

Camera Shot Guide: Framing, Angles and Movement¹

When describing camera positions, or choosing them yourself, you have to think about three important factors

- The FRAMING or the LENGTH
- The ANGLE
- If there is any MOVEMENT involved

When describing camera positions (or shots), different terms are used to indicate the amount of subject matter contained within a frame, how far away the camera is from the subject, and the perspective of the viewer. Each different shot has a different purpose and effect. A change between two different shots is called a CUT.

1 . Extreme long shot -- XLS

Can be taken from as much as a quarter of a mile away, and is generally used as a scene-setting, establishing shot. It normally shows an EXTERIOR, eg the outside of a building, or a landscape, and is often used to show scenes of thrilling action eg in a war film or disaster movie.



¹ Most of the text here was taken from an article called "Describing Camera Angles and Movement" posted on [MediaKnowAll: A Webguide for Media Students](#). Several images and captions were copied and pasted from [Storyboard Design Course](#) by Guiseppe Cristiano.

2. Long Shot -- LS



The most difficult to precisely categorise, but generally one which shows the image as approximately "life" size ie corresponding to the real distance between the audience and the screen in a cinema (the figure of a man would appear as six feet tall). This category includes the FULL SHOT showing the entire human body, with the head near the top of the frame and the feet near the bottom.

3. Medium Shot (or Mid Shot) MS



Contains a figure from the knees/waist up and is normally used for dialogue scenes, or to show some detail of action. Variations on this include the TWO SHOT (containing two figures from the waist up)



TS (two shot)

and the THREE SHOT (contains 3 figures...). Any more than three figures and the shot tends to become a long shot. Another variation in this category is the OVER-THE-SHOULDER-SHOT, which positions the camera behind one figure, revealing the other figure, and part of the first figure's back, head and shoulder.



OTS (over the shoulder)

4. Medium Close-Up -- MCU

This falls somewhere between a medium shot and a close-up.

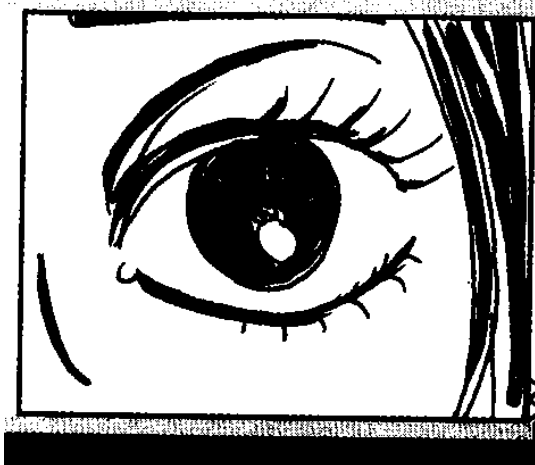


5. Close-Up -- CU



This shows very little background, and concentrates on either a face, or a detail of mise en scene. This shot magnifies the object (think of how big it looks on a cinema screen) and shows the importance of things, be it words written on paper, or the expression on someone's face. The close-up takes us into the mind of a character. In reality, we only let people that we really trust get THAT close to our face - mothers, children and lovers, usually - so a close up of a face is a very intimate shot. A film-maker may use this to make us feel extra comfortable or extremely uncomfortable about a character.

6. Extreme Close-Up -- XCU

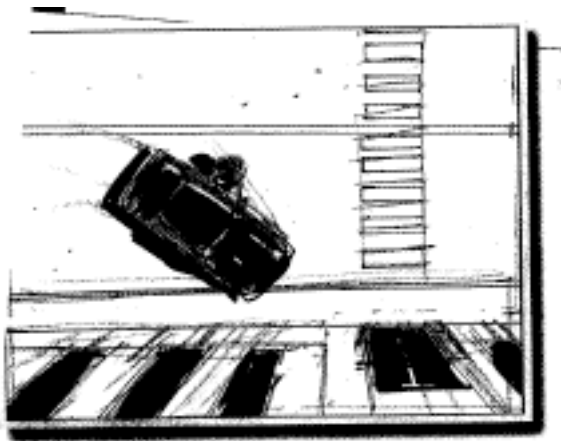


As its name suggests, an extreme version of the close up, generally magnifying beyond what the human eye would experience in reality. An extreme close-up of a face, for instance, would show only the mouth or eyes.

CAMERA ANGLES

The relationship between the camera and the object being photographed (ie the ANGLE) gives emotional information to an audience, and guides their judgment about the character or object in shot. The more extreme the angle (ie the further away it is from eye level), the more symbolic and heavily-loaded the shot.

1. The Bird's-Eye view



This shows a scene from directly overhead, a very unnatural and strange angle. Familiar objects viewed from this angle might seem totally unrecognisable at first (umbrellas in a crowd, dancers' legs). This shot does, however, put the audience in a godlike position, looking

down on the action. People can be made to look insignificant, ant-like, part of a wider scheme of things. Hitchcock (and his admirers, like Brian de Palma) is fond of this style of shot.

2. High Angle



Not so extreme as a bird's eye view. The camera is elevated above the action using a crane to give a general overview. High angles make the object photographed seem smaller, and less significant (or scary). The object or character often gets swallowed up by their setting - they become part of a wider picture.

3. Eye Level

A fairly neutral shot; the camera is positioned as though it is a human actually observing a scene, so that eg actors' heads are on a level with the focus. The camera will be placed approximately five to six feet from the ground.

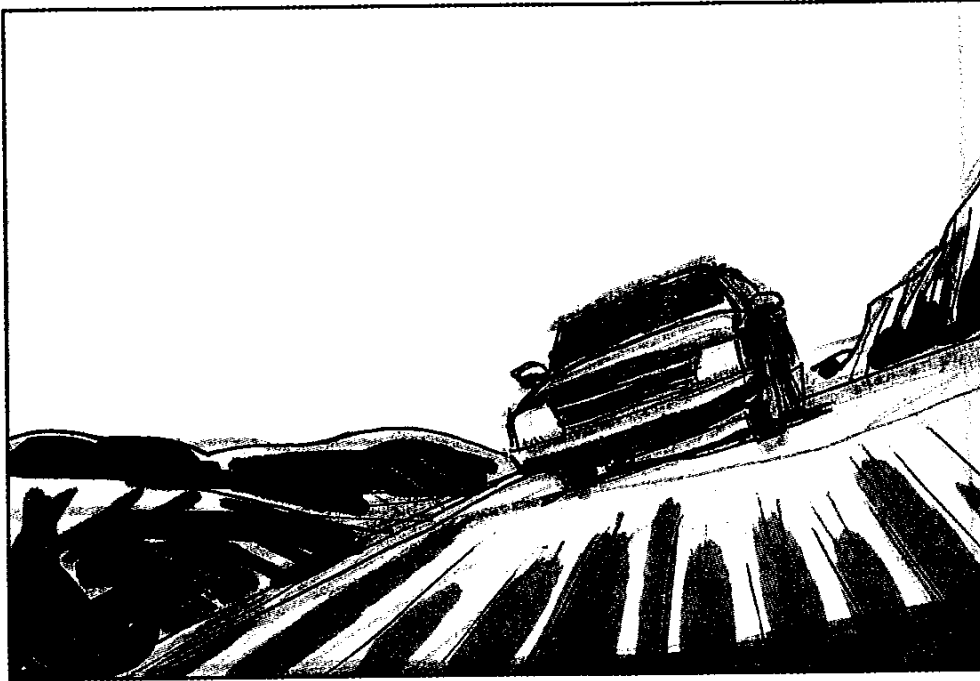
4. Low Angle



These increase height (useful for short actors like Tom Cruise) and give a sense of speeded motion. Low angles help give a sense of confusion to a viewer, of powerlessness within the action of a scene. The background of a low angle shot will tend to be just sky or ceiling, the lack of detail about the setting adding to the disorientation of the viewer.

The added height of the object may make it inspire fear and insecurity in the viewer, who is psychologically dominated by the figure on the screen.

5. Oblique/Canted Angle



Canted angle shot □

Also called a Dutch shot, or a Hong Kong shot, this shot is achieved by tilting the camera so that the horizontal frame line is not parallel to the horizon. This shot is used to make action more dynamic.

Sometimes the camera is tilted (ie is not placed horizontal to floor level), to suggest imbalance, transition and instability (any Michael Bay movie). This technique is used to suggest POINT-OF-View shots (ie when the camera becomes the 'eyes' of one particular character, seeing what they see - a hand held camera is often used for this).

6. Worm's Eye View

Camera is very close to the ground, tilted up. This is a very dramatic version of the low angle shot.



7. Ground Shot

Camera is ON the ground, shooting parallel to the horizon.

□ Anticipating the action

A ground shot works well when you want to surprise the audience, although, at times, it can actually cause the audience to anticipate the action. Say someone is walking down an alley on a ground shot—we can predict that someone or something is about to enter the frame.

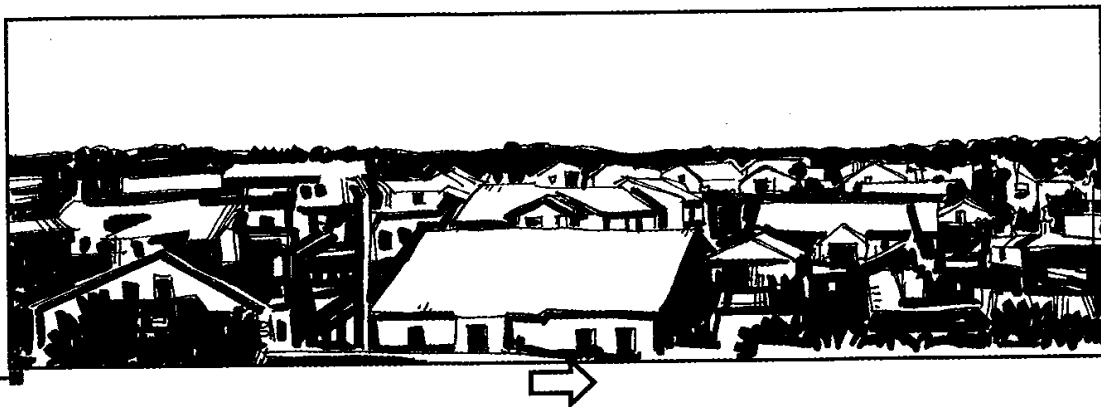


CAMERA MOVEMENT

A director may choose to move action along by telling the story as a series of cuts, going from one shot to another, or they may decide to move the camera with the action. Moving the camera often takes a great deal of time, and makes the action seem slower, as it takes several seconds for a moving camera shot to be effective, when the same information may be placed on screen in a series of fast cuts. Not only must the style of movement be chosen, but the method of actually moving the camera must be selected too. There are seven basic methods:

1. Pans

A movement which scans a scene horizontally. The camera is placed on a tripod, which operates as a stationary axis point as the camera is turned, often to follow a moving object which is kept in the middle of the frame.

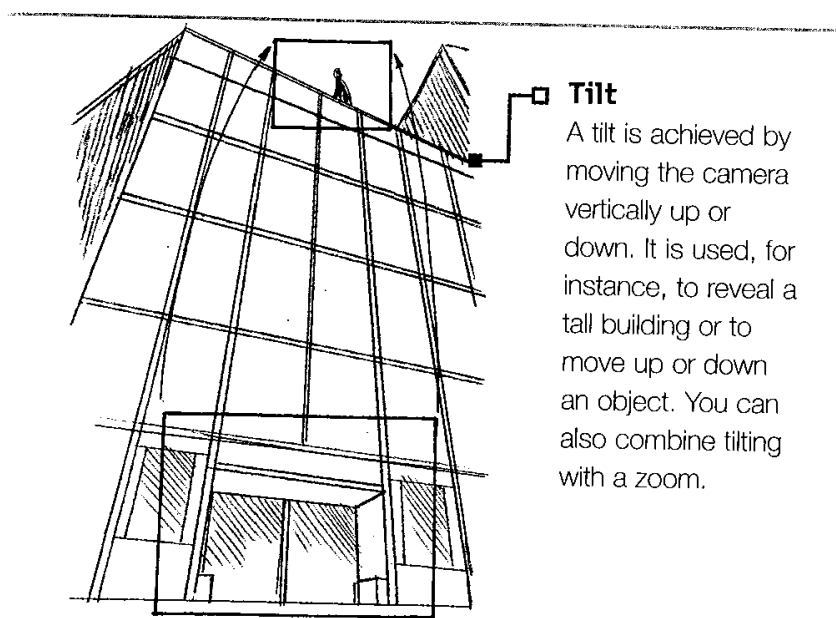


□ Pan

Probably the most common camera movement, a pan is a horizontal motion achieved by rotating the camera on its vertical axis from left to right or from right to left. A simple pan is used to establish a scene or location and it is noted on the storyboard with an arrow to show the direction of the pan.

2. Tilts

A movement which scans a scene vertically, otherwise similar to a pan.



3. Tracking Shots

Sometimes called DOLLY shots. The camera is placed on a moving vehicle and moves alongside the action, generally following a moving figure or object. Complicated dolly shots will involve a track being laid on set for the camera to follow, hence the name. Without a big budget, you can try tracking by holding the camera steady and walking backward, facing subject. A tracking shot may be a good way of portraying movement, the journey of a character for instance, or for moving from a long shot to a close-up, gradually focusing the audience on a particular object or character.

6. Zoom

The zoom lens means that the camera need not be moved (and saves a lot of time and trouble). The zoom lens can zip a camera in or out of a scene very quickly. The drawbacks include the fact that while a dolly

shot involves a steady movement similar to the focusing change in the human eye, the zoom lens tends to be jerky (unless used very slowly) and to distort an image, making objects appear closer together than they really are. Zoom lenses are also drastically over-used by many directors (including those holding palmcorders), who try to give the impression of movement and excitement in a scene where it does not exist.

Zoom □

A zoom is an optical effect that increases or decreases magnification, giving the impression that the camera is moving toward or away from a subject. This technique is used to draw attention to certain details or actions. It can be quick or slow, depending on the pace of the scene, and is denoted on a storyboard by means of arrows.

