

MAKE IT LOOK AWESOME

CINEMATOGRAPHY

Film is a visual medium - which just means it's a story you consume through your eyeballs. So, when you've got your story figured out, you need to think about the best way to tell that story with pictures. What sequence of shots is going to engage your audience the best?

IN THIS GUIDE

* THE CAMERA

You'll need one of these magic boxes to capture the action.

* SHOTS

The building blocks of your film.

* BLOCKING

What's actually happening in your scene?

* COVERAGE

You're going to have to edit your film later. How do you make sure you get enough footage for that to work?

* SHOT TYPES

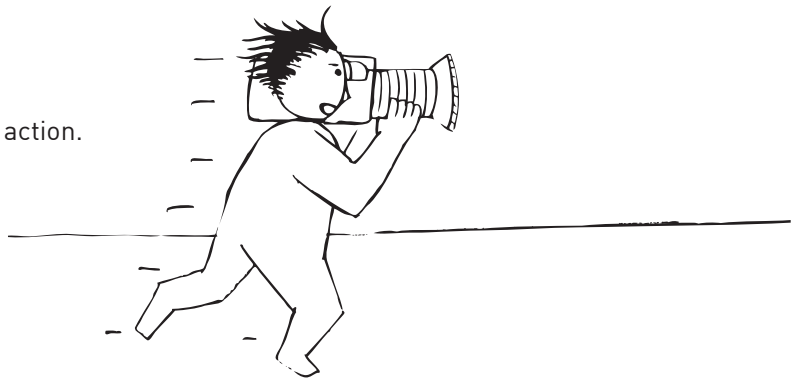
What are the different kinds of shots you can get?

* LIGHTING

Footage isn't much good if you can't see anything. How do you control the light around you?

* SHOTS WORKING TOGETHER

How do you make sure your shots will work together when you edit?



THE CAMERA

There are cameras everywhere these days. While expensive video cameras do give a great result, you can tell a good story no matter what you're shooting with. You might have an iPod or phone with a camera in it. Or your digital camera might be able to take video. But, if you can, use a video camera. Because they're designed primarily for shooting video, they make it much easier to shoot good footage, quickly.

If you don't have access to a camera at home or school, you might be able to hire one from somewhere like **Wide Angle Tasmania**. Have a look at their website and see what you can afford.

www.wideangle.org.au

SHOTS

The simplest way to shoot a scene would be to set up a camera zoomed all the way out and just let the action happen in front of it. But that's pretty boring to watch, isn't it? It also doesn't give you any control over the story when

you're editing. You need to get multiple shots of the action in a scene, then you can edit them together later. That way you can fine tune the most engaging way to show the audience what's happening.



BLOCKING

Before you can decide how you're going to capture the action, you need to know what the action is. **Blocking** is where you get your actors to walk through the scene on set, and make decisions about how they'll do the action. Will they enter the room, or already be there? Where will your actors stand? Will they move during the scene, or stay in one spot? Will

anyone leave during the scene? Where will key props be?

Once you've done your blocking, you can get your actors to rehearse, while you watch and decide how you're going to shoot it.

COVERAGE

The shots you choose to get of the action is called coverage. The more shots you get in different ways of the same action in the scene, the more coverage you have. More coverage gives you more options when you edit, so you can find ways to make your scene as engaging as possible.

You should get inventive on set. What are the coolest ways you can capture the action? But to make sure you can edit your scene, there's a basic set of shots you should always get.



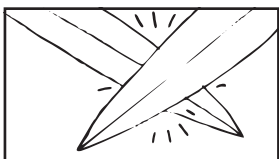
MASTER

This is a wide shot of the entire scene. You should be able to see all the action take place in this shot.



SINGLES

You should get individual closeups of all the actors who are in the scene. Run these for the entire scene - you don't just want their dialogue, you want to see the way they react to what others in the scene are doing.



CUTAWAYS

These are little closeups of key items and actions in the scene that are important for the audience to see. Does a character put an important book on a table? Get a closeup of that action happening. Does something exciting happen, like swords clashing? Get a shot of it.



WATCH A SCENE IN A MOVIE YOU LIKE, AND WRITE A LIST OF ALL THE SHOTS THEY USE IN THAT ONE SCENE.

If you have all of those shots, you know you can safely edit together a scene. But what should those shots be?

SHOT TYPES

Filmmakers have a shorthand for referring to the different kinds of shots you can get. Here's a few key ones you'll use.



WS: WIDE SHOT

A wide shot of the scene, in which you can usually see most of the action take place. If it's a wide shot of an actor, you'll be able to see most of their body.



MS: MID SHOT

A closeup of a particular actor, but you can still see down to their thighs.



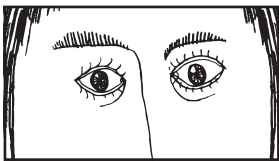
MCU: MID CLOSEUP

This is a fairly standard "head & shoulders" shot of an actor.



CU: CLOSEUP

Just the face of your actor.



XCU: EXTREME CLOSEUP

A very tight shot of just the actor's eyes or mouth. Or nose, if you think that's important.

You can apply those terms to shots of props too, just think about the prop as if it's an actor. But remember these are just some commonly used shots. You can do the shots however you like, as long as they'll tell your story.

Your shot choices decide the effect on your audience. A wider shot of an actor feels relaxed, while a closeup on their face feels intense. You should choose the shots that

make sense for what's happening in your story. Are your characters joking around? Stay wider. Are your characters having a heated argument? Get close.

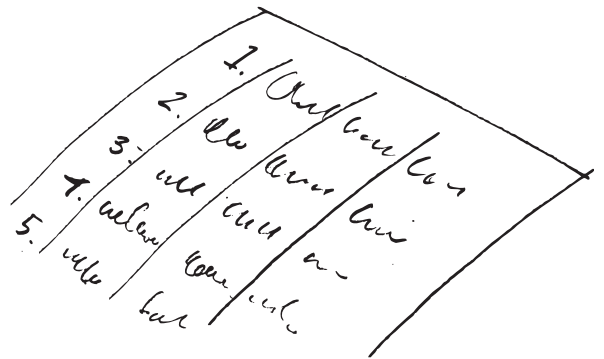
The angle of each shot matters too. If your camera is higher than your actor, looking down at them, they'll feel small and unimportant. If your camera is lower than your actor, looking up, they'll feel large and imposing.

SHOTLIST

Now you know the kind of shots you should get, make a **shotlist**. It's simply a list of what coverage you want to get once you're on set. Each line of the list should have:

- * A shot number (just number them from 1 onwards as you're making the list).
- * The scene number.
- * The shot type (such as WS or MCU).
- * A brief description of the shot ("closeup of Andy for whole scene").

You can then make copies and give them to everyone who will be on set, so everyone knows what needs to be done during the shoot.

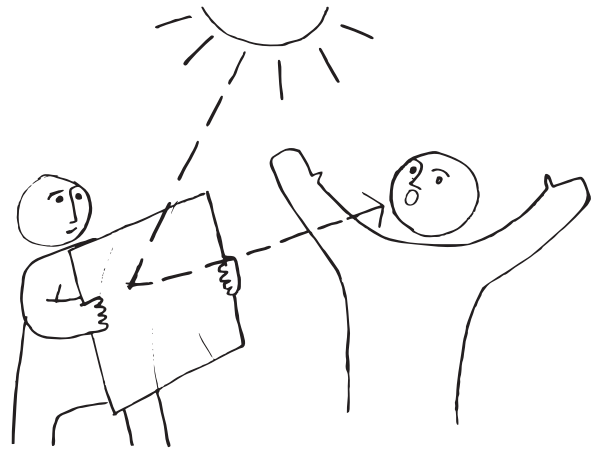


LIGHTING

A camera works by capturing the light bouncing off stuff. If no light bounces into the lens, you don't get a picture.

The easiest way to do your lighting is to rely on what's already around. That might be the sun if you're outside, or ceiling lights and lamps if you're inside. You can bounce light around to get more on your actors with bright materials, like a big sheet of polystyrene. Experiment with different materials to see how you can light up your actors.

If you have access to film lights you'll be able to do a lot more. Search the web for "three point lighting" for a simple starting point, and experiment from there.



SHOTS WORKING TOGETHER

The aim is to tell a story in sequence - so getting a bunch of great individual shots won't do you much good if they don't fit together. The better your shots work together, the better you'll engage your audience.

GET SIMILAR SHOTS

While all your shots will be of different things, there are ways of making them feel similar.

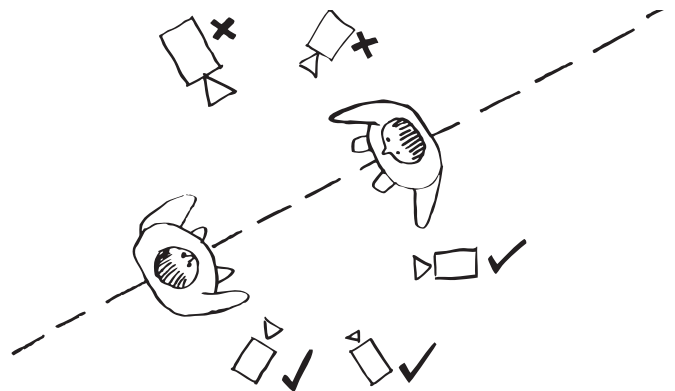
- * Match your framing - if you have all CU's of one character, and all MCU's of another character, it'll be hard to cut them together. If you can, get MCU's and CU's of both - then experiment with what you can get away with in the edit.
- * Get the same angle on your actors. If your shot of one actor is nearly front on, don't do the shot of the other actor on a 45 degree angle.
- * Get matching closeups from the same camera height. This will make sure the direction their eyes are pointing matches up. If you're shooting a conversation between a sitting actor and a standing actor, pick a height somewhere in between.
- * Try to get all your shots on a tripod, **or** all handheld. It's difficult to make tripod and handheld shots work together in the edit.

DON'T CROSS THE LINE

When you're watching a football game on TV, you'll notice the cameras are all on one side of the field. That means when you cut between different cameras, you can still tell which team is going which way - home team is pushing to the right of the shot, away team is pushing left. If you suddenly cut to a shot from the other side of the field, the home team would suddenly be pushing to the left of the shot - and you'd think they were running the wrong way.

The same applies for scenes in films. If you're cutting between two actors talking to each other, and you get one of the shots from the wrong side, it'll look like the actors are both looking in the same direction instead of each other.

The simplest way to get it right is to put an imaginary line through your set, and don't cross it. In a scene with two actors talking, the line would usually run from one to the other. If you get all your shots from the right side of the line, they should cut together happily.



SUMMARY



Get good coverage, and you'll be able to put together a great film when you edit.

1. BLOCK YOUR SCENE.
2. GET A MASTER, SINGLES, AND CUTAWAYS.
3. CHOOSE YOUR SHOT TYPES.
4. KEEP YOUR SHOTS SIMILAR.
5. DON'T CROSS THE LINE.

MAKE IT

This is just one of five MAKE IT guides available on the MyState Student Film Festival website. All of the MAKE IT resources are completely free for you to download and share.

www.mystatefilmfestival.com.au



facebook

If you have any questions about filmmaking, head over to our Facebook page to get them answered by the same filmmakers that wrote this guide.

www.facebook.com/mystatefilmfestival

This is a guide only. Care and adult supervision should be exercised at all times when using film making equipment.