

## HOW TO: Write a VO/SOT By Jamie McIntyre

*Writing a "VO/SOT" [VO= Voiceover SOT = Sound on Tape] is different from writing a television package. You have to keep the differences in mind. Namely that you are writing for an anchor to read, who has not covered the story. And he (or she) is going to be sitting on a set and hoping the video you cut comes up at the right time, which it may or may not.*

Here's one example of how it might be done:

### VIDEO

ANCHOR ON CAMERA

### TAKE VO

:15 Security Camera Video

CG: From: February 4, 2010



:15 Generic Cameras on Campus



### AUDIO

ANCHOR LEAD: As you walk across the University of Maryland Campus, you may not realize that you're constantly being watched. The University has hundreds of hidden cameras -- and recently they helped nab some suspected laptop thieves.

[TAKE VO]

While the video from a security camera was blurry, it was clear enough to arouse the suspicion of University Police last month -- who thought two shadowy figures darting across campus at four A-M, looked VERY suspicious. When officers caught up with the pair on Knox road, a dark object they were carrying turned out to be a stolen laptop. Both suspects are facing charges.

There are some 400 security cameras around campus, some in plain sight, others tucked away in hidden locations. They help authorities keep an unblinking eye on the campus, but still — police say -- it's unusual to catch a criminal in the act:

[TAKE DILLION SOT TRT :15]

VIDEO PG 2

CG: Paul Dillion  
U. Md. Police Spokesman

ANCHOR TAG  
ON CAMERA

AUDIO PG 2

DILLION SOT (TIME CODE:  
10:10:10)

"They aren't used as much as you  
might think. ... Blah blah blah... "

[TAG - ON CAMERA]

An informal survey of Maryland  
students found opinion mixed  
about the 24-7 surveillance.

Some students told Maryland  
Newline it made them feel safer,  
while others said they didn't like  
NOT knowing WHEN they were  
being watched. Police say they  
hope to add even more cameras  
in the coming years.

[END]

A couple of things to keep in mind:

1. The VO/SOT (pronounced Vee-Oh-SOT, or sometimes VOH-SOT) is designed to be a short story for the anchor to read in the studio. It has four essential elements: A) The anchor lead-in - usually one sentence. B) The copy - that's covered by B-roll, the "V-O" - about :20 to :30 seconds. C) The SOT, or soundbite - usually about :15 seconds long, and D) the anchor tag - about :10 seconds to wrap up the story, or give an essential additional nugget of info.
2. Remember that this being television there is no guarantee the video will come up as intended, so avoid direct references such as, "as you see in this video". It's possible the anchor may have to read the story without the benefit of video or even the soundbite, so the copy should hold even if everything goes wrong.
3. Also remember the timing of the video is not going to be as precise as in an edited package where you can place the video exactly where you need it to to match each word. Avoid quick cuts of different things. Instead use longer shots that can cover the subject more generically.
4. Pad the VO. If you have :30 seconds of copy to cover, you should have at least :40 seconds of VO, so if the anchor reads slow, or the timing is off, there is some leeway. And don't make a sudden shot change in the last :10 seconds, that could come off looking like a jump cut on TV.
5. The VO and the SOT should be cut separately so they can be rolled independent of each other. You should have A) a script, B) a VO of :40 seconds and C) a SOT. Three separate elements.

<http://jamiejcintyre.files.wordpress.com/2010/03/convert.pdf>  
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