



# VIDEO CONCEPTS + SHOTS

This handout will provide you with some handy vocabulary and reference as you are learning to shoot video.

## BASIC VIDEO CONCEPTS

**Shot:** Basic unit of a film or video. Begins when you press shutter; ends when you press it again.

**Sequence:** Several related shots that compress time and convey part of a scene. See pg. 3.

**Scene:** Typically refers to all the action in a single location during a continuous time period.

***Big picture:** Several shots make a sequence. Several sequences make a scene. Several scenes make a video or movie.*

**Clip:** Same as a shot, except this term is used in the post-production, or editing, phase.

**Cut:** (*noun*) Where one clip ends and the next begins. (*verb*) Refers to the process of editing — “Cutting together a video,” for example.

**Rough cut:** The first draft of an edit.

**Final cut:** The finished edit.

**Montage:** Refers to editing process of arranging several clips in a sequence, which viewers synthesize into a single experience. Works because of the Gestalt principle of closure.

**Production:** Shooting phase of a film/video.

**Post production:** Editing phase.

## BASIC SOUND CONCEPTS

**Nat sound:** Short for natural sound. Sounds of non-human components of your story that help make it vivid. Examples: bird song, train whistle, babbling water, etc.

**Sound bites:** Video jargon for human sound; your subjects’ talking, also formal interviews.

**Voice overs (VO):** Your own narration.

**Foley sound:** Artificially produced sound effects that are more convincing than nat sound. Named

for pioneer sound designer, Jack Foley (1891-1967).

## VISUAL STORY-TELLING CONVENTIONS

The conventions for telling a story with video are the same five visual story-telling ideas that you used in your still picture story. You still need to characterize your subject, show her/him in action, in interaction, convey the setting where that action takes place. And you need to take close-ups of your subject’s face/hands and of other significant story-telling details.

Many of the shots described below are variations of these five big ideas expressed in the language that film and video professionals use for talking about these ideas.

## BASIC SHOTS

The seven basic shots are establishing shot, extreme long shot, long shot, medium shot, close-up, cut-in and cut-away. You must have at least one of each of these shots in your video project.

**1. Establishing shot (ES):** This shot shows everything relevant to a sequence. It introduces the location, time, and, perhaps, the characters and theme of the story. It sets up the story and provides context for later shots. Typically, they are long shots or very long shots.

**2. Extreme long shot (XLS):** The camera appears very distant from the scene. Think of those great vistas in the old westerns.

**3. Long shot (LS):** Similar to an XLS shot, but relative to a person. Shows person about half the height of the frame, with space above and below. Also called a wide shot (WS).

**4. Medium shot (MS):** The camera appears about 8 to 10 feet from the focal point or action.



MS typically frames a person around waist level. Medium shots are a bridge between long and close-up shots, moving viewers closer to the action.

**5. Close-up shot (CU):** Camera takes a detailed, often intimate, look at people, objects or actions. CU of people includes the full head and shoulders. Emphasizes expression, emotion, texture, story-telling details.

**6. Cut-in:** A close-up on a story-telling detail that appears in the establishing shot.

**7. Cut-away:** A close-up on a detail that is *outside* the establishing shot, but related to story.

## ADDITIONAL SHOTS

You can't make a 2- to 3-minute video with just those seven shots. Below are several additional shots. You don't have to include all of them, but you should have several. They will make your story visually interesting. Even if you don't use them all in your finished piece, try them for the learning experience and watch for them in films.

**1. Two shot:** Portrays two subjects, emphasizing the interaction between them.

**2. Over-the-shoulder shot (OTS):** A two shot that looks over the shoulder/side of one person. Shows more face of second person. Used frequently in interviews. Viewers identify with the person over whose shoulder they're looking.

**3. Extreme close-up (XCU):** Camera zooms in tight on a face, showing just eyes, nose, mouth.

**4. In-frame, out-of-frame:** Shot begins without people. Subject enters the frame, passes through and exits the scene. Very useful for cutting. Note. The ins and outs need not always be across the frame; subjects can enter or exit from behind the camera, through a door, etc.

**5. Motivated pan:** Camera moves horizontally, left or right. Motivated means it must end by showing a person, object or action that's important to the story line. Or must follow an action or subject in motion.

**6. Motivated tilt:** Camera moves vertically up or down, ending on an important person, object or action that advances the story.

**7. Zoom:** Camera zooms in/out on subject.

*NOTE > When shooting in-frame/out-of-frame, pan, tilt and zoom shots, leave a second or two at both the beginning and end of the shot where there is no movement. This lets you avoid cutting on the action, which some editors consider disconcerting.*

**8. Internal framing:** The camera puts an artificial rectangle around reality, but look for natural frames within that border. Shoot through a window, doorway, fence, tree branches, etc. Besides adding graphic interest, internal frames help create spatial depth.

**9. Reflection:** Shoot a person or action reflected in a mirror, window or water. This adds interest by creating two spatial perspectives in the frame.

**10. Angles:** Shoot from above or below your subject. These angles can be moderate or extreme. Extreme angles, called bird's eye view or worm's eye view, add visual interest/drama.

**11. Camera height:** Not the same as angle. Instead of low looking up, this is low looking straight out; for example, you might show feet and ankles walking. Works the same at waist-level, looking straight out.

**12. Discovery (or reveal):** Begins with an object or person filling the frame. The camera moves left, right, up or down to reveal the main person or action, behind. Alternately, person moves aside to reveal action she/he was hiding.

## ADVANCED SHOTS

**1. Tracking:** The camera moves along beside a moving subject. In the professional world, the camera is actually mounted on tracks. But you can do tracking shots without them. Try a car, bicycle, grocery cart, wagon, etc. Alternately, try hand holding the camera and walking very steadily. Be sure to zoom to the widest possible setting to minimize camera shake.



**2. Dolly:** Instead of the camera tracking beside the action (parallel), in a dolly shot it moves perpendicularly toward or away from the action. Use the same techniques as for tracking.

**3. Expand dolly:** Camera follows a subject, who is moving away, but the subject walks faster than the camera is moving, gradually putting distance between her and viewers. This is a good transition or ending shot. As the subject grows smaller, it adds finality to a scene.

**4. Contract dolly:** Camera moves toward subject, who is moving toward camera. This double motion can take viewers from a long shot to a close-up.

**5. Collapse dolly:** Camera moves backwards away from subject, but the subject is walking faster than the camera and eventually overtakes it. Subject passes out of the frame on left or right side of camera. Also a good ender shot.

**6. Spin-around:** Dolly from the back of a subject in semi-circle or full circle around subject.

## KINDS OF SEQUENCES

Plan for, shoot and organize your individual shots into sequences. Here are four kinds:

**1. Completing an action:** Initial shots show a cause; later shots show effect. Example: Player shoots from 3-point line, ball swishes through hoop, crowd goes wild, teammates rush onto the court, scoreboard shows victory for home team, players dump tub of ice water on winning coach.

**2. Action / reaction:** Initial shots show an action; later ones show people reacting. Villain makes caddish remark; heroine slaps his face.

**3. Point-of-view sequence:** At its simplest, this is a combination of two shots: The first is a close-up or extreme close-up of the subject, emphasizing her/his eyes. The second can be any other kind of shot. The psychological carry-over from the first shot is that the viewer is seeing the second through the eyes of the subject; that is, from her/his point of view. POV sequences can be created to employ a high number of shots.

**4. A compressed action:** Condenses a lengthy activity into a few seconds for each stage: Mom buys turkey, cleans and stuffs it, puts it in oven, bastes it, takes it out, Dad carves it, family enjoys eating it, dirty dishes on table, dirty pots in sink.

## MICHAEL ROSENBLUM 5-SHOT METHOD

- Close-up on subject's hands in action (what)
- Close-up on subject's face (who)
- Wide shot (context/setting)
- Over the shoulder of action (subject's POV)
- Side shot (combines above elements)

## ARRESTING CUTS

A cut is where one clip ends and the next begins. Many directors/editors subscribe to the "invisible cut" approach, where cuts don't call attention to themselves. Others try for dramatic/imaginative cuts in their films and videos that grab the viewers' attention.

Based on examples in class, we want you to try for one or more arresting cuts in your video.

**Cross cutting:** Directors frequently have two parallel actions going simultaneously and cut back and forth between them to show similarities or differences between the two lines of action.

Based on examples shown in class, if appropriate to your story, try cross cutting in your video.

## SIX THINGS TO AVOID IN YOUR VIDEO

**1. Garden hosing:** Don't "spray" your camera around aimlessly.

**2. Unmotivated pans, tilts, zooms:** Every camera movement must have a reason, advance the story line, be appropriate to the contents.

**3. Shaky camera:** Avoid shaky camera. It feels very disconcerting to the viewer. Use a tripod, except for tracking and dolly shots.

**4. Vertical framing:** Video is a horizontal format. Take no vertical shots.



**5. Talking while shooting:** Don't talk while shooting. The mic will pick up your voice.

**6. Stopping during a camera move:** Let action end, or exit frame, before stopping the shot.

## DRAMATIC CURVE

Concept from ancient Greek drama, articulated by Aristotle. It's the underlying structure of many stories, from epic poems and folk tales to short stories, novels and movies. A classic example is *The Iliad* by Homer:

**Introduction (setting):** Homer takes us to the ancient eastern Mediterranean.

**Characterization:** He presents Paris, Helen, Menelaus, Agamemnon, Hector, Priam, et. al.

**Inciting action:** Paris abducts Helen to Troy.

**Rising action:** Greeks sail to Troy where they battle the Trojans for 10 years. Achilles sulks in tent, kills Hector. Other sub plots transpire.

**Climax:** Trojans tear down their city's gates to bring in the wooden horse.

**Resolution:** Paris kills Achilles, Greeks slay Trojans, return home. Agamemnon is killed by his wife. Story shifts to Ulysses's journey home. New story cycle, *The Odyssey*, begins.

Although you are not shooting a Greek epic, try to incorporate the dramatic curve to make your piece more memorable for your audience. Characterization, setting, action and interaction apply. You may or may not have inciting action, rising action and a climax, but you should have some kind of resolution in your ender shots and a sense of a "plot" developing as the video plays.

