



# **HUMAN POSTCARDS WORKSHOP**

**BY NORA JACCAUD**



***Remember what you want to get out of the film: A powerful true story, lesson or statement that can resonate with others through its personal and universal tone.***

## **CHOOSE YOUR SUBJECT**

I recommend choosing a subject close to your heart. You should be curious about your subject and genuinely want to learn more about this person through the process of filmmaking. Documentary making is just a passport to be curious and discover worlds outside of yours. This eagerness to discover will allow you to engage much deeper with the person and will increase your chances of making a good film.

## **THE FILMING**

TURN EVERYONE'S PHONES OFF

OBSERVE THE CONTEXT AND THE ACTION AROUND CLOSLY

Ask the contributor about their action and what they will do so you get a sense of the movements to come. Then, tell the contributor he/she can forget about you and just keep doing what they usually do. Make yourself part of the décor. Let them forget about your presence. Don't interact too much with him or her during the filming. Try to be a fly on the wall.

## ONE PERSON AT A TIME

I always try to film one person at a time, as the voice over could be misleading later in the final edit. You might not know who is talking if two people appear on the screen.

## EDIT IN YOUR MIND WHILE YOU FILM

Keep an eye on some actions that could be picked up from different angles in the edit. Maybe ask the contributor to repeat some actions at the end of the filming if you think it is necessary.

For example : standing up from the chair, crossing the room, lifting something again if you filmed it from a certain angle...

## SOUND IS VERY IMPORTANT

Be silent, don't walk heavily and have non-noisy shoes. Make sure to have the best sound recording system you can get. If you can't get a good sound system, I would recommend using music in your edit. You should never underestimate the importance of the quality of sound. Get some ambient sound at the end or beginning of the shoot. This will be helpful later during post production.

## FRAMING AND COMPOSITION

Start wide and get slowly closer.

- Context Shot: Get the person and the action/activity together in the best possible light and composition.
- Mid Shot: Film half of the person. Concentrate on the body language while eliminating distracting elements of the background.
- Close up of the Face: facial features and expression is more important than anything else. Just zoom in or move in closer and get the face, the eyes, etc.
- Close up of the Action: Get creative close ups, hopefully from different angles of the activity itself. Hands are very important to film.
- Over the shoulder Shot: Ask the subject to continue doing what they are doing and get another angle from behind or over the shoulder. If that is not practical get a side shot but in this case keep in mind whether it will cut well with the other shots. The OTS will most likely cut well in the edit.
- Cut Aways/Inserts: Short controlled shots from different angles of different objects in the room. Always ask yourself if it is emotionally relevant to the story.
- Get creative: At this stage you have enough for a film, get creative and have fun! Try different angles... Play with the light, flares, etc.
- The Environment: Shots of the environment.



## BASIC CAMERA MOVES

- Tripod/monopod shot – the camera is still and observes the subject.
- Pan – camera moving horizontally to the left or right
- Tilt – Camera moving up or down on its vertical axes.
- Tracking shot – follow the movement with your gimbal for instance.

## CAMERA ANGLES

- Eye level – camera points straight ahead. Intention is to be objective.
- Low angle – camera points up from a lower angle. It makes the subject dominating.
- High angle – camera points down from a higher angle. It makes the subject diminutive.
- Over the shoulder (OTS)

## RELEASE FORMS

Make sure to have the contributor sign a release form. I can share with you the universal one I use. It is important to have a written official proof of consent from your contributor. If you ever sell your film or present it in a festival you might need this paper



## BASKET OF TIPS

- If you have the possibility, move the action towards a nice spot of natural light (a window for example). Use the natural light you have around you.
- Watch out for flicker with some lights. Check shutter speed.
- Sunset and sunrise are the best times for shooting / Early morning and late afternoon are the golden hours just like for photography.
- Back up your footage on two hard drives minimum.
- Format your SD card before you start filming.
- For stability hold the camera close to your body.
- Check your batteries are all fully charged and all your gear is ready to perform the night before your shoot.
- When you are close to ending your shoot make a mental check list you have all the shots that could be useful for your edit.
- Film for at least 6 seconds any shot. First and last second will be shaky because of the button pressing.
- Don't be afraid to hold a shot for longer, let things happen, let the contributor relax and forget about you. If you move to often you make yourself too visible.

## THE INTERVIEW

### CREATE SILENCE:

- Find a quiet place for the interview.
- Turn off any sounds coming from electrical devices such as a computer, a fridge...
- Turn off your phone and ask your contributor to do the same.

### WATER & COMFORT

Prepare a glass of water for you and the interviewee because a lot of people have a dry mouth and it affects the way they sound. Make sure the interviewee is comfortable.

### BE YOURSELF COMFORTABLE AND POSITIVE

Emotional mirroring also affects interviewing. That means that if you're warm and positive, your subject will likely respond in a similar manner; if you're stressed and rushing, your subject will likely close up. Whatever you do sets a tone.

## YOUR STATE OF MIND: BE PRESENT

- You must invest your concentration, interest, empathy and body language in the interview time. You must be present.
- Make it feel like a conversation instead of an interview.
- Start with questions that have nothing to do with the interview. Talk about sport, fashion, kids, whatever – ask them open ended questions. Don't interrupt and listen.
- Make your contributor feel at ease, he or she is the one who might be the most nervous and you have to make them feel at ease. Just show how curious you are about them... Show interest and mimic their body language at first. Then take a more relaxed pose and you will see they will also relax.

## GIVE COMPLIMENTS

Tell people they look or sound good. They need to be reassured at this vulnerable moment.

## THE WORD “FEEL”

One good question to ask several times is, “How did that make you feel?” or “What did that feel like?” Feel is a good word that usually makes people more comfortable expressing their emotions.



## QUESTION TYPE

Get in the habit of asking questions that demand a complete answer -- questions that are vague, yet going in a specific direction. I don't write down questions. If you are interested and curious, the questions will come automatically. If you feel blocked, always isolate the topic being discussed, and ask (not loudly!):

- How
- What
- Why
- When
- Where
- Which
- Who

## DON'T MAKE SOUNDS

Avoid making any sounds during an interview, even laughs. Always convey your emotions and attention to the interview by smiling, nodding, looking the interviewee in the eyes.

## INSTRUCTIONS TO THE INTERVIEWEE

Tell the interviewee to remember to rephrase your question in his/her answer.  
ex : what's your favorite color? My favorite color is blue.

Another technique is to go in with your own observations to seed the interviewee's answers: "I'm really interested to know...", "Wow, it must have been exciting to..."

## DON'T RUSH THROUGH AWKWARD PAUSES.

Don't be afraid of silence. Some people or moments need that silence. If the person takes time to think, be present and attentive but not expectative. Give the impression you have all the time in the world.

## REVISIT IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

Don't be afraid to revisit certain question later in the interview. Even if the first answer was good, I've found that there's often a point in an interview when the subject starts getting more engaged, excited or emotional, when that happens you can get some real gold by going back to an important question that had a good but not great response.





## SOUND BITES

Towards the end of the conversation, have the contributor repeat some words or sentence you feel you might need during the edit. For example, if the contributor talks at length about a subject but forgot to introduce it, then ask him/her to do so in a way that will be easy to edit together in post. This is a moment you have to prepare for during the entire conversation, make mental notes.

Get the contributor to introduce him/her self with a full sentence.

*Ex: I am Nora Jaccaud, I'm a documentary filmmaker.*

## DON'T STOP RECORDING WHEN THE INTERVIEW IS "OVER"

Especially when you have someone who is nervous and never got quite comfortable with the interview. When you're done with your official questions, say "OK, that's the end of the interview." Make sure your device continues to record at this point because often the conversation will continue. Psychologically, the person no longer feels the "pressure" of the interview and will loosen up.

## END WITH COMPLIMENTS

Make sure your contributor leaves the conversation feeling very good about this experience. Compliment her/him about the answers, topics....



## POSSIBLE QUESTION SEQUENCE

Introduction (at the beginning and end of the interview) :

- Full Name- Occupation - Location ( ex : I am \*\*\*, \*\*\* at \*\*\*)
- Topic Questions : How are you today? What has been on your mind today?
- Tell me how you started \*\*\* / Tell me about the first time you \*\*\*
- What aspects of your personality does it nurture? / What influence \*\*\* had on your life?
- Tell me how \*\*\* makes you feel? / What is it about \*\*\* that makes your heart sing? ( What are you passionate about?)
- Tell me about your strengths in \*\*\* and how it has a positive impact on other aspects of your life? / What ability/aptitude does \*\*\* develops in you?
- Tell me something most people don't know about \*\*\* / you / your job / your condition
- Tell me what important lesson you learned through \*\*\*
- Tell me about a time your heart raced doing \*\*\* / Tell me about a happy memory related to \*\*\*
- How would you describe yourself?
- Is there anything you would like to add?

Life Questions in the Style of Human Postcards:

- Tell me what you are going through at the moment?
- What do you dream of?
- What are you the most proud of ? / What's the most important thing you learned in life ? How did you learn it?
- Tell me about the most incredible moment in your life so far. / What's the most beautiful thing that happened in you life ?
- If you had to tell the story of your life, where would you start? what milestones would you mention? / What are the key events, the turning points of your life?
- What would you like to be remembered for?
- What are your best memories, the happiest periods in your life? What aspects of your personalities did they nurture?
- What is one challenge you have faced recently? ... / Could you tell me how this challenge could be an opportunity to learn something? / Tell me about the biggest challenge you have faced in your life.
- What do you tell yourself when you go through hard times?
- If you could live your life again, what would you do differently?

More difficult question:

- What makes us human?

## BACK UP

Remember to organize and back up your footage on at least two hard drives.

Name your folder : Date\_City\_Name

Create the following folders:

- Video
- Sound
- Release Form
- Pictures

## EDITING

### EDITING SOFTWARE

It doesn't matter what program you use, as long as you feel comfortable with it.

### DE-RUSH THE INTERVIEW

During this process, you will get a sense of which direction you will take with the portrait and the image editing will adjust accordingly.

Organise the interview in different topics and segments. Use colors in your editing program to help you.

Take notes.

### DE-RUSH IMAGES

Just like in the voice editing process, I love to use my own color scheme to organize my shots. For example : I colour in green all the cut-aways and in Mango my favourite shots.



## EDIT

- Start editing and re-arranging sound bites in a way to tell a complete story without the need for a narrator. Often this requires that you assemble sound bites in a way that's quite different from the way they were told by the contributor. However never go away from the ideas and spirit of your contributor. You only need to rearrange words and sentences to create the form not the substance. The point of this slicing is to shorten the sentence and get the point across succinctly without presenting a possibly rambling or stretched out answer. Be true to the intent and your subject.
- Start to cut your images to the sound and find your film. This process is personal and the moment where you are going to express your artistic voice the most.
- Some editors like to start by showing the subject right at the beginning, others like to show the context of the film first, I personally like to show an intriguing detail of the subject. Some hands or gestures that will draw in the attention of the viewer. It is important to know that the first three seconds of a film will determine if people stay and watch your content or if they decide to scroll down or swipe away. I made the mistake with my original Human Postcards to start with the titles on black. I have learned now the importance of the first image. Sometimes a title can also help to create attraction.
- If you decide to edit to music, I recommend starting with the choice of your music before anything else.
- I recommend cutting on actions. It will give a smoother feel to the film.





## MUSIC

Here are a few website with free music for your film:

- <https://mobygratis.com>
- <https://musopen.org>
- <http://freemusicarchive.org>

## COLOR CORRECTION & POST PRODUCTION

- White Balance: Check your white balance on each shot and match shots when needed.
- Exposure: Check your exposure.
- Stabilize your shots in post-production

## TITELING

- Be succinct. If you write a long, rambling title, your video might get ignored. Long titles tend to get cut off in search results. A good title is vivid and descriptive without taking up any more room than necessary.
- Be on-topic. A good title tells viewers what they can expect from a video. It's clear, direct, and honest. People are busy, and they need a reason to watch your video, so using an unclear or ambiguous title is a bad idea.
- Be keyword-focused. Keywords matter for the reference of your video on the video platform you use.
- Be intriguing. An effective title drives people to click on it.

## EXPORT

Make sure to export one high quality video and then export to the platform specs you will use the film on.

## THUMBNAIL

Make sure you choose an interesting picture from the film or even better if you have some RAW pictures related to the film. The thumbnail needs to be eye grabbing.

## SUBTITLES

English subtitles are recommended. Use the free program Amara to easily make subtitles via the Vimeo platform.



## GET IN TOUCH WITH ME

*[nora@humanpostcards.com](mailto:nora@humanpostcards.com) / [www.humanpostcards.com](http://www.humanpostcards.com) / [@nora.humanpostcards](https://www.instagram.com/nora.humanpostcards)*