

AFTER: FILMING SECURE SCENES

INTRODUCTION

In the field, we often focus our filming efforts on capturing the crime as it happens - capturing the police using excessive force during an arrest, bulldozers leveling homes or oil as it pours out of a crashed tanker. While footage showing the actual commission of an alleged crime may very well be valuable, it is also often valuable to have documentation of the before and after. Here we discuss how to film in the aftermath of a human rights violation.

Why film after?

Video filmed in the aftermath of an event - after the bullets have stopped flying, when the bombing has ended and the bulldozers are gone - tends to be useful for several reasons. It can be:

- Used to easily illustrate an overview or layout of the crime scene allowing judges and juries to more readily understand what took place.
- Valuable to show how other types of evidence were collected. For instance, it can be used to document the exhumation of a mass grave.
- Used to verify that evidence has not been planted or falsified.

Goal of filming the aftermath

Enable others - investigators, analysts, lawyers and possibly judges - to visualize the scene, as the videographer first sees it. When well done, the video footage of a human rights incident scene should give viewers a sense of being there.

Filming a secure scene

Here are the broad steps to the “Spiral Approach” to filming a secure crime scene. Often, the steps cannot be followed as outlined because a space is too small, you can only film from one precise point versus being able to walk around the scene, a wall is blocking your path or any number of other reasons. So while you will have to modify the steps below to fit your situation and ensure you are filming safely, these basic principles apply:

- As possible, capture narration and visuals that verify the time, date and location of the scene.
- As possible film from every corner or side of the scene.
- As possible, capture overview, wide, medium and close-up shots of the scene.

TEST YOUR SKILLS

After reviewing the method here, practice by filming a mock crime scene. Then give your footage to someone unfamiliar with the location. Ask them to hand draw a map of the scene you filmed. If the map is accurate, your videography skills are solid. If not, try again!

TAKE HOME POINTS

STEP 1

Ensure the scene is safe for filming

STEP 2

Make a filming plan

STEP 3

Add preliminary information

STEP 4

Film an overview shot and the horizon

STEP 5

Film in a slow 360-degree circle in a 15-second interval from your start point

STEP 6

Film 10-second wide shots from the four-corners or sides of the crime scene

STEP 7

Film 10-second medium shots from the four-corners or sides of the crime scene

STEP 8

Film 10-second close up shots of key evidence in a spiral pattern

STEP 9

Complete a Camera Report

STEP 10

Supplement the video with maps, still photos, drawings, etc. as appropriate



TEN STEPS: IN DETAIL

Before you leave for the scene, check that your equipment is in proper working order and then follow these steps.

STEP 1

Ensure the scene is safe for filming

Your safety and the safety of the community come first. Be on the lookout for potential physical hazards. For instance, do not move bodies if there is any possibility that the person handling the body is not adequately protected against the transmission of illness, do not enter a collapsed building that is unstable, etc. Also, consider whether the act of filming will put your safety, or the safety of the community, at risk if someone sees.

STEP 2

Make a filming plan

Identify the videographer then, if you are working with a professional investigator, the investigator and videographer should walk through the crime scene and plan how to film it. In most human right situations, an investigator is not present and the videographer must make the plan on his or her own.

STEP 3

Add preliminary information to your video recording using either a piece of paper or narration

If safe, begin your recording with either a written 'slate' containing the below information or speak the information into the camera microphone.

- Videographer Name / Contact Information
- Time
- Date
- Specific location, including the GPS location if available

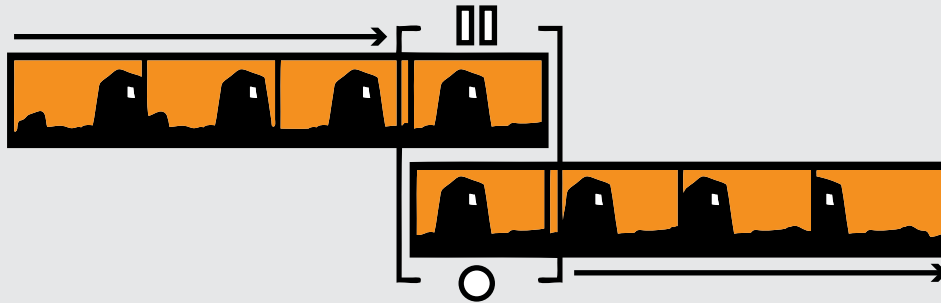
FOR MORE INFORMATION

See Adding Essential Information to Video and Techniques for Filming Anonymously



KEY POINT: ONE SHOT OR PAUSES?

You are now ready to begin recording. When filming for evidence, it is best to film continuously. However, if the crime scene is large, complex or dangerous, it will be difficult to document the scene in only one shot. If you need to, you can start and stop the recording but, if possible, begin the new clip by pointing the camera at the same location you were filming when you pressed stop and then hit record. In other words, overlap the shots. This will help the shots blend together and keep the viewer oriented.



FILMING

STEP 4

Film overview footage and the horizon to help verify the date and location

If possible, capture the following shots:

- A shot from above the crime scene.
- A shot of the sky, which should ideally capture the weather and the angle of the sun or moon to the horizon.
- Any landmarks such as a mountain, river, street sign, church, etc.

Hold these shots for 10 seconds.



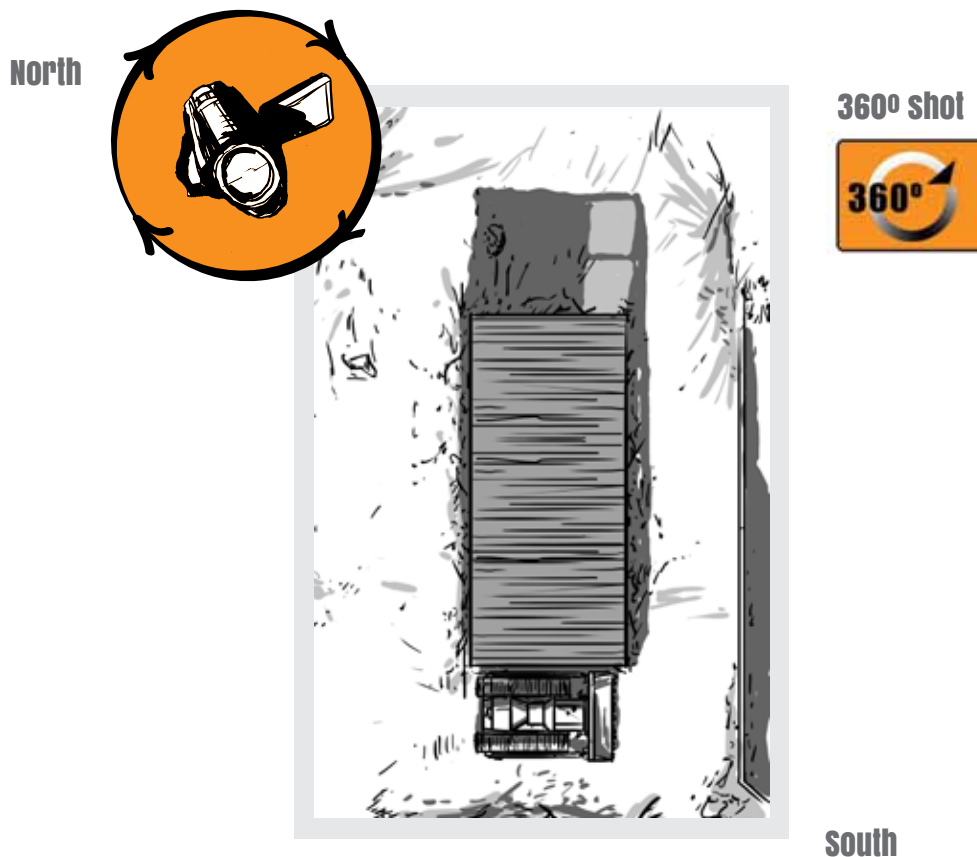
KEY POINT: BE CREATIVE

Other ideas: If you have pen and paper you could draw an arrow, add the word “north”, lay it on the ground pointing north and film it. You could also add a shot of the front cover of a newspaper or the date and time on your cell phone screen. The key point here is that there are many ways to include visuals that show where you are at, when. Be creative.

STEP 5

Film a slow 360-degree shot from the point where you begin filming in a 15-second interval

- Pick a starting point at one corner or side of the crime scene. If possible, pick a starting location that is a cardinal direction (north, south, east or west) as this is a good practice to get into and helps with re-creation of scenes later.
- If it is safe to include your voice, state your starting location on camera (north corner, south side, east bank, west corner, northeast of the square, etc.).
- While continuing to record, slowly - aim for 15 seconds or more - turn completely around in a circle from the spot where you are standing, recording a 360-degree view of the scene.



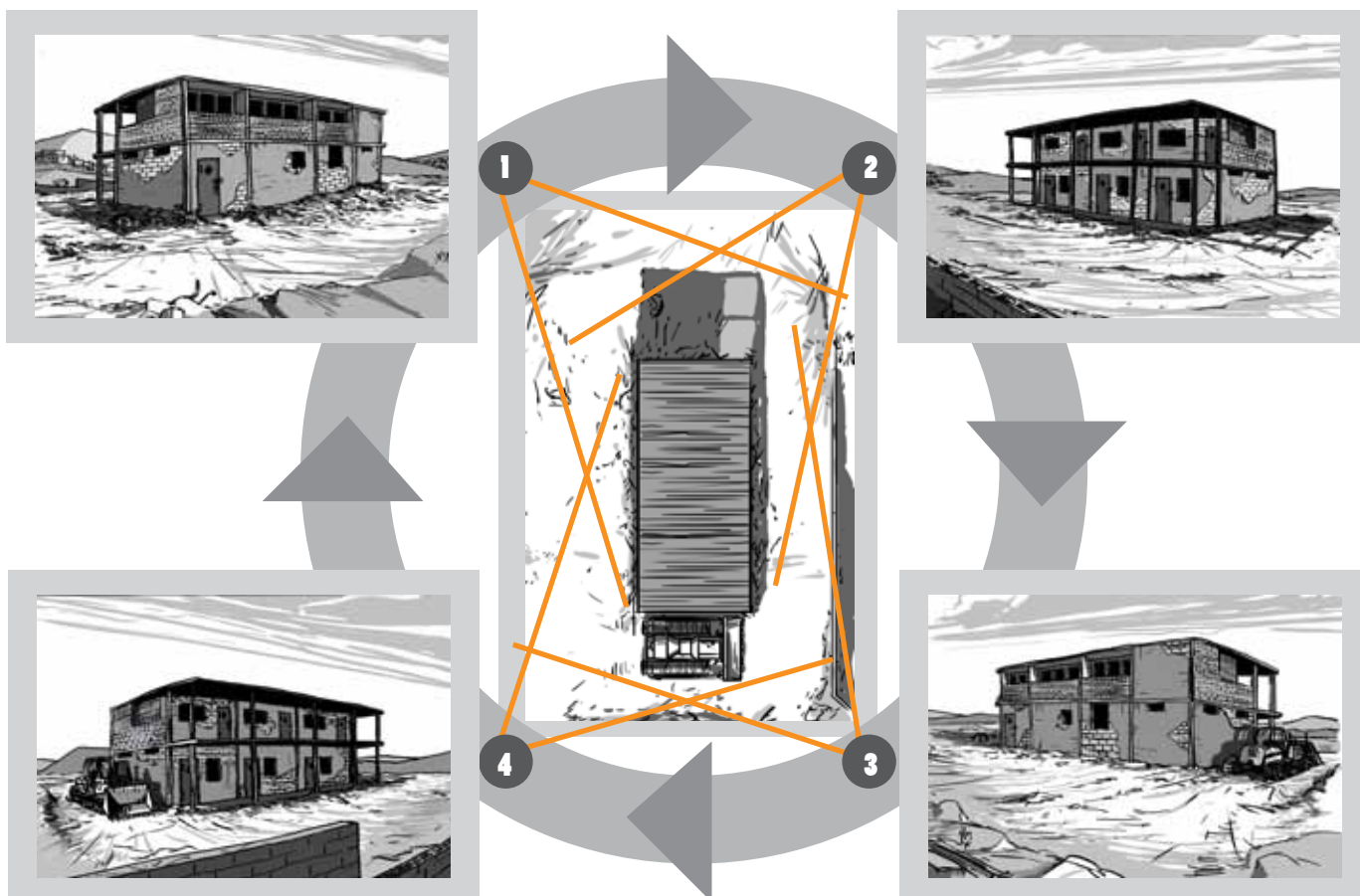
STEP 6

Film 10-second wide shots from the four-corners or sides of the crime scene

The objective of capturing wide shots is to provide an easily understandable layout of the crime scene.

- From the start position, hold your first wide shot for 10 seconds. Then, while still recording, move slowly clockwise, stopping at each corner or side of the scene, to hold a wide shot for 10 seconds until you have completed the circle.
- Keep the video recording as you move to STEP 7.

Wide shot



STEP 7

Film 10-second medium shots from the four corners or sides of the crime scene

The objective of capturing medium shots is to establish the location of evidence in the crime scene and the relationship of one piece of evidence to another.

- From your original start location, move in closer to the center of the scene.
- Hold your first medium shot for 10 seconds. Then, while still recording, move slowly clockwise, stopping at each corner or side of the scene, to hold a medium shot for 10 seconds until you have completed the circle.
- Keep the video recording as you move to STEP 8.

Medium shot



1



2



3



4

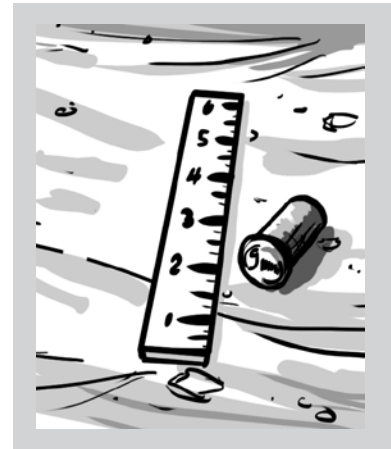


STEP 8

Film 10-second close up shots of key evidence in a spiral pattern

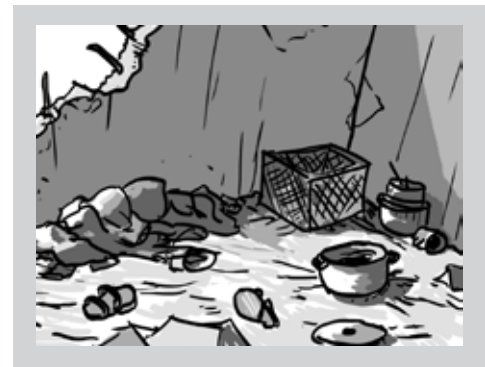
The objective of capturing close-up footage is to be able to see details in the scene.

- From your original start location, moving clockwise and in a spiral, focus in on the first piece of evidence. Hold a focused close-up shot for 10 seconds.
- If possible take a 10-second shot of the same piece of evidence with something that shows scale. For instance, lay a cell phone beside the evidence you want to capture so analysts can determine its size.
- Then, as you continue moving clockwise and in the spiral pattern, take a close-up shot of any details you believe may be significant, held for 10 seconds both with and without something that shows scale.



EVIDENCE

close-up shot



STEP 9

complete a camera Report

A Camera Report allows investigators and analysts to quickly determine if the footage may be relevant to their investigation and helps to authenticate, verify and preserve the chain-of-custody for the footage. Filling out these reports takes time that you likely don't have. However, a Camera Report greatly enhances the evidentiary potential of your footage. The Camera Report should be completed by the videographer and should include a note if anything in the scene was moved.

**FOR MORE
INFORMATION**

See [Completing a Camera Report](#)

STEP 10

Supplement the video with maps, still photos, drawings, etc. as appropriate

If appropriate, complement the video footage with other documentation. For instance, if you use a hand-drawn or topographic map to explain the scene, include a close up of the map and have the videographer sign and date the map and store it with the footage. If you complement the footage with a hand-drawn sketch, the hand-drawn sketch should: be the overhead view, note rough scale, note magnetic north, be signed and dated by the preparer, a photocopy made and the original saved as evidence. Also, consider taking still photos. Still photos are valuable because they are generally higher resolution and, in turn, able to capture more detail. Additionally, still photos are easier to organize and access.

ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES

Videos need to accurately and honestly show the incident scene. To be accurate:

- Never reconstruct a scene - show it as you found it.
- Be careful not to destroy evidence while filming.
- Be as concise as possible. Though the length of the video will depend on the complexity of the scene, be purposeful about what you film.
- Ensure all camera movement, including pans, zooms and tilts are slow, smooth and deliberate.
- Use the proper exposure.
- Have a maximum depth of field.
- The video should be free from distortion.
- The video should be in sharp focus.
- Whenever possible, use a tripod.

It's often not possible for activists who are on the ground and new to filming to implement these additional guidelines. That's okay. Don't let your technical skills stop you from capturing footage if it's safe to do so and you think the footage will support your work to protect human rights. Simply do your best within the confines of safety, security and understanding.

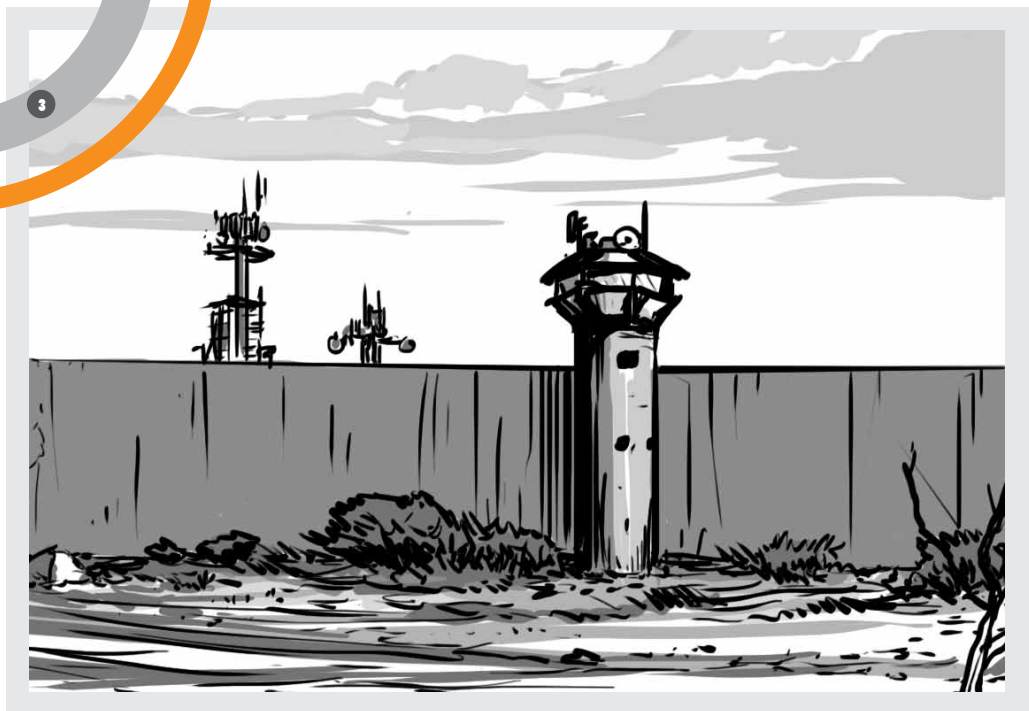
NOW BREAK THE RULES

Videographers frequently find themselves in situations where it is impossible to fully implement the best practices outlined above. Remembering that your goal is to ensure that those who are not on the ground with you can draw an accurate map of the scene by watching the video, consider how you would adapt this filming technique if you were:

- At the wall in Gaza and are only able to film 180-degrees instead of 360-degrees.
- On a rooftop overlooking a protest in the streets of Brazil and it's too dangerous to move from the spot you are in so you can only film from the one location.
- At a make-shift detention center abandoned by the Syrian regime where the regime was holding and allegedly torturing prisoners.



When 360° isn't possible...



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Crime Scene and Evidence Photographer's a Guide by Steven Staggs which can be ordered at staggspublishing.com/CSEPG.html
- Section 20: DRAFT Recommendations and Guidelines for Crime Scene/Critical Incident Videography by the Scientific Working Group on Imaging Technology (SWGIT), available at crime-scene-investigator.net/swgit-section20.pdf

FILMING