

The Art of Cinematic Storytelling

*A Visual Guide to Planning Shots,
Cuts, and Transitions*

Kelly Gordon Brine

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xi
Introduction	1
The Craft of Visual Storytelling	2
How the Author Learned about Visual Storytelling	3
Camera Positions Make a Dramatic Difference	3
The Best Direction Is Invisible	10
Learning More about Film Storytelling	11
1. Seven Film Storytelling Essentials	12
Adding Meaning through Juxtaposition	13
Telling the Story in a Series of Beats	14
Putting the Audience Where the Story Is	18
Making Cuts Smoother	21
Using Motivated and Unmotivated Camera Movement	26
Staying on One Side of the Action	26
Starting a New Scene	29
2. Using Storyboards	32
Shooting on Paper	32
Aspect Ratios	37
Indicating Action Using Arrows	38
Illustrating One Shot in Two Panels	38
Indicating Camera Movement	40
Adding Labels, Dialogue, and Notes	40
Numbering Scenes, Shots, Panels, and Pages	41
Drawing Maps	43
3. Shot Composition Basics	46
Composition Guidelines	46
Framing People	59
Some Classic Composition Techniques	66
Unconventional Framing	67
4. Camera Angles, Lenses, and Storytelling	69
Camera Height and Perspective	69
Depth of Field	70
Constant Object Size	71
Normal Lens (50mm) and Storytelling	72
Wide Lenses (under 50mm) and Storytelling	72
Long Lenses (over 50mm) and Storytelling	73
Pans, Tilts, and Lenses	74
Focus and Storytelling	76
Zooming and Storytelling	77

5. Designing Shots for Storytelling	80
Types of Camera Movement	80
Motivated and Unmotivated Camera Movement	83
Deciding Whose Scene It Is	85
Creating Objective and Subjective Shots	86
Shot Size and Storytelling	88
How the Direction of Movement Affects Storytelling	94
Increasing the Illusion of Depth	97
Shots That Capture Attention	99
Designing Shots That Create Moods	101
6. Continuity Editing Basics	104
The Importance of Left and Right to Editing	104
Characters, Settings, and Cuts	105
The Beta Effect and Shot Contrast	106
Continuous Time and Space within a Scene	108
Three Kinds of Jump Cuts	112
Avoiding Jump Cuts	115
7. Storytelling Cuts and Film Grammar	117
Reasons for Cutting	117
Avoiding Beta Effects When Cutting	118
How to Create Shot Contrast	119
The Match Cut	119
The Punch In	123
Reverse Angles	125
Entrances and Exits	126
Cutting When Traveling with Characters	126
Cutting between Stationary and Traveling Shots	129
Motivating and Hiding Cuts	132
Avoiding Cuts	134
8. 3D Spatial Continuity and 2D Screen Geography	138
Juxtaposition Implies a Context in Space and Time	138
What Is 3D Spatial Continuity?	140
What Is 2D Screen Geography?	140
Keeping Things on Their Side of the Screen	141
Points of View, Eyelines, and Matching	142
Tie-Up Shots	144
Opposed Looks and Eyeline Match	146
Matching Shots for Dialogue	147
Continuity of Screen Motion	150
Crossing the Axis but Preserving Continuity	153
Screen Geography That Spans Scenes	158
Intentionally Flipping Screen Geography	159
9. Compressing, Expanding, and Ending Scenes	161
Compressing Time within a Scene	161
Expanding Time within a Scene	163
Signaling the End of a Scene	164

10. Beginning Scenes and Using Transitions	167
Cuts to the Past, Present, and Future	167
A Jump Cut to a New Scene	169
A Juxtaposition That Links Two Scenes	169
A Hard Cut to a Character's Action	171
An Establishing Shot	172
A Hard Cut to Close Action	172
A Hard Cut to a Close-Up of an Object	173
An Off-Screen Look or a POV	174
An Entrance	177
Using Action or Light to Reveal the Scene	179
An Unmotivated Camera Reveals the Scene	183
Other Ways to Open a Scene	188
Editing-Room Effects as Transitions	189
11. Scenes with Stationary Action	191
The Setting and the Mood	191
How to Make a Character Seem Important	195
A Character Looks at Something Nearby	197
A Character Looks at Something in the Distance	199
A Stationary Character Watches Something Pass	200
Using a False POV	201
A Character Stands Up or Sits Down	202
12. Walking and Running Characters	204
The Camera as an Objective Observer	204
The Camera Travels with the Character	209
The Camera Stops or Starts with a Traveling Character	212
Compressing Travel Time	216
Passing through a Doorway	220
A Character Walks in a Park or a Forest	221
13. Stories about Searching	230
An Example of a Story about a Search	230
The Search Storyboard	230
Making a Shot List and a Map	237
14. Stories about Following or Chasing	240
General Considerations	240
Starting a Pursuit from the Follower's POV	241
Starting a Pursuit from the Target's POV	244
Tie-Up Shots during a Pursuit	246
15. Two-Character Dialogue	249
The Geometry of Two-Character Conversations	249
Beginning Dialogue	259
Ending Dialogue	263
16. Three-Character Dialogue	266
Three Standing Characters Talk	266
Three Seated Characters Talk	269
Three Characters Walk and Talk	271

17. Group and Crowd Scenes	273
Four People Seated at a Table	274
A Boardroom Meeting	275
Formal Gatherings	277
Informal Gatherings with a Speaker and a Crowd	281
A Crowd Watches a Fight	283
18. Shooting Driving Scenes	286
A Car Drives Away	286
A Car Arrives	289
A Car Travels	291
A Driver with No Passengers	297
A Driver and a Front-Seat Passenger	301
A Driver with One Back-Seat Passenger	303
A Driver with Passengers in the Front and Back	304
A Driver with Two Back-Seat Passengers	305
Four Characters in a Car	305
19. Blocking for Cinematic Storytelling	306
An Overall Plan for the Scene	306
Some Classic Blocking	310
Examples of Storytelling Approaches	319
<i>Glossary of Filmmaking Terms</i>	325
<i>Index</i>	337