



Audio & Video in Admissions: Get Ready for Prime Time



An Accepted.com Report

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Basic Do's and Don'ts

Paper application? That's like, so yesterday. Now you Gen X, Y and Millennial candidates get a chance to wow the admissions committee with your dope multimedia "skillz."

UCLA's [Anderson School of Management](#)¹ gives candidates the option to submit an audio or video clip. And next year, according to a recent article in [Businessweek](#)², the University of Chicago's [Booth School of Business](#)³ might be ditching the PowerPoint question. The Booth adcoms haven't yet disclosed what their "get-to-know-you" replacement may be, but you better start thinking digitally.

[Here are some of UCLA's top audio entries that were animated...after admittance.](#)⁴

For undergrads, Tufts has introduced a one-minute video essay option, and Yale accepts links to videos, but warns that if the content is not stellar, it can work against you.

[Check out Amelia Down's interpretive math dance for Tufts, with over 100,000 views.](#)⁵

In this special report we'll discuss how to successfully create a one- to two-minute audio or video clip.

We'll talk about how to plan your content around your technical know-how, so that no matter your skill set, you'll make the adcom hit rewind again and again.

But first, the TOP 10 Do's and Don'ts of Video Applications:

The Do's

1. Do make it about YOU.

Don't waste time by interviewing your friends and family about why they think you're awesome. They can be included peripherally, but you should choose an activity or story in which you are the featured star.

2. Do tell the story in logical sequences.

People like to see processes. Think about how you can show a behind-the-scenes "how-to" of something cool that you do or have done.

3. Do make a story board.

Once you've decided on the content, plan the story out shot by shot. It's like making an outline for an essay. This will help you present a logical sequence, and reduce shooting time.

1 <http://www.accepted.com/mba/UCLAAnderson.aspx>

2 http://www.businessweek.com/bschools/content/mar2010/bs2010038_528531.htm

3 <http://www.accepted.com/mba/chicago.aspx>

4 <http://www.anderson.ucla.edu/mba.xml>

5 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CNPXUWsMdl0&feature=related>

- 4. Do start filming at least two weeks before the deadline.**
And test all your technical equipment beforehand, end-to-end! Something will inevitably go wrong, and you'll need the time to troubleshoot.
- 5. Do use a tripod if possible.**
This will help you have a steady, watchable video. After watching hundreds of shaky shots (which the adcoms will have to do) your story will be a pleasant change.

The Don'ts

- 1. Don't try something new for the first time.**
Keep it simple. Concentrate on telling a really compelling story, rather than stretching your technical abilities.
- 2. Don't use slick production techniques to cover up** the fact that you don't have a compelling story.
- 3. Don't use music that is distracting.**
You can use snippets to punch up certain parts of the video, but if it doesn't have a reason to be there, take it out. Again, a driving techno beat may sound like a good way to make your video exciting, but it can be really annoying if you have to watch hundreds of these clips a week.
- 4. Don't introduce the school campus as a character in the video.**
The adcoms see enough of their office everyday and will get sick of people using it as a backdrop. They want a window into YOUR life.
- 5. Don't ask someone to interview you on camera like you're on Meet the Press.**
It looks pretentious and sounds odd. You should put yourself at the scene of the action, and speak directly to the camera like you're talking to a friend.

Bonus Don't:

Please retire the following clichés. Just drop kick them out of town.

- #1 – Person waking up in the morning and turning into a superhero.
- #2 – School mascots as characters.
- #3 – Enthusiastic candidate jumping off campus landmarks.

Content is King (or Queen)...of Audio

*“My life has a superb cast but I can’t figure out the **plot**.” -- Ashleigh Brilliant, English cartoonist.*

For your clip, you’ve already got the superb cast (you!). Now you need to concentrate on telling a compelling story.

[Let’s analyze some of the UCLA clips.](#)⁶

Anthony Pu: Desk worker by day and hip hop dancer by night—ended up performing in a professional dance group and teaching classes to inner city kids.

Lianna Kong: Restyled her blog “I am Neurotic” into a book deal.

These stories are good because they highlight an aspect of the person’s life NOT related to their regular jobs. Anthony made an impact by nurturing his talent and sharing it with others. Lianna creatively turned a writing hobby into an entrepreneurial venture.

To prepare your story:

1. Listen.

To clips of prior candidates

To “[This I Believe](#)”⁷ or “[This American Life](#)”⁸ to hear how people tell their stories, so it doesn’t sound like they are reading it off a page.

EXTRA TIP:

Don’t take notes while listening. Rather, wait until the clip is complete and write down the details that really struck you, that you remember.

2. Make a list.

Do not go further back than college. What were the most important experiences in your life? Out of these, which one demonstrates personal progression? Impact on others? An entrepreneurial plan?

3. Outline your story.

You’ll notice that most successful application clips follow this structure:

⁶ <http://www.anderson.ucla.edu/mba.xml>

⁷ <http://thisibelieve.org/>

⁸ <http://www.thisamericanlife.org/>

- Clear, catchy introduction.
- How you became interested in this aspect of your life.
- How it has enriched you personally.
- How you have had an impact on others through this activity.
- Catchy conclusion that refers back to the beginning.

4. Write...revise...and remember that humor doesn't hurt!

Refer back to the notes you took when listening to other pieces. In your outline, think about your own experience and write down striking details. Then go back to the beginning. As you write, speak aloud. Use language that you would actually say in normal conversation and sprinkle in a little humor if you can. When you're done writing, time yourself reading from the page. Continue to revise until it is within the accepted time length.

Above all, remember that the arc of the story—showing personal progression and impact on the world around you—is the MOST important aspect of your clip. Even if you can only make a scratchy recording, you've nailed it if you write well.

Content is King (or Queen)...of Video

You're no Kathryn Bigelow, ladies. And you're no James Cameron, gentlemen. It's their job to push boundaries with the armies of cinematographers and CGI artists at their command. When you're brainstorming your application video clip, forget all the slick effects—unless that's part of your prior training. Keep it simple and focus on the story.

Before you even start brainstorming content, make sure you've got the technical gear to make it happen. This will dictate what kind of story you can tell, and save headaches down the road.

Follow these two steps before you choose to create a video submission:

1. **Gather your equipment.** You'll need a camcorder, a tape or memory card, a firewire that will transfer the footage to your computer, and a computer editing program.
2. **Perform a 30-second test shoot.** Film anything for thirty seconds. Then practice transferring the footage into your editing program. Export the clip into a format the school will allow you to upload to their website. If you can get all that done, you're ready to do video. Otherwise, just stick to audio.

As I advised in Part Two of this report, [make a list and then outline your clip.](#)⁹

Take a look at the sample video outline below. Let's say that you choose to write about a personal hobby that makes you unique, like working as an electronic music DJ. I find it easiest to plan out a video clip in seconds. **These times are approximate, but should give you a rough estimate of how to structure the video.**

0 - 10 sec:

Write a 10 sec. introduction that you would say directly to the camera.

Introduce where you are, why you are there, and why the activity is important to you.

10 - 25 sec:

Write a 15 sec. narration.

You will record this over a series of images that show an action in progression.

For example, as you explain how you learned to be a DJ, you could show images of yourself setting up your equipment, turning on the speakers and turntable, a close-up of you grooving with your headphones on, then a shot of a crowd dancing below you.

⁹ http://blog.accepted.com/acceptedcom_blog/2010/3/22/part-ii-the-dos-and-donts-of-audio-and-video-application-sty.html

30 - 40 sec:

Directly address the camera again.

Use this as a transition to state how you have used this hobby to enrich the lives of others. If you change locations, you can film yourself walking into the new place.

40 - 55 sec:

Write another 15 sec. narration.

You will record this over a series of images that show an action in progression.

In this DJ example, you could explain what you learned about leadership through sharing this hobby with others. Let's say that you started an after-school DJ class for disadvantaged kids. You could show images of yourself entering the school, talking to the class, then advising them at the turntable.

55 - 60 sec:

Directly address the camera one more time.

You can end on an image of you talking to the camera while the kids are grooving in the background. State why you love to be a DJ.

As you can see, you must be concise when writing for video. Use simple language and get right to the point! Above all, show a process so that you're giving the adcom a visual story to follow.

Let's get Technical...with Audio

As your story is the most compelling part of your audio clip, there's no need to sweat the technical stuff. Several inexpensive, user-friendly recording options are probably sitting right in front of you, on your computer.

For Mac users: The podcast recorder in GarageBand is your best bet. Record your voice using the computer's internal speakers (works best on a laptop) or a Skype-type USB headset. The program helps you export the final product to iTunes in .mp3 format—which is easily uploadable to various school sites. Here's a [basic](#) tutorial, and an [intermediate](#)¹⁰ version. (Starting at minute 1:30 the instructor offers tips on how to edit within the tracks.)

For PC users: Sound Recorder is the built-in Windows audio tool, but it's not user-friendly. There are numerous other Windows-oriented editing programs you can [buy and download](#),¹¹ but I recommend [Audacity](#).¹² It's free and relatively easy to use. Check out this [podcast tutorial](#).¹³ (It's a bit hard to see on a laptop, but if you hit "Control" and the "+" sign you can enlarge the screen.) Also, on PC's you have to use a Skype-type USB headset as your microphone. Otherwise you'll need to purchase an external microphone that you plug into your computer.

For external audio recorders: I recommend using equipment like a Zoom or an Olympus LS-11. But there is really no need. Sure, if sailing is one of the most important activities in your life, it might be cool to add the sound of the waves and the seagulls to your audio mix. But if all you've got is a hand recorder, it will most likely sound scratchy unless you've got a really good microphone. Basically, if you don't have prior experience recording and mixing audio, I suggest you stick to narrating your story into a computer. Production will be much easier and still sound great.

Here are the Top Five Tips for your audio recording:

- 1. Write as you speak:** As you're writing, speak aloud so that you use language you would normally use for speaking, rather than for writing.
- 2. Use headphones:** When you do record your audio, make sure to use headphones so that you know what you sound like. But don't just trust what you hear. Sometimes there are different controls for how loud the microphone is picking up your voice, and for your headphone volume. Recording programs and devices should have a visual indicator for your voice level.

¹⁰ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K40psTeLDOs>

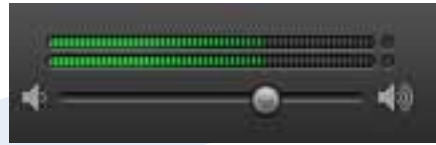
¹¹ <http://podcast-software-review.toptenreviews.com/>

¹² <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>

¹³ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IC3VZkfdgV8>

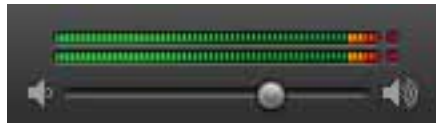
In GarageBand, it looks like this in the editing window when you play back what you've recorded:

GOOD



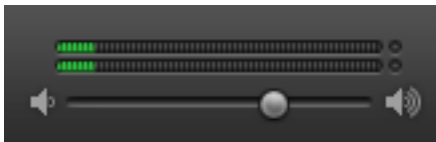
See how the bars are green, a little more than midway into the window? This is a good level.

BAD



In this example, my voice is too loud. This is called peaking and your voice will sound tinny. This means you are too close to your microphone. Move back, or speak more softly so that your voice falls into the “GOOD” range.

BAD



In this example, my voice is too low. I either need to speak up, or move closer to the microphone.

3. Practice, and do a test export. Before you record, practice saying your script aloud at least five times. Print it out so that you can underline words you want to emphasize. You should also time yourself, to make sure that you are staying within the allotted limit. Also, record a short 10 second snippet and practice exporting it into the school's acceptable format.

4. Think like your audience. The admissions committee is going to be listening to hundreds, maybe thousands of these clips. Most people will probably use GarageBand, so if you choose to jazz up your piece with one of the audio jingles they provide, most likely someone else will too, and you will sound less unique! What is going to make you stand out the most is your story. So again, and I can't emphasize this enough, unless adding extra music or sound is part of YOUR story, DON'T add it in!

5. Record in front of another person, and smile. This will help you to visualize your audience, and help you sound more like you are telling a story, rather than just reading off a page. By smiling, you will automatically boost your energy, and sound more interesting as you speak.

Video, Let's Get Technical

Imagine you're a pro rock-climber, contemplating the 300-foot granite face looming above. To succeed, you need to visualize how you'll make it to the top. It's the same with video. Envision what you want to see on the screen, then plan, plan, plan ahead!

Storyboarding

Just like you would do for an essay or an audio clip, first write an [outline and script](#).¹⁴ With video, you will also create a pictorial guide called a storyboard.

Print out several copies of a [template](#).¹⁵ Draw out each shot. It doesn't have to be complicated at all. Use stick figures. Just make a quick sketch to envision what you'll see through the camera.

Each shot should last between three and five seconds. Under three seconds, people might have a hard time grasping what is going on, and over five seconds, people generally become bored. When you're speaking to the camera, however, you can hold the shot for a little longer, like seven to eight seconds. So for a one minute clip, you'll need about 12-15 different shots. (**EXTRA TIP:** [Abroadview.org](#)¹⁶ gives some great tips about choosing visuals for your script.)

Under the picture, write the portion of the script that you plan to say.

Variation of shots: Sequence and distance

As you tell your story, make sure to show a sequence at various distances from the camera. For example, when filming the [DJ sequence](#),¹⁷ you could start like this:

Shot 1: Establishing shot of room with DJ equipment. The viewer can see your entire body, standing near the DJ equipment, facing a crowd.

Shot 2: Medium shot. Closer to the DJ booth, midriff to just above your head with your hands visible on the turntable.

Shot 3: Close-up shot. Your fingers on the turntable.

Shot 4: Establishing shot again. This time with the camera behind your head capturing the silhouette of your back and the crowd dancing below you.

¹⁴ http://blog.accepted.com/acceptedcom_blog/2010/3/23/part-iii-the-dos-and-donts-of-audio-and-video-application-st.html

¹⁵ <http://www.printablepaper.net/category/storyboard>

¹⁶ <http://www.abroadview.org/stories/media/video/tips/guide/index.htm>

¹⁷ http://blog.accepted.com/acceptedcom_blog/2010/3/23/part-iii-the-dos-and-donts-of-audio-and-video-application-st.html

Shooting Tips

- 1. Hold the camera steady.** For each shot, remain stationary and count for at least 10 seconds. You can cut the footage down later in your editing program to the appropriate length. Don't zoom in and out. For the interview portions, use a tripod if possible.
- 2. Position people properly in front of the camera.** When you are speaking to the camera, shoot yourself straight on—like a news reporter.

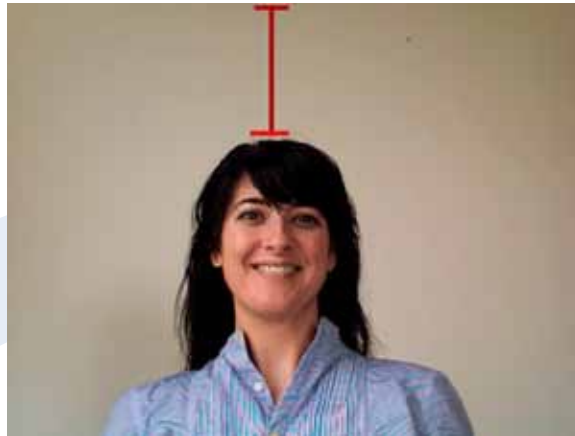
GOOD



This is a nice shot because I've centered myself in the middle and the camera is capturing a shot just over the top of my head. I look like I'm about to speak directly to you.

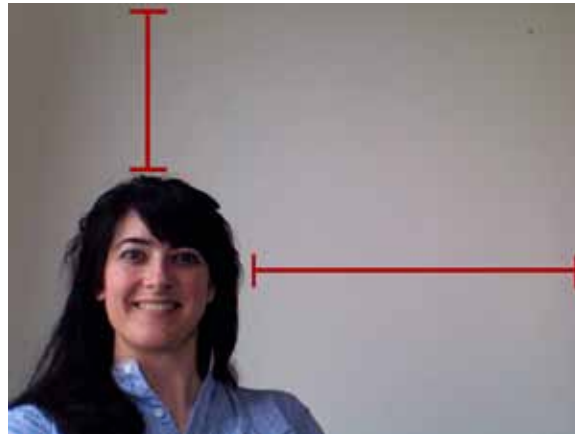
EXTRA TIP: If you are using a camera with a built-in microphone, this is also a good distance to stand for the interview portion, as you'll be close enough for the camera to pick up your voice. Stand too far away, and it may be hard to hear you.

BAD



This is a bad picture because there's too much space over my head in the camera frame.

BAD



Here there's way too much space over my head and I'm not centered.

Sound

Make sure you and any other camera operator use headphones to verify the sound is being recorded properly.

If you're outside, stay conscious of your surroundings. If a car goes by while you're trying to talk, wait until it passes. If you're trying to speak where there is loud music, choose another place. It may drown out your voice and make you hard to hear. Or, you can record your voiceover in a quiet place and edit it over the music.

Equipment

Don't spend lots of money on equipment. There are several inexpensive options for video:

- 1. Borrow a friend's equipment or use a Smartphone.** Just make sure that you know how to upload the content of the camera into an editing program. Here's how you can [enter your iPhone footage into iMovie](#).¹⁸
- 2. Buy a [Flip](#)¹⁹ camera.** Here's a link about how to capture footage into [iMovie](#)²⁰ or [Moviemaker](#).²¹
- 3. Here are a couple of how-to videos for editing with [iMovie](#)²² or [Moviemaker](#).**²³

Final Tips

You could possibly shoot the whole thing by yourself, but I wouldn't recommend it. Have someone else film the portions where you are looking directly into the camera, then takeover for the other parts.

Practice and memorize what you are going to say directly to the camera. If you're not good at memorization, narrate the whole thing—until the end. Make sure you include a small snippet where you are directly addressing the audience.

Above all, remember to smile. This will naturally increase your energy and make you pleasant to watch.

Have fun and happy shooting!

18 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JfqChYdQHjg&feature=related>

19 <http://www.theflip.com/en-us/?gclid=CI6U35L38qACFcgUzAodwQznHQ>

20 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZNUQ_dXeDFk

21 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fCgHSzPqax4&feature=related>

Epilogue

Thank you for downloading this exclusive [Accepted.com](#) special report. We hope you've learned important tips about how to prepare an audio or video application clip.

If you still don't feel confident about creating a multi-media application, then the talented and knowledgeable [Accepted.com staff](#)²² would be happy to help you. Even if you think you can accomplish this lofty goal on your own, a second set of experienced, objective eyes (and ears) can add valuable perspective when you've been working non-stop to best present yourself via audio or video clip. Also, the key to a good audio or video clip is good writing, or scripting.

Professional writers have editors for good reasons. Shouldn't you, like the thousands of clients who have worked with Accepted since 1994, have a pro on your side for something as important as preparing your b-school application—whether you decide to write it, record it, or shoot it?

[Please click here for our catalog of services.](#)

We look forward to hearing from you!



²² http://www.accepted.com/aboutus/aboutus.aspx?utm_campaign=MultimediaInApps&utm_medium=PDF&utm_source=Subscribers&utm_content=AcceptedStaff