

Blake Porter's

FIELD PRODUCER SECRETS®

FOR THE HUNTING TV SHOW



When filming a hunt, things can get chaotic, including your footage. As a field producer or cameraman, your product is your tapes. This article will help take some of the chaos out of your tapes and make you more valuable.



A Hunt is a Story.

Your job as a cameraman is to capture the kill. Ah, but you're not done. You must create a story. Every hunt is a story. Portions of hunting shows are "reality TV," but much of it is crafted. Pure reality TV is extremely hard to do. Reality TV would require multiple cameras and 10 times more footage and 50 times more editing hours. So, to create a cost effective hunting TV show, you must re-create encounters and kills, and create *short stories* for the editors to use.

Short stories are a must. A *short story* can be finding a shed antler, an animal encounter, showing a sponsor product, looking over a map ... Short stories can be as short as 10 seconds or as long as 5 minutes. They are important. Why? If you kill on the last day of a slow hunt, the short stories become very valuable. The hunter is a story. The land is a story. The outfitter is a story. You get the idea. Develop these stories. Find them. Make them. Get them. Think in terms of a beginning, middle, and end. Do these things well and the editors can create one big, beautiful TV show... even if your kill is weak!

Short Story Example: Finding an arrowhead "Hey look at this!" The hunter bends to the ground finding an arrowhead. "I think we've improved upon this ancient design. But the idea is still the same... spill blood. I think this will bring us luck." Hunter walks off. There you go, a complete story. Short and interesting. Get the idea?

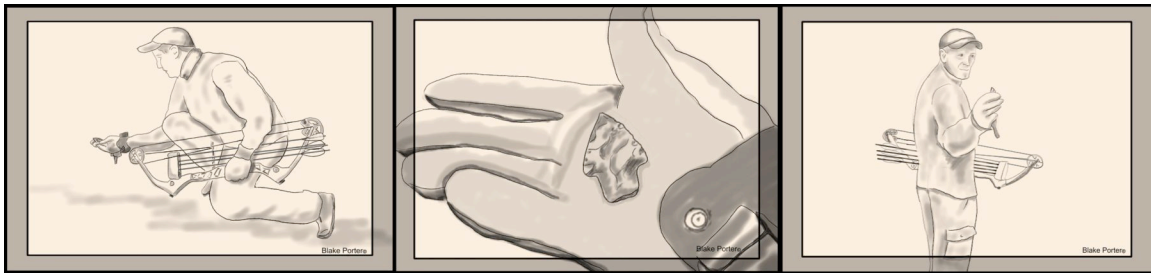


Fig 1

Short Story Example: Camp life sub-story: Loading up a plate of food (beginning), then some talking (middle), then some laughter (end). There, you did it! A complete sub-story! Now eat!

Secret: *The hunt is over. You've got a good kill. You are leaving the woods. Suddenly you see a doe or a buck. It's a gift! A bonus! Use it. Have the hunter stalk the deer. Try to get the hunter and the deer in the same shot. By trying something unique with this moment, you could easily end up with your best footage of the hunt!*



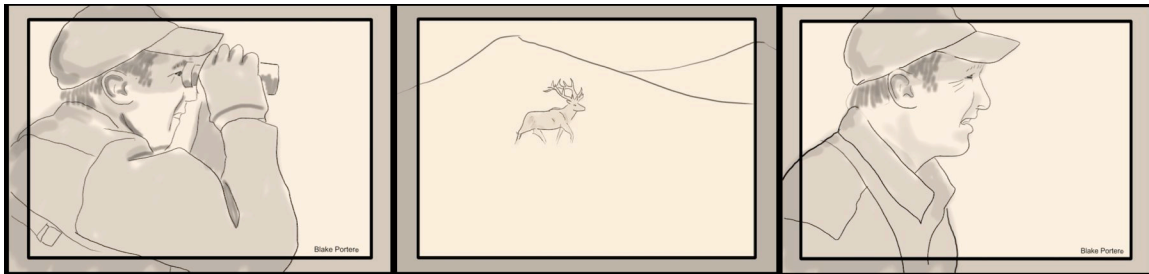
Secret: *If you have a weak kill and good stories, you've given the editor the tools to make a good show.*

Secret: *It is frustrating that so many of your stories will not be used. Get over it. There is no way around this. Keep making them. Use my **Camera Report** to be sure the editor knows about your efforts.*

Encounters

Money shots.

Secret: *The greatest story opportunity of all is animal footage. When you're given the gift of animal footage, use it. You'll never be sorry you did. However, you will be sorry if you don't.*



The basic encounter

Fig 2

Problem: Video of an elk is just footage of an elk. By itself it has no story. You must give it meaning. The illustration above shows a basic way to give meaning to the elk footage. You and the hunter must add these re-enactments. If you don't, you throw a large burden on the editor to tie your animal footage into the hunt story.

Solution: AFTER you've got the animal footage, add story elements: reversals of the hunter discovering & watching the animal, dialogue, etc. If the situation allows, get the hunter in the same shot as the animal. Include a wide shot of the animal along with the tight ones you have already filmed. *When time is short, a hunter and cameraman working together should be able to gather reversals of an encounter in 30 seconds.*

**Reversals must be included with every encounter. It's not always easy, but that is your job.

Secret: *If you see an animal, keep rolling on the animal. Get reversals of the hunter AFTER getting all the animal footage you can.*

Problem: You're a cameraman on an elk hunt. The hunter and guide are in front of you going through the aspens. Suddenly they crouch down. You see, and film, a young bull. The bull moves off and the hunters get up and start to leave. **Stop.**

Solution: This is how it should work: After you film the elk, the camera gets turned on the hunters. Get to the side of the hunters. Have the hunters back up 3 steps, and walk into frame, crouching down to re-enact what just happened . . . quietly watching a small bull, then the hunter and guide get up and walk out of frame. This can be done quickly if the hunter and cameraman are working

together. Congratulations! The encounter is now a complete basic story. The editor will be pleased.

Do re-creates immediately and quickly. If both the cameraman and the hunter know the rules, then encounter re-creates are quick and painless.

Hunts are chaotic. Even with the best intentions, you will find yourself “behind” on getting reversals.

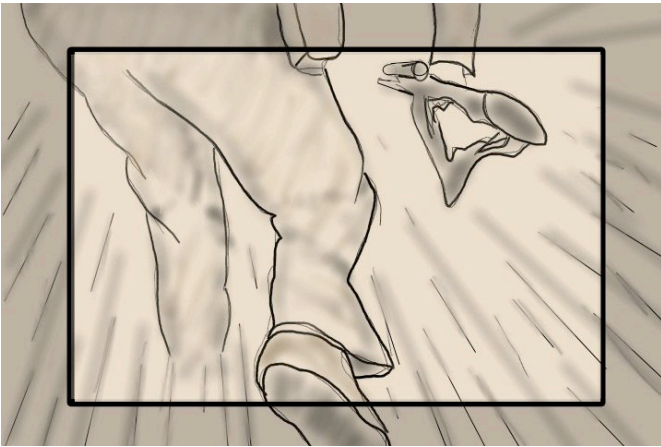


Fig 3

When you get behind, **YOU NEED** to make a mental note that, “I need to get my hunter watching that elk I filmed earlier”...

Secrets: This can be done almost anywhere, **even behind the lodge.** Just try to match lighting, i.e. if the sun was down when you filmed the elk, don't re-shoot the hunter at noon.



Fig 4

Secret: When doing an encounter re-create “behind the lodge”, stay tight on the hunter’s face. Then the editor will have fewer problems matching backgrounds, lighting, etc. to original footage (Fig 4).

Secret: If you’re filming a reversal to use for an earlier encounter, point the camera at yourself and explain this, briefly, on-camera, to the editor.

Problem: "I filmed a nice buck from the road. The editor will do something with it." Probably, but you've put a burden on the editor to figure out how to make it work. That takes more time and effort, which equates to more money.

Solution: If the hunter is in the truck with you, build a quick story, like this: Hunter spotting the buck (beginning- with camera lens wide), glassing with dialogue (middle- lens tighter), walk off with it (end-wide). If the hunter wears the same looking clothing the whole hunt, the editor can drop this footage in anywhere! Congrats! You’ve made a usable story. Fig 5.

Solution: If the hunter is not with you, re-enact him spotting and watching the buck you filmed earlier (Fig 5).

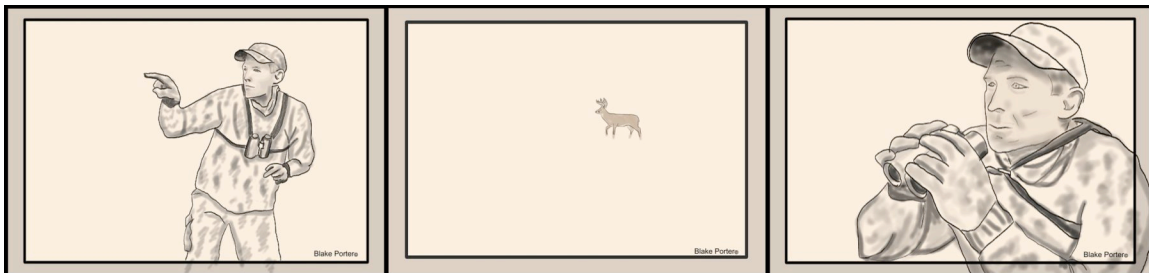


Fig 5

Bottom line: Whenever you film an animal, build it into the story.

Time to Kill

A *whitetail buck* is coming to the food plot. You get on him and ease your headphones in place. In the beginning, you see the buck 200 yards off. Don't start by zooming all the way in on him. Let him look far away. Remember, this is the first spotting of him. Give us a real wide & steady shot. Let him look far way... because he is. This will add more drama and he'll look that much better as he gets closer. Your temptation will be to push in, then pull out, then push back in. Train yourself to leave the zoom as a reframing tool.

Secret: *Frame your shot, and then lay off the zoom, until you need to change.*

If you see an elk in a meadow, film the elk *and* the meadow. DO NOT use an extreme zoom unless you're on a tripod or a stable surface. It's much more important to get a stable shot rather than a full zoom close-up! Stay on the animal the whole time (unless it's real easy to get both hunter and animal, which is, of course, nice).



In the beginning, let the animal look far away.

Fig 6



Closer. Anticipation builds.

Fig 7



Now, he's up-close and personal...Wow.

Fig 8

After the shot-

Smoothly stay on the animal until the animal drops or cannot be seen again. As soon as the animal hits the ground, pull back fast to the hunter and re-focus.

Secret- *Get confused about which way to turn the focus ring? Think of your focus ring as a motorcycle throttle: give the lens barrel gas to focus way-out, ease off the gas for the close stuff.*

Secret: *Stay off the full zoom. You'll be more stable and more in focus. In low light, backing off the full zoom will brighten the image.*

The Moment of Truth

You're on the animal and you're recording. The hunter is about to launch an arrow or a bullet or profanities. Things look good. These questions will be in your head--Which way is the beast going to react? Where is the arrow coming from? How tight should I be?

This is about as tight as you should be:

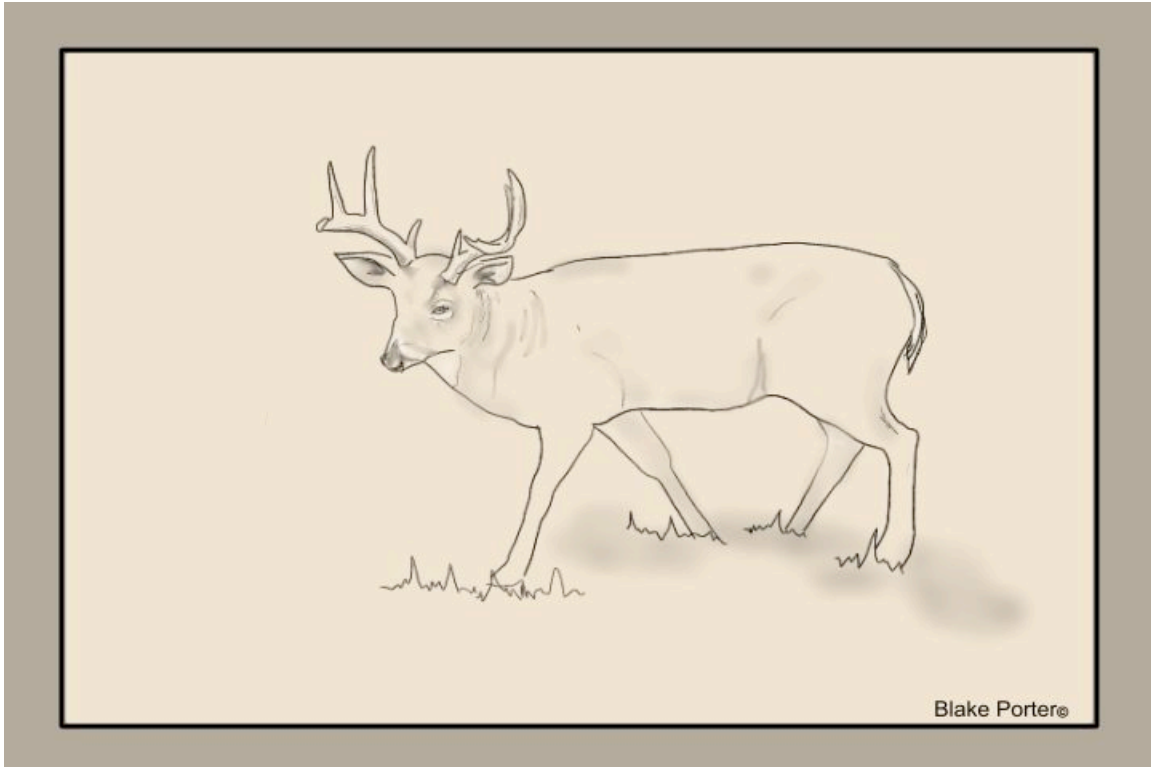


Fig 9

Secret--*Typically the beast drops 5 or more inches at bow noise, then leaps forward. If your framing is any tighter than my drawing, he'll jump out of frame.*

Frame for Arrow Flight

A more advanced method of framing is to allow room for arrow flight. If the arrow is coming from your left, give some room for it.

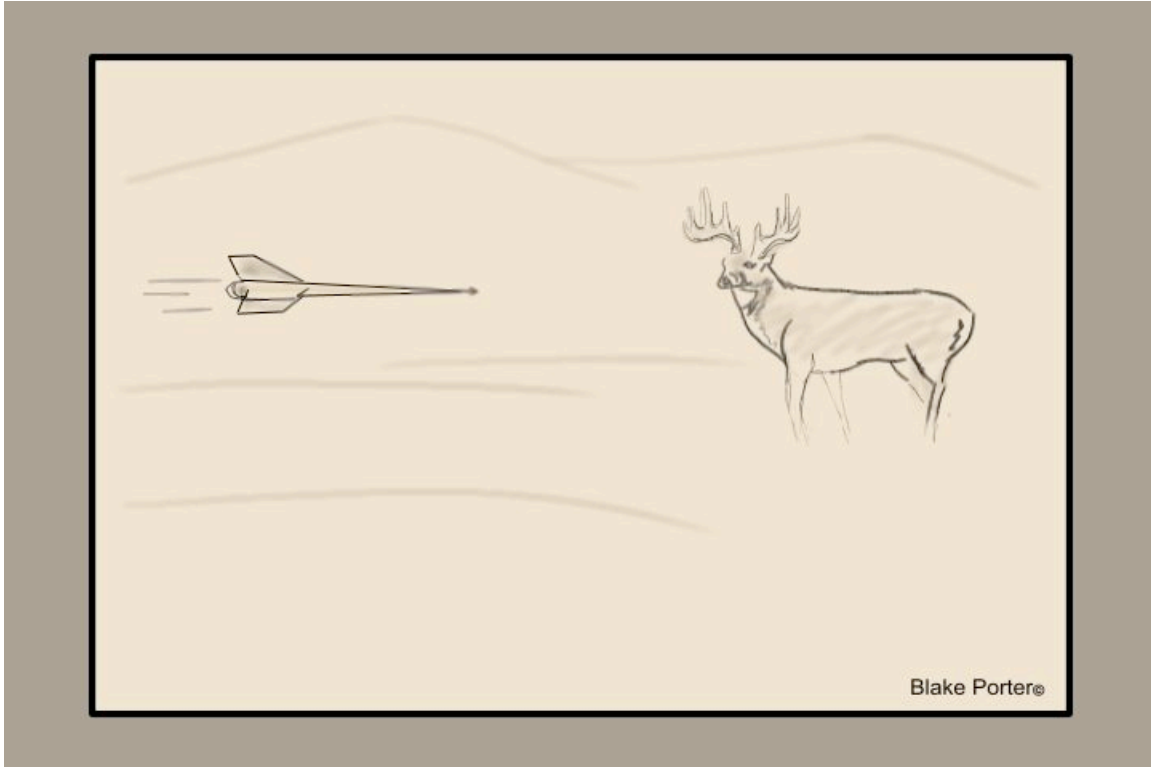


Fig 10

**Give the arrow flight pattern breathing room. This allows for dramatic arrow flight, and great slow motion replay. This framing also allows for following a hit deer very smoothly (Fig 10).

Recapping the Kill:

*Don't be too tight, or the deer will jump out of frame.

*Give it breathing room and be prepared to follow it as smoothly as possible. This is the real money shot. Keep your cool and follow the animal all the way until he drops, or you're sure you can't see him any more. Then whip back to the hunter for reaction!

* The hunter's first reaction is usually the best.

Secret: If you're on a tripod, take your hands off the camera before the gunshot.

The Recovery

Always get a stagnant and steady shot of the downed animal from a distance. This may be a very important cut-away for the editor (Fig. 11).



Fig. 11

A Common Situation-- The hunter tends to want to say the same exact things he did before the kill while he was in the blind or tree stand. We now need something new. I learned this from producer, Pat Reeve. It's OK to reference what has already been said, but a fresh perspective is needed. If the hunter struggles for something new, offer these suggestions:

**Re-hash highlights of this trip.

**Focus on the uniqueness of this particular animal.

**Mention type of bullet used and how hunter likes it.

If the hunter says something of particular interest, get supporting B-roll shots for the editor.

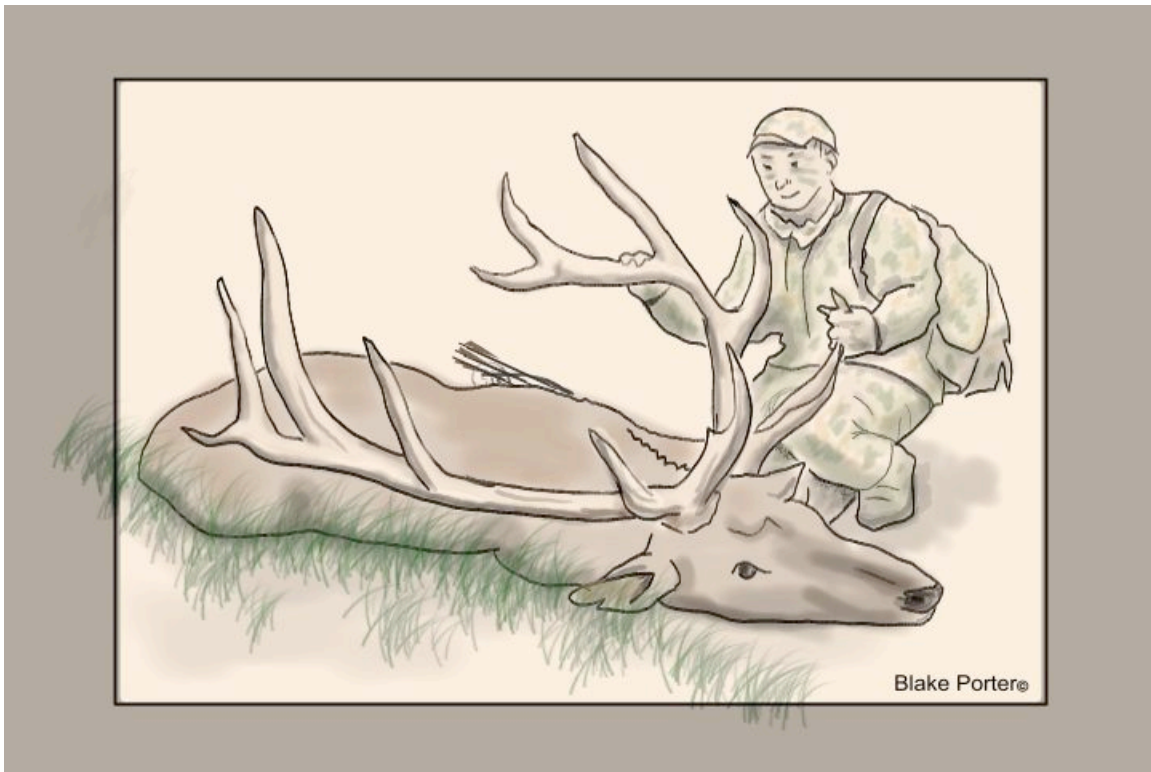
Clean up the blood!! The deer's muzzle should be clean. Too much blood is a major distraction and makes the trophy look bad.



Proper "Hero" framing--Wide.



Proper "Hero" framing--Tight. Include the whole head. Do not cut off the nose.



It's OK to stay wide, like this drawing. We camera guys have a tendency to push in much tighter. It's best to make this the main shot for hero/story, and then do close-ups of the antlers. When doing close-up of antlers, **do not** include hunter's face. It will not match the dialogue. Make sure the hunter's hands are in the same position as when in the wide shot.

Antler close-up--Do at least 3 different angles.

Secret- *The whole point of multiple camera angles is to give the viewer the feeling that there are at least 2 cameras on the hunt. Keep this basic concept in mind for all situations.*

Secret- *During tight close-up of antlers, ALWAYS have the hunter continue talking. Often he or she will add interesting and realistic observations the editor can use.... But do not include his/her face.*

Secret- *Always pack a camera light for evening hunts. I like the Sony HVL-20DW2 10-Watt/20-Watt Video Light. It's light and uses the same Infolithium batteries as my Sony camcorder.*

How to build a story without a kill shot, or a bad kill shot.

Do this and you'll salvage a show segment.

If you can get the "hero" with the deer, do it. Start with the hunter approaching the downed deer, re-enacting the whole recovery. Do this like the hunter is alone or with a guide. The hunter should not be aware of the camera.

Next: The hunter should get into the "hero" position with deer. Now he can be aware of the camera and tell the story.

Next: If possible, do some re-enactments of his story-- stalking / glassing / going over terrain / raising rifle or bow to shoot. Include slightly obstructed, behind the hunter view of the hunter shooting.

Next: Interview the hunter in camp. Tell the story the again from beginning to end. Don't give the ending away until you get to that part of the story. Interview the guide or anyone else who knows something about it. Get their story.

This will then cut together nicely, like a mini documentary.

Take notes of what is said. Take the hunter out in the field to re-enact any footage you're missing in his story. This footage will be B-roll while the story is being told.

It can be fast-paced and entertaining, if you've got a lot of B-roll to go with his story.

Do all this and you'll be amazed how good this segment will come out.

If you have, or can get, b-roll of distant deer, this would also add to the story.

***"All manner of things will conspire against you.
Wind, rain, misery...***

Your job is to conquer them all."

Transitions!

Hunting shows needs transitions. Transitions are needed in the beginning of the hunt, and between segments or different days in the field.

Examples of transitions:

*Your truck going down the road.

*Sunsets and sunrise. The hunter in a sunset is great!

* Distant shot of hunter walking away. Good for end of day hunt.

*Hunter walking toward the camera. An absolute great intro shot! This is my favorite hunter introduction shot.

*Driving through a gate,

*A road sign / state sign / town sign.

*A scenic pan of large area.

Secret: Scenics should be shot on a tripod. If not, it's a waste of time. A scenic should be a very slow, short pan, or a stagnant shot.

What's in my pack?

Extra camera battery

Camera light (evening hunt)

Extra battery for mics

2 extra tapes

Hand saw

A lot of paper towels

White card

A diaper pin (This will save your butt when you lose a mic clip...and you will).

A water-resistant chunk of fabric for camera protection (I make my own. It's easier, faster and much more quiet than the ones you buy).

Bag filled with Minute Rice for filming from truck.

Judgment Day- *The Editor*

It's a great motivator to know that editors *will* bitch, whine and moan about your footage. Missing elements, hand held shots, and poor audio, will create a torrent of obscenities offered to anyone listening. Trust me, over 15 years I've learned the hard way. Knowing there will be a "judgment day" for your footage, your skill, your worth, should be enough motivation for you to handle your job well.

Secret- You want the editor to like you. If the editor to sees your name attached to a pile of tapes and thinks, "Oh crap," you've got some issues to correct. What you want is an editor to see your tapes and think, "OK, there's going to be some usable stuff here."

How you do this:

- **Be organized. Have tapes labeled *1 of 6, 2 of 6, 3 of 6*, and so on.
Lousy labeled tapes are an immediate problem.
- **Include my Camera Report (Fieldproducer.com) with all tapes you hand in.
- **Use a tripod for scenics. If you don't, it's a waste of time.
- **Include reversals for all encounters
- **Have good audio. Set your camera for 48khz. Use a Rycote lav. Windjammer mic (At \$25, they are expensive, but absolutely worth it. They work.)
- *Always keep lav. on the outside of clothes!
- **Have all interviewees begin with their name and spelling and title.
- ** Incorporate what you've learn in this article.

These are general rules. I am well aware that these do not fit all situations. Feel free to share your tips with me.

Blake Porter is an award-winning wildlife cameraman. He's combined 15 plus years for this article. He can be reached at blakeporter@mac.com

Field Producer Secrets for the Hunting TV show, Blake Porter 2007 ©