



Short Form Video (SFV) Tips for Kids & Family Creators

This tip sheet offers research-informed insights for SFV. When making high quality short form content for children and families, creators should consider both how the content is delivered and what is being communicated to young viewers.

HOW

Four Structural Features Specific to SFV

- 1 Make content that is specifically tailored for SFV.** Be sure to consider the amount of time allotted and the vertical aspect ratio.

WHY? Children (as young as 2 years old) will notice and disengage if the visual or auditory content does not make sense. In particular, be intentional when creating SFV based on existing longer form content. The SFV should be able to stand alone and make sense without additional context.

- 2 Repeat learning goals and characters.** Across a grouping of SFV, think about presenting similar information in multiple ways (e.g., pictures, songs, and writing). Ideally you will create a variety of SFV with similar learning goals and repeat characters.

WHY? Repetition improves memory. Presenting the same learning goal in multiple scenarios increases the likelihood of comprehension.

- 3 Present a continuous flow.** Take care to have little to no cuts and scene changes.

WHY? Comprehension declines with more cuts. After an editing cut, young children struggle to anticipate where to look, with most reorienting to the center of the screen (even if that is not where they are supposed to look). In SFV, there isn't enough time for children to reorient their attention if there are too many cuts.

- 4 Use special effects thoughtfully and responsibly.** Ensure that sound effects and animations (“bells and whistles”) are relevant to the main content of the video.

WHY? Irrelevant features that are not directly related to the storyline are distracting. However, in certain scenarios if these features are directly tied to content, they can promote learning outcomes. Take extra care when choosing effects and animations.



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WHAT

Four Tips for Maximizing the Positive Impact of SFV

1 Present content within a narrative structure and make sure the language is appropriate for the age group.

WHY? Children learn better when a learning goal is clearly described, incorporated into a narrative, and presented in multiple ways. Narrative also increases attention which is essential for learning.

HOW:

- Create standalone SFVs with a beginning, middle, and end. If there is a learning goal, clearly detail this up front. Do not create SFV where the narrative is split across multiple videos because they may not be shown together or in the correct order.
- Ensure the narrative structure and vocabulary are age-appropriate. For instance, a preschooler may be into dinosaurs but may not understand the word habitat; use alternative language (e.g., where they live) or explain the word's meaning.



2 Build relationships with viewers through characters that are consistent, familiar, and relatable.

WHY? When an audience connects with media characters, this increases the likelihood of learning from video (the academic term for this is parasocial relationships).

HOW:

- Children will relate to characters or media personalities who they identify with and trust. These can be “hosts” or characters that are repeated across several pieces of SFV. Connect with what’s relevant to children – their interests and identity.
- Characters should be diverse and inclusive. For example, one character could wear glasses or hearing aids, another could be from another country, and yet another’s family makeup might look different from their friends.



Research Sources:

Anderson et al., 1981; Anderson & Kirkorian, 2015; Bond & Calvert, 2014; Bus, Takacs, & Kegel, 2015; Calvert & Scott, 1989; Calvert et al., 2014; Carter et al., 2017; De Jong and Bus, 2002; Fisch & McCann, 1993; Fisch, 2009; Gola et al., 2014; Hodapp, 1977; Holler et al., 2016; Kirkorian & Anderson, 2017; Lauricella et al., 2011; Neuman et al., 2017; Perkins & Salomon, 1992; Rasmussen, 2018; Richards & Clavert, 2017; Richert et al., 2011; Sanders et al., 2018. Singer et al., 2006; Takacs et al., 2015; Takeuchi & Stevens, 2011; Troseth et al., 2020; Yoo & Kirkorian, 2020; Schlesinger et al., 2014

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Four Tips for Maximizing the Positive Impact of SFV

3 Model positive behaviors and character strengths such as gratitude and wisdom.

WHY? Children learn and imitate what they see onscreen, whether for better or for worse. Research shows that character strengths can be learned from media content including SFV.

HOW: Show characters helping others or being kind, perhaps as they make sense of real-world issues. This is also an opportunity to challenge harmful stereotypes – show girls being successful at math or the parenting styles of Bandit from Bluey who challenges the aloof dad trope, for example.

4 Inspire learning and curiosity by promoting opportunities for offscreen interaction with adults or siblings/friends.

WHY? When adults or older siblings are fully present during viewing, they can help younger children engage and make sense of the content. After SFV viewing, caregivers can maximize learning by connecting things in the real world to what was viewed on screen.

HOW: Encourage caregiver involvement and create opportunities to apply content offscreen – a dance, a recipe, a treasure hunt. Programs like Sesame Street, are designed to entertain adults as well! Provide suggestions to apply learning in new environments, i.e., “Now go find other things in your house that have the triangle shape,” or “try being a helper the next time you see a friend having a hard time.”



Additional Resources:

- Parasocial Relationships
[You've got a friend in me — The Benefits of Parasocial Relationships | by Center for Scholars & Storytellers](#)
- Character Strengths
<https://www.scholarsandstorytellers.com/building-character-strengths>
- [The Power of Storytelling](#) research study on character strengths
- [Psychology Today](#) articles by Dr. Yalda T. Uhls, founder of the Center for Scholars & Storytellers