Quick Tips for Securing Quality Video and Audio:

*Plan Your Production*
When possible, preplan your production so you have a sense of your needed end product and its viewers, what you want or need to do, who you may need to alert and/or to secure permissions from in advance, who you may need to help you, how long you have to work in the field, and what challenges you may encounter before you ever head out with a camera. Your planning also should include time for any needed equipment presets and equipment breakdowns in addition to anticipated production time. Depending on the nature of what you expect to do, if you can make a site visit before production, you may find such a visit helpful. Whatever your plan, always be ready to roll with the flow once on site. Even the best plans have to be able to accommodate change, and sometimes in a hurry.

*Check Your Gear Before Heading Out*
Ensure you have functional equipment, proper gear settings and adequate media storage or tape, and battery and/or a back-up power supply before starting a project. A quick check of your camera and accessories before setting out always is advised so you can do what you plan or expect to do once you're ready to roll. It's not much fun to get to a site and then to realize you left your tape or battery behind, or to learn later you had an important switch or setting out of place.

*Optimize Your Subject Placement and Lighting*
Whether you’re using available light only or augmenting with production lighting, do your best to ensure the light is distributed evenly on your subject(s). Guard against backlighting. For example, don’t back your subject against a window (unless you’re adjusting your light setting and camera iris accordingly). Many cameras also now have white balance features so you can set your white levels at the start of your production and thus other colors in the spectrum. (You also will need to make such changes at setting shifts, for example when going from inside to outside, or vice versa). To set your white balance usually only requires that you fill the frame with something white (by focusing on a white piece of paper, for example, within your setting's lighting) and then pressing the camera's white balance button.
USE ALL AVAILABLE TOOLS TO YOUR ADVANTAGE
Depending on the look you're planning for your piece, use tools that may help to optimize your image and sound quality. Unless you're super comfortable with your camera, use its auto focus and auto iris features. If you have a small tripod, also consider using it. If you're strictly shooting handheld, think about the quality of your recording and who you expect to watch it. Shaky video isn't often good video. When handheld, you may find it helpful to lean against something (such as a wall), or to prop your arm on something like a desktop or tabletop. Some cameras also have image stabilization features that may be of some help.

MINIMIZE USING CAMERA ZOOMS AND PANS
There will be great temptation to use camera zoom features. Depending on your comfort level with your camera, this may not be the best plan. Keep in mind our eyes do not zoom in and out. It's more natural for us to change perspective by looking at something close up, by then widening out our view, etc. Zooming in and out should be reserved for times when there's real need to zero in on a subject or image, or to pull out to reveal something. Pans from side to side can be effective, but also should be used sparingly unless you're really comfortable with your move(s).

OPTIMIZE YOUR AUDIO AND MONITOR IT IN THE FIELD
Just as in optimizing camera placement, you need to do what you can to optimize your audio. If you have competing audio sources, such as a busy hallway or bathroom nearby, outside road noise, even an in-room air handler, do all you can to close off or otherwise distance yourself from this competing noise.

Camera operators should monitor their audio, ideally by patching in and listening through compatible headphones or ear buds when in the field. The audio that’s most important is the audio that’s going to tape or your hard drive, so operators need to hear what the camera is hearing. If there’s a hitch, such as a mic hit or a glaring audio drop when in the field, you still have a chance for a second pick-up or other work-around.

If using solely a camera-mounted mic for audio, staying fairly close to your subject will help to optimize your audio quality. If using a lavalier or handheld mic, position the mic close enough to the subject to secure quality audio. Guard against getting the mic so close to your subject that you distort your audio or open yourself up to popping Ps or Ts.
*(More on Audio)*

More advanced cameras, including some available through Clemons Library, have advanced audio input features. Such features allow users to select whether they are inputting audio, say from an onboard camera mic (for natural sound) on one channel, with perhaps separate input from a lavalier or handheld mic on a second channel, patched at the back of the camera. These advanced audio inputs also allow for manual or auto (audio) level adjustments. For most users, it will probably be best to select auto positions.

*ALLOW FOR CAMERA PRE-ROLL AND POST-ROLL TIMES*

Give yourself some pre-roll and post-roll time -- a good practice just generally and one that’s definitely needed when shooting on tape. Let the camera engage for about 10-15 seconds at the start and let things roll about this same length at the end of each clip before disengaging the camera. Let each shot roll for at least 15-seconds.

*PLAN FOR YOUR PERSPECTIVES*

If you have a subject speaking on camera, think about whether you want them to speak directly to the camera (direct address/eyes on camera) or off to the side (news/documentary-style with the subject's eyes looking to the interviewer's). From a production standpoint, it's probably best to do things all in way one or the other.

When actually conducting your interview, don't be afraid to ask a question more than once. Sometimes you may be seeking a tighter or more concise answer or a different thread. Sometimes it also may be helpful to leave a question or line of questioning entirely and then to circle back. Stick with things, though, until you have what you feel you need or what you know will be helpful.

*EDIT IN THE CAMERA*

Consider editing in the camera, and particularly if you want to build sequences for use in editing or if you otherwise want to limit what you have to wade through in post. For example, think about rolling off separate but related tight, medium and wide shots of subjects and/or subject areas. You also will need to think about how such pictures interrelate. For example, if a person is doing a repetitive task, you will want to ensure their face position and hand and other body positions are (or can be) in the same or similar positions at cut or edit points.
*SAFEGUARD YOUR PROJECT’S QUALITY*
Be sure you're satisfied with what you're getting. You're the first gatekeeper of quality. If you're not happy with what you're picking up in the field, you'll probably be less happy when it comes time to putting something together using this material. Stick with things in the field when time permits, making whatever adjustments you may need to make to optimize your sound and image quality. The better you are in the field, the better you'll be down the pike, and particularly in post.

*ALLOW FOR CREATIVITY*
Think not only about the basics, but really think about the artistry or potential artistry of what you're doing. There's video and then there's really wonderful or even beautiful video. When we're standing, we tend to see things just from our standing-up perspective. Moving around a bit, even the very ordinary can become extraordinary. For example, think of a simple sidewalk. If you’re at the edge of a sidewalk standing with your camera rolling off material, your stuff will look pretty pedestrian. (Pun intended). If kneel and place that camera on or near the the sidewalk, this rather ordinary image can become pretty extraordinary. Suddenly your images of a pretty simple sidewalk and the people using it become pretty dynamic.

*SAFEGUARD YOUR STUFF*
Safeguard and label your stuff as you go. If you're dropping things to a drive or popping a tape, make sure you tag and label and otherwise store or safeguard your material. The dates, places and names of people and proper spellings of their names (and titles, when appropriate) also are typically good to note, whether on tape and/or in other ways as well.

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