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Have you dreamt of shooting your own feature film someday? There are a ton of things you'll need to know to make your own film. One of which is to master the art of cinematography techniques that will aid your storytelling. Cinematographers decide how images on screen are most effectively related to an audience in the director's vision. With this in mind, we've listed down some of the most widely used cinematography techniques in film and also explained how each shot can affect your scene.

41 Essential Film Techniques

- Aerial shot** Also termed as a birds eye view shot, an aerial shot was traditionally taken from a higher vantage point like a bridge or a skyscraper. But, the advent of drones has made capturing this shot a lot easier. A birds eye view shot as the name suggests is used to provide audiences an overview of all that's happening by placing a camera up above and capturing the action going on below. Its generally used as an establishing shot to set up the location of the film. It can give viewers a wider view and draw attention to a character in motion and his/her relations to the environment.
- 2. Arc shot** This type of shot involves a camera circling around the subject in a semi-circle. They can be used to indicate transitions or add much-needed intensity to a scene. One of the most common examples of the arc shot is found in *The Matrix*. But, instead of having a camera circling around the subject, this shot was used sparingly creating beautiful, long shots from hundreds of cameras.
- 3. Backlighting** A lighting technique where the main source of light is placed behind the subject. It is typically used to create a halo effect around the subject. But, backlighting can also be used to establish different moods by changing the position of the light source. Read Roger Deakins masterfully lensed *1917* hit *Blade Runner 2049*.
- 4. Bridging shot** True to its name, a bridging shot is used to connect two or more disparate moments in a story. They are integral to maintaining the pace of the film and can suggest a shift in time place. The classic example of this shot is the animated line drawn across a map to denote a character traveling from one place to another.
- 5. Over-the-shoulder shot** A shot where the camera is placed behind the subjects shoulder, usually during a conversation. Its used to imply a connection between the characters seen talking. This is in stark contrast with a single shot that suggests distance. The opening of *The Godfather* employs this shot rather effectively to convey confrontation.
- 6. Low angle shot** The low angle is an obverse of the high angle shot, wherein the camera is positioned below the characters eye-line. This gives the character a larger-than-life appearance and makes them look more powerful when compared to others in the scene.
- 7. High angle shot** The camera is placed high up so as to look down on a character or subject to convey essential information about a certain character. In a pivotal scene from *Titanic*, Cameron frames Kate Winslet from a high-angle against the vast ocean below making her look insignificant and not in control of her life as she debated jumping into the ocean.
- 8. Dutch angle** This technique involves tilting the camera to one side, creating a frame that is not level. A Dutch angle when done well can heighten dramatic tension, leaving viewers feeling slightly disoriented in the process. It can also be used to signify unrest in a character, evoking feelings of psychological distress. Christopher Nolan's *Inception* makes use of this shot to suggest an element of uncertainty to the proceedings.
- 9. Close up** A type of shot where the subject fills almost the entire frame. This helps to register facial expressions better. While information about the surroundings is lost, a close up helps viewers immerse themselves in the character better. It may also be used to draw attention to a specific symbol or recurring motif that may be important.
- 10. Medium shot** is when the camera is capturing a person from the waist up. Its commonly used to trace back to a dialogue between two or more characters. A medium shot is also termed as the sweet spot where the subject looks at a great length characters engaged in conversation along with the backdrop in which it's happening. It can thus audiences engage with characters on a personal level.
- 11. Long shot** A long shot/wide shot sets up the scene and establishes the character's location to it. It captures the full length of the subject along with some details of the background. The extensive use of long shots can sometimes denote a sense of separation from the film itself. A well-composed long shot can stand out in the minds of the viewer even after the end of the film.
- 12. Extreme close-up** This shot only frames the person's facial features, often so much that portions of the subject are cut off by the edges of the frame. You can choose to show specific parts of the body like the face, or go even closer to show an actor's eyes. Inanimate objects can also be framed using the extreme close-up shot. Think of a ticking bomb or a bullet shell ricocheting off against an object.
- 13. Extreme long shot** This is similar to a long shot but covers a wider area and the characters need not be visible in the frame. It works excellently to establish the location, like in the case of Quentin Tarantino's opening frame in *Inglourious Basterds*.
- 14. Eye level** A camera angle where the point of view is set at the eye-level of the subject in question. It helps feel as if we were a part of the scene and bring us into the story. An eye-level close up can help humanize the central character of the story.
- 15. Panning** A shot where the camera moves to the left or right of the vertical axis.
- 16. Tilting** A shot where the camera moves up or down on its horizontal axis.
- 17. Tracking, crane or dolly shot** This shot involves moving the camera throughout the scene for an extended period of time. They're often used to follow traveling subjects like *Butch* when he decides to go back for his watch in *Pulp Fiction*. It makes us feel the action as we're acutely aware of how high the stakes are.
- 18. Zoom** A zoom shot is an instance where the camera moves in and out of the frame by using a zoom lens instead of physically moving the camera. One can zoom into a character's face or zoom out to reveal a full element that was hidden from the frame a few seconds prior.
- 19. Handheld/Random motion shot** A shot where the camera operator holds the camera while moving to create a frenetic, jerky feel. They are generally used to heighten the intensity of a scene and bring us closer to the action. The case of *Saving Private Ryan*. There are a number of handheld shots in the jaw-dropping opening battle scene which manage to capture the inherent chaos of a war.
- 20. 360 Degree** A type of shot where the camera is made to revolve around the subject, hence the name. It was a technically demanding shot which has now been simplified due to the advent of drones. *The Matrix* uses 360-degree shot to create one of the most memorable sequences in movie history. The execution was extremely meticulous so a point where the film editors had the ability to adjust the speed and angle of the shot.
- 21. Compound motion** This is when multiple movements are combined to create a single cohesive shot. The two popular types are the dolly zoom and the single take. A shot where the camera tracks forward towards a subject while simultaneously zooming out. This dizzying effect was first made use of in Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. Movies like *Shawn of the Dead* soon followed suit. Here, multiple movements and camera angles are combined together to create one lengthened shot. When done right, a single take can successfully disorient the viewer as they're getting used to a newer setting.
- 1917** and *Birdman* are some of the popular movies that utilize this technique to create a more immersive environment.
- 22. Full shot** A full shot is a type of camera shot that captures the characters entire body from head to toe. Its typically used to capture the characters setting and context of the character. *Wes Anderson* uses the full shot frequently in all of his works. They serve to demonstrate the appearance of his idiosyncratic characters.
- 23. Cowboy shot** Framed from mid-thigh up, cowboy shot is called so because of its recurrent use in Westerns. The three-way standoff in the 1996 film *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* is a great example.
- 24. Choker** Considered to be a variant of the close-up, a choker shot is usually framed at just above the eyes and just below the mouth.
- 25. Establishing shot** Used to set up the context for a scene ahead and informs the viewer what the kind of action that will be taking place. They can also be used to show the passage of time like the use of *Hogwarts in Harry Potter* and under the same frame.
- 26. The subjects head not to move** One of the most important rules in cinematography is to keep the subject's head from moving. This is used to convey a strong emotional intensity of a scene and to focus on the character.
- 25. Whip Pan** A shot where the camera rotates around a central point of interest. An editors secret weapon, a cutaway shot is used to adjust the pace of the scene or even shift to a voice-over.
- 27. Cut-in** Similar to a cutaway shot except that it features a close-up of an object seen in the main scene. It can either be used purely as an edit point, or to emphasize motion. For instance, hand movements can depict feelings of enthusiasm, agitation or nervousness.
- 28. Master shot** A master shot is the recording of a scene in its entirety. Also called as a long shot, its a key element of film production into which additional scenes can be stitched together. Its generally the first shot to be checked off during the shoot of a scene as it serves to eliminate gaps in the edit by providing coverage.
- 29. Point of view (POV) shot** A shot that depicts the point of view of a character so that we see exactly what they see. They're often used in horror movies to put us in the shoes of a killer, giving us a glimpse of their emotional state.
- 30. Deep focus** A type of camera angle that allows the cinematographer to keep everything in perspective without favoring foreground, mid-ground, or background. It helps to capture all the crucial details in a shot. Director-cinematographer duo *Orson Welles-Gregg Toland* made extensive use of the deep focus technique.
- 31. Locked down shot** A locked down shot refers to a camera shot in which the camera is immobile whilst something else happens on screen. This shot is particularly useful in creating suspense for the audience due to the lack of information on what's happening in the scene.
- 32. Money shot** As the name suggests, this type of shot is deemed disproportionately expensive to produce. Its meant to startle the viewer momentarily. Think of the *White House blowing up* in *Independence Day*.
- 33. Steadicam shot** A steadicam shot is a variant of the handheld shot, employing a special harness that smoothes out the bumps and jerkiness associated with a typical handheld style. Initiated by *Garrett Brown* in the 70s, directors like *Stanley Kubrick*, *Martin Scorsese* and *Alfonso Cuarn* have taken a particular liking to it.
- 34. Two shot** A two shot features two characters in the same frame. Here, the camera is positioned in front of the characters and moves to follow their actions.
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Simply showing your significant other walking along the beach is not a story, its a visual love letter. A true story involves a main character striving to achieve something with the drama unfolding through the obstacles they encounter on their journey. Audiences crave an emotional experience. Hence, your main character has a clear goal and craft a narrative that includes several challenges or conflicts they must face, leading to a defined ending. Keep the story relatively simple and aligned with your movie budget, focusing more on actions than dialogue. While dialogue is important for exposition and providing necessary information about the characters and plot, it is generally more effective to show rather than tell. For example, a character expressing a desire to see the Taj Mahal is less impactful than showing their reaction upon seeing it. The audience wants to witness the emotion, making the experience more memorable and engaging. The Power of the Frame: Composition Techniques Understanding and mastering composition techniques can elevate an ordinary scene into a captivating moment, enhancing the visual storytelling prowess of any filmmaker. Here are some key Filmmaking Techniques to consider: a) Rule of Thirds: This rule of thirds is perhaps the most renowned composition technique. It involves dividing the frame into nine equal segments. Placing key elements along these lines or at their intersections creates balance and interest. b) Leading Lines: Using natural or artificial lines in a scene can direct the viewer's attention to a specific point or subject. This technique is especially useful in establishing shots or emphasizing a focal point. c) Symmetry: Symmetry can create a sense of harmony and beauty. Iconic in *Wes Anderson* films, symmetrical frames are also pleasing to the eye and impactful. d) Frame Within a Frame: Utilising elements like windows, doors, or arches can draw focus to a particular subject or scene, adding depth and layers to the shot. e) Negative Space: Embracing the empty areas in a frame can highlight the isolation or significance of a subject. This technique can also create a sense of scale or anticipation. f) Foreground Interest: Including elements in the foreground, such as depth, context, and layers to a scene, making it more dynamic and immersive. g) Golden Ratio: Often depicted as a spiral, is a composition technique that creates a naturally pleasing harmony and balance in the frame. h) Juxtaposition: Placing contrasting elements side by side can underscore differences or conflicts, providing a visual commentary without the need for dialogue. i) Unleash your cinematic potential with our Filmmaking Course sign up today! **Cinematography Techniques and Tips: Lighting the Scene** Mastering the lighting can profoundly elevate the visual storytelling of a Film, guiding viewers' emotions and enhancing the narrative's impact. This is one of the most essential Filmmaking Techniques that you must implement properly: a) Three-point Lighting: A foundational setup comprising key, fill, and backlight. 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