A director must decide not only what to shoot but also how to shoot it. The distinction here is between what is put in front of the camera and how the camera itself is used to record and manipulate the scene being shot. Film scholars have adopted the French theatrical term *mise-en-scène* to describe the director’s control of the lighting, sets, locations, props, makeup, costumes, and blocking. This concept is useful in defining more clearly the role of cinematography.

The director can make decisions about the mise-en-scène while undertaking planning or during the shooting phase (the last-minute blocking of the actors or adjustment of the lights) but before the camera comes into play. In effect, the mise-en-scène is what is visible through the viewfinder before shooting—the way the scene is staged for the camera. Once the director decides on the mise-en-scène, attention moves to how best to capture it with the camera. At this point, the director and cinematographer must make a number of choices about style and composition.

A shot begins the moment the camera starts recording the subject and ends when it stops. Interpreting the mise-en-scène involves determining how much of that scene to include within the shot. One of the special powers of the camera is its capacity to force the audience to see what the director wants the audience to see. This situation is quite different from real life or from a stage play, where the observer is free to choose the point on which to concentrate. At a play, part of the audience may be watching the doctor; the rest may be watching the nurse. When a camera is used to interpret that scene, the viewer can virtually be forced to see a single area of the scene, such as the doctor’s stethoscope.

Of course, the director may also use elements of the mise-en-scène to direct the audience’s attention. The lighting, blocking, costumes, makeup, set design, and dialogue all
direct the viewer’s eye. But the camera directs the audience’s attention in a more obvious and powerful manner.

**Basic Shots**

Selecting what is to be seen in the frame is one way the camera can be used to direct attention. This capacity distinguishes a film from a play, where the frame is the entire proscenium arch. In the theater, you buy the frame through which you are going to see the play when you pay for your seat. The cheaper the seats, the longer your “shot” of the stage. Shots are constantly changing in a motion picture. You see a variety of long shots (LS), medium shots (MS), and close-ups (CU), or perhaps one shot that moves from long to close-up.

Defining these terms is not always easy, but generally, a close-up isolates the subject from the surroundings, a medium shot includes the subject but also some of the surroundings, and a long shot emphasizes the surroundings and the subject’s place in relation to them (see Figure 4.1). However, to some extent these terms are relative to each other. The medium shot in Figure 4.1 might serve as a long shot in another circumstance. For example, used as a long shot, it could be followed by a medium shot of the head and chest of the man in the middle and a close-up of his face. Perhaps the simplest way to describe different shots is in terms of a spectrum, with an extreme long shot as the widest shot and an extreme close-up as the nearest shot. All other shots are spread somewhere between the two extremes.

***Insert Figure 4.1 here.***

Another common way to describe a composition is according to the number of people in the shot; for example, a two-shot has two people, and a three-shot has three people. Terms such as head shot, head-and-shoulders shot, and full shot are fairly self-descriptive, but none of these terms is exact and one perspective (such as a full shot) can become another perspective (such as a head-and-head-and-shoulders shot) within the confines of one shot. (Figure 4.2 shows some standard shots.) Given that there are many ways to describe a composition, the real translation often lies in the camera viewfinder. The director can look through the viewfinder (or at the video assist monitor) and say, “That’s what I want.”
### Subjective Shots

Another type of composition injects a subjective element. A shot in which the lens of the camera becomes, in effect, the eye of a character in the film is called a **point-of-view (POV)** shot (see Figure 4.3). You are probably familiar with a novel that is narrated by a character such as the hard-boiled detective. Narration from the viewpoint of a character within the story is more difficult in film and video. Nothing within the shot itself tells you that this is what James Bond sees. But a close-up of Bond’s eyes (and a slight widening of the pupils) can be followed by a POV shot that approximates the height, angle, and direction of Bond’s gaze.

The **over-the-shoulder (OS)** shot (see Figure 4.4) is also executed from a particular position. This shot literally looks over the shoulder of one character toward another character or object. An OS shot is a typical way of shooting two people talking. For example, a man might be seen from over a woman’s shoulder. A reverse angle shot would then show the woman from over the shoulder of the man. Over-the-shoulder shots have a subjective element. We are seeing from approximately the same angle as the character whose shoulder we are looking across.

In today’s moviemaking, where the camera is often mounted on a **Steadicam** that allows the operator great mobility, it is not unusual to see one shot go from an over-the-shoulder to a close-up to another OS shot.

### Lens Selection

Another aspect of composition concerns the choice of **lens** or the setting of the variable focal length **zoom lens** (see Chapter 3). This choice can determine how something appears in terms of physical and psychological distance. It can also direct attention by selecting what will and will not be in focus. As more and **increasingly** more shooting moves out of the studio and into the environment, the manipulation of lenses becomes quite important. In the
real world, things are often more crowded and cramped than they are on a sound stage, so the lenses need to be used to convey distances that may not actually exist.

### Focal Length Characteristics

The normal lens, so called because it shows things much as the viewer’s eyes see them, might be the least manipulative and most realistic of the various lenses. It introduces the least distortion into the scene.

The telephoto lens (or long lens or close-up position on a zoom lens) tends to compress the perceived distances between the foreground and background within the shot. A television commercial in which the auto executives demonstrate their faith in the brakes of their company’s luxury sedan actually demonstrates their faith in the power of an extreme telephoto lens. This lens makes the car that is screeching to a halt near their legs seem much closer than it really is. In general, the telephoto lens may be the most obvious lens in the sense of calling attention to itself. It can draw the viewer into the scene, creating intimacy and involvement. An extreme telephoto lens can so distort perspective relationships that the result is an almost surreal, dreamlike quality. This lens can also give a voyeuristic feeling, almost as if the spectator is eavesdropping on the scene.

On the other hand, an extreme wide-angle lens (or short lens or zoomed out lens) calls attention to itself by distorting the image, albeit in the opposite way. It can create a feeling of size and scope by giving a wide horizontal field of view. This characteristic can be used to delineate relationships between characters in a film. Orson Welles’s classic film *Citizen Kane* is noted for its extensive use of extreme wide-angle lenses to emphasize the physical and psychological distance between its characters (see Figure 4.5).

***Insert Figure 4.5 here.***

The objective is to choose the focal length that fits the sense of the scene you are shooting.

What kind of relationships do you want to emphasize through size, distance, and perspective?

Do you want to distort or call attention to the way the mise-en-scène is being manipulated?
<H2>Depth of Field</H2>

By manipulating the depth of field, the director has yet another way to direct the spectator’s attention within the frame (see Figure 4.6). A large depth of field allows the viewer’s eyes to roam throughout every plane of action, all of which will be in focus. Some directors, like Orson Welles and Jean Renoir, are noted for using deep focus in their films. This technique can be more realistic because it approximates the way we see. It also allows the viewer to seek out an area of interest in a composition with many layers.

***Insert Figure 4.6 here.***

A shallow depth of field (or shallow focus) isolates a subject in one plane and throws all other planes out of focus. In the heyday of Hollywood studio production, a shallow depth of field was often used to isolate the studio’s major star from any visual distractions in the foreground or background. Using a shallow depth of field also makes it possible to shift the point of focus during the shot. This technique, as it is seen on the screen, is known as rack focus. It is the result of pulling focus (that is, changing focus) during the shot (see Figure 4.7). For example, a shot might begin with the star in sharp focus in the foreground, but as the focus is shifted, the star blurs out of focus while a character in the background comes into sharp relief.

***Insert Figure 4.7 here.***

<H1>Camera Angle</H1>

The angle of the shot can also affect composition. A camera can be placed above or below the scene, creating a high-angle shot or a low-angle shot (see Figure 4.8). The standard (or conventional) meaning attached to these shots deals with the relative dominance of different viewing angles. A shot looking down usually diminishes or weakens the subject (or character), whereas a shot looking up tends to accentuate the power or dominance of the subject. Orson Welles often used the low angle (review Figure 4.5). In his Touch of Evil, the corrupt and corpulent border police officer, played by Welles himself, is consistently shot from extreme low angles, making him grotesquely sinister and powerful at the same time.

***Insert Figure 4.8 here.***
These are examples of extreme angles, however. The normal camera angle in narrative motion pictures is chest high, not eye high (see Figure 4.9), a practice that does not match the viewer’s everyday visual experience (unless the viewer is very short). This angle does match the viewer’s experience of watching motion pictures—a chest-high camera angle is the norm, the conventional angle for shooting “larger-than-life” film stars. Consequently, eye-height angles (as in shoulder-mounted camera work) look like high angles even though they are totally realistic in terms of our normal viewing experience. A Steadicam allows stable, handheld, mobile shooting at angles lower than eye height.

The framing of a shot may also be manipulated by the degree to which the framing is level with the horizon. A canted shot, or tilted shot, is unusual and disorienting and can be unsettling to the viewer (see Figure 4.10). A POV shot that suggests someone is drunk or drugged frequently uses this composition, but it is wrong to suggest that a canted frame always means something is askew or out of kilter. The meaning of a canted frame, or for that matter a high-angle or low-angle shot or a shot that changes angle, is derived from the context of the film, not from some dictionary of camera aesthetics. (The photos in Figure 4.8 illustrate different camera angles.)

Some shots that the director composes are relatively static because the camera does not move much. A number of conventions, or so-called rules, have evolved regarding the composition of a shot within a static frame. These involve elements such as balance, depth, and the space on and off the screen.

Before the camera rolls, the way the event is staged for the camera has a profound effect on how the composition directs the viewer’s eye. The director’s storytelling technique is
based on a subtle interplay of lighting, blocking, costumes, and setting and the way the camera emphasizes those elements.

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In a culture that reads left to right, the left side of the frame is probably more powerful than the right. To counterbalance this tendency, it may even be useful at times to place an object (or character) of greater size on the right side of the frame. Usually, the element that has the greatest mass or that takes up most of the composition will draw the most attention.

However, the placement of objects or characters within the scene is not the only way to attract the viewer’s attention. The most brightly lit object (or person) in the composition also tends to dominate the frame. The colors of costumes, props, or the set itself can create a visual emphasis. In Robert Altman’s *The Player*, the appearance of Cher in a bright red dress at a formal social gathering, where everyone else is wearing black or white, absolutely guarantees that she will be noticed. During the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto in Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List*, a young girl in a red coat is the only visible color in an otherwise black-and-white scene. The red coat is glimpsed again later in the film as the camera pans across a pile of discarded clothing, indicating that the girl is dead.

The different lines of interest established within the composition have a dramatic effect on how the viewer sees and interprets the image. Diagonal lines across the frame are often more dynamic than horizontal lines. Horizontal lines make people feel comfortable, and vertical lines convey strength. Shooting a group of choir boys in a circle rather than in a straight line may create a feeling of tranquility.

The **blocking** of actors is one of the director’s most basic tools for focusing the audience’s attention. An actor closer to the camera is more dominant than one farther away. A performer facing the camera tends to grab the spectator’s attention more than someone turned three-quarters, in profile, or away from the camera. A person in motion tends to attract the viewer’s eye more than a person who is stationary. Similarly, an actor who is standing while the other actors are seated (or vice versa) receives greater emphasis. A performer alone, away from others in the composition, tends to attract more attention, as does an actor on whom all the other
actors seem to be focusing their attention. Someone entering the scene usually is noticed more than someone leaving the scene (see Figure 4.11).

***Insert Figure 4.11 here.***

Ultimately, the director’s dramatic objective for a given scene determines the way the event is staged for the camera. What are you trying to emphasize? What do you want the audience to see?

**<H2>Balance**

Unbalanced compositions are considered more interesting than balanced compositions. When subjects within the frame are balanced so that the relative “weights” on the left and the right or on the top and the bottom are equal, the composition appears stable and solid but also tends to be flat and lacking in depth. Unbalanced compositions are more dynamic and visually active and can be used to create a sense of instability or tension. One reason for this is that what is in the “heavy” (or weighted) half of the frame tends to draw the items in the “light” half of the frame toward it.

The real objective, of course, is not to create individual shots suitable for framing on the wall, but to create a composition that is appropriate for the subject at hand. Sometimes a perfectly stable and relatively flat composition is exactly right. For example, George Cukor used many balanced frames in his film *Adam’s Rib* to convey equality between Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn (see Figure 4.12).

***Insert Figure 4.12 here.***

Closely related to the concept of balanced-unbalanced compositions is the rule of thirds, which states that you should try to avoid breaking the frame in half (top and bottom or left and right) because such compositions tend to be overly balanced and flat. Breaking the frame into thirds tends to create less symmetrical and more active compositions. Because the lines of interest are more on the diagonal, the viewer’s eyes may be drawn more powerfully across the frame, and a sense of depth may be enhanced by the more angular, less even composition (see Figure 4.13). Of course, following this rule is difficult if you are trying to shoot for both standard definition
**Creating Depth**

A director can accentuate the sense of depth in a static shot in a number of ways. For example, giving a frame a definite foreground, middle ground, and background provides a sense of depth (see Figure 4.14). A shot of a person (foreground) placed in front of a wall (background) does not appear to have much depth, but if a middle ground figure, such as a bush or even a shadow, is added between the person and the wall, the frame will assume more depth. Overlapping foreground objects with middle ground or background objects enhances the sense of depth even more. Variations in size of objects within the frame or in their position within the picture plane can also serve as depth cues, as can color and brightness.

**On-Screen/Off-Screen Space**

Another important element of composition involves the director’s use of space outside the frame of the film or television image. The frame limits what we can see of a scene, but a director can choose to open up the frame by having actors leave and re-enter the frame or by framing shots that make us more aware of the space outside the frame. We may see only the front half of the dog in the frame, but we are at least subliminally aware that the rest of the dog exists just outside the frame.

The **off-screen space** in film or video is more “real” than in a stage play. When actors go offstage (out of the frame imposed by the proscenium arch), we do not expect to follow them.

In film or television, the frame is more like the frame around a window. Viewers have the sense
that if the camera moved just slightly forward and more to the right they could see through the window and continue to watch the characters who just went out of frame. By having a character simply look off screen, the director to some extent can open up the frame and heighten the use of that off-screen space (see Figure 4.15).³

***Insert Figure 4.15 here.***

**<H2>The Edge of the Frame**

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Even if a director tries to open up a frame, the frame does have limits because only a certain amount can be shown. Deciding what to put toward the edge is challenging if the movie is going to be shown in both the rectangular 4:3 aspect ratio and one of the widescreen formats. If you want to place an actor at the edge of the frame to convey isolation, and you do this so the actor is at the edge of the 4:3 frame, that actor will be about a third of the way into a 16:9 frame. Conversely if you frame for widescreen, the actor may not be there at all for a 4:3 ratio unless the frame undergoes pan and scan (see Chapter 3). [X-ref] As the widescreen aspect ratio becomes more common for TV and film, the problems associated with the edge of the frame will diminish.⁴

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The sides of a static frame create another kind of limitation, however, particularly in shots in which a person is the subject. A viewer usually perceives that something is wrong if the framing of a person does not leave enough (or leaves too much) headroom between the top of the frame and the top of the person’s head. Noseroom, sometimes called look space, refers to the space to the sides of the frame and the direction a person is looking within the frame. If the person is looking to the left, placing him or her on the right side of the frame leaves noseroom to the left and focuses attention in the direction the person is looking. If a person looking left is placed on the left side of the frame (with his or her nose virtually touching the left side of the frame), attention focuses on the empty space behind.

These same general principles apply when a person is moving in the frame and the camera is following the action. The convention is to provide leadroom in the direction the person is moving. In a chase sequence, however, allowing the people being pursued to bump up against
(or move closer to) the side of the frame in the direction they are moving may help create the sense that they are hemmed in and about to be overtaken. The photos in Figure 4.16 illustrate proper and improper use of headroom and leadroom.

***Insert Figure 4.16 here.***

**The Moving Frame**

Most of the concepts we have talked about in this chapter thus far would apply equally well to still photography or painting. The mobility of the camera itself, however, is one of the distinguishing characteristics of film and video. When the camera moves, the framing of the scene moves with it. A composition that was unbalanced one second may be balanced the next, or a shot that was high-angle can become straight-on. A camera moving in toward a character gives that character more impact or emphasis.

**Camera Movements**

Tripods, cranes, dollies, and the human body allow cameras to move (see Chapter 3). Camera movement is needed to follow moving people or objects, but it also provides different psychological feelings. The major camera movements are the pan, tilt, dolly, track, and crane. A **pan** is a left to right movement of the camera but not of the mounting device. A **tilt** involves moving only the camera up or down. Moving the camera and the supporting device in or out is called a **dolly**, and moving both of them left or right is called **tracking**. An up and down movement of the camera and the supporting device is called a **crane** (also referred to as a **boom**). Other movements, such as an **arc**, are used from time to time, and you can make several movements at once—for example, a camera can dolly in, pan left, and crane up all at the same time.

In general, when just the camera moves, the feeling projected is one of an onlooker. When the camera and its mounting support—crane, tripod, human shoulder—move, the feeling projected is one of a participant. Take, for example, the difference between a pan and a track.

Both are side-to-side movements, but for the pan only the camera moves left to right—
movement that produces an effect similar to someone moving his or her head from side to side as someone observing the scene would do who was observing the scene. Tracking, on the other hand, moves the camera and tripod and produces a feeling of someone walking or running alongside whatever is being photographed—a much more involving type of shot. The movement of the background is also very different with a pan and a track. For the pan, the background moves at an angle; for the track, it stays parallel. Similar differences in feeling and background occur with a tilt, which involves swiveling the camera up or down, and a crane, which moves the entire camera and supporting mechanism up or down.

**<H2>Zooming**

—in—in In a zoom the elements of the lens move, magnifying or reducing objects in a way that the human eye cannot. With a dolly, the camera and the camera support move together into and through the space in the scene, creating a greater sense of what that particular space is like. A zoom in tends to flatten things out and bring everything in the composition closer. A dolly makes objects on screen appear to move out of frame as the movement occurs, forcing the viewer to experience the space at a more visceral level.

—in—in There are various schools of thought regarding the use of a zoom. Some directors minimize it, feeling that a zoom is artificial because it is foreign to how the eye perceives. They save it to convey the unreal or a disturbance. Other directors feel using the zoom creates excitement and anticipation and use it often combined with panning, tilting, dollying, and tracking to hold the viewers’ attention, particularly for action scenes.

Zooms are also appropriate in situations where it is impossible or expensive to move the camera itself. For example, in *K19: The Widowmaker*, a zoom in on a submarine emphasizes its isolation in the vast ocean; it would have been very difficult to transport a camera over the ocean area.

But a zoom should not be used as a lazy excuse for not putting the camera in the right place for the appropriate field of view. Place the camera where its lens can capture the scene the best according to the needs of the story. Don’t zoom just because it is easy to do.
<H2>Time</H2>

Any camera movement also involves a time element. Camera movements can be slow or fast or any speed in between. Many directors have used the rhythmic quality of camera movement as a powerful, expressive tool. Abrupt, quick movements create more of a feeling of urgency than long, majestic ones. Music videos often employ camera movements that match the rhythm of the music.

The length of time that the movement occurs can also be a factor. A three-minute action scene done in one take of constant movement, as often occurs in ER, augments the disarray of the emergency room environment more emphatically than a series of static shots cut together in editing. If a moving shot is preceded by a series of static shots, the movement will be even more intense and noticeable.

The speed of camera movements is frequently based on the movement of the characters within the frame. But a director may also use timing of a camera movement to create a sense of expectation or suspense unrelated to the characters. Well-timed camera movements can also change our focus to some object or some part of the mise-en-scène that the director wants to emphasize.  

<H1>Shooting Multi-Camera</H1>

Increasingly, movies or television programs are shot using several cameras at the same time. For example, one camera may have a long shot that becomes a medium shot while a second camera may have a static, high-angle shot. Multi-camera shoots are the norm for sports and other live events and for programs such as game shows and talk shows shot in a television studio. For these programs, a director sits in a control room viewing monitors with all the camera outputs and selecting the shots that should go over the airwaves or be recorded. A single Olympic event might require 25 cameras and a live studio-based music show, such as American Idol, can utilize a dozen cameras.

Historically, movies and TV dramas have been shot with one camera that is stopped and started, in order to shoot small bites and various angles of each scene. But directors
are finding many reasons to switch to multiple-camera shooting. One reason is to ensure that a scene that cannot be re-shot is properly covered. For example, if a script calls for a burning building or a train wreck, the director may only have the where with all resources or the budget to shoot it once. Such scenes may use as many as ten or twelve cameras, each covering a different angle or focal length. Some directors like to use a second camera to capture an unusual angle that looks less staged than the main camera. Another reason for using several cameras is if talent is young or inexperienced. When one camera is used and the same shot is recorded many times, the talent must perform exactly the same in each shot so that the shots can be cut together during editing. It is difficult to get a baby or a non-actor to re-enact the same movements from shot to shot. Shooting with several cameras can also speed up production because it is not necessary to start and stop the one camera as often. Again, this can be valuable when using children who are only allowed to work for a limited amount of time.

The downside to using multiple cameras is that they can easily get in each others’ shots. For example, if one camera has an over-the-shoulder shot and another has a head-on two-shot, one camera is quite likely to show the other. Likewise, lights, mics, and other production items are hard to hide when cameras are covering multiple angles of a set. The time needed to set up and make sure everything is safely out of sight often negates the time saved by cutting down on camera set-ups. And then there is the question of quality. The compromises needed to keep a microphone out of multi-camera shots may result in unacceptable sound. In the same way, lighting that is set up to work for all angles may not be particularly effective for any of the angles.

Nevertheless, many movie directors are opting for multi-camera shoots. Usually, they sit at a portable console some distance from the action (see Figure 4.17). Each camera has a video assist unit which, through wire or wireless, sends its signal to a monitor on the console. The director watches all cameras in much the same way that a director watches monitors for a studio shoot, except that there is no selection of shots at this point. The director is usually assisted by a script supervisor who helps make sure the shots are useable.
***Insert Figure 4.17 here.***

**<H1>Color and Tonality**

Manipulating the filmed image through the choice of film stock is strikingly different from capturing an image on videotape. A black-and-white slow film stock (one less sensitive to light) records a richer range of grays and a sharper image than a fast film stock (one more sensitive to light), which tends to yield grainier images with less contrast.

Different color film stocks, and even different stocks from different manufacturers, offer perceptibly different tonal qualities (one stock may emphasize the reds and yellows, another the blues and greens). The lab can further manipulate all these differences if the film is processed and printed.

There is no such thing as color videotape or black-and-white videotape. In video, the same tape can be used to record both. In most cases, it is easier to obtain black and white in postproduction than in production because most video cameras do not allow the user to shoot in black and white. Tonal quality gradations are also best handled in postproduction.

**<H2>Black and White or Color**

Color is the norm for commercial production in film and video, so the absence of color calls attention to itself. Television advertisers recognize the attention-getting value of a black-and-white commercial. Some commercials extend this idea even further by colorizing the product in postproduction (the pink cherry cola can or ravishing new red hair rinse), to highlight the product in an otherwise black-and-white environment.

More commonly, black and white is used to evoke the past. Both film and television began as black-and-white media, with color becoming the standard as the technology evolved. Woody Allen’s comic “documentary” *Zelig* uses black and white in much the same way, suggesting not only the past but also old movie newsreels, as well. In fact, one of the clichés of student moviemaking is the use of black and white to cue flashbacks in a color film.

Director Martin Scorsese seemingly inverts this cliche in his black-and-white film
The only color material in this film consists of flashbacks to the La Motta family’s faded color home movies.

Black and white may be more appropriate than color for certain subjects. Movies meant to be somber or earthy may convey this mood better if shot in black and white. This is true for Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List*, with its somber Holocaust subject matter. Many music videos have experimented with ways black and white (or black and white in combination with color) can be used to enhance the mood or meaning of a particular piece of music. Oliver Stone’s *Natural Born Killers* switches between black and white and color within the same scene, mimicking the intercutting of color and black and white in many music videos.

## Color Considerations

Much has been written about the aesthetics of color. Even beyond the theorizing of the artists and scholars about the power of color to evoke specific emotions, most of us accept a number of cultural conventions about color. Whether we are buying fabric or talking to a housepainter, we have a tendency to describe certain colors (reds and yellows) as emotionally warm and other colors (blues or greens) as emotionally cool. One theory holds that warm colors make items appear large, close, heavy, and enduring, whereas cool colors make items appear small, far away, light, and temporary.

Certain colors seem to go together, and others seem to clash. Mixing colors opposite each other on the color circle, such as green and red, creates color contrast. Working with colors on the same side of the color circle creates color harmony (see Color Plate 3).

Advertisers go to great lengths to determine what color of packaging encourages us to buy their products.

In moviemaking, many decisions about color are made during the planning stage. The director, in conjunction with the production designer, decides which colors are appropriate for the sets, costumes, props, and even makeup. Color can emphasize or deemphasize any element of the mise-en-scène.

The camera can also be used to alter the emotional content of the shot with subtle shifts
in color tonality. Think of the warm and homey glow of the typical hamburger chain’s television commercials, or the way beer commercials tend to be shot in the orangish light of late afternoon (after work when the world is beautiful). In Robert Altman’s western *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*, the Golden West comes to life visually on-screen. A dreamlike golden tone pervades most of this film, a technique that further heightens the contrast with the cold blue death of McCabe in a snowstorm at the end. Warren Beatty’s film *Dick Tracy* uses vibrant primary colors to emphasize the story’s comic book origins.

With film, these effects can be produced to some degree in the laboratory as the film is being processed or printed. With video (or film transferred to video), similar effects can be created during digital postproduction (see Chapter 12). In both film and video, color effects can be enhanced by placing a filter on the lens to warm (orange or reddish) or cool (blue or green) the image (see Color Plates 6 and 7).

The same scene or subject can read in very different ways, depending on shot composition, framing, camera movement, and manipulation of the color and tonality of the image. The power to interpret the mise-en-scène with the camera is basic to the art of moviemaking.

Choosing and controlling the type and quality of the shot is one of the most important decisions confronting the moviemaker, student and professional alike.

### Shooting to Edit

The camera can move from a medium shot to a close-up; the actor can move toward the camera and change a medium shot to a close-up; or this change of view can be created by editing two separate shots, a medium shot and a close-up, together. The director needs to have in mind an idea of how the final edited film will look so that the various scenes can be shot appropriately. If a director decides during editing that a scene should incorporate a medium shot and a close-up but he or she never recorded a close-up, he or she obviously has there will be a problem.

### Methods of Shooting Scenes
All shots, whether the result of one camera taking one shot at a time or multiple cameras shooting simultaneously, eventually will be joined with other shots during editing. In narrative moviemaking, the basic building block in the construction of the story is the scene, a unified action occurring in a single place and time. A scene is usually composed of a series of shots, though an entire scene can be one continuous shot. To provide complete coverage of the scene, the director usually shoots more shots than will actually be used in the final edited version. At the simplest level, the objective is to provide a variety of shots of the physical action and dialogue in the scene (see Figure 4.18).

There are a variety of ways to undertake this, one of the most common being what is often referred to as the master scene shooting method. Imagine a simple, one-minute scene in which a man and a woman eat breakfast while talking at the kitchen table. To ensure adequate coverage of this scene, the director would begin by shooting a master shot, a fairly long shot showing both characters at the table as they play out the scene in its entirety. If used in the edited version of the motion picture, this one master shot would present all the dialogue and action within a single shot—a one-shot scene. A director, using this master scene shooting method, would then begin to provide coverage of the scene with shots from a variety of angles and perspectives: close-ups of each actor delivering lines, two-shots, reaction shots of one character listening to the other talk, and cut-ins to some essential detail within the scene (for example, a piece of burned toast). Perhaps the last element in providing complete coverage of a scene is to shoot cutaways, shots of related details that are not actually part of the scene (such as the kitchen clock on a wall off-screen). In the editing room, these different shots will be cut together to build up the scene—beginning, perhaps, with a master shot of both actors, then cutting to a close-up of the clock, a two-shot of the woman talking, and a CU of the man listening.

There are other ways to shoot that differ from the master scene method. For example, some directors like to start with the most complex shot in a scene, while others prefer...
the opposite. A director can go through a scene one action or one line of dialogue at a time and film each as it will appear when edited into the final movie. This method could involve, for example, all close-ups and no master shot. If it is an intense scene that the director is sure will only use close-ups, there is no sense wasting time on a master shot.

At the other extreme, a director might shoot only two or three master shots from different angles, perhaps shooting all of them at one time with multiple cameras. Or the director might shoot a master shot but have the camera move from a long shot to a medium shot to a close-up to a cut-in—all without stopping. The director might want to have the actors move, perhaps from far away from the camera to close to it, in effect creating an LS, MS, CU pattern, again with the camera running. Sometimes both the cameras and the actors move, creating a whole array of shots (LS, two-shot, OS, CU, cut-in, MS) within one shot. With these types of shots, the amount of editing needed for a scene can be minimal.

**<H2>Shot Duration**

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*In addition to determining how to capture all the necessary shots, the director must decide how long to shoot each shot. The dialogue or the movement of the actor within the scene often dictates the length or duration of a shot. Moving the camera (because it takes place in time) can also determine shot duration. In addition to the composition, framing, and use of camera movement, the duration of the shot deeply affects how we see and understand it. The viewer can absorb more during a shot of long duration than during one of short duration.*

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*On the purely technical level, providing extra time at the beginning and end of a shot for identification and editing purposes is important. In film and video the first few feet are needed to slate, or identify, the shot. In filmmaking, the first few frames of the shot often contain overexposed frames (or flashframes), which are created while the camera is getting up to speed. Having a little more head or tail on each shot can prove invaluable in the editing room because it allows for options, both technically and aesthetically.*

**<H2>Shooting for Continuity**
Technically, a single shot maintains continuity, a sense that the space we see in the shot and the time of the shot are continuous and uninterrupted. In conventional moviemaking, continuity most often becomes an issue in the scene. Usually, scenes take place in a single location and in a continuous segment of time. This arrangement is not a problem if the scene is shot with a single run of the camera or cameras. But because most scenes are composed of a variety of shots taken at different times and from different angles, continuity is often difficult to maintain during editing.

On the set of a typical Hollywood film, crewmembers such as the script supervisor are constantly checking for continuity errors. Some of the most common gaffes involve costumes or props: the tie that changes color from one shot to the next or the glass that is almost empty in the first shot but full in the next. Even something as simple as changing light values (when shots taken at different times of the day are edited together in what is supposed to be a continuous sequence of time) can violate continuity. This kind of error involves the mise-en-scène, but unless a director is consciously shooting to maintain continuity, the placement of the camera can also create problems.

One common technique for shooting to maintain continuity involves the axis of action, or the so-called 180-degree rule. In any shot, whether it contains two people talking or a single person walking down the sidewalk, the principal axis of the action is identifiable. It is the imaginary line between the two people talking or the screen direction established by the walking character or moving object. If the camera is placed on one side of this imaginary line (anywhere within the 180-degree arc on the same side of the line), spatial continuity will be maintained (see Figure 4.19). A shot that crosses the line would, when edited, flip-flop character A and character B to opposite sides of the screen. Similarly, crossing the axis of a walking character or moving car would make the person or car appear to reverse screen direction on the cut.

Maintaining a constant screen direction also extends to the line of action established by a character looking off-screen. Imagine, again, two characters talking. We see character A in a
close-up talking to character B, who is off-screen. In the next shot we see a close-up of character B responding to character A, who now is the one off-screen. Unless there is an **eyeline match** between the two shots, character A and character B will not appear to be talking to each other and might even appear to be distracted by something else off-screen (see Figure 4.20).

***Insert Figure 4.20 here.***

A radical change in the speed of a character or object (a car, for example) from one shot to the next also can violate continuity. The first few steps people take when they are getting up to walking speed (almost always near the beginning of the shot) are appreciably slower than when they are already at full walking speed. If you cut together two shots of people walking down the street, you want their relative speed (and gait) to match up as you edit from one shot to another.

A **match cut**—a cut that maintains a continuous sense of space and time from one shot to the next—can be extremely difficult to make unless the director has shot the material with an eye to editing.

The time-tested method of ensuring footage that can be match cut is to have **overlapping action** during shooting. Imagine two shots that are going to be match cut. A character (from an angle in the hall) comes up to a door and opens it. The next shot shows the character entering the doorway and coming into the room from an angle inside the room. To overlap the action during shooting the director should shoot the entire action (walking up to the door, opening it, and walking into the room) in both shots. By overlapping the action in this manner, the director provides the editor with an almost infinite number of cutting places for matching the two shots.

Even though you have perfect continuity between shots, if the angle of view does not change sufficiently between the LS, MS, and CU, the shots will appear to jump and lose continuity when they are edited together. One way to avoid this problem is to vary the angle of view at least 30-degrees from the previous shot (the so-called **30-degree rule**). For example, if you shoot the long shot head on, you should move the camera at least 30-degrees to the right or left before shooting the medium shot.
Of course, continuity entails much more than the placement of the camera. It also depends on how the director stages the mise-en-scène for the camera and the way in which the editor puts the material together in postproduction.

**Shooting for Visual Effects**

Many movies incorporate visual effects that are part live action and part computer generated. This requires special shooting techniques. Usually the actor or actors perform in front of a green or blue screen (see Color Plate 10). When the shot is placed in the computer, the visual effects artist can make the green or blue drop out and put another background behind the actor. The reason green or blue is used is that the particular shade of color, called chroma key green or chroma key blue is not present in flesh tones. Therefore, when the green or blue drops out, people’s faces will remain intact. The actors must not wear clothes that are chroma key green or blue, however, or those will drop out and the actor may have a visual effect, such as a raging fire, where his necktie should be.

Computers can also be used to create animated characters that the actor interacts with. For this type of shooting, eyeline match is particularly important because the actor may be interacting with or reacting to something that is not visible on the set. In addition, subjective shots such as over-the-shoulder shots, must be carefully planned so that the item that is going to be added will fit properly. Likewise, camera angles, depth, zooms, and other elements of image capturing must be carefully orchestrated.

**Now That You Know the Rules . . .**

Now that you know the rules . . . go ahead and break them. Cross the line. Shove someone’s nose up against the edge of the frame. Forget chest-high shooting and try other angles. Break the frame into halves instead of thirds. The “rules” presented in this chapter are violated frequently, and usually for good reason. They are broken because doing so serves the needs of the story or will, in some way, affect the perceptions and emotions of the audience. If you are a student, school is an excellent place to experiment.

Use your creativity and imagination and try some new techniques. It is a good
idea to also record material in the tried and true fashion in case your ideas don’t work, but don’t be afraid to go out on a limb. If you are shooting on film, experimentation can be expensive, but if you are shooting on video, try whatever comes to your mind—tape or hard drive space is cheap.

Professionals know that in actual practice, composing a shot is more intuitive than analytical. Through composition of the image within the frame, the director can choose to highlight, modify, shade, reinforce, or even undercut almost any element in the scene. Whether the composition of a shot is good or bad depends more on what the director is trying to accomplish with a shot than on some abstract principle of pictorial composition.

Notes


5. For more on camera movement, see “Putting the ‘Move’ in Movie,” American Cinematographer, October 2003, pp. 72–95.


Chapter 4 Captions

<FN>Figure 4.1 <FC> (a) A long shot, (b) a medium shot, and (c) a close-up. NEW PHOTOS. Provided on CD-R as 04.01a LS, 04.01b MS, 04.01c CU

<FN>Figure 4.2 <FC> Other common shot descriptions: (a) a two-shot; (b) a full shot; (c) a head-and-shoulders shot; and (d) an extreme close-up, sometimes called a choker close-up. (Photos (a), (b), and (c) from Len Richmond’s Merchants of Venus, courtesy of Amazing Movies, Dianna Ippolito, photographer) PICKUP PHOTOS. Old 4.2

<FN>Figure 4.3 <FC> A point-of-view shot of a person framing a picture for a film shot. (Photo courtesy of Dark Lantern Pictures, www.dreamersthemovie.com) PICKUP PHOTO. Old 4.3

<FN>Figure 4.4 <FC> An over-the-shoulder shot from 10 Attitudes. (Photo courtesy of Attitude Productions LLC) NEW PHOTO. Provided on CD-R as 04.04 OS

<FN>Figure 4.5 <FC> In this breakfast scene from Orson Welles’s Citizen Kane, the husband and wife are made to look further apart than they are to emphasize alienation. (Photo from Photofest) PICKUP PHOTO. Old 4.5

<FN>Figure 4.6 <FC> (a) This shallow depth of field from Lemony Snickets: A Series of Unfortunate Events essentially forces the audience to focus on Meryl Streep while (b) the deep or large field in Jean Renoir’s Rules of the Game allows the viewer more choice of what to look at. (Photo (a) supplied by Alpha-Globe Photos; Photo (b) from Janus Films) NEW PHOTO and PICKUP PHOTO. Old 4.6b. New Provided on CD-R as 04.06a shallow

<FN>Figure 4.7 <FC> (a) The man in the foreground is in focus. Pulling focus (b) brings the man in the background into focus and throws the man in the foreground out of focus. (Photo courtesy of Video Producer: A Video Production Lab by Herbert Zettl and Cooperative Media Group, published by Wadsworth) PICKUP PHOTOS. Old 4.7

<FN>Figure 4.8 <FC> In (a) from About Schmidt, Jack Nicholson (Schmidt) is looking at the clock and waiting for the hands to point to 5:00 PM at which time he will be retired from a rather insignificant job. The high angle emphasized his insignificance. In (b) director Jean Renoir used a low-angle shot to show Christine de la Chesnaye as she attempts to defy the rules
of the social world. (Photo (a) supplied by Globe Photos, Inc; Photo (b) from Janus Films) NEW PHOTO and PICKUP PHOTO. Old 4.8d. New provided on CD-R as 04.08 high angle

<FN>Figure 4.9 <FC>A two-shot from the conventional chest-high angle in Merchants of Venus. (Photo from Len Richmond’s Merchants of Venus, courtesy of Amazing Movies, Dianna Ippolito, photographer) PICKUP PHOTO. Old 4.8b

<FN>Figure 4.10 <FC>A canted shot. (Photo courtesy of Brian Gross) PICKUP PHOTO. Old 4.8a

<FN>Figure 4.11 <FC> (a) The diagonal lines add to the interest of this shot of Prunella Gee and Michael York; (b) the two people in the center of this scene from Dr. Zhivago create a mass that is dominant in the frame; (c) the woman standing facing the camera stands out from the others.

(Photo (a) from Len Richmond’s Merchants of Venus, courtesy of Amazing Movies, Dianna Ippolito, photographer; photo (b) © 1965 Metro–Goldwyn-Mayer, Inc.; photo (c) courtesy of Dark Lantern Pictures, www.dreamersthemovie.com) PICKUP PHOTOS. Old 4.9

<FN>Figure 4.12 <FC>A balanced and relatively flat composition from Adam’s Rib. (© 1949 Turner Entertainment Co. All rights reserved.) PICKUP PHOTO. Old 4.10

<FN>Figure 4.13 <FC>This shot from Big Fish provides an example of the rule of thirds. A strong diagonal line of interest flows from the seated woman in the lower left third to the man in the upper right third. (Supplied by ES/Globe Photos, Inc.) NEW PHOTO. Provided on CD-R as 04.13 thirds

<FN>Figure 4.14 <FC>With Prunella Gee and Michael York in the foreground, the foliage of a bluff in the middle ground, and a harbor in the background, this shot has great depth. (Photo from Len Richmond’s Merchants of Venus, courtesy of Amazing Movies, Dianna Ippolito, photographer) PICKUP PHOTO. Old 4.12

<FN>Figure 4.15 <FC>The frame of this shot is opened up because Beverly D’Angelo is looking off-screen and also holding a cup toward something that is off-screen. (Photo from Len
Richmond’s Merchants of Venus, courtesy of Amazing Movies, Dianna Ippolito, photographer) PICKUP PHOTO. Old 4.13

<FN>Figure 4.16 <FC>Photo (a) shows a composition with too much headroom; photo (b) shows a more typical or conventional amount of headroom. Photo (c) does not give the man on the bicycle enough leadroom; photo (d) is better. (Photos courtesy of Video Producer) PICKUP PHOTOS. Old 4.14

<FN>Figure 4.17 <FC>This cart with three monitors is used to show the images from three cameras used simultaneously to shoot this scene in a metro station for Fox’s 24. NEW PHOTO. Provided on CD-R as 04.17 cart

<FN>Figure 4.18 <FC>In this scene from Merchants of Venus, two policemen confront Nancy Fish, who plays a business owner. Director Len Richmond filmed the master shot (a) of the three people. Because a heated argument transpires between the owner and one of the policemen, he shot the two of them (b). At the end of the scene, the owner becomes ill, so Richmond also filmed her by herself (c). (Photos from Len Richmond’s Merchants of Venus, courtesy of Amazing Movies, Dianna Ippolito, photographer) PICKUP PHOTOS. Old 4.15.

<FN>Figure 4.19 <FC>Anywhere within the 180-degree arc established from camera view 1, the two people (A and B) will maintain the same spatial relationship—A on the left and B on the right. Crossing the axis, however (as in camera view 2), will reverse, or flip, A and B to the opposite sides of the screen. PICKUP PHOTOS. Old 4.16

<FN>Figure 4.20 <FC>Once the eyelines have been established in one shot (a), the eyes must maintain those directional lines in subsequent shots to match. The woman in photo (b) illustrates correct eyeline match as she is looking in the correct direction for the man established in photo (a). If the woman is supposed to be listening to the man, the eyeline match is wrong in photo (c) because she is looking away from him (and his eyes). The implication of cutting from shot (a) to shot (c) is that she is not really listening to him or that she has been distracted by something off-screen in the other direction. NEW PHOTOS. Provided on CD-R as 04.20a eyeline, 04.20b eye
right, 04.20c eye wrong