

## Video & Scriptwriting / Documentary Structure

Specify B-roll needed to support interview content and narrative arc — visual coverage mapping for documentary editing.

Difficulty: Intermediate

Model: GPT-4 / Claude / Gemini

Use Case: Visual Coverage, Editing Support

Updated: June 2026

Why This Prompt Exists

Documentaries live and die on B-roll. Without planned coverage, editors face hours of talking heads with nothing to cut away to — resulting in boring, static films.

You get:

- talking heads with no cutaways (jump cuts visible, visually static)
- B-roll that doesn't match interview content (disconnected, confusing)
- generic, meaningless footage (filler, not storytelling)
- insufficient coverage for key moments (can't illustrate what's being described)
- no visual variety (same shot type, same angle, same location)

But B-roll has specific functions:

- illustrative B-roll: shows what interview describes (visual evidence)
- atmospheric B-roll: sets mood, establishes place (emotional tone)
- transitional B-roll: bridges topics, covers cuts (editing aid)

- metaphorical B-roll: represents abstract concepts (visual poetry)
- archival B-roll: historical footage, photos, documents (evidence)
- process B-roll: shows action, work, movement (dynamic, engaging)

Without planning, B-roll fails.

This prompt plans B-roll coverage based on interview content.

The Prompt

Assume the role of a documentary B-roll specialist who plans visual coverage.

Your task is to specify B-roll needed to support interview content.

Generate:

## 1. B-ROLL TYPE CLASSIFICATION

Type	Purpose	Example	Best For
Illustrative	Shows what's described	Factory floor while talking about work	Concrete topics
Atmospheric	Sets mood, establishes place	Foggy landscape, empty room	Emotional tone
Transitional	Bridges topics, covers cuts	City streets, building exteriors	Editing between segments
Metaphorical	Represents abstract concepts	Clock ticking for time, birds flying for freedom	Abstract ideas
Archival	Historical footage, photos	Newspaper headlines, old	

home movies | Past events |  
Process	Shows action, work, movement	Hands working, machines running	Action, labor, creation
Portrait	Subject in environment	Walking, working, thinking	Character development
Detail	Close-up of specific element	Hands, objects, textures	Emphasis, evidence

## 2. INTERVIEW CONTENT TO B-ROLL MAP

Interview Topic	B-Roll Type	Specific Shots	Duration
Describing a place	Illustrative + Atmospheric	Location exteriors, interiors, details	10-30s per mention
Recalling an event	Archival + Illustrative	Photos, documents, reenactment suggestions	15-45s
Explaining a process	Process + Illustrative	Step-by-step action, hands working	20-60s
Emotional reflection	Atmospheric + Metaphorical	Weather, light, empty spaces	10-20s
Relationship with subject	Portrait + Detail	Subject in environment, close-ups	15-30s
Transition between topics	Transitional	Location changes, time passing	5-10s

## 3. B-ROLL SHOT LIST TEMPLATE

| Shot ID | Type | Description | Location | Duration | Corresponding Interview Topic |

BR-01	Illustrative	[detailed shot description]	[where]	Xs	[topic from transcript]
BR-02	Atmospheric	[detailed shot description]	[where]	Xs	[mood setting]

#### 4. COVERAGE RATIOS

Documentary Length	Interview Footage	B-Roll Needed	Ratio
10 minutes	5-7 min	3-5 min	1.5:1
30 minutes	15-20 min	10-15 min	1.5:1
60 minutes	30-40 min	20-30 min	1.5:1
90 minutes	45-60 min	30-45 min	1.5:1

#### 5. B-ROLL SHOT VARIETY

Shot Type	Percentage of B-Roll	Purpose
Wide/Establishing	20%	Context, location
Medium	40%	Action, process, subject
Close-up	30%	Detail, emotion, texture
Extreme close-up	10%	Emphasis, evidence

#### 6. B-ROLL SEQUENCE PATTERNS

Pattern	Sequence	Effect

Establish → Detail → Return	WS → CU → WS	Context to specific to context
Wide → Medium → Close-up	WS → MS → CU	Increasing intimacy, focus
Details building to whole	CU → CU → WS	Mystery to reveal
Parallel action	A → B → A → B	Connection between two subjects

## 7. COMMON B-ROLL MISTAKES

Mistake	Why It Fails	Correct Approach
Generic stock footage	Disconnected from story	Shoot specific, relevant footage
No variety	Visually boring	Mix shot sizes and types
Shots too short	Can't see subject	Minimum 5-8 seconds per shot
Shots too long	Slows pace	Cut every 5-15 seconds
No establishing shots	Disoriented viewer	Start each location with WS

### INPUTS:

Interview transcript or key topics:

[PASTE INTERVIEW TOPICS OR KEY QUOTES]

Documentary topic:

[E.G., "Small town bakery closing after 50 years"]

Locations available:

[E.G., "Bakery interior, bakery exterior, owner's home, town main

street"]

Visual style:

[CINEMATIC / OBSERVATIONAL / INTIMATE / GRITTY / POLISHED]

RULES:

- Illustrative B-roll shows what interview describes (visual evidence)
- Atmospheric B-roll sets mood and establishes place (emotional tone)
- Transitional B-roll bridges topics and covers cuts (editing aid)
- Metaphorical B-roll represents abstract concepts (visual poetry)
- Process B-roll shows action, work, movement (dynamic, engaging)
- Minimum 5 seconds per B-roll shot (shorter is disorienting)
- Shoot variety: 20% WS, 40% MS, 30% CU, 10% ECU
- Plan 1.5 minutes of B-roll for every 1 minute of interview

How To Use It

- Illustrative B-roll shows what the interview describes — visual evidence of the story.
- Atmospheric B-roll sets mood and establishes place — emotional tone without words.
- Transitional B-roll bridges topics and covers cuts — editing aid between segments.
- Metaphorical B-roll represents abstract concepts — visual poetry for feelings.
- Process B-roll shows action, work, movement — dynamic, engaging visuals.
- Minimum 5 seconds per B-roll shot — shorter is disorienting, viewer can't absorb.
- Shoot variety: 20% wide, 40% medium, 30% close-up, 10% extreme close-up.
- Plan 1.5 minutes of B-roll for every 1 minute of interview — coverage ratio.

Example Input

**Interview transcript or key topics:**

"Interview topics: Growing up in the bakery, learning from father, the decision to close after 50 years"

**Documentary topic:**

“Family bakery closing after three generations”

**Locations available:**

“Bakery interior (ovens, display cases, flour), bakery exterior (sign, storefront), owner’s home (kitchen, family photos), town main street”

**Visual style:**

“INTIMATE, WARM, SLIGHTLY NOSTALGIC”

**Why It Works**

Most documentaries shoot interviews first and figure out B-roll later — resulting in generic, disconnected footage that doesn’t support the story.

This framework improves outcomes by forcing:

- B-roll type classification (illustrative, atmospheric, transitional, metaphorical, archival, process, portrait, detail)
- interview-to-B-roll mapping (which B-roll for which topic)
- shot list template (ready-to-use production plan)
- coverage ratios (how much B-roll relative to interview)
- shot variety guidelines (WS, MS, CU, ECU percentages)

**Failure modes this prevents:**

- Talking heads with no cutaways (jump cuts visible, visually static)
- B-roll that doesn’t match interview content (disconnected, confusing)
- Generic, meaningless footage (filler, not storytelling)
- No visual variety (same shot type, same angle, same location)

**This improves on:** Post-hoc B-roll shooting. Planned coverage supports the story.

**Related to:** DS-02 (Interview) for content mapping; DS-05 (Archival) for historical footage.

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