

## The Shots

The shots are defined by the amount of subject matter that's included within the frame of the screen. In actual practice, however, shot designations vary considerably. A **medium shot** for one director might be considered a **close-up** by another. Furthermore, the longer the shot, the less precise are the designations. In general, shots are determined on the basis of how much of the human figure is in view. The shot is not necessarily defined by the distance between the camera and the object photographed, for in some instances certain lenses distort distances. For example, a **telephoto lens** can produce a close-up on the screen, yet the camera in such shots is generally quite distant from the subject matter.

Although there are many different kinds of shots in the cinema, most of them are subsumed under the six basic categories: (1) the **extreme long shot**, (2) the **long shot**, (3) the **full shot**, (4) the **medium shot**, (5) the **close-up**, and (6) the **extreme close-up**. The **deep-focus shot** is usually a variation of the long shot (1–9b).



**1–9a** *The Polar Express (U.S.A., 2004)*, directed by Robert Zemeckis.

In this traveling extreme long shot, the camera swirls out in space as the fragile train puffs and strains and chugs up a steep mountain top. Shots from this distance reduce human beings to grainlike specks of light in a cosmic landscape. (Warner Bros.)

**1–9b** *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (U.S.A., 1994)*, with Robert De Niro (under wraps) and Kenneth Branagh, directed by Branagh.

The long shot encompasses roughly the same amount of space as the staging area of a large theater. Setting can dominate characters unless they're located near the foreground. Lighting a long shot is usually costly, time consuming, and labor intensive, especially if it's in deep focus, like this shot. The laboratory had to be moody and scary, yet still sufficiently clear to enable us to see back into the "depth" of the set. Note how the lighting is layered,



punctuated with patches of gloom and accusatory shafts of light from above. To complicate matters, whenever a director cuts to closer shots, the lighting has to be adjusted accordingly so that the transitions between cuts appear smooth and unobtrusive. Anyone who has ever visited a movie set knows that people are waiting most of the time—usually for the director of photography (D.P.) to announce that the lighting is finally ready and the scene can now be photographed. (TriStar Pictures)

The *extreme long shot* is taken from a great distance, sometimes as far as a quarter of a mile away. It's almost always an exterior shot and shows much of the locale. Extreme long shots also serve as spatial frames of reference for the closer shots and for this reason are sometimes called **establishing shots**. If people are included in extreme long shots, they usually appear as mere specks on the screen (1-9a). The most effective use of these shots is often found in **epic** films, where locale plays an important role: westerns, war films, samurai films, and historical movies.

The *long shot* (1-9b) is perhaps the most complex in the cinema, and the term itself one of the most imprecise. Usually, long-shot ranges correspond approximately to the distance between the audience and the stage in the live theater. The closest range within this category is the *full shot*, which just barely includes the human body in full, with the head near the top of the frame and the feet near the bottom.

The *medium shot* contains a figure from the knees or waist up. A functional shot, it's useful for shooting exposition scenes, for carrying movement, and for dialogue. There are several variations of the medium shot. The *two-shot* contains two figures (1-10). The **three-shot** contains three figures; beyond three, the shot tends to become a full shot, unless the other figures are in the background. The **over-the-shoulder shot** usually contains two figures, one with part of his or her back to the camera, the other facing the camera.

The *close-up* shows very little if any locale and concentrates on a relatively small object—the human face, for example (1-11a). Because the close-up magnifies the size of an object, it tends to elevate the importance of things, often suggesting a symbolic significance.

**1-10** *Juno* (U.S.A./Canada, 2007), with Ellen Page and Michael Cera, directed by Jason Reitman.

Above all, the medium shot is the shot of the couple, romantic or otherwise. Generally, two-shots have a split focus rather than a single dominant: The bifurcated composition usually emphasizes equality, two people sharing the same intimate space. The medium two-shot reigns supreme in such genres as romantic comedies, love stories, and buddy films. (Fox Searchlight Pictures)



The *extreme close-up* is a variation of this shot. Thus, instead of a face, the extreme close-up might show only a person's eyes or mouth (1-11b).

The *deep-focus shot* is usually a long shot consisting of a number of focal distances and photographed in depth (1-9b). Sometimes called a *wide-angle shot* because it requires a *wide-angle lens* to photograph, this type of shot captures objects at close, medium, and long ranges simultaneously, all of them in sharp focus. The objects in a deep-focus shot are carefully arranged in a succession of planes. By using this layering technique, the director can guide the viewer's eye from one distance to another. Generally, the eye travels from a close range to a medium to a long.



**1-11a** *Blood & Chocolate (U.S.A., 2006)*, directed by Katja von Garnier.

The close-up can seem to force an image into our faces, especially when the subject matter, like this snarling wolf, seems to be on the verge of attacking us. Of course, if the image contained a more alluring subject, the effect would be more appealing, even seductive. (*Lakeshore Entertainment and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures*)

**1-11b** *War of the Worlds (U.S.A., 2005)*, with Tom Cruise, directed by Steven Spielberg.

The closer the shot, the more intense the emotion. In this extreme close-up, for example, the terrified protagonist is cornered like a trapped animal. The blurred, throbbing red light in the background is like a molten eruption on the surface of the image, an apt symbol of his emotional meltdown. (*DreamWorks/Ambin Entertainment/Paramount Pictures*)

