

GENERATOR

Production: The Shoot

Education Resources



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THE SHOOT

Strong production work is the result of both creative planning ideas and the ability to use production technology in an effective and innovative manner. An in-depth understanding of basic filmmaking principles is essential to the filmmaker's ability to visually translate and express their thoughts and feelings to the audience. With this knowledge, filmmakers may then experiment with new and expressive production techniques to convey their ideas. An application of mise en scène principles combined with skilful camera techniques can result in the composition of visually rich imagery that emotionally engages the audience with the film's narrative.

PRODUCTION MODE AND FORMAT DECISIONS

Production style and budget are the factors that most often dictate which format a filmmaker chooses to work with. With the increasing affordability of digital recording devices, filmmakers are now able to present their ideas in a range of film formats, and some contemporary filmmakers have challenged tradition by experimenting with film formats, presenting their ideas in an eclectic selection of colour, black and white, digital, video and animated film formats.

Today, there is a wide range of digital cameras available with corresponding quality and affordability. There are four basic types of cameras:

- Basic DV (digital video) camcorder
- HDV (high-definition video) camcorder
- HD (high definition) camera
- Digital cinema camera

Each of these types of camera varies in quality, price and purpose. With technology advancing so rapidly, high quality production cameras are now much more affordable. When purchasing a camera it is recommended that the selection is made based on budget and purpose, with consideration also given to the post-production tools available to arrange and edit the captured footage.

CINEMATOGRAPHY AND MISE EN SCÈNE

The camera is the filmmaker's key tool that has the capacity to drive the narrative intensity of the story. Although it is invisible to the audience, the camera engages the audience with the world they see on-screen. Decisions made by the director and cinematographer about camera techniques usually are based on their relevance to the situation, the subject and the intended reaction of the audience to that scene. In addition, mise en scène decisions may shape and influence the selection of camera techniques to ensure that the desired meaning is conveyed.

In French, mise en scène means 'putting into the scene'. The term is used to signify the director's control over what happens in the film frame. Mise en scène involves close planning, and the decisions that need to be made about setting, lighting, costume and staging usually lie in the hands of the director. The director's ability to successfully control, compose and capture these elements helps to convey his or her ideas to the audience.

Framing and composition

Filmmakers rely on selective framing and composition techniques to visually communicate with their audience. The way a scene is framed and composed has the power to direct and draw the audience's attention towards essential details within the frame. Selective framing and composition is what positions audiences to interpret and respond to the lighting, costumes and staging of each scene.

Some terms used in relation to framing and composition are:

Aspect ratio Aspect ratio refers to the proportions of the screen for which the film is shot. Some common aspect ratios are: 4:3 (television), 16:9 and widescreen. The size and shape of the frame determines what the audience can and cannot see. Shooting in widescreen format can provide audiences with a wider vantage point, which is particularly useful if the film features large-scale landscape settings and locations.

Angle, height and distance The placement of the camera – its height, distance and angle – can position audiences to see and respond to elements within the frame in the filmmaker's desired way.

Movement Camera movement can influence or determine the degree of audience involvement. The audience can be moved through a scene in order to elicit a particular response to what is in the frame.

Composition and the rule of thirds The composition of the frame determines where and how the elements within it will be positioned to capture the audience's attention. Apply the rule of thirds (imaginary horizontal and vertical grid lines dividing the frame into thirds) to compose your shot better. Avoid placing your main subject directly in the centre of the frame. Line the subject up with an intersection on one of the imaginary grid lines.

Camera framing

As someone watches a film or television show, they are aware that what is on the screen is a construction of reality. The techniques adopted by the filmmaker combine to create and reinforce this 'reality' for the audience. The director and cinematographer will generally work together to decide how best to tell the story, and an analysis of the types of shots and the best way to compose them is an essential part of the planning process.

When shooting your production, consider how your framing choices can help to reinforce reality, establish narrative intensity and reveal important information about selected characters to your audience.

Camera distance

All shot types have a narrative purpose. The selection of shot type should be made in relation to the size of the subject in the frame and the intended response of the audience.

- Extreme wide shot (ELS)** The extreme wide shot is often used early in a film to establish a larger setting or location – for example, a cityscape or a rural landscape. This shot allows the audience to take in the ‘macro’ details of a character’s location, while the look and size of the location can convey the scale and tone of the film overall.
- Wide shot (LS)** In the wide shot (or long shot), the characters in the shot are clearly visible, as are their location and surroundings. This shot is primarily used to highlight the importance of the setting in relation to the characters in the shot. Their surroundings will usually reveal additional information about the characters. The setting dominates in this shot.
- Medium long shot (MLS)** Characters can be seen in detail in the medium long shot, as can some of their surroundings. Most of the character’s body is in the frame, with the character visible from the knees up. This shot is traditionally used for dialogue and action sequences.
- Medium shot (MS)** In the medium shot, the character is filmed from the waist up. This shot is best for dialogue scenes when attention needs to be drawn to the character’s facial expressions and body language.
- Close-up (CU)** The close-up highlights and draws attention to detail. Traditionally, a close-up will reveal facial expressions and heighten emotion in the scene.
- Extreme close-up (ESL)** The extreme close-up shows selected detail, and it is often used to draw attention to or magnify something that is small. What the audience cannot see can also be important: suspense films often use this shot to create a sense of mystery.
- Point-of-view shot** The point-of-view shot positions the audience to view and experience the events on-screen from the character’s perspective. To achieve this, all vision and sound is limited to the character’s perspective.

Camera angle

The position of the camera can help to establish the relationship between the audience and the on-screen characters, while camera angles can create a scene’s mood and reveal power relationships between characters.

- High camera angle** By positioning the camera up high and tilting it downwards, the audience is placed in a position of power in relation to the on-screen character. However, when used with a point-of-view shot, the subject at whom the character is looking appears small, inferior and intimidated by the character looking down at them.
- Low camera angle** Positioning the camera down low and tilted up towards the subject positions the audience so they feel inferior to the

overpowering subject they are looking at. Again, when used with a point-of-view shot, the character is looking up towards the subject who appears to be large and threatening.

Eye level

Most film scenes are shot at eye level, evoking a sense of equality and connection between the subject and the audience.

Dutch angle

A 'Dutch angle' means the camera is tilted to one side and everything appears to be on a slant or angle. This angle is often used to present the audience with an unsettling, distorted perspective, and it can be used to reflect a character's emotions or feelings.

Depth of field

Using cinematography, filmmakers intentionally draw the audience's attention to details within the frame and the scene. The area that is in focus is called the depth of field. A director or cinematographer may decide to focus on certain areas within the frame while intentionally keeping other areas out of focus. This is achieved by using a wide angle lens and a wide aperture, which reduces the depth of the area in focus.

Deep depth of field

Used when all parts of the shot need to be in focus so that all details in the foreground and background of the scene can be seen by the audience. This is often accompanied by a long take to ensure that the audience has ample opportunity to take in all the visual information on screen.

Selective focus or shallow depth of field

This technique requires skill and control over the camera and is mostly used when only selected elements in the shot need to remain in focus.

Pull focus

This technique refers to the camera's focus intentionally shifting from one subject to another within the same shot.

Camera movement

Camera movement can be used to intentionally direct or move the audience's attention towards a particular object or character within the frame. All camera movements have a particular purpose.

Panning

Moving the camera horizontally from left to right or vice versa. Panning can be used to set the mood or tone in the way it establishes and sets the scene. As an example, a pan can be used to scan a horizon in search of someone the audience or a character is looking for.

Tracking or dollying

Moving the camera in a particular direction – forward, backward or sideways. A 'dolly' system, whereby the camera is moved in the desired direction on a rail-like track, may be used for tracking shots. This type of camera work invites the audience

to move through the scene, enhancing the realistic, three-dimensional quality of the setting.

Tilting	Moving the camera, which is on a tripod, up or down in a tilt-like motion. A tilt may be used to follow an upward movement, jump or action.
Zoom	With the camera remaining still, the cinematographer zooms in to enlarge and magnify an object or character within the frame. Filmmakers may intentionally use a rapid zoom to startle and shock the audience. This technique should be used sparingly as it can appear unnatural; as an alternative, cut closer to the subject or action when a closer perspective is required.
Steadycam	The camera is attached to a special camera mount that smooths out its motion as it travels through the scene, enhancing the sense of realism for the audience. This technology was made popular by documentary filmmaking, where camera mobility is essential.

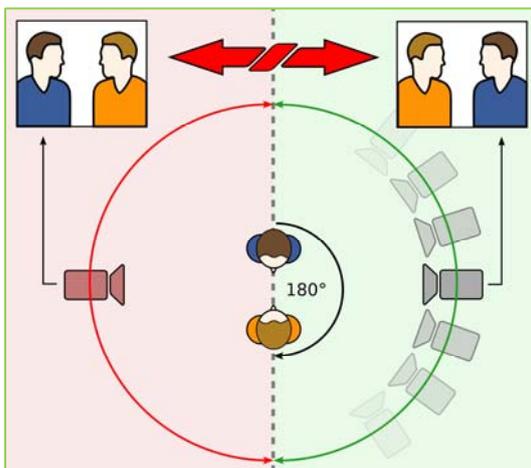
FILMING FOR CONTINUITY

A successful film will allow its audience to suspend their disbelief. As we watch a film or television show we know that what we are watching is a construction of reality. Continuity techniques allow the audience to be drawn into the on-screen world of the narrative by projecting a believable illusion of on-screen reality. Often referred to as the 'classical Hollywood' mode of filmmaking, this approach relies on a number of conventions that conceal the film's construction process and create a plausible story for the audience to engage with. When a scene is shot many times during filming, it is important to pay close attention to continuity; if not, the editing process will not be able to conceal the fact that the scene is made up of several different takes.

Some continuity conventions include:

- Filming at eye level or the use of a mid shot replicates the viewer's height so that the audience feels they are viewing the experience first-hand.
- Performers' looks and glances should preserve the illusion of reality. Eye-line matches and consistency between shots are essential – for example, a shot revealing a character looking to the right of the screen at another character should be followed by a second shot of that character looking back to the left of the screen at the first character. The same rule applies to characters looking up or down at each other.

The 180-degree rule



The 180-degree rule dictates that the camera placement and direction should remain consistent from one shot to the next. Regardless of shot type and framing, the camera must remain on one side of the action axis to prevent audience confusion. The decision to cross the axis must be done so with careful shot selection and editing techniques.

This diagram shows the axis between two characters and the 180-degree arc on which cameras may be positioned (green). When cutting from the green arc to the red arc, the characters switch places on the screen [source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:180_degree_rule.svg#file, accessed 13 July 2010].

TECHNICAL SKILL DEVELOPMENT AND PICTURE QUALITY

Filmmakers need to be comfortable with the equipment they are using and confident of their production skills before they begin shooting. Prior to the shoot, read the instruction manual for all pieces of equipment and learn how they work. The following tips will help to ensure good quality filming:

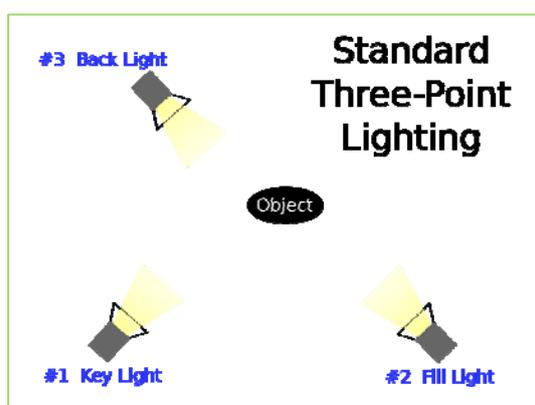
- Use a tripod whenever possible to avoid camera wobble. If a tripod is not available, set the camera up on a stable surface.
- Allow a brief pause at the beginning and end of each shot – do not start or stop filming too abruptly (videotapes take a couple of seconds to roll after pressing record).
- Press pause between scenes rather than stop.
- Look through the viewfinder (if using a digital camera with batteries, avoid using the flip-out window as it takes more power).
- Use manual focus, not automatic, once you are more confident (auto-focus is useful when starting out, but the results can be disappointing).
- For effective manual focus, turn the focus to manual, zoom in as far as possible and then manually adjust the focus on your subject so that it is sharp. Then zoom out to the required frame size.
- Carefully compose your shots. Consider how to best arrange the visual information you want to convey to your audience.
- Frame your shots. Think carefully about what you want to see in the frame and what you want to leave out.
- Avoid zooming and frequent panning as these camera techniques can look jerky and unprofessional. Consider only using the zoom to frame and set shots up.
- Wherever possible try to shoot out of the wind to avoid noise distortion.
- Always check for continuity: watch for errors and if shooting at the same location over a period of time check that the setting, background and lighting have not changed.

LIGHTING

Lighting is a powerful element of mise en scène used by filmmakers to express particular emotions and mood in a scene. Lighting considerations are a high priority, and a significant amount of time may be required to experiment with a range of lighting set-ups to ensure that the desired mood, atmosphere and meaning of the scene is captured and conveyed. A cheaper alternative to professional lighting kits are large garage lights (available from hardware stores) positioned on tripods or stands.

Some commonly used lighting set-ups are as follows:

Traditional three-point lighting



Three lights are used to fill the scene. The key light, fill light and backlight all work together to make the scene appear as natural as possible by filling in all shadows and lighting the subjects in the frame.

Source: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3_point_lighting.svg (accessed 13 July 2010).

To arrange a three-point lighting set-up, position the lights in the following manner:

Key light	The key light is the main and brightest source of light. It is positioned slightly to one side of the main subject.
Fill light	The fill light is a slightly softer diffused light that is positioned on the other side of the main subject. The main purpose of the fill light is to fill the shadows cast on the subject by the other lighting.
Back light	The back light is placed behind the subject to create the illusion of depth within the frame. It separates the subject from the background to enhance the three-dimensional quality of the shot.

Expressionist forms of lighting

Films that are highly stylised often experiment with alternative ways of lighting the scene. Low and high key lighting techniques, although non-realist in style, can illuminate a scene in a way that conveys emotion and mood particularly expressively.

Low key lighting	Low key lighting is an expressionist form of lighting that is often used to cast deep, long shadows across the set. This effect can be created by positioning the key light directly
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towards the scene. Low key lighting is often associated with films that are expressionist in style, such as film noir.

High key lighting

High key lighting intensifies the scene in a stylised and quite artificial manner. This non-realist form of lighting, popular in musicals and comedies where the visibility of set colour and detail is essential, suggests a sense of perfection.

Improving lighting quality

The subject of the scene must be lit effectively to convey your intended message. Where possible use brightly lit environments, and before rolling think about the following points to ensure good quality filming:

- Can you see everything clearly in the frame?
- Is the natural lighting suitable?
- Try to minimise shadows where possible. Take care with direct sunlight as it produces harsh shadows and flare in the camera lens.
- Make sure lighting and cables are not visible in the frame (keep cables tidy and use gaffer tape to fix them down so they are not a trip hazard on the set).
- Do not shoot towards the light: actors who are backlit by light (including sunlight) will appear as silhouettes.

CAPTURING SOUND

Poor quality sound can seriously diminish the impact of high quality images. Conversely, high quality sound enhances on-screen visual material while at the same time conveying the desired mood and tone of a scene. The director's ability to experiment and manipulate sound adds another creative dimension to the successful realisation of their ideas. Care should be taken when capturing sound; as with lighting, much time and consideration should be allocated to microphone selection and placement.

When filming, microphone placement can either be on-camera or off-camera. On-camera microphones, traditionally used in reportage or documentary forms, are visible to the audience. Off-camera microphones are hidden or positioned outside the camera frame. Off-camera microphones can be suspended from tracks around the set or attached to a boom pole that is held just outside the camera frame.

Microphone types

Microphones are classified according to their directional sensitivity or pickup patterns.

- **Omnidirectional mics** are sensitive to sounds from all directions – that is, they will capture sounds from a 360-degree area.
- **Bidirectional mics** capture sounds from opposite directions.
- **Unidirectional mics** capture sounds from one direction.
- **Cardiod or shotgun mics** are sensitive to sounds directly behind the microphone, but more sensitive to sounds directly in front of it.

- **Multidirectional mics** have more than one pickup head – that is, they are sensitive to sounds from different directions.

Tips for improving sound quality

It is important to be able to hear dialogue easily. Wind and other peripheral noise can spoil the captured audio. For best sound quality, think about the following issues:

- Are you using just the camera microphone or do you have additional microphones?
- When capturing sound, it is recommended that someone monitor the sound levels, wearing headphones to listen to the audio that is being recorded. Using this technique, ensure that the sound is clear and dialogue audible at all times.
- Before shooting, test the audio in all locations. What is the optimum distance from the camera to achieve the best sound? Keep the microphone as close to your subject as possible to reduce the impact of extraneous sound.
- What is the location sound like? Check for peripheral noise such as loud traffic, trains, playgrounds or air-conditioning that may affect the shoot.
- Try to shoot out of the wind, as wind noise can spoil a recording. A windsock can be used if it is windy outside.
- During shooting do not worry too much about sound effects, as these can usually be added in post-production.
- Do not bump the microphone when recording.
- Avoid shooting in rooms with hard floors that clatter or echo. Look for carpet and soft floor coverings to contain background sound.

YOUR NOTES

