Composition and TV Field Production

So you want to be a star!

What a camera does

- Captures visual images.
- Converts them to electronic signals that can be transported and manipulated and eventually reconverted to new images displayed on the TV screen.

Video Formats

- 1/2-inch VHS -- consumer grade
- S-VHS
- Betacam -- most popular with TV stations.
  - Quality very good.

Video Formats

- 3/4-inch U-matic -- used in 1970s-80s.
- One-inch -- excellent slow-motion and still frames.
- 8mm/Hi-8 -- easily transportable.
- Digital -- high-quality.

Video advantages

- Recording is quick and easy.
- Videotape can be viewed immediately.
- Videotape is cheap; equipment is relatively inexpensive.
- Editing features widely available on camcorders.
- Duplicate copies are easy to make.

In-the-field uses

- Lighting, mini-cameras, videotape away from the studio.
  - Electronic news gathering (ENG)
  - Electronic field production (EFP)
Videotaping equipment
- Camcorder -- combo camera & recorder.
- Microphone
  - Lavaliere (clip-on)
  - Shotgun
  - Handheld
  - Wireless
- Tripod

Videotaping equipment
- Lights
- Headphones
- Monitor

Camcorder features
- Zoom lens
- Viewfinder
- White balance (most automatically)
- Batteries/power supply
- Auto-focus

Camera movements
- Panning -- left, right

Camera movements
- Tilting -- up, down
- Dollying -- physically moving close to or away from subject.
Camera movements
- Trucking -- movement parallel to subject
- Pedestalling -- raise or lower some portion of the camera mount.
- Zooming -- change in the focal length of the camera lens.

“To zoom or not to zoom”
- Save movements until you feel you need one.
- Needs to contribute to the continuity of your video.
- Don’t “zoom” (or pan or tilt) just to be doing it. Must be motivated.

Visual composition rules
- Good visual composition is essential to good visual communication.
- Avoid jump cuts.
- Pans, tilts and zooms must be motivated.
- Observe screen direction.
- The operator’s role is to function as part of the production team. Remain alert.

Camera perspectives
- Objective--Camera assumes role of an objective observer and watches to see what happens.
  - Supermarket surveillance cameras.
  - Television interviews--viewer is the objective person in the guise of a camera.

Camera perspectives
- Receptive--Camera is passive participant in what is happening.
  - A TV newscast--the anchorperson talks straight to the camera.
- Subjective--Camera becomes an actor in a drama or one of the drivers in a race.

Framing
- Framing the shot--camera user must decide what angle to shoot from and what portion of the scene to include in the shot.
Basic shots
- Long (or wide) shot (LS or WS) -- shows the object of interest in its surrounding or setting.
- Used to establish the setting in which something will happen.

Basic shots
- Medium shot (MS) -- bridges the gap between long shot and close-up. Arouses the viewer's curiosity.
- Close-up (CU) -- places attention on the object of interest.

Basic shots
- Extreme close-up (XCU/ECU) -- narrow perspective.
- Removes the surrounding elements from view and taken the broader context of the scene away.
- Over the shoulder (OTS) -- camera looks over the shoulder at another person.

Sequencing
- When telling a story, follow rule of long shot, medium shot, close-up.
- You achieve smoothness and avoid jumpcuts.

Composition
- Composition is part of the framing process.
- It involves the way the various elements within the frame are arranged.
- Some basics:
  - Centering
  - Angles

Centering
- Objects in the center hold the place of most prominence. (Like on a stage.)
- The eye looks first at the center of the area enclosed.
Angles

- Eye level -- flat angle shot
- High angle -- above the point of interest -- de-emphasizes
- Low angle -- looking up at the object -- magnifies
- Reverse angle -- gives both points of view -- used in interview situations
  - interviewee... reporter (smiling)... interviewee

Line of action

- Rule of 180 degrees.
- Don’t cross the line without a bridge.
- Reason why football games label it “Reverse Angle”

Headroom

- Objects near the edge of the frame tend to seem crowded.
- Allow a bit of extra space above a person’s head to avoid this appearance.

Nose or lead room

- Look into the picture.
- Also used in movement.

Rule of thirds

- Divide the TV screen into thirds horizontally and vertically. Place objects of interest at the intersections.
- Frame the shot so that the subject’s eyes are on the line dividing the upper third from the middle third.

Undesirable cutoffs--at a joint

- eyes, nose, mouth line
- chin
- bust
- waist
- hands (held at the side)
- hemline
Continuity

- Each scene bears a relationship to the one before it and after it.
  - Action should “flow.”
  - Need to shoot sequence of shots.
- Establish the scene with “establishing shot” (long shot).

Continuity

- Keep in mind:
  - Jump cuts
  - Screen direction
  - Cut-ins– close-up of something on screen.
  - Cutaways- cut to something not in the scene.
- Special effects
  - Dissolves/fades
  - Wipes

Techniques

- Documentary recording
  - Poor planning = poor documentary
  - May miss things
- Editing in the camera
  - Requires careful planning to acquire all the shots needed for the script.

Techniques

- Scripted and edited video
  - Planned action = good video.
  - Can shoot out of sequence and then edit at the end.

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