

Studio Directing Workshop

What is the Director?

In a multi-camera setting, a Director wears many hats: **Technical Manager**, overseeing lighting, camera placement, sound, and graphics; **Event Coordinator**, making sure the program stays on schedule, **Interpreter** of the program for the viewing audience.

A good Director must possess or develop several important attributes:

- 1) Communicating clearly and concisely
- 2) The ability to think ahead and anticipate the next event
- 3) Reacting quickly and decisively under pressure
- 4) Multi-tasking, or doing several tasks at the same time
- 5) A solid understanding of the role and tasks of each crew position

What isn't the Director?

The King (or queen, as the case may be). The most successful Directors are those who are positive, calm, and upbeat -- even when things aren't going well-- and who can create a sense of teamwork and common purpose.

The Director doesn't have to be a technical wizard. She should know the abilities of her crew and equipment, and rely on them to provide what she needs.

Director Duties: Pre-Taping

- 1) Check with the producer to find out as much as possible about what is to happen.
- 2) Coordinate crew positions. Assign jobs, and oversee technical preparations, including:
 - a) Tape preparation: Correct tape length, rewind, Bars and tone, audio levels?
 - b) Cameras: Blocking (placement), white and black balance?
 - c) Lighting and Set: Adequate light levels, enough chairs, props, set decor?
 - d) Audio: All mics, roll-ins, music tested, record sound levels set?
 - e) C.G.: All pages ready, spelling and placement?
 - f) Telephones: Tested and ready for live shows.
- 3) Rehearse the Open and Close, as well as any transitions.

Director Duties: Taping

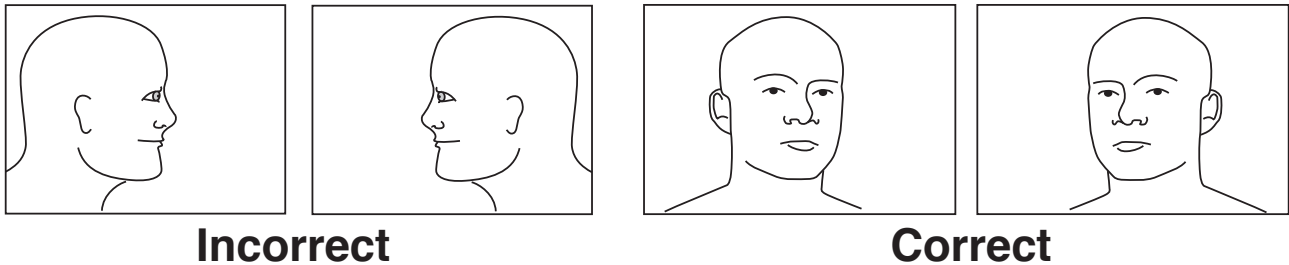
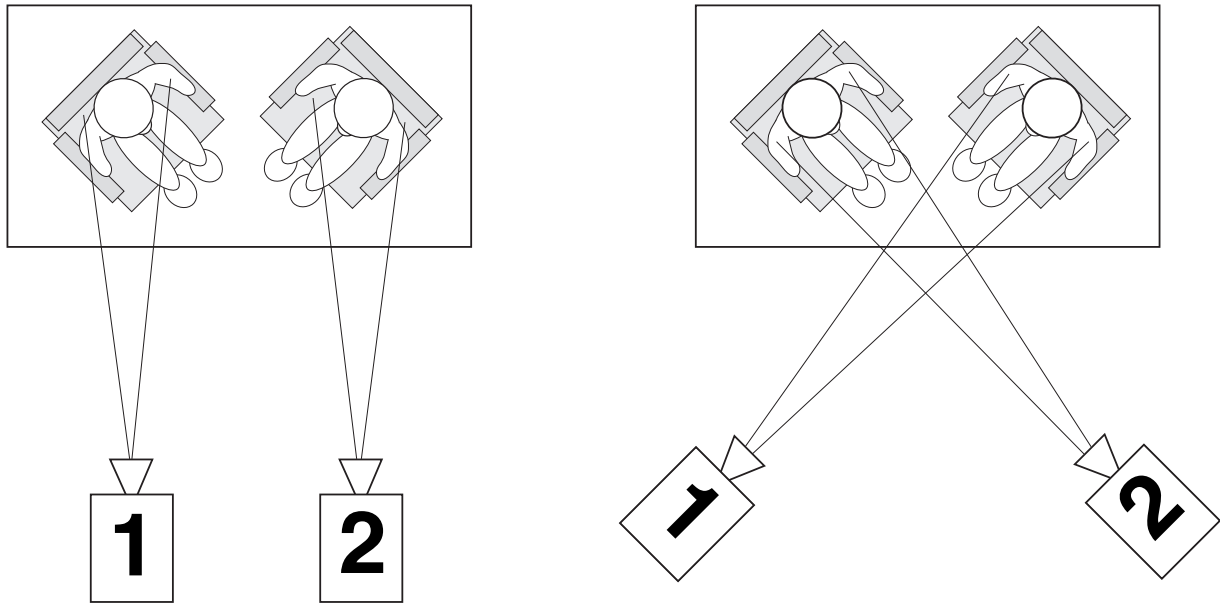
- 1) Provide succinct instructions to crew members about shot composition, audio and VTR operations, graphics, and talent cues.
- 2) Give "ready" commands to crew to allow for adequate preparation time.
- 3) Show the viewer what they want to see, when they want to see it.

Director Duties: Post-Taping

- 1) Oversee (and participate) in studio normalization and clean-up.
- 2) Thank and congratulate crew for their work.

Camera “Blocking”:

Refers to pre-taping decisions about where cameras will be placed during the production.



Considerations in Camera Blocking:

- 1) Provide shots which are “face on” to the talent, not profile.
- 2) Give a variety of different and interesting angles, including a wide shot which shows all the action, and close-up detail of all subjects.
- 3) Backgrounds should be complimentary to the scene. They should not include distracting detail, should not be brighter than the subject, should not be glaringly different from camera to camera.
- 4) Choose positions which minimize the need to move the camera.
- 5) Don't “Cross the Axis” of action. That is, keep all cameras on the same side of the talent. If you cross the axis, the viewers will see a change of direction as you switch from one camera to another.

Choosing Transition Types:

There are 3 basic transitions available for moving from one shot to the next:

- 1) **The Cut.** An instantaneous switch between 2 sources. The most basic and most often used transition. Makes up the bulk of most programs.
- 2) **The Dissolve (mix).** A more gradual blending of the two shots, where one fades away as the other fades in. The Dissolve is a more gentle transition, appropriate for slow or soft music, or at a significant transition point in the production, such as going from live action to a taped roll-in or break.
- 3) **The Wipe.** A pattern or line moves across the screen to wipe away the current image and replace it with the new one. Wipes are the most numerous, most elaborate, and least often used transition. Wipes should be used at major transition points in a show, to draw the viewers attention to an important change.

Wipes have the disadvantage of diverting the audiences attention away from the show content, and placing it on the visual effect. Therefore, wipes should be used sparingly.

Image Composition:

One of the Director's primary responsibilities is to control the visual style of the program. An element of this process is directing the camera operator's framing of various shots. The Director should consider several factors in this process:

- 1) **Orient the Viewer.** At the start of the program, and from time-to-time throughout, show the audience a shot wide enough to see the whole scene and all the participants. This permits the viewer to get "the lay of the land" and see the environment in which the action is taking place, as well as the relative positions of each person and object.

In some cases this wide shot should be dead center to the scene, in other cases (wide or large set-ups) the shot might be more effective from a 3/4" profile angle.

- 2) **Fill the Screen.** Television is a close-up medium. Viewers will be watching on small screens, so you'll need to spend most of your time on shots which fill the screen with the subject. Wide angles tend to minimize the message. Use wide shots sparingly, and when necessary to see all the action.
- 3) **Shot Definitions.** Each Director will use slightly different terminology, so be sure you and your camera operators are on the same page. See Page 4 for terminology.
- 4) **Mind the edges.** While you want to fill the screen with image, you don't want the viewer to become aware of the frame around the image. Avoid framing shots that crowd the top or sides of the screen.
- 5) **Avoid Distractions.** Make sure the viewers attention isn't drawn away from your subject by such things as set decorations which appear to grow out of the head of the talent, and signs or written material in the scene which viewers may try to read.
- 6) **High/Low Angles.** For most purposes, the camera lens should be at about eye-level to the subject. Angles which are significantly low create the psychological impact in the viewer of inflating the importance or significance of the subject, while high angles create a sense of weakness or powerlessness.

Directing Terminology:

The essence of good directing is effective communication. You must be able to quickly and accurately ask for what you want.

To save time, avoid confusion, and ensure consistency, most Directors develop a vocabulary of short words to describe complex ideas. Although there is variation between individuals, here are a few standard terms:

Camera movements -

- 1) **“Pan” Left/Right.** Move camera lens left or right.
- 2) **“Tilt” Up/Down.** Move camera lens up or down.
- 3) **“Pedestal” Up/Down.** Raise or lower camera to adjust lens height.
- 4) **“Truck” Left/Right.** Roll camera left or right (relative to the position of the talent)
- 5) **“Dolly” Forward (In)/Back (Out).** Roll camera forward or away from subject.
- 6) **“Cheat” Up/Down/Left/Right/In/Out.** Gently nudge the camera in the direction. Usually used for a camera which is currently “hot”.

Framing Terms -

- 1) **“ECU” Extreme Close-Up.** Very intense, “feel what they feel” shot. Too close to fit the whole head into the scene. Top of the frame is at mid forehead, bottom just below chin. Not very flattering, so use sparingly.
- 2) **“CU” Close-Up.** More flattering, less intense. Provides a good tight view of the subject without feeling intrusive. Top of frame just above the head, bottom just below tops of shoulders. Don’t cut subject at the base of the neck.
- 3) **“MCU” Medium Close-Up.** Most common shot. Very flattering to subject, allows a bit more view of the whole person and their surroundings. Top of frame just above the head, bottom just above belly-button.
- 4) **“Waist Shot/Knee Shot”.** Describes where the bottom of the shot falls. Avoid cutting people on a joint line. Cut just above the joint.
- 5) **“2-Shot”.** Wide enough to include 2 subjects. Frame as tightly as possible. If you must cut off part of the subjects, cut off at the feet, not the head.
- 6) **“Over The Shoulder” shot.** Camera positioned slightly behind and to one side of the subject in the foreground, looking toward the person they are speaking with. Viewers see just the side of the head, and one shoulder of the foreground subject, and their attention is drawn to the person facing the camera.
- 7) **“Head Room”.** The gap between the top of the frame, and the top of the subject’s head. Proper headroom usually places the subjects eyes at 1/3 of the screen height from the top of the picture.
- 8) **“Nose/Lead Room”.** The gap between the side of the frame, and the tip of the subject’s nose. Proper leadroom usually places the subjects nose on the vertical centerline of the screen.

The Job of the Director:

A director must convey the essence of what is happening to the viewer. Remember, the audience doesn't have the luxury of seeing all three cameras at once; They only see what's on "the box", and are relying on you to show them **what they want or need to see, when they want to see it.**

How you direct two identical scenes can have a dramatic impact on how the viewer perceives it: Wide shots and slow paced cutting may leave the viewer feeling detached and uninterested; Many close shots and fast pacing can engage and interest the viewer.

Good Directing is "Transparent." That is, the viewer is carried along, always seeing what they desire to see, but is never really aware of the cutting or framing or pacing.

Viewers become aware of the direction when the framing or camera movement is poor, or they are unable to see what they want to see, or when the pacing is slow.

Directing Styles: Each Director must develop his or her own style based on taste, personality, and the type of program being produced. Be sure your crew knows your style:

Shot Shoppers - Allow the camera operators the freedom to choose their own shots (within limits) and the Director chooses the best of the shots.

Shot Directors - Don't want the cameras to move until directed to do so.

Directing Tips:

- 1) Address cameras by number not operator name.
- 2) When giving a command, first say the name of the camera, then specify the shot or move you desire.
- 3) Give the "Cue Talent" command before you take the talent close-up. This will help to avoid the awkward staring into the camera moment.
- 4) Rehearse the hard parts: The Open, Close, and any transition points.
- 5) After the flurry of activity at the open, don't relax entirely: Take the opportunity to think about what's coming up, and begin to prepare the crew.
- 6) Don't yell or swear at your crew: we're all in this together. If you have problems with a crew member, speak privately after the show is over.
- 7) Work out camera angles, audio, VTR, and CG cues in advance. Let the crew know what you'll expect.
- 8) Give the command to open mics just before speaking, and to kill mics immediately after the talent says goodbye. This will avoid airing what were intended to be private comments.
- 9) Make the pacing of your cutting appropriate to the action.
- 10) Cut before action, not after!

Multi-Camera Directing: Summary

The skill of the Director is the single most important factor in the success of any studio production. A good Director will probably exhibit most of these personality traits:

- 1) **Effective communicator.** She must be able to give instructions to crew members in as concise a manner as possible.
- 2) **Multi-tasking.** She should also be able to juggle several tasks at once, as well as anticipate what's coming next.
- 3) **Understanding of Studio Production process.** She should have a working knowledge of each piece of equipment in the studio.
- 4) **Quick and Calm.** She must be able to act quickly and decisively, but also be able to keep her head when things go awry.

Directing Tips:

- 1) **Practice the Hard Parts.** Before the show begins, get crew into positions, and rehearse the show open, any transitions to pre-recorded material or guest changes, and the end of the show. These are when the action is at it's most frantic.
- 2) **Don't be afraid to NOT cut.** Your job is to show the viewer what they want to see, not necessarily to make a transition from one source to another every 5 seconds. For example, if shooting a band, spend most of your time on the soloist.
- 3) **Don't Let the Talent or Crew Direct.** Communication about what happens and when it happens should come FROM the Director to the talent and crew, not the other way.
- 4) **Avoid "Jump Cuts."** A jump cut occurs when the Director cuts between 2 cameras that have very similar views of the same subject. The viewer sees a quick shift in the camera angle, but no real change in picture composition. Jump cuts almost always look like mistakes.
- 5) **Communicate Clearly.** The Director should strive to make each instruction as brief and concise as possible. When speaking to cameras, address them first by camera number, and then give the direction; Don't just say "zoom in a little" or you may see all 3 cameras -- including the on-air shot -- start to zoom at the same time. Don't say "camera 1... fix your shot" because camera 1 probably doesn't know what you think is wrong with his shot.
- 6) **Keep an Eye on Program.** Sometimes, Directors get so busy setting up the next shot or following their rundown that they don't notice that the "on-air" shot has fallen apart. The most important shot is the one the viewer is watching NOW.
- 7) **Look Ahead.** Don't be satisfied with what's on screen. Be thinking about what's coming next, and what's after that. Have a back-up plan; Where will you go if the shot on program suddenly falls apart... what if the talent unexpectedly stands up?
- 8) **Give "Ready" and then "Execute" commands.** "Ready to..." commands give crew members a chance to get their fingers on the right buttons or make last second adjustments before you "take" their shot, or ask them to roll music.
- 9) **Acknowledge Good Work, but Don't Dwell on Mistakes.**

