

Notes on Panasonic Camcorder SDR-S15

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Devon ACL bought 3 of these in March 2009. They are for recording 'micro-teach' and other sessions on the Initial Teacher Training courses, and may also be useful elsewhere. These camcorders are small, light and record onto SD-HC memory cards.

The camcorders come with a comprehensive manual. This sheet draws attention to a few of the more relevant or obscure items from the manual but is not intended as a substitute. The numbers in brackets below indicate page numbers in the manual.

A. Charging the battery

1. Open the LCD screen and make sure the dial is set to OFF. Close the LCD again;
2. Put the battery into the camcorder (if it isn't already in there);
3. Flip open the little panel at the back of the camcorder and plug in one end of the AC adaptor lead;
4. Plug the other end of the AC adaptor into the mains and switch on – the red light on the back of the camcorder should flash slowly;
5. Wait till the red light stops flashing – the battery is now fully charged.

NB. Charging time is approx 2hrs 15mins from flat to full. See p14-16 in the manual.

B. Recording

1. Open lens cover by sliding the switch at the front next to the lens;
2. Open the LCD screen;
3. Rotate the dial from OFF to the first position (red 'movie camera' symbol);
4. Wait for a few seconds for the LCD to come to life;
5. Use the zoom buttons at the top of the camcorder to zoom in/out;
6. Press the red record button at the back to start recording;
7. Press the red record button again to stop recording;
8. When finished, rotate the dial to OFF, close the LCD and close the lens cover.

Symbols in the LCD when recording

The recommended settings to use are shown by the following symbols in the display:
(For a helpful explanation of all possible LCD symbols see p88-89 in the manual.)

iA = intelligent Auto (if it says 'AUTO', press the iA button to change it to iA)

SP = Standard Play: this is the recommended recording quality (XP is higher quality but produces much larger files; LP is long play but is lower definition). See p27.

A* = Automatic LCD brightness (see p23).

Battery symbol: the more diagonal stripes, the more battery left.

Notes about recording:

- You need a memory card in the camcorder in order for it to record. See p17.
- Hold the camera with two hands – one on the camcorder body, one on the LCD.
- The LCD swivels up and down to allow viewing from different angles. See p10.
- If you swivel the LCD completely upside down you can see yourself whilst filming.
- As well as the record button at the back there is also one at the side, near the front. This can be useful if holding the camera at waist level, or if recording from the front.
- The camcorder can get hot underneath whilst filming; this is normal.

- If you are recording with the camcorder on a table, put something soft beneath it to avoid the microphone picking up unwanted vibrations, knocks etc – but remember it can get hot underneath.
- There is a neat 'fade-in/fade-out' facility to add a bit of professionalism – see p37.

C. Playing back video recordings

1. Open the LCD screen;
2. Rotate the dial from OFF to the second position (green triangle in black oblong);
3. Use the left-right-up-down buttons to choose a clip to view from the thumbnails;
4. Press the blue button to run the clip;
5. Use the left-right-up-down buttons for rewind, fast forward, pause, stop (these functions should be shown on-screen, if not press the blue button again);
6. When finished a clip, press the 'down' button to stop and go back to the thumbnails;
7. At the end, rotate the dial to OFF – or to the red 'movie camera' to record.

Note you can also play video back on a TV using the lead supplied. You will need a TV with red-yellow-white sockets at the back or an adaptor to plug these 3 into a standard SCART.

Deleting clips

1. Follow steps 1-2 above, then press the 'dustbin' button;
2. Use the up-down buttons to choose 'Select' – you should now see the thumbnails;
3. Move around the thumbnails, pressing the blue button for any you want to delete;
4. Press the 'dustbin' button a second time;
5. Select 'Yes';
6. Press MENU to get back to normal.

D. Power conservation

The battery should last between **40mins** and **1hr 15mins**, depending on use of zoom, LCD, light etc. To make the most of the battery:

- Make sure the white 'headlight' on the front of the camcorder is turned off (press the 'LIGHT' button if necessary). See p35.
- If recording a number of short clips, close the LCD between each – this puts the camcorder into standby and saves the battery.
- If you are recording a longer session (eg 10 mins or more) you can start recording then carefully close the LCD – the recording will continue but this will save the power normally consumed by the LCD.
- If you are not using the camera for a few minutes, turn the dial to OFF.
- If you are not using the camera for a few weeks, remove the battery (otherwise it will slowly drain and eventually over-discharge - which damages the battery).

Note that the camera will automatically turn off if left idle for a few minutes with the LCD open. To bring it back to life, either (a) close and re-open the LCD or (b) rotate the dial to OFF then back again.

To avoid draining the battery at all, plug the camcorder into the mains when in use.

Note, however, that this does not charge the battery– that only happens in OFF mode.

E. Other tips

- Format the memory card before first use and repeat if you use it often (but save the recordings first as formatting wipes them all). See p13.
- Zoom mic setting: this 'focuses' the microphone as you zoom in. See p31.
- Still pictures: the camera can be used for taking these but only at low (0.3M) resolution.
- Web mode: this limits clips to 10 minutes – the maximum allowed by some web sites.

F. Transferring video clips to a computer

The video files are in MPEG2 format which is standard for burning on to DVD's and can be played by newer versions of Windows Media Player (but not older versions) and other media player software.

Method 1 – drag and drop using 'My Computer' or similar

This method assumes that you are already familiar with using 'My Computer' or similar software to move & copy files on a computer.

1. Plug the USB lead into the the camcorder then into a USB socket on the computer;
2. Open the LCD screen on the camcorder;
3. Rotate the dial to the first position (red 'movie camera' symbol).
You should see the 'Select USB Function' list come up on the LCD;
4. Use the down button (from the left-right-up-down cluster) to select 'PC/Recorder';
5. Press the blue button;
6. Use 'My Computer' or similar programme on the computer to drag files across from the camera to the hard drive of the computer;
7. When finished, click 'Safely Remove Hardware' or similar icon on the computer (eg at bottom right of screen) and click to remove the camcorder;
8. Once safe to do so, unplug the USB lead from the camcorder and computer;
9. Turn the dial on the camcorder to OFF.

Once on the computer you can use DVD burning software to burn the files onto a DVD.

Note: The burning process may take longer than the length of the recording itself!

Method 2 – using the VideoCam software supplied with the camcorder

(This method also allows some editing of the video clips.)

Before starting you need to install the software onto the computer – which may only be possible if you have 'administrative' rights. Assuming that you **are** able to install software, insert the VideoCam CD into the computer and follow the instructions that should appear.

Once VideoCam has been installed, you need to:

1. Plug the AC adaptor into the camcorder and into the mains;
2. Plug the USB lead into the the camcorder then into a USB socket on the computer;
3. Open the LCD screen on the camcorder;
4. Rotate the dial to the first position (red 'movie camera' symbol).
You should see the 'Select USB Function' list come up on the LCD;
5. Use the down button (from the left-right-up-down cluster) to select 'PC/Recorder';
6. Press the blue button.

The VideoCam software should start up automatically at this point.

7. Use 'VideoCam to import video clips – and edit/re-save etc as required;
8. When finished, close the VideoCam software on the computer;
9. Click 'Safely Remove Hardware' or similar icon on the computer (eg at bottom right of screen) and click to remove the camcorder;
10. Once safe to do so, unplug the USB lead from the camcorder and computer;
11. Turn the dial on the camcorder to OFF.