

Why is it important to be aware of camera-subject distance, perhaps before addressing any other aspect of visual media?

- Television is made up of hundreds and thousands of pictures, called shots, each of which must be carefully planned. The long shot, medium shot, and close-up (and many other camera-subject distances such as the medium long shot and extreme close-up) are the basis of editing in movies and on television.
- Without these shots, the person who edits the movie, TV show, or commercial would have nothing to work with. Editing, in nearly all cases, is the combining of long shots, medium shots, and close-ups to create an effective visual presentation. Camera-subject distance is the basis for visual editing.
- It is essential to have a clear understanding of camera-subject distance before you begin to analyze visual media.

What terms are used to identify the three main types of shots that describe how near or far the camera is from the subject?

- Close-up, medium shot, long shot.



Long shot

close-up

medium shot

CAMERA SHOTS

Although there are many different kinds of camera shots, it is possible to narrow down the list to six different categories:

- Extreme Long Shot
- Long Shot
- Full Shot
- Medium Shot
- Close-Up Shot
- Extreme Close-Up Shot

As a rule, different shots are determined by the position of the human figure in the image. For instance:

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.

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 or setting in which we find a character.

A **Full Shot** is a variation on a long shot. It includes the full human figure, with the feet at the bottom of the frame and the head at the top of the frame.

A **Medium Shot** shows the human body from the ankles or knees 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 **Close-Up** focuses in 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.

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.

What are some examples for each of these shots?

- A close-up shows only one part of the subject, usually in great detail. Close-ups would include shots of a person's face, or the paws of a dog walking down a path, of a hand on a doorbell, or of a tree branch. A picture showing half of the subject, such as a character from the waist up or the back end of a car, is a medium shot, while a long shot shows the whole subject: a person from head to foot or the entire car. Any of these shots can show one subject or more at the same time.

How might these shots be used in a movie or television show?

- These three shots are used for specific reasons. An establishing shot at the beginning of a scene tells viewers where they are; for example, a long shot of a car driving up to a hotel, or a close-up of a restaurant sign. To show the effect of one person's words or actions on the other people in the scene, a reaction shot is used.

What types of camera shots are you most likely to see in movies? In television? In music videos? In commercials?

- In general, television is a close-up medium: things look better in close-up because the screen is small. However, mixing the shots provides variety and gives information needed to keep the story moving.

In addition to camera shots, camera angle is also important. The angle from which a shot is taken is another way to give variety as well as information. (Think *Blair Witch Project*!)

CAMERA ANGLES

The angle at which a character is shot in any visual media can dramatically affect the meaning we attribute to that character. Film directors know this and often choose to shoot characters using different angles in order to make an authorial comment on the role and importance of that person in the film. There are five basic angles used to shoot visual media. The angles are determined by where the camera is placed rather than how a subject looks in the photograph.

- Bird's-Eye View
- High Angle
- Eye-Level
- Low Angle
- Oblique Angle

The **Bird's-Eye View** is the most disorienting angle to shoot a subject. The camera is placed virtually on top of the subject looking down towards the subject and the ground. This kind of shot can seem so disorienting because it is rarely the way audiences themselves see the world. Because of this, directors only use the bird's-eye view when they want to make some kind of dramatic comment on a character or scene. In *Regeneration* (Gilles MacKinnon, 1997), a film about the brutality of World War I, an incredible bird's-eye view shot of the battlefield is used to open the movie. The effect of this shot is to suggest the madness of war and the brutality it inflicts on soldiers.

The **High Angle** does not look as disorienting for audiences as the bird's-eye view. Instead it tends to draw attention to the importance of the environment or setting for a scene. High angle shots also tend to make characters look small and are often used by directors to symbolically suggest insignificance or withering authority. A high angle shot positions the camera above eye-level, looking down on the subject, which consequently appears insignificant, weak, helpless, or small according to how extreme the angle is.

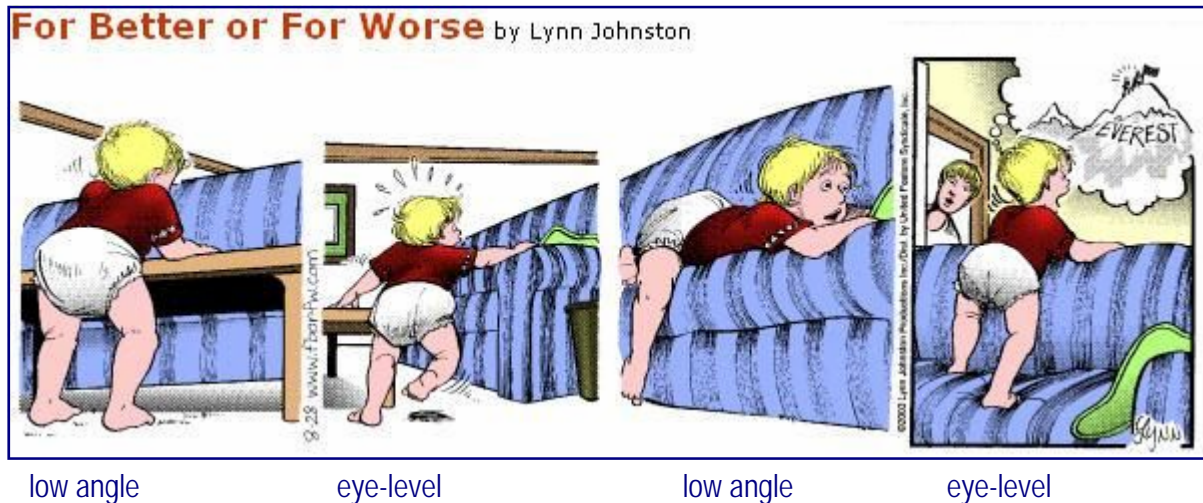
The **Eye-Level** shot is the most common angle seen in movies. Scenes are shot at roughly the same level an observer might see the scene. These shots are not terribly dramatic. Instead, they're used to photograph scenes that explain story development. At eye-level, the impression is neutral.

The **Low Angle** has the opposite effect of a high angle shot. It tends to focus attention on the size and significance of a character or object. Often directors will use this kind of shot to symbolically announce the power and authority of one of their characters without literally telling the audience this information. For instance, in *Star Wars* the first time the audience meets Darth Vader, he is shot from a low angle to immediately announce his role as the arch villain in the story. A low-angle shot has the camera looking up at the subject, who then appears important, powerful, or domineering, again depending on how exaggerated the angle is.

The **Oblique Angle** is shot by laterally tilting the camera frame. Anyone who has seen old reruns of the 1960s *Batman and Robin* television series will be familiar with this kind of shot. In that series, oblique angles were used to shoot the headquarters of the villains the Caped Crusaders were about to face. In this case, the effect was to suggest a sense of "crookedness" and anxiety. More recently, television news shows and music video programs have tended to use oblique angles to suggest a sense of playfulness, mostly because when oblique angles are used to suggest anxiety, the effect is too obvious.

What is a reverse-angle shot?

Usually the camera looks at the subject, but occasionally the camera shows what the subject is seeing. This is a reverse-angle shot.



Another way to give television programs variety is for the camera to move. When the camera changes its position by moving left or right, this is called *tracking* or *trucking*. Changing the camera's position by moving it forward or backward is known as *dolly*ing. When the camera stays in the same position but turns left or right, this is *panning*, and when it turns up or down, this is known as *tilting*. Even when the camera is stationary and not turning it can appear to move closer to or further from its subject; by using a special ring or lever on the lens, the camera person can *zoom in* or *out*.

Although these moves are useful, they should not be overused or they will lose their effect. In fact, any camera movement must be planned and rehearsed so that it will be smooth and in tune with the action.

Camera Shots/Angles Examples**Close-up**

All you see on the screen is a well-manicured hand, nervously tapping a countertop.

Medium Shot

An interior of a car where a couple are having an argument.

Long Shot

A car is driving on a deserted road. The outline of a city can be seen in the distance.

High Angle Shot

You have a bird-eye view of a group of children playing in a schoolyard.

Low Angle Shot

A villain laughs cruelly – it's as if he is standing on top of you as he does this.

Eye-level Shot

The condemned man looks squarely at the camera and declares his innocence.

Reverse Angle Shot

As the heroes escape, it's as if we are in their shoes, looking ahead at the dark alley as we try to

Tracking

The camera moves from left to right, following the hero as she runs on top of a moving train.

Panning

A teacher and principal are having a discussion. The camera doesn't move, but the shot moves

Dollying

The camera moves backwards from an interior shot of a couple arguing in their car, to an exterior

Tilting

With the camera remaining in one place, the shot follows Spiderman as he climbs up the side of a building, and then down again.

LIGHTING

Historically, painters and photographers have used light for symbolic purposes to say certain things about characters and settings. The use of light versus dark is perhaps the oldest and most obvious lighting technique. Generally, light is used to highlight ideas of security, virtue, and truth, whereas dark shots are used to highlight uncertainty, fear, evil, or loneliness. Lighting creates mood. For example, with harsh lighting, everything is exposed, while when soft lighting is employed it may be suggestive of being romantic or gentle, or of something being hidden.

Front light (sunlight) - Most of the scene is well lit and bright sunny days bring out the colors of a scene. It provides the most information to the camera by lighting the entire scene. Very high sunlight (seen at noon) will create deep shadows under eyes and chins. This may cause the subject to appear sinister. Such lighting can be a bit boring, as the picture may lack volume and depth. Textures and details are minimized. Scenes appear flat with few shadows. Natural sunlight may create a realistic or documentary feel in a movie. It tends to add a layer of "authenticity" to a movie, as though the story we are watching on screen is a true-life tale.

Side light - is perfect when the artist wants to emphasize texture, dimension, shapes, or patterns. Side lighting sculpts a subject, revealing contours and textures. Side lighting may exaggerate dimension and depth. Side lighting can separate the subject from the background, convey depth, as in a landscape at sunset, or convey texture, as in a weathered tree, fence, or plowed field. However, it may be too severe for some subjects, creating some areas that are too bright, and some that are too dark.

Lighting a character from below creates a feeling of power and authority. In *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941), Orson Welles' character, Charles Foster Kane, is often lit in this manner to suggest the sinister nature of his growing power.

The **use of silhouettes** creates a feeling of sinister betrayal. Film noir (literally "black cinema"), a style of detective films from the 1940s and 50s, was dominated by low key lighting. Silhouettes turned up throughout these films, usually to highlight a dark, urban world inhabited by broken heroes and lost women.

Lighting a character from above creates a "halo" effect, which tends to suggest beauty or innocence. Renee Zellweger (Tom Cruise's love interest) is lit this way in a number of scenes in *Jerry Maguire* (Cameron Crowe, 1996). Combined with the soft make-up used on Zellweger, it tends to make her look honest, innocent and beautiful.

Backlight - Light that comes from behind the subject may provide the most dramatic effects. It simplifies a complicated scene by emphasizing the subject, as in a silhouette. It provides a flattering halo of light in portraits. However, backlighting tends to obscure the features of the person. This technique can be used effectively to frame a monster in horror movies. Used in other types of movies, it can be very distracting because it makes it difficult to see the facial features of the character speaking to the camera. Backlighting will add strong shadows in landscapes.

COLOUR

- may create mood or atmosphere, suggest genre, illustrate a specific theme or moment, be symbolic, suggest a time period
- a black and white choice may evoke a period, recreate a style, produce a specific atmosphere or mood

What is color good for?

A designer should not use color without a specific plan or goal. Here are some of color's principle uses:

- conveying emotion and meaning
- changing perception of space
- changing apparent size
- showing similarities and differences
- parsing the visual field into chunks
- linking spatially separated objects together
- attracting attention
- creating emphasis
- smoothing to improve image quality
- creating aesthetic and emotional appeal

How does color convey meaning?

Color can also be used to convey specific meaning such as warning (red), caution (yellow), safety (green), etc. There are some standards on the assignment of colors to meaning. The OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Agency), for example, has standardized:

red: danger
orange: warning
yellow: caution
blue: notice
green: safety

Various sources have suggested other standard meanings signalled by color:

- red: urgency, passion, heat, love, blood
- purple: wealth, royalty, sophistication, intelligence
- blue: truth, dignity, power, coolness, melancholy, heaviness
- black: death, rebellion, strength, evil
- white: purity, cleanliness, lightness, emptiness
- yellow: warmth, cowardice, brightness
- green: nature, health, cheerfulness, environment, money, vegetation
- primary color choices such as red, blue, yellow, and blue may convey a sense of clarity or newness
- muted colors such as greys, pastels, and mauves may leave a feeling of sadness, loss, or depression
- cool colours (green, blue, violet) suggest peace, aloofness, tranquility
- warm colours (red, orange, yellow) suggest violence, aggressiveness, seduction



Robert Giroux / Getty Images

Consider the mood created in this picture of New York City at dusk.
How did the use of colour and lighting contribute to this mood?
How would it be different if the photo had been taken at noon?

Branding is another use of color to convey meaning. Businesses frequently try to differentiate themselves by creating a visually distinctive brand. One way to accomplish this goal is create an association with a color(s) by means of a logo. IBM is blue, Fidelity is green, **Coke** is red and white, etc.

Lastly, be warned that use of color to convey meaning is very tricky. Of course, color-meaning connections do not always transfer across cultures, but there can be difficulties even within Western culture. Color meanings can conflict. For example, blue can mean power or melancholy, two ideas which don't seem compatible.



John McColgan / U.S. Forest Service

Carefully view the photo of a fire scene, above, and MENTALLY answer the questions below.

1. Define which type of camera shot was used and present evidence that supports your idea. What effect does the camera shot have on the subject of the photo?

An Extreme Long Shot is generally taken from a great distance away from subjects. Quite often these are landscape shots. This photo perfectly suits the definition. The elk in the photo are a great distance away from the photographer, and the fiery landscape certainly commands the viewer's

attention. Using this particular type of shot has the effect of showing the inferno that results from a forest fire, and how those living in it are directly affected. The extreme long shot, in this case, illustrates how massive and destructive a wild fire can be by showing that it consumes everything in its path.

2. Define which camera angle the photographer used, complete with evidence that supports your idea. What effect does the camera angle have on the subject of the photo?

The High Angle tends to draw attention to the importance of the environment or setting for a scene. High angle shots also tend to make characters look small and are often used to symbolically suggest insignificance. A high angle shot positions the camera above eye-level, looking down on the subject, who consequently appears insignificant, weak, helpless, or small according to how extreme the angle is. Again, this photograph suits this definition well. Obviously, the environment – the forest in flame is of utmost importance, while the elk appear small, insignificant, weak, helpless . . . They are at the mercy of the flames and the wind. The effect of this kind of camera angle for this photo suggests the voracious appetite of the inferno, and goodness help anything that gets in its way.

Although one might be tempted to suggest that this is a bird's eye view, for that kind of angle, the photographer would have been in a helicopter, hovering directly over the elk and the conflagration.

3. Describe the type of lighting used in the photograph. What effect does the lighting have on the subject of the photo?

The lighting used in the photo is natural light coming from the fire. The fire backlights the animals, thereby silhouetting the two elk, highlighting the danger in which they find themselves. This natural lighting reinforces the heat and danger of the flames, from which there appears to be little room for escape.

4. Describe the colours used in the photograph. What effect does the colour choice have on the subject of the photo?

The colours used in the photo are the colours of the fire itself – bright yellow and orange. The viewer feels as though she can reach out and actually touch the fire. Even in the photo the fire appears threatening to anyone who views it. Remember that red, orange, and yellow may suggest violence or aggressiveness. This blaze certainly appears to be both violent and aggressive in its consumption of the forest.

5. Discuss what you believe to be the theme, or message of the photo.

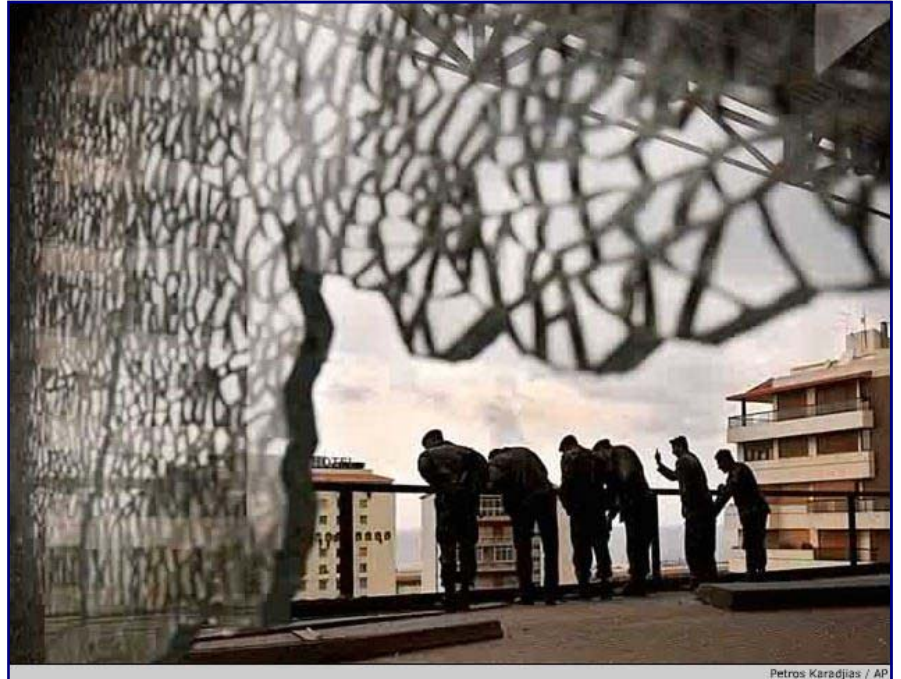
The theme of this photo is THAT a wild fire can grow to massively destructive proportions, destroying anything in its path. Such fires have voracious appetites and no mercy for anything or any creature. Such blazes are violent and aggressive in their consumption of their surroundings.

NOTE: By taking a different attitude toward the fire, one might suggest there is a strange and spectacular beauty to be found in it. If that were the case, then the effects of the camera shot, camera angle, lighting and colours would change, as would the theme. There is no "correct" answer, but any answer that is suggested MUST be supported by detail.

FRAMES

The choice of frame for the picture, or lack of frame, can also send a message.

Natural Frames are those that occur in the scene naturally and are used to the photographer/artist's advantage as a frame or 'box' for the picture. For example, a tree trunk brought into the edge of a picture or the branch of a tree is a frame, while a door frame or window frame may also be used in such a way. In the photo to the right, the soldiers are framed by the wreckage of a shopping centre.



Juxtaposition is the placing of objects side by side to accentuate the differences or to provide contrast. When you put a black type on a white paper you get a strong contrast which makes the type stand out clearly. Likewise, if you put two objects that are very different side by side, the startling differences will make the objects more prominent. For example, if you see a picture of a pristine meadow, with beautiful flowers and peaceful, calming lighting, muted colors and in the middle of the meadow is an old oil can, rusted and jagged, the oil can will stand out because it clearly contrasts or juxtaposes with the scene. The juxtaposition in the photo above is an ironic one. It is clearly a photo taken on a cold winter day; the setting juxtaposed against an ad with a scantily-clad man wind surfing.



All of these terms can be used when discussing a visual medium. The main idea that is conveyed by a picture or photograph is mostly expressed through the subjects themselves. Take into account the expressions on peoples' faces, where they stand or sit in relation to one another, what their body language conveys. All of these details should be examined to decide what the idea being conveyed to you is and how that idea is conveyed.