

Video Tips

Videotapes of an individual child or of a classroom performance can be valuable records. In order to produce the best quality videotape, the following tips should be considered.

Video

- Determine camera and subject placement before recording.
- Avoid bright lights and windows in the background that cause objects and people in the foreground to appear darker. Try to position the camera between the windows and the subject.
- Pull the curtains or shades (or cover the window with a sheet or another object in the room) if a video must be shot with a window in the background.
- Keep the bright light in the background out of the picture by keeping the camera “zoomed in” on an object in the foreground. Use the automatic focus, if possible.
- Avoid bright light in the background. If this is not possible, activate the camera’s “backlight button,” if the camera has one. This will lessen the glare from the window.
- NEVER shoot directly into the sun. This could ruin your camera.
- Determine if more lighting is needed and make adjustments:
 - Add light by opening or removing curtains and shades from windows out of the camera shot.
 - Increase wattage of the light bulbs being used in the room.
 - Use auxiliary lightening. Place it to the right and left of the camera, and behind it.
 - Bring additional lamps from other rooms.

Remember, if the background is dark, more light will be needed than if shooting against a light background.

Sound and Speed

- Analyze the settings for any distracting environmental noises such as the following:
 - Air conditioners
 - Fans
 - A nearby class
 - Traffic sounds coming through an open window
 - Television and radio volumes should be lowered or turned off, even in adjoining rooms.
- Check the first few minutes of videotaping for sound and picture quality before filming in earnest. For the best quality, film at SP speed.

Picture Composition and Videotape Content

- Seat or position people close together. Videotape magnifies distance, so use a closer proximity than usual when taping so people appear at a normal distance on the videotape.
- Keep the background simple to avoid distracting the viewer. Avoid clocks, shadows, and the appearance of objects “growing out of people’s heads.”
- Keep some contrast between the color of the background and the subject’s clothing. With a light background, details of movement may be lost if the subject is wearing similar colored clothing.

Camera Moves and Angles

- Keep the camera level. If needed, an adjustable tripod can be used to get the best level when the child is on the floor or seated.
- Focus the camera before recording.
- Keep the tops of people's heads near the top of the viewfinder. Follow the rule of thirds: don't place the most important picture element in the center of the screen. Position the camera so the center of attention is in the top or lower third of the viewfinder.
- Use wide-angle shots if using a hand-held camera. Telephoto shots magnify wiggles when viewed on the television; wide angle shots hide them.
- Limit the movement of the camera to imply motion. Continual "zooming in" and "zooming out" is distracting to the viewer.
- Hold the camera steady. Use a tripod or position the camera on a table (adjusting the height with books) to keep the camera steady for shots over long periods of time.
- Set up equipment near a power outlet to minimize cable and power cord hazards.

Adapted from *Family Involvement in the Computer Center*, Center for Best Practices in Early Childhood Education, Macomb, Illinois, 1992.