

Desk Top Video Production – Week 2

Shooting Techniques

This session deals with the ‘language of film’, effective camera work and ‘on-set protocol’.

Shot Sizes

An interesting film will contain a number of different shot sizes. Indeed, a good rule-of-thumb when editing is to make sure that cuts are always made between shots of different sizes. It is the job of the camera operator to provide a range of different shot sizes for the editor to choose from.

The ‘Hollywood Code / Convention’ of editing was developed in the 1930s and 1940s as a means of spoon feeding audiences into programmes. So, for example, a sequence would begin with a Long Shot (LS) to establish the scene, before moving to a Two Shot (2S) of the characters beginning a conversation and then on to individual Medium Shots (MS) and Close Ups (CU) of the characters as the conversation unfolded. Although modern audiences, who have grown up with television, are a lot more difficult to confuse these days, the Hollywood code is still used where a smooth delivery which does not focus attention away from the subject matter is desired.

The following three shot descriptions will use the human body as a yardstick. Naturally, a ‘medium shot’ of a larger object will be much ‘wider’ than a MS of a human.

Long Shot (LS) – Whole of body. Also known as a Wide Shot/Master shot. Used for establishing shots.

Medium Shot (MS) – Head and upper body. Classic interview shot.

Close Up (CU) – Head

There are a number of degrees between these (Medium Long Shot MLS, Medium Close Up MCU) and extremes at either end (Extreme Long Shot – eg tiny horse set in panoramic landscape or Extreme Close Up ECU when a persons single eye fills the whole screen). As a general rule, try to avoid cutting people off at either the knees or the waist (slightly above or below is always better).

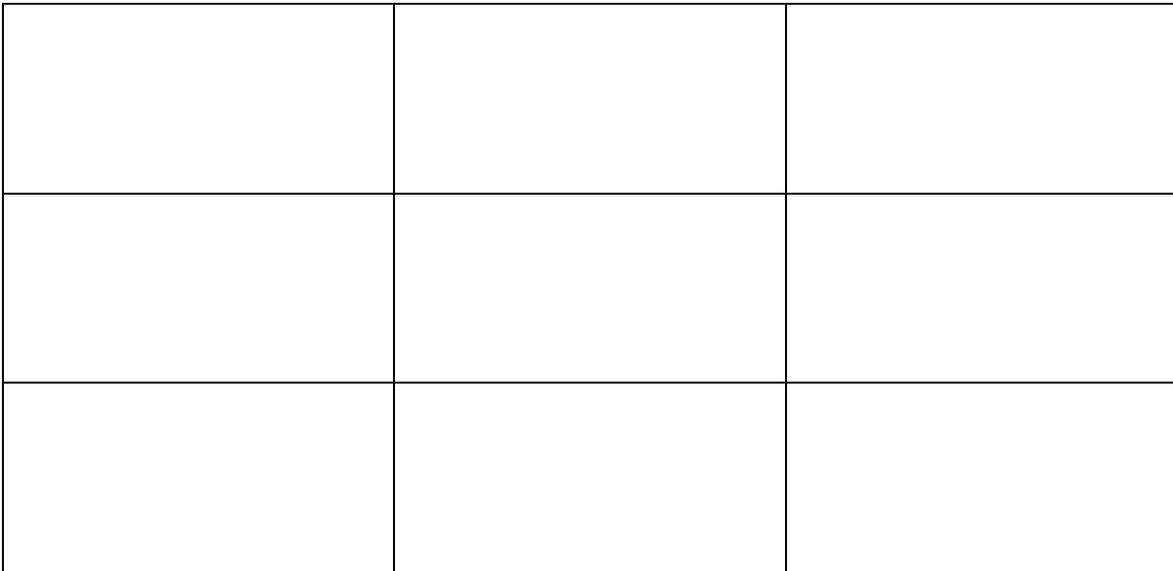
Composition

What makes good shot? In a nutshell, a well-balanced shot wish covers the action. There are three simple guidelines you should keep in mind which may (or may not) help you in this when you are shooting something.

1) Rule of Thirds

The temptation is to put the focus of interest in the middle of the frame, but this rarely results in an interesting shot.

Far better to imagine two horizontal and two vertical lines dividing your frame into nine equal squares, and then to place your focus of interest where two of these imaginary lines cross, as below:



2) Foreground, Midground and Background

To give your shot depth, don't concentrate on just one of these in shot, but try to include at least two. For example, a street scene is more interesting if there is something in the foreground as well as the street in the background.

3) Natural Frames

If there is something in your shot which can be used as a frame, see what the shot looks like if you use it – to frame one or both sides and/or top / bottom. For example, English Heritage's promotional shots of castles are invariably taken through an archway to make the shot more interesting.

Camera Movement

Not having the budget for cranes or dollies to mount our cameras on, the following details only those movements possible either using a tripod or going hand-held (though, as mentioned previously, using a tripod where possible is generally preferable).

All camera movements should be as smooth as possible – unless a director specifically wishes to draw attention to the camera movement rather than the subject. The two main camera movements possible with a tripod are

The Pan – moving the frame from side to side

The Tilt – moving the frame up or down

Whenever using moving shots, always shoot five to ten seconds of still at each end of the movement. Cutting from moving shots can make the viewer a little disoriented.

Another type of shot possible with a tripod is the Dutch Tilt, where the tripod is purposely fixed at an angle rather than using the spirit level.

The Zoom is not used much on TV. A Zoom out is sometimes used as an establishing shot and a slow zoom in on a character is sometimes used to denote that he or she is under pressure. To be used sparingly, if at all. (The most useful thing about zooms is the ability to frame static shots without having to move the camera).

Hand-held camera work should be avoided if possible. In situations where it is necessary, shoot on the widest angle possible all the times. (When using a telephoto lens to zoom in, the smallest movement of the camera is wildly exaggerated in the frame). If you need to get a closer shot of the subject, move in with the camera. It is also best to use the auto focus and auto exposure functions when working hand-held.

Twelve Golden Rules for Better Camerawork

- 1) Economise on film and screen time by shooting only part of the action to represent the whole.
- 2) Whenever you introduce anything new, use a re-establishing shot to enable the audience to relate once more to the general scene.
- 3) Always start a new scene or change of location with an establishing shot.

4) When filming action which is to be broken down into related shots change the angle and image size every time you stop the camera.

5) To obtain a three-dimensional effect, shoot wherever possible at an angle of about 45 degrees to the subject. (NB, contrary to this, when filming an interview, try to place the interview just to the side of the camera).

6) When you reposition the camera to break down continuous action into separate shots, or to take alternating over-the-shoulder or point-of-view close-ups of opposing players, try not to move camera less than 30 degrees or more than 180 degrees (the latter so that you don't 'cross the line' of action) for each shot in the sequence.

7) Start the camera before the subject enters the frame and don't stop the camera until after the subject leaves the frame.

8) Wherever possible, a panning shot or tilting shot should be preceded and followed by a static shot.

9) Try to avoid filming subjects against a strong background light source. Subjects should be evenly lit from the front and/or sides in most circumstances.

10) When you compose a scene try, so far as possible, to keep it simple.

11) In any filming situation in which you wish to heighten suspense by expanding screen time, make full use of reaction close-ups or cut-in shots.

12) If you have an artistic or dramatic reason for doing so, ignore any or all of the above rules whenever you please. These rules really are made to be broken.

Pre-Roll, Roll Back and On-Set Protocol

It is always good practice to leave a few seconds before action. This ensures stable recording. It is also useful to have a few seconds of roll back at the end of a take when editing.

Camera	Action	Cut	Stop
Rolling			
[-----1-----2-----]			

A take should be handled as follows:

- 1) Director says "Quiet on set please. Going for a take. "
- 2) Director waits for everyone to be quiet.
- 3) Director says "Turn Over"

- 4) Camera Operator switches on camera, checks it is working and says "Camera Rolling."
- 5) Sound Recordist checks sound is coming through OK then says "Sound OK"
- 6) Director says "Action"
- 7) Everyone waits a few seconds, and then begins the action.
- 8) When the action is complete, Director says "Cut".
- 9) Camera Operator leaves camera going for a few seconds, then switches the camera off.