

A vintage movie camera is the central focus of the cover. It is a large, dark, mechanical device with a prominent lens on the right side and various dials and knobs on the front. The camera is mounted on a tripod, which is visible at the bottom. The background is a light, textured surface, possibly a wall or a backdrop. The overall appearance is that of an old, well-used piece of equipment.

# How to Shoot a Movie Story

*The Technique of Pictorial Continuity*

By Arthur L. Gaskill  
and David A. Englander



ARTHUR L. GASKILL has had a notable career in the newsreel field for over thirty years, climaxed by his present position as New England representative of NBC Newsfilm. During World War Two he was director of the Army Photographic School which trained thousands of cameramen. He is a lecturer at schools and colleges on film techniques.

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**How To SHOOT A MOVIE STORY - *The Technique of Pictorial Continuity*** starts you out with the simple sequence and takes you all the way through the buildup, the story and the editing. It explains when and how to change shots, change angles, change pace, cut-away, cut-in, pan, dolly and so on. All the tricks of good planning and production that lead to the final professional effect are presented with many practical examples and detailed illustrations.

The proven techniques and tips in this book apply equally to features, TV programs and commercials, documentaries, industrial, educational or personal home-movie films. **How To SHOOT A MOVIE STORY** is a reference "must" for motion picture studios, advertising agencies, schools and colleges, industrial & research organizations, and home-movie makers.

*"No other book so effectively explains and illustrates the basic steps required to achieve real professional results in photographing a motion picture."* American Cinematographer

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# HOW TO SHOOT A MOVIE STORY

*Technique of Pictorial Continuity*

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## INTRODUCTION

There are ten million film makers in America today. Most of them are amateurs, but the number who migrate to professional ranks grows constantly as television enlarges its demands for motion pictures of all kinds.

Whether he shoots for fun or profit—for a family circle or a television station—the experienced film maker knows that getting correct focus and exposure are only the first steps in using a movie camera.

He wants to tell a movie story. He will not do so if he shoots all over the place in a series of correctly exposed but pictorially unrelated scenes. To tell a movie story, he must put together a wide variety of shots so as to achieve a smooth, meaningful, visual flow. In short, he must understand his medium as well as his camera; he must know pictorial continuity.

Pictorial continuity is the indispensable framework of every soundly constructed motion picture, whether it is a Hollywood epic, TV film, newsreel, documentary, cartoon or home movie.

Without it, any movie, no matter how elaborately or expensively made, is amateurish; but with it, the raw beginner can achieve a professional touch.

It is the answer to how to shoot a movie story.

## BASIC ELEMENTS OF THE SIMPLE SEQUENCE

The Long Shot



The Medium Shot



The Close-up



D. D. Nibbelink

## CHAPTER 1

### PICTORIAL CONTINUITY: THE SIMPLE SEQUENCE

#### The Meaning Of Continuity

Most people who have pressed the button of either a still or move camera appreciate the fact that a motion picture is only a series of still pictures in which the change between the frames is so slight that the illusion of motion is gained.

But a good motion picture is more than just a series of animated snapshots. It hangs together, it tells a story smoothly, coherently, logically. The know-how of this is contained in the technique of *pictorial continuity*.

Pictorial continuity is a rather fancy term, but we like it, because it states so precisely what we're out to describe. The dictionary explains "continuity" as an "uninterrupted, close union of separate parts." Pictorial continuity, therefore, in a fully rounded definition, would be *the proper development and connection of motion-picture sequences to create a smoothly joined, coherent motion-picture story*.

#### Basic Elements Of The Sequence

Defining more closely, we use the dictionary description of a "sequence" as a "series of things following in a certain order or succession," and we therefore term our motion-picture sequence a *related series of shots*. The sequence thus is a fundamental unit in pictorial continuity. And it has three simple basic elements: the long shot, the medium shot, and the closeup. We break down the sequence this way because all people view action in real life with their eyes in terms of long shot, medium shot, and close-up, even if they do not realize it.

Grasp these elements, and their correct logical use, and you have caught the basic idea. They are elementary, but you cannot start without learning them. They are the ABC's of continuity; the XYZ's will come in due time.

### The Long Shot

We say these elements are simple and that they correspond to the stages by which the human eye views action. Let's prove it by shooting a simple sequence.

We will use two admirable photographic instruments. First, we'll shoot with the greatest, most inimitable camera of them all—the human eye. Then we'll shoot the same action with a motion-picture camera.

Now for our action. We want something ordinary and everyday, such as one person's visiting another. To bring it closer to home, we make it an event which has doubtless occurred in the lives of many of our readers—profitably, we trust, for some: a salesman's call on a prospective customer.

You enter the door of Mr. Prospect's office. The scene is new to you, so you hesitate for an instant to orient yourself and to satisfy your curiosity. *Your eye has automatically started to shoot.* In a split-second glance, it has swept the room, registering walls, ceiling, window, charts, desk, and most important, Mr. Prospect seated at the telephone. Your eye, in short, has established the locale and your subject in it.

Now your camera must do for a movie audience what your eye did for you, so that what the audience sees on the screen will be what your eye has seen in real life, so that it will know without asking questions that it is looking at an office.

This first shot which *establishes the scene* is the long shot, the "LS."

Well, then, take it. Pick up your camera and, guided by what your eye sees in the viewfinder, shoot.

Don't move your camera so fast! Shoot what your eye sees, but don't try to shoot it *in the same way*. There's no camera made that can imitate your eye in throwing a glance around the room with lightning speed. Try it with your camera and you'll have a weird, waving effect (blurred, too, if you do it

fast enough) that will force your audience to shut its eyes because it is so painful to look at.

Many an over-ambitious but under-experienced beginner has lost his audience by selling his photographic soul for a "flashy pan." You can "pan" later—on the right occasion.

Right now, your LS can be taken from a nice, steady, stationary position. From where you stand in the doorway, you are far enough back to take in your subject and a great deal of his surroundings—enough to establish the locale.

If you are fussy about composition, you can move back even more, and shoot the office interior with the doorway as a frame on either side. It won't be worth it, though, if you cut off too much of the interior, or if your subject is so far away that he seems lost. It is, after all, *his* office; *he* dominates it. You don't want to suggest the reverse. This is just a simple home-made movie, not a deep, dark psychological drama.

By now, the long shot and its function should be well established in your mind. Go on into the office, with your eye again doing the shooting.

You and your eye want to get as close to your subject as you can. As you move in toward Mr. Prospect, your eye instantly, automatically, and continuously keeps readjusting itself to the changing perspective and proportions of the scene. It takes in increasingly more and more of Mr. Prospect, his face, hair, shoulders, tie, shirt, the articles on his desk, and less and less of the rest of his surroundings, such as the wall, the window, and the body of the desk.

This is the way you want it. After all, the vital part of the scene is Mr. Prospect, not his location. You want to cut out as much of the extraneous, distracting locale as you can, and come as close to his face as your eye, and politeness, will allow. This is your closeup, the heart of your picture.

### The Medium Shot

But before discussing the closeup, we must look at the technique by which we duplicate the eye's transition from long shot to closeup with the camera. This brings forth the inevitable question. Why is a transition shot needed at all?

