

Competencies

- The responsibilities of a director
- The control available to the director
- Responsibility of making correct choices
- The tools available to the director
- The shot and its uses
- The transitions and their appropriateness
- The communications method used by directors

Perspective on Directing

The director is the person in charge of the entire production. How this person goes about using the tools of management is determined by the management style of the individual. Because of the complexity of the business, it is nearly impossible for one person, alone, to do everything. Good management is getting things done through other people.

Production Decisions

You might think of the director as someone faced with an almost unlimited number of choices. A good director is able to make the right production choices, in the right order, and at the right time. In effect, a production is the sum total of the director's choices. As you become a more experienced director, these choices will become clearer and the decisions will become more automatic.

The many production decisions made by the director are not determined by chance. There must be an established viewpoint of the production. You are the guide for your audience. You have control as to how the audience will finally view the production. You are the eyes and ears of your audience. You also have the opportunity to stir the other senses and emotions. The director usually does not want to just create reality, but a feeling and a mood.

The shot

You are responsible for deciding what is important and not important. You must guide the audience effortlessly in the path that you as the director want to take them.

Unless you are trying for a special effect, a wide shot is usually the first shot of a scene. Recall walking into a room for the first time. You usually do not look at a specific object closely, but get a general overview of the entire space. This is called an establishing shot and is used to orient the audience.

After you have oriented your audience, you can go in tighter for a closer look. A medium shot of the most important element of the scene is now taken. Finally, close-up of this element is appropriate. The flow from wide shot the medium to close-up should be smooth and unnoticeable by the viewer. It would be a natural transition the viewer would have if they were actually on the scene.

The angle the camera is viewing the scene also determines the mood of feeling of the program. A camera that is high above the action acts as a spectator to the action and not a participant. There is also a feeling of dominance over the action. If the camera is low in relation the scene, the reverse is true. Both these angles produce an objective look at the scene by the audience. A hand-held camera can provide a subjective view for the audience. They can feel a part of the action.

Camera Movement

Camera movement is also an important element to the shot. Camera movement should be continuation of the viewer's eye. As a viewer, you probably would move in a specific direction to keep your eye on the action or to get a better look at the scene. Camera movement does this for the viewer. Movement should be natural and motivated. The viewer should want to be moved in that general direction. Zooms make it easy to move the camera. However, zooms should not be used when other camera movement would be more appropriate.

Also, remember to allow the subject to move about the frame of the picture. The subject can also move into and out of the shot just as someone might move in and out of the view from your eye. The main element of the shot does not have to be centered on the cross hairs of the viewfinder every second.

There is usually a rhythm to going from on shot to another. It may be the end of a paragraph of the script, the beat of the music, or a different person speaking. The director must anticipate what is coming next in the program to make changing shots effective and appear natural to the viewer.

The time to change shots is "when you have shown all you can tell." Cut when there is something new to show or you have a different view that tells a better story. This change could be motivated by the current shot. A good rule-of-thumb is the three-to-one cutting ratio. The rule states that you do not take a shot that is three times longer or three times shorter than the previous shot. "All rules should be broken", is another good rule to follow.

Reaction shots, showing a response to what has occurred in the previous shot can be appropriate.

Problem Shots

There are several problem shots that disrupt the flow of the action.

A jump cut from a wide shot to a close-up can be a distraction of the viewer becomes disoriented. Cutting from a shot from the opposite side of the current shot is also very

disorienting. This is called crossing the axis. The reverse angle special shot at a football game is a good example of a cut from across the axis.

Cutting from or to a moving shot to a still shot can also call attention to the shot itself and not the action. Pans and zooms should have a definite start and finish before the next shot is taken.

A big problem with shooting individual scenes and then editing them together is that there may appear a discontinuity between shots. A person may have a different costume, hairstyle, or appear to jump from one place to another.

Transitions

Cut

In the previous section on shots, it is assumed that the transition between each of the shots is a cut. A cut is an almost instantaneous change from one shot to another. It is the most natural form of transition, and it is the way your eye usually follows action.

Fade

A fade is usually from black or to black. They usually signify “the end” and act as a logical transition between major parts of a production. The speed of the fade is determined by the pace of the action of the previous series of transitions.

Mix

The mix is a replacement of one shot with another, as one shot dissolves out, the next is dissolved in. It can be used to show action going on at the same time at different places, and is especially useful in music productions. It can be overused, however.

A match dissolve is when the action in both shots is at the same speed and direction. Pans and zooms during dissolves can also be used but require preplanning. A focus to de-focus and return can also be used. It requires coordination between the cameraperson.

Wipe

The wipe is electronic cutting of into the current shot and the “hole” is replaced by the next shot. The line created by the effect draws attention to itself. The use of a wipe is limited to specific applications and must be used sparingly. Softening the edge of the wipe can make it appear as a dissolve and the distraction factor is reduced.

Defocus

The on air camera slowly goes out of focus as it is dissolved to the next camera which is also out of focus but slowly comes into focus.

Digital Video Effects

Digital video effects are used mainly to draw attention to the shot or series of shots. The unnatural look of some of the effects is quite startling, but the newness soon wears off and the overuse tends to be distracting. Creative use of digital effects adds to the quality of the production.

Sound

Sound should compliment the picture and should not be noticed. It should just “be there.” Sound sweetening should be added when appropriate, and music should be added to develop the required mood. The audio should follow the video when transitions are made.

The Director at Work

The director must develop a pace and special language when directing a live production. Most of the conversation is one-way to the camerapersons. The Clearcom master control is located above the production switcher. This unit allows two-way communication between the control room and the camera persons. Lighting control and spotlight operators are also connected. There is also a wireless headset that is used by the floor director.

The director usually calls “ready” and then the camera number. This is followed by the action or movement needed, the direction, and the speed. An example, “Ready two, zoom out slowly as the talent stands up” gives the cameraperson advance notice to begin the action when the action changes.

If the director is not actually operating the switcher, the technical director must also be given directions. This includes the “take” command and the transition speed.

The floor manager is the extension of the director in the studio. This person relays the director's commands to the talent, either verbally or with hand signals when the program is on air.