

Basic Filmmaking Concepts

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Composition Basics

- Composition deals with the arrangements of things in the frame.
- In film, everything the viewer sees needs to be arranged inside the frame. This creates meaningful relationships between the subjects.
- The points is to achieve a balanced, aesthetically pleasing, unified, harmonious whole.

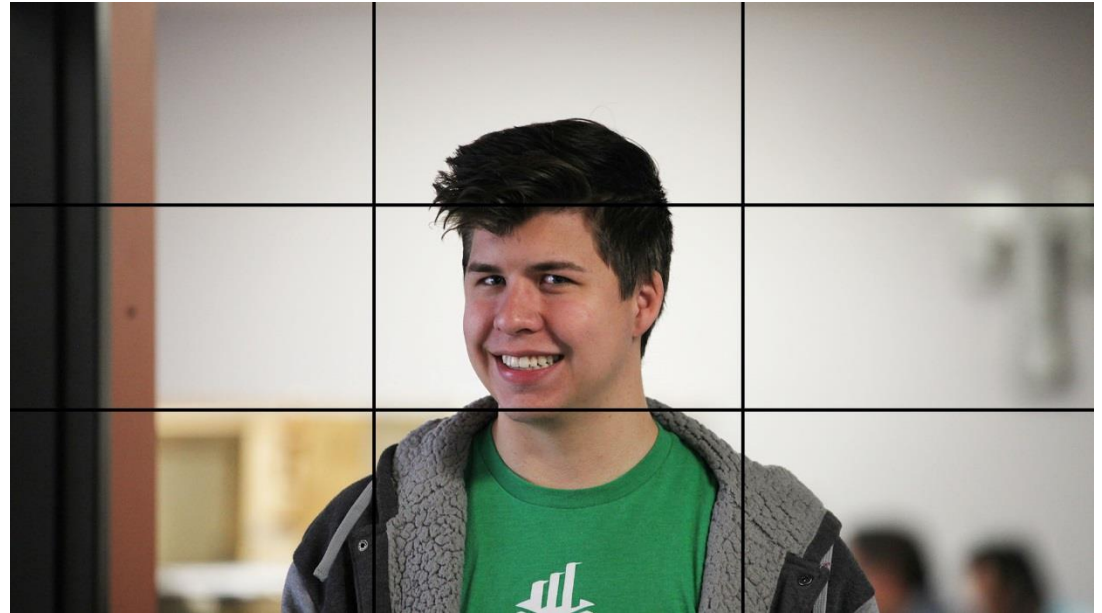
Don't put your subject in the middle.

- Everyone's instinct is to put the subject of the in the center.

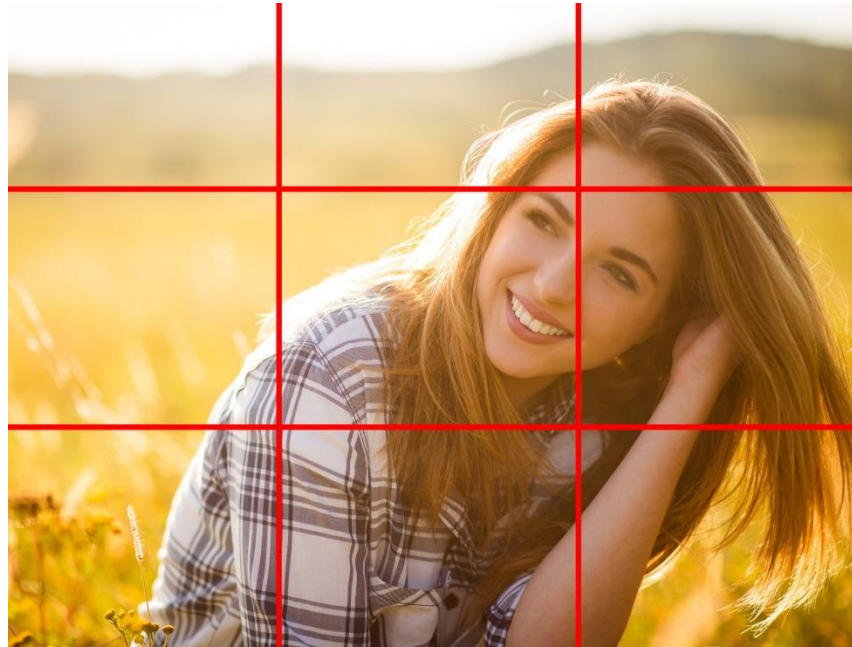
Like this.



Or this.

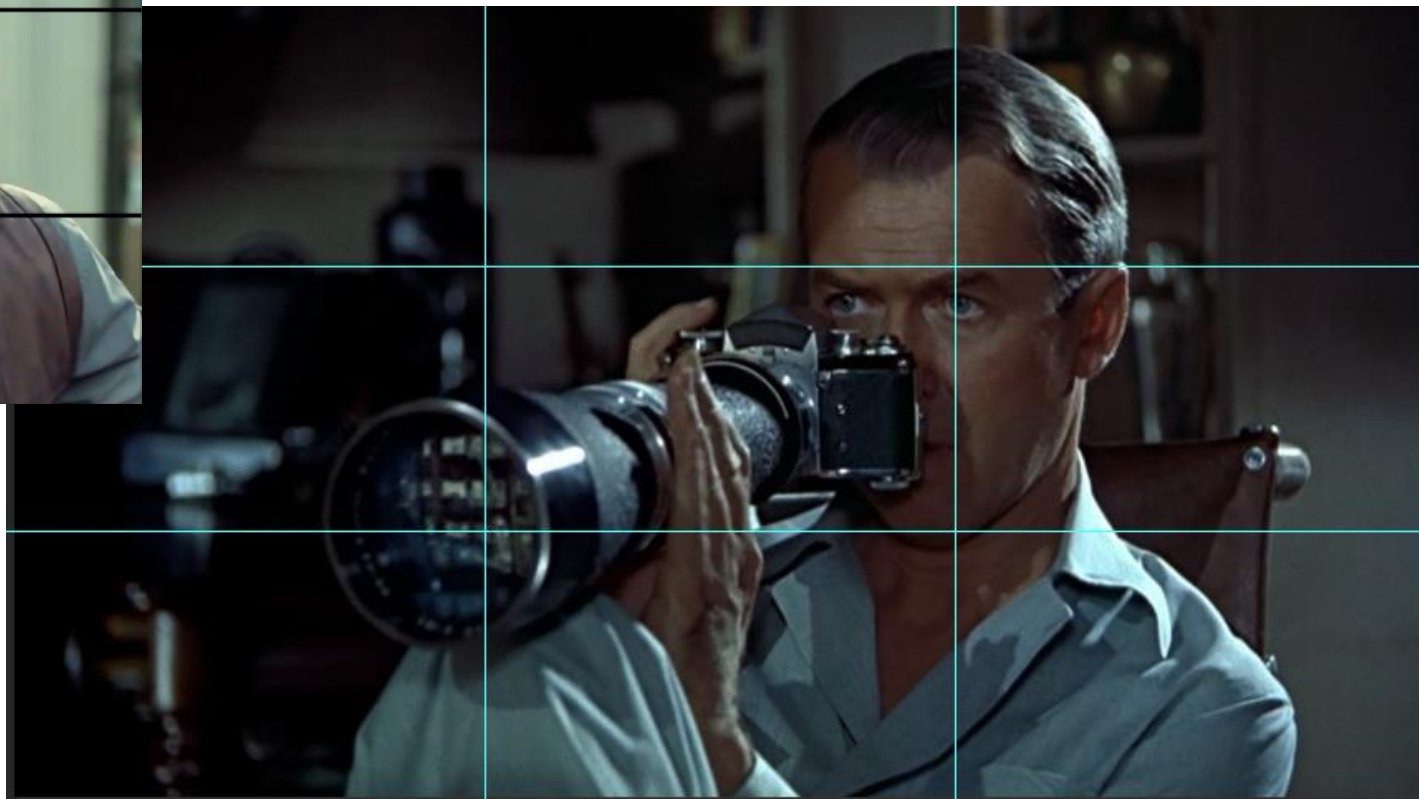


It is actually more pleasing to put the subject off to one side.

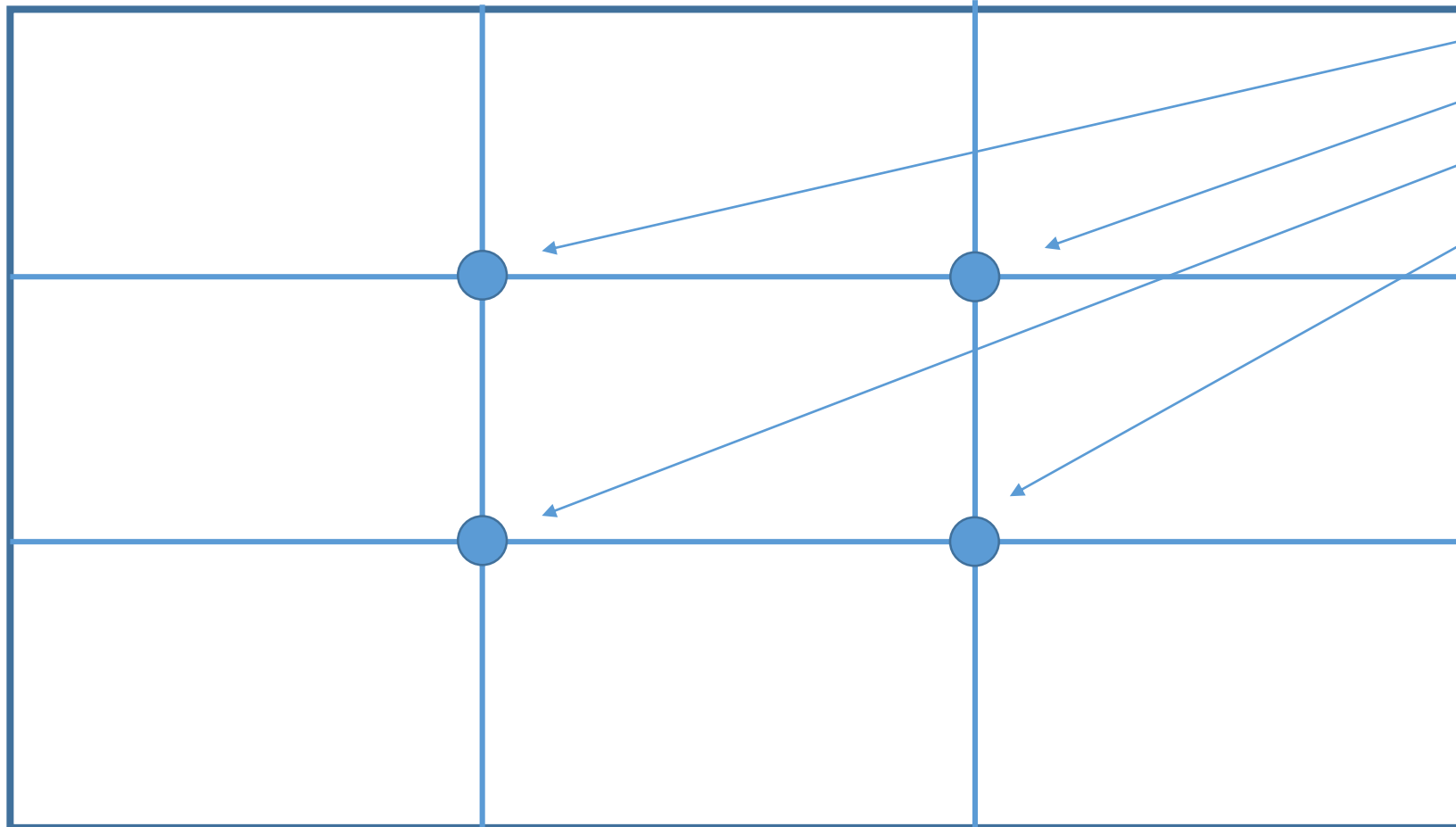


Like these.

You see this in film and TV all the time.



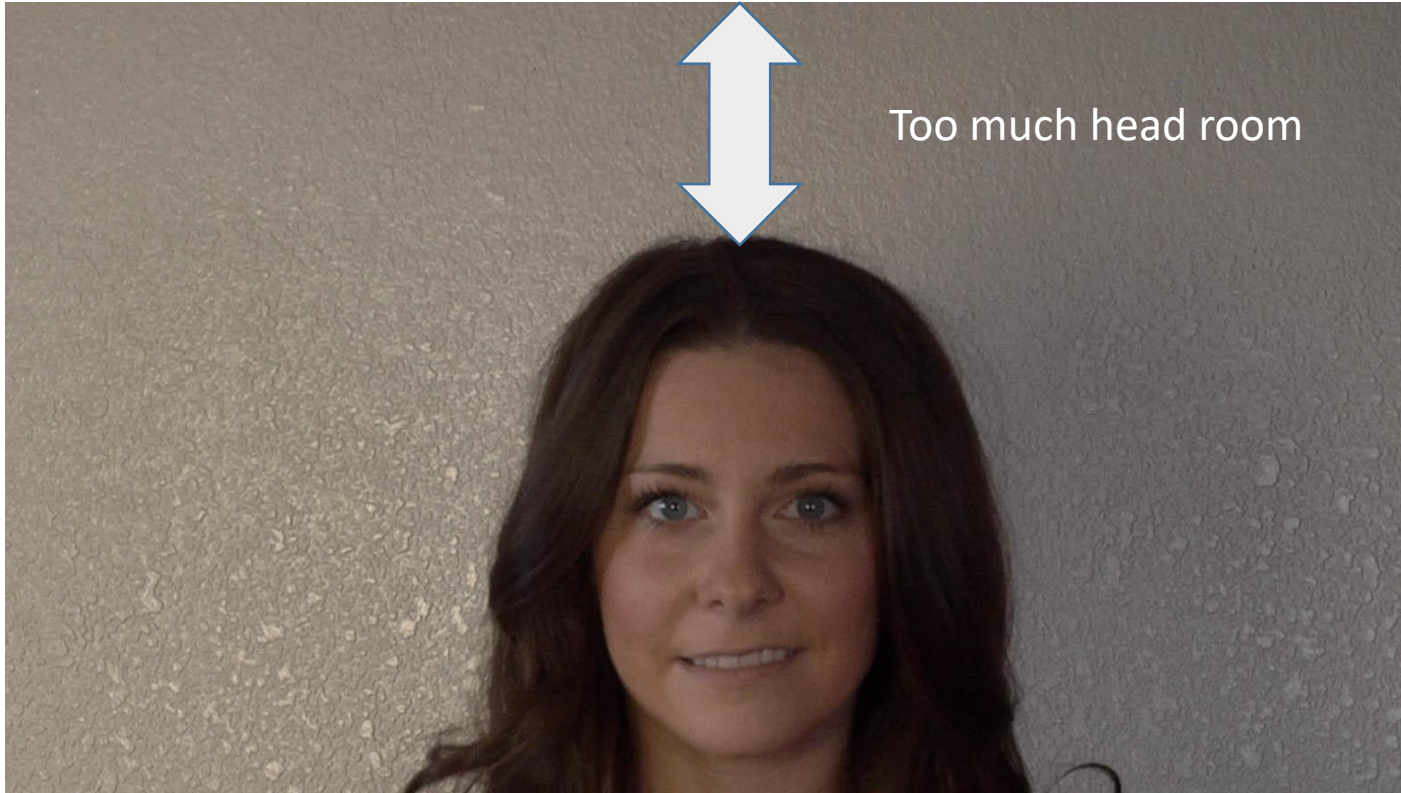
The previous shots follow a guideline called the *rule of thirds*.



The rule says that compositions are more pleasing if the subject is placed at one of the intersections of this grid. It also ensures that you will have the right amount of head room.

For more on this concept, watch this short video:

[Rule of Thirds](#)

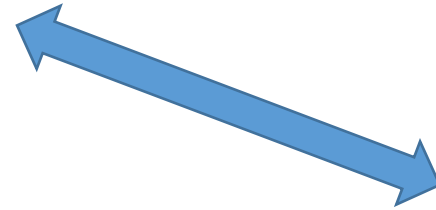


*Also don't shoot your subject right up against a wall. It causes shadows and looks like a mugshot...

Don't put your subject too low in the frame or you will have too much room above their head.

Don't put your subject too high in the frame or you will have too little room above their head. It will feel cramped.

Not enough
head room



Vary your shot types.

Basic Camera Shots



Extreme Wide Shot



Wide Shot



Medium Shot



Medium Close up



Close up



Extreme Close up

Shot types help tell a story. Each has a purpose.

- Different types of shots give you more options when it comes to editing.
- It will give your documentary more visual interest
- Don't shoot every shot in a long shot.



In this extreme long shot (XLS), we know where the people are, but nothing about them.



This long shot (LS) provides context. We know this is a dancer and where she is; in the studio. We can also still see some details about her.



Close ups (CU) are for emphasis. Here we see the boys expression. We don't know anything about where he is, but we see the emotion on his face very clearly. Look for parts of your documentary that would help the viewer feel the emotion of a subject and shoot that in a close up.

When you compose a shot, make sure that there is a clear subject.

- Don't make the viewer guess what they are supposed to be looking at. You should direct their attention.
- This can be achieved via the use of
 - Color
 - Size
 - Contrast
 - Placement in the frame
 - Line
 - Shape



This shot has no focal point/dominant. It is too busy and there is nothing that is commanding our attention at the expense of everything else. The viewer doesn't know what to look at.



Just making sure that one element sticks out, here with color, you can ensure that the viewer is not confused as to what to look at.

Camera Angle

Camera angles influence how we interpret the material we see.

- Most shots are taken from eye level. This helps create empathy, since it is as though we are there, seeing what someone would see if they were in the scene.

Camera Angle

- However these are not always the most interesting or dramatic. Sometimes you should use a high (camera low but looking up) angle, and sometimes a low (camera high but looking down) angle.
 - A high camera angle means that the camera itself is low but it is looking up
 - This makes subjects look dangerous, powerful, or imposing
 - A low camera angle means that the camera itself is high, but looking down
 - This makes subjects look weak, powerless, unimportant, or diminutive.



Superheroes, arch-villians, and presidents are often shot from a low camera angle.

Subjects that are weak or vulnerable are sometimes shot from a high camera angle to emphasize their state.



Establishing shots

- It is a good idea to make sure you let your audience know where the action is taking place. You do this via an establishing shot. It let's the audience know where and when the event is.

Establishing shots

Here we know that the action is taking place during the day at a coffee shop.



Establishing shots



Here we know that the action is taking place in a large city at night.

Technical Settings

- Unless you have done this before and understand the technical issues in film, use the following settings on your phone or camera
- Resolution: 1920x1080
- Frame rate: 30 (29.97) FPS
- Know that video files are big. Very big. You will need to copy them to a laptop or external hard drive frequently.

Lighting

Lighting is one of—if not the most—important factor in film.

- There are two factors to consider when dealing with light:
 - Practical and aesthetic
- You need enough light so that you can see your subject properly. This deals with what is called *exposure*.



If there is not enough light, it is called underexposed. You can't see your subject clearly.

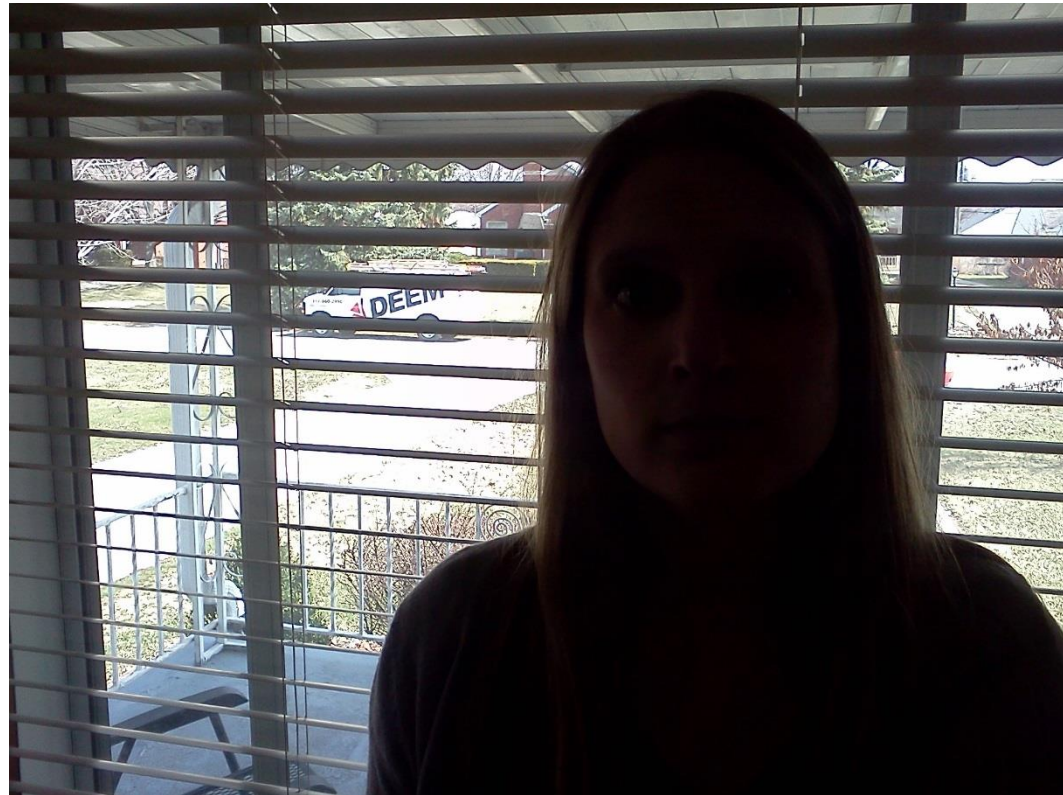
Underexposed

If there is too much light,
it is called overexposed.
You can't see your subject
clearly here either.



Overexposed

- Don't shoot your subject against an open window. It will likely be underexposed.



This is a tripod. Use one.
It is very uncommon to
see an entire film shot
handheld. It is visually
disconcerting. Tripods
and mounts for cell
phones are available in
the library.



Camera movement

For your purposes, it is generally better to leave the camera still. If you have to move the camera make your movements slow or they will be disconcerting to the viewer. Camera movement can add a degree of visual interest, however, so if you need to do it here are some guidelines.

- A *pan* moves the camera left and right. It is good for following action where you don't want to make an edit.
- Set up your action so that the camera follows the person from the front so you can see their face(s).
- Zooms
 - Don't do it. It is extremely uncommon in film. It is a highly visible technique that draws attention away from your subject.

Audio

- Audio is just as important as your video. If your audience can't hear, they will likely lose interest faster than if the video isn't great.
- Without a microphone, stay under 6"
- Ambient noise is the naturally occurring noise that goes on in any given space. Pay attention to ambient noise that might interfere with your recording. Common things are:
 - Fans
 - Ventilation
 - Noisy rooms
- If any of these are present, move somewhere else.

Shooting tip

- When you start a shot, let the camera run for a few seconds (5-10) before you start the action, and then a few seconds after the action is finished. This will make your editing a lot easier.
- If you are interviewing a person, ask them the question and then tell them to count silently to themselves to 5 then answer. It allows you more time to make edits and include transitions.

Legal Issues

- If you are going to interview anyone, you need to have them sign a video release form for legal purposes. They are available on the Ethics Institute site.
- Most music is owned by someone. They have the copyright to that music and you can only use it with permission. You will need to use music that is not copyrighted. There are many sites that you can find royalty free music on.
- The same thing applies to images you may find on the Internet. Make sure you are using images that are not copyrighted.

Editing

- You can edit using any tool you are familiar with. This may include:
 - Windows Moviemaker
 - iMovie
 - Adobe Premier
- Editing can be time consuming when done properly. **Make sure you start early** to allow for feedback and revisions.