

Documentaries are a popular genre for filmmakers nowadays and there are plenty of good ones out there. However, there are also a lot of bad ones. For the up-and-coming documentary filmmaker, there are a few rules you need to follow before you get your camera out and start filming. Before you decide to make a documentary, you should ask yourself some important questions.

What's it going to be about? It's vital that you find a topic that you feel passionate about and want to share with the world. Many documentaries are made because the filmmaker believes that a particular viewpoint is not being discussed enough in the media.

Is there a story to be told? OK, you've found your topic, but will other people be interested? Although documentaries are non-fiction, you should plan to portray a story or message. The information you find must be factual and accurate, but it can also be funny, disturbing, enlightening or a mixture of all three. Whatever it is, it must hold the viewer's attention. A worthy, but dull topic will just make people want to switch off.



Do you have a question to answer?

According to Baines (2015), successful documentary makers like to use the film-making process as a voyage of discovery and hope to find answers to their questions. Answering a question in a film adds dramatic tension to the documentary and creates conflict which is more likely to interest the audience.

How long will it be? Unlike feature films, documentaries are quite short, usually between 30 minutes and one hour, and they need to be focused. Many people choose to watch documentaries on the Internet and will switch to another website if the documentary doesn't hold their attention.

When you have answered these questions and feel ready to continue, there are some practical issues to think about, such as finance, equipment and location.

2 Read the extract again. Are the statements true (T), false (F) or is there no information (NI)?

- 1 There are many poor-quality documentaries.
- 2 A documentary must be about a problem in the world today.
- 3 The filmmaker should know the answer to their own question.
- 4 Baines makes documentary films.
- 5 There are a lot of distractions on the Internet.
- 6 Documentary filmmakers need a lot of money to make a film.