



The production process – Editing / first cut



Until now the production has progressed according to a plan that is measured in days or hours. Now the production will be assembled, piece-by-piece, according to a plan that is measured in twenty-fifths of a second.

All recordings are first viewed and logged - clip for clip. This is undertaken using the same computer software that will be used to edit the production. When everything has been logged, all the material is easily accessible for the subsequent post-production processes.

If the production involves longer dialogue or interview scenes, these will be transcribed word for word, to make the editorial process of selecting sequences easier.

The video and audio recordings from tape will be digitised - played on to the hard drives on our media server, which has capacity for several hundred hours of material. For a short production with a limited amount of raw material - such as a commercial spot or news segment - the raw material will be digitised in a high resolution, and the final quality will be visible throughout the editing process.

Material for longer productions, or productions with a large amount of raw material, will usually be digitised at a lower resolution - allowing all the material to be accessible at once.

After the first cut is completed, the material that has been chosen for the production will be re-digitised at the final - high resolution.

When the material has been digitised, editing can begin. We call this process the first cut - though there can be several versions and stages of the first cut, before we reach the final cut.

The first cut is the most important editorial process. The scenes, takes and sequences that will be used in the production are selected and edited in the correct script order, so that the running time of the production and the structure of the story may be evaluated and adjusted as we work.

Scenes will often be condensed during editing - by cutting between different takes and camera angles, the content is reduced to the essential, and the scene usually becomes shorter in duration.

During the first cut process, the editing script is gradually built up - starting with the shooting script - the dialogue and interview from the transcripts are added for each scene, and the narration script is also written. At the same time the need for music, graphics and other elements that must be added can be quantified and their content defined.

As we progress, the editing script gradually becomes the final script for the production, it is no longer a plan for what we will do, but rather a record of what we have done.



Programme timeline on the editor's workstation (Avid/Pinnacle Liquid)

The editing process is undertaken on a PC workstation with access to the raw material and house archive footage via the media network. Throughout the process the editor and director have a graphic overview of the production as it exists so far, as a clip-by-clip display on a virtual timeline.

Both video and audio clips can be viewed in this way, and it is easy to see where one clip begins and ends, and where other clips overlap.

The first cut gives the production staff and client a clear indication of how the finished product will be, how the different takes and scenes work together, how the structure of the story progresses and how the message will be delivered.

The running time of the finished film is also evident, and it is easy to make any adjustments to the content and flow at this stage. Moving or rebuilding scenes is a relatively simple "cut and paste" process, so it is also easy to experiment with alternative solutions.

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In the days of analogue videotape editing, the first cut was often edited on cheap "off-line" VHS decks with limited editing capability. Then the process would be repeated using expensive "on-line" editing facilities - working quickly to save cost. The physical separation of the off-line and on-line processes meant that there was a clear division between the first cut and the second cut processes.

Today, with digital non-linear editing, there is not always the same clear division between the two processes - in fact these processes are usually undertaken using the same facilities and staff.



Edit 2 at Channel 6 Television

The most important difference between the first and final cut processes is that during the first cut, the accent is on the editorial process of selecting the raw material and determining the dramatic structure of the production - whilst during the final cut the focus is on finishing the production, paying attention to details such as narration, music, dubbing, graphics and visual effects.

Because these processes - at Channel 6 Television - are usually undertaken in the same editing suite by the same staff, the progression from first to final cut is more gradual, and when the client sees the

production for the first time it may be less clear where we are in the process. Each production has its own requirements and rhythm, which will dictate the order in which each element of the production is added. Generally speaking, the art of editing is to build the production in chronological order, adding only those components, which are necessary to determine structure, duration, content and dramatic flow.

This approach results in the producer and editor - and where relevant, the client - being able to evaluate the production before all the expensive work on details is added.

Any changes made during this part of the process are simple and inexpensive.

For some productions - particularly industrial films with a high degree of technical content - it is often necessary for the client to approve the narration text before it is recorded and edited. The same can apply to other elements such as graphics and captions.

For every production, the particular elements, which must be approved by the client, and the plan for such approval in relation to the production schedule, are defined in the production contract and subsequent production plan.

The reason for a well-defined approval schedule is simple - the production elements to be approved are usually those that involve many hours work - often with the involvement of freelance artists. Such elements must be right first time if a fixed-price agreement shall apply.

So for example - the narration text will be subject to approval before the recording session - any subsequent alterations to the text that necessitate re-recording would not usually be covered by a fixed-price agreement, and would be billed separately.

The screening of the first and final cuts for the client usually take place at Channel 6 Television's studios, where any simple requests for alterations may be tried immediately, whilst the client is present.

In the event of a screening at Channel 6 Television not being possible, such screening can sometimes be arranged at the customer's premises, or by forwarding a tape or disc copy.

In some - less critical - situations, a low-bandwidth approval copy may also be made available via the internet.