

6.2

Framing Effective Shots

The basic purpose of framing a shot is to show images as clearly as possible and to present them so that they convey meaning and energy. Essentially, you clarify and intensify the event before you. When working a camcorder, you are the only one who sees the television pictures before they are videotaped. You therefore cannot rely on a director to tell you how to frame every picture for maximum effectiveness.

The more you know about picture composition, the more effective your clarification and intensification of the event will be. But even if you are working as a camera operator during a multicamera studio show or a large remote where the director can preview all the camera pictures, you still need to know how to compose effective shots. The director might be able to correct some of your shots, but he or she will certainly not have time to teach you the fundamentals of good composition.

This section describes the major compositional principles and explains how to frame a shot for maximum clarity and impact.

► **SCREEN SIZE AND FIELD OF VIEW**

Operating with close-ups and medium shots rather than long shots and extreme long shots

► **FRAMING A SHOT: STANDARD TV AND HDTV ASPECT RATIOS**

Dealing with height and width, framing close-ups, headroom, noseroom and leadroom, and closure

► **DEPTH**

Creating the illusion of a third dimension in both aspect ratios: choice of lens, positioning of objects, depth of field, and lighting and color

► **SCREEN MOTION**

Z-axis motion (movement toward and away from the camera) and lateral movement in both aspect ratios¹

SCREEN SIZE AND FIELD OF VIEW

Screen size and field of view are closely related. On the large movie screen, you can show a relatively large vista with a great amount of event detail. When the same scene is shown on television, however, you will not only have difficulty making out the smaller event details but, more important, you will lose the aesthetic impact of the shot. This is why some film critics suggest seeing a particular film “on the big screen.”

SCREEN SIZE

Most television sets have a relatively small screen, especially when compared with the average movie screen. To reveal event details, you must show them in close-ups rather than long shots. In other words, your field of view must generally be tighter on television than on the motion picture screen. Such a close-up approach necessitates choosing and emphasizing those details that contribute most effectively to the overall event.

FIELD OF VIEW

Field of view refers to how wide or how close the object appears relative to the camera, that is, how close it will appear to the viewer. It is basically organized into five steps: (1) *extreme long shot (ELS)*, also called *establishing shot*; (2) *long shot (LS)*, also called *full shot* or *establishing shot*; (3) *medium shot (MS)*, also called *waist shot*; (4) *close-up (CU)*; and (5) *extreme close-up (ECU)*. **SEE 6.6 ZVL1**
CAMERA → Composition → field of view

Four other ways of designating conventional shots are: *bust shot*, which frames the subject from the upper torso to the top of the head; *knee shot*, which frames the subject from just above or below the knees; *two-shot*, with two people or objects in the frame; and *three-shot*, with three people or objects in the frame. Although more a blocking arrangement than a field of view, you should also know two additional shots: the over-the-shoulder shot and the

1. For an extensive discussion of screen forces and how they can be used for effective picture composition, see Herbert Zettl, *Sight Sound Motion*, 4th ed. (Belmont, Calif.: Thomson Wadsworth, 2005), pp. 93–194.

6.6 FIELD-OF-VIEW STEPS

The shot designations range from ELS (extreme long shot) to ECU (extreme close-up).



Extreme long shot (ELS),
or establishing shot



Long shot (LS), or full shot



Medium shot (MS),
or waist shot



Close-up (CU)



Extreme close-up (ECU)

cross-shot. In the *over-the-shoulder shot (O/S)*, the camera looks at someone over the shoulder of the camera-near person. In a *cross-shot (X/S)*, the camera looks alternately at one or the other person, with the camera-near person completely out of the shot. **SEE 6.7**

Of course, exactly how to frame such shots depends not only on your sensitivity to composition but also on the director's preference.

FRAMING A SHOT: STANDARD TV AND HDTV ASPECT RATIOS

Many high-end studio cameras, ENG/EFP cameras, and even some high-quality consumer camcorders have a switch for changing the aspect ratio from the standard 4 × 3 format to the HDTV 16 × 9. Although the aspect

ratios of standard television and HDTV are quite different and require different technical manipulations, many of the aesthetic principles of good picture composition apply to both. Nevertheless, in framing effective shots some aesthetic principles need to be adjusted to the specific requirements of the aspect ratio. This section takes a closer look at (1) dealing with height and width, (2) framing close-ups, (3) headroom, (4) noseroom and leadroom, and (5) closure.

DEALING WITH HEIGHT AND WIDTH

You will find that the 4 × 3 aspect ratio is well suited to framing a vertical scene, such as a high-rise building, as well as a horizontally oriented vista. **SEE 6.8 AND 6.9** It is also relatively easy to accommodate a scene that has both wide and high elements. **SEE 6.10**

6.7 OTHER SHOT DESIGNATIONS

Other common shot designations are the bust shot, knee shot, two-shot, three-shot, over-the-shoulder shot, and cross-shot. Note that the bust shot is similar to the MS and that the knee shot is similar to the LS.



Bust shot



Knee shot



Two-shot (two persons or objects
in frame)



Three-shot (three persons or
objects in frame)



Over-the-shoulder shot (O/S)



Cross-shot (X/S)

**6.8 FRAMING A VERTICAL VIEW**

The 4×3 aspect ratio allows you to frame a vertical scene without having to use extreme camera distance or angles.

**6.9 FRAMING A HORIZONTAL VIEW**

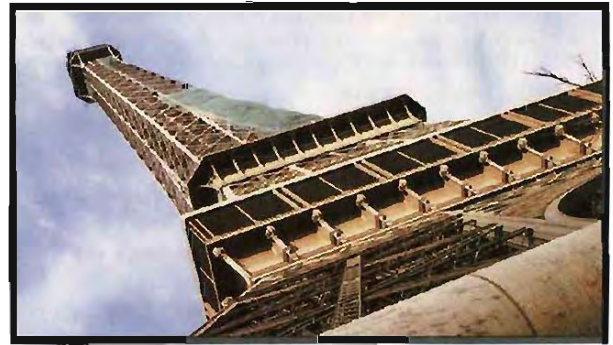
The 4×3 aspect ratio readily accommodates a horizontal vista.

**6.10 FRAMING HEIGHT AND WIDTH IN A SINGLE SHOT**

The 4×3 aspect ratio easily accommodates both horizontal and vertical vistas.

**6.11 FRAMING A HORIZONTAL VIEW IN THE HDTV ASPECT RATIO**

The 16×9 format is ideal for framing wide horizontal vistas.

**6.12 FRAMING A VERTICAL VIEW IN THE HDTV ASPECT RATIO**

The 16×9 format makes it quite difficult to frame a vertical object. One way to frame a tall object is to shoot it from below and cant the camera.

Although the horizontally stretched 16×9 aspect ratio makes horizontal scenes look quite spectacular, it presents a formidable obstacle to framing a vertical view. **SEE 6.11** You can either tilt the camera up to reveal the height of the object or shoot from below and *cant* the camera to make the subject fit into the diagonal screen space. **SEE 6.12** Another frequently used film technique for dealing with vertical objects is to have other picture elements block the sides of the screen and, in effect, give you a vertical aspect ratio in which to frame the shot. **SEE 6.13**

FRAMING CLOSE-UPS

Close-ups (CUs) and extreme close-ups (ECUs) are common elements in the visual language of television because, compared with the large motion picture screen, even large television screens are relatively small. The 4×3 aspect ratio and the small screen of the standard television receiver are

**6.13 NATURAL MASKING OF THE SCREEN SIDES IN THE HDTV ASPECT RATIO**

You can use parts of the natural environment to block the sides of the wide 16×9 screen to create a vertical space in which to frame the vertical object. In this shot the foreground buildings create a vertical aspect ratio for the high-rise building.

**6.14 FRAMING A CLOSE-UP**

The normal close-up shows the head of the person and part of the shoulders.

**6.15 FRAMING AN EXTREME CLOSE-UP**

In an extreme close-up, you should crop the top of the head while keeping the upper part of the shoulders in the shot.

the ideal combination for close-ups and extreme close-ups of people's heads. **SEE 6.14**

As you can see, the normal close-up shows the customary headroom and part of the upper body. The ECU is somewhat trickier to frame: the top screen edge cuts across the top part of the head, and the lower edge cuts just below the top part of the shoulders. **SEE 6.15 ZVL2**

CAMERA → Composition → close-ups

When you try to frame the same shot in the HDTV 16 × 9 aspect ratio, however, you are left with a great amount of leftover space on both sides of the subject's face. The close-up looks somewhat lost in the wide-screen format, and the extreme close-up looks as though it is squeezed between the top and bottom screen edges.

SEE 6.16 AND 6.17 You can solve this problem relatively easily

by including some visual elements in the shot that fill the empty spaces on either side. **SEE 6.18** Some directors simply tilt the camera or the talent somewhat so that the shot occupies more of the horizontal space. On the other hand, the HDTV aspect ratio lets you easily frame close-ups of two people face-to-face. Such an arrangement is quite difficult in the traditional format because the two dialogue partners must stand uncomfortably close together. **SEE 6.19**

HEADROOM

Because the edges of the television frame seem to attract like magnets whatever is close to them, leave some space above people's heads—called *headroom*—in normal long shots, medium shots, and close-ups. **SEE 6.20** Avoid having the head “glued” to the upper edge of the frame.

**6.16 FRAMING A CLOSE-UP IN THE HDTV ASPECT RATIO**

When framing the same close-up in the 16 × 9 format, both screen sides look conspicuously empty.

**6.17 FRAMING AN EXTREME CLOSE-UP IN THE HDTV ASPECT RATIO**

In the 16 × 9 format, the ECU of the person seems oddly squeezed between the upper and lower screen edges.



6.18 NATURAL MASKING OF A CLOSE-UP IN THE HDTV ASPECT RATIO

To avoid excessive empty space when framing a screen-center close-up of a person in the 16 × 9 format, you can mask the sides with objects from the actual environment.



6.19 FACE-TO-FACE CLOSE-UPS IN THE HDTV ASPECT RATIO

The 16 × 9 format makes it relatively easy to have two people face each other on a close-up without having to stand uncomfortably close together.



6.20 NORMAL HEADROOM

Headroom counters the magnetic pull of the upper frame. The person appears comfortably placed in the frame.



6.21 TOO LITTLE HEADROOM

With no, or too little, headroom, the person looks cramped in the frame. The head seems to be glued to the upper screen edge.



6.22 TOO MUCH HEADROOM

With too much headroom, the pull of the bottom edge makes the picture bottom-heavy and strangely unbalanced.

SEE 6.21 Because you lose a certain amount of picture area in videotaping and transmission, you need to leave a little more headroom than feels comfortable. Leaving too much headroom, however, is just as bad as too little. **SEE 6.22** If your camera is so equipped, you can use the frame guide in the viewfinder to see the picture area that actually appears on the television screen. The headroom rule applies equally to both aspect ratios. **ZVL3** CAMERA → Composition → headroom

NOSEROOM AND LEADROOM

Somebody looking or pointing in a particular direction other than straight into the camera creates a screen force called an *index vector*. You must compensate for this force by leaving some space in front of the vector. When someone looks or points screen-left or screen-right, the index vector needs to be balanced with *noseroom*. A lack of noseroom or leadroom makes the picture look oddly out



6.23 PROPER NOSEROOM

To absorb the force of the strong index vector created by the person's looking toward the screen edge, you need to leave some noseroom.



6.24 LACK OF NOSEROOM

Without noseroom the person seems to be blocked by the screen edge, and the picture looks unbalanced.



6.25 PROPER LEADROOM

Assuming that the cyclist is actually moving, his motion vector is properly neutralized by the screen space in front of him. We like to see where the person is heading, not where he has been. Note that a still picture cannot show a motion vector. What you see here is an index vector.



6.26 LACK OF LEADROOM

Without leadroom the moving person or object seems to be hindered or stopped by the screen edge.

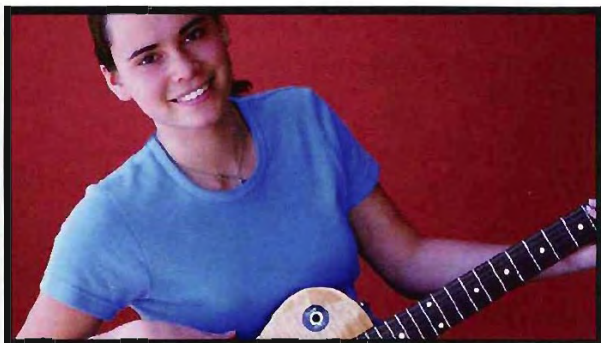
of balance; the person seems to be blocked by the screen edge. **SEE 6.23 AND 6.24**

Screen motion creates a *motion vector*. When someone or something moves in a screen-right or screen-left direction, you must leave *leadroom* to balance the force of the motion vector. **SEE 6.25** Even in a still photo you can see that without proper leadroom the cyclist seems to be crashing into right screen border. **SEE 6.26** To avoid such crashes, you must always lead the moving object with the camera rather than follow it. After all, we want to see where the moving object is going, not where it has been. Note, however, that neither of the leadroom examples here represent actual motion vectors because they are still pictures; because they

don't move but simply point in a specific direction, they are index vectors. **ZVL4** CAMERA → Composition → leadroom

CLOSURE

Closure, short for *psychological closure*, is the process by which our minds fill in information that we cannot actually see on-screen. Take a look around you: you see only parts of the objects that lie in your field of vision. There is no way you can ever see an object in its entirety unless the object moves around you or you move around the object. Through experience we have learned to mentally supply the missing parts, which allows us to perceive a whole world



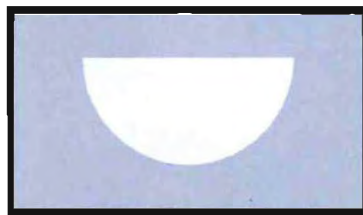
6.27 FACILITATING CLOSURE BEYOND THE FRAME

In this shot we perceive the whole figure of the person and her guitar although we see only part of them. This shot gives us sufficient clues to project the figure beyond the frame and apply psychological closure in the off-screen space.



6.28 TRIANGLE CLOSURE

We tend to organize things into easily recognizable patterns. This group of similar objects forms a triangle.



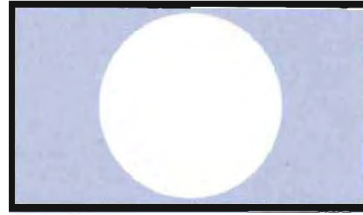
6.29 SEMICIRCLE CLOSURE

These objects organize the screen space into a semicircle.

although we actually see only a fraction of it. Because close-ups usually show only part of an object, your psychological closure mechanism must work overtime.

Positive closure To facilitate closure you should always frame a shot in such a way that the viewer can easily extend

the figure beyond the screen edges and perceive a sensible whole. **SEE 6.27** To organize the visual world around us, we also automatically group things together so that they form a sensible pattern. **SEE 6.28 AND 6.29** You would be hard-pressed *not* to perceive figure 6.28 as a triangular pattern and figure 6.29 as a semicircle.



6.30 UNDESIRABLE CLOSURE WITHIN THE FRAME

This shot is badly framed because we apply closure within the frame without projecting the rest of the person into off-screen space.



6.31 DESIRABLE CLOSURE IN OFF-SCREEN SPACE

In this ECU there are enough on-screen clues to project the rest of the person's head and body into off-screen space, thus applying closure to the total figure.



6.32 ILLOGICAL CLOSURE

Although we know better, we perceive this reporter as balancing a street sign on his head.

Negative closure This closure automation can also work *against* good composition. For example, when framing a close-up of a face without giving prominent visual clues to help viewers project the image beyond the screen edges, the head seems oddly cut off from its body. **SEE 6.30** You therefore need to provide enough visual clues to lead the viewers' eyes beyond the frame so they can apply closure and perceive the complete person in off-screen space. **SEE 6.31**

Our mechanism to organize our environment into simple patterns is so strong that it often works *against* reason. In the excitement of getting a good story and an interesting shot, it is easy to forget to look *behind* the object of attention, but it is often the background that spoils a good picture composition. **SEE 6.32** As you can see in figure 6.32, we tend to perceive the background as part of the foreground. The reporter seems to be balancing a street sign

on his head. Most often you must guard against compositions wherein background objects seem to be growing out of the foreground people's heads. A slightly tilted horizon line is another common compositional problem. Once you are aware of the background, it is relatively easy to avoid illogical closure. **ZVL5** CAMERA → Composition → closure

DEPTH

Because the television screen is a flat, two-dimensional piece of glass upon which the image appears, we must create the illusion of a third dimension. Fortunately, the principles for creating the illusion of depth on a two-dimensional surface have been amply explored and established by painters and photographers over the years. For creating and intensifying the illusion of depth on the most basic level, try to establish a clear division of the image into foreground, middleground, and background. To do this you need to consider the following factors:

- *Choice of lens.* A wide-angle zoom position exaggerates depth. Narrow-angle positions reduce the illusion of a third dimension.
- *Positioning of objects.* The *z-axis*—the line representing an extension of the lens from the camera to the horizon—has significant bearing on perceiving depth. Anything positioned along the *z-axis* relative to the camera will create the illusion of depth.
- *Depth of field.* A slightly shallow depth of field is usually more effective to define depth because the in-focus foreground object is more clearly set off against the out-of-focus background.
- *Lighting and color.* A brightly lighted object with strong (highly saturated) color seems closer than one that is dimly lighted and has washed-out (low-saturation) colors. **SEE 6.33 ZVL6** CAMERA → Picture depth → *z-axis* | lens choice | perspective and distortion

SCREEN MOTION

Contrary to the painter or the still photographer, who deals with the organization of static images within the picture frame, the television camera operator must almost always cope with framing images in motion. Composing



6.33 FOREGROUND, MIDDLEGROUND, AND BACKGROUND

In general, try to divide the *z-axis* (depth dimension) into a prominent foreground (dead tree), middleground (pine trees), and background (ski run). Such a division helps create the illusion of screen depth.

moving images requires quick reactions and full attention throughout the telecast. The study of the moving image is an important part of learning the fine art of television and film production; here we look at some of its most basic principles.

When framing for the traditional 4×3 aspect ratio and small screen, movements along the *z-axis* (toward or away from the camera) are stronger than any type of lateral motion (from one screen edge to the other). Fortunately, they are also the easiest to frame: you simply keep the camera as steady as possible and make sure that the moving object does not go out of focus as it approaches the camera. Remember that a wide-angle zoom lens position gives the impression of accelerated motion along the *z-axis*, whereas a narrow-angle position slows *z-axis* motion for the viewer.

When working in the 16×9 HDTV aspect ratio, however, lateral movement takes on more prominence. Although the stretched screen width gives you a little more breathing room, you must still have proper leadroom during the entire pan. As mentioned, the viewer wants to know where the object is going, not where it has been.

If you are on a close-up and the subject shifts back and forth, don't try to follow each minor wiggle. You might run the risk of making viewers seasick; at the very least, they will not be able to concentrate on the subject for very long. Keep the camera pointed at the major action area or zoom out (or pull back) to a slightly wider shot.



6.34 TWO PERSONS SAYING GOOD-BYE

If in a two-shot the people walk away from each other toward the screen edges, don't try to keep both people in the shot.



6.35 CAMERA STAYS WITH ONE OF THEM

You must decide which person you will keep in the frame and let the other move off-camera.

When one of the persons in a two-shot moves out of the frame, do not try to keep both people in the frame—stay with just one of them. **SEE 6.34 AND 6.35 ZVL7** CAMERA → Screen motion → z-axis | lateral | close-ups

If even after extensive rehearsals you find that in an over-the-shoulder shot the person closer to the camera blocks the other person, who is farther away from the camera, you can solve the problem by trucking or arcing to the right or left. **SEE 6.36 AND 6.37**

Whatever you do to organize screen motion, do it *smoothly*. Try to move the camera as little as possible unless you need to follow a moving object or dramatize a shot through motion. Because you can move a camcorder so easily, it may be tempting to “animate” a basically static scene by moving the camera with great fervor. Don't do it. Excessive camera motion is a telltale sign of an amateur camera operator.



6.36 CAMERA-FAR PERSON BLOCKED

In an over-the-shoulder shot, you may find that the camera-near person blocks the camera-far person.



6.37 CAMERA TRUCKS TO CORRECT

To correct this over-the-shoulder shot so that the camera-far person can be seen, simply truck or arc the camera to the right.

MAIN POINTS

- ◆ Because the television screen size is relatively small, we use more close-ups and medium shots than long shots. When shooting for wide-aspect-ratio, large-screen HDTV, you can use more medium shots and long shots.
- ◆ Field of view refers to how much of a scene you show in the viewfinder, that is, how close the object appears relative to the viewer. The field of view is organized into five steps: ESL (extreme long shot, or establishing shot), LS (long shot, or full shot), MS (medium shot, or waist shot), CU (close-up), and ECU (extreme close-up).
- ◆ Alternate shot designations include the bust shot, the knee shot, the two-shot, the three-shot, the over-the-shoulder shot (O/S), and the cross-shot (X/S).
- ◆ In organizing the screen area for the traditional 4 × 3 and the HDTV 16 × 9 aspect ratios, the major considerations are: dealing with height and width, framing close-ups, headroom, noseroom and leadroom, and closure.
- ◆ In organizing screen depth, a simple and effective way is to establish a distinct foreground, middleground, and background.
- ◆ In creating the illusion of a third dimension (depth), you need to consider the choice of lens, positioning of objects, depth of field, and lighting and color.
- ◆ In organizing screen motion for the 4 × 3 aspect ratio, z-axis motion (movement toward or away from the camera) is stronger than lateral movement (from one side of the screen to the other). When working in the 16 × 9 aspect ratio, lateral movement becomes more prominent.

ZETTLE'S VIDEO LAB



For your reference, or to track your work, each *Video-Lab* program cue in this chapter is listed here with its corresponding page number.

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