

Composition

The Rule of Thirds

A basic rule of composition is the rule of thirds. This guideline gives you an idea on where to place your subject within the frame. Though your tendency may be to position your subject dead center on the screen, the rule of thirds will give you a more compelling picture.

First, imagine that two vertical and two horizontal lines divide your viewfinder into thirds. (Think of a slightly elongated tic-tac-toe board). The rule of thirds suggests that the main subject in your shot should fall on one of the points where these imaginary lines intersect. The resulting image will be much stronger than if you simply place your subject in the crosshairs.



When videotaping a person, that person's eyes are your main focal point. Whether using a wide shot or a close up, compose the shot so that the person's eyes fall on one of the uppermost imaginary intersections. The intersection you choose depends on which direction the person is looking. Frame someone looking screen left on the right third of the screen. This places the subject slightly off center and builds in another element of composition called "look room."

Look Room, Lead Room and Headroom

Look room (or lead room) is the space that you leave in front of someone's face on the screen. This space gives the person room to breathe, as well as gives the impression that the person is looking at or talking to someone just off screen. If you don't leave enough look room, your subject will appear to be boxed-in and confined.

Head-room is another element you should consider when framing your subject. Headroom is the amount of space between the top of someone's head and the top of the frame. If you leave too much space, the person will appear as if sinking in quicksand. If you don't leave enough room, the person will seem in danger of bumping his head. By positioning the subject's eyes on the top third imaginary line, you will be building in the proper amount of headroom.

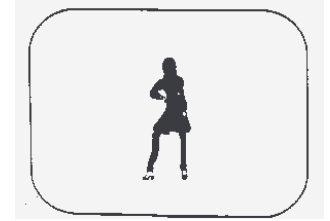
When considering head- room, be sure the shot is loose enough so that you see part of the subject's neck or the top of the shoulders. If not, you'll end up with what looks like a severed head on a platter. However, don't be as concerned with cutting off the top of someone's head. Viewers do not perceive this as abnormal as long as you frame the actor's eyes where they should be.



Framing

LS (Long Shot)

The point of this shot is to show the subject's surroundings. The EWS is often used as an "establishing shot" - the first shot of a new scene, designed to show the audience where the action is taking place.



WS (Wide Shot)

In the WS, the subject takes up the full frame. The feet will be almost at the bottom of frame, and the head almost at the top. The small amount of room above and below the subject can be thought of as safety room - you don't want to be cutting the top of the head off.



MS (Mid Shot)

The MS shows some part of the subject in more detail, whilst still showing enough for the audience to feel as if they were looking at the whole subject. In fact, this is an approximation of how you would see a person "in the flesh" if you were having a casual conversation. You wouldn't be paying any attention to their lower body, so that part of the picture is unnecessary.



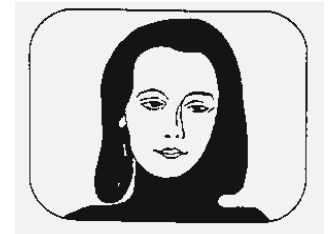
MCU (Medium Close Up)

Half way between a MS and a CU. This shot shows the face more clearly, without getting uncomfortably close.



CU (Close Up/tight)

In the CU, a certain feature or part of the subject takes up the whole frame. A close up of a person usually means a close up of their face.



Remember

Good composition is a means to an end. When it's done well, the audience should not notice it. Instead it should help create a mood, or at the very least, a sense of normalcy and stability. The next time you watch a movie, pay attention to how the cinematographer frames the shots. You'll notice that they use the rule of thirds as their foundation, and build from there.

Searching for shots:

Always be searching for new shots. *Your Goal as a camera operator is to get your camera “Live” as many times as possible.* The best way to do this is to continually “Feed” the director Shots.

Once a camera shot is no longer live either zoom the camera out or look with your eyes to see where the action is on the stage. Unless instructed to stay on a subject by the director, as a camera operator you should always be finding new shots

-Note: The director can only see what you as a camera operator have for a shot. It is up to you to find the action and energy on the stage

-Note: try not to get the same shot as the other camera operators. To ensure this look at the side screens to see what is live or use return video if your cameras has it.

-Note: move quickly between shots, keep feeding the director shots as soon and as fast as you can, and remember Quality Matters

Appropriate Framing:

When framing your shots be sure to pay close attention to headroom and Lead-room. Improper framing can be a distraction to the audience. Always apply the rule of Thirds when framing up your shots

Other tips:

Keep your camera in focus: out of focus shots are hard to look and can cause a disconnect with the audience. To make sure you are in focus zoom all the way in on a subject. Focus and no matter how far out you are that subject will always be in focus.

Keep your camera moving. You should always be pushing or pulling during music to add to the Feel of the song. Be sure not too zoom in and out too fast, if needed adjust the speed of the zoom controller.

A steady hand is important. Shaky shots are hard to watch and can even make people sick. Be careful not to grip the camera’s handle bars too tightly, a loose grip can make a big difference

Taking Direction

The Technical Director will give direction to you and the other Camera Operators. It is important for the cameras to work precisely and efficiently with the Technical Director to assure a quality video recording. When the Technical Director instructs you to get a particular shot, it is important that you get there quickly so that he or she can take your shot. When your camera shot is clear, the Technical Director should tell you exactly that. But, until you hear “your clear” stay on your shot as if you are “live”. The TD should also give you a verbal warning like, “ready” or “Standby” so you know your camera is going live. When the TD takes your shot you should hear “camera 1 live” or “take camera 1”.

I would encourage all of you to find some time to practice your camera moves. Obviously, we want to avoid jerky or violent pans and zooms. I would illustrate that a good camera move is like landing a plane. You want to land your plane smoothly. Your pans should maintain a slow, constant velocity and then decelerate as you come to a stop. Likewise, when you start a pan or zoom, you want to ease into it. If any of you would like to come in and practice with the cameras, feel free to come in on Saturday morning or afternoon and practice your panning and zooming.

Shooting Styles:

Broadcast: For us we switch a separate feed for our lobby TV's and for web than we display on our side screens. This is usually the same as IMAG but if we send a moving graphic to all screens we separate the two. We also separate the message into two different switched feeds. Broadcast allows us to get shots wide shots that show the entire stage or room.

IMAG: Stands for Image Magnification, a zoomed-in shot of what you see on stage displayed on the projection screens. This is mostly close up shots of the action going on, on stage.

Directives:

Clear: You are no longer on program or Live and you can find another shot

Cut: An instantaneous switch from one video signal to another.

Dissolve: A transition from one video signal to another in which one signal is faded down while the other is simultaneously faded up. The term "mix" is often used interchangeably with "dissolve".

Live: Your Camera is on program or it is on the projection screens for IMAG.

Ready: informs cameraperson to be ready for their shot to be taken by the technical director.

Reset: start your shot over again from the beginning

Standby: informs cameraperson to be ready for their shot to be taken by the technical director.

Take: A phrase said during cuts or a transition to tell a cameraperson they are live. This is also said by a Camera director when telling the TD to make a camera or input live.

Camera movements & Focus:

Fly over: During a push, tilt the camera up and go over the subject's head to add an effect to the transition from one camera to another.

Focus: This is an adjustment that needs to be made to make the subject as sharp as possible.

Head-room: This is the amount of space between the top of the camera frame and the subject's head

Lead-Room: The amount of space between the subject and where they are looking, see compositing section for more information on lead room.

Look-Room: same as Lead Room

Loosen up: Zoom the camera out just a little bit to create a wider shot of the subject

Lose left / right: pan the camera either left or right to lose the subject

PAN: Moving your camera left or right.

Pull: Widening your shot out slowly for an effect.

Push: Zooming your shot in slowly for an effect.

Rack Focus: Going in and out of focus on purpose to create a transition effect

Soft: Out of focus a little bit so everything looks a little bit blurry and not as sharp as it could be.

Tilt: The movement of your camera in an up or down motion.

Tighten up: you are a little wide on the subject zoom in to create a tighter shot

Zoom: Making the image closer or further away.

Camera terms:

Cross Hairs: The plus pattern in the viewfinder of your camera that shows center.

Return video: a button that allows you to see in your viewfinder what is live on the side screens. (Only a few cameras have this ability)

Lens: allows you to zoom, focus and change incoming light levels into the camera

Pan Friction/ Drag: An adjustment that can be made to the side-to-side motion of the tripod head to allow smooth side to side movement.

Pan lock: This adjustment prevents the tripod from moving side to side

Tilt friction/ Drag: An adjustment that adds tension to the up and down motion of the tripod head to allow smooth movement.

Tilt Lock: This adjustment prevents the tripod head from making and up and down movement