EPA's Climate Change in Focus Student Video Contest: Video-Making Tips

Before you create your climate change masterpiece, just a few things that every award-winning director should know.

Concept. Before you even pick up the camera, get your story down. You don't have to go through five hundred rewrites, but you should have a good idea of what you're going to shoot.
- Use your imagination.
- Start with an idea (ideally a good one)!
- Really think about the story—what type of visuals and sound will you need to tell it? What locations? How many actors? What type of space aliens?
- Figure out what feeling or emotion you want to convey. What's the final message, the overarching theme?
- Create a storyboard or write a script to use as your guide. Refer to it often, carry it with you at all times.

Shooting. Now it's time to do the actual filming.
- First take the lens cap off—this is an important step toward shooting a good film.
- Think about how you want to frame your shots. What/who is your subject? What's in the background and foreground? Prepare for the unexpected like a dog, or even worse, a parent wandering into frame.
- Have a tripod handy—especially for close-up shots. A tripod will help keep your shots smooth and steady.
- Zoom with your feet and get close to your subject. In most cases, they won't break the lens.
- Check your focus—is your subject clear? Do they look blurrier than normal? Never fear, many cameras have auto focus.
- Want to shoot handheld? Go ahead and embrace it, make it part of the visual story.

Lighting. Light is your friend, it makes stuff look good.
- A "three-point lighting system" will help your subject look its best.
    1. Key light – illuminates subject from the front
    2. Rim light – illuminates subject from the side
    3. Back light – illuminates subject from the back
- In some cases natural light can work well; just remember the camera sees less light than your eye.
- Use lighting and shadows to create the desired mood.

Sound. Good sound quality goes a long way to making a good video.
- When shooting interviews or dialogue…
    o Use an external microphone when possible; the camera microphone has a tendency to pick up every sound in the room except the sound you want.

- o Find a quiet spot—remember if you can hear the background noise so can your microphone.
  - o Turn your smart phone on vibrate. There is about a 100% chance you will receive a text or a call while you're filming.
- Record ambient sound—the sound that's around you can help tell your story.
- Music—be sure any music in your video is royalty-free, i.e. you have the rights to use it. This means everything on the radio/tv/personal device is probably off limits. Hit up a royalty-free music website if you want to be sure.

Editing. Putting it all together.
- Choose an editing program—Windows Movie Maker or Apple's iMovie are simple and easy to use. More advanced programs like Final Cut Pro or Premiere offer more options for editing, but take longer to master.
- Edit your movie by putting clips into your software's timeline in the order you want.
- Consider adding titles, graphics and additional effects to help tell your story. But try to refrain from adding effects just to add effects. Star wipes get a little tired the 10th time around.
- Use audio, such as music, narration, ambient sound or sound effects to enhance the story.

Most important, get out there and have some fun.