


Basic Film Composition: Framing, Angles & Other Compositional Elements



Frame (shot size)


- Taken as a single photo of film
- It is the relative distance between the actor and camera
- Dividing line between the edges of the screen image and the enclosing darkness of the theater

Examples of shot size:
 §Extreme Long Shot
 §Long Shot
 §Medium Shot
 §Close-up
 §Extreme Close-up



Types of Shots (framing)

- Cinematic shots are defined by the amount of subject matter within the frame (eg: how big the person is in the frame)
- Shots can vary in duration
 - Shots vary in time from subliminal (a few frames) to quick (less than a second) to "average" (4-6 seconds) to lengthy (more than a minute)




Establishing Shot (or Extreme Long Shot, ELS)

What is it?

- Shot taken from a great distance, almost always an exterior shot, shows much of locale

When to use it?

- To emphasize environment
- To make your character look lonely, insignificant
- Show where the action takes place




Indiana Jones And The Temple Of Doom

Long Shot (LS)

What is it?
 (A relative term) A shot taken from a sufficient distance to show a landscape, a building, or a large crowd

When to use it?


- To show relationship between the actor and the environment
- Character as one of the crowd
- Lots of on screen action



Austin Powers and the Spy Who Shagged Me

Medium Shot (MS)

- (Also relative) a shot between a long shot and a close-up that might show two people in full figure or several people from the waist up



The Talented Mr. Ripley

Close-Up (CU)

- A shot of a small object or face that fills the screen
- Adds importance to object photographed



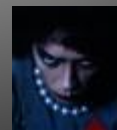
Under Pressure

Extreme Close-Up (ECU)

- A shot of a small object or part of a face that fills the screen



The Saint In London



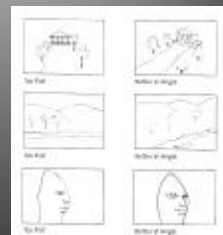
Rocky Horror Picture Show

Types of Angles

- The angle is determined by where the camera is placed not the subject matter
 - Angles can serve as commentary on the subject matter

About Angles:

- Angle or diagonal shots give a sense of depth, dimension, and interesting perspective lines. Too many flat, straight-on shots start to look boring.



Bird's Eye View

- Camera is placed directly overhead
- Extremely disorienting
- Viewer is godlike



Beverly Hills Girl Scouts

High Angle (h/a)


- Camera looks down at what is being photographed
- Takes away power of subject, makes it insignificant
- Gives a general overview



Without Limits

Low Angle (l/a)

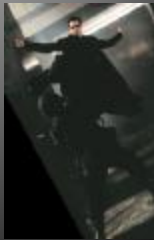
- Camera is located below subject matter
- Increases height and power of subject



The Patriot

Oblique Angle


- Lateral tilt of the camera so that figures appear to be falling out of the frame
- Suggests tension and transition
- Sometimes used as the point of view of a drunk



The Matrix

“Eye-Level”

- Roughly 5 to 6 feet off the ground, the way an actual observer might view a scene
- Most common



Shot Composition


Composing Your Shots:

- Composing your shots within a frame is a skill you will get better at the more you do it and the more you study how other filmmakers create great shots.

Depth Staging & Planar Staging

Depth staging involves placing characters at extensive distances from each other.

Planar staging involves lining up the characters emphasizing a flat surface.



Frame within a Frame



Your camera lens creates a natural frame (border) where you're shot will reside in. Look for other natural frames to direct your audience's attention to the main action.

Leading Look

Leading Look means that you have allowed for the compositional weight of the "look."

Rule of Thirds

Rule of Thirds & Leading Look

The Rule of Thirds is a compositional technique filmmakers use to help frame shots. The Rule of Thirds can sometimes enable you to improve the composition of your shots dramatically.

Rule of Thirds Applied:

Leading Lines:

- Designing shots with strong graphical lines will lead the viewer's eyes to specific areas of the frame.

Focus: Depth of Field

A shallow focus or shallow depth of field means to isolate the subject from indistinct foreground or background. Subject is more in focus than the rest of the frame, which appears fuzzy.