

The creation of a documentary is a challenging-- yet rewarding-- means for a filmmaker to engage viewers with a topic that could otherwise be overlooked. While some documentaries have the potential to go viral if viewed and discussed enough (I'm looking at you, *Making a Murderer*), a boring documentary will send viewers right to the pause button or right out the theater door. As a filmmaker, it's crucial to consider the key elements that make up a good documentary.

1. Do Your Homework
 - a. Be prepared. Cross your t's, dot your i's, and verify, verify, verify. There is nothing worse than promoting a film that is supposed to be factual, only to hurt your reputation for having not double-checked what your interviewee claimed to be true.
2. Evoke Passion Without Depressing
 - a. It's important to remember that, even when viewers are open to the idea of watching a documentary, they still want to be entertained. Michael Moore reminds filmmakers that viewers "don't want to be lectured" and that they have anticipated their weekend night out at the movies to see your film: "It's Friday night, and if they go home and it's like, "Oh God, that was just horrible... ugghhhh... I feel just awful..." Well, goodbye fireworks. That's just not fair. Don't do that to your audience. I'm not saying you can't present them with a serious subject. I'm just asking that that you do it in a way that makes them feel full of energy and passion and aroused. Politically, I mean.
3. Use Interesting & Applicable Characters
 - a. Don't just interview the story's victim's uncle's brother's neighbor because he was the only one willing to sit down with your crew to answer some questions. Ensure you are providing viewers with quality interviews that reveal information otherwise unknown regarding the main character, case, topic, etc. Now, if the victim's uncle's brother's neighbor was actually directly involved in the topic of your piece and he's particularly intriguing, you've hit the jackpot. Also, an expert on the topic at hand is pretty crucial to the quality of your film.
4. Mood Music or Silence
 - a. The music you select for your documentary will set the mood of your viewers. Forego upbeat music during serious discussions. Consider the era of your topic if you'd like to showcase popular music from that time at any given point in the film, such as the intro, locational transitions, etc. On the other hand, the use of silence is equally effective, depending on the topic at hand, particularly when displaying conclusive text at the end of your film.
5. Use a Subject Matter of Interest
 - a. Very little people will be motivated to spend their Friday watching a documentary on any given topic that does not interest them in the least. It's important to focus not only on topics that are important to *you*, but to your audience as well.