



Health Conscious Video Competition Resource Guide

Proposals and submitted videos will be reviewed by a panel of judges from the journalism, marketing, medical and nonprofit/advocacy fields. Judges will be considering the relevance of the information presented, storytelling aspects of the project, production quality, insights shared, and the overall impact of the piece. To help student teams prepare the strongest submissions, the MedShadow team has put together a list of Top 10 Tips for each judging criteria. This document is intended to be a guide and all the tips here are optional, not required.

But first, some general guidance...

Keep It Simple: Don't Feel Overwhelmed

This guide is meant to help, not overwhelm. If you're feeling stuck, remember: a great documentary doesn't require a big budget, fancy equipment, or a complex story. Here's how to keep it manageable:

1. **Start with one question** – What's one thing about medication safety that confuses, frustrates, or surprises you? That's your issue.
2. **Start with one to two voices** – One expert and one person with lived experience can carry an entire short documentary. If you'd like help connecting with experts, reach out to us at info@medshadow.org.
3. **Use what you have** – A smartphone, natural light, and a quiet room are enough to capture a compelling interview.
4. **Look for underserved or trending issues in topics** – Is there a medication safety issue affecting your community, your generation, or your field of study that isn't getting attention? Or is there a micro-issue in topics that strikes you as interesting?

5. **Micro-issues are valid** – You don't need to tackle "the FDA" or "Big Pharma." A focused story about one drug, one common concern, or one patient's experience can be more powerful than a broad overview.
6. **Let interviews guide you** – You don't need to have all the answers before filming. Sometimes the story reveals itself through conversations with others.
7. **B-roll can be simple** – Shots of pill bottles, pharmacies, someone reading a label, or even stock footage can effectively support your narrative.
8. **Done is better than perfect** – A clear, honest, three-minute video beats an overproduced project that loses focus.
9. **Revisit MedShadow's site for inspiration** – Browse [medshadow.org](https://www.medshadow.org) for story ideas, angles, and examples of issues that matter to consumers.
10. **Ask for help** – Reach out to your team, your professors, or MedShadow (info@medshadow.org) with questions. This is designed to be a learning experience, first and foremost.

Tips for Excelling at the Five Judging Criteria

1. Relevance

Video investigates a meaningful issue related to medication safety.

1. **Define your issue, not just your topic** – For example, "Generic drugs" is a topic. "Why are some generic drugs less effective than their brand-name counterparts?" is an issue worth investigating.
2. **Frame the issue as a question** – A strong documentary answers a question. What are you trying to find out or expose?
3. **Identify who is affected** – Every issue has real people at the center. Who is harmed, helped, or left in the dark?
4. **Establish what's at stake** – Why does this issue matter? What happens if nothing changes?
5. **Mission alignment** – Frame your issue through medication safety, transparency, or patient empowerment.
6. **Research before you film** – Understand the landscape of your issue first; interviews should uncover insights, not just background information.
7. **Find the tension** – Good issues have conflict: patient vs. system, safety vs. access, information vs. confusion.

8. **Know your audience** – Your issue should matter to everyday people making health decisions for themselves and their loved ones.
9. **Narrow your scope** – A focused investigation of one facet of an issue beats a surface-level overview of many issues.
10. **State your issue early** – Viewers should understand the central idea in your video within the first 30 seconds.

2. Storytelling

Video demonstrates strong narrative craft, including a clear structure, effective pacing, engaging characters/subjects, and emotional resonance. It draws viewers in and maintains their attention.

1. **Use "therefore" and "but," not "and then"** – Each scene should cause the next or introduce conflict, not just follow sequentially.
2. **Follow a three-act structure** – Setup (introduce the problem/stakes), Confrontation (explore tension and complexity), Resolution (provide insight or call to action).
3. **Lead with a hook** – Open with a compelling question, surprising fact, or emotional moment that demands attention.
4. **Create stakes** – Why should viewers care? Make the consequences real and human.
5. **Show, don't tell** – Use visuals and scenes to convey meaning rather than relying solely on narration.
6. **Feature a protagonist** – Give viewers someone to follow, whether a patient, caregiver, or researcher.
7. **Embrace tension and conflict** – Documentaries need obstacles; don't shy away from complexity or unanswered questions.
8. **Pace for engagement** – Vary rhythm; don't let any single interview or segment run too long without visual relief.
9. **Use emotional beats intentionally** – Balance information with moments that compel viewers feel something.
10. **End with resonance** – Your closing should leave viewers thinking, feeling, or wanting to act.

3. Production Quality

Video is market-ready with all audio and visual elements (sound clarity, lighting, framing, editing, etc.) executed at a professional level.

1. **Prioritize audio** – Viewers forgive imperfect visuals but not poor sound; use external microphones whenever possible.
2. **Light your subjects** – Natural light or simple three-point lighting elevates interviews dramatically.
3. **Stabilize your shots** – Use tripods or gimbals; shaky footage signals amateur work.
4. **Frame with intention** – Follow the rule of thirds; give subjects "looking room" in interviews.
5. **Record clean audio separately** – Capture ambient sound and interviews on dedicated tracks for flexibility in editing.
6. **Match your b-roll to your narrative** – Cutaways should reinforce what's being said, not distract.
7. **Film and color correct for consistency** – Ensure footage from different sources or days looks cohesive.
8. **Use text and graphics sparingly** – Lower thirds and titles should be legible, clean, and consistent in style but not required, and your documentary may be better with less text or none at all.
9. **Edit for clarity** – Remove ums, long pauses, and redundancies; respect your viewers' time.
10. **Use the best settings** – You can film with a cell phone camera at the top settings (4k in horizontal) and achieve good quality with proper lighting (using daylight is fine).

4. Insight

Video clearly explains the issues for a consumer audience and demonstrates a deep understanding of the topic.

1. **Do your homework** – Research beyond surface-level articles; read studies, FDA documents, and expert commentary.
2. **Explain jargon** – Define medical or regulatory terms for a general audience.
3. **Show multiple perspectives** – Include patients, providers, regulators, or researchers to demonstrate depth.
4. **Anticipate questions** – Address the "but what about..." objections that a skeptical viewer might raise.
5. **Use data wisely** – Statistics should clarify, not overwhelm; visualize key numbers when possible.

6. **Contextualize the issue** – Help viewers understand why this matters now and to whom.
7. **Acknowledge complexity** – Avoid oversimplification; the best documentaries respect nuance.
8. **Cite credible sources** – Attribute information and images to build trust.
9. **Interview real experts** – A credentialed voice adds weight and credibility to your claims. If you'd like help connecting with experts, reach out to us at info@medshadow.org.
10. **Synthesize, don't just report** – Offer your own informed analysis or conclusion, not just a summary of facts.

5. Impact

Video message is compelling and conveys the main points in the Topic Prompt.

1. **Know your one takeaway** – If viewers remember only one thing, what should it be?
2. **Make it personal** – Individual stories stick longer than abstract statistics.
3. **Create a call to action** – What should viewers do, think, or feel after watching?
4. **Use repetition strategically** – Reinforce your key message at the beginning, middle, and end.
5. **Appeal to emotion and logic** – The most compelling messages engage both heart and mind.
6. **Avoid preachiness** – Trust viewers to draw conclusions from well-presented evidence.
7. **Test with fresh eyes** – Show a rough cut to someone unfamiliar with the topic; ask what they took away.
8. **End strong** – Your final 30 seconds are prime real estate; don't waste them on credits alone.
9. **Make it shareable** – Would someone send this to a friend or family member? That's the impact test.
10. **Connect to real-world change** – Show how understanding this issue can lead to better health decisions.