

Well-done video footage can save great holiday memories

The holidays are one of the most common times to bring out the old video camera. We all want to capture the holiday joys of opening presents and family gatherings.

While videotaping can be fulfilling and fun, it can also be a frustrating experience, filled with dead batteries, mismatched tapes and unsatisfying video. Too many people shoot first and then ask questions later: "Why did we take 20 minutes of eating dinner, anyway?"

By following these simple tips, you can turn your dull video into exciting home movies.

■ **BE PREPARED:** Charge your batteries and have tapes ready before the holidays start. Take a few moments to glance at your owner's manual. Get familiar with your camera. Practice taking some film before the big holiday.

■ **BE AWARE OF YOUR SURROUNDINGS:** Turn off the TV, radio, fans and other distracting ambient noise. Low light? Open the window shades, turn on some lamps. If it doesn't look good on the monitor, don't be fooled that it will look good on your TV.

■ **BE DELIBERATE:** Know what you are shooting before you turn on the camera. Don't search for your subject while the camera is turned on.

■ **THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU ARE GOING TO SHOOT:** We have all seen this. Someone decides to set up the video camera and film the whole one-hour gathering. Don't shoot to just shoot. Get two minutes or so of one scene. Turn off the camera and get the next scene.

■ **SLOW AND STEADY:** Professionals use tripods and for good reason. Shaky video can be nauseating to watch. If you

don't have a tripod, use what you have, your body. Firmly place your feet steady, elbows close to your body and shoot. While shooting, move the camera slowly.

■ **GET DOWN TO THEIR LEVEL:** Most kids will be opening presents sitting on the floor. Sit on the floor and shoot at their level. It is much better to get a face in the video instead of the top of a head!

■ **BE WARY OF ZOOMING:** When we zoom, every movement is magnified. So unless you are using a tripod, it is difficult to get a steady shot. Instead get closer to your subject. Remember that audio won't follow the zoom.

■ **DON'T LEAVE ANYONE OUT:** Get the whole family, including yourself!

■ **LABEL, LABEL, LABEL:** Perhaps the most important tip of all. We think we will remember the Christmas Aunt Sally burnt the turkey, but time flies and we don't. When starting a video, narrate the date, place and the circumstances. "It's Christmas 2008 and we are excited to have Uncle Joe's family over to open presents." Label your camcorder tapes as soon as you put a new one in. Protect your camcorder tapes by switching the switch at the top of the tape to protect it from being recorded over.

■ **STORE PROPERLY:** Dampness and humidity are enemies of video tape. Avoid storing in basements or garages. Instead store them under a bed in a plastic box or in a closet.

By following these simple tips, your holiday video will be memorable and will be shared with future generations.

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