

10 TIPS FOR CLEMENCY & PAROLE VIDEOS

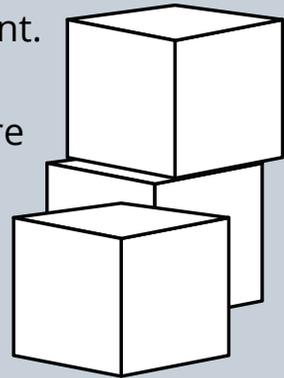
Video can be a powerful tool for advocates & clients seeking clemency or parole. It can help clients take control of their narratives and communicate their transformation and remorse in ways that written documentation can fall short. Video can also help present clients in their full humanity, especially the parts of a person that get lost in a lengthy written packet. Though video is not the right tool for every case, if you do decide to use it, below are **10 tips** to help:



(1) You can't and shouldn't put a client's entire story in the film. Remember that the film is just ONE aspect of the overall advocacy strategy. Some elements make more sense to address in the written packet. Pick the most compelling aspects about your client and their story that can be communicated visually. Think about what your target audience (the clemency or parole board) is looking for. Is it an expression of remorse? Or perhaps their re-entry plan?

(2) Storytelling structure. Before you film, it can be helpful to imagine a story structure. Choose the elements of the story that you want to convey in the video. For each story element you choose, think of a few questions that can help prompt the interview with your client. You can also start planning additional visuals that would be helpful for each story element. This will save you time in the editing process. Keep in mind that your structure may change after filming. See our [Video Action Plan](https://wit.to/VAPLegalVideoAdvocacy) for more about this process: <https://wit.to/VAPLegalVideoAdvocacy>

Sample structure: Early Childhood → Remorse → Transformation → Accomplishments → Who they are today



(3) Remorse and Transformation are at the heart of the film. These two elements tend to be what the board is most interested in hearing your client express. Think about how your client can express remorse and transformation beyond saying "I'm sorry" or "I've changed." Articulating remorse sometimes requires deep reflection, talking about traumatic details of a crime or challenging narratives that clients may have held onto for years. This takes time and patience. Building a trusting, non-judgemental relationship and being an active and supportive listener for your client is crucial.



(4) Prepare with your client. Send your client questions beforehand. If you're worried that the responses will sound too rehearsed, send prompts, bullet points or the storytelling structure that you're envisioning so they can start thinking about what they'll say without memorizing. Ideally you could prepare with them in person or over the phone. It's also helpful to access any prior transcripts of your client's parole hearings so you can better understand how to improve.

(5) Make the process as participatory as you can. Talk through story structure and brainstorm questions together. Ask how they feel most comfortable dressing and sitting for the interview. This will ensure a more valuable process and effective final film.

(6) Equipment list. Be aware that some prisons may require you send an equipment list a month in advance of filming. It's helpful to send a more detailed list than what you actually anticipate bringing just to be safe.

(7) Additional visuals can be helpful. While the most important part of the film is the interview with your client, childhood/family photos, any certificates or objects your client has that are important, can help illustrate their story. If they have them in their possession, ask them to bring them with on filming day.

(8) Editing. It is helpful to transcribe your interview before beginning. This will enable you make cuts and start rearranging quotes according to the story structure before you work with editing software, which can be a tedious process. We recommend doing a paper edit: <https://youtu.be/pJjvVmGij6w>



(9) Try to keep the final film under 5 minutes, this better ensures that the board will make time to watch it. To increase the likelihood that the video is received and viewed, consider submitting it in multiple formats, i.e. DVD, flash drive, online link (we suggest linking to a private, password protected video on Vimeo or YouTube).

(10) Clemency and parole videos are not a standard procedure, so it might require some backend advocacy to make sure that the video gets in front of the board. Keep this in mind before/after you submit.