but the data is usually retained if the file is sent via text message or email. That could be important if you don't post a photo yourself, but send it anonymously to an advocacy organization or journalist.



The easiest way to remove data from a still photo is to take a screenshot of that photo and share it instead of the original photo. If you have an iPhone, the Photos app in iOS 13 makes it easy to remove location data from photos and videos. If you don't want data saved while you're on a protest, turn off location services in the settings before you leave home or revoke your camera's location permissions.

No matter what, you will reveal a few things about yourself if you choose to post videos or photos online, even under a fake name. Social media platforms will usually comply with legal requests for information about the activities of their account holders. And your documentation is more powerful if you're willing to attach your name to it. There are risks involved, but this is a time when each and everyone of us has a chance to have a voice.



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