

Shooting Video

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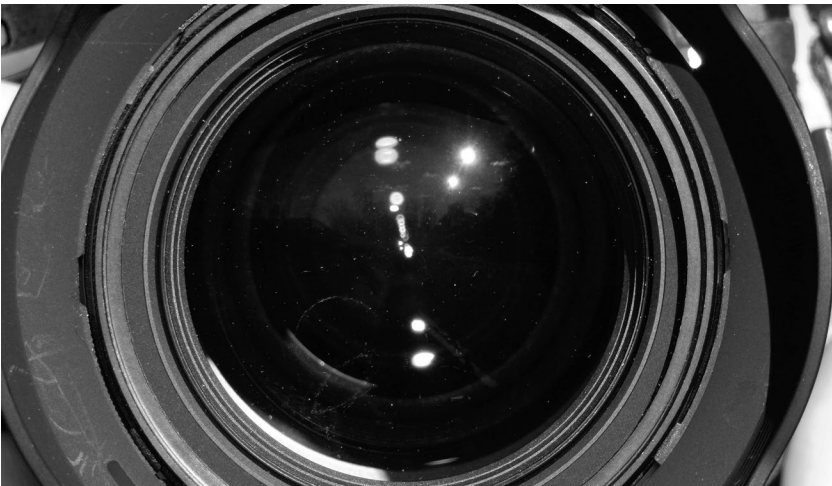


Figure 5.1

Credit: Matt Pearl

I get it.

For most would-be reporters learning the skills of solo video journalism, most of the profession seems like a giant Thanksgiving dinner of investigation, creativity, and excitement ... and shooting one's own story seems like a side of broccoli.

It's the vegetable you need to eat but hate to digest.

My job, in the next few chapters, is to prove it's really a nice slice of pumpkin pie.

(If you don't like pumpkin pie, substitute whichever Thanksgiving-related dessert you enjoy. I am partial to my mother's cranberry mini-muffins ...)

Before we get into the reasons why the best MMJs relish the opportunity to pick up the camera, let's list all the reasons – many of which make complete sense – why many MMJs abhor it:

Shooting is, physically, the most demanding part of the job. Journalism, for many, is a mental pursuit; it should not tax the body.

Shooting is mentally exhausting as well. It forces a one-person crew to balance both the technical steps of using a camera and the creative and information-gathering demands of developing a story.

Shooting is a blow to the ego. Particularly for solo video journalists in larger markets, it can be the source of mockery from traditional reporters and derision from traditional photographers. It is the part of the job that prevents them from striding around in expensive suits or dresses.

Shooting is a step with no finite conclusion. One cannot simply print a checklist of shots and collect them in the field. One must examine every situation and get as much footage as possible, never fully able to declare when the job is done.

Shooting alone almost always requires driving alone. Where a traditional reporter can work to develop his or her story – making phone calls, starting to write a script, or just relaxing in the passenger seat – an MMJ must keep two hands on the wheel.

Shooting is not fun.

Shooting is behind-the-scenes.

Shooting is not storytelling.

These reasons, for so many, can be summed up by one prevailing feeling:

Shooting is “not why I got into the business.”

I know the feeling. I grew up wanting to be a play-by-play announcer for the NFL. I required enough technical know-how to push RECORD on a tape recorder. When I decided instead to become a sports anchor, I found I would not be able to get a job in most small markets without being able and willing to use a camera. I had never considered learning to shoot, and I had never envisioned it as part of my career.

As I said at the start, I get it.

But I completely disagree.

As a solo video journalist, I expend the most mental and physical energy while shooting. It is easily the most taxing part of my day. But I relish the

chance to do it, and I understood long ago the advantages of being my own photographer:

Shooting gives me control. Traditional reporters return from the field with perhaps passing knowledge of what has been recorded, but I know exactly what I have captured, and I can often envision how I might write to and edit my footage.

Shooting offers creative freedom. I do not need to ask anyone's permission and convince a second person to take an aesthetic risk. If I want to capture a shot of a traffic light, I do not need to explain to a photographer why he or she should shoot it. I also do not need to apologize later if I don't use it.

Shooting streamlines the process. Throughout this book, you will hear me say how the best solo video journalists refuse to approach their jobs like assembly lines. We don't shoot, then write, then edit; we write and edit while we shoot, in a way that can be more difficult for traditional crews.

Shooting can be thrilling. I love the triumph of rolling on a beautiful moment, sensing in progress the majesty of what I am recording.

I will not lie and say shooting makes an MMJ's job easier. It does not. But it does make an MMJ's job far more empowering.

Shooting is fun.

Shooting is not just a behind-the-scenes job.

Shooting IS storytelling.



Anne Herbst does not label herself as a shooter.

She does not label herself as anything.

"I am definitely not a journalist to be put in any sort of box," says the Director of Visual Journalism at Denver's NBC affiliate, KUSA-TV.

Herbst (Figure 5.2) developed long ago a reputation as one of the top solo video journalists in the country. She mentors numerous younger MMJs and regularly speaks on the subject at conferences. But she refuses to fly the flag for one-person operations.

She would rather fly it for versatility.

"I think [working solo] makes me a better teammate when I'm on a team," she says. "I think it makes me a better employee. I do it to challenge myself. I do it because it's fun. I do it because it's a little different."

"But," she says, "I don't wear this as a badge of honor at all. It's just something that I do."

She happens to do it extremely well.



Figure 5.2 Anne Herbst.

Credit: Steve Gray

Herbst entered journalism school with the goal of reporting for a newspaper. When a professor told her she was better at shooting video, she re-routed and received an internship at KUSA.

“That place turned it around for me,” she says. “I never wanted to do TV. I had no interest in TV. But they convinced me: ‘You can write, but you can also shoot and do artistic stuff.’”

Throughout her career, Herbst has nourished those twin passions – as well as a third. Herbst founded the NPPA’s Women in Visual Journalism conference and recently took over its Advanced Storytelling Workshop. She regularly provides critiques for younger MMJs – particularly women, who make up a large portion of the solo community but too infrequently receive speaking roles at conferences.

“People get all freaked out,” Herbst says, “like, ‘You’re carrying that stuff all by yourself.’ Conferences are weighted heavily towards men, and there needs to be a female perspective.”

And what is Herbst’s perspective on the one-person work she sees? She can often tell something’s missing.

“A lot of young MMJs want to be reporters,” Herbst says. “They don’t want to be photographers. And I can really see it. They aren’t able to get great moments to write great stories, because they don’t really care about it. And you miss a lot of great stuff if that’s your motivation.”

But when you get that great stuff? You leave with a satisfied smile.

“It’s all yours, and it feels so good,” she says. “You feel really accomplished. There are some really tiring, exhausting things about being an MMJ, but there are some great things.”

Before we delve into those great things, let’s master the techniques that provide a foundation.

Understanding the Basics

The “foundation,” in this case, does not refer to the true foundations of shooting: how to focus, zoom, open and close the iris, white balance, and press RECORD.

In this case, it refers to the essential building blocks of visual storytelling. Far too often, solo video journalists fail to use them.

In fact, if I had to point to one thing missing from most stories by young one-woman and one-man bands, I would not need long to determine my answer:

Sequences.

Learn to properly shoot and then edit sequences, and you will immediately leap forward as a storyteller.

It’s a simple step. It involves getting shots of the same subject or action from multiple zoom lengths. Shots typically fall into one of three aptly-named categories:

- **Wide shots:** These are your establishing shots, which allow you to set the scene and allow your viewer to get a sense of, physically, where your story takes place.
- **Medium shots:** These are your substantive shots, zoomed close enough to capture your subject but wide enough to indicate some distance.
- **Tight shots:** These are your dramatic shots, where you show little else but a specific item or portion of your subject.

How does this work in practice? Let’s say you are filming a conversation between two people on the street. The wide shot would capture the people in the context of the street; the medium shot would show the people themselves, perhaps from the waist up; and the tight shot would focus on one person’s face (for another example, see Figures 5.3, 5.4 and 5.5).

How does this improve your storytelling? Most importantly, it establishes continuity. You must always keep in mind that a viewer has not experienced your story like you have. You might spend several hours on a shoot and



Figures 5.3, 5.4 and 5.5 Ideally your story will be about something more active than flowers in the park.

Credit: Matt Pearl

capture 30 minutes of video, but a viewer will only see 90 seconds of it, often compressed into 20 or 30 actual shots. That means you must constantly, within your story, reestablish its location and provide a clear path for your audience to follow.

From a visual sense, sequences provide that path. You can edit them in various ways – start with a wide shot and follow with a medium and several tights, or start with a tight shot and then back up with a wide – but by using them you create a far more digestible story.

You also, as a solo act, make your job much easier.

“You’re shooting sequences because they are really easy to edit together,” says Herbst. “I make sure I get enough wides and tights. Mediums are great, but wides and tights will get you around a lot of stuff. You want those shots to help get you out of jams.”

Beyond that, a proper sequence can provide triple or quadruple the bang for your photographic buck. Let’s say you use, in a typical story, 30 shots. Without sequences, you must find and capture a unique moment for each

of those shots; that means 30 moments. With sequences, you can capture the same moment with three shots from different distances or zoom lengths. That means you only need to find ten unique moments.

The numbers speak the truth: sequences are golden.

Even more golden? Using a tripod.

Younger MMJs often despise the tripod. It is bulky, difficult to carry, and seemingly unnecessary. After all, one does not need a tripod to record video. One only requires a camera.

But one almost always needs a tripod to record steady video.

A tripod is, at its most fundamental level, the difference between TV news and home movies. It enables stable, balanced video that can rarely be achieved without one. Especially when getting shots that require a heavy zoom, a photographer benefits greatly from having a firm base on which to plant the camera.

“Mostly I shoot on a tripod,” Herbst says. “If I move, I carry the whole thing attached. I do it all the time. It’s better to be on the tripod all the time than on the ground.”

I didn’t always feel that way.

During my junior year of college, I received a three-month internship at KELO-TV, the top-rated station in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. I often shot sports, where I never used a tripod because I needed to capture fast-moving action, but the assignment editors would occasionally ask me to shoot a news story. One wintry weekend, they sent me to the scene of a car accident on an icy highway. I arrived and got out of my news van, only to get pelted by repeated blasts of wind and snow. I could barely keep my balance. I decided, instead of using two hands to carry both the camera and tripod, I would take only the camera and leave my left hand free to potentially break a fall.

I did not fall, but I did not record anything close to usable video.

That night KELO-TV aired a shaky, potentially seasickness-inducing mess. At the next day’s morning meeting, while discussing a potential follow-up piece, the chief photographer belted two sentences that stung so much I remember them today:

“Hey, do we have any good video of that? Any tripod-ed video?”

Everyone got quiet. My face got red.

No one in the meeting stood up for me. Perhaps the chief had crossed the line by humiliating an intern, but he was not wrong. And I have never forgotten his lesson. You can spare yourself a similar one by getting comfortable with your tripod. It’s true that many documentaries and TV shows today rely on footage shot without one, but their photographers typically use rigs and stabilizers that most broadcast journalists don’t possess. Particularly in the

early stages of your career, you can eliminate an enormous variable – the potential shakiness of a shot – by taking a few extra seconds to set up your sticks.

You can also help yourself enormously by knowing your gear as well as possible. You should “feel like the camera is a part of your body,” Herbst says.

Why?

“The technical part of it is really daunting for a lot of people. If there’s a technical glitch, I need to know how to fix it and not get all freaked out in front of the people I’m interviewing. I need to be able to fix it while I’m talking to them about their dog. I need to be able to multi-task, fix my gear, and have a chat with these people so they don’t feel like I’m wasting their time.”

On a theoretical level, most photographers understand they will likely face the occasional technical hiccup, from a static-filled microphone signal, to a dead battery, to a loose tripod leg.

When such hiccups occur, the best photographers – and, thus, the best MMJs – know how to troubleshoot with composure.

That comes by understanding your equipment – and, sadly, learning from experience. I have reached a point where I have faced and conquered virtually every issue that can arise in the field. When one happens now, I can rely on steps that have worked in the past.

If you have not reached that point, you can at least remember to field adversity with serenity.

Capturing People

Let’s go back a few paragraphs to an example worthy of elaboration.

When Herbst faces a technical glitch, she says, she must “be able to fix it while I’m talking to [the people I’m interviewing] about their dog.”

The underlying point? A journalist must be able to do her or his job while calling as little attention to it as possible.

“It’s everyone’s goal, right?” says Herbst. “Just forget that we’re here.’ They can’t just forget that we’re here.”

They also cannot forget about the camera that can potentially capture their every move and immortalize it on television. The camera, in a fundamental way, serves as a major barrier to authenticity – which is, of course, all a journalist really wants.

In a traditional news crew, the reporter can often distract people from the photographer’s actions. Some of the best reporters I know are also the most

disarming. They connect with their interview subjects seemingly immediately, and they enable those subjects to become comfortable with being on camera. The photographer can then capture those coveted authentic moments that elevate a story.

A one-person crew must juggle both jobs, which often requires juggling multiple personalities: the focused journalist and the empathetic human being.

That means avoiding the pitfalls that make an already artificial situation seem more so.

Step 1 (and it is worthy of all caps): NO STAGING!

“I think the biggest piece of advice is to not tell anyone what to do,” says Herbst. “I never ask anyone to stop, and I never ask anyone to slow down.” Why? “You’re not a director. You’re a journalist.”

But when a situation develops quickly or feels overwhelming, a frazzled shooter can lose sight of that. He or she may attempt to slow things down by trying to guide the situation. That simply does not work, from either an ethical sense or a storytelling one.

Of course, a photographer often encounters gray areas. For example, perhaps you have just been assigned to cover a mother who says her son was wrongly suspended for fighting in school. You call the mother, who agrees to an interview at home. You arrive and conduct the interview (a process we will cover in full in the next chapter), but you cannot leave with just that. You must shoot B-roll, or footage to show under your tracked audio.

What should you do? You cannot simply point your camera and start rolling, because you will only obtain B-roll of a dumbfounded mother, staring at you with a look that says, “Are you serious?”

Should you stage something?

Not exactly.

But you can establish potential B-roll situations before you arrive and then allow your subjects to execute them.

“I’ll get to know a little bit about them before I get there,” says Herbst. “I try to know what I’m in for. I’m always doing homework on people, if that makes sense.”

And if, during that homework, Herbst discovers an activity germane to her piece, she will tell her interviewees she wishes to capture it.

For example, she once told the story of a husband, Jack Cohen, who donated part of his liver to his wife, Ruth. Talking with them on the phone, Herbst struggled to figure out a possibility for B-roll ... until she learned how Jack pushed wheelchair-bound Ruth on daily walks around the block. She jumped at the opportunity and asked Ruth and Jack when they would walk next.

That became a precious supply of B-roll when Herbst sat down to edit.

“That story is so visually poor,” she says, “but it’s one of my favorites, because I was able to, as a one-man band, jump through so many freaking hoops to get that thing done.”

One hoop that often seems daunting is obtaining great audio from your interview subjects. Again, I am not referring to generating responses during a formal interview setting; I will cover that in Chapter 6. I am focusing specifically on B-roll situations, which can often produce tremendous nuggets of sound.

Those nuggets come far more easily when you provide your interviewee with a wireless lavalier microphone.

Considering how many people freeze up around a camera, a solo video journalist might expect a similar response to wearing a wireless microphone. And one might receive that response ... at first.

“When you convince someone to do an interview, the mic is so invasive,” Herbst says. “But once you get it on [the person], then it’s fine! Then it’s just a conversation.”

Or, more bluntly, “Most people forget about it the minute you stop shoving the microphone in their butt pocket.”

This, in my experience, is quite true. I cannot tell you how many times I have needed, at the end of a shoot, to remind my subject that she or he is still wearing a microphone. Today’s wireless mics weigh very little and feel surprisingly natural. My advice? Follow the famous slogan for Ron Popeil’s Showtime Rotisserie: set it and forget it.

Then make sure you hear the results by wearing headphones when you shoot. You want to be aware of every sound imprinted on your memory card, and you will not always be in a position to hear with your ears, particularly as you walk away for wider shots.

I once told the story of William Lowary, a rock climber who took part in the World Championships of Paraclimbing. William is blind, and when I came over to his home for our first shoot, he seemed visibly tentative. At one point, he leaned toward his mother and whispered something I would not have heard without headphones:

“It’s very weird,” William said, “having someone film me.”

That moment – an endearing, sweet two seconds that helped introduce William’s personality – found a fitting home at the start of my story.

The best one-person crews know how to establish an environment where those moments happen naturally. They understand the Golden Rule of solo shooting, articulated beautifully by Herbst:

“Just act like a normal human being. Don’t act all reporter-ly.”

Gathering Material

Of course, photographers should still think all reporter-ly. They might not conduct the interviews or write the story, but the best ones communicate with their reporters about collecting video that fits the yet-to-be-written script.

An MMJ must do this internally ... and that's a major advantage.

Because television relies on strong visuals, a solo video journalist must focus on both gathering information and obtaining B-roll that fits with it. This means, most importantly, shooting with a purpose: seeking out compelling shots that advance the story.

I advocated in Chapter 1 for taking a brief chunk of time, after receiving one's assignment, to brainstorm it: Why does this story matter? What video do I need to make that point to the viewer? How can I go beyond the norm?

I thus arrive at my shoot with a greater sense of focus – an important quality when dealing with the circus of uncertainty that comes with the newsgathering process. I try to avoid collecting shots that show no immediate connection to my story.

On the flip side, when I detect a shot that could fit perfectly, I will devote massive amounts of energy – and sometimes time – to ensure I get it right (Figure 5.6).



Figure 5.6 For the right story, this shot could be worth a five-minute wait.

Credit: Matt Pearl

Herbst does the same thing. I believe it's her defining trait as a photojournalist: her willingness to wait for that perfect moment if she senses it might be worth it.

"I have waited five minutes for a bird to fly up off of a post," she says.

"I am not afraid to burn space, if I have a little time, to get that moment. You need that memorable stuff in your story ... not that the bird flying off the post is memorable, but maybe it's what the bird was reacting to!"

"But," she adds, "while I'm waiting for the bird to fly away, as a one-man band, I'm writing; I'm multi-tasking."

Exactly. You cannot shoot with purpose unless you think, while shooting, about your writing. Similar to how one captures individual shots with the expectation of editing them later into a sequence, one must also look for B-roll that matches a potential script. You never want to write a story before you shoot it; you should approach each piece with an open mind and willingness to learn. But you can certainly brainstorm, both in advance and during a shoot. You can think of potential lines or turns of phrase, and you can figure out ways in the field to represent them visually.

You can also make notes, both mentally and physically, of potential shots and sound bites you want to include.

"When I get a sound bite that I like, I just flip up bars," says Herbst, referring to a function common on most cameras that records a rainbow of color bars and a screechy tone. That way, when she looks later through a sea of B-roll and interviews, she can quickly identify those pivotal sound bites. Other journalists use a far lower-tech option: they put one of their hands over the lens so, after they record a moment they like, they follow it with nothing but black. Others use their phones: they snap a photo of their viewfinder with the shot in question, and, if time allows, post it on social media – one way of engaging their digital audience while their story is still forming.

"I'm doing everything on the fly," says Herbst. "Usually the story is almost written by the time I get back to the station."

This is especially true if she is able to capture great audio, and not just from people.

Every so often, I will hear a photographer expound, "Great audio is even more important than great video." I don't know if I fully believe that; one cannot tell a story without video, making it, in my mind, more essential. But I definitely understand the thinking.

Audio is what allows a storyteller to fully immerse a viewer in a story's environment. A photographer must, in the field, seek two types of audio: general, atmospheric sound that goes under the reporter's tracks, and specific

natural bursts that fit between those tracks and sound bites. Those bursts are usually called NAT pops.

Obtaining atmospheric sound is relatively easy: just make sure your camera or shotgun microphone is picking up audio when you shoot. Then, when you edit, you can lay down a video clip at the same time as its corresponding audio.

Finding NAT pops is tougher – and a frequently forgotten task by photographers who don't think to do it.

What constitutes a NAT pop? It can be anything short, grabbing, and loud. Here is a quick list of examples you have probably heard, if not on the news then in the movies:

- The whirr of a car driving down the street
- The buzz of a chainsaw cutting through a fallen tree
- The snap of a baseball into a catcher's mitt
- The implosion of a building
- The explosion of a firework
- The explosion of a gas tank
- The explosion of anything.

The next time you find yourself in public, set aside a minute to stand still and listen for NAT pops. You will probably hear half a dozen.

Keep that mindset on a shoot, and you can capture some great moments.

If I notice a NAT pop worth getting, I try to put a wireless microphone as close as possible to the source of the sound. This enables me to isolate that sound, which is critical in noisy environments.

I needed this technique on a shoot in 2014, at the Winter Olympics in Sochi.

I was reporting about the most popular structure in the central village: a larger-than-life-size construction of the Olympic rings. A giant line of visitors would gather every day around the rings, all ready to pose for photos. Spectators would step up on the structure's base, always making the same loud noise with their shoes:

STOMP, STOMP.

I knew I wanted to capture that sound.

I also knew I could not do so with my shotgun microphone.

Surrounding the rings were numerous speakers, all blaring the latest hits of Top 40 radio. I could not have snared the STOMP, STOMP without a large helping of Nicki Minaj lyrics ... unless I got right next to it.

I tucked my lavalier microphone on the corner of the base, then used my headphones to make sure I picked up the sound I wanted. Sure enough, people continued to stomp, and I captured it.

When using any of these techniques, I think about one overarching goal: capturing moments that viewers will remember.

“How do I recognize a moment?” says Herbst. “It makes me feel something.”

Watch any story that moves you, and you will likely be able to pick out the moments. Shoot any story worth telling, and you should notice them in the field. Your job, then, is to spot them and get video.

When talking with Herbst, she brought up a story she shot about a legitimate concern for many Coloradans:

Bears.

Specifically, bears coming too close to people’s homes, thanks to easy access to their trash cans.

Herbst produced a story about companies that sold bear-proof trash cans and tested them with actual bears. She went to a facility and shot one of these tests, snaring a great moment where a bear (in a glass cage, mind you) arrived upon a trash can and absolutely mauled it.

“I only had 12 minutes to get that bear decimating that trash can,” she recalls. “So I knew, ‘I have to stay on top of my game here.’”

That meant a few things:

- Holding shots longer to fully capture the standout moments.
- Getting a series of shots from multiple zoom lengths, so she could show the moments as sequences in the edited story.
- Anticipating how the decimation might unfold – and staying alert for actions that defied her expectations.

Of course, moments are not always so predictable.

“I miss stuff a lot,” says Herbst with a laugh. “You’re gonna miss stuff. You’re gonna miss moments. But once you get the moment you love – that happens within frame – you can allow yourself to move on.”

And you can put together a story that’s far more memorable.

Shooting with Smarts

But you also need to shoot the video that gets you from Point A to Point B, or Moment A to Moment B.

Sometimes it doesn't need to be video you shot ... or video, period.

A solo video journalist should think of every available visual option to help properly tell a story, and that sometimes means gathering viewer-generated photos and video. I have used this strategy on countless pieces, from day turns to long-form packages.

I can think of no better example than a story about a powerful pair of moments at a Little League baseball game.

A viewer had written us about Andrew Williams, an 11-year-old who loved the sport of baseball, largely because of his father. Greg Williams had served as his children's coach and had always made time to play catch in the yard. The previous summer, Greg had been diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease, or ALS. He had held on for nearly a year but passed away June 3rd, less than two weeks before Father's Day.

On that meaningful holiday, Andrew played in a Little League game and did something far beyond the norm:

He hit two home runs ... in honor of his dad.

When I read about Andrew's homers, I felt chills. I still get chills when I think about it today. I produced a story that won numerous honors, from a Southeast Regional Emmy to a Regional Edward R. Murrow Award to an NPPA Best of Photojournalism Award.

But I could not have told such a poignant story if I had not obtained video of the home runs.

Before I set up any interviews for Andrew's story, I focused on tracking down a usable recording. So many people shoot video with their cell phones, especially at their children's sporting events, and I assumed I could find a clip of Andrew's homers if I asked enough people.

I assumed right, and I got the video I needed.

But I also concentrated on obtaining photos, namely of Andrew's father. For obvious reasons, I would not be able to show any present-day video of Greg, but I knew his family would likely possess numerous snapshots – both by himself and with his wife and kids. Those photos proved critical in thoroughly telling the Williams' story.

I take these steps for not just potential award-winners but virtually every story I do. I constantly inquire about photos to help fill the gaps in my stories, and I often use those photos – even ones that don't make the final story – in posts on Facebook and Instagram. I highly recommend it.

I also recommend seeking and shooting cutaways, which Herbst calls by a different name.

"I shoot 10 to 15 'cover-my-ass' shots," she says: "tight shots that will get me out of any sort of jam. They always have something to do with the story,

but they're not the most active shots. They are the shots that will save my butt in the end."

You might reasonably wonder why your butt might need saving. As with many of the techniques in this chapter, this one deals with continuity.

While you largely want to spray your story with sequences, you will likely reach several points while editing where you simply need to fill a hole. For example, you cannot cut from a medium shot of a police chief to another medium shot of the chief; doing so will break the continuity of your police-based story.

We call that a "jump cut," because you have made an edit that clearly jumps ahead or behind in time.

Here is where you can reach for a cutaway, which looks exactly as it sounds: it is a shot away from the action, usually on the tighter side, that allows you to move forward in your story without breaking the space-time continuum. For your police story, a cutaway might be a super-tight shot of the chief's badge or the flashing lights of his or her patrol car.

When Herbst mentions the need to capture 10–15 of these, she emphasizes another key philosophy of shooting: overshoot, don't undershoot. I have been shooting my own stories for nearly two decades, but I can only recall a handful of packages where I did not, at some point while editing, wish I had shot more B-roll.

You can almost never shoot too much. You must eventually cut yourself off in order to set out on the rest of your day, but you should use whatever time you can to fill your visual cup with footage.

The Final Foundations

I close this chapter with two critical pieces of advice.

First and foremost, be safe. The process of shooting a story can occasionally place journalists in potentially dangerous situations, none of which should be approached without understanding the risks and, if necessary, raising one's voice.

"Safety is huge," Herbst says, particularly for those who work alone. "It's a little terrifying to go out at midnight on a freaking gang shooting. It's terrifying for anybody!"

Solo video journalists face the unenviable task of carrying a bunch of heavy, delicate, expensive gear, with no one nearby to call 911 in case of an emergency. I have never been shy about speaking up when I feel I am being sent to an abnormally unsafe situation. I encourage all one-person crews to take similar stances.

“I’ve had some threatening stuff happen when I’m out by myself,” Herbst says, “and I get in my car and I leave.” Herbst is a renowned photojournalist who routinely expends extra effort for her stories, but she does not risk her life for them. She stresses this point constantly with female MMJs, who, she says, may feel an extra sense of danger in certain situations.

Regardless of gender, you should never be afraid to say you’re afraid.

You should also never be afraid to take chances and be creative.

Throughout this chapter I have explored a variety of techniques. Nearly all can make your story better, but they can also make it stale and boring without compelling subjects and innovative vision. The best photographers do not just follow the rules; they build upon them and bend them. When the right moment strikes, they even break them.

Remember, this is the fun part! This is where you get to set the tone for your story’s appearance, and you are unbound in how you do it. Solo video journalists who embrace the aesthetic nature of the job – shooting from different angles, using multiple (and super-small) cameras, finding creative ways to capture a subject – enjoy themselves far more. They relish the chance to seize visual control from start to finish, and they find ways to elevate each story with a unique approach.

“It’s easier to be lazy when you’re by yourself,” says Herbst. “But it’s also easier to go overboard.”

Do it.

Go overboard ... to a point, of course. Leave room for writing, editing, posting, and more.

But don’t look at shooting as a necessary evil. Appreciate the opportunity, and take advantage of the power it provides.