Have you had this experience? You grudgingly agree to watch a friend’s video. You click on the link. The first few shots are good. Cute kids. But about 10 seconds in you start to get a sinking feeling. This video isn’t about anything. It’s a bunch of shots that aren’t leading anywhere. And you’re stuck having to watch enough to lie to your friend about how much you loved it.

You are watching a video without a story. Your friend took out a camera or phone, pointed without thinking, and shot for a while, also without thinking. The result is a series of unrelated images that become more boring the longer they continue. Your brain is trying its best to make sense of the images cascading before your eyes, but failing. That failure induces boredom, distraction, and tension.

A shot of two kids on a swingset followed by a guy pouring a beer followed by a wide shot of a field where people you may or may not know are playing softball kind of suggests a story about a company picnic without actually being a story of a company picnic.

While we can’t help a friend who shoots video this way (other than sending her this free booklet), we can vow never to be that friend.

Fortunately, that’s easy. Find the story in your videos every time, and they will be infinitely more watchable, every time. Read on, try the exercises, and your video will no longer suck. You’re welcome.

Do you want more video lessons? How to Shoot Video That Doesn’t Suck has 248 pages of simple concepts and easy exercises you can use to get better. Buy it.

You can get still more free tips, tricks, sample videos, and lessons at SteveStockman.com. Follow me on Twitter @stevestockman for even more!
EXERCISE 1

Channel Charles M. Schulz or Garry Trudeau

1. The daily comics are masters of three-panel storytelling. Take a look at your daily paper (or a site like comics.com) and break any three-panel strip into story components. No need to write—just notice: Each one features a hero and a setup (beginning), complication (middle), and joke (end). Simple and elegant storytelling.

2. Practicing looking at story this way will help you internalize story structure. And all by itself, that will change the way you shoot video for the better.

3. Before you shoot your next video, write out some notes on the four story building blocks. Who is your hero? What happens at the beginning, middle, and end of your story?
EXERCISE 2

Subject Plus Action = Shot

1. Start thinking of your shots in a complete sentence—noun, verb—just like your English teacher taught you in fourth grade. The noun is the hero of the shot, the action verb is the story.

2. Ask yourself: What’s this shot about? If you can answer in a complete sentence, you’ve got a good shot. If you can’t, you don’t. “A dog walks past the house” is a complete story in one shot. “A dog” all by itself is not.

3. Turn on your favorite TV show or movie. Watch the individual shots with your finger on the remote. After each shot, pause. Decide who or what is the hero (noun) and what is happening to them in that shot (action). Repeat until you can see it without pausing.

4. Extra credit: Notice how the shots end when the action is complete and we know what just happened.

5. For more on story, go to: stevestockman.com/?s=story
How to Shoot Video That Doesn’t Suck is all about the language of video. It’s about how to think like a director, regardless of equipment. It’s about the rules developed over a century of movie making—which work just as well when shooting a two-year-old’s birthday party. Author and director Steve Stockman explains in 74 short, pithy, insightful chapters how to tell a story and entertain your audience.

“Stockman skips past all the technical crap and cuts right to the chase: How do you shoot a video somebody else will want to watch?”

—DAVID A. GOODMAN, executive producer/head writer of Family Guy

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STEVE STOCKMAN is a working Hollywood writer/director/producer. He’s created and executive produced shows like *Dogs of War* on A&E and *Brew Dogs* on Esquire Network. He’s also directed over 200 commercials and the MGM film *Two Weeks* starring Sally Field and Ben Chaplin.

STEVE TWEETS WITTILY ABOUT VIDEO
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HIS WEBSITE FOR LOTS OF COOL FREE VIDEO STUFF
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