

Shots indicating subject size

There are many ways in which you can frame your subject, from seeing their entire body to only their eyes. Generally speaking, we can break this down into three main shot sizes: Long, Medium, and Close. Long shots (also commonly called Wide shots) show the subject from a distance, emphasizing place and location, while Close shots reveal details of the subject and highlight emotions of a character. Medium shots fall somewhere in between, putting emphasis on the subject while still showing some of the surrounding environment.

It's important to note that the following shot types only relate to subject size within the frame, and don't directly indicate what type of lens is used to capture the scene. The choice of lens—and, thus, the distance of the camera from the subject—remains an artistic decision for the Director and/or Director of Photography. With that in mind, on to the list!

Extreme Long Shot (aka Extreme Wide Shot) Used to show the subject from a distance, or the area in which the scene is taking place. This type of shot is particularly useful for establishing a scene (see Establishing Shot later in the article) in terms of time and place, as well as a character's physical or emotional relationship to the environment and elements within it. The character doesn't necessarily have to be viewable in this shot.



Long Shot (aka Wide Shot) Shows the subject from top to bottom; for a person, this would be head to toes, though not necessarily filling the frame. The character becomes more of a focus than an Extreme Long Shot, but the shot tends to still be dominated by the scenery. This shot often sets the scene and our character's place in it. This can also serve as an Establishing Shot, in lieu of an Extreme Long Shot.



Full Shot Frames character from head to toes, with the subject roughly filling the frame. The emphasis tends to be more on action and movement rather than a character's emotional state.



Medium Long Shot (aka 3/4 Shot) Intermediate between Full Shot and Medium Shot. Shows subject from the knees up.



Medium Shot Shows part of the subject in more detail. For a person, a medium shot typically frames them from about waist up. This is one of the most common shots seen in films, as it focuses on a character (or characters) in a scene while still showing some environment.



Medium Close-Up Falls between a Medium Shot and a Close-Up, generally framing the subject from chest or shoulder up.



Close-Up Fills the screen with part of the subject, such as a person's head/face. Framed this tightly, the emotions and reaction of a character dominate the scene.



Extreme Close Up Emphasizes a small area or detail of the subject, such as the eye(s) or mouth. An Extreme Close Up of just the eyes is sometimes called an Italian Shot, getting its name from Sergio Leone's Italian-Western films that popularized it.



Shots indicating camera angle/placement

In addition to subject size within a frame, shot types can also indicate where a camera is placed in relation to the subject. Here are some commonly used terms:

Eye Level Shot taken with the camera approximately at human eye level, resulting in a neutral effect on the audience.



High Angle Subject is photographed from above eye level. This can have the effect of making the subject seem vulnerable, weak, or frightened.



Low Angle Subject is photographed from below eye level. This can have the effect of making the subject look powerful, heroic, or dangerous.



Dutch Angle/Tilt Shot in which the camera is set at an angle on its roll axis so that the horizon line is not level. It is often used to show a disoriented or uneasy psychological state.



Over-the-Shoulder Shot A popular shot where a subject is shot from behind the shoulder of another, framing the subject anywhere from a Medium to Close-Up. The shoulder, neck, and/or back of the head of the subject facing away from the camera remains viewable, making the shot useful for showing reactions during conversations. It tends to place more of an emphasis on the connection between two speakers rather than the detachment or isolation that results from single shots.



Bird's-Eye View (aka Top Shot) A high-angle shot that's taken from directly overhead and from a distance. The shot gives the audience a wider view and is useful for showing direction and that the subject is moving, to highlight special relations, or reveal to the audience elements outside the boundaries of the character's awareness. The shot is often taken from on a crane or helicopter.



Point of View Shot (POV) Shot intended to mimic what a particular character in a scene is seeing. This puts the audience directly into the head of the character, letting them experience their emotional state. Common examples are of a character waking up, drifting into unconsciousness, or looking through a scope or binoculars.



Two Shot A shot in which two subjects appear in the frame.

