

# A Beginner's Guide to Making a Great FleadhFest Video



It doesn't matter if you have thousands of Euro worth of recording equipment or if you are recording on your normal smartphone the key to getting a good quality recording is knowing how to use the equipment you have to its best effect and using it to tell your story effectively in an engaging and exciting way.

Consider, if you go to a concert to see a performer you are generally limited to what you can see from your allocated seat. If you are watching a video or recording you see the performance from wherever the camera is positioned and quite often there will be more than one camera so you will get a mix of viewpoints throughout a performance. Cameras will move about, sometimes even weave between performers, this is not done by accident, but it helps to add to the mood and experience of those watching. Even if you only have one camera you should consider this when planning your recording.

For FleadhFest you will undoubtedly be recording some great and talented creative people. From musicians, singers, dancers and storytellers. Video recording is a powerful creative element which you can add to the process. The person who will be watching the finished video will not be watching just the performer on screen, they will be watching the whole production so you should consider the whole video as the artistic output.

For your program, start by thinking about what story you want to tell and what journey you are going to take your viewers on. Like any good engaging story, you want to draw your audience in and take them with you as you move through the narrative from beginning to end. From here think about what set pieces of video, interviews, stories etc which you can use along the path and how you are going to connect or weave them together. Think about whether you want a common theme or thread running through the whole program. Will it be a single presenter who connects all the experiences of people together, or will it be a selection of presenters who interact and generate their own connections? Will your program follow a

geographic route around the county or is there some other reason for the journey? Consider why you are including something in the program and what it adds to the overall story you are telling.

Ask yourself “Where am I pointing my camera lens and from what angle?” but also consider point of view figuratively, as well: “How will the video’s point of view help me tell the story?” Some videos are like selfies and use a very subjective point of view to connect viewers to the story. For other videos you might want a more detached, less personal point of view. If you are recording young children do you want the camera to be standing over them or at their level? Does a musician, speaker or presenter always need to be standing right in the centre of the screen?

Although you are likely to be recording primarily musicians you must consider that what you are recording is both audio and visual. So, while a musician might be fantastic to listen to: are they interesting or exciting to watch? Is the video fun? While we are all aiming to showcase the best of Irish culture we do not necessarily have to do this in a formal or ‘stiff’ way. If you have a static camera pointing at a musician playing in a chair for half an hour the audience may begin to lose interest.

As with all performances – if the people performing appear to be enjoying it, having fun and engaging then the people watching will enjoy it, have fun and engage more. So, consider the style of recording.

# Technical Advice

These are some of the basic rules which you need to follow to make sure your recorded video footage is good and can be used fully in the final program.

1. Always shoot video in landscape – turn the phone sideways! While phones do have a vertical screen, computers, laptops, tablets, TVs all have a landscape screen, so you need to make sure all your video is recorded for this.
2. Use a tripod - If you have ever tried to record a set of tunes on your phone you will know that holding a phone (or camera) in the air for 3 minutes is incredibly difficult, and the more you try to hold it without moving the more you inevitably shake. This shake and movement are very noticeable when you watch the video back and will at the least make your recording look unprofessional, at worst could make people feel seasick. So, when recording always use a tripod or place the phone/camera on something so you are not trying to hold it still for any length of time. If you cannot use a tripod or place your camera/phone on a surface i.e., recording a moving shot. Then always hold your camera/phone with two hands. This will give you a much steadier shot and reduce the effect of trying to move the camera/phone too quickly.
3. If your camera allows you to adjust settings then always use the highest possible settings. Record in at least HD quality or better and if it is an option use the highest frame rate possible.
4. Always allow a few seconds of 'silence' at the start and end of your recording. If the person you are recording starts speaking or playing as soon as you press record you will not be able to edit or fade in the recording later, so you are limiting your options. Similarly, at the end of your recording make

sure your subject stops and stays still for a few seconds at the end of the recording. This will ensure you record the last notes as they release from the instrument (natural fade out) and also that the musician isn't seen running away as the video fades. Speak to the musicians/subject you are recording and explain about this before you start recording.

5. Do not use 'digital zoom'. Digital zoom on a camera or phone is not a real zoom. All the phone/camera does is crop off the edges of your recording and then expands it to make it look bigger. When it does this it reduces the quality of your final video. If you need to get closer to a subject to record them – move your camera.  
Optical zoom (where the lenses of the camera move) is fine to use as this does not reduce the quality of the recording – but again the best option is usually to use your feet and move position.
6. Focus – Smartphones will have some focusing capability. In the majority of circumstances this will be automatic but in most cases (iPhone and android) you can touch the screen to indicate where you want the phone camera to focus. This will help if you do have problems with light/dark areas of the shot or if you have musicians with dancing in front of them. Do not try and re-focus during a set of tunes or piece – set your focus at the beginning.
7. Keep your subject in the safe zone. When framing your subject make sure you leave space all around the person/people you are recording. If when it comes to editing you need to crop some video to make it fit the screen or if you want to apply some effects it is much easier to re-position or zoom into a piece of footage – if you didn't leave enough background space in the original recording you will not be able to zoom out. If you have left a reasonable space around your subject. This will also ensure you don't accidentally cut anyone's head off! If you need to apply image stabilizing effects to get rid of some camera wobble this also crops the videos edges.

8. Rehearse with your camera person. Your musicians/dancers/performers will all rehearse so they know when to start, when to come in and what they are doing. There is nothing worse than when a camera person is recording a musician and they suddenly notice a dancer has come on the other side of a stage, so they quickly move the camera over to the dancer only to find they are too close, and the dancers head or feet are cut off. The camera person recording should know when and where all elements of the recording are going to happen so they can be ready to capture the best of a performance.
9. Avoid unwanted product placement. Be aware that large logos. Or company branding on clothes or in the background of videos should be avoided. Firstly, this can be distracting to a viewer, but it could also give the impression that you are somehow endorsing, recommending or advertising one product over another. If you are recording in front of a bookshelf, consider which books you want people to know you have been reading!
10. Consider and avoid personal details accidentally being shown on camera. Watch out for names, addresses etc. which may be written down in the background of a scene. Avoid showing car number plates where possible.
11. Make sure your camera/phone is clean! Clean your lens as any dust or marks will make your video recording fuzzy.

The two most important factors in getting a good recording are your lighting and your acoustics. There are a multitude of add-ons, plug-ins and software programs which all aim to be able to 'fix' your recording after it has been made. None of them will give as good a result as getting it right during the recording. The more you can do to get a good recording, the less you will need to do in editing and the better your video will be.

## Light

It is very important that you have good lighting when recording video. This will be especially important if you are using a smartphone to record. If possible, natural light will give the best results when recording. Always do a test recording and look at it to make sure it looks good.

Avoid backlighting – Do not sit your subject in front of a window or strong light source. This will make the person you are recording look dark and silhouetted. Where possible (unless it's for artistic effect) your light source should be behind the camera illuminating the subject you are recording.

Be aware that some lights (LED, fluorescent strips, etc) do flicker. While we cannot see this normally it may show up on your recording due to the framerate of the camera. Always check a sample section of your video before recording a long section with people.

As well as making sure everything is clear on your video remember light not only defines your subject but also sets the mood or evokes emotion. If possible experiment with

## & Sound

The majority of your final video will undoubtedly feature music. What you are recording (speech, music, singing etc), where you are recording it and how many people you are recording will impact on how you should try and get the best sounding recording.

In many settings the built-in microphone on your camera/phone will work well. In other situations, you might choose to bring in more microphones and record/mix the audio separately.

If you are recording an individual, conversation, interview or speech you could use another smartphone placed close to the person to record the sound rather than using the sound recording from the video camera which might be several feet away.

Again, as with video the best quality and clarity you can get on your audio recording the easier the editing will be and the better the finished program. Spend the time thinking about the space you are recording in and your preparation it

light and be aware of where your main light source is. Look for where shadows fall and if you could use that to your advantage. Look at your recording and see if your lighting makes people look cold and grey or if it feels warm and inviting.

## Background or 'Set Design'

Think about your background. This will help with the professional look and feel of your recording. It can also affect how your subject looks on camera. Putting someone with pale complexion in front of a white/magnolia wall and shining a bright white light on them and you will find they disappear, and everything blends into one. Similarly, if you put someone in front of a very busy multi colour backdrop it will be distracting and act as catalogue taking away from your performer or presenter. Think about contrast between the subject you are recording and the background – again do a short test recording and see how it looks.

Generally speaking, people are not interested in seeing your radiator, washing up, or where a young child has scribbled on a wall, so consider what is behind your performers. Make it interesting, if you've taken time to get your musicians/dancers into a costume or uniform then why not take the time dress your set.

This doesn't mean you have to record everything on a traditional stage, you could be recording outside with some scenery, or in a more personal space but do watch what is going on around the performer in the video.

will save you hours of work trying to fix problems or having to rerecord things later on.

It doesn't matter if you are using the built-in microphone on the camera or if you have multiple mics setup, if you do not record good sound at the time then you will run into problems later on in editing the video. When selecting a venue for recording always consider the acoustics of the room or location. Listen to how the sound echoes, how the tone of instruments is affected by the room. The clearer the sound is when you are listening to it 'live' the better the sound recording will be.

There should be no background noise or interruptions in the recording. Every effort should be made to eliminate all (and potential) background noise. Doors closing, passing traffic, people whispering or moving about off camera, even fridges or electrical equipment could all be picked up on a recording and will be distracting in your final video.

It is a good idea to watch / listen back to your video clips on different devices or using headphones and different speakers. A nice video clip might look and sound good on your phone but can then look or sound terrible on a TV or computer monitor. Remember people will be watching your final program on all kinds and sizes of devices.



# Interview Technique:

There are several styles which can be employed if you intend to interview or have people talking on camera. You could decide to use a presenter, shown on camera talking to the person being interviewed in a conversational style (chat show) You could just show the person being interviewed as if they are talking directly to the camera without including the questions which are prompting them (talking heads), or you could be setup 'over the shoulder' of the interviewer so the viewer can see it's an interview, but the main focus is on the person being interviewed (news reporter in the street)

If you choose to go for a talking heads style with someone telling their story direct to the camera remember the questions you ask will not be included in the final program so the person on camera needs to start their speaking with full sentences.

For example: if you ask someone "what is your name?" they will likely respond just by saying their name. If this is then later edited to take out the question you are just left with someone saying a name without any context.

In this case when you ask, "What is your name?" the person responding should answer "My name is....." This way it still makes sense when the question is removed.

If you do intend to talk to people or interview them then let them know the questions in advance. Practice with them and go through the 'script' to make sure they are familiar with it. (record all the practices)

Erm - Um - Ah - So - You Know - Like - Right? - Well

When people are asked to speak 'on the spot' or become rattled (for example, when you point a camera at them) then we all start using these words, phrases or just noises as we think and search for the next word. You probably won't notice this when you are talking or interviewing someone, but it does become more obvious when you watch the video back again. Putting the person at ease, letting them rehearse what they are going to say and practicing with them will greatly help to reduce this. This will be the case not only for a person being interviewed but also if someone is introducing a set of tunes, or piece of performance.

Remember to choose a suitable setting and position for people to make sure they are comfortable being interviewed. You don't want someone getting tired because you made them stand up for two hours while you recorded an interview. Also, watch out for swaying. Many people when they are interviewed standing up on camera become nervous and this means they wave their arms more than usual, or move about, fidget or even start swaying around without noticing it. Encourage people to adopt a comfortable posture with feet evenly spread and weight evenly distributed.

Always try and ask open questions. These are questions which should lead to a conversation and create a flow in your interview. Avoid questions which can be answered with a simple yes or no.

# Final Tips:

- Plan as much as possible. Use lists, sketches, storyboards everything you can. It will help everything go smoother and help in describing / explaining what you are trying to achieve to the performers, parents and others involved in the project. The more people understand what you are trying to do the more they will help get there.
- Talk to people, explain what you are doing with the camera, microphones etc. explain why you are doing something and what you are trying to get from the recording. The more people understand what you are looking for, why you are doing something or and how good it will all be when it works the better.
- Record as much as possible. Record practices, rehearsals introductions and chats with people as you get ready to interview them. The best parts of your program will be the spontaneous and unplanned stories, ideas and situations so you need to have the camera on to capture this. If someone tells a good story in a really good way you can be sure when you say 'do that again now that I'm recording' you will not get the same story for the camera.
- Be patient with people. Cameras and recording make many people nervous, so they are more likely to make mistakes. Reassure people, don't rush and record something as many times as necessary until you

are happy with it and the subject is happy with it. Don't be afraid to diplomatically ask a musician, singer or dancer to do something again in the hope of making them look or sound even better.

- Everyone in the parish might know who Johnny the Piper is, making him famous to you, but you are making a program which will be seen by people from across Ireland, Britain, and as far as Japan, Australia and the Americas. It will also be watched by a range of people from the most die-hard traditional musician to those with only a passing interest in Irish culture and who may never have set foot on the island. So, don't assume anything, explain everything and keep in mind the wide and general audience who you are trying to get interested in your music, song, dance, county, language and culture.
- Almost all of the advice and suggestions mentioned above can be completely ignored if you want to put together something more unusual, artistic or individual. Remember the camera and video can be as creative as the thing you are presenting just make sure 'how you record' compliments 'what you record'.
- Make sure all words, dialogue etc is clear and at a good volume. Consider your program will be watched by people of all ages from all parts of the world. Your accent or local phrases might be perfectly normal in your county but unfamiliar to other people. Likewise, some of your audience may have hearing impairments or difficulties, how are you going to make sure they can also enjoy your story?
- Consider how you are using or incorporating the Irish language. You don't want to be saying everything twice (in Ireland and English) throughout the whole program but people watching may not have both languages and they will still need to follow what's going on.

