

Chapter Two

Understanding the Footage

QUESTION: Why should an editor be well versed in the various shot types?

ANSWER: Consider the individual shot types as the vocabulary — the visual phrases — used to edit together complete scenes in a motion picture. Knowing the “words” and their meaning will help an editor construct more meaningful visual sentences.

When you watch a stage play, a music concert, or a sports event in an actual public theatre, club, or stadium you generally only get to observe the actions of the performers from one static viewpoint — your seat. If any of these events were recorded and broadcast on television, the person watching at home, although missing out on the thrill of being at the live event, will benefit from having a more “intimate” viewing experience thanks to the event’s coverage by multiple cameras of varying positions and lens focal lengths. The person at home “sees” more views and details than the person at the actual event.

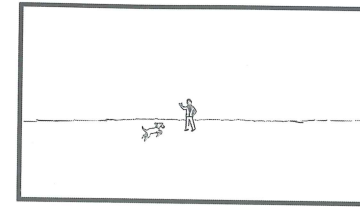
It is this same concept of coverage that allows people watching a motion picture to feel as though they are observing actual events unfolding before their eyes. They get to “see” more because the camera records the people, places, and actions from many different vantage points and with varying degrees of detail. The production team photographs all of the important action from what they consider to be the most advantageous and necessary points of view. Each one of these camera views is called a shot.

These shots, or individual units of visual information, are eventually given to the editor during post-production. Even though the editor had no control over which shots were recorded on the film set or how they were composed, it will be his or her job to review all of the material and choose the best viewpoints — pull the selects — and combine these various shots to show the audience the best visual presentation of the action in the story, whatever it may be.

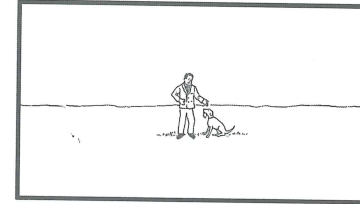
Basic Shot Types

Most editors only get involved with a project during post-production. Although many professional editors may have worked in production on a film set or in a studio at some point in their careers, it is not that common for them to work both production and post-production jobs. What is common, however, is the need for all editors to know certain production concepts and terminologies and be well-versed in the visual grammar of filmmaking. Knowing the basic shot types and how to best juxtapose them during the edit is a key responsibility for the editor. He or she must know how to best “show” the story. So as a review, we will present the following section which highlights and illustrates the main building blocks of film language — the basic shots.

- Extreme close-up (XCU or ECU)
- Big close-up (BCU)
- Close-up (CU)
- Medium close-up (MCU)
- Medium shot (MS)
- Medium long shot (MLS)
- Long shot (LS) or wide shot (WS)
- Very long shot (VLS)
- Extreme long shot (XLS or ELS)
- Two shot (2S)
- Over the shoulder (OTS)



Extreme Long Shot : XLS / ELS



Very Long Shot : VLS



Long Shot : LS



Medium Long Shot : MLS



Medium Shot : MS



Medium Close-Up : MCU



Close-Up : CU



Big Close-Up : BCU



Extreme Close-Up : XCU / ECU



2-Shot



Over-The-Shoulder

FIGURE 2.1 The extended family of film's basic shot types.

Shot Descriptions

The basic shot types can be used to record any subject or objects of varying sizes, but to keep the examples grounded in an easily understood relationship, we are going to mainly focus our attention on the framing of a human subject. It should then be pretty clear, based on the following shot descriptions, how to create similar framing when recording objects or **film space** devoid of human figures.

Extreme Close-Up (XCU or ECU)

1. Purely a detail shot. The framing favors one aspect of a subject such as his or her eyes, mouth, ear, or hand; may be a magnification of any object or item or merely just a part of an object or item.
2. Lacking any points of reference to the surrounding environment, the audience has no context in which to place this body part or object detail, so understanding will stem from how or when this shot is edited into the motion picture. It is often helpful, but not required, that the subject whose body detail is displayed in the XCU is shown before or after in a wider shot so context may be established for the viewer.
3. This type of extremely magnified imagery can be used in documentary work such as medical films or scientific studies, more fanciful projects like music videos and experimental art films, or it may be used sparingly in a fictional narrative story.

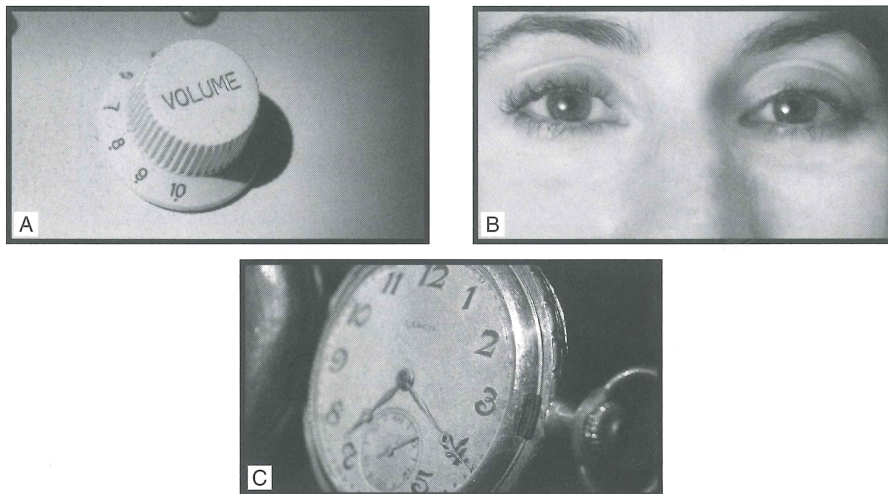


FIGURE 2.2 Examples of extreme close-up (XCU/ECU) shots.

Big Close-Up (BCU)

1. Human face occupies as much of the frame as possible and still shows the key features of eyes, nose, and mouth at once.
2. Such an intimate shot puts the audience directly in the face of the subject. Every detail of the face is highly visible, therefore facial movements or expressions need to be subtle. Very little head movement can be tolerated before the subject moves out of frame.
3. This shot is about who and how that “who” feels — angry, scared, romantic, etc.

Close-Up (CU)

1. Sometimes called a “head shot” because the framing is primarily the face, but it may cut off the top of the subject’s hair. The bottom of frame can begin anywhere just below the chin or with the neck and a little upper shoulder visible.
2. A very intimate full face shot of a human subject showing all detail in the eyes, mouth, and facial muscles of an actor. Health conditions and facial hair in men and make-up use in women are clearly visible.
3. An audience member should be totally focused on the human face with this framing.
4. This shot shows who but not so much where or when.

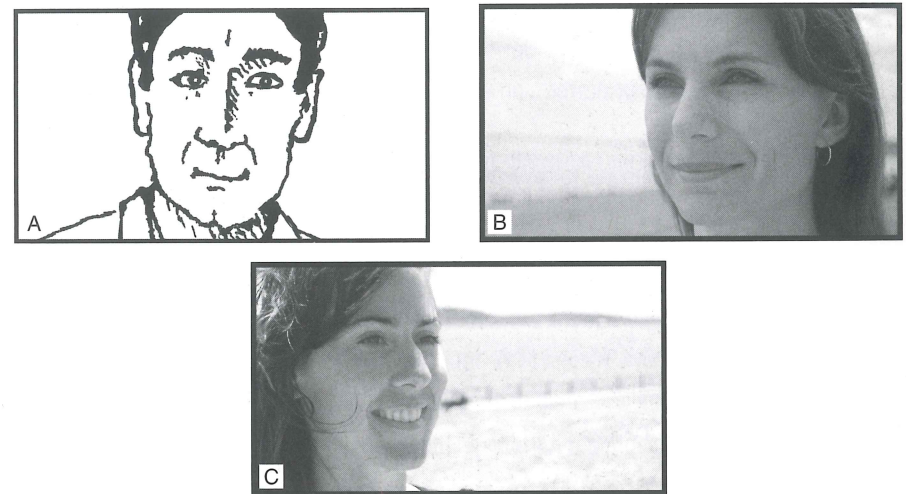


FIGURE 2.3 Examples of big close-up (BCU) shots.

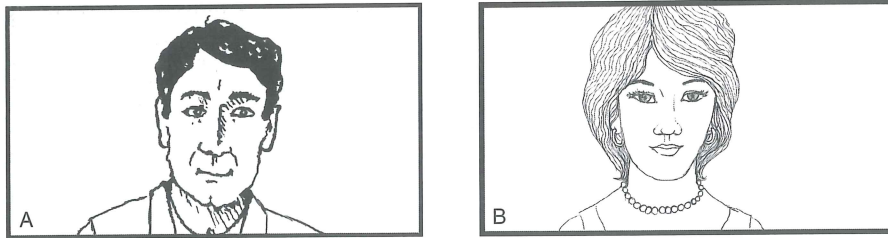


FIGURE 2.4 Examples of close-up (CU) shots.

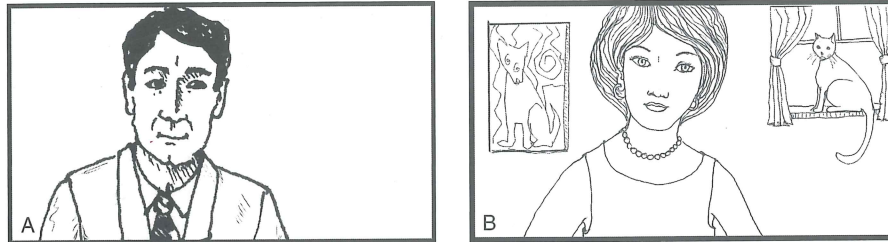


FIGURE 2.5 Examples of medium close-up (MCU) shots.

Medium Close-Up (MCU)

1. Sometimes called a “two-button” for the tight bottom frame cutting off at the chest, roughly where you would see the top two buttons on a shirt. Definitely cuts off above the elbow joint. Adjust bottom frame slightly for men or women depending on costuming.
2. Character’s facial features are rather clear. Where the eyes look is obvious, as is emotion, hair style and color, make-up, etc. This is one of the most common shots in filmmaking because it provides so much information about the character while speaking, listening, or performing an action that does not involve much body or head movement.
3. An audience is supposed to be watching the human face at this point in the framing so actions or objects in the surrounding environment should hold little to no importance.
4. Depending upon general lighting and costuming you may discern general information about where and when.

Medium Shot (MS)

1. May also be called the “waist” shot because the frame cuts off the human figure just below the waist and just above the wrists if arms are down at the side.

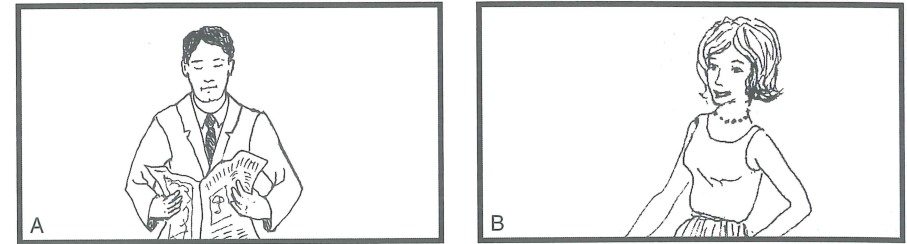


FIGURE 2.6 Examples of medium shots (MS).

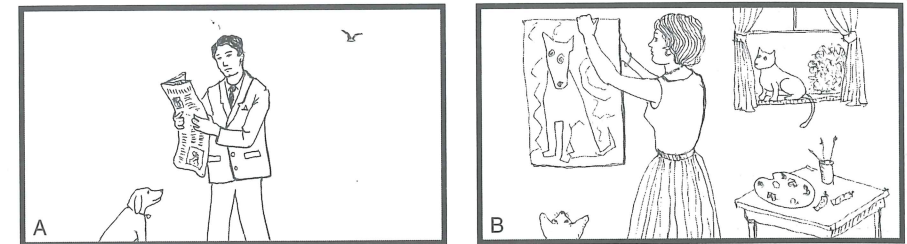


FIGURE 2.7 Examples of medium long shots (MLS).

2. Human torso is most prominent in the frame. However, eyes and the direction they look, clothing, and hair color and style are all plainly visible.
3. Subject movement may become a concern since the tighter framing restricts the freedom of gesture. Be careful not to **break frame** (have an actor’s body part touch or move beyond the established edge of the picture frame).
4. Certainly shows who and may provide generic detail about where (inside or outside, apartment, store, forest, etc.) and when (day or night, season).

Medium Long Shot (MLS)

1. First shot where surrounding environment occupies more screen space than the subject. Traditionally framed such that bottom of frame cuts off the leg either just below, or, more common, just above the knee. The choice for where to frame the leg may depend on costuming or body movement of the individual in the shot. If you cut bottom of frame above the knee, it is sometimes referred to as the “cowboy.” (In classical Hollywood Westerns, it was important to get the obligatory “six gun” strapped to the hero’s thigh in the shot.)
2. Human figure is prominent and details in clothing, gender, and facial expressions are visible.
3. Shows more of who than where and may still show when.

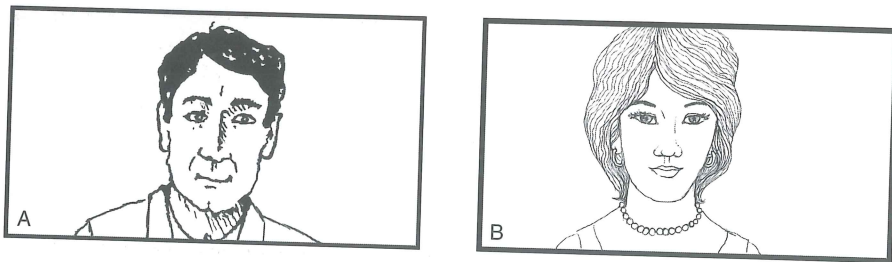


FIGURE 2.4 Examples of close-up (CU) shots.

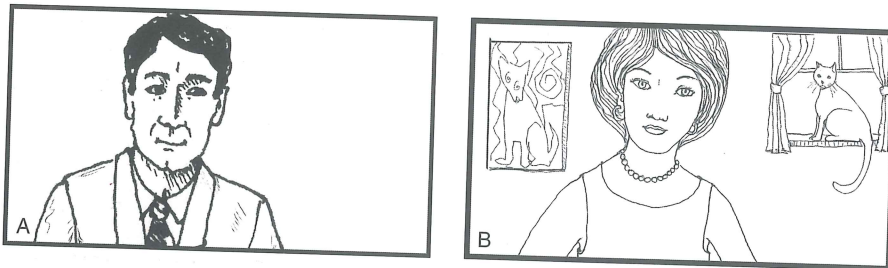


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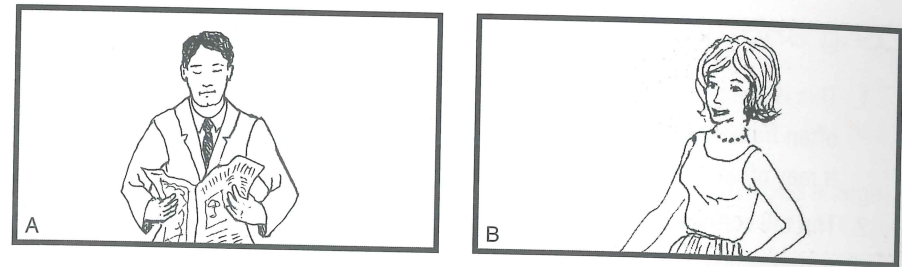


FIGURE 2.6 Examples of medium shots (MS).

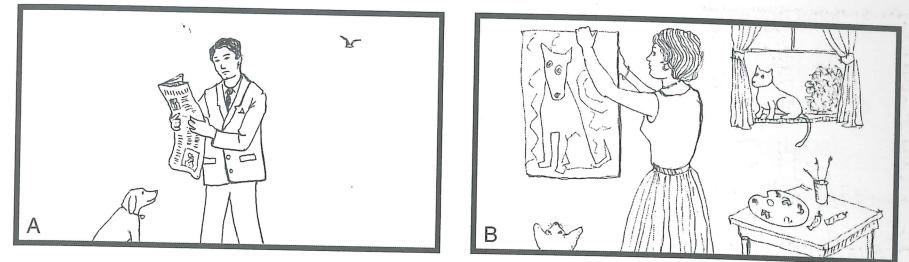


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2. Human figure is prominent and details in clothing, gender, and facial expressions are visible.
3. Shows more of who than where and may still show when.

Long Shot/Wide Shot (LS/WS)

1. This is usually considered a “full body” shot, wide but still in close to the figure often framing feet just above bottom of frame and head just below top of frame. It may often be noted as a generic wide shot (WS) as well.
2. The tall vertical line of the human figure attracts the viewer’s eye away from the surrounding environment; however, a fair amount of the character’s surroundings are still visible and should be considered in the composition.
3. May not work well for an **establishing shot** because it may not show enough of the environment to provide the required information to the audience.
4. Shows where, when, and who. The gender, clothing, movements, and general facial expressions may be seen but real facial detail is lacking.

Very Long Shot (VLS)

1. Proud member of the wide shot family.
2. May be used in **exterior** or **interior** shooting when enough width and height exist within the studio set or location building.
3. The human figure is visible but only generalities of race, mood, clothing, and hair may be observed. The environment within the film space dominates much of the screen.
4. May be used as an establishing shot where movement of character brings the figure closer to the camera during the action of the shot.
5. Shows where, when, and a bit of who.

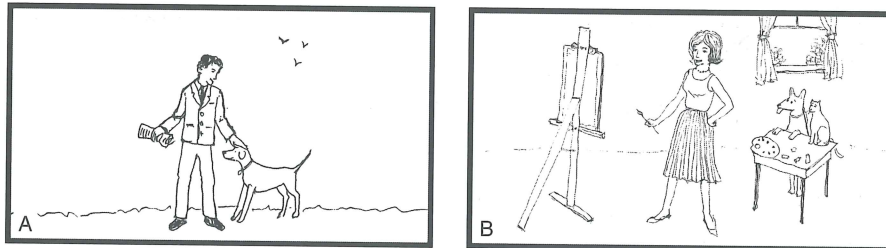


FIGURE 2.8 Examples of long shots (LS).

Extreme Long Shot (XLS/ELS)

1. Also referred to as a very wide shot or a very wide angle shot.
2. Traditionally used in exterior shooting.
3. Encompasses a large field of view, therefore forms an image that shows a large amount of the environment within the film space.
4. Often used as an establishing shot at the beginning of a motion picture or at the start of a new sequence within a motion picture.
5. Shows urban, suburban, rural, mountains, desert, ocean, etc.
6. May show day, night, summer, winter, spring, fall, distant past, past, present, future, etc.
7. May show the lone stranger walking into town or massive invading army. Most often the human figures in the XLS are so small that details are indistinguishable. General, not specific information will be conveyed.

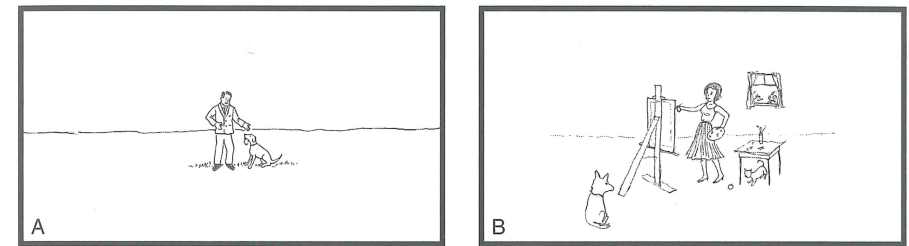


FIGURE 2.9 Examples of very long shots (VLS).

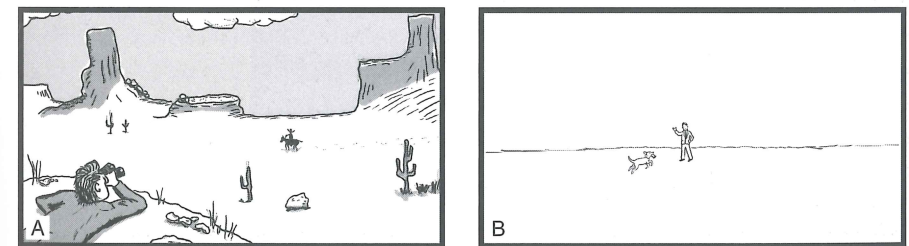


FIGURE 2.10 Examples of extreme long shots (ELS/XLS).

Simple Shots

- No lens movement
- No camera movement
- No mount movement
- Simple subject movement

Simple shots are just that — simple. They have no focal length changes (zooms). They have no tilting or panning actions. They show no camera body movement as with a dolly or a jib. They do show the subject move in simple ways across screen, standing, sitting, etc. The basic shot types, discussed earlier, are all covered from a particular angle, with a set focal length on the lens and a **locked-off** mount. Whatever simple action unfolds before the camera, it happens within that set and finite framing. Often, simple shots can make up the bulk of fictional narrative dialogue driven motion picture content.

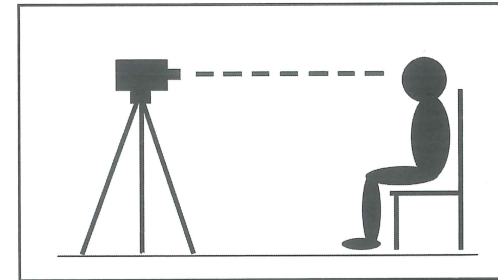


FIGURE 2.17 Simple shot with no lens, camera, or mounting movement but maybe talent movement.

Framing and Composition

Living at the cusp between a technical issue and an aesthetic issue is the framing of a shot. It can be considered technical in the sense that sometimes the format of the recording device (film or video camera) may be larger than the frame size for the final deliverable product. This is especially true these days when people shooting wide screen **16:9 high definition (HD)** may be looking to finish the show at a traditional aspect ratio of **4:3** for **standard definition (SD)** television. As an editor, you may be called upon to **reformat** the video frame (cut it down to a smaller size for TV or the Web), or perform what is called a **pan and scan**, where you take a wide screen camera original format and extract a smaller frame size from it while simultaneously panning left and right to maintain some semblance of good composition in the new, smaller image.

Aesthetic criteria for framing and composition have fewer immediate fixes. You will have to watch complex and developing shots for good focus, but also for good framing and proper composition. If an elaborate camera move bumps, jumps, sways, or in some way misses its mark while covering talent or action, then you should not consider using that particular take, or at least not that particular portion of that take. Again, during production, there are normally quality controls for reviewing each shot, and if they do not get it right they usually perform the shot again, so you should have at least one good choice for your edit, but not always. That is where creative cutting comes into play.

Of course, you will also wish to gauge the qualitative attributes of a shot. Is there appropriate **head room**? Is there appropriate **look room** or **looking room**? Is the **horizon line** parallel to the top and bottom edges of the frame (if it should be)? Is the vertical **camera angle** too high or too low? Is the horizontal camera angle too **subjective** or too **objective**? Does it work with the type of project you are editing? Very few of these other aesthetic shot qualities can be fixed by the editor (short of using some software effects to resize or rotate an image) so it might be best to place them on the back burner and use any other better takes.



FIGURE 2.23 (A–B) An example of an SDTV 4:3 extraction from an HDTV 16:9 widescreen image. (C) An example of a frame with good head room, look room, and a visible horizon line. (D–E) High and low angles on a subject. (F–G) Examples of subjective camera coverage and objective shooting style.

Screen Direction

This is mostly an issue with scripted fictional narrative footage, but it comes up in other genres as well. Talent or subject movement out of the frame of one shot and into the frame of another shot must maintain consistent screen direction. To clarify, frame left is screen left and frame right is screen right when watching the images. The film space itself, the world in which the characters live and move, must be considered as real space; therefore it is subject to the same rules of left, right, up, down, etc.

If shot A shows a character exiting frame left of a simple shot, then when you cut to shot B, the same character must be entering from frame right. The character's direction of movement within the film space must be consistent — right to left and right to left again. If you show a character exiting frame left in shot A, then show the same character entering from frame left in shot B, it will appear as though the character has simply turned around but is magically re-entering a different location. This will confuse your viewing audience and cause them to mentally recoil against the edit.

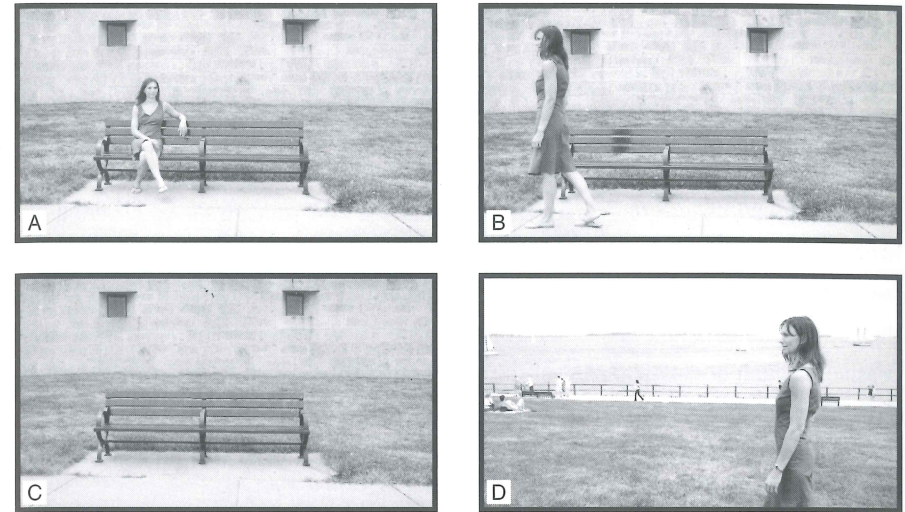
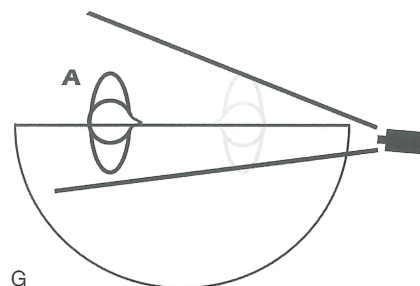
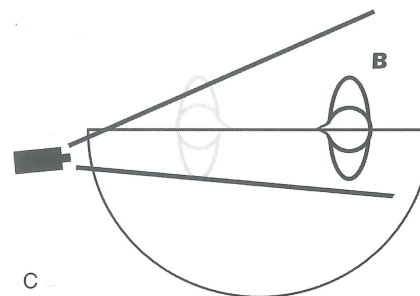
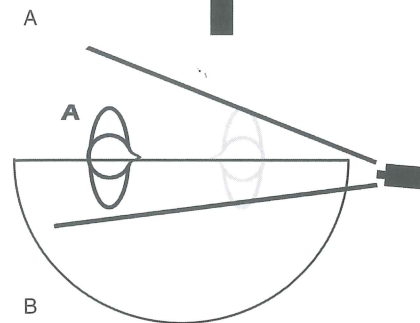
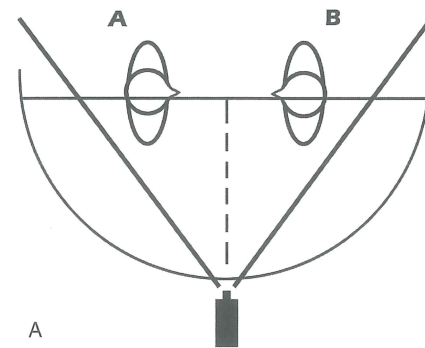


FIGURE 2.24 Maintaining screen direction of talent movement between shots helps orient the viewer within the film space.

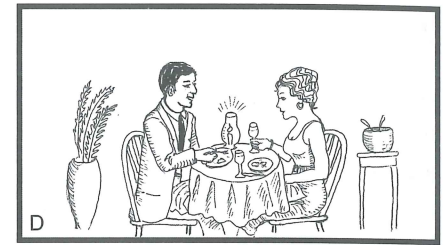
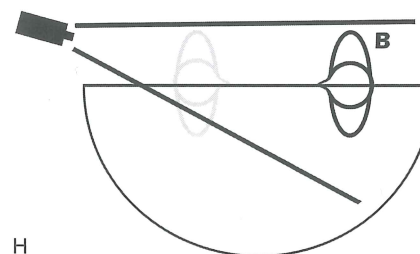
180 Degree Rule/Axis of Action

Continuing the logic of our **screen direction** discussion, you must also analyze the footage to make sure that the production team respected the **axis of action** or the **imaginary line** while they were shooting coverage for the various scenes. As a quick review, the 180 degree rule is established from the first camera set up covering the action of a scene, which is usually a wide shot showing the players and the environment. An imaginary line, following the direction of the talent's **sight line**, cuts across the set or location and it defines what is frame left and what is frame right. Each successive medium or close-up shot of the talent within the scene must all be set up on the same side of this **line of action** or else, to the viewing audience, the spatial relationships of the talent will be flipped left to right or right to left. Screen direction is maintained by shooting all the coverage from the one side of this line.

If you consider one of the alternate names for this practice, the **180 degree rule**, it might help clarify what is going on. When the camera crew photographs a two-person dialogue scene for the wide long shot, they have established the side of the room from which they will continue to shoot for the other, closer shots they will need for coverage. If you imagine a circle running around the central talent, then the camera can only operate within one-half of that full circle, or within a 180 degree arc. The imaginary line has bisected the full circle and made a semi-circle within which the camera can move for more shooting. Should the camera have been moved across the line to shoot an individual's close-up, that character, once edited into the scene, will appear to be turning and facing the opposite direction. This will look incorrect to the audience because the anomalous shot will break from the established screen directions for this scene. As a result, you really cannot edit in a shot that has **crossed the line**.



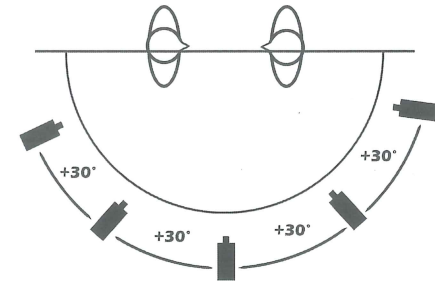
WRONG SIDE OF LINE



30 Degree Rule

Based around the concept of the 180 degree rule, the **30 degree rule** calls for the camera crew to move the camera around the 180 degree arc by at least 30 degrees before they set up for a new coverage shot of talent. The reason is simple. If two shots, say a medium long shot and a medium shot, of one person are shot from two locations around the 180 degree arc and the physical distance between camera set-ups is less than 30 degrees, then the two shots, when cut together by the editor, will look too similar and cause a “jump” in the mind of the viewer.

This is where the expression **jump cut** comes from. Without sufficient movement around the shooting arc, the viewpoint that the camera offers is too similar. If you have to edit these two similar shots together, the imagery will appear to suffer an immediate jump in space and possibly in time. The angles of coverage and the shot type must be different enough to allow a believable alteration in view points across the cut. As the editor, you cannot control where the camera was placed for the close-up coverage, but you do have control over what two shots you juxtapose together at a cut point, provided there are more than two angles of coverage. Make sure that the two shots are sufficiently different enough in **angle on action** so they do not appear to “jump” while viewing them together.



A



B



C

FIGURE 2.26 It is best to edit coverage shots whose individual angles on action are greater than 30 degrees apart along the 180 degree arc. If the camera angles covering the action are too similar, as in this example, the audience will perceive the edit as a jump cut.

Continuity of Action

We will discuss this in greater detail later in the book, but it is a topic that frustrates many editors. The action performed by or around the talent in one shot must match, relatively exactly, the same action performed in a different angle within the same scene. Humans are very good about determining fluidity of motion. When things do not flow — when supposedly continuous actions do not match across a cut point — it is easily noticed (see Figure 2.29). Your job will be to finesse these action cuts as best as possible. Unless there is an obvious glitch in one entire shot, you may not be able to tell that action is not matching until after the footage review stage. Save all the good takes and see which ones eventually cut best with one another.

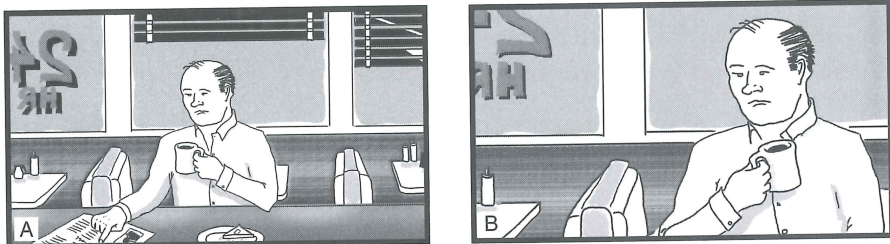
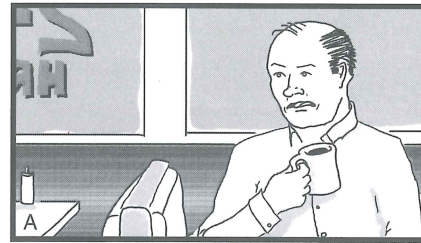


FIGURE 2.29 Be watchful of continuity issues within the shots you are considering for the edit. Here, the coffee mug jumps hands across the cut point.

Continuity of Dialogue

Be aware of line delivery when reviewing the footage. Does the talent say different words from take to take and shot to shot? Is there a different timbre in the voice or a modified rate of delivery? Some of these issues may be cut around by laying in different audio from alternate takes and so forth, but sometimes things just will not match. As with most audio issues, there may be a way around them for a fix, so keep the footage for later use, but try to separate out all the best and most usable takes first.

Dialogue: "I said no sugar."



Dialogue: "I said no cream."



FIGURE 2.30 Lines of dialogue that stray from the script may still be used or even replaced.

Performance

Performance is certainly an issue that the editor has absolutely no control over, except for deciding which performance works best in the edited story. You cannot fix bad acting or bad direction of good actors. You can only try to hide it or mask it as much as possible. Sometimes there just is nothing else to cut to and there are no “better” takes to use. Cut in what you think works best for the overall scene, grin and bear it, and move on. If the talent performance is actually very strong but their ability to match their **business** (holding a glass or cigar, brushing their hair, etc.) is what makes a certain take less appealing, be ready to cut in the best performance and let the discontinuity of the little business ride.

Be Familiar with All of the Footage

Reviewing and assessing the footage for quality issues and gauging useability at the very beginning of the editing process actually serve a two-fold purpose. Obviously this will help you “pull the selects” or set aside your best shots for use in the assembly edit. It also forces you to become familiar with all of the footage shot for the project. This is exceedingly important because it will be your job to know what options you have during the cutting process.

For scripted fictional narrative stories, you are guided by the script and footage usually matches that closely. Use the best of what you have to follow the script’s framework. As the editor, though, you are often given the ability to rework entire scene order and restructure the story a bit differently than what the script called for originally. You are paid for your storytelling abilities, not just as an assembly monkey. Additionally, if you are working with documentary, news, or even “reality” TV footage, you will have to be rather familiar with everything that is shown (the actions or **B-roll**) and with everything that is said (interviews and so forth). You never know which piece of footage will turn a good edit into a great edit. As you begin to frame the story during the edit, the footage itself helps give it form, direction, influence, etc. An editor familiar with all of his or her building blocks can construct a better project.

So How Does All of This Help You?

The job of the editor goes well beyond just slapping together a few pictures and sounds with a song and a title or two. The editor is the person at the end of the creativity chain who takes all that has been done before (all the production footage, etc.) and puts it together in such a way that it makes sense, tells a story, gives information and/or entertains. An editor is a storyteller who also has to possess technical knowledge, not just of the editing tools he or she uses to conduct the edit, but also of film language — the grammar of the shots.

This chapter has presented you with a review of the simple shot types (i.e., long shot, extreme close-up, etc.), what they look like, and how they may be understood by the viewing audience. These basic shots evolve into complex and developing shots as soon as the production team ups the ante and introduces zooms, pans, dolly moves, and so forth. You have also become familiar with a short list of criteria upon which to base your judgments of “good” or “no good” where the footage is concerned. Knowing what not to use in your edited piece is almost as important as knowing what to put in it. Understanding film language and the ability to scan footage for compromising quality issues are important first steps in becoming a good editor.

End of Chapter Two Review

1. Coverage provides the editor with different views of the same actions for better choices of showing the scene unfold.
2. The basic shot types are extreme close-up, big close-up, close-up, medium close-up, medium shot, medium long shot, long shot, very long shot, extreme long shot, two-shot, and over-the-shoulder shot.
3. Simple shots with only small subject movement become complex shots when there is a zoom or a pan/tilt action. Complex shots become developing shots when you add camera mount movement as well as more elaborate subject movement.
4. Reviewing your footage for best technical and aesthetic qualities will help you pull your selections for the assemble edit.

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Chapter Three

When to Cut and Why?

QUESTION: Is there ever a right way or a wrong way to make an edit?

ANSWER: Yes and no.

Editing a motion picture is more than just assembling a bunch of shots one after the other. It involves the creative placement of various picture and sound elements such that when the entire package is viewed by an audience it is able to impart information, entertain, or inspire. This last statement really highlights a fundamental aspect of any motion picture (whether it is a feature film, a TV commercial, a situation comedy, a music video, etc.). The main purpose behind any edited project is for it to be shown to an audience. So as an editor, you are tasked with crafting an experience that will impact a viewer in whatever way the producers of the project intend.

The material for the project was written with an audience in mind, the footage was recorded with an audience in mind, and you must edit it together with an audience in mind. And this is not just any audience, but the specific audience that the project is targeting. A movie about the pranks at a college fraternity may not be seen by the same people who would watch a documentary about late nineteenth-century North American textile mills. Understanding audience expectations and their degree of involvement in the program will be an excellent skill to develop during your editing career. Anticipating the needs of the viewer will go a long way toward aiding your approach to editing the material.

Of course, different genres of motion pictures, different genres of television programming, etc., may all require different editorial approaches. Different content and different target audiences will necessitate different editing styles, techniques, effects, and so forth. While you are starting out on your filmmaking journey and your editing career path, you should be watching any and all of these motion image products so you can begin to see how they are treated, the common approaches, the presence or lack of certain aspects or elements, and so on. Over time, you will most likely develop a solid interest and rather strong skill set in just one of the programming formats (commercials, documentaries, feature films, news, etc.) and you will do the majority of your editing in that genre.

But before we get embroiled in such specifics about the future job you might have, let us return to the goal of our book, which is discussing the basic grammar of the edit. Although it is true that different editing jobs will call for different editing techniques, it is also true that there are some common attributes to most styles of editing. These common attributes are the elements that your viewing audience (including yourself) will look for when watching a motion picture. People are rarely conscious of these elements, but through viewing film and television imagery over time, they subconsciously know how to “read” certain edits and they can easily decipher meaning in the flow of images across the screen. So just as the basic shot types have meaning in the language of film, how an editor strings those shots together in the motion picture also has meaning to the viewer. There is a grammar of the edit.

What Factors Help Make a Transition a Good Edit?

In Chapter One we introduced the four major types of transitions that are used at a cut point in a motion picture: cut, dissolve, wipe, and fade. Each one of these transition types enables the editor to move from one shot to the next. We will discuss what may cause an editor to choose from one of these four transition types in the next chapter, but for now, let us explore something even more basic. What factors or elements compel an editor to want to make an edit in the first place? Why cut from one shot to another very particular shot at that very moment in time?

The following list is meant to serve as a jumping off point. These criteria are some of the major reasons for considering a cut when dealing with most material, but, as with many moments in the filmmaking process, other factors not mentioned here may come into play. Using this list will put you in very good shape when editing decisions need to be made.

- Information
- Motivation
- Shot composition
- Camera angle
- Continuity
- Sound

Information

A new shot should always present some new information to the viewer. In a motion picture, this may primarily be visual information (a new character entering a scene, a different location shown, an event whose meaning is not quite known yet, etc.), but it may also be aural (**voice-over narration**, the clatter of horse hooves, a speech, etc.). A smart editor will ask himself several questions: What *would* the audience like to see next? What *should* the audience see next? What *can't* the audience see next? What do *I wish* for the audience to see next?

Remember, one of the many tasks set up for the editor is to engage the audience both emotionally (to make them laugh, cry, scream in fright, etc.) and mentally (to make them think, guess, anticipate, etc.). Asking the previous questions can generate clever or less-than-straightforward ways of showing the same story. In a mystery you may purposefully show misleading information and in a romantic melodrama you may show the audience information that the characters do not yet know. Regardless of the kind of information presented, the fact that it is there to engage the audience, get them involved, and get them thinking helps keep them interested in the motion picture. When an audience member is thinking and feeling they are not paying attention to the physical act of the edit and this engagement helps keep the movie running strong and smooth. It also means that the editor has done his or her job well.

It must be understood then that this element of new information is basic to all editing choices. Whenever one cuts from one shot to another, one has to ask that if there is no new information in the shot that is being cut to, then why is it being cut to. Is there a

better choice? Is there another shot perhaps, from the same scene, which does provide new information and fits into the story as required? No matter how beautiful, cool, or expensive a shot may be, if it does not add new information to the progression of the story, then it may not belong in the final edit.

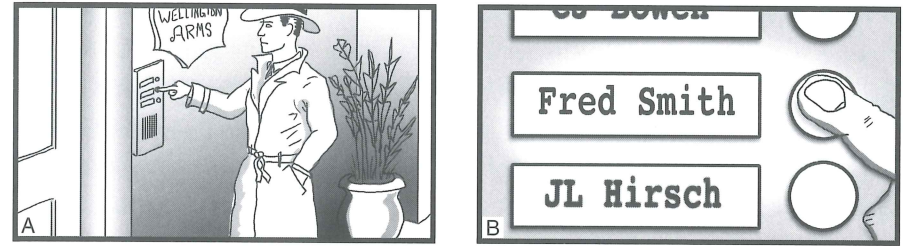


FIGURE 3.1 Each shot presented to the audience should be providing them with new information about the story to keep them engaged and attentive.

Motivation

The new shot you cut to should provide new information, but what about the shot that you are cutting away from? What is the reason to leave that shot? When is a good time to leave that shot? There should always be a motivation for making a transition away from a shot. This motivation can be either visual or aural.

In picture terms, the motivating element is often some kind of movement by a subject or an object in the current shot. It could be as grand as a car jumping over a river, or as simple as a small movement of a face. Perhaps a character in close-up only moves his eyes slightly to the left as if looking at something off-screen. Editing logic would hold that you could then cut away from his close-up and cut to the object of his interest. The motivation to cut away comes from the movement of the actor's eyes. The reason for cutting to the next specific shot, let us say of a cat, is to provide the audience with new information. It shows them what the man is looking at.

If you wish to use sound as a motivating element, then you would need to address the editing of both picture and sound tracks more precisely near that transition. In its most simplistic usage, the sound could be generated by something visible in the shot currently on the screen. As an example, a man standing in a kitchen in a medium long shot (MLS) watches a tea kettle on the stove. The kettle begins to whistle. The sound of the whistle starting in the MLS can motivate a cut to a close-up of the tea kettle showing steam shooting up from the spout causing the louder whistle (see Figure 3.2). It should be noted that because the close-up shot actually magnifies the visual size and importance of the tea kettle, it can be appropriate to raise the volume on the sound of the whistle in your audio track as well. This lets the size of the visual object influence the volume level of the sound that object is producing.

Changing this scenario slightly, let us now say that the man is sitting at his dining room table in a medium shot. The tea kettle begins to whistle but the tea kettle is not visible within this medium shot's frame. You may then cut to the same close-up of the tea kettle that we used in the previous example, again with a louder whistle on the new shot's audio track. In this case, the audience will accept the domestic whistle sound of the tea kettle even though they do not see the tea kettle. The pay off, and new information, comes when you cut to the close-up of the tea kettle proper. The audience does not notice the transition from one shot to the next because they are processing the information and it makes sense in their knowable universe.

A third and more advanced way of using audio as a transition motivator is rather conceptual in its design. An editor may create what is called a **sound bridge**. A sound, seemingly generated by something not seen or known to the audience, begins under shot one. It motivates the transition into shot two, where the origin of the strange sound is **revealed**. To modify our tea kettle example slightly, let us say that we are seeing the man in the kitchen with the tea kettle in the MLS. The audience begins to hear what they may interpret as the tea kettle whistling. This motivates the cut to a shot of an old steam engine train's whistle blowing. The sound of the train whistle acted as a motivator to leave shot one and it acted as a bridge transitioning the viewer into the new information and new location of shot two. The audience does not notice the unexpected transition because the new visuals of the train whistling give them information to process and it follows a knowable logic (see Figure 3.4E and F).

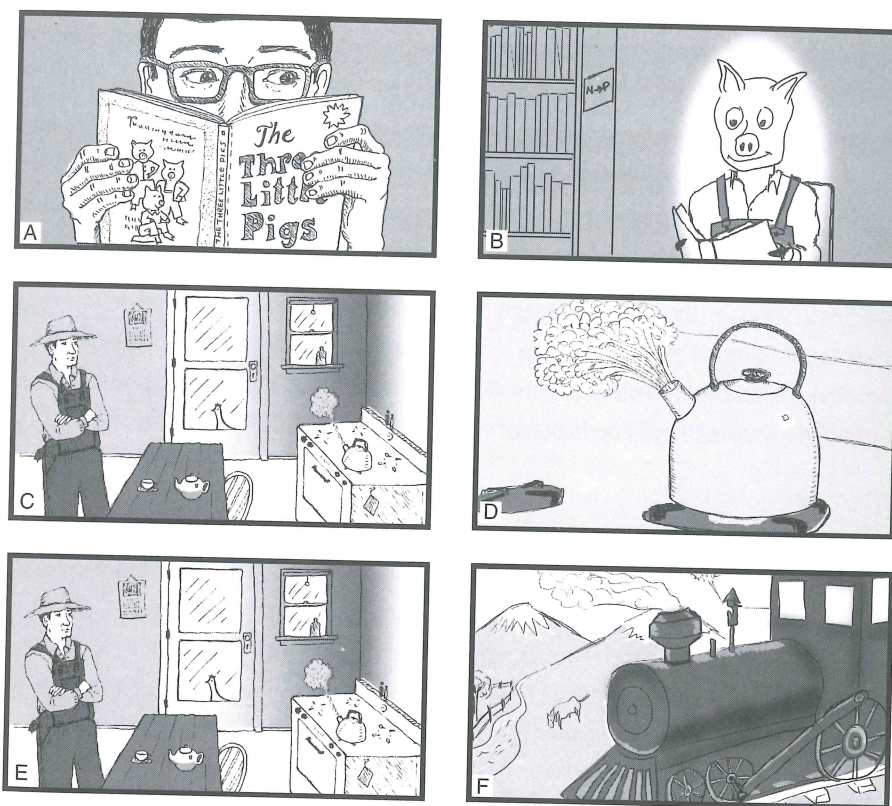


FIGURE 3.2 (A–B) Motivation for the cut comes from the movement of the man's eyes. (C–D) Motivation for the cut comes from the audio track of the tea kettle whistling. (E–F) Motivation of the cut to new information, new location comes from the sound bridge of the train whistle beginning under shot one and carrying the viewer along into shot two.

Shot Composition

Although the editor cannot control the composition of visual elements in the shots that he or she is given to edit, the editor can certainly choose what two shots get cut together at a transition. Provided the correct composition is in the visual material, the editor can help make the viewing of these images more engaging for the audience member. In its easiest form, an editor's choice can be to simply edit in all the footage from one beautifully composed and recorded shot — simple, complex or developing. The beautiful, well-balanced shot was designed to be a show piece, it looks great and plays well once cut into the program. The audience is given the time to appreciate the shot for what it is as it unfolds in its entirety, and their experience is enhanced. Everybody is happy.

Another simple technique is to take two basic but properly composed shots and transition them one after the other. A two-person dialogue presents the perfect scenario to demonstrate this. Your scene starts with a wide shot of two people having a discussion sitting across the table from one another. As character A speaks you cut to a medium close-up of character A. He is sitting frame left with his look room open across frame right. Now as audiences have grown to expect, you will wish to cut away to character B listening. You do cut to a matching medium close-up of character B. She is sitting over on frame right with her open look room across frame left.

Even though you in no way created the individual medium close-up (MCU) shot compositions, you use the alternate placement of characters frame left and frame right to generate interest in the audience members and cause them to stay engaged with the progression of the motion picture. As you cut from MCU to MCU, the audience is getting to experience eye-line match or eye trace.

When a viewer is watching character A speak over on frame left, their attention is over on frame left. They are aware, however, that character A's attention is actually across the screen over on frame right. When the cut to character B comes, the audience traces character A's eye-line across the empty screen and rests upon the new face of character B over on frame right. The compositional placement of character B should be in such a place as to match the eye-line from character A, so the audience is rewarded for following the eye trace across the screen and across the edit.

Like a tennis ball bouncing back and forth across the court, the eyes of the viewing audience will travel back and forth across the screen seeking the new information from each character as you cut from one shot composition to the other. You want to

engage the audience's eye trace without making them search too hard for the next bit of information. Subtle searches will keep the viewing experience interesting, but more elaborate searches may only serve to make it more confusing. Beautiful and multi-layered shot compositions can look great on screen, but be aware of how you cut into and out of them and think of how the audience will locate the new, important information within the more complex visual environment.

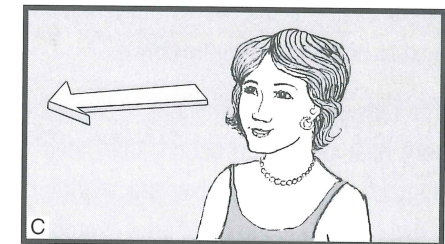
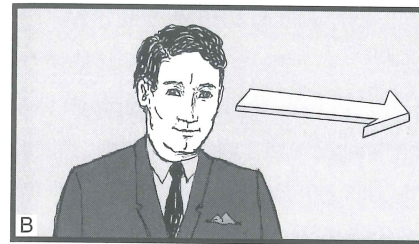
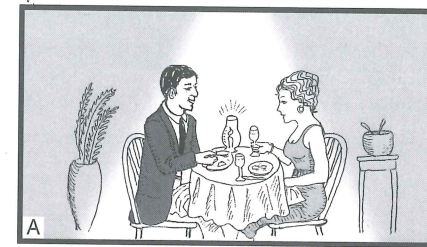


FIGURE 3.3 Even traditional compositions like these engage the viewers by asking them to trace the matching eye-line across the empty look room on screen.

Camera Angle

In Chapter Two, we discussed how to review your footage and watch out for shots that may have been taken from two positions on set less than 30 degrees around the 180 degree arc of the action line. This is one of the key elements of a shot that will help you determine if it could or should be cut next to another shot. There has to be reasonable difference in the camera angle on action for two shots to be “comfortably” edited together.

When the shooting coverage is planned for a scene, certain camera placements or camera angles are considered to be the most advantageous, and they are the shots eventually undertaken by the camera crew. Due to factors of time and money, only certain shot types from certain angles will be recorded and the production team tries to fit the most information into the fewest, but best looking frames that they can. But an editor will never know from where around the 180 degree arc the camera was placed to record the actions of the scene until he or she reviews the footage. The editor can only do his or her best to place shots of differing horizontal angles (greater than 30 degrees apart) next to one another in the edit.

The reason for this is simple. If two shots are recorded with similar framing from two, very near angles on action, then their resulting images will look too similar to one another, even though they are slightly different. This similarity will register with the viewer as he or she watches the program and it may appear to the eye like there is a glitch or a **jump** in the image at the cut point.



FIGURE 3.4 Editing together two shots of similar camera angles will cause a jump at the cut point. Differing

The expression, **jump cut**, is used frequently in the analysis of editing for motion pictures. In this case, as in most, it simply refers to the fact that while watching the motion images, the viewer perceives a jump, a glitch, or extremely brief interruption or alteration to the pictures shown. In our current example of two shots with angles on action that are too close, we will find that the images of shot one and shot two are too similar in their appearance. The audience will not see them as providing sufficiently different views on the same information. The image in their eyes will merely jump, which they will consciously notice and as a result it will serve to pull them out of the viewing experience, which is something that the editor should almost always try to prevent.

Continuity

Providing smooth, seamless **continuity** across transitions is a very important element to keeping your edits unnoticed by the viewer. Once again, editors are not responsible for the quality of the footage that they are given, but they are responsible for massaging that material into the best motion picture possible. If the production team and talent did not provide the correct visual performances to transition with smooth continuity, it will be the editor's job to make up for that deficiency in some way in the editing. And to make matters more interesting, there are actually several different forms of continuity that need to be addressed at various points throughout the editing process. Let us take a look.

Continuity of Content

Actions performed by the on-camera talent must match from one shot to the next. Because actors are obliged to make the same actions from one take to the next, and from one camera set-up framing to another, for each shot covered in the scene, one hopes that they did the same thing over and over and over. This is not necessarily always the way it is. The continuity of content must be watched for but may not be easily fixed.

As an example, if the family dog is sitting in a chair during the wide shot of a dinner table scene, then the dog should also be seen in the tighter shots used to show the remainder of the scene. If the dog had been taken off set and there were no other shots with the dog sitting at the table with the family, then, as the editor, you get to make a choice. Do you begin the family dinner scene without the wide establishing shot that shows the dog? Perhaps you start the scene on a close-up of the character speaking the first line. Perhaps you start with a close-up of a plate of food, then move out to a two- or three-shot. Additionally, you have the option of showing the dog in the wide shot and then laying in the sound effect of the dog walking away on the hardwood or linoleum flooring while you show the tighter shots of the family without the dog at the table. Perhaps you cut in a shot of the dog lying on the floor in a different part of the house. Regardless of your approach, you are searching for a solution to a continuity problem.

If a man picks up a telephone in an MLS using his right hand, then the telephone device should still be in his right hand when you next transition into an MCU of him speaking on the phone. If, for whatever reason, the production team did not provide any shots of the man with the phone in his right hand, but only in his left, then you would have to **cut away** to some other shot after the MLS and before the phone-in-left-hand MCU. This will give the audience enough of a break from continuous action so that they can believe the man

In this case, the cut-away is any brief shot that will provide the appropriate distraction and time filler to allow the audience to make the leap in logic of object continuity adjustment (see Figure 3.5).

So either the footage already contains the proper material to edit with the correct continuity of content, or the editor must create some means of hiding, masking, or "explaining" the visual incongruity. No matter the approach taken, the audience must remain ignorant of the issue or else you run the risk of breaking their belief in the filmed illusion. In this respect, editors are rather like magicians or illusionists purposefully distracting the eyes of the audience to cover the trick of the edit.

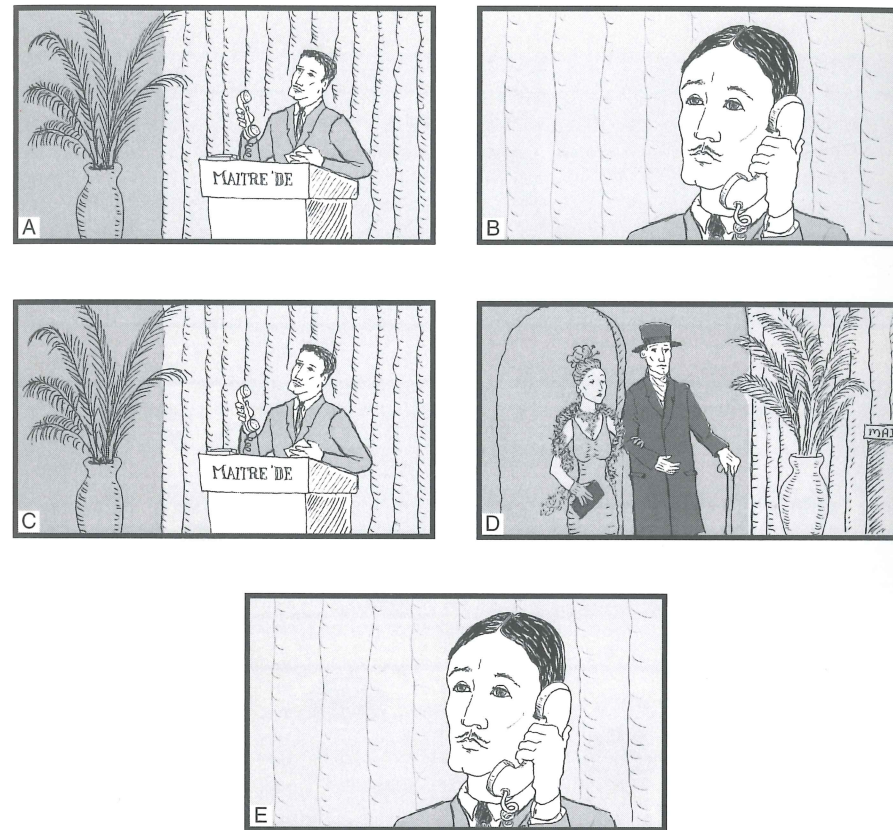


FIGURE 3.5 Using a cut-away shot may provide the requisite break from action so that the audience does not consciously notice the discontinuity of the telephone in the man's hand.

Continuity of Movement

Screen direction is the movement of talent or objects toward frame right or frame left. This must be maintained as you transition from one shot to the next, if the next shot still covers the same movement of talent or objects. The production team should have respected the scene's screen direction and the 180 degree rule during the shooting of coverage. If they did not, and the shot that you would like to use next that continues your talent's movement contradicts the already established screen direction, then you will have to **insert** a logical shot that will continue the narrative and still provide a visual break from the discontinuity of movement. This other shot, of whatever material you have that fits the narrative flow, will offer the audience a break to allow the character time to reverse his direction in the third shot continuing the previous action.



FIGURE 3.6 (A–B) Talent movement should maintain screen direction across the edit point. (C–E) If you wish to cut together two shots that reverse screen direction, then it may be advisable to use an insert shot to break the

Continuity of Position

Since the film space has direction as noted above, it also must have a sense of place. Talent subjects or physical objects within the frame occupy a certain space within the film world as well. It is important for the editor to string together shots where that subject or object placement is maintained continuously. If an actor is shown frame right in shot one, then he must be somewhere on frame right in any subsequent shots during that scene. Of course, if the actor physically moves, during the shot, to a different location within the film space then it is logical to show him on a new side of the frame. Cutting together two shots that cause the subject or object to jump from one side of the screen to the other will distract the viewer and the illusion of smooth editing will be broken.



FIGURE 3.7 The physical position of objects within the film space and the shot composition should stay consistent across edit points. This woman appears to jump from screen left to screen right after the cut to the other character.

Continuity of Sound

The continuity of sound and its perspective is of critical importance. If the action of the scene is happening in the same place and at the same time, then the sound will continue from one shot to the next. If there is an airplane in the sky in the first shot, and it can be seen and heard by the viewer, then the sound of that airplane should carry over across the transition into the next shot from that scene. Even if the airplane is not seen in the next shot of this sequence, the sound of it would still be audible to the characters; therefore it should still be represented to the viewing audience as well.

Sound levels for voices and objects should be consistent throughout an edited scene. Changes in object distances from camera, within the film space, should also be accounted for through raising or lowering volume levels in the audio mix for those shots. Perspective increase or drop off should be represented.

Additionally, all spaces have a background noise level. It may be soft, deep, high, or loud depending on the environment depicted on screen. This ever present layer of sound is commonly called **ambience**, but it may also be referred to as **atmosphere** or **natural sound (nats** for short). It is responsible for creating a bed of consistent audio tone over which the dialogue and other more prominent sound effects and so forth are placed. This extra, uninterrupted sound bed is either lifted from the production audio recordings (sometimes called **room tone**), or it is generated by an editor or **sound design** person from other sources. This ambience track helps smooth out audio transitions when you cut from one shot within a scene to another.

Sound

Because there are too many potential topics, we will consider sound as our last major “good edit” factor or element. Entire books are written on the subject of sound editing in movies and television and awards are presented to people who do it well. We will simply scratch the surface of the topic to provide you with a basis for ideas and plenty of food for thought.

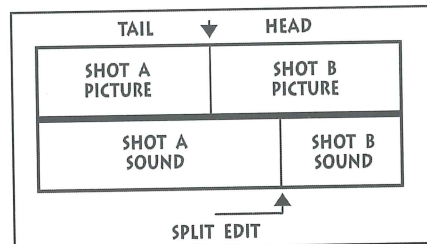
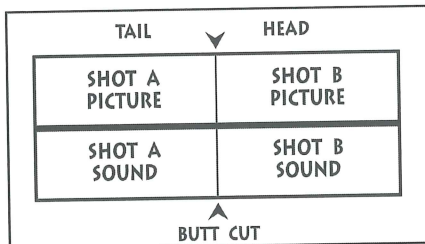
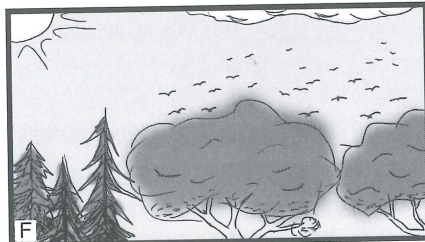
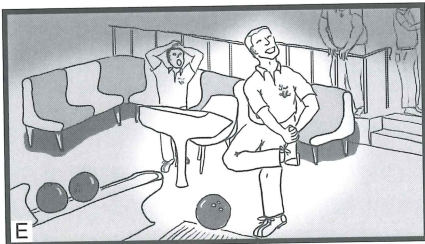
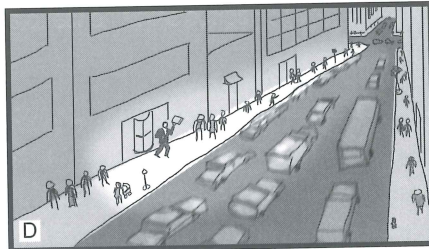
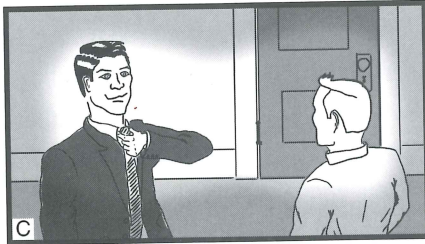
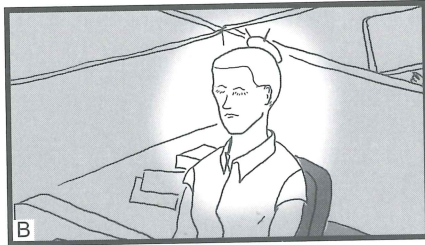
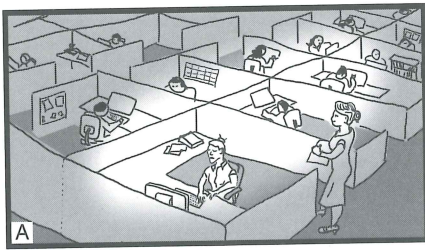
Earlier we discussed the tea kettle scenario as a motivator for the edit. Beyond being a source for motivation, the sound track can also be a great way to comment on something within the film or to juxtapose messages within the film; for example, a woman is seen sitting in a noisy business office in a long shot. There is a cut to her in an MCU. One would expect the noisy business office ambience to continue to be heard under the new MCU of the woman. If the audience is not presented that continuity of audio, they

What if the same scenario occurs except this time there is no office noise after the cut? The only thing to be heard is dreamy, ethereal music that seems to match the calm look on the woman’s face. This peaceful music is her internal sound track. The audience is given new information about the internal mental or emotional state of this woman. Somehow, within all of the office craziness, she is staying calm and collected. The editor used sound to draw positive attention to the transition through providing the audience, and the woman, with a break from the office noises (see Figure 3.8).

Alternately, sound can make a statement that goes against the visuals being presented to the viewer; for example, you have an interior shot of a man who tells his friend that he is “going to hunt for a job.” The roar of a lion is heard on the sound track and the transition takes the picture to a wide shot of a crowded, bustling city street during commuter rush hour. Animal noises are mixed in the sound track with the busy street ambience. The character from the previous shot, the job hunter, is now out in the wild on the hunt for a new job. An audience would not normally accept the animal sounds played while watching a busy city street, but because it follows the context of the job hunt, the inappropriate animal sounds actually become story-enhancing sounds (see Figure 3.8).

As with our train whistle example earlier, the lion’s roar scenario presents another sound bridge. The roar takes us from one shot into another. In these examples, the sound of the next shot is heard before the picture of the next shot. We call this sound leading picture. The opposite holds true as well. You may have the sound of shot one carry under the newly visible picture of shot two. We call this picture leading sound. Perhaps you have a wide shot of a man dropping a bowling ball on his foot. As he yelps in surprise, you cut to an extreme long shot of the tops of trees in the forest. As the sound of his yelp continues under the new picture of tree tops, flocks of birds fly up and away in a sudden fright as if the man’s yelp carried so far it scared the birds into flight (see Figure 3.8).

This editing practice of having either picture or sound start early or end late is known as creating a **split edit**, an **L-cut**, or **lapping**. If you think of picture and sound as two separate tracks or footage elements (as they are with both film and video editing), then it is easy to see how you might cut both picture and sound track(s) at the same moment in time. This is called a **butt-cut** or **straight cut** where picture and sound end and begin at the same point in time. Assemble edits and maybe the rough cuts will most likely be all butt-cuts. As soon as you start to finesse timing of shots in the fine cut and you offset the cut point for picture or sound for creative purposes, you are making split edits. One track leads or follows the other. When done correctly, these can make your transitions very engaging for the audience. When done incorrectly, they can put



G

H

FIGURE 3.8 (A–B) The sound drops away at the cut to show the woman’s inner peace. (C–D) The lion’s roar bridges shot one to shot 2, which continues the animal sound treatment. (E–F) The yelp of the man bridges across the edit and laps under the split picture track. (G–H) An example of the butt-cut becoming a split-edit.

Is There a Right or Wrong Reason for a Cut?

Yes and no. As with anything that involves a craft, there are the technical methods and reasons for doing things certain ways, but then there are the aesthetic or creative reasons for doing other things in other ways. How you make an edit and why you make an edit are two different things, but they are always interrelated. You can edit a project as you see fit, but in the end, it will be the viewing audience that decides if your choices were right or wrong. Did the edits work or not? Did the audience notice them or not? As long as you have reasons why you made each edit, you are on the right path. Keeping the various elements mentioned in this chapter in mind and pre-thinking what your audience would appreciate will take you a long way into the world of well-received editing.

End of Chapter Three Review

1. Know your audience and remember that you are really editing for them and their viewing experience.
2. Each shot you transition into should provide the viewer with new information that progresses the "story" of the project.
3. Each transition you create should be motivated by some visual or aural element within the shot you are leaving.
4. Use differing or interesting shot compositions to lead the viewer's eye around the frame so they stay engaged when transitioning from one shot to the next.
5. Present differing camera angles to the viewer within a given scene or sequence so they will not experience the jump cut problem.
6. Ensure, as best as possible, that your transitions conform to the appropriate continuity of content, movement, position, and sound.
7. Sound, whether matching the visuals or contrary to them, is a great tool to enhance or undercut meaning in the story and to engage your audience on a different sensory level.

Will I Be Quizzed on Any of This?

Most likely not. The job of the editor is not to memorize the six elements of good edits or the five types of edit categories as presented in this book, but to use the reasoning behind these concepts to inform his or her choices while making the edits. Knowing that cuts, dissolves, wipes, and fades are made in different ways, have different meanings, and can convey different experiences to the viewing audience is very important. Joining shots together at the right time, in the right way, for the right reasons is really what your goal should be. Knowing the grammar of the edit will help you to better execute the edit. This, and practice over time will enable your skills to develop even more.

End of Chapter Four Review

1. Straight cuts are great for continuous action, when there needs to be a change in "impact," and when there is a change in plot point or location.
2. Dissolves are used to help change time or location, draw out an emotion, or where there is a strong visual relationship between the outgoing and incoming imagery.
3. The wipe can be used to jump in time, jump in location, unite two totally unrelated shots simply to move the "story" along, or just because the project calls for a more graphically vital presentation.
4. The fade in begins a program, scene, or sequence. The fade out ends a program, scene, or sequence.
5. Action edits join shots that cover continuous, uninterrupted action or movement.
6. Screen position edits, through well-planned shot composition, purposefully draw the audience's attention from one side of the screen to the other at the cut point.
7. The form edit unites two shots with two similarly framed objects that have similar shapes or movements. This is usually executed with a dissolve to show the audience how the objects look alike.
8. The concept edit unites two seemingly unrelated visual shots at a certain point in the story and the result is an idea, concept, or message in the mind of the viewer.
9. The combined edit is still just a cut, dissolve, or wipe at one transition, but it combines elements of several of the edit types. These make for rather powerful storytelling moments.

Chapter Five

General Practices for Editors

QUESTION: Aren't the rules of editing made to be broken?

ANSWER: No, they are made to be followed, and, perhaps eventually, creatively reinterpreted by you.

The material in this chapter will brief you on some of the major guidelines for any edit session. Over time, these practices have evolved a bit but they basically stay true to their original intentions because they hold up so well no matter what the project or what the editing fashion of the day may be. To established editors, these guidelines may seem quaint or simplistic, but we are looking to provide some basic ideas for you, the new editors, so that you may absorb these concepts and also move forward with your careers.

These general practices may be considered the starting point at which you begin to consider your approach to editing any material, but they are not the only points, nor are they the end point. We want you to think on your own as well. The common grammar presented gets everybody on the same page, but your creativity and your skill with your editing craft can overrule the grammar. That said, however, you should always be conscious of the rules that you are attempting to bend with your innovation.

The general practices of editing to always consider are as follows:

- Sound and vision are partners and not rivals
- A new shot should contain new information
- There should be a reason for every edit
- Observe the "action line"
- Select the appropriate form of edit
- The better the edit, the less it is noticed by the viewer
- Editing is creating

Sound and Vision are Partners and not Rivals

This seems somewhat obvious, but it is surprising how many editors allow the sound to “fight” the picture. Sound is a partner in the production and must be edited with the same care and attention to detail as the visual elements. The ear and the eye work in unison, supplementing information to each other, so any conflict between the two will cause confusion.

Aural information should extend and expand the message and story of the visuals. It should give information that enforces and supports the shot. For example, if a shot shows a car passing a road sign “Airport,” then by adding the appropriate airport sounds (jet engines, etc.), the visual message is enforced and, consequently, more easily understood by the audience. You deliver a multi-sensory experience and you support, or enhance, the picture. A large truck, for example, demands the sound of a large engine.

In its most simplistic terms, it could be said that an editor should never have a picture on the screen with sounds that do not match. The reason for this is that sound can more quickly create reality than vision. The eye tends to take what it sees factually, whereas sound can stimulate the imagination in a more direct way.

Consequently, stimulating the ear to help the eye is one of the basic tasks of the editor, but if the sound directly contradicts the vision, the result will be confusion and rivalry in the mind of viewer — unless, of course, this is the creative intention of the filmmakers.

An editor should always remember that sound and vision are both tools to be used to help show and tell the story. Picture can get in the way of sound and vice versa, but if one should dominate a shot or scene it should be the result of a conscious choice made by the editor.

A New Shot Should Contain New Information

This general practice is one of the elements of the cut and also one of the elements of the dissolve. It is almost important enough for it to be called a “rule.”

The success of a good program is based on the audience’s expectation that there will be a continuous supply of visual information. This supply, if it is correctly delivered, will constantly update and increase the visual information the viewer has of the events of the program.

There Should Be a Reason for Every Edit

This convention is linked with *motivation*, one of the six elements of the cut.

If the shot is good and complete in itself, with a beginning, a middle, and an end, then it may not serve much purpose to cut a section out and replace it. Especially if the overall result is not better or more interesting and does not fulfill the expectations of the audience even better than the original shot. In short, do your best not to cut apart a shot that stands on its own, intact. Sometimes the best choice for an editor to make is to not cut a shot at all, but simply time its entrance and exit within the sequence.

This does not mean that a three-minute monologue from one person to another should not be edited visually. If one person is listening, then that person is likely to make some form of facial or body reaction to what is being said. These **reaction shots** should be shown to help break up the continual, verbal assault of the one character and to provide new information about the listening party (see Figure 5.1). If, however, the person is talking to himself, and there are no reasons to add flashbacks or to reference other shots, then this uninterrupted monologue may stand unedited. Cutting up a shot such as this just so the audience should have something else to look at is a poor motivation and may only serve to break the monologue and disturb the audience. If the shot is boring, the fault may lie in the type of shot or the shot composition, the script, or the actor's performance.

In recent history, a very fast paced editing style has become rather widespread. Some call this the MTV effect thanks to the quick cutting of many of the music videos once found on that cable network. This tendency has developed alarmingly to where a shot lasting more than three seconds is viewed by some producers and directors as "boringly long." Quick cuts can be very effective, but they have their place like all styles.

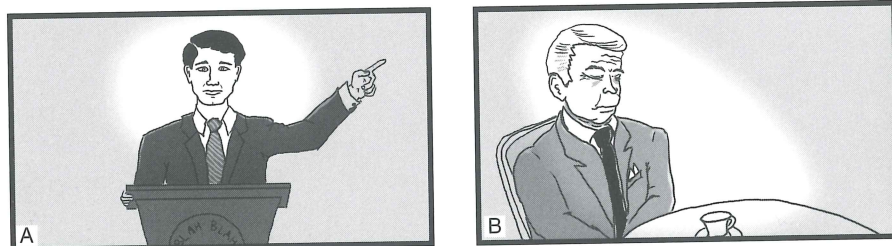


FIGURE 5.1 For long monologues, you may wish to cut in a reaction shot to help keep the viewer interested in the proceedings.

It obviously depends on the type of production, picture content, and viewing habits of the expected audience. What is acceptable in an action sequence is not acceptable in a love scene. The reason to make the edit should be worthwhile and visible to all. If you capitalize on the motivation and the reason for the edit, the edit will then seem more "natural."

Finally, in deciding the length of a shot, it is essential to give the eyes enough time to read and absorb the visual information. If you are questioning the "proper" duration for a shot, then you could describe, in your mind, what you are seeing in the shot. When viewing the example in Figure 5.2 you could say to yourself, "There is a house in the hills, there is smoke coming out of the chimney, a man is walking to the house, it is evening because the sun is setting. Cut!" And that is the length of the shot.

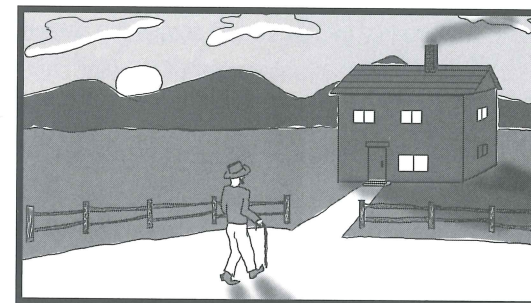


FIGURE 5.2 One method of deciding shot length is to talk out the basic description of the shot content. If your eyes and brain require that much or that little time to digest the image, then most viewers will comprehend the visuals at about the same rate.

Observe the Action Line

The **action line** (or axis of action) is a mental guide for both directors and editors. It is the imaginary line that cuts through the area of action along talent's sight lines or follows in the direction of an object's movement. With it one establishes the 180 degree arc around the recorded subject. It dictates from which side of that subject one is able to shoot. Editors must make sure that the shots they use in the final edited version stay on the correct side of the line and therefore maintain the established screen direction for the scene.

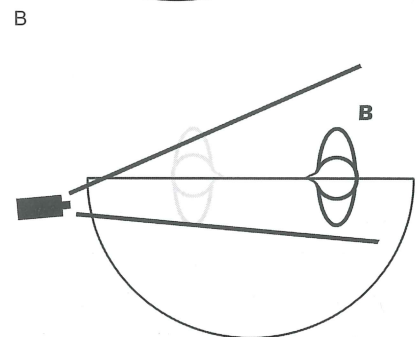
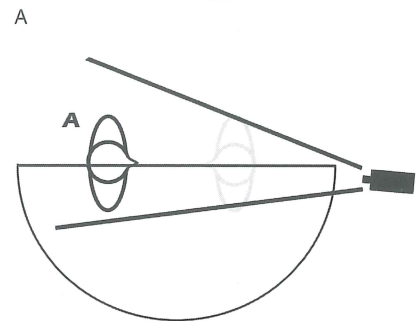
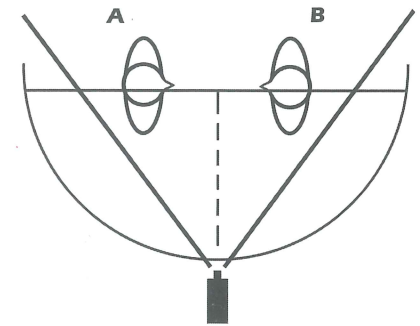
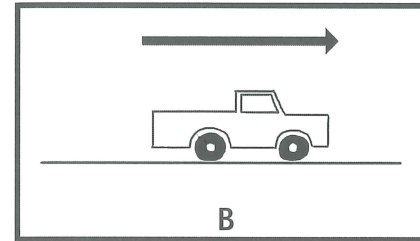
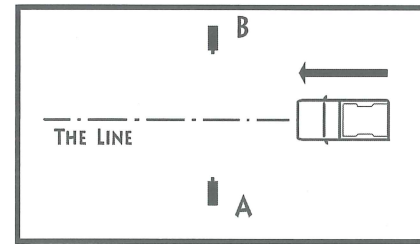
Crossing the line results in a visually contradicting situation for the audience. They are confronted with a different viewpoint of the action and this will change their perception of what is happening. It will, in essence, flip-flop the orientation of left and right within the film space (see Figure 5.5).

For example, if a car is traveling from right to left across the screen in shot one, then the action line becomes the direction of movement. If another shot is taken from the other side of the line, and that shot is then cut next as shot two, the car will appear to be going from left to right as if it immediately turned around in its screen direction. In the film's reality, of course, the car is actually going the same way all of the time. Cutting these two shots together, one from the first side of the line and one from the other, will break the visual flow and the viewer will be confused and will ask, "Why is the car now going the opposite way?" (see Figure 5.3).

The editor must only select shots from one side of the line unless the line is seen to change, for example, if the car changes direction on screen during one of the shots.

The line also exists for people. A two-shot will establish frame left and frame right, therefore also establishing screen direction, look room, and lines of attention for the two characters. Character A is looking toward frame right and character B is looking toward frame left. Any coverage single shot, such as a medium shot or a medium close-up should keep the characters on the same sides of the screen and looking in their appropriate directions. The two shots would edit together well (see Figure 5.4).

However, if one of the shots, perhaps the single shot of character B, was shot from the opposite side of the established line, then that person would also appear to be looking toward frame right. Clearly, with both persons looking right, they would appear to be talking to some third, but unseen, person off-screen. It just would not make sense to the audience who would only be able to account for the two characters. Both shots



C

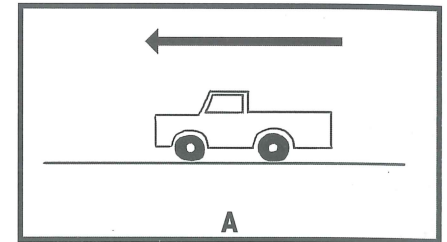


FIGURE 5.3 The camera placement from shot A establishes the axis of action and the subsequent screen direction for the moving vehicle. When the camera is mistakenly moved to the opposite side of the action line, shot B records the vehicle's movement again but this material will appear as a reversal of screen direction when edited together. Edit shots that have respected the 180 degree rule when assembling coverage for a scene.



FIGURE 5.4 Shots that respect the line for people will cut well together. Screen direction is maintained for char

Select the Appropriate Form of Edit

If a cut does not create a successful transition between two shots, then it is unlikely that a dissolve or a fade will make it successful. An illegitimate cut is no better than an illegitimate dissolve. Depending on the program edited, it might be possible to use a wipe to make an edit work at an otherwise “sticky” cut point. If a wipe is not appropriate for the show then you are back to square one. Of course, different genres of visual media call for different treatments at transitions. Carefully observe how things are done, replicate them yourself, and then try to break new ground through experimentation. You will find, at times, that certain edits will just not work.

If two shots will not go together as a cut, then they will certainly not go together as a dissolve. This is because either:

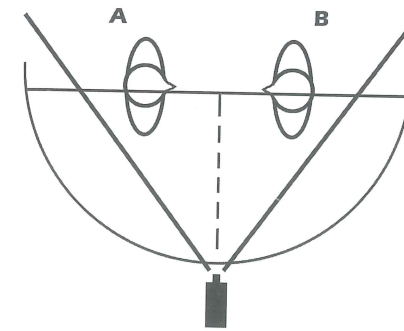
- The angle is wrong
- The continuity is wrong
- There is no new information
- There is no motivation
- The shot composition is wrong
- There is a combination of the above

There is very little an editor can do to improve this.

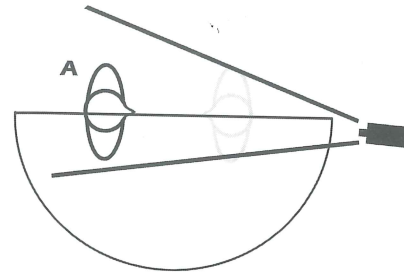
For example, the line has been wrongly crossed as in Figure 5.5. Obviously character B is on the wrong side of the picture. As a cut from one shot to the other there will be an obvious jump. It will jar the audience visually. The “technical” interruption of the images will also then cause a narrative interruption for the viewer and it will not flow smoothly as intended or needed. Clearly, the edit as a cut would be incorrect.

If the editor were to treat this transition between these shots as a dissolve, the edit would be as equally confusing for the viewer. First because the faces of the man and the woman would superimpose over one another during the dissolve, which would make a viewer wonder if this visual treatment were somehow symbolic of the couples union or perhaps there is some supernatural activity at play, and so forth. Secondly, it would be extremely rare for an editor to use a dissolve during any traditionally edited back-and-forth dialogue scene — there is no reason for it. It just does not make sense unless you are emulating classical, shot-in-the-studio soap opera camera switching.

If an edit should be a cut and it fails as a cut, then the failure might be compounded, even more, as a dissolve (see Figure 5.6).

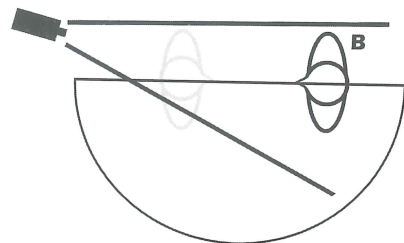


A



B

WRONG SIDE OF LINE



C



FIGURE 5.5 Shots that do not respect the line for people will not cut well together. Screen direction established for character A is reversed for character B.



FIGURE 5.6 The incorrect framing of coverage shots will not work on a straight cut.

The Better the Edit, the Less It Is Noticed

This is the ideal situation. A program that is well-edited will result in the edits going unnoticed by the viewer. If the edits are not seen, the story flows from beginning to end.

Sometimes the edits can be very powerful, merely because of the selection of the edited shots. But they will still not be "seen" and as such will help the visual flow. This is the work of a creative editor.

It is equally true that one bad edit can ruin an entire sequence of shots. The general public (not including filmmakers and those familiar with the technical side of motion picture creation) is not likely to stand up, point at the screen and shout, "Hey! That was a lousy edit." What is more likely to happen is much more subtle and also much more insidious. The average viewer, when experiencing a bad edit, will acknowledge the "glitch"; perhaps not consciously, but that visual or auditory blip will register on their brains as something "not-quite-right." As they watch the program after the bad edit, their brain may still be trying to justify what it had earlier experienced at the bad cut, therefore causing issues with the viewer's ability to absorb the new information presented after the bad edit.

Remember, it is your job, as the editor, to create a program that will be pleasing to an audience. If what you do is not to their liking, or presents picture and sound elements beyond the accepted film grammar, they have the right to reject it. If your editing style fits the content of the "story" then they are much more likely to be accepting. As many people are very familiar with this "invisible" technique of film editing (cutting that does not purposefully draw attention to itself), you will not go wrong by working in this fashion. Some of the best edits are the ones that no one notices but you, the proud editor.

Editing Is Creating

As stated earlier in the book, the editor is one of the last people in the creative chain of a motion picture production. It is his or her job to craft the final version of the program from all the rough picture and sound materials provided by the production team. Furthermore, it is the editor's responsibility to make sure that the types of edits fall within the accepted grammar of the program's genre. If the editing style falls outside the traditional audience's understanding, then the program may not be well-received and they simply may not get it.

The general and working practices presented in this book, offer, to the new editor, the rules and guidelines for basic program editing. Everyone should start out understanding why these guidelines exist and then move forward into the realms of play, experimentation, and innovation with the editing styles. There are very well-known, experienced directors who, with their editors, have produced very creditable results in breaking the fundamentals of editing. Some directors have even used the jump cut to a creative end. But this has always been for a special sequence. Breaking the practices to achieve a special result is valid under nearly all circumstances. Certainly, when an editor is seeking to achieve these special circumstances, some general working practices may be changed, ignored, or subverted.

It is usually best to learn these general guidelines and working practices of the following chapter — the "grammar" — before trying to break conventions. But perfect editing grammar is not an end in itself. And if for that reason alone, the greatest working practice of all applies: effective creativity overrules grammar.

End of Chapter Five Review

1. Use sound creatively to underscore and enhance the visual data or subvert it in some clever way and you will provide the audience with a multi-sensory experience.
2. Keep the viewer interested by providing new visual or aural information in each new shot you edit.
3. Find the motivation for each edit. There should be a reason to leave a shot at a certain time and a reason to transition into the beginning of the new shot at its special time.
4. Observe the action line by editing material that holds true to the established screen direction, lines of attention, and lines of motion.
5. Select the appropriate form of edit. Learn when a cut or dissolve or wipe is best and know that sometimes none of them will work to your liking.
6. Good editing often goes unnoticed — this is a compliment so be proud.
7. Learn and understand the basic rules and guidelines of editing grammar and film language, but be prepared to creatively innovate when you know how and why.