



How to Make a Storyboard: Movie Storyboarding Examples

By Jennifer Albright

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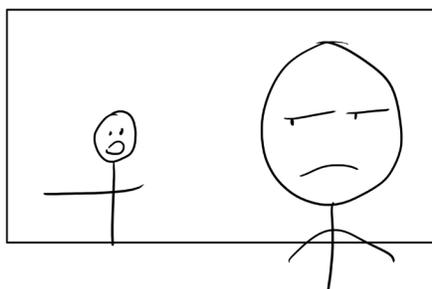
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Introduction to Storyboard

When you set out to make a movie, the more planning ahead you can do, the better. Figuring out exactly what you'll be doing during a shoot saves your crew time and labor, and saves you, the producer and/or director, from cost overruns and production headaches. A storyboard is one method of planning ahead. By visualizing your shots ahead of time with a storyboard, you can see how your shots fit together before you've shot a single foot of film or kilobit of video, which will prevent you from wasting both time and footage. A good storyboard allows you to show your crew what you have in mind, and saves you from trying to convey what you want with wordy explanations and frustrated hand gestures. When you show your DP and cameraperson your boards, they will immediately know what type of shot you need and how to frame the subjects.

While you were learning about filmmaking, paying your dues as a PA or other crew member, or even just searching around the internet, you may have seen elaborately detailed storyboards by professional artists. Boards like this are nice, but you don't need to be a talented artist to storyboard effectively. Even simple stick figures can give people a good idea of what your shot sequence will look like. For example, take a look at the following illustration:



The example above may be crude, but it's clearly a two-shot with one character close to the camera.

In other words, rudimentary art skills are perfectly fine. What you do need to know, however, is how you're going to frame the subjects of your film. A basic knowledge of camera shots, paired with a few simple perspective tricks, will enable you to map out your scene in an easy-to-read visual shorthand.

The Different Types of Shots

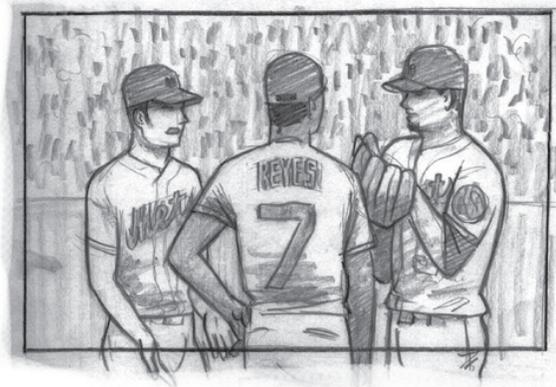
Let's begin with a quick rundown of basic shots and what they look like:

LONG SHOT:



Generally speaking, a long shot will include the entire body of the subject or subjects.

MEDIUM SHOT:



A medium shot will usually depict your subject anywhere from above the knees and up to just above the waist and up. Remember not to cut off your subjects right at the knees, or any other juncture of the body. It looks awkward and poorly composed. Try to frame them just above or below the joint in question.

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CLOSE UP:



Close ups are where we most often see the emotional content of a scene. They allow us to see the character's faces up close, and thus their state of mind. Close ups are usually framed from the chest up. Occasionally, however, they can be framed from forehead to chin, or will even involve just the subject's eyes. We call this an:

EXTREME CLOSE UP:



Extreme close ups add drama. For the most part, they're used sparingly, but a single ECU can add a real punch to a scene.

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MASTER SHOT

A quick note about the master shot: this is a term referring to a shot that runs for the length of a scene and shows all of the characters in view. It's the most conservative way of staging a scene. Think of a master shot as being like watching a play from somewhere out in the audience. You see the entire set and where the characters are in relation to each other on the stage. In older films, and multiple-camera productions like sitcoms, scenes often begin with a master shot in order to orient the audience, and all of the rest of the shots in the scene relate back to this shot. Most single-camera productions don't rely so heavily on the master shot; however, keeping the master shot in mind can help you plan out the rest of your shot list. For example, in a scene depicting a conversation between two people, you may decide to cut to close ups of each person talking, plus an insert shot of an item that they're talking about, and then cut back to the master shot after each one. This is a very basic way of editing a scene.

There are also some special shots you might want to use in your storyboard. Here are a couple of examples.

POV

POV, or the point-of-view shot, is just that: it allows the audience to see what's going on through a character's eyes. The easiest way to indicate this is to show a character looking at something, and then cut to what they're looking at from an angle that makes it look as though the camera is in that character's place. Here's a storyboarded example. In this scene, a woman is working at her desk when the family dog enters the frame. The woman looks down and sees the dog looking up at her, wagging his tail.



Notice how the juxtaposition of shots conveys the woman's POV to the audience.

POV shots tend to be used sparingly, although there have been some films with entire sequences shot from a character's point of view. In fact, the 1947 film noir *Lady in the Lake* was shot entirely from the POV of the main character.

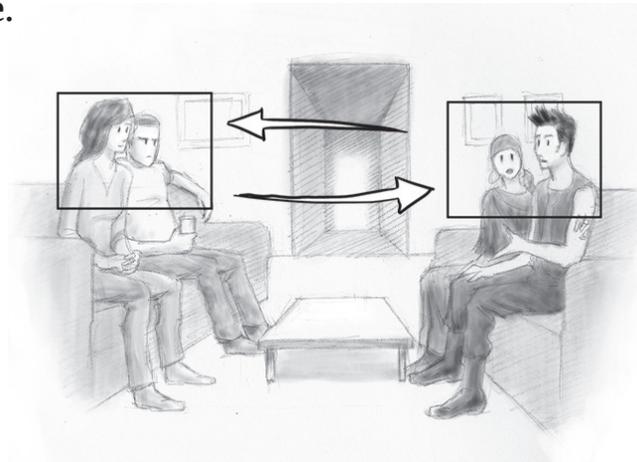
Depicting Camera Movement

Now that we've talked about some basic shots, let's go over some important camera movements, and ways to depict them on the page.

PAN

Panning involves a sideways or up/down rotation of the camera on the tripod. It's one way to put the camera on another subject without cutting to a different shot. It can also be used to follow a character or characters when they're moving within the frame.

A panning shot can be depicted by first placing a couple of frames in order to show where the camera will start and where it will end up, and then adding arrows to describe the camera movement. In the illustration below, we see a panning shot for a simple dialogue scene.



As depicted, the camera moves first from one set of characters, and then to the other. The arrows show the direction of movement.

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TRACK

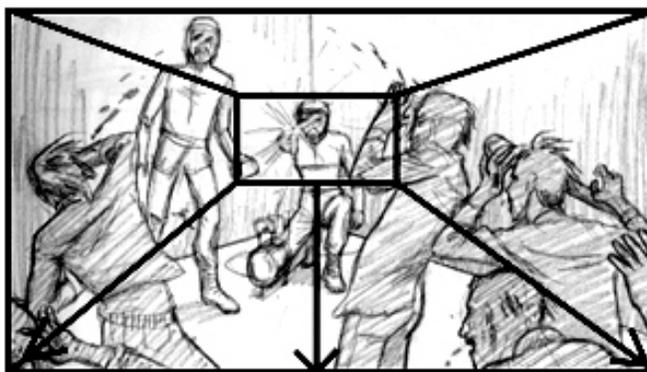
A tracking shot is another way to follow a subject or subjects. This type of shot involves moving the entire camera from one place to another, instead of merely rotating the camera body on a fixed point. Tracking can involve moving the camera with tracks or on a dolly, or it can be done hand-held.

In this shot, the camera follows the mother as she runs. Note the arrow showing the camera direction.



ZOOM

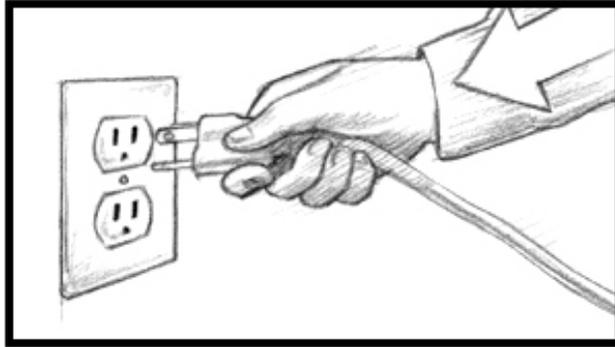
Zooming is a movement of the camera lens as opposed to a movement of the camera itself. Zooming in means adjusting the lens to frame in closer on the subject, while zooming out means the opposite: adjusting the lens to take in more of the scene. Here's an illustrated depiction of a zoom:



The interior frame indicates where the shot begins. As the action proceeds, the camera pulls out, as shown by the arrows. The outside frame shows where the shot finishes: on a wide angle showing the entire room and all the characters in frame.

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What if you don't need the camera itself to move, but want to show characters moving into, out of, or through the frame during a shot? An easy way to do this is by drawing arrows.

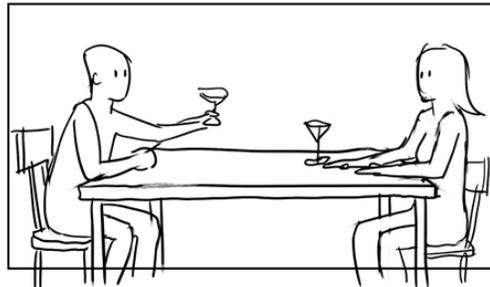


Arrows can also depict smaller movements within the frame, such as a head turning.

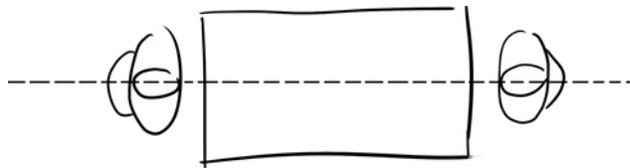


The 180 Degree Rule

Now that we've covered the basics, here are a couple of other things to keep in mind when setting up your shots. Firstly, you may have heard people talk about "not crossing the line" when they're setting up a scene. They're using a slang term for the 180 degree rule, which is a very important rule of thumb for filmmaking. We'll demonstrate this rule with a simple dialogue scene. Here's the master shot, showing Bill and Carol seated at a table together:



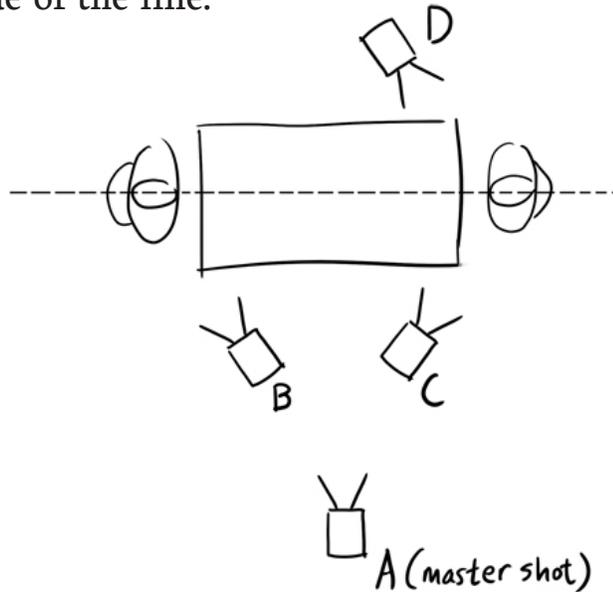
Now imagine this scene from overhead, with a straight line running through the middle of the subjects, like so:



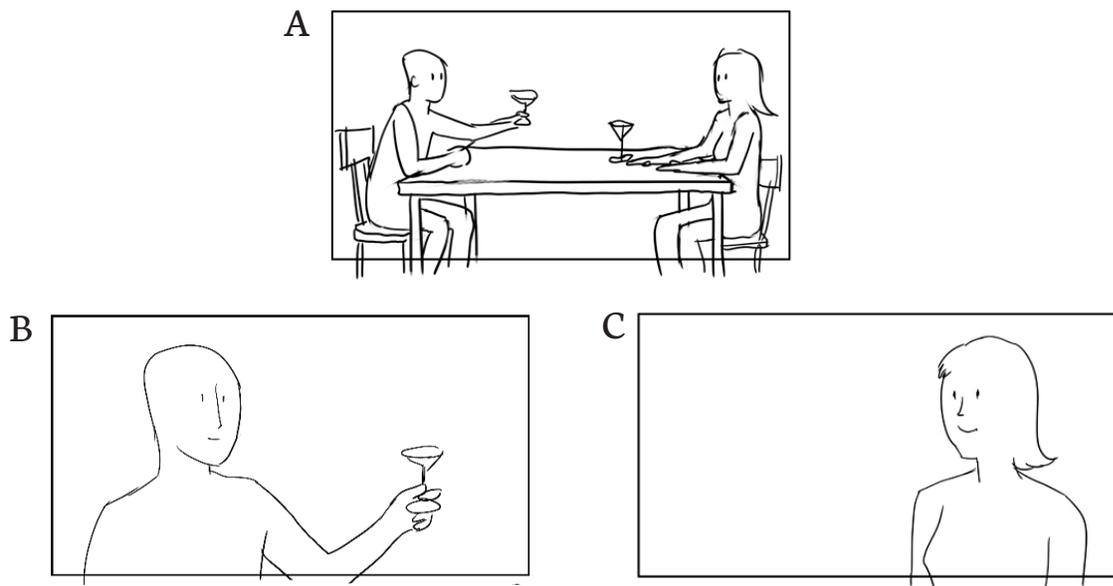
Keeping your camera on the same side of this line aka the 180 degree line-- will assure visual continuity and prevent your viewers from becoming disoriented.

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Here is the same diagram with a few possible camera placements. Notice that shots A, B and C are on the same side of the line.



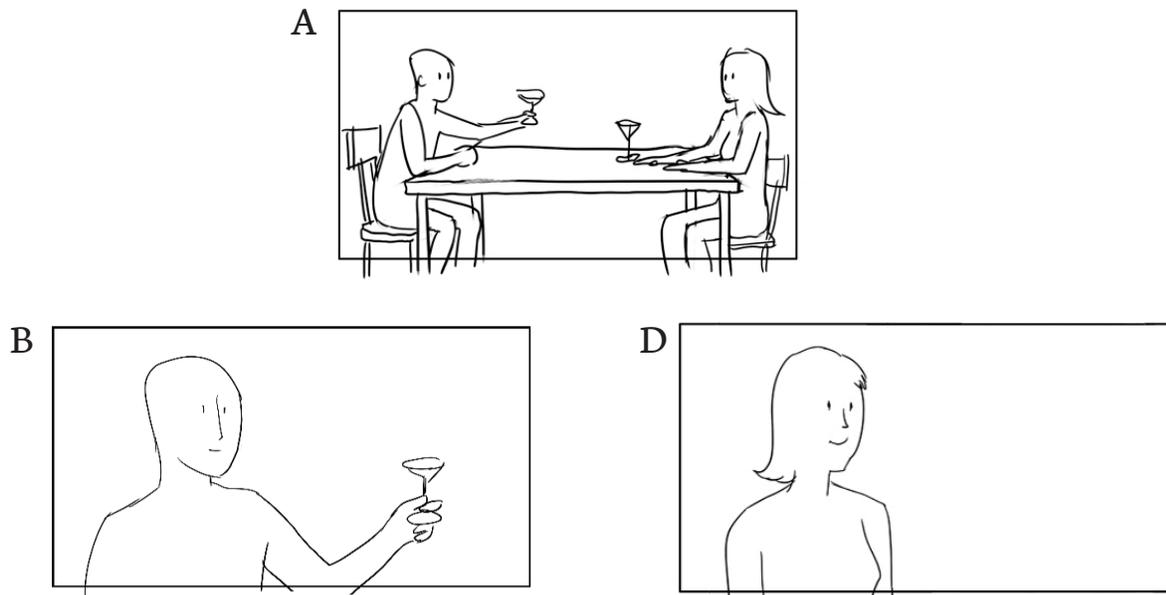
Let's put shots A, B, and C into a storyboard. It will end up looking like this:



This shot sequence adheres to the 180 degree rule. Bill and Carol are having a conversation. First we have a master shot of the two of them, showing the audience where they are in the scene and where they are in relationship to each other (shot A). Next is a close up of Bill (shot B), and then one of Carol (shot C). When the individual shots are edited together, Bill and Carol appear to be facing each other, just as they are in the master shot.

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Now let's try putting together shots A, B, and D from the diagram. The storyboard will look like this:



This shot sequence is disorienting because it breaks the 180 degree rule. Notice how Bill and Carol now look like they're facing the same direction, rather than looking at each other across the table? Keeping your camera on one side of the action will save you a big headache in the editing room!

Some Final Hints

Now that you're equipped with some visual references and a basic shot vocabulary, here are a couple of other things to remember. As we've just seen, a good storyboard can prevent you from directing scenes that are disorienting or visually monotonous. When you've illustrated your shots beforehand, you get a "sneak peek" at how they'll cut together. On the flip side of the coin, don't go overboard with dozens of different shots. Remember that each shot involves time to set up, which burns crew time and labor.

Finally, it always pays off to practice! You can do this even if you don't have a script of your own to work on. Get a DVD of one of your favorite movies and choose a memorable scene from it. Sit down with a pencil and some paper and go through the scene shot by shot. Copy each shot onto your paper, using the examples in this article as a reference (remember, stick figures are OK!). As you draw, think about the shot choice. How does the selection of shots contribute to the overall feel of the scene? Are there lots of emotive close ups, or does the director use wide shots to convey distance or loneliness? Does he or she stick closely to the master shot, or is the scene full of movement? Looking at the work of other directors can teach you a lot about how scenes are put together. You don't even have to pick up a camera to do it!

About the Author: Jennifer Albright is a UCLA film school alumna and Los Angeles-based illustrator whose storyboard clients include Fox Sports Marketing. Her illustration work can be seen at www.trickunicorn.com.

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