

The Shot

A Basic Guide to Film's Most Essential Element

Before you film, you need to consider each shot in your video. The shot is the most basic, elemental unit of film. As such, each shot must be considered carefully and planned ahead of time. Some video programs, like an educational video or a recording of a live performance, may only use one shot. Others, like a cooking demo, a marketing piece, or a storytime, may have multiple shots.

Choosing your shot is perhaps the single most important decision you will make as the director of your video program. Your shot frames your audience's world—it will determine what visual information they have and what information they don't have. Your shot will establish context, mitigate the relationship between your viewer and your subject, and even convey important emotional information.

Every shot has multiple aspects that you, the filmmaker, can manipulate to tell a more cohesive story. For our purposes, we will focus on 3 basic aspects of the shot: Distance, Angle, and Movement:

Distance

There are many different shot distances, but for simplicity's sake, we are going to focus on three common shots most useful for library programming: wide-shots, medium-shots, and close-ups. Closer shots can provide your audience with more visual information about your subject, while a wide shot can provide your audience with more contextual details about the setting. You will want to use different shots depending on your subject and the type of video you are making. For example:

- Wide-shot: group or musical performances, building shots, outdoor events
- Medium shot: two-person interview, crafting and cooking demonstrations, speaker event, storytimes
- Close-up: book talks, single-person interviews.



Image Credit: [Daniel Chandler \(2001\)](#)

Angle

Again, there are many different angles you can shoot at, but for most library video programming, you should be shooting at an eye-level angle.

In general, unusual shot angles establish tone and provide your audience with emotional context. A slanted, dutch angle is used to unsettle and alert the audience that something is not right. A low angle shot can make the audience feel vulnerable as they look up at a powerful, imposing figure. They can also be used to create point-of-view (POV) shots.

Shot angles are by-and-large storytelling devices. As such, unless you are filming a skit, I strongly recommend you stick to eye-level angles in all your library video programming.



Image Credit: [Daniel Chandler \(2001\)](#)

Movement

The final shot element to consider is camera movement. There are two basic shot types when it comes to camera movement: Static shots and Dynamic Shots.

- Static Shots- the camera does not move
 - For filmed library programming, I recommend using all static shots. They are easier to control and leave less room for error. They require less equipment to get right and tend to result in better-looking footage.
 - IN a good static shot, stability is key. Find a flat, sturdy surface to set up your camera on, whether that's the table or the floor. Never place your camera on a surface that is going to be bumped. Use a tripod or stand if you can.
- Dynamic Shots- the camera moves.
 - If you need to use a dynamic shot, you should do everything in your power to make the shot as smooth and steady as possible.
 - Again, a tripod can be very helpful in helping you achieve smooth pan and tilt shots.

- If you are doing a walking shot, walk slowly and steadily. Avoid shaking the camera as much as possible (unless it's motivated)
- Never whip the camera around. Always move slowly, or else your footage will be blurry and could even make people nauseous.
- If you are going to zoom with your camera, go slow (again to avoid nausea) and try to keep your zoom steady and even.

Camera and Lens Movement

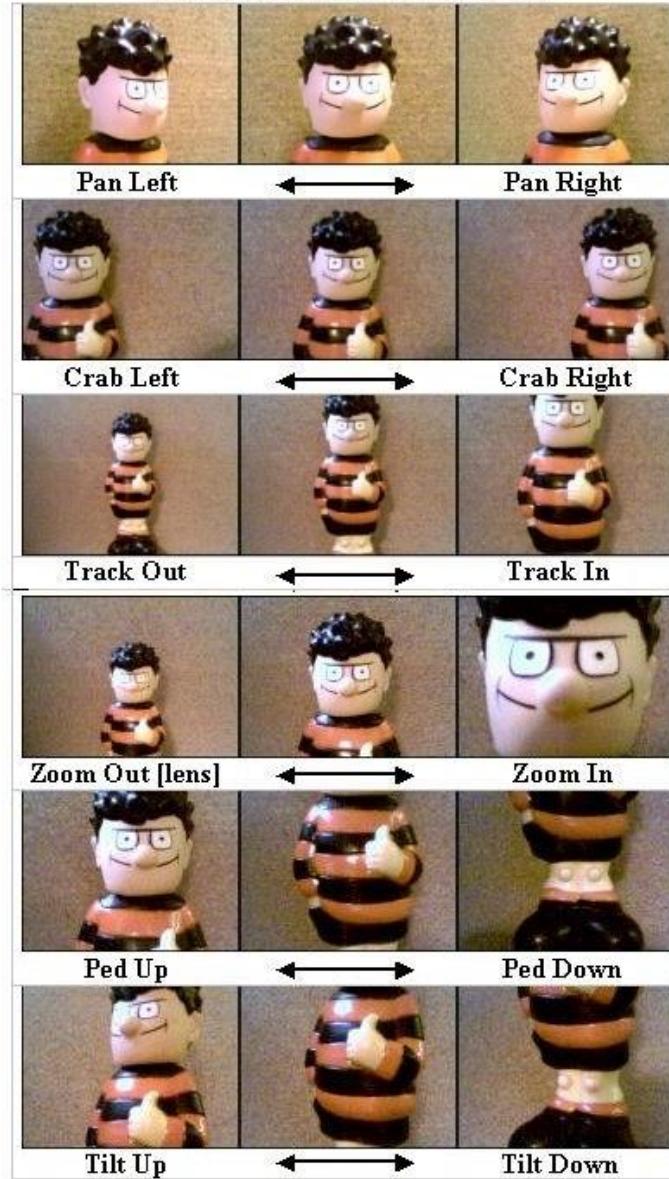


Image Credit: [Daniel Chandler \(2001\)](#)

Whether you plan your shots out intentionally or not, every shot in your video will have these three aspects: distance, angle, and movement. Because the shot conveys important emotional and contextual information, you are better off being intentional with your shots and conveying what you mean to convey.

Planning your shots ahead of time also means you're more prepared day of filming. The type of shot you pick can impact all sorts of things, from your location to your camera tripod/stand to what your performer is going to wear. You can alter your shot on the day-of if you need to, but if you know what you're filming ahead of time, you'll save yourself time and headaches.