



Video Production **Masterclass**

The Complete Video Course

WORKBOOK

Video Quality Thresholds

**How to Make a Video That Your Audience
Will Watch All the Way Through**

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Why Be Concerned With Quality Thresholds?

Whether you're on the content carousel or in the launch crucible your video quality is important. It reflects on your brand in a rather profound way. A crappy video signals a sloppy approach to all your work. This is especially true if you are not already well-known in your market.

Mostly this comes down to inattention to detail, which is perceived as a lack of respect for your audience. There are ways to get around this, but it's usually best not to have to apologize on the front end.

In this brief document I'm going to share a simple checklist that will give you quiet assurance that all your videos are reaching a threshold of excellence. Anything above this threshold is up to you, but as long as you get up to this point your videos will keep your audience glued to the screen right to the end.

Fortunately none of this is at all difficult to achieve. If you approach it in a step-by-step fashion, I guarantee you and your audience will be more than happy with the results.

Here are the thresholds we'll look at:

1. Backgrounds
2. Location
3. Lighting
4. Audio
5. Composition
6. Music
7. Pacing
8. Web formatting

Ready? OK, here we go. First let's look at our canvas...

Background

Background is critical. It speaks a thousand words. Let those words be in support of what you're doing.

Here the watch word is order. The less clutter the better and the more space the better.

Believe it or not, even a clean room can look messy with only one item out of place.

Therefore the threshold of cleanliness is "everything in its place." And I mean EVERYTHING.

Not that the room shouldn't look inviting and homey, if that's the right message; just that it's straightened up to the extent that it actually looks on camera the way it looks to you in real life. And this might take some real attention to detail. You may find it quite surprising how different your room looks on camera compared to how it looks in real life.

Now, sometimes it's simply not practical to change the room around for a simple shoot. Maybe it's not your room. Maybe there are too many elements that can't be moved for one reason or another.

In any case, if you don't like what you see or can't do much about the background, you can always use the nuclear option. This looks a lot like the lens that comes attached to the front of a DSLR camera. That's right. A great lens can make nearly ANY background work by throwing it out of focus.

That way, anything that's out of place becomes irrelevant, and may even compliment the scene with a splash of color and form.

Spaciousness

There is simply no kind of cramped space that will ever support your message. The threshold of spaciousness can be measured by a DSLR camera. If it is possible to throw your background out of focus using a 35 - 50mm lens, then you're far enough away from the wall.

Subject-to-Background Arrangement

If items in the background look like they're coming out of your head, rearrange them or move yourself. There is no gray area here.

Wistia created a nifty, fast-paced video on this very subject. There's nothing in it I would change. In fact, I wish I'd made it. I think you'll like it.

Location

This threshold Factor is based on the concept of **Message Support**. Does the location contribute to the message or take away from it? There is not much gray area here. It either supports you or it does not.

The Office

Many people have a home office, and this is usually a reasonable location for most business-related videos. Just be mindful of the elements discussed under **Location**, and you should be fine.

Living Spaces

Living Rooms, Kitchens, Bedrooms and the like CAN work in your videos, but be careful. Other than a living room sofa with a nondescript background, anything else backing a solid business-related message will be counter-productive.

Some marketing gurus promoting “lifestyle” businesses like to shoot in other areas of their homes to subtly suggest that if you copy them you will enjoy the same kind of success. If that’s your business, have at it. Otherwise it might be best to steer clear of your other rooms.

The caveat is if you have access to a DSLR camera and good lens. Then the same advice goes for location as it does for background.

The Great Outdoors

It’s more difficult to make an outdoor location work than most people realize. It’s noisy, unpredictable and uncontrolled. It may take several reshoots to get one acceptable take. The final background may itself have elements that do not support your message. The location itself may be inappropriate. I once saw a business coach do a shoot in the reptile cage at the zoo, with no mention made of his environment. Kids and parents were wandering in and out of the shot, making it a total mess. This is the kind of thing that can easily happen if you’re unaware of your surroundings.

In the Car

Many people shoot in cars nowadays to avoid the uncontrolled and noisy environment of the outdoors. Recently saw a business coach try to get people to sign up for a \$10,000 coaching program by sitting in his parked car talking about why you should sign up for a “strategy session”. It did not strike me as something you would want to

make a normal practice just to avoid shooting outdoors, unless you provided a good reason why.

When should you shoot in a car? When a sense of movement seems like a good idea. I wouldn't do it while explaining complex concepts like math, but for a video that seems "spur of the moment", or where you just have to explain about something that has a good deal of urgency and scarcity, it might be fine.

Neutral Backgrounds

The [Wistia](#) video has good solid advice on how to set up a neutral background. I would add that this kind of background provides a stable and consistent location for your video series, which can work for you when all the videos are thematically related, as in a launch sequence. Neutral backgrounds connote professionalism when done right.

Lighting

Quality of light

Under most circumstances today, the flatter the lighting the better. Any harsh shadow is a no-no.

Shooting Outdoors

Usually you would not want to shoot out in the bright sun. Not only does it cast a harsh kind of shadow, it can cast many harsh shadows all over your face. It can also create too much brightness for your camera to even resolve.

However, you can still shoot outside if you stay in the shade. That will make your lighting flatter.

Artificial light

Try to avoid incandescent lighting, as it's hard to make it soft without purchasing extra soft boxes.

Daylight-balanced fluorescent lighting is the most economical choice today. The light produced by these instruments also come with their own soft box, so it's a higher quality light for video, it produces a flatter image, holds up better with green screen and you save money.

Shadows

Video is almost all about the control of light. Controlling light means controlling shadows. Soft shadows are the best shadows, and are produced by softboxes. Harsh shadows are to be avoided and are produced by incandescent lighting, and require a good bit of technique to convert those harsh shadows into soft shadows.

Follow the directions on the next page to get your lighting to an acceptable quality threshold when shooting indoors...

1. Set at least one soft box one Head height above your head.
2. Position the soft box close to the camera.
3. For every 85 Watts of intensity set the soft box 1 foot from your face.
4. Adjust the distance of the light until there are no hot spots on your face
5. Adjust the angle of the light until there are no harsh shadows on your face
6. You'll have enough light when there is no grain in the picture



Audio

We need to start from the premise that any kind of an echo is unacceptable. It's just too hard to listen to long enough to get a message. Maybe 1 minute, but after that it's just oppressive.

So what is it that makes audio acceptable? It all comes down to PRESENCE. Presence is the idea that you are right there with your audience member; right there in the room with them, sitting across the table, facing them person to person.

But this is not often what we hear in videos online, is it? Instead we hear tinny audio that sounds like it was recorded in a trash can 30 feet away. Ugh. We can do better. How much better? Generally speaking, A LOT better. Tragically, most online video suffers from outrageously bad audio.

This is truly horrible, because the perception of quality in a video is about 60% due to the perceived quality of the audio!

So if the more echoey, the worse the audio, then the more "present", the better the audio.

The question is, how much presence do you need to be acceptable? I should take off my critic's hat here and say there is no one answer to this. But if you want to make your audience comfortable (and I know you do!), then just follow the suggestions on the next page...

How to Get Acceptable Audio in Every Video You Make

1. Use a lavalier microphone with fresh batteries.
2. Form an upside down L with your thumb and forefinger, placing the tip of your forefinger at your mouth, with your thumb pointing at your chest. Where your thumb rests is where you should place the lavalier mic. As a point of reference, if you're wearing a button-down shirt, the mic will attach quite near the first button down from your neck button.
3. Keep the room as sonically "dead" as possible; meaning as little echo as possible. That might mean throwing a large carpet underneath your feet to absorb sound.
4. Hide the mic wire inside your clothing.

If you do these 4 little things, your audio will be perfectly acceptable to your audience!



Composition

Arrangement of elements on the screen is critical. Use the rule of thirds to your advantage. Most cameras have that display setting built in.



The eyes: minimum vertical acceptable placement is center screen.



Precise placement is on the top line of the tic-tac-toe board.



When placing text on the screen with you, place yourself at the intersection of a horizontal and vertical line.



If you can't tell whether the text is placed correctly on the screen, try this trick: Squint your eyes while looking at the screen. This places less emphasis on the actual text and more on the shapes sharing screen space.

You'll likely discover that making a small adjustment in where the text is placed will make a big difference in how it looks.

Music

Music is great when it's short and sweet, so that's what this section will be.

The 2 basic principles

1. Music should support your message without overpowering it.
2. It's OK to have no music rather than the wrong music.

Volume Thresholds

Just loud enough to hear the music
or
Just soft enough to hear your voice.

How to get your music to the minimum acceptable threshold of volume:

1. Bring the music level down to where you can no longer hear it.
2. Slowly bring it up until you can hear the melody, but there is no interference with the voice.

That's your sweet spot. Monitor the song all the way through. Sometimes a song will start going crazy in the middle and you'll have to adjust the level so that it doesn't start overpowering the dialogue.

Extra Credit

Fade the music in and out at start and finish of the piece.

How to Choose Your Music

[Here is a video](#) on how to choose the right music for your videos.

Pacing

Speaking Rate

Here's the main point about the pacing threshold. Video absorbs speaking rate like crazy. You can speak very quickly and it is unlikely to sound too fast.

The average person speaks at about 165 words per minute. If you speak much slower than that, the danger is that you may be perceived as "slow" in other areas, and that would not be fair at all.

What's to be done? Well, in this case your editing program can help. You can keep the pace going simply by using jump cuts.

How do you do this? Simple. Rather than wait through the natural speaking pauses, you change position and size on the screen, then cut out a lot of the natural pauses in between shots.

In this way you can literally create a 160 words per minute video and so hit the threshold of pacing.

Performance threshold

It's an undeniable fact that video absorbs most of your natural energy, so a minimum performance threshold is easily twice your natural energy level.



For most people this means to give it all the energy you've got. Unless you are a professional speaker, you probably won't overdo it. If you think you've overdone it, don't jump to conclusions until you've shown the video to someone you trust. You may be surprised by their favorable perception of your energetic performance!