

Guidelines for a Research Plan

On the big picture level, it is important to refine your understanding of larger issues. If you are doing a film about cooking or sports, it is good to think about the social roles of these aspects of human culture. There are anthropology texts about the role of sugar in globalization for instance. This might be too far afield, but it is worth thinking about the “big issues” your story intersects with. On the local level there is field research. As Rabiger suggests, research methods emerge from the subject you've chosen.

In *Crafting Truth: Documentary Form and Meaning* Spence and Navarro note that documentary films operate on three levels of truth, “factual truth, a higher truth, and a symbolic truth.” It is good to remember this as you think about your project so that you can develop the full richness of the area you are investigating. Your research plan should indicate how you've thought about these layers of meaning.

In *Directing the Documentary*, in the chapter on research, Rabiger asks us to look for *visible evidence*. He also suggests that one of the important things to do is frame what he calls a “working hypothesis” and goes into some detail about how to develop that.

To help I have posted a chapter on visible evidence from Barry Hampe's *Making Documentary Films* and the section of Spence and Navarro indicated above in Reading.

RESEARCH PROCESS

Using the internet, publications (we have access to electronic databases at Hunter) and PHONE CALLS and MEETINGS with people, find out as much as you can about your topic.

Your research plan should include material in the following areas:

SECONDARY RESEARCH

Deep Background. What do you know about your topic? Bookstores in the digital era, the nature of modern work, affect theory, you need to develop some kind of broad understanding that will help you develop your own point of view on your subject. You can read a book BY James Baldwin. You might also need to read a biography OF him to get a sense of his significance in world literature, etc.

Periodical Literature. What is the conversation like around your issue right now in the Press? You should use databases such as Lexis-Nexis, which you can access free through the Hunter Library, to find out what are current discussions on your topic. If you are looking at groups in New York, are there related groups in other cities (i.e. are they part of a national “movement?”) etc. Talk to a research librarian if you need help. And don't forget both academic and artistic journals.

Other Artistic Work.

Who else is doing work in this area? Also, are there makers whose approach to work seems useful for you methodologically.

PRIMARY RESEARCH

Identify possible events to shoot. Get permission to shoot them.

Identify key players on the issue who you can touch base with to find out what's happening (do this every week or two).

Identify people to interview (you do not have to do preinterviews on video. But you do need to meet them or talk to them on the phone.)

What about archival material? Do you need historical images? Footage? Think about where you might start to find these elements.

FILM AS RESEARCH

Remember that the making of the work will be informing your understanding. Keep refining your perspective on the issues in your video and revisiting your **Working Hypothesis**.

The written out plan doesn't have to be long, but it should include half a dozen written sources of one sort or another that fall into the first two categories. And don't forget to include your working hypothesis.