



Scientific Working Group on Digital Evidence

Considerations for Release of Synopsis Videos for Public Review

21-V-002-1.2

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1. Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance and practical considerations for preparing condensed video, and other associated multimedia, for internal review, initial legal proceedings, and public release. For additional information relating to multimedia displayed in court, see *SWGDE Practical Considerations for Submission and Presentation of Multimedia Evidence in Court*. For additional information on forensic video analysis, see *SWGDE Best Practices for Digital Forensic Video Analysis*. For additional information on audio/video redaction, see *SWGDE Video and Audio Redaction Guidelines*.

Video sharing websites, social media, and news media platforms provide the means for mass distribution of incident videos for local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies [1]. Release of video to the public can assist organizations in meeting investigative, crime prevention, and community outreach objectives when effectively used [2]. Reasons for video release may include, but are not limited to critical incident review, public assistance with identifying a person or object of interest, community awareness, crime prevention, organizational transparency, etc.

Regardless of the reason for release, the technical responsibility of assembling video synopses is commonly tasked to personnel in an organization with video editing knowledge and training.

2. Scope

This document provides a framework for practitioners and practical considerations for the preparation of demonstrative work products, or video timelines. It focuses on the technical preparation of video and audio files, common video editing terminology and techniques, graphics and annotations, media conversion, and potential pitfalls (copyright, fair use, music, etc.).

The completed media is intended for demonstrative and illustrative purposes to provide an overview of the events.

3. Technical Considerations

While some videos may be readily available, there may be times when the agency is required to collect video recordings from private or public sources (e.g., body worn camera, dash cam, video from unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), interview rooms, facility cameras, traffic cameras, external contributors).

For additional guidance on collection, see also:

- *SWGDE Best Practices for Data Acquisition from Digital Video Recorders*
- *SWGDE Best Practices for Digital Evidence Acquisition from Cloud Service Providers*

In the course of media release, understanding the media files themselves, and selecting appropriate software (e.g., freeware, commercial software) for multimedia preparation (conversion and processing of files for video editing software to recognize files) will aid the agency in processing media.



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See also:

- *SWGDE Technical Notes on FFmpeg_v2*
- *SWGDE Technical Overview of Digital Video Files*
- *SWGDE Digital Image Compression and File Formats Guidelines*
- *SWGDE Video and Audio Redaction Guidelines*
- *SWGDE Guidelines for Video Evidence Canvassing and Collection_v1.0*

4. Preparation

There are several preparation steps necessary to complete prior to the creation of any released synopsis videos. These steps will aid the investigator to ensure the final product is produced accurately and efficiently.

4.1 Media Collection

The integrity of all collected media should be verified or authenticated as needed. The scope of this examination is dependent on the acquisition methodology. More information on the authentication of digital video files is available in *SWGDE Best Practices for Authentication of Digital Video Files*. The practitioner should also evaluate the video sources (be aware of copyright restrictions) and determine the scope of the video synopsis after reviewing all relevant video recordings.

Search and collection of agency multimedia (e.g., body worn video, in-car, facility cameras, crime scene photographs) is important for a complete set of all relevant videos. Note that some organizations do not automatically associate video recordings (e.g., in-car camera recordings, body-worn camera recordings) with case nomenclature and other identifying video information with case metadata (e.g., badge number, employee number, name, report number, case ID, vehicle number). This may make identification of relevant video(s) difficult. Use of software vendor features to perform searches (e.g., multicamera view, GPS-BWC relationships) may aid the practitioner in locating the relevant recordings.

Understanding the technical limitations of the device and the recording environment (unstable, low light, acoustics, too much data, where the BWC device is mounted, wide field of view, etc.) may pose challenges on what video is released. The human perception system (visual and audible) is different from which a camera records.

Read police reports, situation reports, and review CAD info to obtain a more complete understanding of officers dispatched, timing of events, and context surrounding the incident.

4.2 Internal Media Search

It is important for organizations to review video sources received from the public and digital video recorders. Depending on the situation, this can be a time-consuming process. Video analytics software can assist to expedite this process.



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Additionally, a search and collection of organization multimedia is useful in the search for a complete set of all relevant videos. Note that some organizations do not automatically associate video recordings (e.g., in-car camera recordings, body-worn camera recordings) with case numbers and other identifying video information with case metadata (e.g., badge number, employee number, name, report number, case ID, vehicle number). This may make identification of relevant video difficult. The use of software features to perform searches (e.g., multicamera view, GPS-BWC relationships) may aid the practitioner in locating the relevant recordings.)

4.3 Verification of Timecode

A practitioner should evaluate and verify the proper timing of the video event(s). Special consideration must be given to the source's purported time and any offsets (i.e., the time difference, if any, between the displayed DVR screen timestamp and the real-world time).

4.4 Evaluation of the Request Scope

When evaluating the scope of the request, the practitioner should identify the reason(s) for the release. Some of the most common reasons include but are not limited to the following:

- Suspect, vehicle, or object identification
- Organizational transparency (force review)
- Public interest
- Criminal or civil proceedings (charging or courtroom presentation)

Prior to public dissemination, synopsis video work products should be reviewed and approved by an executive committee and/or in consultation with personnel tasked with making legal or public information decisions for an organization. This includes making determinations about what information can be released. In addition, redaction or privacy restrictions of victims/witnesses, Personally Identifiable Information (PII) or Criminal Justice Information (CJI) may need to be maintained. Where applicable, an organization's Public Information Officer (PIO), Legal Advisor, or other public facing unit may be consulted to consider what information is pertinent for public release.

4.5 Annotations and Re-Timing of Video

Release of public interest recordings may provide general awareness of crime and contribute to its prevention. As such, some annotations and/or the re-timing (freeze frame or slow-motion) of video may help direct the viewer's attention to specific areas. The presentation of annotated or re-timed video should be clearly presented as such, and the unedited version may also be included.

Some example questions that direct the viewer's attention include but are not limited to the following:

- What happened?
- Specific actions or items visible in the imagery
- What is the organization trying to communicate?

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4.6 Release of Information

Videos released for suspect identification should be as brief as possible. Videos released for use of force review should initially be produced depicting the overall context of the encounter, along with the incident in question. The context of the encounter may require capturing of the events prior to and after the conclusion of the incident in question. A complete public release of all videos related to a public safety force review incident, including the entire recorded segment(s) should be considered to be released at a time determined by the organization.

4.7 Privacy Considerations

Privacy consideration must be given for the victim(s), witness(es), and privately sourced camera owner's personally identifiable information.

When possible, organizational personnel included in critical incident imagery should be notified in advance of public release.

When publishing use of force review incidents, practitioners must consider current labor agreements and local, state, or federal regulations for the dissemination of PII or legal exemptions related to organizational personnel.

4.8 Alternative Content Sources

The Fair Use doctrine should be considered when utilizing alternative video or other content sources. The practitioner must be cognizant of potential copyright infringement litigation and intellectual property disputes as take down notices may result.

5. Workflow

It is important that organizations develop a standard workflow which is documented in their standard operating procedures (SOPs). This will allow all publicly released videos to follow the same cadence, visually and informationally.

5.1 Video Synopsis

- In the software, prepare timeline settings, including establishing sequence resolution, pixel aspect ratio, and frame rate.
 - Note: Care should be taken when making corrective changes within the videos; however, it is not recommended to make corrections that visually alter the appearance or actions originally captured within the videos when making changes to these settings. If the video requires clarification (e.g., stabilization, speed adjustment, cropping) it is recommended that they be identified or disclosed prior to their review which may be misleading if not directly outlined within the disclaimer. For example: The purpose of the video is to garner leads, not to make identifications on its own. Disclaimer: still images you are about to view may have been enlarged and brightened to improve the visual appearance of the area of interest.

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- Title safe and action safe areas are inner boundaries on a screen where information should be kept within. This ensures the images, video, text, or other vital information is not cut-off by the viewer's display. Consider that the viewer's screen (e.g., tube, projection, digital television, smart phone, tablet) may not be configured for title safe and action safe areas. Take into consideration the multiple sources and cut-off areas of each display, if any. The National Association of Broadcasters (www.nab.org) revised the standards for title safe and action safe areas for 4:3 and 16:9 in 2010 [3]. An example of title safe and action safe areas is displayed in Figure 1 below.

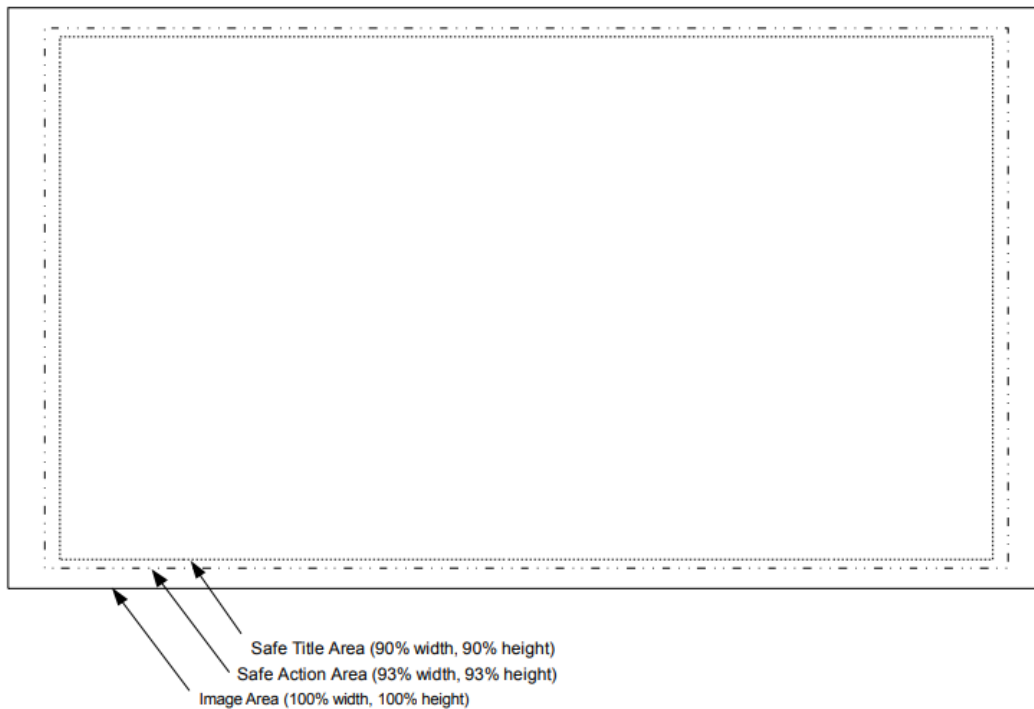


Figure 1. Safe Title and Safe Action Areas (Image Credit: SWGDE)

5.2 Title Slide

The video synopsis should begin with one or more title slides. These slide(s) may include an organizational logo, graphic imagery warning, date, time, location, and organization incident number. The physical location listed on the title slide should not be the exact address but rounded to the block area in order to protect the privacy of the victim. Dates and times should be depicted in standard time format, rather than military time format. The background color of the information slides should be dark in color and text light in color to allow for viewing in low light environments. An example of a title slide is displayed in Figure 2 below.



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Figure 2. Title Slide (Image Credit: SWGDE)

5.3 Event Slide

An event slide may then immediately follow the title slide and provide detailed information of what the viewer is about to see. If the video synopsis is intended for suspect identification, universal terms such as “suspect” and “seeking to identify” should be used.

This slide should also list the specific individual (with contact information) who the public should contact relevant information. An example of an event slide is displayed in Figure 3 below.

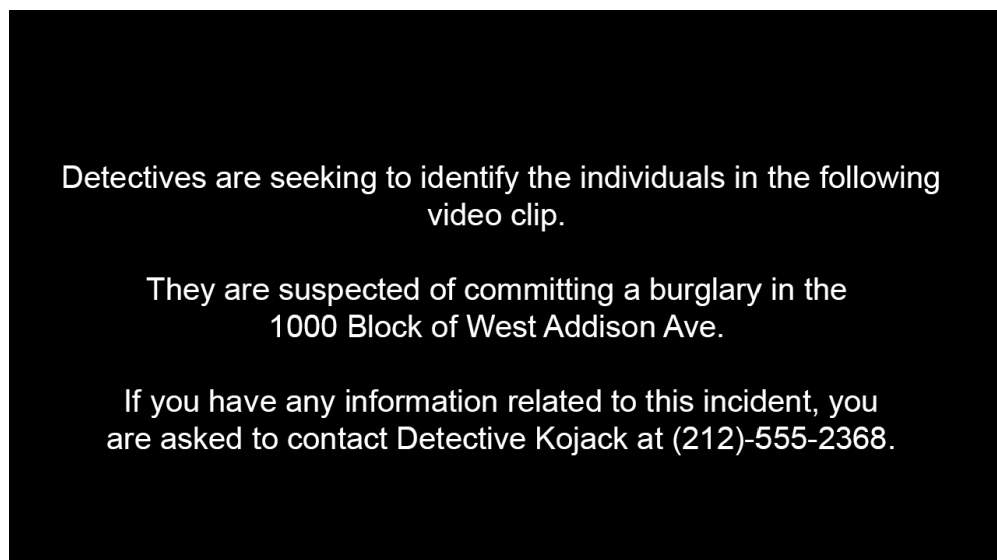


Figure 3. Event Slide (Image Credit: SWGDE)



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5.4 Video Timeline

This section of the video synopsis will contain the video segments presented in chronological order.

- The video length should be long enough to depict the incident in question. There is no recommended video length; however, research suggests that salient, short form videos are most effective [4][5][6].
- Videos for public distribution may suffer lack of viewership if there is non-pertinent video included.
- The beginning of the video timeline should establish the scene with enough time for the viewer to gain an understanding of the context for the incident before it transpires.
- The producer of the video timeline should consider the use of annotations to guide the viewer's attention to areas of interest. Examples include:
 - A callout box may be used to describe the scene, the direction the camera is pointing, or to identify a single officer's body worn camera or a specific in-car camera designation.
 - Use arrows to guide the viewer's attention to particular individual suspects, suspect vehicles, events, paths, and locations.
 - Use of pause, reduced playback speed, and/or zoom functions to focus the viewer's attention during critical moments in the event can be very helpful. Such that it identifies the best image of the suspect and/or suspect vehicle.
 - Use transitions or text to alert the viewer to the passage of time.
 - Any colors used should be standard baseline colors.
- Use of Watermarked Logo or Text
 - It is recommended that a logo for the submitting agency be placed in the lower or upper third of the video within the title safe area. This technique may also be used to reference video sourced from third-parties or annotations about edits made to the video by the practitioner. The visual opacity of the logo or text should be set to allow the underlying video to show through and not obscure critical information presented. The placement of watermarked information may facilitate the identification of officially released video trimmed or edited by other parties as well as provide appropriate citations or contextual annotations (e.g., zoom, reduced playback speed, video sourced from social media).



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*Figure 4. Example of Video with added Watermark
(Image Credit: Seattle Police YouTube Channel)*

5.5 Exit Slide

An exit slide should immediately follow the compiled video footage. The exit slide should contain the original contact information and alternative contact information (e.g., an organization headquarters number, online tip tool), as well as an instruction for public safety related video synopses, 'DO NOT APPROACH! Call 9-1-1.'



Figure 5. Exit slide Example (Image Credit: SWGDE)



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5.6 Output

The video should end with an organization logo or a repeat of the title slide.

If this video synopsis is going to be published on an online video hosting service, the producer should generate an image thumbnail which represents the event. This image thumbnail should contain, if possible, images of all suspected individuals and suspected vehicles. This allows for quick reference for parties looking for the video in a channel. Some online hosting providers automatically produce a thumbnail, and this automation may produce an image with which identification of suspected individuals and vehicles is difficult.

6. Important Considerations

Practitioners should be aware that the produced video may require adjustment based on updates to an investigation. Therefore, practitioners should preserve their project file to allow for future adjustments.

Practitioners should consider producing more than one video with varying levels of complexity. Videos containing annotation, pauses, zooms, and even audio may not be warranted in all situations.

6.1 Video Synopses for courtroom purposes

A byproduct of the completion of a synopsis video is that it may be used by the court. The work should strive to maintain impartiality while disclosing pertinent information. Additionally, retaining any case notes, project files, and work products may be requested for production as evidence. In addition, the synopsis video may require additional encoding at higher quality levels to ensure all events are depicted accurately and clearly for courtroom use.

6.2 Video Synopses for Internal Viewing

- A synopsis video produced for internal agency viewing only does not require the level of redaction a public video requires. For example, if the same subject appears in many of the same robbery videos, this person may be a lookout for the suspects. Also, patrol officers may already know witnesses depicted in the video and can provide this information to the assigned investigators.
- Internal video synopsis should contain an advisory notice before the video begins to advise that the video is for internal organization viewing only and is not to be disseminated in any way contrary to department policies.

7. Social Media Distribution

Online social media platforms provide a cost-effective way to expose synopsis videos to a larger audience. These platforms are widely used and have become mainstream in today's society.

- 91% of law enforcement agencies surveyed use social media to notify the public of safety concerns [7].

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- High-profile incidents, the adoption of body-worn camera programs, and continued civil unrest have increased the use of police videos and social media by law enforcement agencies to quickly distribute video content.
- Visual information (e.g., graphic content, audio, authentic content) may be more compelling than a written account (e.g., press release) of an incident.

Each social media platform has its own Terms of Service (TOS) that each organization must review. Practitioners must realize that once a video is posted on a social media platform, that video may reside on multiple servers forever; therefore, organizations should establish and follow set protocols and a peer review process.

A suggestion of items for the organization's social media posting personnel are as follows:

- A social media compliant video
 - Produced in a manner which follows the organization's guidelines.
 - The video should be produced in a container and codec for easy ingestion on social media platforms.
- A completed Community Alert/BOLO/Seeking to Identify
 - A text document that contains the reference details about the video. This document contains text information about the incident as well as some reference still images. This allows the information officer to have a one-page reference sheet. A text document allows subsequent production in other languages.
- A completed social media text component
 - This allows the person posting on the social media platform to cut and paste the relevant information without the need to watch the video multiple times in order to obtain information.
- Custom social media thumbnail
 - Many social media platforms automatically generate thumbnails which the platform uses to represent the video. This auto-generated thumbnail may be irrelevant to the posted video. A custom thumbnail should be chosen to represent the video. The thumbnail should be the person(s), vehicle(s), or other object(s) the agency author is trying to identify.

Organizations should be aware that news outlets often rebroadcast these public videos, which increases viewership. Social media platforms like YouTube can be linked with Twitter accounts to notify subscribers immediately when there is a new posting by an organization.

8. Peer Review

Before videos are publicly distributed outside an organization, they should be peer reviewed with a practitioner of similar training and experience as well as reviewed and approved by any committee or representative responsible for making decisions for releasing information from the

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organization. The review process should be completed by someone who is familiar with the organization's SOPs.

Things to consider include:

- Does the video follow the organization's current approved workflow?
- Is there enough time to read the information on the slides?
- Is the video length appropriate?
- Does the viewer understand what the point of focus of the video is?
- Have legal and privacy considerations been evaluated?

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10. Additional Resources

Scientific Working Group on Digital Evidence. *Best Practices for Data Acquisition from Digital Video Recorders*. SWGDE 17-V-002-1.0, SWGDE 2018, <https://www.swgde.org/17-v-002/>.

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11. History

Revision	Issue Date	History
1.0 DRAFT	9/16/2021	Initial draft created. SWGDE voted to approve as Draft for Public Comment.
1.0	6/9/2022	No comments received. SWGDE voted to approve as a Final Approved Document. Formatted for release as a Final Approved Document.
1.1 DRAFT	6/15/2023	Changes to the technical preparation of projects, specifying when appropriate to apply clarification methodology. Changes made to social media preparation section making the examiner more directly aware of hosting platform incompatibility issues. SWGDE voted to approve as Draft for Public Comment.
1.2 DRAFT	9/18/2023	Public comments received that included substantive changes within the video clarification section and how the clarifications added should be disclosed within the narrative video. Additional comments regarding how much of the context of the encounter depicted should be released.
1.2 DRAFT	5/16/2024	Additional comments received, which were addressed by the video committee. Updates were made to the document.
1.2 DRAFT	9/19/2024	Document was reviewed again by the video committee.
1.2	11/1/2024	Formatted for release as a Final Approved Document.
1.2	11/6/2024	SWGDE voted to approve as Final Approved Document.

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