



By Barry Hampe

**Back Door to Film School: A
Complete Video Production
Course Between the Covers of a
Book**

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The Shut Up and Shoot Documentary Guide

by Anthony Q. Artis

Focal Press, 2008

295 pages

"The back door to film school is now open," Anthony Q. Artis writes at the end of his preface to *The Shut Up and Shoot Documentary Guide*. He has lovingly placed a complete video production course between the covers of a book. Here are all the things you need to know as a student. And, new media being what it is, he's also included a DVD showing, among other things, examples of documentaries with prominent documentarians. Plus, more video tutorials and other information are available at his website, [www.aqartis.com](#).

The book puts the focus on doing. The tacit assumption is that everyone makes mistakes when they begin producing documentaries. It starts right where most readers want to start--getting going. Chapter One is titled "Preproduction: From determining the goal of your documentary ("What story do you want to tell and why?") to care and feeding your project."

By Chapter Two we're on location, and the book offers a lot of good advice about making a film in someone else's space: getting it shot, getting good information, good images and good sound, planning for and conducting interviews, editing, and post-production.

Every chapter includes one or more sidebar articles called "Been There, Done That" featuring words of wisdom

- Producer/editor Sam Pollard (*4 Little Girls; Eyes on the Prize*) on "Concept and Storytelling."
- Producer Alrick Brown and producer/director Michael Schaffer (*Death of Two Sons*) draw on their experience Prepared for Remote Locations."
- Documentary icon Albert Maysles (*Grey Gardens, Lalee's Kin*) on the topic of "Fair Subject Portrayal and Respect."
- And producers/directors Rose Rosenblatt and Marion Lipschutz (*The Education of Shelby Knox; The Abortions to Walk Away*.)"

Every chapter includes a few Hot Tips about the subject matter it covers, such as:

- 4 common budgeting mistakes
- 10 ways to lower your budget
- Stealth shooting tactics
- How to work a press conference

There's a full chapter on lighting. This is a topic every documentarian must master sooner or later. In this case stills and simple instructions to make the fundamentals of basic lighting set-ups clear to the most inexperienced

Another chapter covers everything audio. In this era of on-board shotguns and prosumer sound systems, Oh,

Plus there's all the basic film school doctrine about camerawork and composition. And Artis includes sub-section "Don't Just Tell 'Em, Show 'Em," about visual storytelling.

There's a good section on interview questions. Artis demonstrates the difference between open-ended questions that stop everything dead with a simple yes or no. And he shows how to sequence questions to build to answer.

In the post-production chapter, Artis clearly breaks out the possible answers to the question of who should edit yourself with a technical editor, or a creative editor (working on his or her own).

He also devotes some care and attention to getting your completed film out into the world, including film festival festival.

Finally, the book includes a DVD that contains a sample talent and interview release form, a storyboard form, documentary budget form, and a number of what Artis calls "cheat sheets," which remind you how certain technical use certain software. These alone are worth the price of the book.

Do I love everything about it? No. In many ways, while it talks about guerilla filmmaking it embraces a rather formula which is to record interviews and shoot B-roll. While Artis says in Chapter Six, "Your B-roll is your A-roll," there is evidence over visual evidence. You find it in the two chapters on the interview and even in the two chapters where the author stands in front of a camera and tells us, "Your audio is more important than your video." He says that using a different shot), but not much can be done for bad sound.

With this I must disagree. If the visual evidence of the scene is out of focus, too dark, badly composed, or otherwise you can't see the story you are telling with pictures. If the sound in a scene is not good, you may be able to cover with music. Sound and picture need to be technically acceptable. Sometimes sound may be the more important channel, sometimes picture, but both must play well together.

That said, there is a lot to like about *The Shut Up and Shoot Documentary Guide*. This book is so rich in so many ways for the beginning, wannabe documentary filmmaker as well as a handy resource for the rest of us who learn

long ago that we can occasionally use a brush-up. Just as I carried the *American Cinematographer Manual* in documentaries on film, I'd keep this book on the reference book shelf near my computer and stick it in my sho

And, if I were still teaching, this would definitely be one of the books I'd use.

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