

## What is a storyboard?

A storyboard is a graphical representation of the camera shots in a film sequence which are connected together to create a 'narrative flow'. It is similar in appearance to a comic-strip. The story of the film is visualised by a series of drawings which depict the location, characters, props and setting of each shot. Beneath the images there are captions detailing action, camera directions, lighting directions and sometimes basic dialogue.

## What is a storyboard for?

A storyboard serves the same function in film making as an outline does in written projects. It enables the film director to visualise the flow of camera shots and sets that s/he wants to eventually appear on the cinema screen. Drawing a rough storyboard is the first step a director will take in visualising a script or a screenplay. When the words of the script are broken down into units of action and drawn as a storyboard, it is easier to see whether the director's ideas are going to work on screen. The process of storyboarding therefore helps the director to decide the sequences of shots, the movement of actors, camera directions and lighting directions. Most importantly, the storyboard illustrates how the narrative will flow from one shot to the next as the audience watches the film.

Once on paper a storyboard is then used as a basis for discussion between the film director and director of photography to decide how the shots need to be acted, lit and shot. It is not usually necessary to storyboard a whole film. However, with sequences involving action, special effects or complicated camera moves it is essential that they are storyboarded before shooting begins.

*'In a production meeting, a picture really is worth a thousand words. You can script a sequence in words as clearly as you like, and there will always be some misunderstanding. But if you use storyboards, it's so much easier to communicate your visual and dramatic ideas.'*

Matthew Jones, Television Script Editor, Red Productions

### To Discuss:

Imagine that you are about to make a short action-packed film. Give three reasons as to why it would be a good idea to draw up a storyboard before you began shooting the film.

## What does a storyboard look like?

The images on the following two pages are a good example of a typical storyboard. It is for the opening sequence for the thriller 'P' is for 'Psycho'. The storyboard illustrates how individual camera shots can be used to create 'narrative flow'. Each shot is drawn as a 'frame', a rectangle that represents a single shot on the cinema screen. Each frame is annotated with brief information about settings, actions, camera angles, shot types, camera movements and editing notes. Frames are usually connected together with words or symbols that help to create the 'flow' of the images.

— 'P' is for Psycho

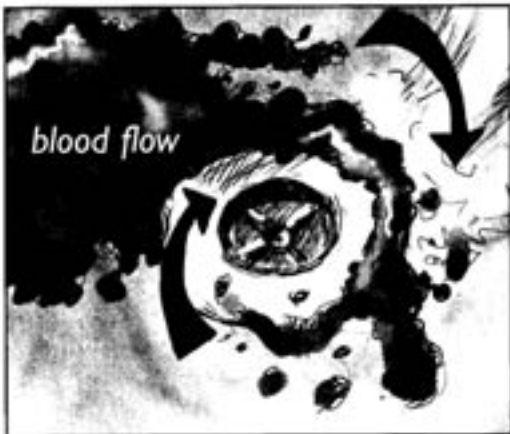


1 Est. wide shot (WS) (Low key lighting) low angle. zoom in - med. shot

mix to... →



2 Int. low angle (MS) Slow tilt up to 3...



5 (CU) plug - hole!

CUT



6 (CU) "bandage - wrapping"

CUT



9 (MS) Boy enters room R-L

CUT

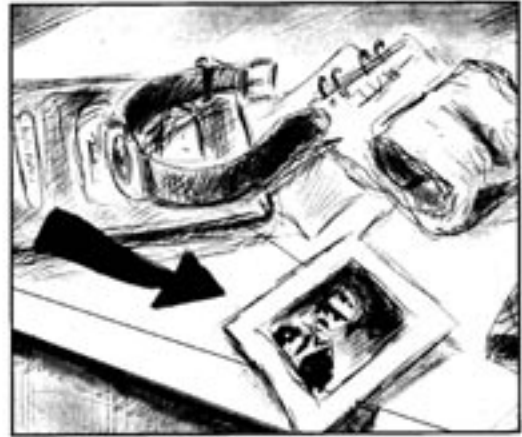


10 (MS) man tucks gun into belt...

CUT



**3** Low angle (MS)



**4** High angle (CU) Pan across objects L-R (very slow)



**7** (CU) mirror image. Clench fist

pull out 

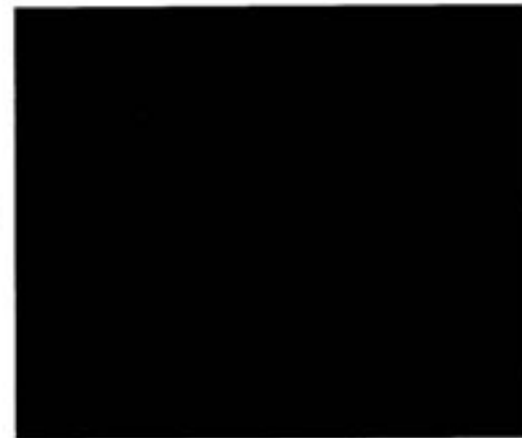


**8** (CU) head turns / blurs quickly (right to left) R-L (Low back-lit) SFX: door opening



**11** (ECU) man's eyes. (Shadows/underlit) man: "BAD MOVE, KID..."

fade to black



**12** Black (Pause) BANG! BANG!

## **To Discuss:**

Study the storyboard for 'P' is for 'Psycho' (pages 2/3). Try to imagine what it would look like on screen.

- a) What is happening in the opening sequence of the film?
- b) How is the narrative flow established?
- c) If you were directing this sequence, what aspects of the storyboard would you like to change?

## **When are storyboards used?**

### **Pre-Production (before shooting)**

At this stage of film making the director and the production designer will discuss how to achieve the right look and feel of the film by planning the sets and costumes. A storyboard artist will then be brought in to draw up the director's rough storyboards adding any necessary details and creating a detailed version with action, camera and lighting directions.

A director will discuss these detailed storyboards with the director of photography (DOP) whose job it is to achieve the 'look' of the film on the screen. Together they will talk through each specific shot and discuss composition of the scene, camera placements, camera movements, lighting and the equipment needed for each shot.

The storyboard is an important piece of communication between the members of the film crew as it provides a common outline which everyone can work from.

### **Production (during shooting)**

When filming begins copies of the storyboard are given to the crew so that everyone knows what is required for each shot in the way of placement of lights, camera movements, movement of actors etc.

Once on set, a director might decide to change his/her ideas from those drawn on the storyboard. That is appropriate if the storyboard is only being used as a guideline for shooting.

In special effects sequences, scenic backdrops are added later by computer and matte paintings and it is vitally important that actors know exactly where they should be in the shot and what they have to react to. By following the storyboard with the director the actors are more likely to give a convincing performance.

### **Post-production (after shooting)**

Once the film has reached this stage, the storyboards should act as a visual reminder of what has been filmed and in what order. Storyboards are used by film editors, especially those who are working on special effects films, where each effect has to be perfectly timed to match the action around it. Non-linear, digital film editing means that films can be swiftly edited on a computer desktop. The storyboard remains a blueprint of the original intentions and provides a framework against which changes can be judged.

## How do I draw a storyboard? ---

You are probably keen to start planning, scripting and storyboarding your own short film or video. It does not matter if you are not the best drawer in the world because it is your filmic ideas, your story and the 'narrative flow' that are the most important aspects to communicate. Steven Spielberg's rough storyboards for *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* were very simple sketches of stick people on scraps of notepaper, but they were obviously effective in getting over his ideas.

Your storyboards should always be designed to communicate the narrative flow of the story as clearly as possible to your production crew. Drawings should be clean and simple, arrows should be bold and helpful, and annotations should be brief. Rough storyboards can be drawn on storyboard 'sheets', on large sheets of plain paper, in sketch books or even on the backs of envelopes. Final draft storyboards, however, should be designed on quality paper with the care and attention that your film or video deserves.

### **Framing the Shots: Angle, Level, Height and Distance**

On the film set, a film director will make choices about where to position the camera in relation to the action, that is, how to frame the shot. We can speak of 'camera angle', 'camera level', 'camera height' and 'camera distance' to describe some of these choices of 'framing'. The framing of the shot creates what we see on the screen. Choices about the framing of a shot change the shot's meaning.

#### **Angle**

This refers to the angle of framing. In practice we typically refer to three general types: the straight-on angle, the high angle and the low angle. The straight-on angle is the most common. The high angle shot positions us 'looking down' on the material in the frame. This can be used to make a character appear small and powerless. The low angle framing positions us as 'looking up' at the framed material. This can be used to make characters appear very large and powerful.

#### **Level**

This refers to the degree to which the frame is either 'level' or 'wonky'. Imagine that you are filming telegraph poles. If the framing is level, the poles will be vertical in the frame (straight up and down) and the horizon will be horizontal (straight side to side). If the horizon and poles are at diagonal angles, we say that the frame is 'canted' (wonky). You can use the camera level to create the effect of a sloping hillside or to make the material in the frame appear strange or weird.

#### **Height**

Sometimes it is important to frame a shot from different heights to change the audience's perspective on the material. The camera could be positioned close to the floor, shooting straight-on to give the impression of a low height. Perhaps this would be used to signify the view of a child or small creature. Alternatively, the camera could be positioned high up in the room, or very high up in the sky to signify the view of a bird or a pilot.

## Distance

Changing the camera distance supplies a sense of us being close-to or far-away from the material of the shot. The standard measure of camera distance is the scale of the human body. Some typical examples of camera distances are given below:

### Camera Distance

extreme long shot (ELS)

### Used for...

Framing landscapes. Human figure is barely visible.

long shot (LS)

A shot that shows a character at a distance, spanning their whole height but leaving an area above and below them. This focuses the audience's attention on the character and their surroundings.

medium shot (MS)

Also known as a mid shot, this shows a character from the knees or waist up or a full length seated figure. Most effective for showing the interplay between two characters and bridging the gap between a wide shot and a close-up. This shot can also be adapted to a medium long shot or a medium close-up.

close-up (CU)

Used to show extreme detail or facial expressions. A character is framed from just beneath the shoulders with space left above the head. This shot is effective for showing an audience a character's emotions and reactions because it focuses their concentration on only one thing on the screen.

extreme close-up (ECU)

This shows only part of the head, the area from the lips to the eyes, and is often used for highly emotional shots to increase dramatic effect.

over-the-shoulder shot

A shot made from over-the-shoulder of a character, focusing on what he or she is seeing.

point-of-view shot (POV)

Seen from the character's point of view.

two shot

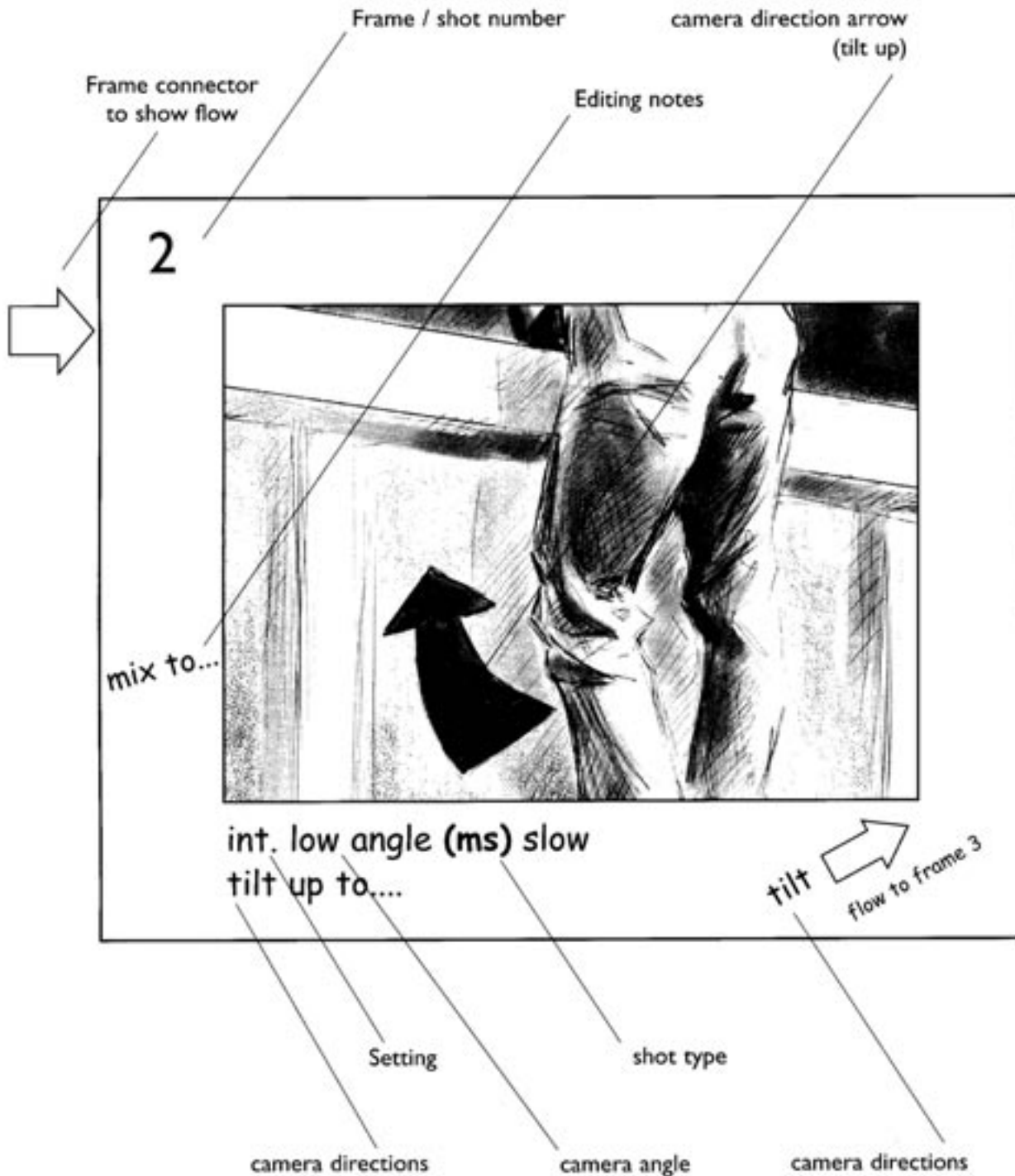
Shot with two characters in it.

## The Uses of Framing

It would be wrong to suggest that specific framing devices have hard-and-fast meanings. It is tempting to believe that a 'low angle' shot automatically means that a character is powerful. But framings have no absolute or general meanings. In some films angles and distances carry such meanings, but in other films they do not. Meaning and effect always stem from the whole film, not just a single shot or sequence.

# Elements of a storyboard frame

Every cell should contain certain elements...



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## Activities

In small groups, pairs or individually:

1 Redraw four frames from the storyboard of 'P' is for 'Psycho'. Alter at least three elements to change the look of the sequence.

2 Study a short sequence from an existing film or video. Break the sequence down into individual shots using the pause control. Sketch a rough storyboard for the sequence. Add notes on the settings, actions, camera angles, shot types, camera movements and editing used in the sequence.

3 Choose five interesting shots from an existing film or video. Redraw the frames from different camera angles.

4 Sketch a 12-20 frame storyboard for this opening sequence:

*1995, 3am, mid-west USA. A girl wakes from her sleep. An electric storm brews in the distance. She sits up in bed and looks around. The sound of the storm increases and a bright, blinding white light streams through her window. The windows shudder then implode, spraying shattered glass into the room. She staggers to the door, but it will not open. The girl is blown against the walls of the room. She looks into the light to see a small, thin figure walking towards her out of the light. She screams, but can make no sound. The figure raises its arm and the girl is pulled into the light, helpless to resist. Fade to black. Titles.*

5 Imagine and prepare an opening sequence for a new British film called **I Want You**, set on a cruise ship bound for India. Draw a 12-20 frame storyboard to illustrate your ideas.

6 Draw Me a Movie! An activity in pairs:

Each person writes a brief outline for a short film sequence. Swap outlines and draw a storyboard for your partner's movie.