

PRODUCTION

3. MASTER THE CAMERA



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Master the camera (camera shots, angles and movements)

Top Tip

Before you begin making your film, have a play with your camera: try to film something! A simple, silent (no dialogue) scene where somebody walks into the shot, does something and then leaves is perfect. Once you've shot your first film, watch it. What do you like/dislike about it? Save this first attempt. We'll be asking you to return to it later. (If you have already done this and saved your films, you don't need to do this again.)

Professional filmmakers divide scenes into shots. They set up their camera and frame the first shot, film the action and then stop recording. This process is repeated for each new shot until the scene is completed. The clips are then put together in the edit to make one continuous scene.

Whatever equipment you work with, if you use professional techniques, you can produce quality films that look cinematic. The table below gives a description of the main shots, angles and movements used by professional filmmakers. An explanation of the effects they create and the information they can give the audience is also included.

When you start out, you will probably instinctively shoot using mid and long shots as these are the easiest to use. As you become more confident, try to include a wider variety of shots. Close-ups are particularly effective as they enable the audience to connect with your characters which gives your film more impact.

When deciding which shots to use, consider the length of the scene and the information you need to get across. Shot changes should be used only for a particular purpose or effect that is needed to tell the story. (Details of your shot choices should be recorded on your storyboard and/or shot list. If you make changes as you shoot, remember to update this so your editor has the correct information for post-production.)

Top Tip

At this point, you might want to revisit and watch some scenes from your favourite films. How many shots were used? What type of shots were used and when do shot changes occur? Why did the director make these decisions? Use this information to inform and guide your own filmmaking choices.

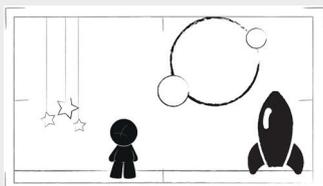
CAMERA SHOTS

Name

How to achieve it

What it does

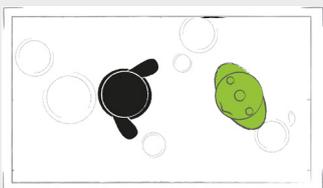
Extreme long or wide shot, sometimes called an establishing shot.



Film from a distance to include a whole setting in the frame.

Introduces the audience to the setting for the film. Often used at the beginning so the audience knows where the action is taking place.

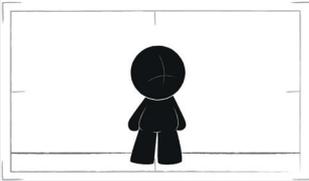
Bird's-eye shot



Professional filmmakers will use a jib or crane to film a setting from above. You could use a bird's-eye shot to look down on a table in order to show an important prop or detail like a footprint on the ground.

When used for settings, a bird's-eye shot replaces or complements an extreme long or wide shot to introduce the audience to the setting. For props or details, this shot is used to give the audience a key piece of information and move the story on.

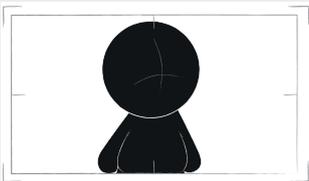
Long or full shot



Zoom out to include the full length of a character, from head to foot, and the surrounding setting.

Introduces a character into the story by placing them in the film's setting. Gives the audience information about the character (costume, height, stance etc).

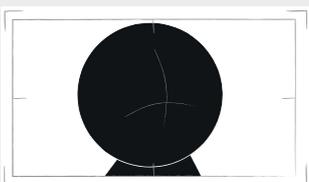
Mid shot



Zoom in to frame just the top half of a character's body or just the legs from the waist down.

Focuses the audience on what a character is doing and their body language. Can also show the movement of the legs if this is needed for the storytelling, eg dancing, running away when being chased.

Close-up/reaction shot



Tightly frame the character's face or part of an object; does not include the broader setting.

Shows the audience a character's facial expression to give clues about their feelings and emotions. Using this shot helps the audience connect with the character.

Extreme close-up

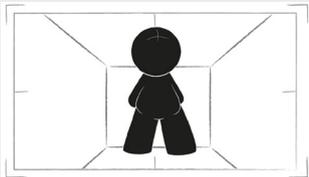


Zoom right in to focus on just a small part of a person or thing, perhaps the eyes or mouth.

Highlights an important small detail, to move the story on or help the audience's understanding.

CAMERA ANGLES

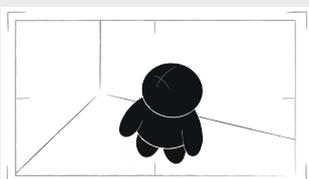
Low angle



Film your subject from below, camera looking upwards.

Filming from this angle makes your subject look tall, scary, dominant or powerful.

High angle



Film your subject from above, camera looking downwards.

Filming from this angle makes your subject look small, scared or weak.

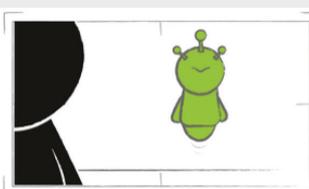
Dutch angle



Slant the camera.

Makes things look weird and is often used to cause a sense of unease or disorientation for the viewer.

Over the shoulder

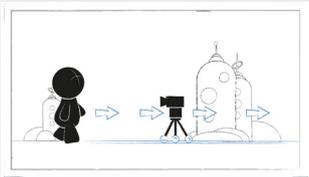


Film over the shoulder of one character to show another.

Helps the audience to place characters in a dialogue scene or interview.

CAMERA MOVEMENTS

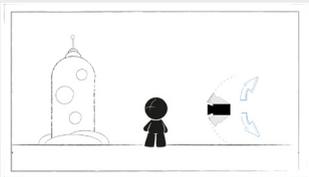
Tracking shot



Move the whole camera to follow a subject. You need to use a dolly for effective tracking shots. A forward movement is called a track in, backwards is track out and sideways is crab.

This shot can be used instead of zooming to show what a character is seeing or to expose more of a setting.

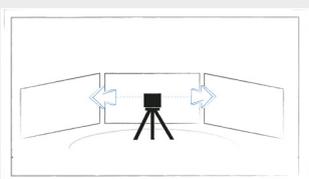
Tilt



Turn the camera vertically up or down. Practise the movement before you go for a take. Always plan where the shot begins and ends: moving from something to something else is a useful approach. Hold the shot for a few seconds at the end of each movement.

Slowly reveals somebody or something. The classic example is the shot that starts with someone's feet and tilts up to show how big and scary they are.

Pan



Turn the camera horizontally left or right to scan a scene or follow movement. Practise the movement before you go for a take. Always plan where the shot begins and ends. When filming someone who is moving, try to allow space in the shot for them to walk into. If possible, try to anticipate the action in advance. Ensure the camera stops panning and the person walks out of shot before you stop filming.

Reveals more of a scene or setting, covering more space sweeping across a landscape.

A range of camera shots, angles and movements are demonstrated in the short Into Film animated guide [How to Use a Camera \(http://bit.ly/HowToSetUpACamera\)](http://bit.ly/HowToSetUpACamera)

Activity: Shot match

Can you suggest which shot, angle or movement or combination of these you would use to film the following?

A character realises he has been tricked

High angle close-up of feet.
Tilt shot from feet to head

Film is set in a bank

Mid tracking shot of running legs

A terrifying character enters

Bird's-eye, extreme close-up

A character flees

Close-up

A ring has a missing diamond

Two establishing shots: extreme long or wide shot, close-up filmed from a low angle of a sign

The correct answers are on page 13.

The process

This is the filming process you should work through on your shoot.

1. Check the storyboard and shot list. What shots do you need for this scene?
2. Dress the location and position the actors for the first shot.
3. Frame the shot and check the composition.
4. Film the action. Record at least 5-10 seconds of time at the beginning and end of each shot. This “breathing space” gives the editor extra footage if they need it. For example, if an actor gives a great performance and you have extra footage, you can linger on their face after they have delivered their final line.
5. Keep a shot log. This is often completed by the first assistant director. It involves recording the time code from the clock on the video screen. They should record the in-point (ie the starting point) and out-point (the ending point) into their shot log. Each shot should be given a scene number, shot number, take number and a name that describes it.

If you are filming on a tablet, review your shots as you go and delete any shots that don't work. Only keep and log the good takes.

Shot log

A paper record taken during filming of each shot you record. It lists the 'in point' (ie the starting time), 'out point' (the ending time), scene number, shot number, take number, a short description and a note of whether or not the shot was good or bad.

Before you begin filming, remember to:

- Try and shoot a wide variety of shots so that the editor has plenty of varied footage to work with. You may have to film a scene or part of a scene several times to get the range of shots you need.
- Consider a variety of angles; a high angle to show a location in its entirety or a low angle to make someone look important.
- Only include camera movements if you have good reason. Each change of movement, shot or angle should provide new information.
- Frame each shot whilst the camera is idle. Avoid zooming or framing shots whilst recording. The separate shots you record will be put together in the edit.

Advanced camera techniques

Using these techniques will vastly improve the quality of your finished film:

Establishing shots

At the beginning of a film a series of establishing shots can be recorded to introduce the setting. As well as an extreme long shot of the location, other shots like a close-up of a sign could be recorded. A variety of establishing shots helps to locate your audience in a 'place in time'.

Master shot

You should begin the filming of most scenes by recording the entire scene using one shot called a master shot. Having a master shot ensures you always have a shot you can use if other shots aren't suitable.

Master shot

A master shot is usually a long shot which shows an entire scene from start to finish. It's a good idea to shoot a master shot, as it gives you footage you can use if there's any problem with the close-ups, mid shots etc that you recorded of the scene.

Cutaway shots

A cutaway shot gives the editor something to cutaway to if other shots have failed. They can draw an audience deeper in to a story and add meaning to what the film is about. Cutaways are also useful for scenes where your characters might be talking about a moving object. For example, a moving dog cannot be included in the frame but cutaways of it could be inserted between the main shots of the characters.

Here is an example of how a master shot and cutaways could be used.

The scene shows the main character writing a letter. To begin with a master shot of the entire scene is recorded. The director decides to use a long shot for this. He/she then asks the camera operator to record a close up to show the concentration on the character's face. Finally, the director instructs them to frame a cutaway shot of a ticking clock on the wall.

What messages does the audience get from this scene? What sort of letter might the character be writing and to whom?

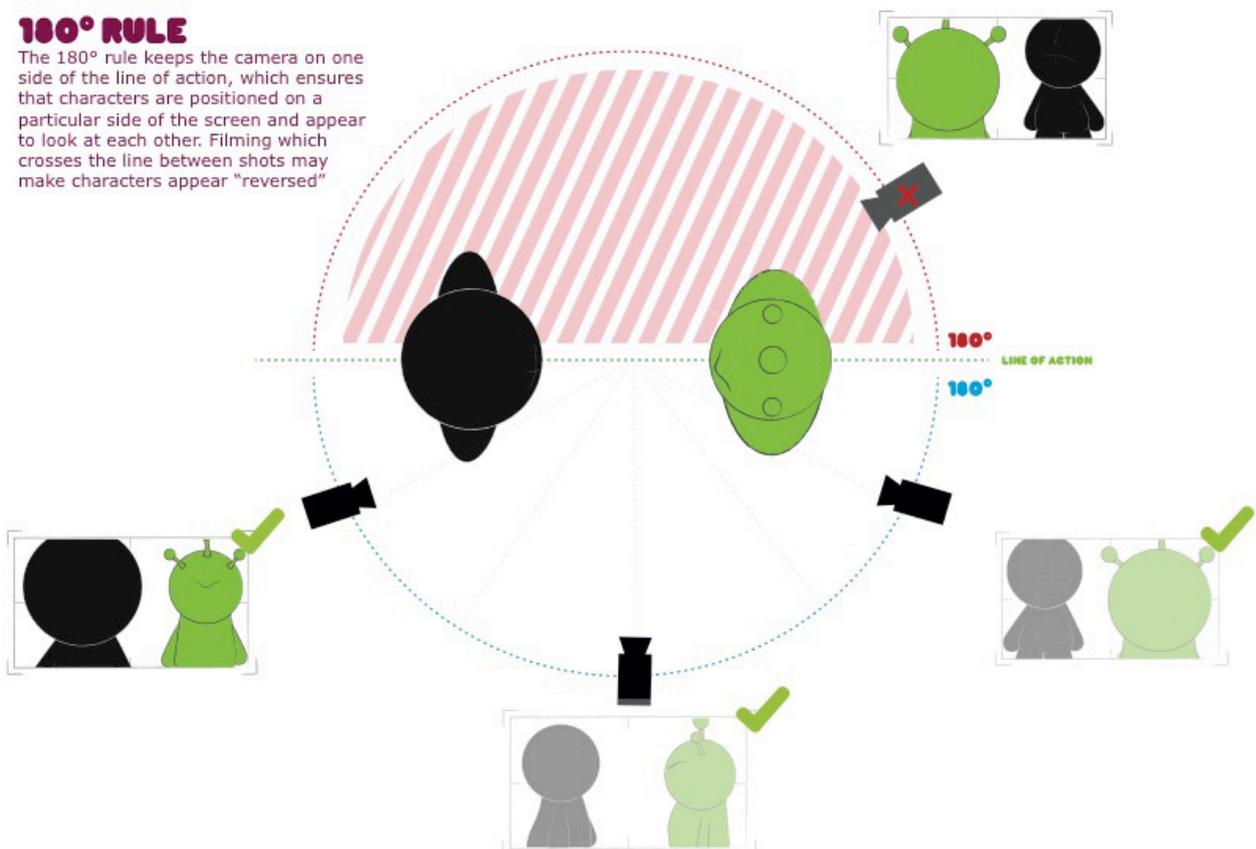
Shot-reverse shot

This is a technique where the camera shoots in one direction, then in the other (the reverse angle). It is useful because it makes it easier for the audience to understand the space. It also lets filmmakers shoot two people in conversation using close-ups.

To make this work, you need to follow the 180-degree rule. This means that you should shoot all of your shots with the camera on one side of an imaginary horizontal line between the two characters. If you 'cross the line' viewers won't be able to make sense of the scene. You don't need two cameras for this; you can just shoot the scene several times with the camera in different positions. When you edit the film you can cut between the shots from the different cameras/positions.

180° RULE

The 180° rule keeps the camera on one side of the line of action, which ensures that characters are positioned on a particular side of the screen and appear to look at each other. Filming which crosses the line between shots may make characters appear "reversed"



Activity: Practice scene

Try shooting or reshooting the scene we suggested at the beginning of this mini guide using the knowledge you now have about camera techniques. (A character walks into the shot, does something, then leaves.) In this version aim to tell the audience something new about the character or explain why they have changed.

For example, if your character walks in, does a silly dance and then walks out again, why did they do the dance? Did they find a lottery ticket? How can you show this? What camera techniques could you use? What props will you need?

If the character walks in and does nothing, why is this? What mood are they in? How are they feeling? How can you show this?

You could make a quick storyboard or shot list for this scene.

When you've filmed it, select the best shots and delete the rest. Use the editing app on your tablet or the program on your computer to put the shots together and play the scene back. What worked well? Could anything be improved? How?

Activity: Shot Match answers

