

A video camera's viewfinder is shown in the foreground, displaying a scene with several people on a green background. The camera's controls, including a white arrow button and red lights, are visible. The background is slightly blurred, showing people in various outfits.

◀ STORYBOARDS FOR THE BEGINNER

Shot types

Introduction to camera shots

Every film and television show you've ever seen is made up of a lot of what we call **camera shots**.

There are different ways of framing what the camera sees, and that's why we have lots of different shot types. A **shot type** is defined by how close the camera is to the subject that's being filmed. The subject of a camera shot is usually a character, but settings and objects can be as well.

Check out the shot types and examples listed below, then tackle one or more of the activities at the end of the page to create your own shots. The shot types are listed roughly in order of distance from subject.

ESTABLISHING SHOT

Establishing shots are used to give the audience an understanding of where the scene is taking place, or where it's about to take place – so they're establishing where we are. They are usually a long shot, as you see the setting from a distance, but the point is not to focus on characters within a setting, rather establish the setting for the next scene. That's not to say you can't have characters in an establishing shot, but more often than not they don't.



Here's a great establishing shot of the Hogwarts and its Quidditch stadium. Question: where do you think the next scene will take place? In Hogwarts Castle or at the Quidditch stadium? Explain your answer. (Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, Warner Bros. Pictures)

LONG SHOT or WIDE-SHOT

If you want to see a character from a distance, a long shot is perfect. In a long shot you'll see a character's whole body from head to toe. In some instances the character might not be that far away from the camera, in others the character might appear extremely small in the landscape or space they're in.



Here's a really nice long shot from 'The Hobbit'. We can see the character in full along with a significant amount of the setting he's in. (The Hobbit, Warner Bros. Pictures)



Here's another long shot but with the character seen from a little further away. As a result they look significantly smaller, dwarfed by the landscape. (Into the Wild, Paramount)

MID-SHOT or MEDIUM-SHOT

Somewhere between a close up and a long shot, a mid-shot shows us some but not all of a character or object. With people, a mid-shot generally shows a character from the roughly the waist up, but it doesn't have to be exact. Mid shots are great for showing us a character's body language and character's performing actions.



Here is an example of a mid shot from the world's most tragic romantic film Titanic. You could also call this a two shot because there are two characters interacting in the shot, so remember different shots can have similarities. (Titanic, 20th Century Fox)

TWO-SHOT

In terms of framing, two shots are framed like mid-shots, but it can vary. A two shot is basically when you see two characters in the frame. They're often a mid-shot because the two characters in shot are often talking or interacting

in some way, or maybe we want to see the emotion of both characters face.



Here we see two characters who aren't interacting too much, but are both looking at the setting in front of them. We can see their individual reactions to what they're both looking at. (The Hunger Games: Catching Fire, Lionsgate Films)

OVER THE SHOULDER

This shot is usually used when filming a conversation between two people. Rather than filming them in a two-shot, you film the conversation twice, once with the camera facing person one character, then again facing the other. By shooting over each person's shoulder the audience remains quite close to the conversation whilst focussing on one character at a time.



Here is a conversation taking place between two characters (one of whom is Spiderman). We see a lot of Spiderman, not just his shoulder, so you can frame over the shoulder shots so we see little or a lot of the character who's shoulder we're looking over. (Spiderman: Homecoming, Sony Pictures)

CLOSE-UP

Close-ups are great for showing emotion on character's faces, be it during a key point in a conversation scene, or with the character by themselves reacting to something. Emotions captured in close ups don't always need to be extreme emotions like crying or absolute fear, a close up might show us a character trying hard to hide their emotions, or displaying strength or determination. There are a lot of emotions outside the obvious ones we can capture with a close-up.



Question: what emotion do you think the close up shot is trying to capture in this image from Wonder Woman? (Wonder Woman, Warner Bros. Pictures)

EXTREME CLOSE-UP

Take your regular close-up and make it more extreme. Using a close-up we can usually see most of or all of a character's face and head. An extreme close-up often focuses on the eyes meaning other character features can't be seen.



This is an interesting one: the top of Harry's head and his chin are framed out so you could call this an extreme close up, but you could be forgiven for calling it a close up. (Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2, Warner Bros. Pictures)



This extreme close up is more obvious because the focus is really on Shrek's eyes here. Describe the expression that's being shown in Shrek's eyes using an extreme close up here. (Shrek 2, Dreamworks Pictures)

Complete one or all of the following activities using your understanding from the above descriptions of shot types.

Quick activity: Download the image below and then add rectangular frames (digitally or physically, it's up to you) onto the image to illustrate the following shot types: long shot, mid shot, close up, and extreme close up. Make sure you label each frame and add a short note to each explaining at least one purpose of each shot type, i.e what that shot type is usually used for.



Film It - framing shot types

(138.0 KB .pdf file)

Moderate activity: Download and print the template below – you'll notice there are 7 frames labelled with shot types. Draw an example of each shot type to show your understanding using one to two characters in each panel help illustrate the shot type. You should also give your characters expression and or movement that relates to what that shot type can be good for capturing.

If you don't consider yourself a fantastic illustrator, you can include notes below each frame to explain what you're attempting to capture in the shot/ drawing.



Film It - illustrating shot types

(15.7 KB .pdf file)

A little longer: Grab a camera and photograph examples of each shot to show your understanding. When doing this, give whoever is in your photos some basic acting instructions – to do this you'll need to think about what the shot types are good for. So for your extreme close up would you like the person's eyes to express fear, wonder, sadness? In the mid-shot do you want the person to be performing some sort of action or striking a pose? For the two-shot, what kind of interaction do you want your characters to be having?

Present your images somehow, as a poster or maybe a presentation, and include a short written or verbal explanation of what you were trying to capture in each image.

Back to Storyboards for the beginner ▶

Australian Centre for the Moving Image

We are Australia's national museum of film, TV, videogames, digital culture and art.

🕒 OPEN DAILY, except Christmas Day
MUSEUM 10am–5pm
CINEMAS until late

📍 Fed Square, Melbourne, Australia

☎ +61 3 8663 2200

MUSEUM

EXHIBITIONS

TALKS

WORKSHOPS

EDUCATION

COLLECTION

COMMISSIONS

TOURING EXHIBITIONS

CINEMAS

WHAT'S ON

AUSTRALIAN

FAMILY FILMS

MATINEES

MELBOURNE CINÉMATHEQUE

MELBOURNE FILMOTECA

IDEAS

WATCH

READ

LISTEN

WHAT'S ON

VISIT

CAFE & BAR

ONLINE SHOP

FAMILIES

ACMI X COWORKING

ACMI LABS

JOIN & SUPPORT

DONATE

MEMBERS

VOLUNTEER

CORPORATE PARTNERSHIPS

ABOUT ACMI

CAREERS

MEDIA RELEASES

VENUE HIRE

CONTACT

SUBSCRIBE

TERMS OF USE

POLICIES

TICKETING AND ENTRY TERMS

COLOPHON

GOOGLE TRANSLATE





[MENU](#)

acmi

[WHAT'S ON](#)