



Medium close-up (MCU)



Close-up (CU)



Big close-up (BCU)



Extreme close-up (ECU)



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Underwater camera work was traditionally wide shots, following shots. Now we apply standard shot sizes to build story sequences. Anyone who wants to do nature filming should apply the same traditional film techniques that are used in drama, i.e. build up visual sequences. That's what producers look for in demo reels and in programs.

As you can see, shot sizes are defined in relation to the human figure. With the exception of the term *close-up*, these terms aren't applied to other objects.

You can't have a mid-shot of a car, for example (regardless of how personal your relationship is with your car!).

There's one other shot size, not shown above. It's the *wide shot*. The wide shot is the unhindered view you get looking at a scene. It can be very wide, like a view of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, or smaller, like the front of a cafe. In a wide shot it's possible to see many human figures.

Framing

Here are some guidelines to consider when framing your subject.

Head Room

Shots of people are usually framed with a small amount of space above their heads. This space is called *head room*.

Shots need to have sufficient head room because when the top of the head is right against the top of the frame, it can produce a claustrophobic impression.

The most common framing error of beginners is to put the subject too low in the picture, leaving heaps of head room. If nothing important is happening in the part of the frame that's above the head, this is wasted screen space and you could more productively either tilt down to show more of the person's body, or zoom in to give the viewer a better look at the subject's face.



Too little head room



Too much head room



Good

If the person isn't framed properly s/he will appear to head-butt the frame or to be hanging by the neck.

The Eyes

Generally speaking, you should aim to put the subject's eye level about two-thirds of the way up the screen.

The eyes play a very important role in communication, and eye signals and eye orientation are very closely connected to culture.

Although it's standard practice in broadcast television to use close-ups of subjects facing directly to the camera, with their eyes looking straight down the lens barrel, this is culturally inappropriate in many societies, including some Indigenous peoples.

Because it's unacceptable in some cultures for a younger person to meet the eyes of an older person, the full-on gaze of an older person looking out from the television screen can cause some younger viewers to avert their eyes. If it's important for your audience to continue watching the screen, it makes sense to arrange your shot so they can comfortably do so.

It may be more acceptable to have the elder shown in three-quarter face (i.e. looking slightly away from the camera), or even in profile, so their eyes aren't directed straight

at the viewer, so that the scene reflects the image the audience would normally see in daily life.

When you're making a program, consider the cultural mores of your subject and the needs and responses of your anticipated audience.

The Mouth

The mouth is also an important element in communication. The shot should usually be framed so the audience can get a good view of moving lips, so the mouth shouldn't be partway off the screen.

Because many people watch mouth movements when they're listening to a person speak, profile shots—which show only the side of the mouth—can reduce the viewer's ability to catch the words the person is saying.

Any program which is aimed at an audience which includes hearing impaired people (could we say this is every audience?) should be made with thought given to the placement and visibility of the talking mouth on the screen.

Looking/Talking Room

When a person is framed so s/he is looking off screen, there should be more space in front of the person's face than behind the head. This is called looking room.

When a person is talking to someone off screen, as in a three-quarter close-up of a person in a talk show situation, there should be space in front of them in the frame for their words to flow out of their mouths. It may sound silly, but if the edge of frame is close to the front of their face, it feels to the viewer as if their words will hit a brick wall and go nowhere.



Not enough looking/talking space



Preferred

Walking Room

Similarly, a person walking across the screen needs to have walking room at the front. Keeping walking room requires well-timed panning on the part of the camera operator. It's easy to go a little too slow and have the person appearing to head into a rigid barrier (the edge of the frame), and then jerk the pan over to try to catch up. This looks daggy. Shots with planned movements like this should be well rehearsed before they're recorded.

The concept of walking room also applies to other human movements, like skating, swimming, skiing and so forth. And it also applies to vehicular movement—planes, trains and automobiles.

Framing for Widescreen

If you're shooting on a widescreen format, most of the same ideas on composition apply, but in addition you have to consider who your audience will be. Will they be viewing your material on widescreen? Or will they still have to see it on standard 4:3 screens?

Some frames just don't convert from wide screen to 4:3.

This shot was framed for widescreen—16:9 aspect ratio.



A 4:3 centrecut of this frame looks ridiculous.



Some editors will 'pan and scan' it into two shots like this.

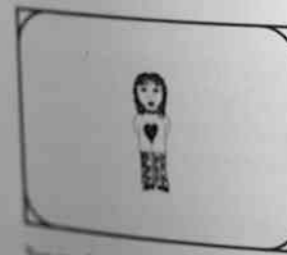
Because we're in this transition to widescreen TV, you have to shoot everything in 16:9 so it's 'future-proofed', so it will be compatible to go in programs made a few years from now. But you also have to frame your shots so they're acceptable for viewing on today's 4:3 screens.



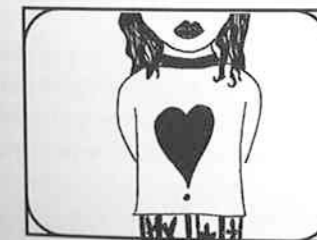
Richard Fitzpatrick, Camera Operator, Digital Dimensions.

Appropriate Size

Make sure the subject is shown at an appropriate size, so sufficient detail can be seen and important parts aren't chopped off by framing that's too tight.



Too small



Too tight



Preferred