

Grammar of Television

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When describing camera angles, or creating them yourself, you have to think about three important factors

1. The FRAMING or the LENGTH of shot .

2. The ANGLE of the shot

3. If there is any MOVEMENT involved

When describing different cinematic shots, different terms are used to indicate the amount of subject matter contained within a frame, how *far away the camera is from the subject*, and the *perspective of the viewer*. Each different shot has a *different purpose and effect*. A change between two different shots is called a CUT.

CAMERA ANGEL

Finding the *perfect position for the camera* -- the camera angle -- is influenced by how much area needs to be shown and what viewpoint the filmmaker wants the audience to take. A carefully selected camera angle can heighten dramatic visualization of the story -- a bad one can confuse and distract. Filmmakers need to constantly ask themselves: Where is the best place for the camera? How much should be shown or included in the shot?

Three important components make up a camera angle:

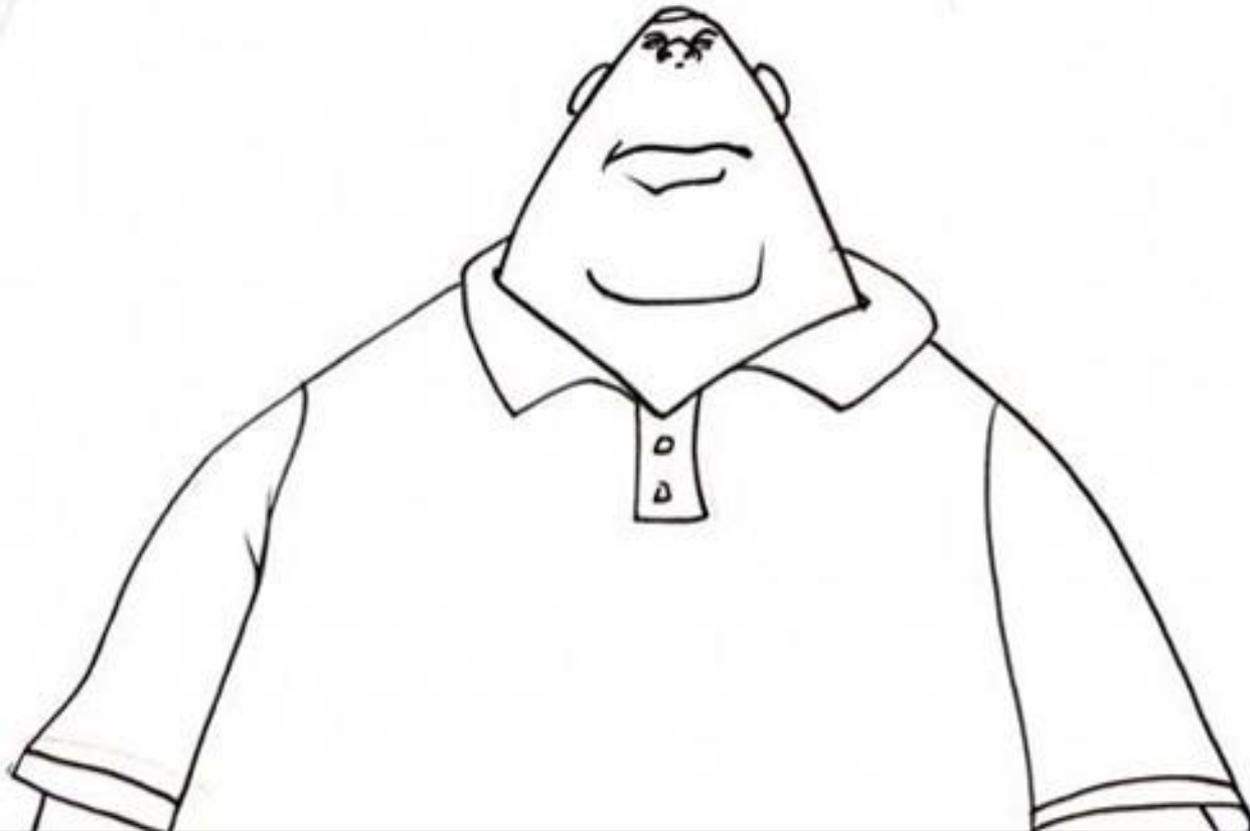
Subject Size

Subject Angle

Camera Height

By manipulating size, angle and height, filmmakers are able to shift the way an audience perceives the action. This can heighten or reduce drama as well as effect the mood, tone and impact of a given shot.

• **LOW ANGLE SHOTS** - This shot shows the audience a view looking up at a subject. The camera is placed on the ground or floor and tilted to look up. A low angle shot, or worm's eye view, can be used to make a subject look bigger than it really is, it gives a effect of its being larger than life and towering superiority



This brute, towering over us, really makes him look like he could kick our butts. You wouldn't want to mess with him! The **low-angle shot** makes him look superior.

HIGH ANGLE SHOTS- High angle shots are basically the opposite of low-angles, both figuratively and literally. The camera is placed above the subject and tilted to look down on the subject. This type of shot is sometimes called a **bird's eye view**. You can use it to create a sense of smallness in the the subject or to show that the audience has a sense of looking over the subjects from a superior position.



This sheepish lad looks frightened. The **high-angle shot** makes him seem intimidated.

EYE LEVEL SHOTS-A fairly neutral shot; the camera is positioned as though it is a human actually observing a scene, so that eg actors' heads are on a level with the focus. The camera will be placed approximately five to six feet from the ground.

OBLIQUE/CANTED ANGLE - Sometimes the camera is tilted (is not placed horizontal to floor level), to suggest imbalance, transition and instability (Titanic!!). This technique is used to suggest POINT-OF-View shots (i.e. when the camera becomes the 'eyes' of one particular character,seeing what they see - a hand held camera is often used for this).

SHOT SIZES

Long Shot (LS). Shot which shows all or most of a fairly large subject (for example, a person) and usually much of the surroundings.

Extreme Long Shot (ELS) /establishing shot: In this type of shot the camera is at its furthest distance from the subject, emphasizing the background.

Medium Long Shot (MLS): In the case of a standing actor, the lower frame line cuts off his feet and ankles. Some documentaries with social themes favour keeping people in the longer shots, keeping social circumstances rather than the individual as the focus of attention.

ELS

LS

MLS

Medium shots or Mid-Shot(MS) -In such a shot the subject or actor and its setting occupy roughly equal areas in the frame. In the case of the standing actor, the lower frame passes through the waist. There is space for hand gestures to be seen..



Medium Close Shot (MCS): The setting can still be seen. The lower frame line passes through the chest of the actor. Medium shots are frequently used for the tight presentation of two actors (the two shot), or with dexterity three (the three shot).



CLOSE UP -The close up shot is used to reveal detail. If you are shooting just the head and shoulders of a subject this is a close up.

The CU is used to read emotion or reaction. Like the XCU it is usually to enhance an emotive response or to reveal something key.

In interviews, the use of CUs may emphasize the interviewee's tension and suggest lying or guilt. CUs are rarely used for important public figures. Note that in western cultures the space within about 24 inches (60 cm) is generally felt to be private space, and XCU s may be invasive.

EXTREME CLOSE UP- The extreme close up is used to reveal very small details in the scene. It might be used to reveal horror in a subject (extreme close up of the subject's mouth as she/he screams). It might also be used in a mystery to show some detail that the detective picks up on or to show some small clue .This shot is intended for deep psychological impact. It often reveals an enhanced emotive response to an onscreen event or uncovers a plot point.

OVER THE SHOULDER (OTS)-The over the shoulder shot reveals one subject as seen from over the shoulder of another subject. It simulates a view of the subject as seen from the second person's eyes. This shot is often used in conversations between two people where the director wants to focus on the person speaking. Usually these shots are head shots (close ups of the speaker).

CAMERA MOVEMENT

A director may choose to move action along by telling the story as a series of cuts, going from one shot to another, or they may decide to move the camera with the action. Moving the camera often takes a great deal of time, and makes the action seem slower, as it takes several seconds for a moving camera shot to be effective, when the same information may be placed on screen in a series of fast cuts. Not only must the style of movement be chosen, but the method of actually moving the camera must be selected too.

SOME CAMERA MOVEMENTS

1. Pans

A movement which scans a scene horizontally. The camera is placed on a tripod, which operates as a stationary axis point as the camera is turned, often to follow a moving object which is kept in the middle of the frame.

2. Tilts

A movement which scans a scene vertically, otherwise similar to a pan.

3. Dolly Shots

Sometimes called **TRUCKING or TRACKING** shots. The camera is placed on a moving vehicle and moves alongside the action, generally following a moving figure or object. Complicated dolly shots will involve a track being laid on set for the camera to follow, hence the name. The camera might be mounted on a car, a plane, or even a shopping trolley (good method for independent film-makers looking to save a few dollars). A dolly shot may be a good way of portraying movement, the journey of a character for instance, or for moving from a long shot to a close-up, gradually focusing the audience on a particular object or character.

4. Hand-held shots

The hand-held camera (despite its name, a heavy, awkward piece of machinery which is attached to its operator by a harness) was invented in the 1950s to allow the camera operator to move in and out of scenes with greater speed. It gives a jerky, ragged effect, totally at odds with the organized smoothness of a dolly shot, and is favored by filmmakers looking for a gritty realism (eg Scorsese), which involves the viewer very closely with a scene. Much favored by the makers of *NYPD Blue* .

5. Crane Shots

Basically, dolly-shots-in-the-air. A crane is a useful way of moving a camera - it can move up, down, left, right, swooping in on action or moving diagonally out of it.

6. Zoom Lenses

The zoom lens means that the camera need not be moved (and saves a lot of time and trouble). The zoom lens can zip a camera in or out of a scene very quickly. The drawbacks include the fact that while a dolly shot involves a steady movement similar to the focusing change in the human eye, the zoom lens tends to be jerky (unless used very slowly) and to distort an image, making objects appear closer together than they really are. Zoom lenses are also drastically over-used by many directors (including those holding palmcorders), who try to give the impression of movement and excitement in a scene where it does not exist.

7. The Aerial Shot

An exciting variation of a crane shot, usually taken from a helicopter. This is often used at the beginning of a film, in order to establish setting and movement. A helicopter is like a particularly flexible sort of crane - it can go anywhere, keep up with anything, move in and out of a scene, and convey real drama and exhilaration.

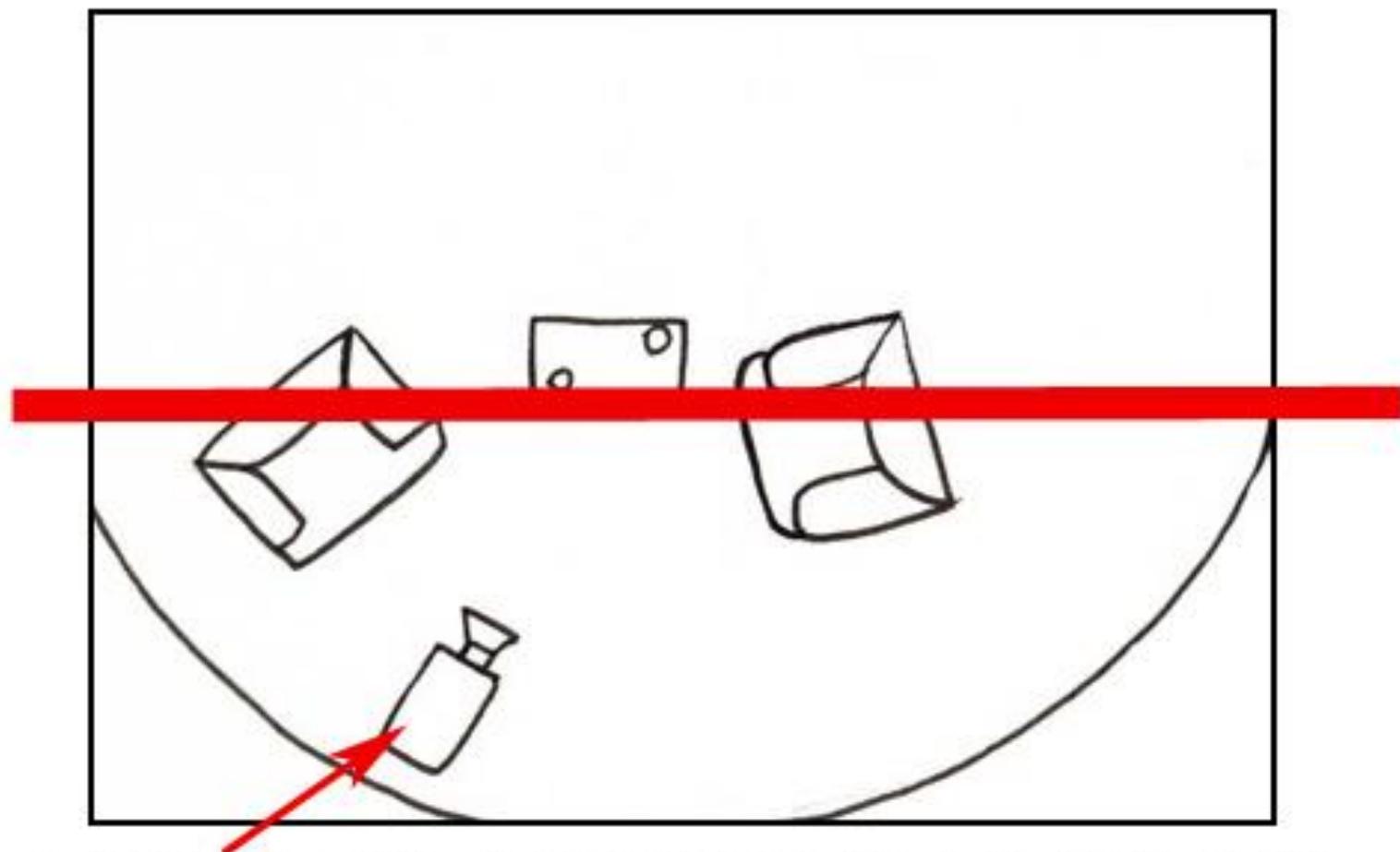
THE 180- DEGREE RULE (Principle Action Axis)

This rule is applicable when there are two characters facing each other, especially in an interview. The camera must remain on one side of a half circle to keep continuity with the action in the scene. The 180 rule can best be described with a sports example.

Notice that in a basketball game, the main camera is positioned on one side of the court. The court is the imaginary line and the side that the camera is on is the half circle. Now, the camera can move anywhere within that half circle, but it should never (and does not) cross the line to the other side of the court. This would create confusion with the viewers because it would skew their perception of the scene. If the Chicago Bulls are shooting on the net to the right of the screen, but all of a sudden the camera **crossed the line** and showed Michael Jordan running with the ball to the left of the screen, the viewer is left wondering why the hell Jordan is racing toward the other team's basket.

Another example is of a TV interview. OPRAH WINFHR Y is sitting on the left side of the screen, and her interview subject is on the right. This is apparent due to the **establishing shot** when the interview first begins. Now, when Walters is talking, she should always be looking to the left of the screen toward her interview subject. When the interview subject is talking, he or she should always be looking to the right where Walters is sitting. This keeps everything in proper relation to each other. If the camera were to "cross the line" and shoot from the other side, the viewer would get confused. Suddenly, Walters is looking toward the right of the screen. Is she talking to a different person?!

The 180-Degree Rule



This camera can move anywhere within the half circle, but it shouldn't stray across the red line. Otherwise, cut shots between talking characters would have them facing the same direction.

FRAMING SUBJECTS

(Creating moods with shots and angles)

It's important to frame your subjects properly within a shot. And as such, there are several factors to consider, chief among them:

- the rule of thirds,**
- nose room and**
- headroom.**

When you want to create specific moods, the camera angles you choose to draw from will do more work than any dialogue on your page ever will.

THE RULE OF THIRDS

There is something in the TV and film industry known as the rule of thirds. Taking thirds into account when shooting traditionally provides for shots more aesthetically pleasing to the eye. Despite what may come naturally to you, subjects should rarely be placed in the dead-center of your frame. It's boring. Pay close attention. Even news anchors oftentimes tend to be docked to the right or left of the screen with little graphics floating over one of their shoulders.

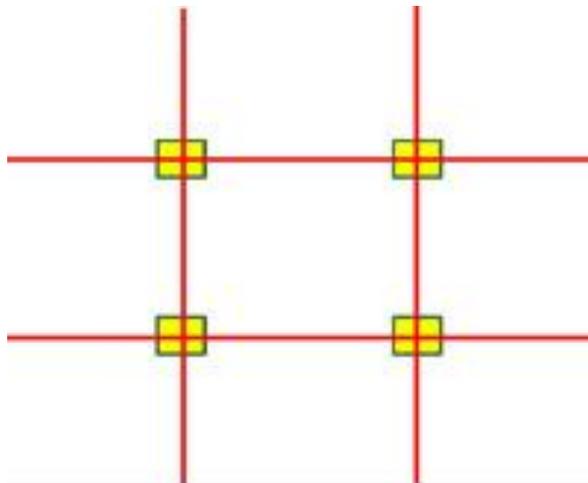
For the rule of thirds, imagine a giant pillow on your frame. It divides it into three sections horizontally and three sections vertically. The four spots where the lines intersect—called the golden mean—are considered the best place to position subjects and objects of importance. This composition offers a symmetrical shot with a focus on who or what is important.

A shot considered aesthetically beautiful would be when the eyes of an individual align with the top horizontal line in the frame. This is true even in a tight shot, even if the top of your subject's head is cut off (audiences don't find this distracting). That's not to say the eyes have to be lined up all the time. It's impossible, especially when trying to set other moods, like the low and high angles described below.

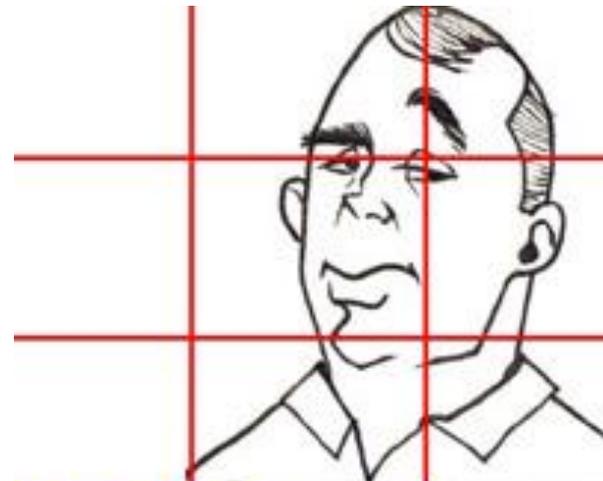
The rule of thirds also applies to objects. You'll commonly see three distinct sections in a frame. It may be (horizontally) a horizon, a sea and beach, or it could be (vertically) a building on the left, a gangway in the middle and a person walking on the right. Filmmakers commonly like to set up their shots in thirds, either horizontally or vertically, where there is something distinct in each section. Compositionally, it simply looks more pleasing to the eye.

Of course, there are few, if any, "rules of composition" that withstand an ultimate test of time since story context and the audience's expectations are always changing.

RULE OF THIRDS



The four spots where the lines intersect are the **golden means**.



Rule of thirds: The character is on the right of the screen and his eyes are in the golden mean.

NOSEROOM

Nose room is the distance from a subject's nose (or eyes) to the edge of the frame on either the left or right side (depending which way the subject is facing). If your subject is looking to the right of a frame, it's a good idea to allow for more nose room on the right. This means your subject will be docked more toward the left of the screen. The subject won't appear boxed in.

Nose room allows you to get tricky as well. If your subject is being pursued (think young, foolish teenager in a *Friday the 13th* movie), framing him or her without much nose room tells your audience that something is happening behind this subject.

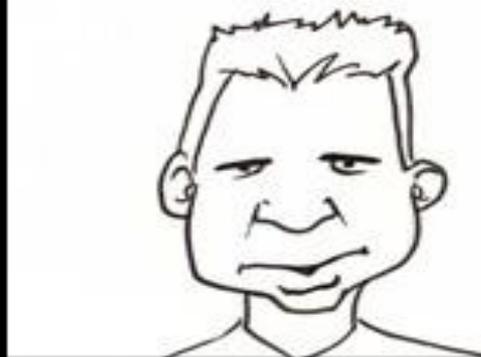
If you draw a man hacking away at a confidential file in a computer at night, and in the following frames, you want to have someone catch him red-handed, here's a good way to do it: By framing your subject toward the right of the screen without much nose room, there is a lot of space behind him. You're foreshadowing to the audience what is about to happen—that someone is sneaking up behind the computer geek.

HEADROOM

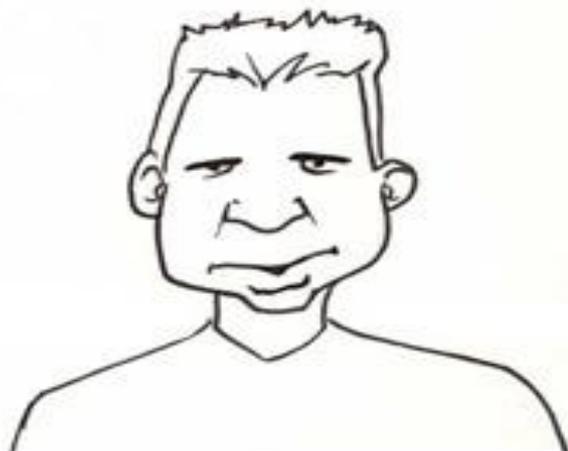
Headroom is the distance from the top of the subject's head to the top of the frame.

With too much headroom, all you see is this little head toward the bottom of the frame—it's awkward and your subject will appear to be short, if not sinking. With not enough headroom, the subject appears too confined. It's not very pleasing to the eye when the subject's forehead is chopped out (unless you're doing a tight shot with the eyes on the top horizontal line in the rule of thirds).

There isn't a defined right or wrong amount of headroom to leave in a frame. Just keep in mind that more headroom is better for wide shots, and less headroom works well with tighter shots.



SHOT 1

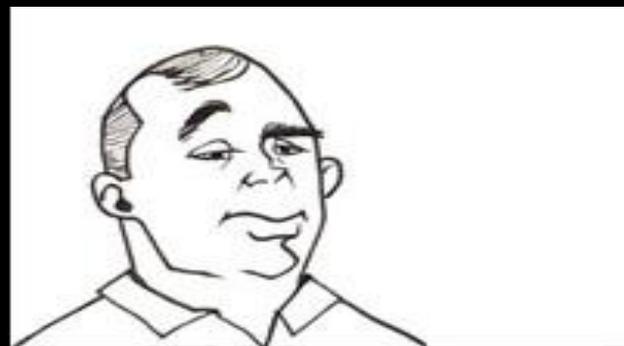


SHOT 2

The way Shot 1 is framed, the character appears to be sinking. There's **too much headroom**. Shot 2 is has just enough headroom for the character to not appear confined.



SHOT 1



SHOT 2

In **Shot 1**, there is not enough headroom. But this shot could be used effectively if you were trying to show that something was about to happen behind this character. Perhaps someone is sneaking up on him. In **Shot 2**, the character has a good amount of headroom. He's also positioned more toward one side of the frame, which makes it more visually appealing than positioning him dead center.

RULES TO BE KEPT IN MIND

RULE 1: The most important rule when videotaping people is to always compose your shot so that the subject is cut off in between joints. ***Don't cut your subject at the knee, neck, elbow or waist.*** Try to think about this when you plan the shots in your storyboard.

RULE 2 :Always shoot one scene from one angle and then move the camera or change the angle for the next shot. If you don't do this you will get a "jump cut."

Angle of shot. The direction and height from which the camera takes the scene. The convention is that in 'factual' Programmes subjects should be shot from eye-level only. In a high angle the camera looks down at a character, making the viewer feel more powerful than him or her, or suggesting an air of detachment. A low angle shot places camera below the character, exaggerating his or her importance. An overhead shot is one made from a position directly above the action.

Viewpoint. The apparent distance and angle from which the camera views and records the subject. Not to be confused with point-of-view shots or subjective camera shots.

Point-of-view shot (POV). A shot made from a camera position close to the line of sight of a performer who is to be watching the action shown in the point-of-view shot.

Two-shot. A shot of two people together.

Selective focus. Rendering only part of the action field in sharp focus through the use of a shallow depth of field. A shift of focus from foreground to background or vice versa is called rack focus.

Soft focus. An effect in which the sharpness of an image, or part of it, is reduced by the use of an optical device.

Wide-angle shot. A shot of a broad field of action taken with a wide-angle lens.

Tilted shot. When the camera is tilted on its axis so that normally vertical lines appear slanted to the left or right, ordinary expectations are frustrated. Such shots are often used in mystery and suspense films to create a sense of unease in the viewer.

Objective Angle (OA)- shows the action as you would normally see things in the real world. Most films and videos are shot from this angle. For example, if you were watching a fight from a seat in an auditorium, you would be watching it from an Objective Angle. Another example is a person standing on a street corner who sees a person riding by on a motorcycle. This would also be an Objective Angle.

Point of View Angle (PVA)- shows over the shoulder, but not from the eyes of the character. An example would be watching two fighters with the camera view taken from over the shoulder of one of the fighters. This angle brings the viewer into the action. If you were riding on the back of a motorcycle and you held the camera behind the person driving, you would be shooting from a Point of View Angle. You would get a shot looking over the shoulder of the driver.

Subjective Angle (SA)- shows what a character or subject sees. Here is an example: a student walks across a classroom toward a wastebasket. As he walks from left to right in the front of the room, you shoot him from an objective angle. The camera gets halfway to the wastebasket, and you stop and move the camera so that it is over his shoulder as he continues to walk. You are now shooting from a point of view angle. He bends over to look into the wastebasket. The next shot is a direct shot of the middle of the wastebasket. This is a subjective angle.

CUTAWAYS

Cutaways are a shot away from the main action but used to join two shots of the main action in order to

- 1) *Designate the passage of time***
- 2) *Build suspense by extending time***
- 3) *Show the reaction of of someone or some group to the major action***
- 4) *Bridge two shots that would form an unwanted jump cut perhaps because part of the action is missing***
- 5) *Remind us about some other character or action, perhaps to give added tension to the main scene***
- 6) *Allow the audience some relief from the main action***

CUT IN SHOTS

A shot that cuts into small portion of the main scene. For example a shot that shows an object such as a knife or gun , or part of character, such as his eyes.

CUTBACKS

A return shot or action from one happening immediately before, that is a return to the main action after an intercut.

