THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO USING A GOPRO ON LAND & WATER

Excellent Tips That Will Help You Get The Most Out Of Your GoPro Camera.
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INTRODUCTION

The GoPro community are some of our most active users and we are always trying to learn more about the type of videos they want to create.

The majority of our users want to create fun and interesting GoPro videos. They are not video editing experts (and do not necessarily want to become one) and they are not pro or semi-pro sports people.

This guide is aimed at the regular enthusiastic person, who wants to capture their passion and hobbies in the best possible way without becoming bogged down in technical jargon.
Creating a GoPro video should not become the sole aim of the day. You want to enjoy the experience of skiing/snowboarding/biking, etc. Capturing that rush of adrenaline on camera is just a great by-product.

When you are in the zone and not focusing on the camera, the video will look a lot cooler and be more authentic.

With this in mind, we’ve put together our most popular tips to help you create better GoPro videos whether you’re using your GoPro camera on land or water.
WHERE YOU MOUNT YOUR GOPRO MATTERS.

It may seem obvious, but mount placement can make or break a video. This topic appears again and again in forums and comment sections. However, it is not a one size fits all solution and different sports definitely benefit from different mounts.

According to Pro mountain biker Aaron Chase, in an article in Men’s Fitness:

“Before you film your shots, test the angles and the outcome. Mounting a GoPro on the handlebars is significantly bumpier than a helmet- or chest-mount, since the body’s motion absorbs jolts more readily than the bars.”
Chase continues, “The go-to shot would be to stick it on the top of your head, but it actually doesn’t give you much reference to what’s going on, and your helmet might cut off a lot of the action”. If you want the most natural POV perspective, Chase recommends **mounting the camera to one side of a full face helmet**.

**Another great tip, this time from Whitelines:**
“mount the camera on your helmet before you put it on your head. Get the mount near the front, not bang on the top like a teletubby.

When you’re filming helmet-cam the most exciting action will be happening roughly two-three metres in front of you, so angle the camera down so that a straight line drawn from the centre of the lens will intersect a similar line drawn from your eyes a couple of metres away. That way, you’ll be recording what you’re looking at, easy!”

**Abe Kislevitz**, a professional GoPro videographer, has a really great site where he shares great tips and resources. Although there are tons of poles and monopods on the market, he still uses his trusty old ski-pole with a GoPro duct-taped to the end.
According to Abe, “having a good pole for GoPro follow-cam filming while skiing/snowboarding is absolutely imperative in my eyes. No matter how steady you think your hands are, handholding a GoPro will never yield good stable shots. Also, the name of the game for dynamic GoPro shots is getting as close as you can to your subject. Having a longer pole will help you with that extra 3 feet of length which could be the difference between a mediocre shot and an amazing shot!”

Also think about turning the camera on yourself – you’re part of the story and an element missing from many GoPro Videos.

Finally, get a friend to check the position of the camera or use the GoPro app.

Here is some advice from DigitalSpy:

“Once you are set up and ready to go, make sure you use the GoPro app to check positioning of the camera. We once filmed ourselves out at a go-kart track with a head-mounted GoPro, only to find the footage we had was all of our chin.”
LESS IS MORE
EDIT, EDIT AND EDIT SOME MORE.

Many of the videos we see from GoPro users are 5 minutes or longer. We know it’s a tough balance – you’ve captured all this great content and you feel obligated to use it. However, your video will be more interesting to other viewers (and yourself in the future) if you cut it down to less than 3 minutes.

Key Points to take away:

The first few seconds should set the scene – where are you? / who are you with? / when is it? Selectively pick the best shots from the day.

Be ruthless. Edit out all unnecessary footage. It may seem painful at the time but you’ll be glad you did. Use quick edits to keep the video interesting.

End the video with some footage that sums up the joy / adrenaline / fun of the day.
GET INSPIRATION

Watch some Pro videos on the GoPro channel and you’ll get a great feel for what works.

For editing your footage, a video editing suite like trakaxPC is great tool to quickly edit audio, video and photos. The software includes colour correction, cropping, motion and panning and effects so users can quickly edit any mistakes and create professional-standard videos without spending a fortune.
GO PRO SETTINGS

Getting to grips with all the settings and features of any camera can seem intimidating. However, just knowing a few key settings should set you up nicely.

Visit http://imgur.com/a/CjmC5 for a larger version of the image below which explains the various frame sizes available to you on your GoPro.
GoPro cameras now go even as high as 4k which is cinema resolution, but unless you’re actually shooting for a feature film, this is probably a bit much.

Footage captured in 4k will also create very large video files and can put lower spec computers under severe pressure when trying to edit.

The frame rate is the other number you need to worry about. It refers to the number of pictures taken per second by the sensor. Humans can’t see anything faster than around 25fps with the naked eye so unless you’re planning to go slo-mo, won’t need anything faster.

There are some great Cheat Sheets available that summarise all the main formats and give you great advice on what’s the best format for your needs.

**Whitelines** probably gives the best advice on this:

“720p, 1080p and now 2k and 4k are different resolution sizes. They refer to the number of pixels on the vertical axis of your square frame to be exact.

1080 is officially HD, but in actual fact 720 is good enough for most computers. You’d only notice the difference on a pretty substantial TV screen and if you film on **720 you’ll save yourself a whole heap of memory.**

View the Cheat Sheet: David Coleman Photography
But when it comes to slo-mo, the higher the frame rate the more you can slow it down before the footage starts going juddery.

So 50fps or 60fps will be the standard slo-mo setting, while filming at 100 or 120 will allow you to slow everything right down. Simple really!

Here is another article, again on Abe Kislevitz’s site pretty much explains everything you may need to know. It’s very technical, but if you want a deeper understanding, it pretty much covers everything.
LETTERBOXING
WHY IS THERE LETTERBOXING IN MY VIDEO?

What is letterboxing? As a video is playing, you may notice the video images uses the full width of screen but when a picture enters, there will be pillar boxes on the sides of the image.

This can happen because of two things: the aspect ratio your original footage was taken in (i.e. the resolution setting chosen on your camera) and the aspect ratio you choose when exporting and uploading your video file.

The GoPro camera only shoots still images in a standard 4:3 aspect ratio, while video is generally shot in the popular widescreen resolution such as 1080p or 720p (16:9 aspect ratio).
YouTube now uses only 16:9 aspect ratio for its media player. If you are uploading a non-16:9 file, it will be processed and displayed correctly as well, with pillar boxes (black bars on the left and right) or letter boxes (black bars at the top and bottom).

We have created an in-depth blog post on why letterboxing can appear when creating a video.
HOW TO FIX LETTERBOXING IN MY VIDEO?

First off, if you’re recording video be sure to select the correct aspect ratio. You will want to select a video setting with a 16:9 aspect ratio. Selecting either 1080p or 720p HD will be a perfect fit for your video.

The main issue with letterboxing occurs when a 4:3 aspect ratio is selected. This can happen when shooting images, selecting the timelapse setting on your GoPro device or choosing a video setting like 960p (1280x960) or 1440p (1920x1440).

If your image or video has letterboxing, you can fix this issue in your video editing software. If you are using a video editing software like trakaxPC, you can use the zoom settings in the segment properties for the file or use the “pan & zoom” effect to zoom into the image. By zooming into the image you will remove the letterboxing at the side. After zooming in, you can use the “Sharpen” tool in the Colour Adjust Menu to smooth and tighten the image quality.

YouTube also allows you to stretch a video with a 4:3 aspect ratio to 16:9 when uploading. This option will cut off any content that falls outside of this area. It will also zoom in if you have widescreen content that is being shrunk to 4:3 and may lead to some distortion. You can test this option out by entering: “yt:crop=16:9” in the “Tag” field in the video upload section.
AUDIO & SOUNDTRACK
We recently found a site called “Free Music Archive” which has tons of great free tracks perfect for most videos.

Check out our blog on how-to legally use free and paid music in your video. In the post, we cover how to give the correct attribution to music you use in your video. We also provide some links to useful sites offering free and royalty-free music.

THINK ABOUT THE AUDIO & SOUNDTRACK

The next area to check out is the sound quality. You see tons of GoPro videos with whistling wind, rattling mounts and overall sound distortion.

**We recommend muting everything other than bringing in some cheers, whoops, voices or landings that add to the story.**

As this is a personal video, you may have a soundtrack picked out in your head. However, bear in mind on YouTube, a copyrighted soundtrack may be blocked in certain countries and certain devices.
CONTENT IS KING

We’ve spent a good deal of time on GoPro forums trying to learn more about this community and what’s important to them.

I think one thing I find slightly disconcerting is the amount of technical talk from the users. Sure, you may want to do some colour correction, however, what makes the best GoPro videos engaging is the first person experience, the exhilaration of the run, and the authentic reaction of the user to the thrill of the ride.

I think some GoPro users get caught up in the mindset of “if only I had the latest GoPro” / “if only I had $300 to buy Final Cut Pro”, my videos would be so much more awesome.
When you’re on the GoPro channel, you’ll see awesome videos like the flip-jump by Clayton Butler in Utah. The editing is super simple, the actual video itself is only around 50 seconds long and they added a soundtrack.

No matter what your set up and equipment, the content you are working with is what will make or break your video. Be natural, keep it real and edit interesting content and you have all the ingredients for a successful video.

The reality is, most of us won’t be jumping off a mountain anytime soon. But the same principles apply –

keep it simple,
keep it short,
keep it authentic.
SHOOTING AROUND WATER

If you know you’re going to be shooting on a specific day, first thing to check is that your battery is fully charged. Make sure you have enough memory to capture all the necessary footage (you can always invest in an extra external SD card).

Before using the GoPro around water, make sure to check your waterproof housing. You do not want water pouring in and ruining the camera.
GoPro state:

“you’ll want to be sure to verify that there is no dirt or debris along the white rubber gasket that could compromise the integrity of the waterproof case.”

When shooting underwater, the heat from the battery and the cold exterior can sometimes cause the lens to fog which is something you definitely do not want to happen.

You can combat this by adding some Anti-Fog inserts into the water-proof casing. These are available from GoPro for around $20.
CAMERA SETTINGS

“If you are filming underwater and want to capture fast moving objects like fish, we would recommend shooting at 1080px 60fps as this will allow you to slow down the footage without impacting too much on quality.”

Remember - If you are taking photos and video, the GoPro captures still images in 4:3 aspect ratio which, as mentioned previously, can lead to letterboxing in your video if exported to 1080p or 720p HD (16:9 aspect ratio).
LIGHTING UNDERWATER

Lighting any shoot can be testing at the best of times. Shooting underwater without a source of light, as you can imagine, can be extremely challenging. The shallower you are in the water the better the light source will be for your video. If you are filming around a reef the colours will seem bright and vibrant.

**Tip: always shoot with the sun at your back**

However, the deeper you go in the water, the darker the footage will become. It would be advisable to add a red filter to your lens as the colour spectrum will be mainly blue/green (and this red filter will help bring a natural colour back to the video).

If you plan on doing a deep dive it would certainly be recommended to add a focus-light to your set up as well. Another tip that may help when capturing footage underwater is to shoot with a slight downward angle, as this will help to maximize the light from the light source.
ACCESSORIES

As mentioned at the start of this guide, where you mount your camera matters. With so many different mounts available, think about the type of videos you will be regularly capturing and select the ones which will work best for you, be it for your head, chest, wrist, board or special camera mount.

For scuba-drivers, there are a number of mounts options such as a double-handed tray with GoPro and light mounts available.
PRIORITIZE SAFETY
SAFETY IS ESSENTIAL

Whether you’re capturing videos on land or around water, safety is paramount for you, your friends and the general public.

I think it would fair to say, everybody understands that any activity around water, be it in the sea, on lakes or rivers, can be extremely dangerous, no matter how experienced you are. Before jumping in, make sure you check all the notice boards in and around the area for any warnings of strong riptides or dangers lurking in the deep.

For snorkelers and scuba-divers, make sure all your equipment is working correctly and you are happy with the environment and all the procedures involved.
When on land, think of the activity you are going to doing and the safety procedures involved. For example, if you are an experienced skier and like to go off-piste, have you the necessary equipment such as survival gear and avalanche tools?

If you are going to a track day with your car and want to record some in-car dashboard footage, is your car safe and do have the required equipment such as a crash helmet and proper shoes?
FEEDBACK & SHARE

We would love to hear some of your tips on creating great GoPro videos.

What works for you and what tips do you think any GoPro novice needs to know?

If you found this guide interesting, maybe you help us spread the word by sharing it. Please share your comments and videos on any of our social media channels below.

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About trakaxPC:

trakaxPC is an affordable, easy-to-use, feature-rich video editing software for the everyday person. trakaxPC is aimed at the novice to intermediate level users who wishes to create original professional standard videos with minimal investment in time and cost. Users can create unique, fully featured videos for YouTube, Vimeo, Facebook, etc. Works with all the most common file formats captured by camcorder/action-cams. We also provide solutions through dedicated resource areas for Small Businesses and Education.

The company is based in Dublin, Ireland. For more information, please visit: trakax.com