Choosing Your Topic

- Your topic should easily relate to the theme
- Pick a topic that relates to your areas of interest
- If covering a large, well-known topic, focus on one particular aspect
  - Bus Boycotts in Civil Rights Movement
  - Don’t cover entire war, find one part of the war like a battle or person
    - Christmas Truce, WWI
    - Code Girls, WWII
    - Home front
    - Battle of Antietam, Civil War
- If your topic is a well-known person, narrow your topic to a specific part of their life or significant event
  - Eleanor Roosevelt’s time as a delegate to the United Nation’s General Assembly
  - Amelia Earhart and the creation of the 99’s
  - Joan of Arc being burned at the stake
  - Booker T. Washington and the Atlanta Compromise speech
  - Crazy Horse at the Battle of Little Big Horn
- Be careful of or avoid topics with known conspiracy theories
  - JFK assassination
  - Death of Meriwether Lewis

Researching Topic

- Look at all point of views
  - Suffrage and anti-movement
  - Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and George Wallace in Civil Rights Movement
  - United States and Russia/Soviet Union in Space Race
- Look for newer interpretations
  - Historians examine psychological and biological explanations for the Salem Witch Trials

While Filming

- Avoid gimmicks or “vlog” style
  - Remember this is a documentary
- Include an opening title segment (under 10 seconds)
- Include credits at the end
  - List the sources for your images and sound
  - Include anyone whose help was integral to your documentary
- Should be between 8-10 minutes

Before You Film

- Think about the story you want to tell
  - It is about telling a story, not just presenting facts
- Outline the events and arguments that will tell your story
  - Have a thesis statement and supporting arguments
    - Draw conclusions and analyze the information you present, don’t editorialize
- Write a script (1 page is about 2 minutes)
- Edit your script

I don’t think that there has been a film that I’ve done that hasn’t been influenced by libraries and archives.

Ken Burns
Other Tips

• Don’t plagiarize!!!
• Cite your sources

According to Roosevelt’s autobiography ...

Elizabeth Smith Friedman said ...

Other Tips

• If presenting a fact that is not well known or “common knowledge”
• When quoting someone

Use high quality images
• If it becomes pixelated in video, don’t use it
• Ask the institution for a higher quality version
• Speak with an even cadence and pace
• When recording audio, leave a few seconds at the beginning and end to help with editing
• Look up phonetic pronunciations of words you don’t know
• If you’re not comfortable in front of camera, don’t use on-camera narration
• Don’t use audio or video of recorded interviews if either is poor quality
• Keep interview clips short (under 30 seconds)
  • Treat like a block quote in a paper
  • Should be used to present unique facts or interpretations, not basic information

Helpful Resources

• TurnItIn.com
• Plagiarism.org
• The Dust Bowl: An Unforgettable Farming Catastrophe
• Mental Disabilities From Cursed Beings to Equal Citizens
• The Pendergast Machine
• Jeannette Rankin: Pioneer, Pacifist, Peacemaker