

## HOW TO MAKE A MINI-DOCUMENTARY FILM FOR A SCHOOL PROJECT

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BXfqk4pLYQs>

Oh, watching this documentary about the [Triplets Ghetto Kids](#) brought back so many beautiful childhood memories.

I remember how, as free and happy kids, we used to dance like nobody's business. House music was all the rage then.

We loved forming big circles and each one of us would take turns dancing in the middle of the circle. While someone danced, we cheered and clapped and shouted at the top of our voices.

Our mothers would call us to go eat lunch or supper and we would continue dancing, shaking, laughing, not giving a care about our world.

This mini-documentary brought back such long gone moments and I thought of recapturing them in writing.

That is the power of a documentary because it reflects reality. It is about real people, places and events.

### **In this particular mini-documentary, I loved...**

- the compelling interviews with inspiring people.
- the heart-warming background music. I actually played the video several times just to enjoy the music.
- the dancing, of course!
- the personal stories that taught me the power of believing in one's talents and dreams.
- seeing successful outcomes.
- hearing that language that resembled my own language '[Chichewa](#)', a [Bantu](#) language.
- having a glimpse of the classrooms and schoolyards and it made me think of how we used to play at break time.
- seeing the different locations and the soil. It made me think of how we used to love the smell of soil after the rains and how we would fervently hunt for soil to eat because of the taste and not because of hunger.

Below is another inspiring documentary that left me with mixed reactions.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BMR9SwALU0I>

This film made me tear up because of painful joy. It left me with a deep, sad feeling about the unbelievable state of the continent for many children. It made me think of selfish African leaders and how they remain oblivious to talent and innovation. It made me wonder what would happen if these selfish people suddenly woke up and saw the grace and the beauty in these children.

What a different life these children would have then!

**Your Turn:** Do you watch mini-documentaries? If so, what type do you like? If you don't like watching documentaries, what is your reason for not doing so? If you had to make a mini-documentary, what would you be willing to capture? Prepare your answers and record yourself using a mobile phone.

## ADJECTIVES FOR DESCRIBING DOCUMENTARIES

A collection of colorful sticky notes with various adjectives for describing documentaries. The adjectives are arranged in a grid-like pattern on a light grey background. The adjectives include:

- SPECTACULAR
- GREAT
- COMPREHENSIVE
- PLAYFUL
- OUTSTANDING
- NARRATED
- POLITICAL
- COMPELLING
- JUDICIAL
- RAW
- HEARTBREAKING
- SUBTLE
- LEGAL
- ONLINE
- IMPRESSIVE
- ENTERTAINING
- DIGITAL
- MYSTERIOUS
- INTIMATE
- ENVIRONMENTAL
- ENLIGHTENING
- SOCIAL
- POLITICAL
- CAPTIVATING
- INTERESTING
- ROMANTIC
- EDUCATIONAL
- PROFESSIONAL
- INDEPENDENT
- PRIVATE
- REMARKABLE
- PSYCHOLOGICAL
- PRIVATE
- PHILOSOPHICAL
- FASCINATING
- TRUTHFUL
- INFORMATIVE
- INSTRUCTIONAL
- POWERFUL
- RELIGIOUS
- INSPIRING
- DEVASTATING
- SOCIAL
- WELL-CRAFTED
- UNDERRATED
- INSTRUCTIVE
- BEAUTIFUL
- MAGNIFICENT
- BEAUTIFUL

# How to Make a Mini-Documentary Film in English for a School Project: Step One

## (Definitions)

Let's look at a few definitions first in order for us to be on the same page.

### **A documentary...**

- is a non-fiction film.
- a television or radio programme that gives information about a particular subject.
- presents factual information about real people, institutions, places or events.
- presents political, social or historical information based on real interviews or pictures of existing people.
- aims to present facts objectively.
- represents reality.
- strives to be accurate and truthful when presenting information.
- can educate, inform, persuade, raise awareness or entertain.

### **A film...**

- is also called a movie or a motion picture.
- is a story that is told using moving pictures and often sound.
- consists of moving pictures that have been recorded with sound in order to tell a story.
- is a form of entertainment.
- can be seen at the cinema or on television.

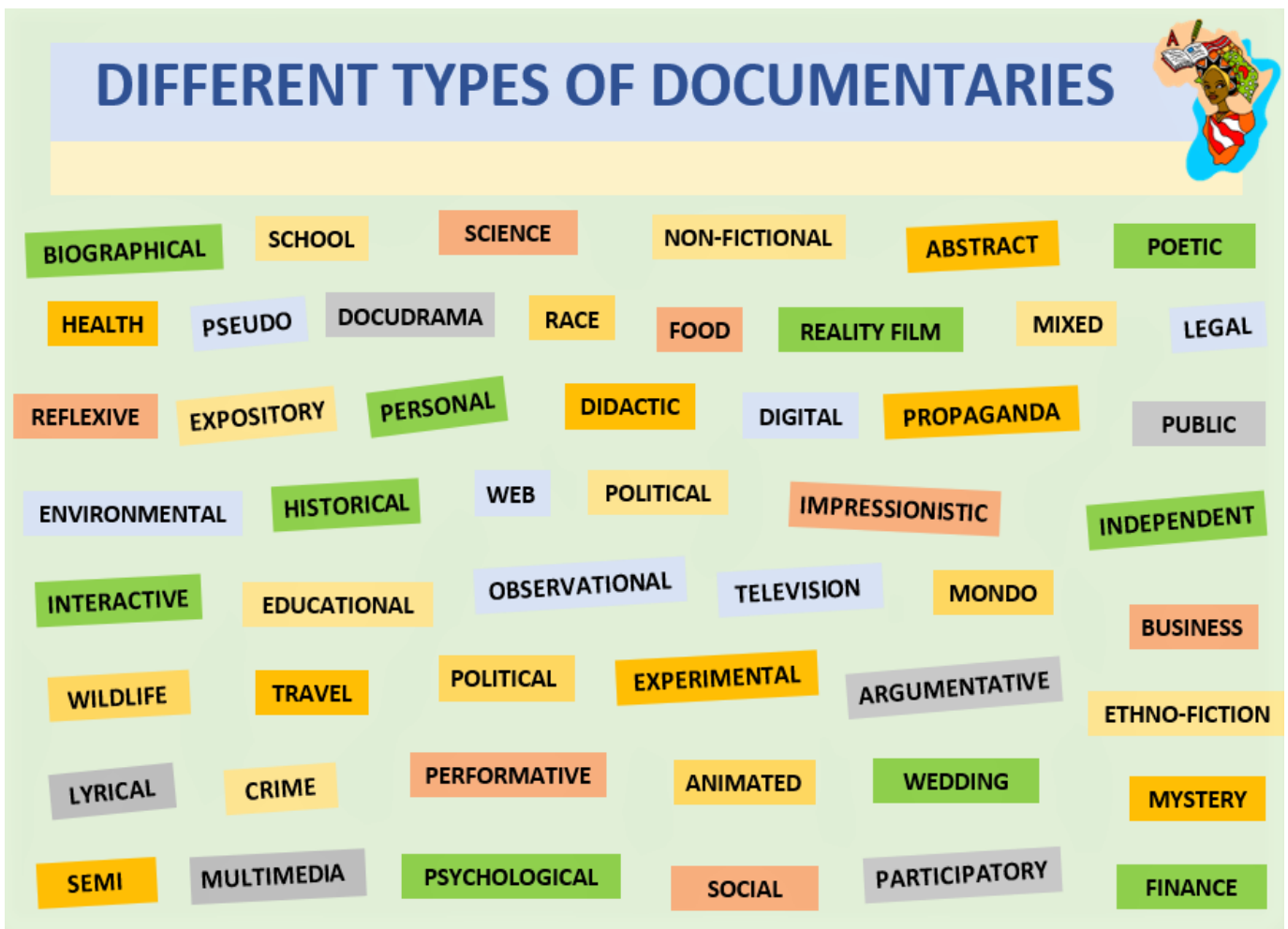
### **A documentary film...**

- is a film that is based on real events or people.
- documents real life.
- can be educational or informative.
- is another word for 'documentary'.

## A mini-documentary film ...

- is also called a mini-doc.
- is a short-form documentary that can last from 1 minute to 30 minutes.
- is often used by businesses or companies to tell their story or sell their products.
- aims to document reality for the purpose of education.

Do you know the different types of documentaries? Below is a vocabulary chart that will show you some of them. You can check the meaning of some of the words you are unfamiliar with in a [bilingual](#) or [unilingual](#) dictionary.



**Your Turn:** Which type of documentary do you readily recognise? Which ones do you prefer? Prepare your answers and record yourself. Remember about voice modulation, tone and rhythm.

## How to Make a Mini-Documentary Film in English for a School Project: Step Two

### (Conditions for Success)

When you hear the word documentary, you think that making one will be a humongous task.

However, it is actually very easy to make a mini-documentary! You don't need sophisticated material.

Nowadays even your phones and simple video editing software can do wonders.

### What material(s) do you need?

#### **You need:**

- a camera or a phone with a good camera.
- a tripod if you have one. It makes the camera steady and you can capture good shots.
- nice, royalty free background music or sounds.
- a lavalier microphone for interviews. The sound quality is better but your phone can also do.
- easy-to-use video editing software.

### Other things to think about

#### **You will need to carefully think about:**

- the story you will tell.
- the reason why you want to tell this story.
- how you want to tell this story.
- the locations or the places where you will film.
- the people who will feature in your mini-documentary.

### Preparatory Stage

#### The Story

Remember that you are telling a story. You need to choose the angle of the story very well. Answer the following **6-WH** questions:

- Who is going to feature in your story? **(People)**
- What are you going to talk about? **(Action)**

- Where are you going to film? (**Setting**)
- When does the story take place? (**Time**)
- Why are you telling this story? (**Reason**)
- How are you going to tell this story? (**Manner**)

Just like in a novel, your story should evolve around a character or characters who are dealing with some kind of conflict.

For example, in the first mini-documentary, we saw how those ghetto children struggled and managed to rise above their circumstances, thanks to their talent.

The story will be even more successful if the characters are relatable and inspiring.

### **Researching**

Once you have your story, you can start looking for information or extra material to add more weight to your message.

#### **You can look for:**

- video clips.
- newspaper snippets.
- objects that can add depth to your story. It can be a personal belonging or a souvenir.
- powerful quotes online.

### **Organise your Ideas**

First of all, you should know what you want to achieve with your mini-documentary.

#### **Do you want to...**

- educate?
- inform?
- raise awareness on a particular issue?
- entertain?
- inspire?
- shock?

- make people change their habits?

Knowing your goal will help you structure your mini-documentary. Just like in a story, there should be a beginning and an end, a climax and an anti-climax or rise and fall situation.

There should be some kind of tension or drama. The viewer should be looking forward to the next segment. This prompts you to think carefully about meaningful sequencing.

You can structure your mini-documentary along these lines:

- time (past, present, future).
- cause and effect.
- birth, growth and death.
- childhood and adulthood.
- rise and fall.
- rags to riches.
- rise, fall and rise.
- conflict and resolution.
- beginning, middle and end.
- end, middle, beginning.
- beginning, end and now.
- Then and now.
- introduction, rising action, climax, falling action and resolution.

Below is a rather playful video by [Scratch Garden](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NpWHZJZQDSE) to help you understand storytelling.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NpWHZJZQDSE>

### Production Stage

#### **Filming**

You can take the following aspects into consideration when filming:

- **Light:** make sure that you have enough light whether you are filming inside or outside. Avoid harsh lights.

- **Background:** think of what's behind the person you are interviewing. If you are filming in the street, be aware of privacy issues. You can ask for people's permission to feature them in your mini-documentary or you can just blur their faces during editing. Dark, grey or white backgrounds work best for interviews. The person can also be in a place that best represents them. For example, you can film a teacher in a classroom.
- **Sound:** capture as many natural sounds as you can. These can be the sounds of children playing, someone singing, people walking in the street, a dog barking, a car passing by, water dripping, etc. This creates a fantastic background for your documentary. However, ensure that the place is calm or with little noise when conducting interviews.
- **Footage:** film as much as you can about your subject. It is better to film too much than not enough. Choose different angles and different settings.

### **Editing:**

Think of the following aspects when editing:

- **Video Editing Software:** choose easy software to use such as [Wondershare Filmora](#) or [Window's Movie Maker](#). There are many tutorials on [YouTube](#) on how to edit a video. There is also a [free video editor](#) that comes with Windows 10. It is quite simple and fun to use. If you want to capture your screen and record audio at the same time, you can use this fantastic [website](#). Their video editing software is so easy to use, you don't need to be computer-savvy to know the basics.
- **Image and Sound:** it is a good idea to mix sound and images for a more professional result. For example, you can put soft background music when a person is talking during an interview. There is a lot of royalty free music for content creators on [YouTube](#). Pay attention to logic as well. The music that you use should be in accordance with the mood of the story.
- **Transitions:** think of proper transitions between clips. You can also use photos for your documentary so think of how you are going to switch from a photo to a video clip.



- **Pictures:** it is also possible to make a movie with pictures and sound [online](#). Explore this feature as well and see if it can work for you. Old photos also do well in a mini-documentary that retraces a past event. You can also show images and explain what these images are using voice-overs.
- **Sequencing:** make sure that the order of clips is correct. The story should make sense to the viewer.

## [How to Make a Mini-Documentary Film in English for a School Project: Step Three](#)

### **(Sample Mini-Documentary Ideas)**

You can bring to life past events or places through the unique lenses of your camera.

Below are 5 film ideas:

- You can tell the story of an inspirational figure, living or dead. If the person is still alive, who is he or she? Where does he or she live? What does he or she do? What makes this person's story motivational? Can you meet this person and interview him or her?
- You can also talk about how your school came into being. When was it built? Was it built for a particular reason? Where were people studying before your school was built? Are there any famous people who have studied in your school? Can you interview them? What are the core values of your school?
- How about interviewing your grandparents and ask them how life was in the past? They can show you old photos. They can explain what they used to eat, how they used to play, etc. Did they go to school? What was school like in the past? This could be a very interesting subject for a mini-documentary.
- What about featuring your local bakery? You can talk to the owners and they can show you how they make their products. You can ask them why they started this bakery. Did they choose this profession? What is it like to own a bakery for them? Is it difficult or rewarding? I am sure there are a lot of things they can talk about.

- It is equally possible to talk about a sports team. Football is a popular game so this might interest a lot of people. What's the name of the team? Are there any national players in the team? Where do they play? Have they won any major games? What values do they embrace?

**Your Turn:** Imagine more ideas for mini-documentaries and record yourself using a mobile phone.

**What next?:** Practise, practise and practise. Get creative and use your many skills to come up with a killer mini-documentary. Make it as interesting as possible and share it with your friends and family! Hopefully, you will get an excellent grade! Good luck!

**How to Make a Mini-Documentary Film in English: Get more Inspiration**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-z8B\\_gx-Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-z8B_gx-Y)



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