

Storyboard basics

A storyboard is simply a sequence of drawings, similar to a comic book, which represents the sequence of shots in the finished screen-work. In addition to the drawings there is information about duration, sound effects, dialogue, the movement of objects within the frame and camera movement. In the real world, the storyboard is not the responsibility of the screenwriter, but is in the province of the director, who may work with a storyboard artist in order to realise a script visually. It is not necessarily a 'work of art' but it must be functional – essentially it must convey information about how the shots will be framed, how long they will last and how they will be sequenced. Consequently it is worth spending some time on prescriptive drawing and sequencing exercises.

Storyboarding can be laborious, and sometimes unpopular, but it does provide a useful training in visualisation and sequencing and is an essential part of the planning process. Fortunately there are now many examples of storyboards available both online (URLs in the bibliography, on page 77) and as extras on DVDs. For example, *Mission to Mars* (Brian De Palma, US, 2000) includes storyboards and animatics from key sequences in the film, and *Star Trek: The Motion Picture (The Director's Edition)* (Robert Wise, US, 1979) includes a storyboard archive.

Those with primitive drawing skills get easily disenchanted with the process of storyboarding and there are some common tendencies, such as:

- Using only one or a few frames to represent an entire scene;
- Failing to grasp that the storyboard frame represents the screen and drawing stick figures hanging in space;
- Avoiding the visual dimension altogether and writing descriptions in the frames.

If a storyboard is to be submitted as a final product there must be a high degree of correspondence between it and the moving image sequence it represents. If it is a step in the process of producing a piece of video work it must be a functional document which expresses narrative information visually. In either case it is important to highlight the skills that are necessary and practise them.

If hand-drawing storyboards is too difficult, digital photography can be a solution; but taking photographs should still be prefaced by mental visualisation and writing out a sequence of shots. Another solution is to use dedicated software, such as *Storyboard Quick* which, although not cheap, enables the user to:

- Choose an aspect ratio for the frame;
- Select a location and background from an extensive library (or even import a digital image from another source);
- Select characters from the library in pre-drawn positions (additional character libraries, such as 'action' and 'ethnic' are available as extras);
- Select props and vehicles;
- Rotate, position and zoom characters;
- Add direction arrows and icons to indicate a dolly, zoom or tilt;
- Add captions;
- Re-shuffle the frames.

Version 3 even allows a script to be imported from a screenwriting program (including *Word*) and then sets up a new scene to be visualised for each slug line.

Storyboard Format

There is no single format used for storyboards. The template used in the examples in this pack includes space for essential information about sound, movement and duration and uses a screen ratio which approximates to the TV screen (1:33:1). Similar templates can easily be constructed using, for example, standard 'academy ratio' (1:85:1) or widescreen ratio (16:9) depending on what is required.

worksheet 16 Shot types

Working title _____
Group name _____

Shot no.	Picture	Type of shot & duration	Sound/Dialogue

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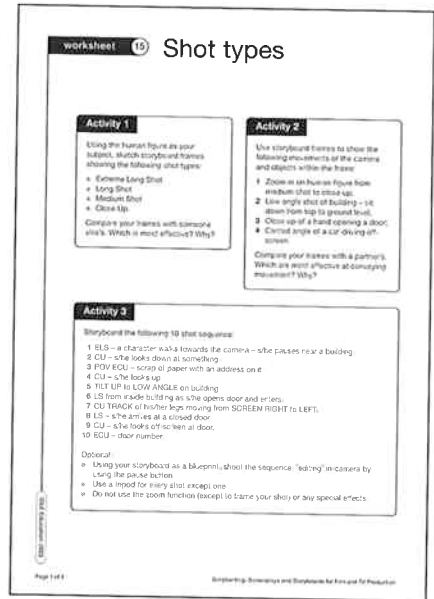
Storyboarding: Screenwriting and Storyboards for Film and TV Production

Shot types

Worksheet 15

● Activity 1

Initially it is worth establishing the vocabulary of shots, such as close up, establishing shot and high angle shot, for example. The function of different shot types should also be addressed – play a short sequence from a film or TV drama (muted) asking students to record the different shot types and then go through it again with the pause button and collate the responses. Almost anything will work for this exercise, providing there is an emphasis on visual information.



Worksheet 15, Activity 1 asks students to sketch specific shot types – an opportunity to address some technical as well as aesthetic issues – which may produce the results illustrated in figure 1. Even without highly developed drawing skills it is possible for students to create the illusion of depth using lines of perspective and, with some practice, effectively convey the human figure using simple shapes. This exercise can be enlivened by making a public activity out of it, using a whiteboard or flipchart and discussing why some shots perform some functions better than others.

When practising more difficult shot types, such as high and low angles, it can be useful to take appropriate shots using a video camera or a digital still camera and then to copy these into storyboard frames. Regular sessions of sketching practice can be scheduled in which students (and teachers, if necessary) establish some fairly simple techniques of conveying point of view and perspective in two dimensions.

Working Title _____

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Group Names _____

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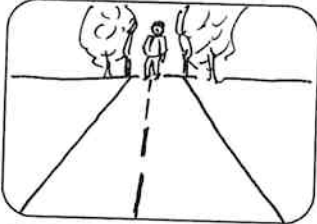
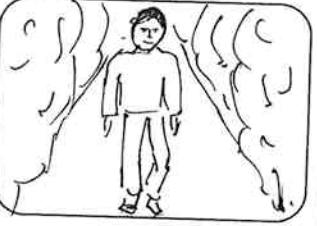


Shot No.	Picture	Type of shot & duration	sound/dialogue
		ELS	
		LS	
		MS	
		CU	

fig 1

Working Title _____

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Group Names _____

Date: / /

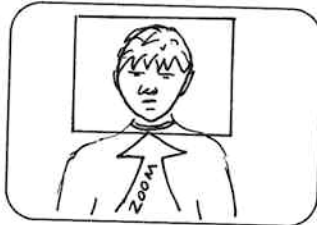
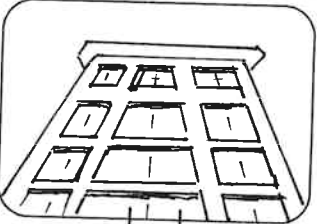
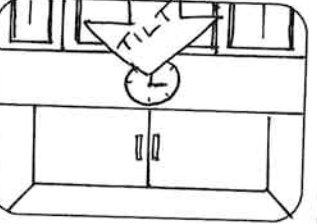
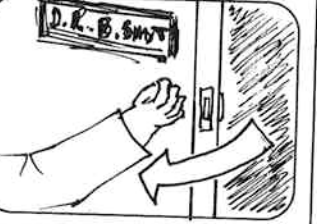
Shot No.	Picture	Type of shot & duration	sound/dialogue
1		ZOOM IN TO C.U.	
2		TILT DOWN FROM LOW ANGLE	
↓		↓	
3		C.U. ON OPENING DOOR	

fig 2

● Activity 2

This exercise is primarily a technical one designed to get students to practise representing movement, of both the camera (in the form of zooms, tilts, pans and tracking shots) and objects within the frame. Essentially this entails the use of directional arrows and some simple preparatory demonstrations should help students. This is an opportunity to show how the frames of a storyboard can be used flexibly in order to 'animate' the sequence and movements and the possible outcomes of some of the examples in Worksheet 15 are illustrated below.

● Activity 3

This exercise builds upon skills of sketching and framing and develops an understanding of how shots can be simply sequenced to create narrative openings and enigmas. If this sequence can subsequently be shot and 'edited' in-camera by small groups it provides an excellent opportunity to exhibit and discuss the various versions that result. At the very least, the degrees of accuracy of framing can be discussed and, in addition, the effects of the different shot types can also be addressed. It can be useful to formalise a set of 'assessment criteria' for students to apply to each other's work, such as accuracy of framing, shot stability, shot duration and continuity as consideration of these can greatly benefit the 20-shot exercise which follows.

Worksheet 16

This exercise involves the creation of a storyboard sequence from an explicit list of visual events and should consolidate the previous work on framing and movement. The exercise is suited to group work, but the groups should be small enough to ensure that each member is involved in the construction of the storyboard. It also provides an opportunity for self-assessment if one is sufficiently confident to produce an 'authoritative version' and display it as an OHT. The illustration in fig 3 shows some of the shots that might result from Worksheet 16.

worksheet 16 Shot types

In small groups create a storyboard sequence based on the following list of shot descriptions:

- 1 CU side on - tracking shot of a woman walking across a car park. She checks she hasn't something and turns.
- 2 MS rear angle - slow zoom into CU on face. She turns back.
- 3 Front angle CU of face. She resumes walking.
- 4 Front angle CU of her feet walking.
- 5 CU of bag as she fumbles for keys.
- 6 CU of her face - moment of panic.
- 7 POV tracking LS as she approaches her car.
- 8 CU of her face as she continues to fumble. She breathes into a run.
- 9 CU side angle - her feet running.
- 10 MS rear angle as she approaches car and stops at door.
- 11 CU of door lock as she fumbles with keys.
- 12 High rear angle zoom in to her back.
- 13 CU of keys and lock. She drops keys.
- 14 MS ground level from far side of car as she bends down to look for keys.
- 15 MS rear angle as she bends down.
- 16 MS ground level as she lies on floor trying to reach keys.
- 17 CU of her face and hand as she tries to reach keys.
- 18 POV ground level - male feet approaching the car from the far side.
- 19 CU of her face - panic. She gets up.
- 20 High rear angle - she runs help.

Complete your version with audio or video.

- Is it clear what happens in each shot? If not, why?
- Is it clear how the shots link with each other to form a sequence? If not, why?

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Group Names _____

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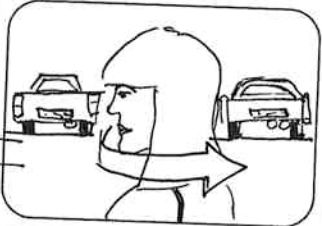
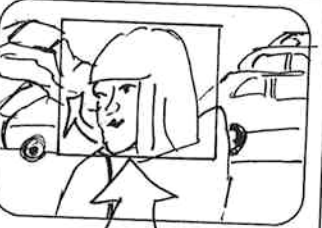

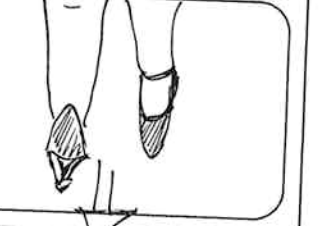
Shot No.	Picture	Type of shot & duration	sound/dialogue
1			
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fig 3 (i)

Working Title _____
 Group Names _____

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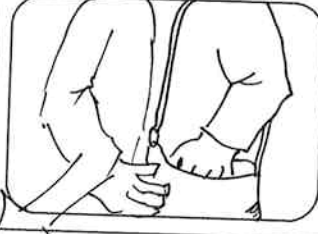

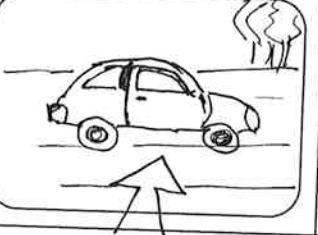

Shot No.	Picture	Type of shot & duration	sound/dialogue
5			
6			
7			
8			

fig 3 (ii)

Working Title _____

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Group Names _____

Date: / /

Shot No.	Picture	Type of shot & duration	sound/dialogue
9			
10			
11			
12			

fig 3 (iii)

The exercise can be extended into a video activity in which the small groups produce a video version of their storyboard which is 'edited' in camera. The advantage with this is that the shooting can be achieved in a short time (perhaps 30 minutes) and the results can be viewed immediately, stimulating discussion about the construction of narrative expectation through the vocabulary of available shots. There is another advantage to realising the sequence on video – the versions can be compared with the original, from which the above sequence has been transcribed (it is a short extract from an episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Season 2, Episode 2 'Some Assembly Required'). This inevitably generates discussion about the importance of music and sound effects, the effects of different shot durations and camera movements and the quantity of shots used in such a short space of time. This is the kind of 'thriller' sequence that students may have otherwise been tempted to represent using one or two shots and this exercise demonstrates effectively how to generate tension through the fragmentation of space.

Sequencing

Worksheet 17

In a subsequent exercise students can build creatively on their awareness of framing and sequencing. Here, the requirement is for students to produce a storyboard of 15–20 shots in which they build up a sense of narrative expectation from a given scenario. You can invent your own scenarios, but some thought should be given to the objectives, which are to encourage students to do the following:

- Avoid simply assuming that the meaning of a scene is evident, or relying on making it apparent through dialogue.
- Establish a scene visually and then break it up into elements which have narrative significance.
- Use different shot types to convey information about character, mood and expectation.
- Use editing to establish relationships between characters and objects and create narrative expectation.

