

The Film Shot

Types of Film Shots

Although there are many different kinds of shots in movies, it is possible to narrow down the list to six different categories, generally determined by the position of the human figure in the image:

An **Extreme Long Shot** is generally taken from a great distance away from human subjects. Quite often these are landscape shots or shots that give a view of a whole world - a city, a town, or even a galaxy - where the story is set. Not surprisingly, we generally see these kinds of shots in epic movies that focus attention on setting, such as Westerns. When people are included in extreme long shots, they often look like specs on a screen.

A **Long Shot** is roughly the same distance as that which separates an audience from a theatre stage. It includes the full human figure and often provides a clear view of the environment in which we find a character.

Both extreme long shots and long shots can also act as establishing shots and re-establishing shots, which are often the opening and closing shots in a scene. An establishing shot helps to tell the audience where a scene is taking place. Re-establishing shots can work to remind the audience of the setting in a long scene, and can also help to distance the audience from a scene that is about to end, much the same way chapter conclusions help to break up story flow in a novel.

A **Full Shot** is a variation on a long shot. It can incorporate the full human figure, with the feet at the bottom of the frame and the head at the top of the frame. Charlie Chaplin used to favour this kind of shot because it allowed him to exploit the art of the pantomime while at the same time capturing some of his most dramatic facial expressions.

Long and full shots can each act as a Master Shot, where the entire scene is first captured as one shot to provide continuity for the actors and to create more editing choices for the director and the editor.

A **Medium Shot** shows a little over half of the human body up and is generally used to show interaction between characters, including dialogue. Medium shots are also used to show movement, for instance when two characters are having a conversation while walking down a corridor.

A "medium 2 shot" includes two figures from the waist up. This is a common shot for two people sitting side by side in which they are talking while looking forwards, at the camera.

The “over the shoulder” shot is also a medium shot and commonly used when two people are talking to each other, face to face, to indicate their closeness. The shot includes a piece of the near person’s shoulder and the full face of the other (usually but not always, speaking) person. This frame gives the camera (and audience) a voyeuristic feeling, as if they were listening in on a private conversation. When cutting back and forth between these shots, great care is taken to maintain the eye line.

A **Close-Up** focuses on the human face and is generally shot from the mid-torso up. It is used to create intimacy or to show emotional responses from characters. A close-up can also be used to focus on an object as a way of highlighting the importance of that object in the story. Cinematographers will frame close-ups that allow characters a little space to move in and will often adjust the frame if necessary. Generally, close-ups will be framed so that the top or side of a person’s head will be cropped rather than their chin, as this is far less distracting. Close-ups hold the audience very tightly to the screen and are often used to pump up the drama of a certain moment, for example: the kiss.

An **Extreme Close-Up** is a variation on the close-up. It is often used to highlight a symbolically important object or a particular body part such as an eye, a hand, or a mouth.

The Ordering of Shots

To craft effective scenes, filmmakers order their shots in roughly the same way sentences are ordered in a paragraph. So, for instance, in a paragraph we begin with an introductory statement, which is often called the topic sentence. In a movie, the establishing shot has the same function as the topic sentence of a paragraph.

After the topic sentence in a paragraph, we move to explanatory sentences that fill in the ideas that are being conveyed. Likewise, in a film, the establishing shot leads to a series of medium shots, close-ups, and extreme close-ups that reveal the scene’s actions or events. At the conclusion of a scene, a final long shot or extreme long shot is used again to act as a kind of punctuation mark, telling viewers that the scene is now complete.

Needless to say, filmmakers (and writers) play with this sequence all the time. But this analogy provides a rough guide for starting to think about how shots are edited together into movie scenes.