

Definitions:

Wide Shot (or Establishing Shot)

Medium Shot

Close-up

Extreme Close-up

Pan –Right or left movement of the camera

Tilt –Up or down movement of the camera

Zoom –Change in focal length (magnification) of the lens

V/O –Voice-over, narration not synchronized with video

SOT –Sound on Tape, Interview audio synchronized with video

B-Roll -Refers to the earlier days of film when you had two rolls of film – A and B – and you had to edit them together.

A-roll is the main subject of your shot, with audio such as an interview with someone or SOT (Sound on Tape synchronized with the video). B-roll is the background video for your film, often just video over which you'll lay an audio track (such as the person talking in the A-roll).

Nat Sound (Wild Sound) –Natural sound recorded with B-Roll

This is video that has some natural background noise – traffic on a street, birds chirping in a park, etc. This audio can add depth and impact to a two-dimensional video tape.

2-Shot –Shot of the interview subject and the person asking the questions

Reverse Angle –Straight-on shot of the person asking the questions

Use a Tripod

Use a tripod to get a steady shot, particularly if you're shooting something that is not moving or a formal interview.

Shaky video, especially in close-ups, can cause the viewer to become dizzy, even nauseous.

If you don't have a tripod or you're doing a shot where you'll have to move quickly, then find something to steady your camera – i.e. set the camera on a desk, lean against a tree or a wall, put the camera on top of a trashcan, etc.

If you must shoot without a tripod or other support, shoot a wider angle shot. The wider the focal length, the steadier the shot.

To get a close-up it's better to move the camera closer to the subject of your shot, than to have the camera farther away and just zoom in for the close-up. A telephoto shot will accentuate movement by the subject and make the shot appear shakier.

FOCUS

Make sure your shot is in focus. You are telling the viewer what is important by where the focus is.

When shooting interviews, be sure to focus on the person's eyes... literally. Zoom in, focus on the eyes and zoom out to compose your shot.



Also remember that a wide angle shot will provide a much better depth of field than a telephoto shot where you've zoomed in on your subject.

In a similar vein, be sure to keep your lens clean. Dust spots can ruin a good shot.

Hold Your Shots

Hold your shots and look for the one moment that's really captivating - don't constantly pan from side to side or zoom in and out with the camera.

Let the action take place within the frame. Don't allow the camera movement to take away from the content of the shot. If you're constantly panning and zooming, the one shot you'll really want to use will lose its impact with all the movement by the camera.

This is especially important for video you're using on a Web site because video with a lot of movement, doesn't display well on the Web.

Hold your shots for at least 10-15 seconds before you pan, zoom or go onto another shot. This will give you three useable shots – the wide-angle, the close-up and the zoom in between – to choose from in the edit room.

You can always take a 15-second clip and make it a 2-second clip during editing, but you can't take a 2-second clip and make it into a 15-second clip.

Most camcorders now have built-in counters. If not, count silently in your head. Soon you'll get used to how long your shots should last.

Roll Blank Tape Before You Shoot

If you're using tape, before you start shooting, roll your tape for 30 seconds at the beginning of your tape with the lens cap on (or with color bars – see your camera manual for setting your camera to display color bars). This will reduce the possibility of tape crinkles at the start of the tape appearing in the video you want to shoot.

Check Your Audio

Plug a set of headphones into the camera and check your audio to make sure you're getting good audio.

It's easy to forget to plug an audio cord into the camera or to properly set the audio level – and wind up with great video but no audio to accompany it. Audio is just as important for your final project as your video.

Shut Up When You Shoot

When you press the record button, shut up already!

Keep in mind that when the camera is rolling it picks up all the ambient sound, not just what you're focusing on. And it takes extra steps to separate out the unwanted audio in the editing process.

Don't talk while the camera is rolling, either to yourself or with other members of your team.

This is especially important when you're shooting B-roll with natural sound, such as the noise of a busy street or a nature scene, where the sound is critical to the shot.

Planning Your Shoot

Talk over your shoot with other members of the production team and make sure you're clear on what shots you need to tell the story.

If you're on your own, write up a list of shots you need. Write the story beforehand in your head, and list the elements you want to get video of to do that story.

Think about what's going to look good visually, and how your shots are going to come together sequentially.

Try viewing your piece as a skeleton, and you're shooting the flesh for all those bones.

Shoot Selectively

Think before you shoot and don't waste video. Be aware of what you're shooting and when the tape is rolling. Don't roll unless you're taking a shot you want.

For example, don't roll when you're changing from one focal length to another, or focusing. Wait until you have the shot you want. That way you won't have to go through an hour-long tape with a lot of junk to find the 20 minutes of shots you really want.

Shoot in Sequences

This is especially true when shooting B-roll, rather than a static shot of an interview with someone.

Remember that you will be determining what the viewer sees and how the story unfolds, so try to shoot discrete segments that you then can assemble into that story when you're editing.

Think of different scenes, as in a movie. Each of those scenes is made up of sequences. In each sequence, you need to follow the action, and shoot wide, medium and close-up.

Say you want to capture a person arriving at work in the morning on her bicycle. It might break down like this: a wide shot of her arriving. A medium shot of her getting off the bicycle. A close-up of her pushing the front wheel of the bike into the bike stand. A close-up of her chaining the bike to the stand. An extreme close-up of her taking off her gloves. An extreme close-up of her eyes as she looks at her hands while she's taking off her gloves. A close-up of her taking off her helmet and tucking the gloves into it. A close-up of her straightening her hair and looking at the building. A medium and wide shots of her walking into the building with the helmet tucked under her arm. Think of continuity in a movie.

Every little detail is important. You can't shoot enough details to tell the story well.

In fact, a good ratio to shoot for is 50 percent close-ups and extreme close-ups, 25 percent medium shots, and 25 percent wide shots.

Make sure you get all the requisite set-up shots, cut-aways, and so on, even if you don't think you'll use them. They may come in handy in the edit room.

Change Angles and Perspectives

Try to change point and/or angle of view after every shot or sequence. Look for interesting perspectives.

Don't shoot everything from your eye level – it's boring.

Try shots where you hold your camera close to the ground and shoot up toward your subject... a worm's eye view. Or try a bird's eye view from above. The small size of digital video cameras today makes these shots very easy to take.

For example, if you're shooting a scene like people walking on a sidewalk, hold the camera low to show their feet moving, rather than straight-on shots of their faces.

Or if you're shooting someone working at a computer terminal, take one shot from over their shoulder, then another that is a close-up of their hands and fingers using the keyboard and mouse, then a low angle shot looking up at them and then a facial shot.

Shoot a close-up, because that often provides a more intimate view of a person. This is especially important on the Web, because the video viewers use small windows and wide-angle shots won't offer much detail.

Don't rely on zooms to get these different perspectives – move the camera closer or farther away.

If you take shots from these different perspectives, when you edit your video you'll be able to put together a sequence of 4- or 5-second shots of your subject, rather than one 20-second shot from a single perspective.

Get People in Your Scenes

Try to get people in your shots, which almost always makes the video more interesting. Don't just do a static shot of the front of a building – try to include people walking in and out to animate the scene. Cars can work as well.

Anticipate Action

Anticipate action by trying to predict where the subject/action will go, and then be ready to shoot it when it moves into the frame of your shot. Think ahead and get positioned for the action that's to come.

Let action happen within the frame. Don't constantly move the camera in a futile attempt to catch everything.

And allow your subject to move out of frame sometimes, rather than trying to follow them with your camera. It makes a natural transition point.

This is especially important if you're taking a shot of a person who is walking and then later another shot of the person sitting down.

If you follow the person while they walk with your first shot and always keep them in frame, and then cut to second shot of the person sitting down, it can create a mental disconnect for the viewer as to how the person got to the second position.

If instead you show them walking out of the frame in the first shot, then it's logical to the viewer that the person would be seen in the next shot sitting somewhere else.

Framing and Composing Your Shots

Be aware of composition in your shots and how you frame your shots, particularly with interviews.

For example, avoid a shot of a person with a plant or pole in back of them. It will look like the plant or pole is growing out of the back of the person's head.

When shooting interviews pay attention to your surroundings and don't be reticent or shy about rearranging furniture, moving things on a desk, pushing plants out of the frame of your shot, etc. to improve the setting, or asking the subject of your shoot to change positions so you properly frame the shot.

And if you're having technical problems, don't be afraid to take charge and stop the interview until you can properly set up the shot.

Interviews

Ask the person you're interviewing to look at you, not at the camera. This is especially important for politicians who may be used to doing commercials looking straight into the camera.

But make sure you can always see both eyes. Leave extra room in the shot in the direction the person is looking, rather than centering the person in the middle of the frame (Rule of Thirds).

Don't do a pre-interview off camera where you tell them the questions you'll be asking beforehand. It makes them sound stilted and canned in their responses when the real interview begins. Just give them a general idea of what you'll be discussing.

And during the interview, relax and listen. Just nod, don't say, "Sure" or "Uh huh". Limit your own gestures, it can distract your subject.

When the interviewer will be asking questions of the person, get a set-up shot from behind and on the same side of the reporter that focuses on the person talking while the questions are asked.

Then do a wider angle shot from the same position that includes the reporter while the subject of the interview is responding to a question.

Finally, move your camera to get a frontal shot of the reporter listening to the person –a reverse shot or cut-away. This is shot from behind the person being interviewed. And again get both a close-up and a wider angle shot.

It's important that you position the camera on the same side of the interview for all your shots (180 Degree Rule, Axis of Action, Crossing the Plane)

So visualize that there's an axis that runs from the interviewee to the reporter. When you are taking your first shot from behind and to one side of the reporter, stay on the same side of that axis when you move the camera to do the front-on shot of the reporter.

You generally do not film the reporter actually asking the questions – just the answers of the interviewee and/or the reporter listening while the questions are answered, unless there is a special question you want to use on-camera.

Headroom and Noseroom

Leave the proper amount of headroom above, and noseroom in front of the person you're shooting.

For example, don't have a shot where there's excessive empty space above a person's head. That's just dead space. There should be just a little room above a person's head in a shot.

It's better to have that room below the person's face, space you then could use when you're editing the video to add a title with the person's name.

But don't have the shot too low where you crop the top of the person's head.

And if you're shooting a person standing, don't chop them off at the knees – get their entire body in the shot.

And if the person is looking to the side, add space in the direction in which the person is looking, in front of their nose.

One approach is the rule of thirds:

- one third of the frame should be above the person's eyes
- one third of the frame should be behind the person's head



Microphones

If possible, use a lavalier clip-on microphone to reduce the ambient sound. Even better, a wireless lav.

But watch for necklaces or chains on a person's neck, or buttons on a shirt, that could rub against the lav mic and create noise.

With a lav mic, you'll need to "dress the mic" – properly attach it to the person you're interviewing and loop the cord behind their clothing (lapels and ties work great). Sometimes bringing the mic over their shoulder from the back works on women with a very plain neckline.

Clip the mic to the outside of their shirt, about 5-6 inches below their mouth. Try to center the mic as much as possible. If you have it too far to one side, it won't pick up the audio well if the person then tilts his/her head to the other side while talking.

If it's windy, use a windscreen that muffles the noise of the wind. As a last resort try to clip the lav mic under their clothing.

If you are using a handheld microphone, you usually should hold it about 5-6 inches below the interview subject's mouth, preferably out of the camera shot.

Tell the interview subject to try to ignore the mic and concentrate on the camera.

Avoid High Contrast in Lighting Situations

Avoid shots of areas that have high contrast such as dark versus light settings, or bright sunlight and shadows.

For example, don't place an interview subject against a bright window or white wall or with sunlight behind the person.

This back light is problematic for the automatic exposure feature of the camera. If the camera focuses on the light in the background, then the face of the subject will be darkened and indistinguishable. If the camera focuses on the person's face, then the background will be washed out in light.

It's usually best to shoot with the sun to your back.

If the sun is causing lens flares, try holding your hand over the top edge of the camera lens to eliminate them.



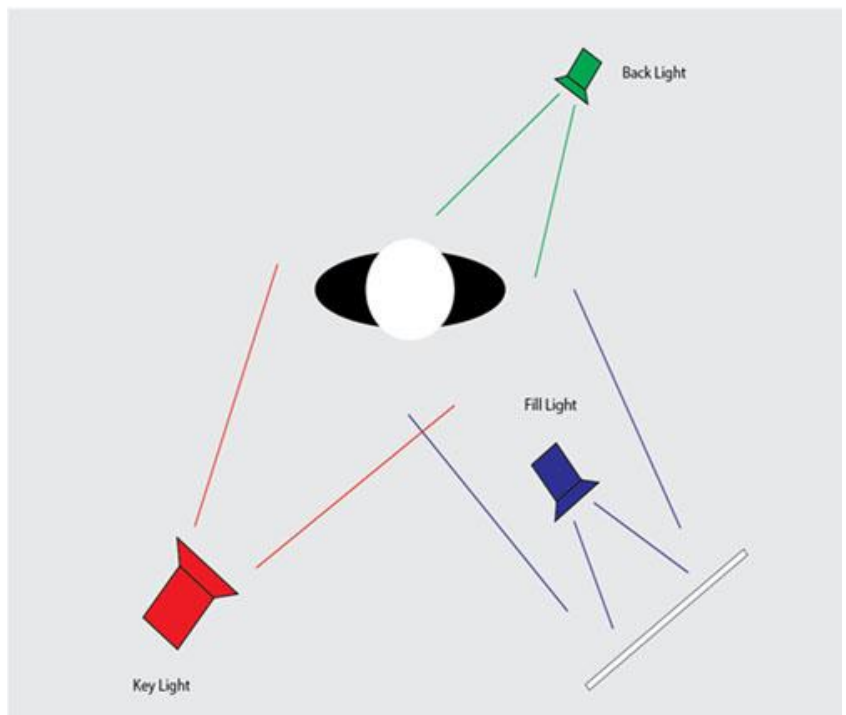
Supplemental Lighting

When shooting indoors, also be aware of lighting.

Add light when necessary. Clamp-on utility lights are an inexpensive source of controllable light. Removing a shade from a lamp will also add more light.

Soft lighting is generally better than harsh lighting. Bouncing a light or using an umbrella or reflector can accomplish this.

Think: Key Light, Fill Light, Back Light.



Manual Exposure

The auto exposure on digital video cameras is generally very good at setting the correct lighting. And most difficult lighting situations should be solved first by changing the position of the camera, the subject, or the lights.

But there are occasions when you'll need to manually adjust the exposure on your camera.

One example is on a bright day where there's lots of movement and light contrast in front of your camera, such as buses passing by with large billboards on their sides that reflect the bright sunlight. The camera then will open and close its exposure in response to these changes.

Another is in meeting situations when your subject is reading from a stack of paper. If they turn a page, the reflection off the paper can force your auto exposure to change the aperture and ruin your shot.

In these cases, aim your camera at the light setting you want for your shot and then switch from auto to manual exposure.

If You're Using Tape, Label Your Tapes

When you are doing a shoot that requires more than one tape, be sure to label each tape at the scene. And pick a label that will make it easy to identify later.

There's nothing more frustrating than starting to edit and not knowing which tape is of which shot or what is on each tape.

Keep each mini-DV tape in its plastic box to avoid dust getting into the tape.

You can shift the little white switch on a tape from record mode to save mode to avoid accidentally recording over a tape on which you already have video. If you want to later record over the tape, just move the little switch back to record mode.

Check White Balance

White balance has to do with differences in color caused by the intensity or "temperature" of light and how a video camera compensates for these differences in color.

Digital video cameras usually come with an automatic white balance meter that essentially tells the camera which intensity of the color white is in the picture, and the rest of the colors in the spectrum are adjusted accordingly to make the video look as natural as possible.

But there are cases where a video camera may misconstrue the intensity of the lighting because it is measuring the general intensity of the light it sees at the spot where the camera is located rather than the intensity of the light at the location of the subject of your shot. The result is either a blue or orange tint to the video you shoot.

Video cameras also usually come with white balance pre-sets, such as artificial light or natural sunlight.

Misc.

Take extra media or tapes. You don't want to miss something important because you didn't have enough recording space.

Keep a spare battery around. Backup battery power is just as important as keeping extra tapes or discs on hand. Some spare batteries offer longer recording times than the battery that came in the manufacturer's box, so be sure to check out your options before you buy.

The Seven Deadly Camcorder Sins

- Headhunting--placing every subject in the center of your frame.
- Motor zooming--overuse of on-screen zooms.
- Rooting--staying in one spot instead of looking for interesting angles.
- Fire hosing--panning all over the scene.
- Upstanding--shooting everything from standing eye-level.
- Snapshotting--recording only two or three seconds per shot.
- Backlighting--too much light from behind the subject.

Ten Helpful Tips for Shooting Great Video

- Plan your shoot.
- Use a tripod or other image stabilization device.
- For handheld stability, imagine that your camcorder is a very full cup of hot coffee.
- Use manual focus if your camcorder has it.
- When shooting outdoors, keep the sun behind you.
- Use the zoom to compose your shot. Avoid zooming while the tape is rolling.
- Move the shot only when necessary.
- Shoot to edit.
- Keep your average shot length between 10 and 15 seconds.
- Keep the shot steady (no zoom or pan) for at least 10 seconds.

Ten Helpful Tips for Recording Great Audio

- Check your camera's audio settings before you start recording.
- Use an external microphone if you have one.
- Get the microphone close to the talent.
- Listen through headphones while you shoot.
- Keep hand movements on the camcorder to a minimum.
- Use a lavalier or shotgun mike when possible.
- Use a wireless mike to avoid cable hassles.
- Keep audio in mind when scouting locations.
- Don't move mike cables while recording.
- Avoid long cable runs to minimize interference.