

Aesthetic Principles and Camera Work for Video/Film



Lecture Topics

- Aesthetic in directing
- Shot types
- Frame composition
- Shots combination
- Audio and Visuals

Outcome: After this lecture you should have some insight into good practices on making aesthetically pleasing camera shots, and how to make them work together.

Aesthetics def

- The branch of philosophy that deals with the nature and expression of beauty, as in the fine arts.
- 2. The study of the psychological responses to beauty and artistic experiences.
- 3. A conception of what is artistically valid or beautiful: *minimalist aesthetics*.
- 4. An artistically beautiful or pleasing appearance.

Function, Form, and Content

In the context of art:

- Function
 - Refers to why something is expressed; its goal or purpose
- Form
 - How something is expressed in a work of art
- Content
 - What is expressed
- Function (why), form (how), and content (what) are closely connected aspects of any creative work

The Important “Shot”

- The director must decide how to combine shots (and music) into a comprehensive whole
- Camera Shots
 - Often classified by:
 - 1) camera-distance-to-subject
 - 2) camera angle
 - 3) camera (or lens) movement
 - 4) shot duration

Camera Shots



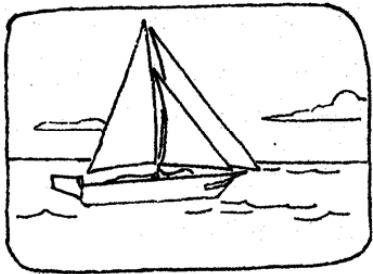
XCU



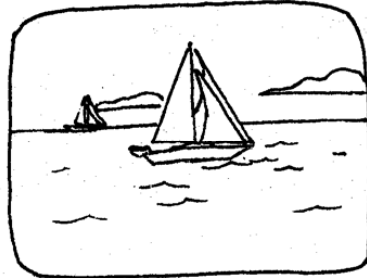
CU



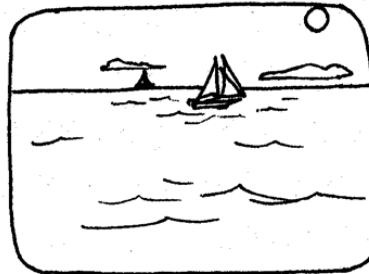
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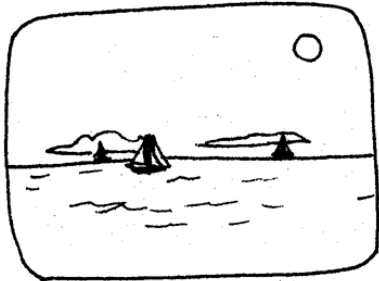
MS



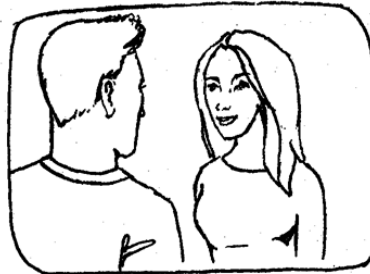
MWS



WS



XWS



OS



POV

XCU	Extreme close up
CU	Close up
MCU	Medium close up
MS	Medium shot
MWS	Medium wide shot
WS	Wide shot
XWS	Extreme wide shot
OS	Over the shoulder
POV	Point of view

Camera-to-subject distance

Shot use

- Close up
 - Draws the attention to the subject
 - Can increase dramatic emphasis
 - If overused, dramatic impact greatly reduced
- Long Shot
 - Orients the viewer to the subject
 - Used to “establish” the scene
 - An opening scenes often start with a long shot that we call “establishing”

Camera Angles

- Point of view
 - Shows scene from a subjects point of view
- Reverse-Angle shot
 - shows what the actor is seeing, i.e. point of view shot, but used after showing the actor (i.e. we see the actor, then their POV)
- Eye Level
 - Most common
- Low-Angle Shot
 - Gives emphasis that the object is powerful, larger
- High-Angle Shot
 - Can be used to indicate smallness, but also can just add variety into the sequence
- Overhead Shot
 - Creates a unique perspective for the viewer



Eye Level



High-Angle



Low-Angle



Overhead

Camera Motion (1)

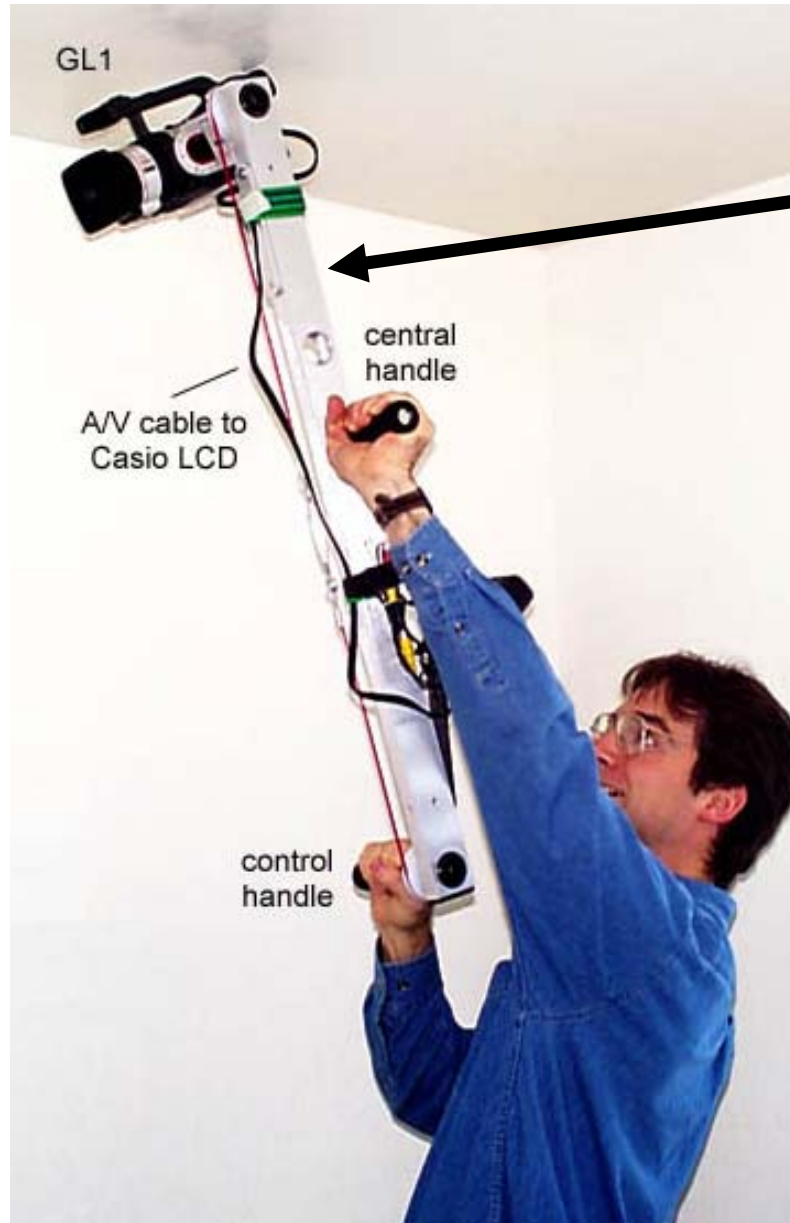
- **Pan Shot**
 - Side to side motion on a fixed point (i.e. rotation sideways)
 - **Usage:** Used to follow the action without moving the camera
- **Tilt Shot**
 - Up-down motion on a fixed point (i.e. rotation up-down)
 - **Usage:** Used to follow actor (if sitting to standing), also used to emphasize height of object (like a building)
- **Pedestal Shot**
 - Camera moves up or down
 - **Usage:** These shots are rare
- **Zoom Shot**
 - Changing the focal length (smaller focal length number = larger field of view)
 - **Usage:** Alters spatial perspective
 - All things in the scene appear close (zoom in)
 - All things in the scene appear farther apart (zoom out)

Camera Motion (2)

- **Dolly Shot**
 - Camera moved towards or away from the subject
 - **Usage:** Follow complicated motion
 - When combined with zoom-in (slowly) appears to bring people together*
- **Trucking Shot**
 - Camera moved from side to side from the subject
 - **Usage:** Move with an subject to keep it in frame
- **Tracking Shot**
 - Tracks laid over rough surfaces to allow so-called “impossible” locations
 - **Usage:** Follow action in difficult locations
- **Crane or Boom Shot**
 - Camera is on a large crane (or boom) and raised and lowered over the scene
 - **Usage:** Creates a dramatic effect

*<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y48R6-iLYHs&feature=related>

Camera Cranes and Booms



Boom



Crane

Frame Composition

- The way in which images can be effectively structured within a frame or single shot

Some considerations:

- Aspect Ratio
- Rule of Thirds
- Symmetry
- Closure
- Scale, Shape, and 3D

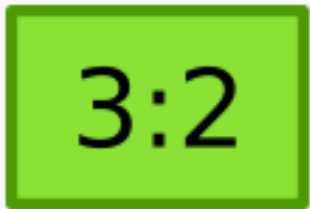
Aspect Ratio

- The dimension of the film/video effect the relation of objects and shapes
- Aspect Ratio
 - Specific dimension of video/film in (width):(height)
 - Video: 4:3
 - Feature Film: 1.85:1
 - HDTV: 19:6 (which is close to feature film)
- Essential Area
 - Rarely is a video/film viewed in its complete form
 - Different TV sets, projectors, etc, may cut portions due to manufacturing differences
 - The essential area is an area that is “guaranteed” to be shown

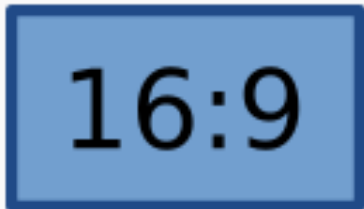
Aspect Ratio



Standard TV



Standard 35mm photography aspect ratio



HDTV aspect ratio



Feature Film aspect ratio

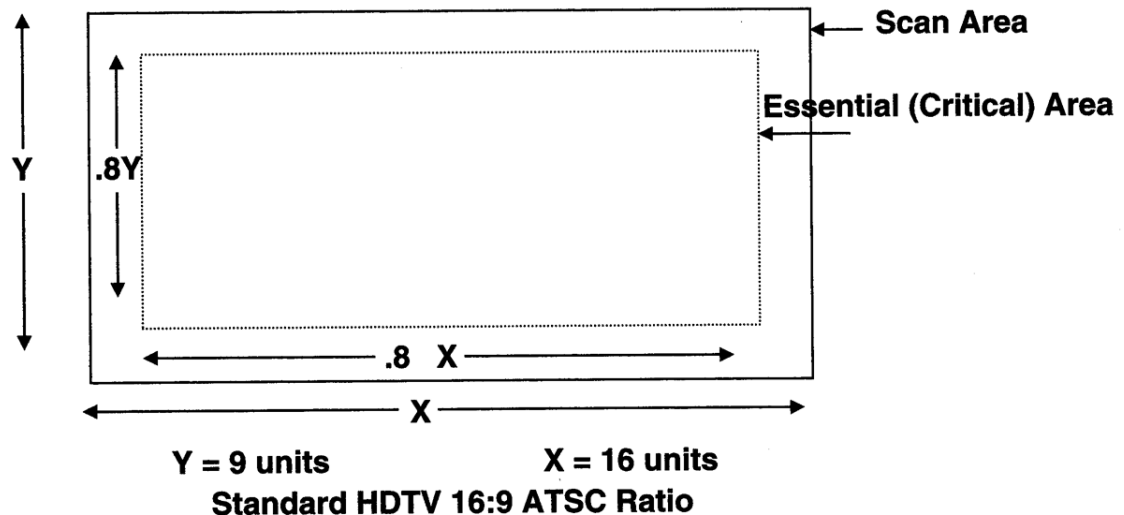
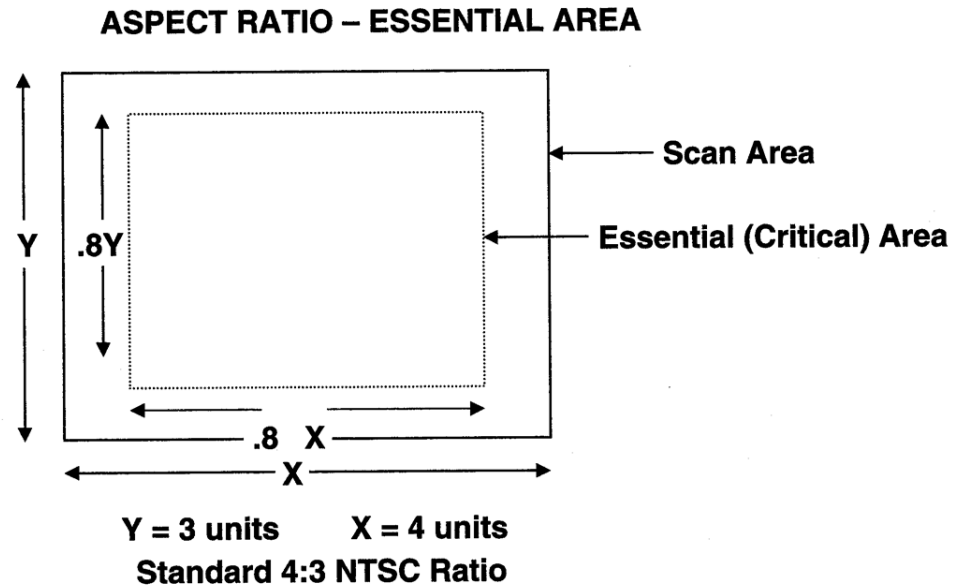
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aspect_ratio_\(image\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aspect_ratio_(image))

See above link for very good examples of the difference of an image taken at the various aspect ratios.

Essential Area

When you make a title in Adobe Premiere it often shows you this area.

Adobe Premiere does this so you can guarantee your title will appear.



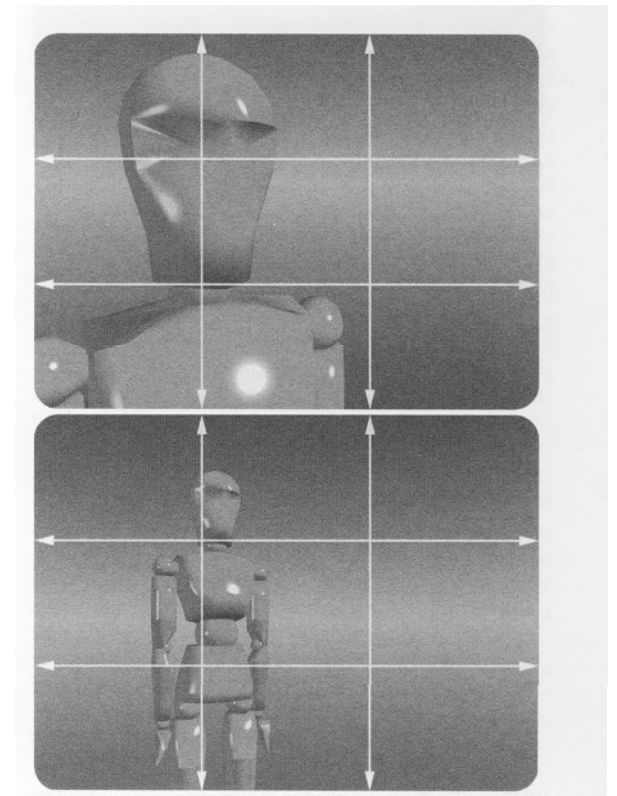
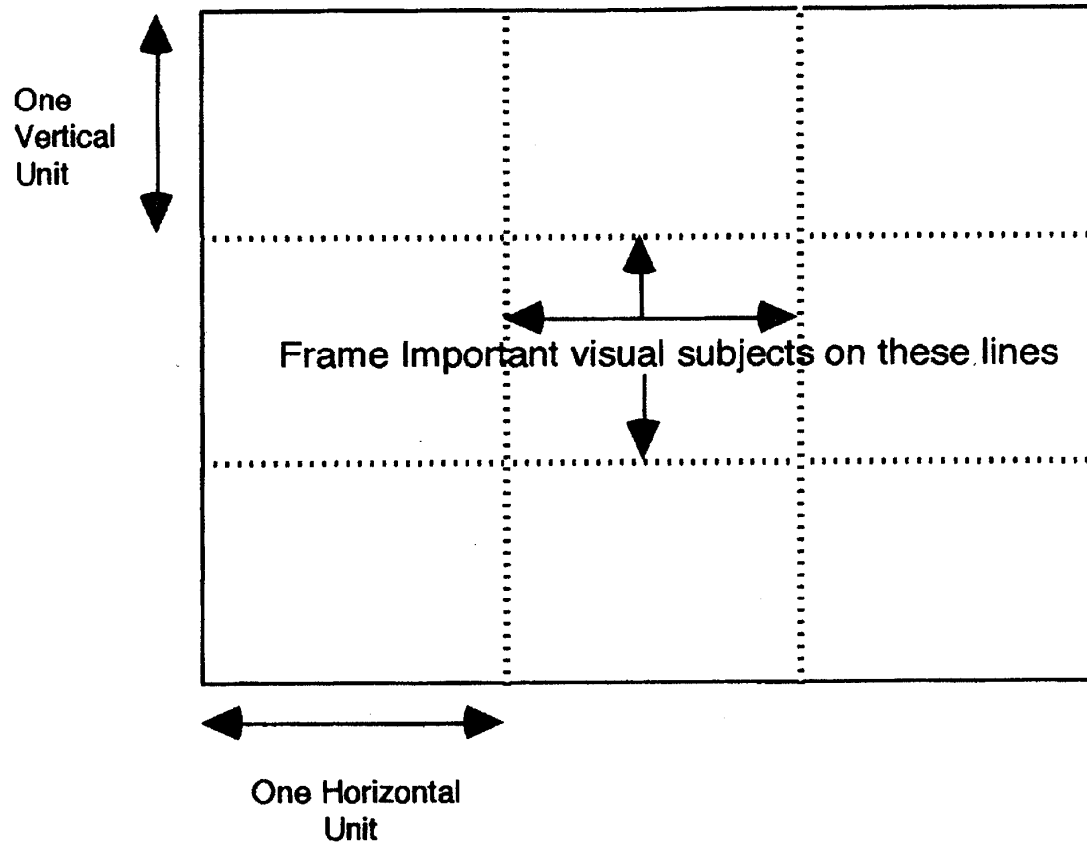
Rule of Thirds



Which one is better?

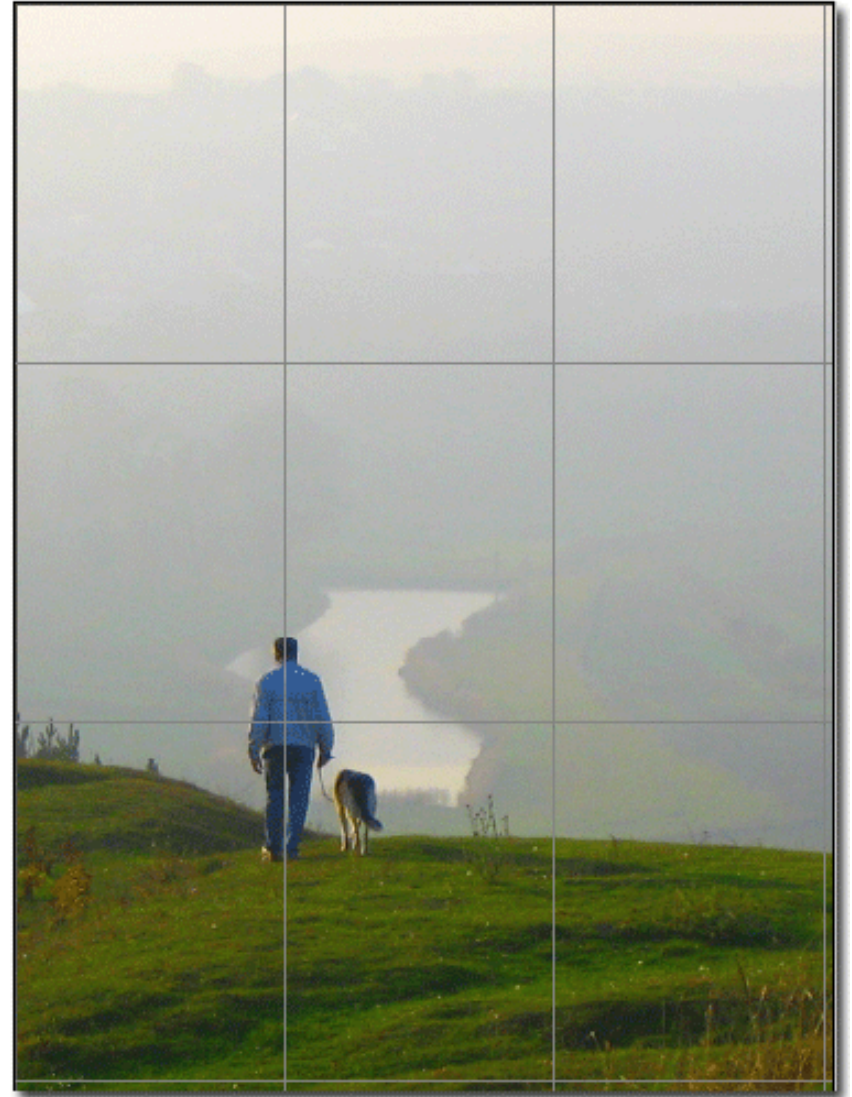
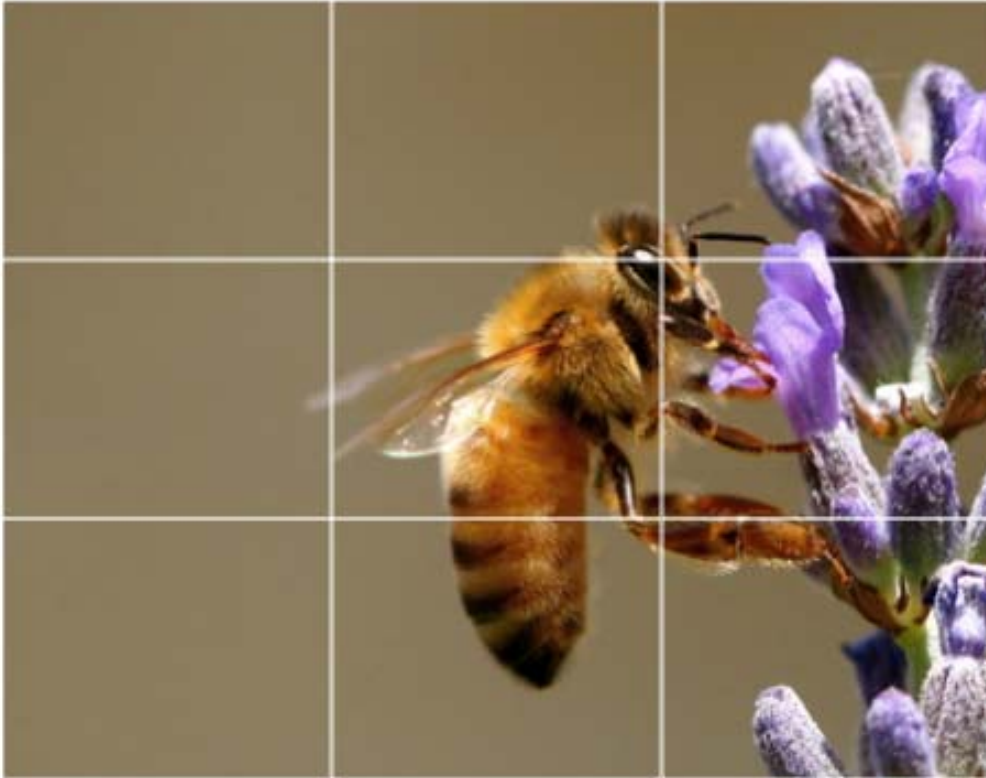
Rules of Thirds

FRAMING RULE OF THIRDS

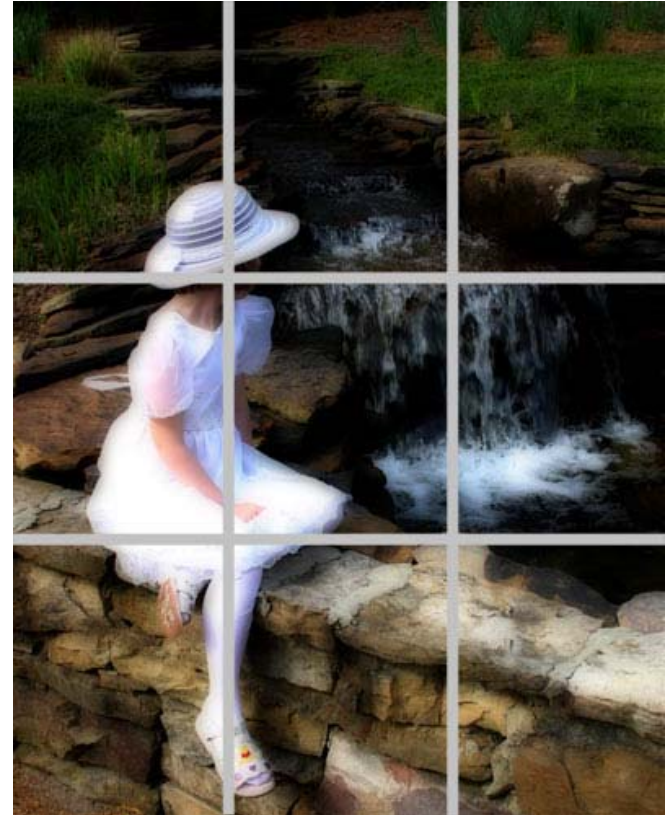
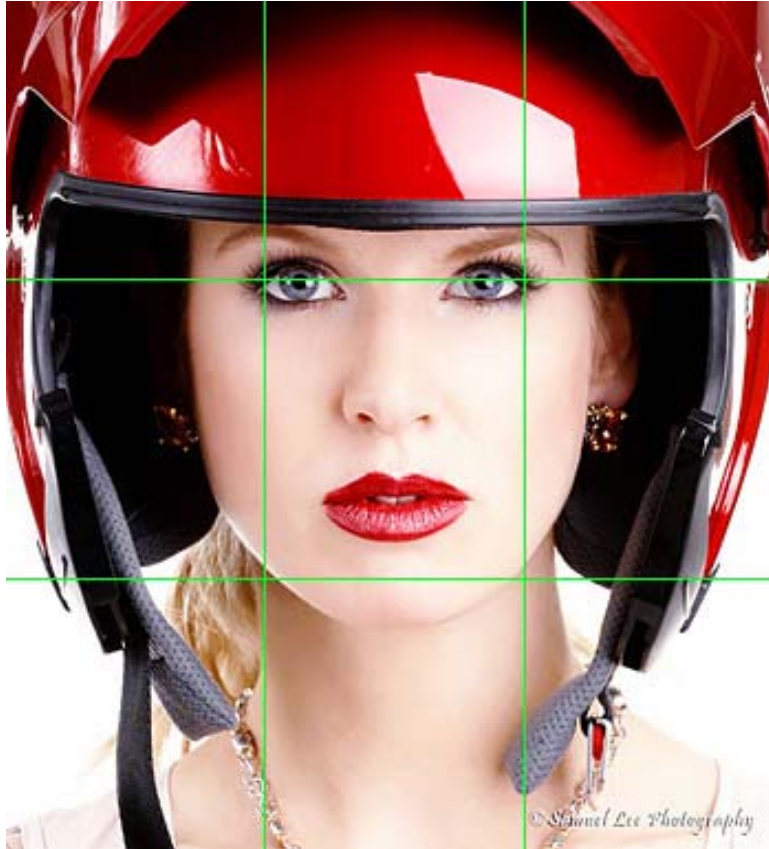


When shooting a subject, align the subject on the one of the lines (or intersections) . This makes a more aesthetical pleasing image/shot.

Rule of Thirds: Examples



Rule of Thirds: Examples



This is not a photo, this is a painting. Rule of thirds applies to art, not just photographs.

Symmetry/Asymmetry (1)

- Symmetry
 - balances the objects in the scene, appears stable and solid
 - But can be boring
- Asymmetry
 - Frame is more volatile and interesting
 - But can be distracting

Key to good directing is knowing how to balance these.

Symmetry/Asymmetry (2)

- Symmetry should be balanced with rule of thirds
 - When people are talking, asymmetry is distracting
 - Characters need to be balanced
- Asymmetry
 - It is better to have an single actor make the frame asymmetric than symmetric in many cases
 - This follows the rule of thirds
 - Depends on your goal
 - Maybe you want to have the audience focus on the actor for something dramatic, then center perhaps center them

Symmetry and Asymmetry



Frame is balanced with two subjects.

symmetry



Frame has only has one subject.

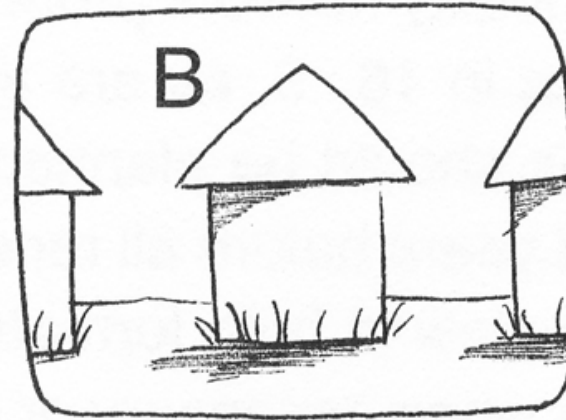
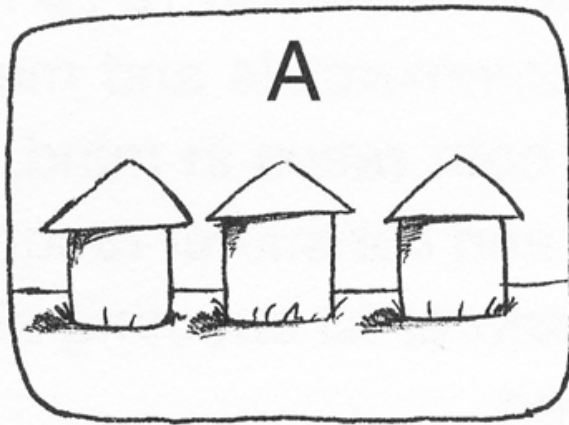
asymmetry

Why did the director do this?
He could have shown both people
in this shot.

Closure

- **Closure** is the sense of completeness invoked in the viewer.
- Frame the subject in the center of the frame gives a sense of closure (call this a “closed frame”)
 - We feel the scene is complete, no relationship with the rest of the scene
- Framing the subject on a principle line, or leaving viewroom or leadroom (call this an “open frame”)
 - Gives the sense that the subject is still part of the scene
- Directors must know how and when to use closure/non-closure to help the narrative of the story

Closure Example (1)



Frame “A” indicates three houses are present.
Frame “B” indicates more than three houses.

Shot A gives us a sense of closure. We think this is a shot about 3 house. We may call this a “closed frame”

Shot B is not closed, gives us a sense that there are lots of houses (maybe more than 3). We may call this an “open frame”

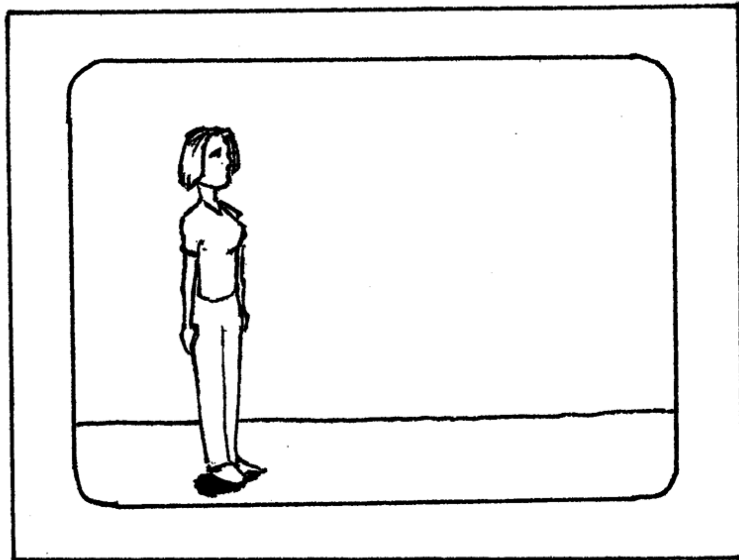
Depends on what the director wants to convey to which shot is correct.

Closure Example (2)



Lead space or View room

Look room gives us a sense of openness.



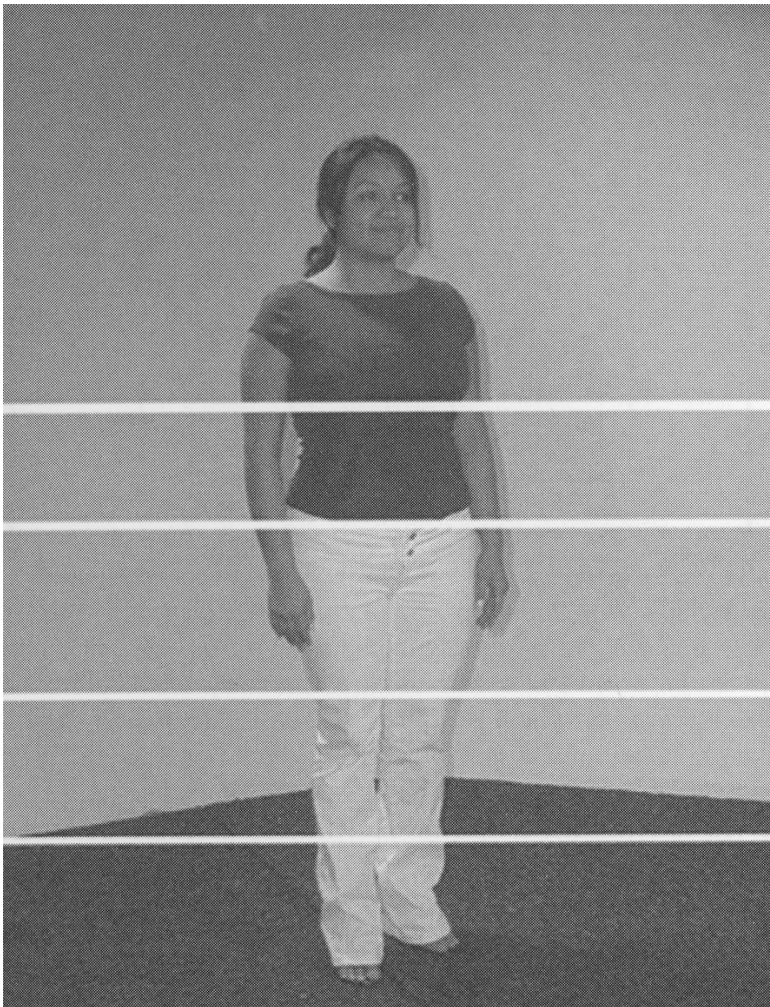
Lead space or Lead room

Lead space gives us a sense of openness.

We can also say these are asymmetrical.

Closure for Human Subjects

- Do not cut the person at joint points. This gives doesn't give a sense of closure, we will something is missing. Instead frame between joints.



- ← Frame up to here if you want to include the shoulders. Don't cut at the shoulders.
- ← Frame up here if you want to have an Upper body shot. Don't cut right at the mid-waist.
- ← Frame here for even more. Don't cut at the knees.

Frame Movement

- Try to maintain the composition style when there is motion
 - Closed frames should stay closed
 - Open frames should stay open
- Common bad camera work
 - Asymmetric frame becomes symmetric
 - Symmetric frame becomes asymmetric

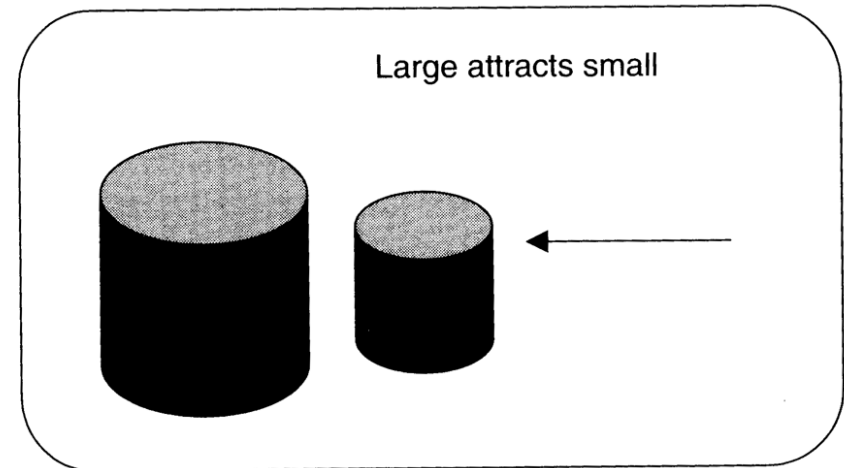
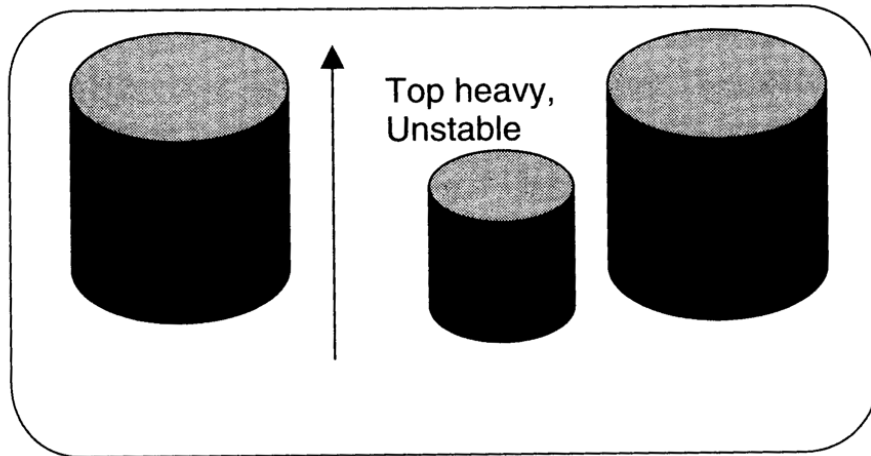
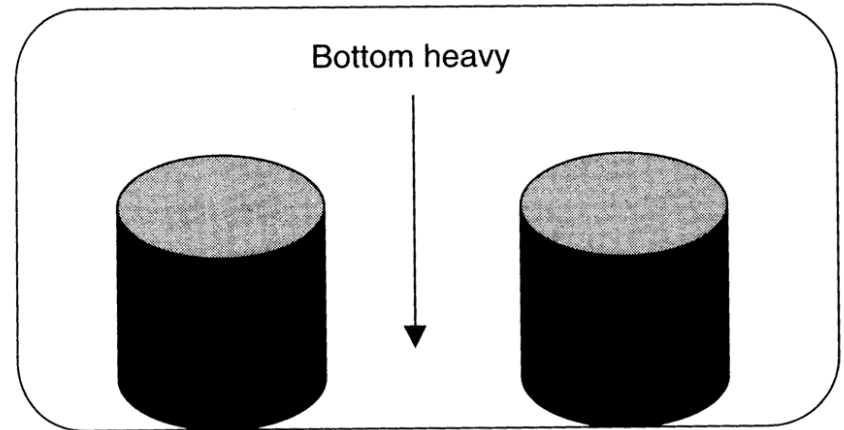
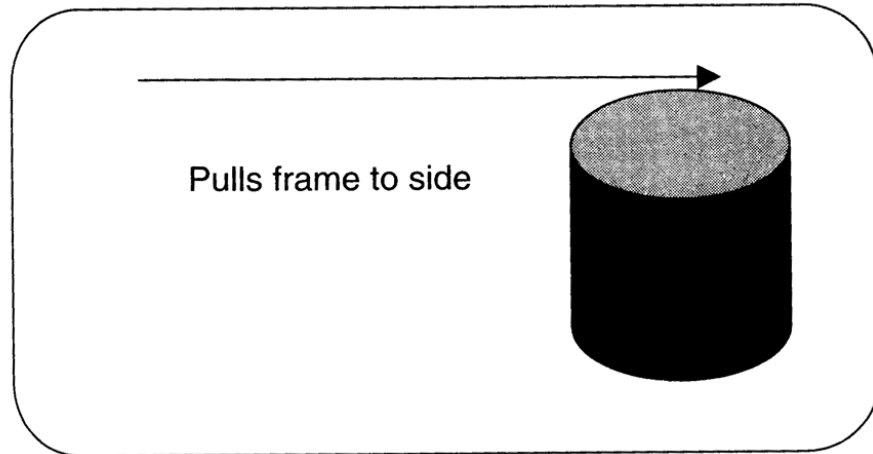
Image Qualities

- When compositing multiple shots, the tones in the images must stay similar
- Combining shots with very different contrast levels is disconcerting to the viewer
- Combining mismatched tonal shots can “shock” the audience

Scale, Shape, and 3D Effect

- Objects of similar shapes/scales can have an effect on symmetry and balance
 - Be mindful of how objects/subjects are placed in the frame
- Film image is 2D only
 - 3D dimension is lost
 - Use camera angles to give a sense of 3D to the viewer

Shape Effects



Creating “3D” effect



Don't



Do

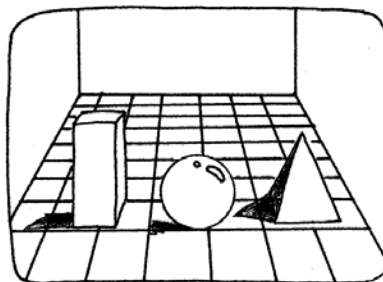


Don't

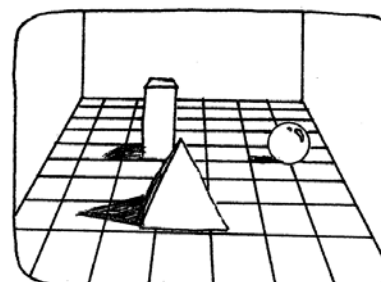


Do

Use camera angles to give a sense of 3D, otherwise the scene can appear “flat”.



Don't



Do

Combining Shots

- One job of the director is to decide the order and duration of shots (esp. in the final compositing)
- Long takes (durations) slows down the actions and allows the audience to concentrate on characters, situations, and settings
- Short takes intensive the action
 - 3 minute “climax” scene can have up to 100 separate shots
 - Ex: Shower scene from Alfred Hitchcock’s “Psycho”
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rOC-zvyhrCU>
- Combining shots is often the most important part of the production
 - Relies on the director being a good editor (or help from a good editor)

Shot Transitions - Straight Cut

- Straight cut is an **instantaneous** change from one camera shot to another
 - For example, long shot cut-to close up
 - If the scene is the same, time is assumed to be continuous by the viewer
 - **Jump cuts** to different parts of time in the same scene can create a startling effect
 - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=atl_JfS23Zg&feature=related
 - If the scene is different, it suggests a gap in time
 - A series of jump cuts can be used to simulate a compression in time
 - Often used in commercials to tell a story
 - If the content in the scene match, this can be called a “match cut”
 - Example: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CDAWsizeZtNg>

Shot Transitions- Fade and Dissolve

- Fade out and Fade in
 - Can be used to mark the beginning and end of a sequence to the viewer
 - Emphasizes a significant passage of time
- Dissolve
 - A simultaneous fade-out and fade-in
 - Used to “smooth” over passage of time without drawing attention to it.
- *Fade out draws attention to the passing of time, dissolve does not.*

Other Transitions

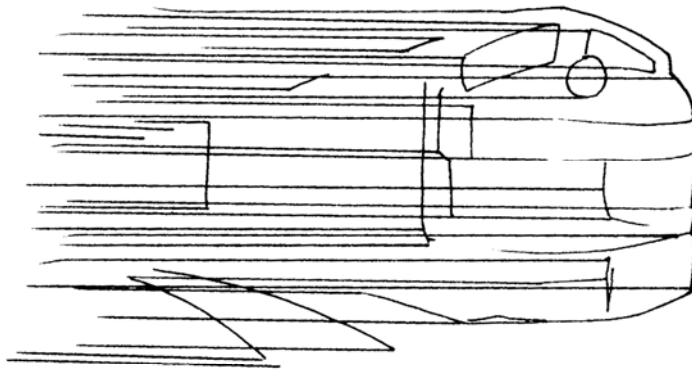
- Defocus
 - Defocusing the end of a shot
- Superimposition
 - Two shots 50% on the frame
- Freeze frame
 - Freeze on a single frame
- Swish pan
 - Fast motion of the camera to blur the scene
 - Creates sense of action (used with upbeat music)

Swish Pan Transition

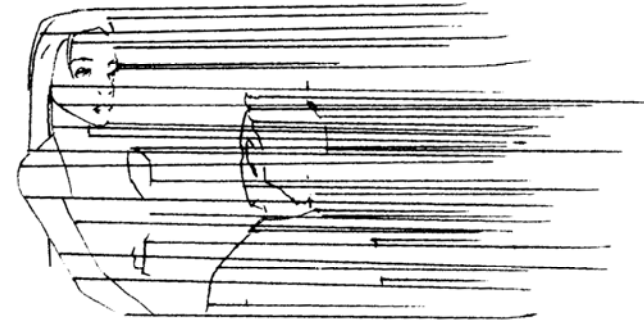
Swish Pan



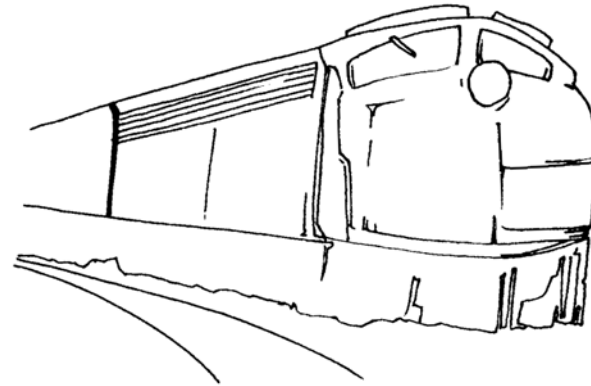
Beginning of shot A



SWISH PAN →



SWISH PAN →



End of shot B

Scene Construction (1)

- A *scene* is a series of shots of actions
- Its important to have significant change in camera angles and/or camera-to-subject distance between two shots
 - Camera angles should move at least 45 degress
 - Or, camera-to-subject change should be significant

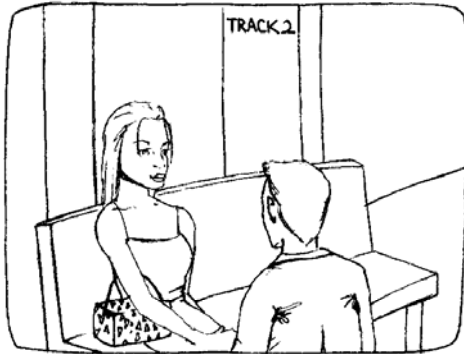
Scene Construction (2)

- Change in camera-to-subject distances
- Uses
 1. to depict an action omitted in the previous shot
 2. provide closer look at an object
 3. emphasis an object
 4. draw back and establish the setting

Cut-in and Cutaways

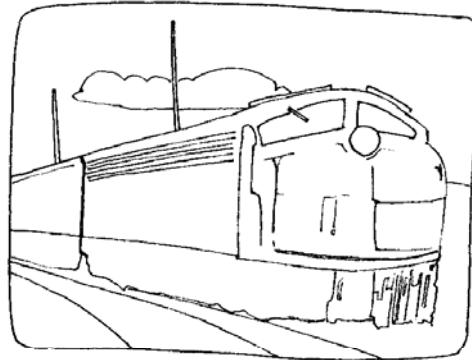
- *Cut-in* depict actions that appear within the master frame
- *Cutaways*
 - Secondary shots that depict action outside the master shot, but part of the scene
 - These can be used at anytime to help bridge mismatched action, or acting continuity, or to add detail/depth to a scene
 - Cutaways can also be used to “stretch” the time of a scene.

Example of cut-in and cutaway

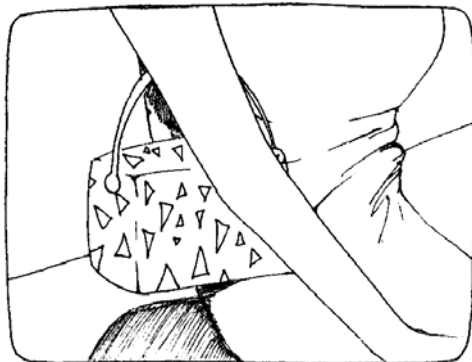


Cover

Cover is the main frame.



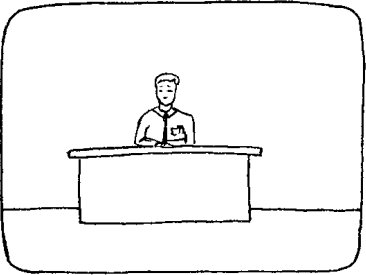
Cutaway



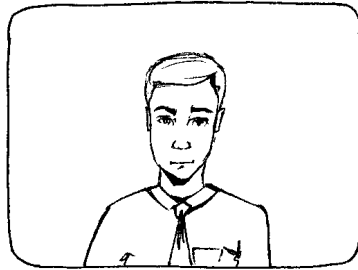
Cut-in (sometimes call cutback)

Scene Continuity

shot 1



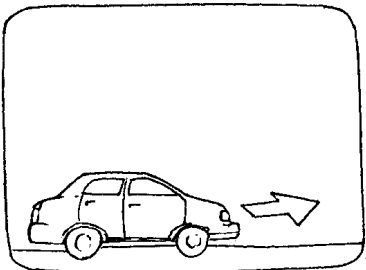
shot 2



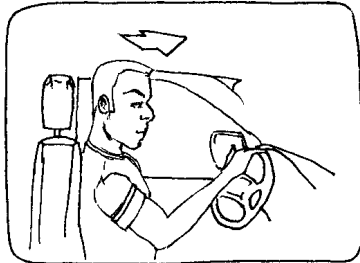
Continuity of Action
(cut-in)

Action of the actor at different camera shots should be consistent.

shot 1



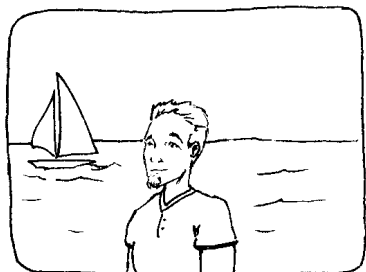
shot 2



Continuity of Direction

Direction of action should be consistent between shots.

shot 1



shot 2

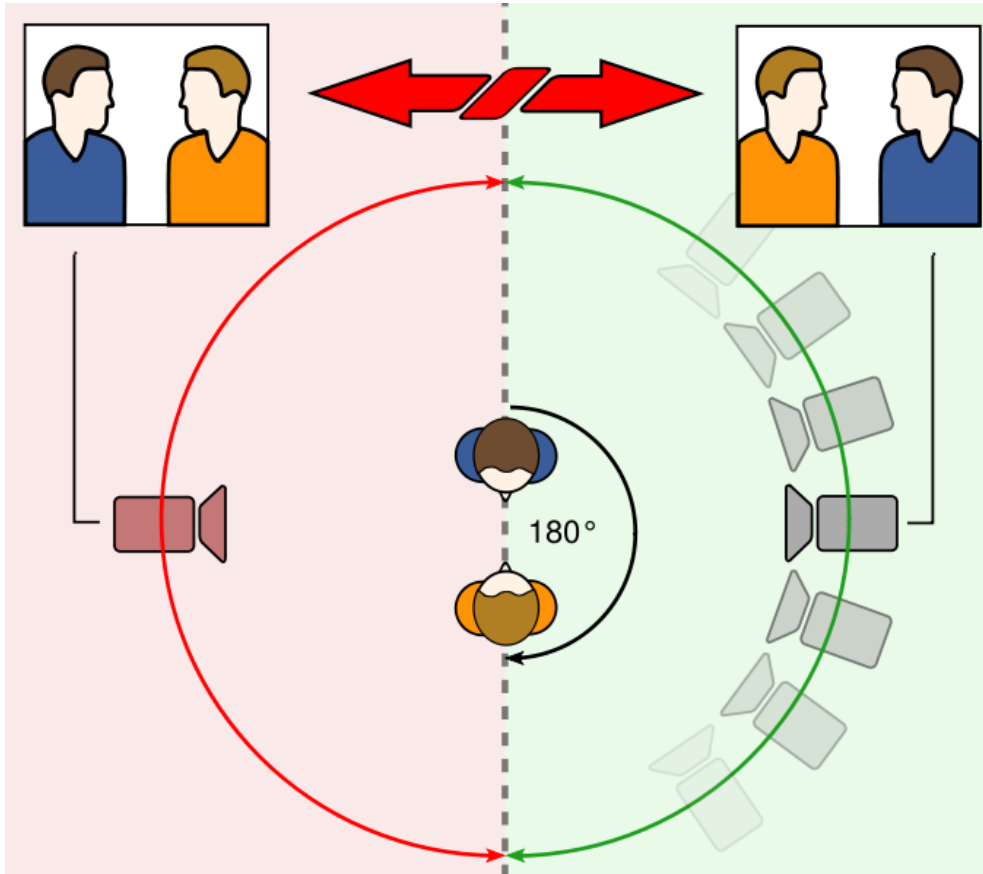


Continuity of Location

Location should be consistent in between shots used in the same scene.

The Three Types of Continuity

180 Degree Axis of Action Rule



Two subjects establish a line. Always stay on side on own side of this line.

This is call the 180 Degree Axis Action Rule.

Nice explanation:

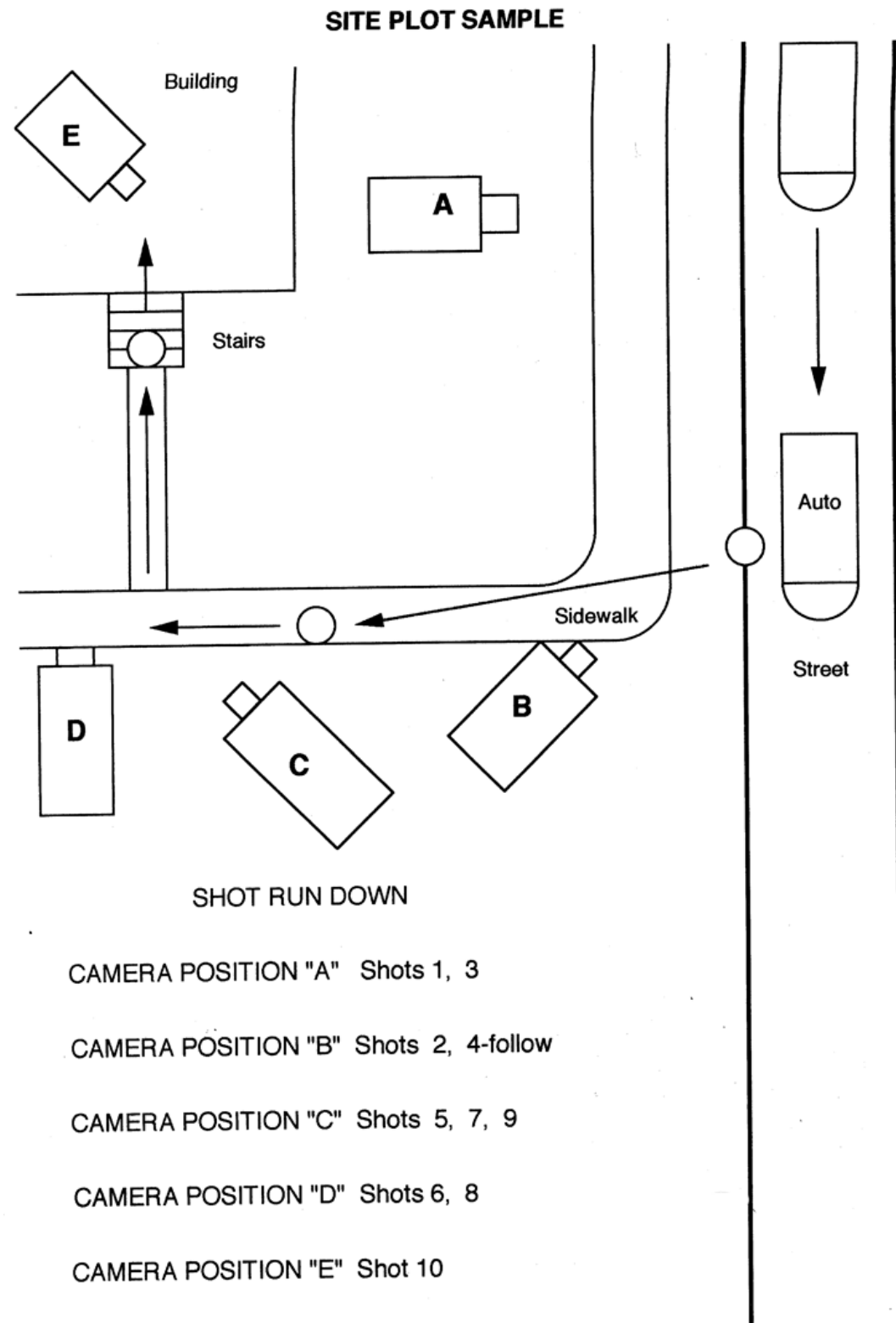
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HdyyuqmCW14>

Multiple Cameras

- Shooting with multiple simultaneous cameras
 - Allows action to be captured from various angles
 - Allows smooth continuity for the actors
- Requires significant planning
 - Cameras must be “blocked” to determine location
 - Requires several rehearsals with the actors to get it correct
 - Requires a sketch up of the location

Blocking

Figure 4.23 A director blocks performers and cameras before and during rehearsal in order to determine the best placement of each to provide the framing and movement intended for each shot. A plot drawn as if looking straight down on the scene is helpful in visualizing where cameras and performers need to be blocked.



Sound and Image Interaction

- Sound is an extremely important role
 - Sound can help shape the way the visuals are interrupted
 - Set the mood of the viewer, stimulate emotion
- Music composed for TV or film often
 - Intensity the drama
 - Establish period and setting
 - Stimulate a specific emotion or theme for a particular character
 - Same music may be used over and over for that character (call this theme-music; i.e. James Bond)
 - Help fill in silence
- Music must be used carefully
 - Gaps or changes in levels can cause discontinuities
 - Disrupt perceived time and continuity

Sound and Image Interaction

Four categories:

1. On-screen vs. off-screen sounds
2. Commentative vs. actual sounds
3. Synchronous vs. asynchronous
4. Parallel vs. contrapuntal* sounds

* pronounced: con-tra-pun-tal

Off-screen vs. On-Screen

- On-screen sound is anything that is from the visual frame shot
- Off-screen are sounds that are assumed to be outside the frame
 - This can be used to enhance spatial depth
 - Setup expectations of the visual presentation
 - Help breakdown limitations of the visual frame

Commentative vs. Actual

- Actual
 - The viewer assumes comes from a real source in the scene
 - Examples: spoken dialogue, scene noise
- Commentative
 - Sounds that the viewer *knows* is not part of the real scene
 - Examples: accompanying music/sounds, narration, etc.
 - Note: off-screen sounds can still be interpreted by the viewer as part of the scene

Synchronous vs. Asynchronous

- Synchronous
 - Sounds match the on-screen source
 - Ex.: dialogue, footsteps
- Asynchronous
 - Sounds do not match the on-screen source
 - Often is not desirable (like bad lip-sync)
 - But, can be used for artistic expression
 - Scream of a victim, played after the action

Parallel Versus Contrapuntal

- Parallel
 - Sounds match the emotion effects of the on-screen action
 - Very common in movies and film, sound is used to support our feelings
- Contrapuntal
 - Sounds do not match the emotional effects of the on-screen action
 - Example: pleasant music during violence*

*<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wxrWz9XVvls&feature=related>

Summary

- A “director” turns a script into visuals + audio
- A “director” must know how to use different types of shots to tell the story and make it interesting
- A “director” must be aware aesthetic qualities of the shooting process
- Music and sound can be used to enhance visuals and increase depth