

# Storyboard Vocabulary

The Principles of Animation help you craft what should be found in any and every animated scene - these are clearly defined and have been used for decades. They offer clear cut structure shot by shot.

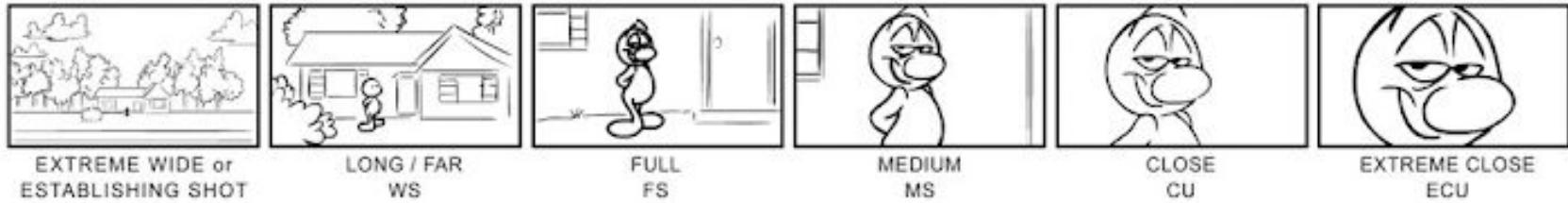
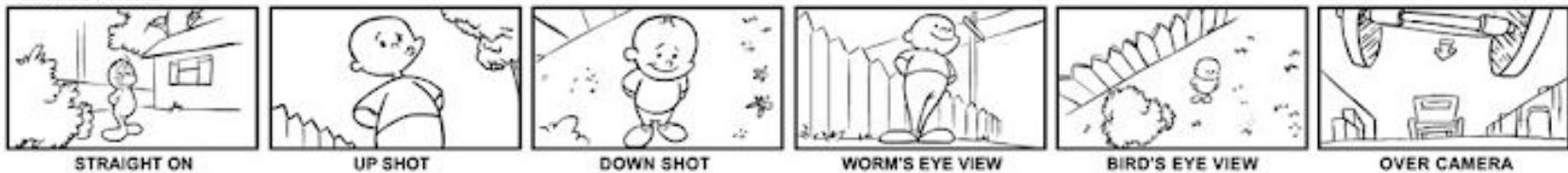
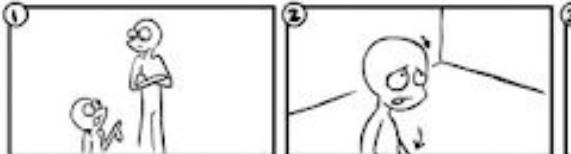
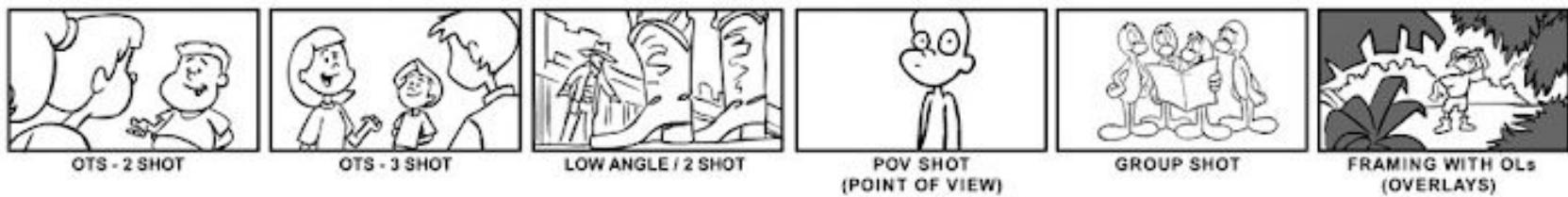
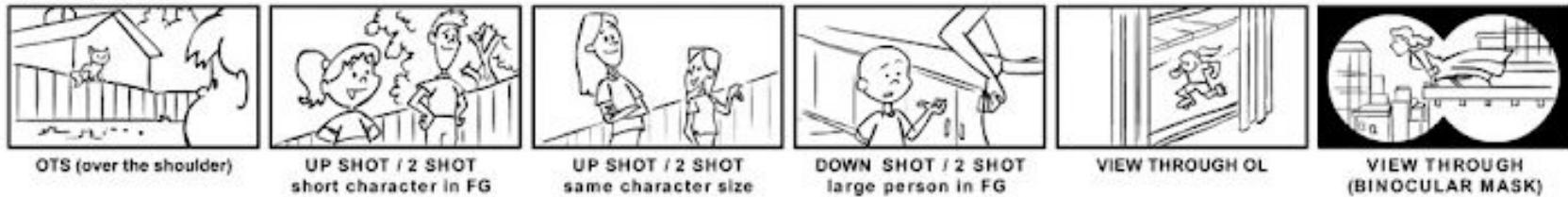
The principles that govern storytelling are not as clearly defined, probably because there are so many different ways to tell a story. Still, studying in depth the work of filmmakers that have been successful, can help us understand what it takes to build a great story visually. It is one thing to have a successful written story in hand, quite another to turn a written story or script into a visual story.

If you stop to think about it, you'll realize everything that goes into a good visual story falls under the overarching principle of "Staging." It is easy to say that decisions a director makes about the presentation of ideas on the screen will make or break a film, but those decisions are difficult to come by. There are so many factors to consider.

Staging is the most general of the principles because it covers so many areas and goes back so far in theatrical history. Its meaning, however, is very precise. It is the presentation of any idea so that it is completely and unmistakably clear. An action is staged so that it is understood, a personality so that it is recognizable, and expression so that it can be seen, a mood so that it will affect the audience. When staged properly, each is communicating to the fullest extent with the viewer.

The graphic below contains visual examples of the options open to a storyboard artist, and will help you understand the vocabulary of visual storytelling. This picture is truly worth a thousand words:

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**TYPES OF SHOTS****ANGLES - BASIC****ANGLES - VARIOUS**

Upshots place the viewer beneath the focus and downshots place the viewer above, physically and psychologically. These shots add variety and drama to the sequence. Shot 1 - medium long shot, cut to Shot 2 - downshot (POV), which sets up the upshot (POV).

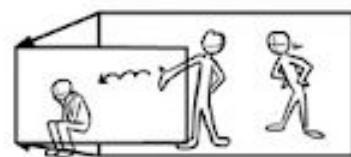
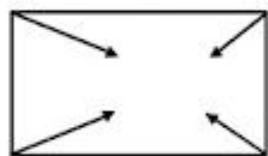
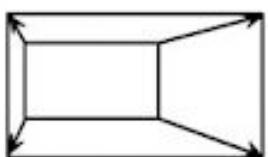
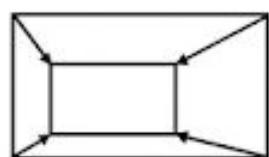
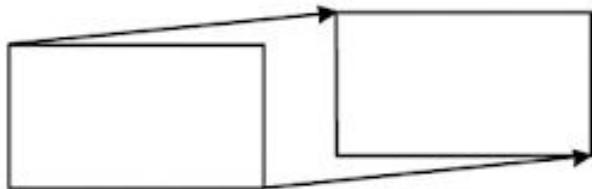


**TIILT / DUTCH ANGLE**  
Used when weird, unstable, impressionistic, spooky, or other novel views are needed.

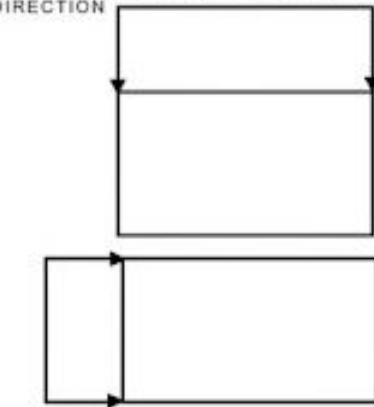


**DUTCH ROLL**  
Twist in to a tilt to over-dramatize a reaction.

### CAMERA MOVES



CAMERA ADJUST: THE CAMERA MOVES LESS THAN ONE FULL FRAME IN ANY DIRECTION

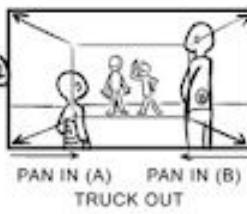


### USING MOVES IN COMBINATION

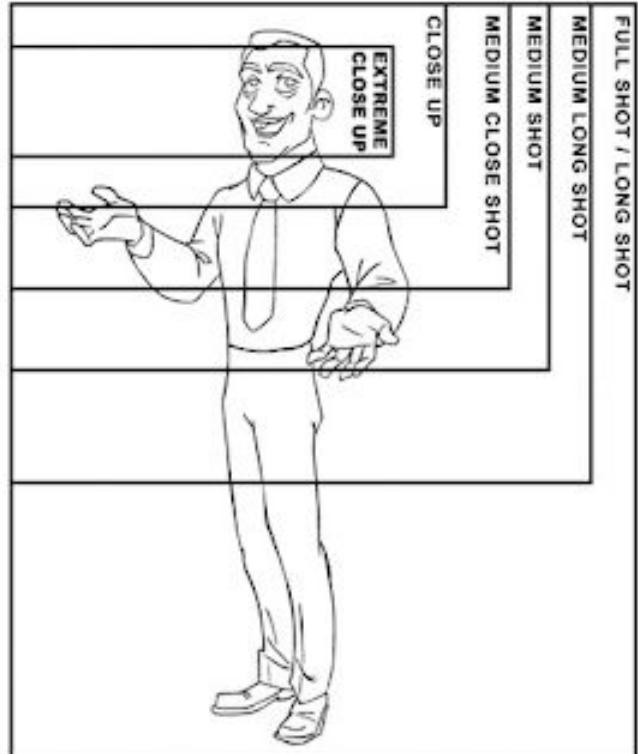


SHOW THE DIRECTION AND START & STOP POINTS OF THE PAN.  
IF ACTING CHANGES THROUGH THE PAN, SHOW A FEW POSES.

### MULTIPLANE EFFECT



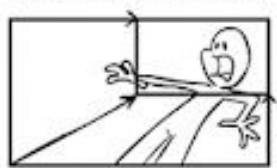
### FRAMING THE SUBJECT



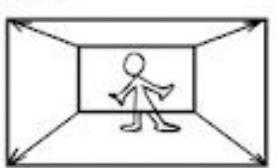
S/A = SAME AS      OL = OVERLAY      \$ = CENTRE  
BG = BACKGROUND      MG = MIDGROUND  
FG = FOREGROUND      O/S = OFF SCREEN

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#### CAMERA MOVES & TRANSITIONS



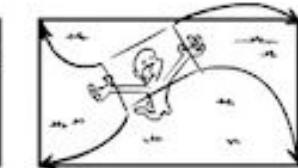
TRUCK IN



TRUCK OUT



CAMERA SHAKE

CCW ROTATION  
TRUCK INCW ROTAIION  
TRUCK OUT

HORIZONTAL PAN - BG TO FG OR FG TO BG



DIAGONAL PAN WITH TRUCK OUT



DIAGONAL PAN



ANIMATED ROAD BG



ANIMATED GROUND BG

VERTICAL PAN  
W/ CAMERA AT C

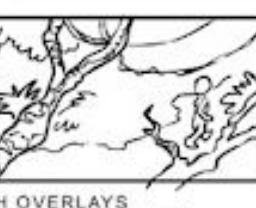
DIAGONAL PAN WITH TRUCK OUT



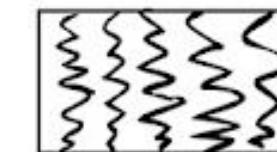
HORIZONTAL PAN WITH ACTION



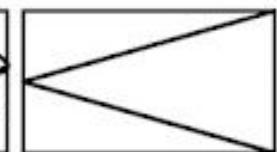
ZIP PAN (SWISH PAN / WHIP PAN)

PAN WITH OVERLAYS  
UNDERLAYS PAN FASTER IN FG  
UNDERLAYS PAN SLOWER IN BG

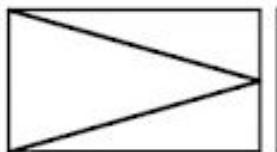
RACK FOCUS FROM (A) TO (B)



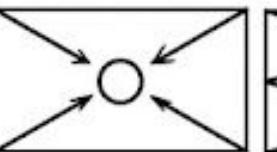
RIPPLE DISSOLVE



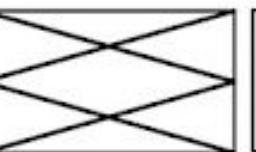
FADE IN



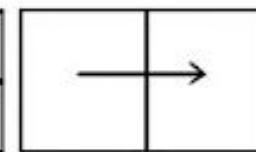
FADE OUT



IRIS OUT



CROSS DISSOLVE



WIPE

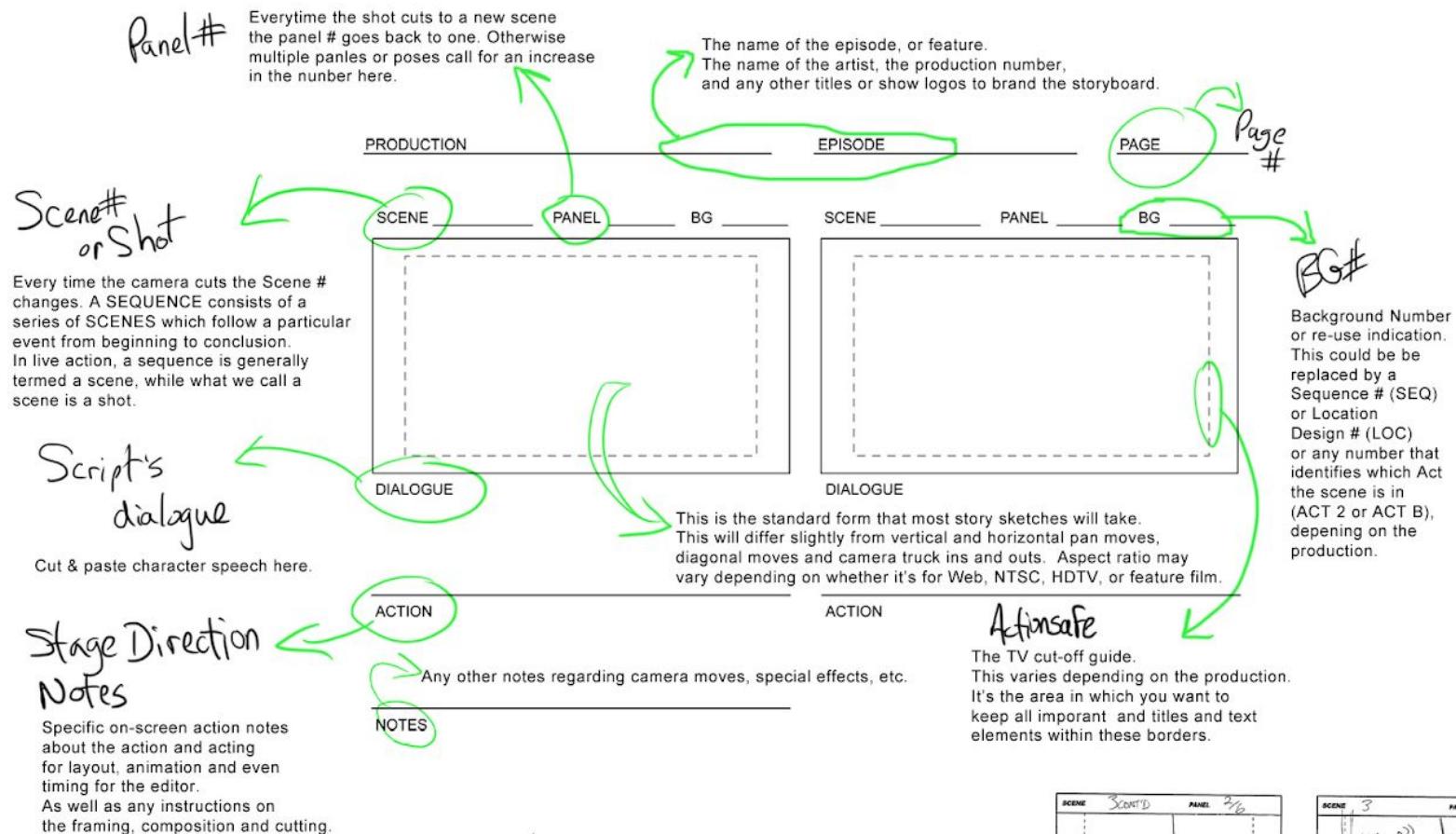
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THINGS TO AVOID: • DEAD CENTER COMPOSITIONS • TILTED/OBLIQUE ANGLES • SPLITTING THE SCREEN IN HALF WITH HORIZONTAL LINES

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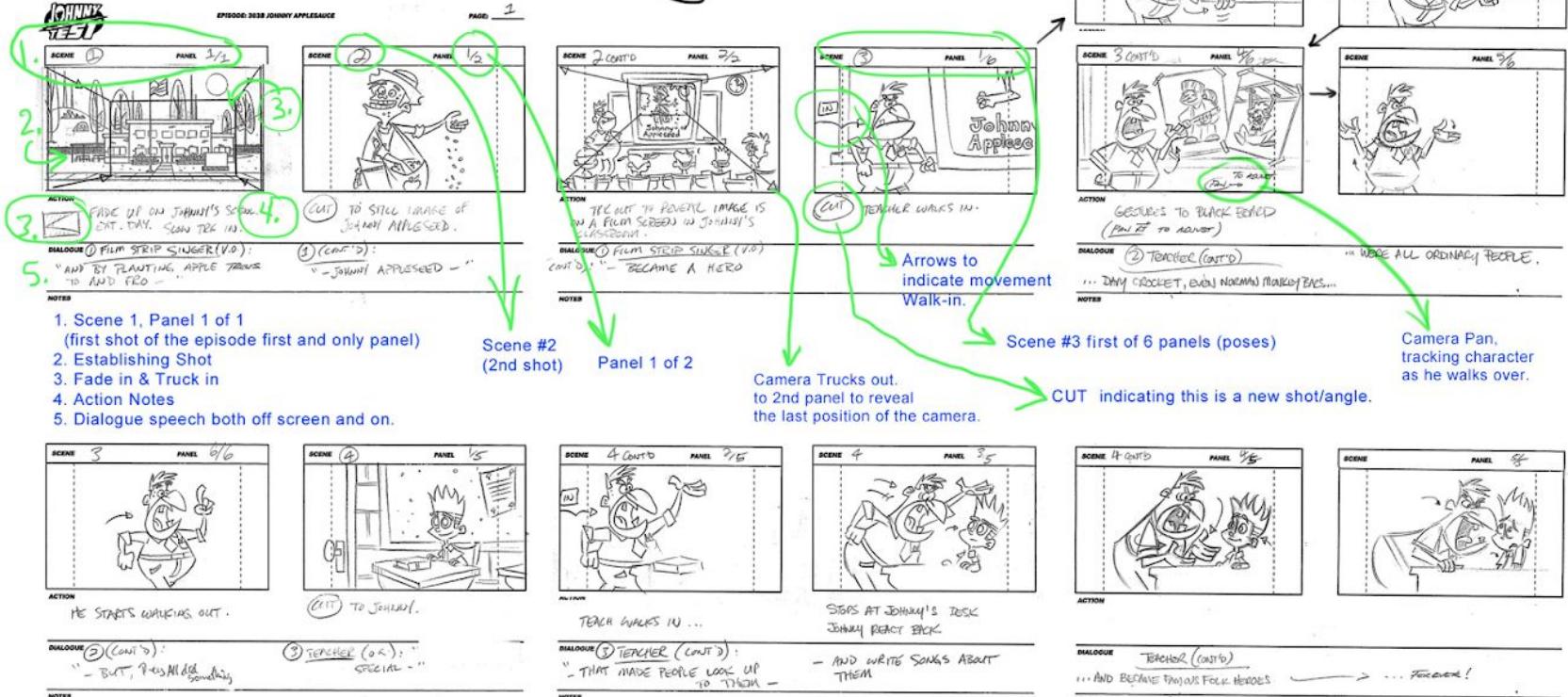
Here is another version, offering basically the same information in a little different format:

# The Anatomy of a Storyboard



for layout, animation and even timing for the editor.  
As well as any instructions on the framing, composition and cutting.

## Scene Labelling



Notice that the Background is drawn in for the first panel, then (unless indicated otherwise) remains the same in all the other poses and panels in the same shot.  
Lots of arrows to indicate the arcs of motion and direction of gestures and body movements.  
The scene numbers stay the same as long as the camera does not cut. The Panel numbers accumulate until we cut to a new shot (thus resetting the Panel number back to 1).

### The Economy of the Storyboard

When Peter Jackson was questioned about his process during the production of the Lord of the Rings Trilogy, he talked in depth about Storyboarding. He said, "For the cost of a few pencils and paper, I get to make the entire movie. I get to see how things work and how I want to direct my actors."



The Storyboard becomes your first draft, and should be a vehicle for visual experimentation, all with the purpose of telling a good story. When storyboard panels are scanned and taken into a software package like After Effects, the filmmaker has the chance to time their film, adding scratch dialog and music, the resultant Digital Storyboard or *Animatic* will inform the director and lets them make creative decisions based on audience reaction and understanding. Animatics produced by professional filmmakers are nearly as entertaining as the finished film. If an audience cannot follow the story

in an animatic, they won't be able to follow the story in the finished film. In fact no production on an animated film should begin until the animatic is finished and polished to a state where it defines precisely what should happen scene by scene.

# Storyboarding Basics

Before beginning to explore the very basics of storyboarding, be aware that the concept of visual storytelling will be explored further in the Module 4a. Layout. What you will find here is an introduction, there is more to follow. Concepts introduced here will be revisited, reinforced, and enhanced in the next module. There's an awful lot of information regarding storyboarding that needs to be understood if you want to become a storyboard artist on any type of production, whether it's just for yourself, a school project, a freelance job, a short film, a television show, commercial, music video, or a feature film.

It's impossible to try to put everything onto one page. In this module and those that follow an attempt will be made to spread it out a bit and try to cover as much as possible. The best way to learn how to storyboard is to actually do a storyboard... lots of them, and this will be echoed in the Layout Module as well. This lesson will show many examples, and a few techniques that will help you get motivated to try and tell a story through boards.

Years ago, in the early days of media education in colleges, there was a course called *Visual Language*, or *Visual Communication*. It wasn't about storyboarding but rather how we interpret visual input through our eyes in everything we look at. This visual input is a language all its own. Like any other way of learning a language we need to start with the basic building blocks.

Storyboards present the visual image of what the viewer will be looking at on screen, whether it's a television set, a movie theater screen or a computer monitor. These are shown in a format called a "storyboard panel". A storyboard panel is a rectangular shaped box on a piece of paper. The dimensions of this box are usually around 4" wide x 3" high for television. There are usually 3 panels to an 8 1/2" x 11" page. The size and shape of the panel can vary depending on what is called the "aspect ratio". This is the size of the width to the height. The television aspect ratio is 1:1.33 - 1 unit high by 1.33 units wide (also known as 3:4). Standard Widescreen is 1:1.85, 70mm film is 1:2.2, and Anamorphic Wide screen in 35mm Panavision is 1:2.35.

## Aspect Ratios



**1:1.33**  
Full-Screen Aperture for  
Television and 16mm motion picture  
(1 unit high x 1.33 units wide)



**1:1.85**  
Standard Wide-Screen (America)  
(1 unit high x 1.85 units wide)



**1:2.2**  
70mm frame  
(1 unit high x 2.2 units wide)



**1:2.35**  
Anamorphic Wide-Screen  
35mm Panavision  
(1 unit high x 2.35 units wide)

PG:

SC#		DIALOGUE:
PANEL /		ACTION / NOTES:
SC#		DIALOGUE:
PANEL /		ACTION / NOTES:
SC#		DIALOGUE:
PANEL /		ACTION / NOTES:

SCENE #	PANEL #
	
DIALOGUE :	
ACTION / POSING:	
NOTES :	
TIMING :	

SCENE #	PANEL #
	
DIALOGUE :	
ACTION / POSING:	
NOTES :	

SCENE #	PANEL #
	
DIALOGUE :	
ACTION / POSING:	
NOTES :	

PAGE #

**PG:**

SC#		DIALOGUE:
PANEL	/	ACTION / NOTES:

SC#		DIALOGUE:
PANEL	/	ACTION / NOTES:

SC#		DIALOGUE:
PANEL	/	ACTION / NOTES:

SC#		DIALOGUE:
PANEL	/	ACTION / NOTES:

## **Shots/Scenes**

The storyboard artist illustrates the point of view that the audience will be looking at throughout the entire movie. They do this through a series of *shots* or *scenes*. Think of a shot this way: through your eyes you are looking at something. At this very moment it's these words on this internet page on your computer. If you pause for just a moment as you keep reading this, notice what is within your *field of vision*. That's all the stuff you can see right now through your eyes, without moving your head around. Now turn your head and look behind you. What do you see now?

As you turned your head, you may have closed your eyes for a moment, maybe just a blink as you physically moved your head. When you opened your eyes again, you were looking at a different area than you were a moment before. In storyboarding and filmmaking in general, this would be considered a new *shot* or *scene*. The moment that you closed your eyes would be called a *cut*. In real life, when we close our eyes to blink we see black. In film, they take out the black and have one scene instantaneously move to the next one.

Surely you've seen "the making of..." on a DVD where they show the director at the beginning of the scene, with the camera rolling, will call out, "And, ACTION!", then when the scene is done, the director will call out, "And, CUT!" "Action" means *begin*, and "cut" means *end*. Later when the film is processed, the editor will cut out the unnecessary film at the beginning where the director says, "action" and then cut the end off where the director says, "cut". They will then splice this scene to the end of the previous scene and then splice on the next scene. The moment when one scene ends and the next one begins is called a *cut*.

Any time you are looking at something from a new point of view, you have a new scene. It's up to the storyboard artist to choose the shots that will be used from the beginning to the end of the film. The type of shot used will dictate where you, the viewer are within the movie, and how you perceive what is going on.

Good shot selection can make a movie interesting, bad shot selection can make it very boring. It all depends on what you want the viewer to see and feel. Let's go through some of the basic shot selections that you have available to you.

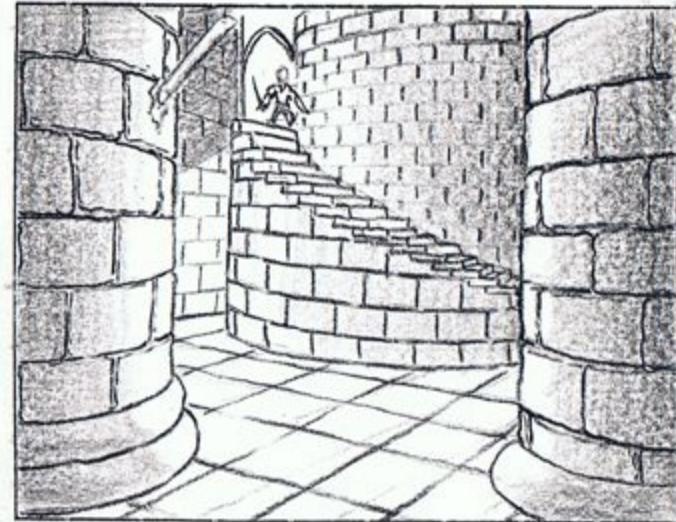
## **Types of Shots & Camera Angles**

Here's a listing of some of the different types of shots that you have available in your *storyboarding tool kit*.

A "camera angle" usually refers to the placement of the camera relative to the subject that it is photographing. If you think of yourself as physically holding the camera, ask yourself where you are... are you near the subject or far away from them? Are you standing at their height or are you up high looking down on them? Or, are you below them looking up at them?

### **Extreme Long Shot**

The camera is positioned a good distance away from the subject. This shot is used more for the purpose of showing the Character's environment and their relationship to it. Usually used as an "establishing shot" and to introduce the audience to a new location and the character's relationships or placement within the shot.



9.1



9.2

## Long Shot & Full Shot

This is closer to the character and shows the entire character with some space both above their head and below their feet. Sometimes, labeled a *Full Body Shot*, although this latter designation usually means the camera has moved in a little tighter, but maintained the full character, head to toe and may have a smaller space above their head and below their feet.

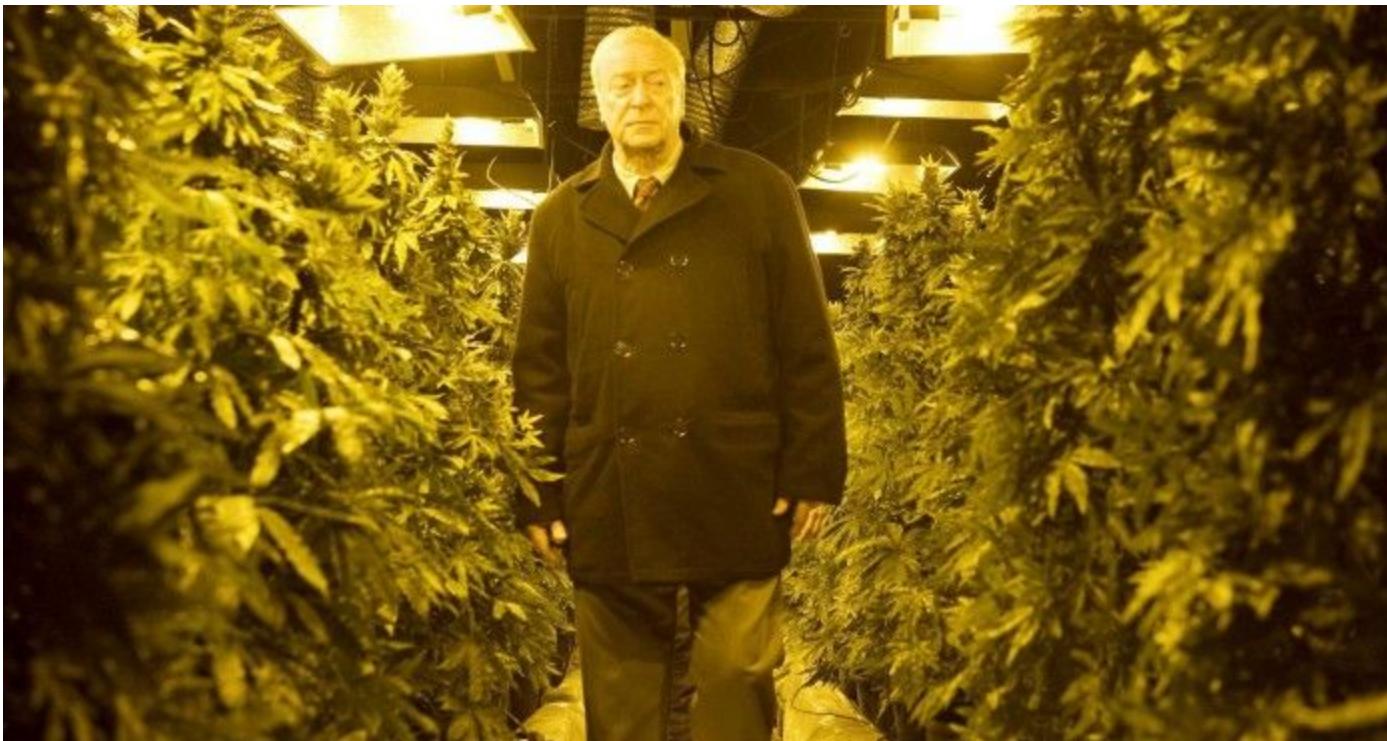


## Medium shot

This shot cuts the character off between their knees and waist. Sometimes also called a "waist shot", it doesn't actually have to show the character from the waist up, it could show the character from the waist down if necessary, but is not limited to just showing half of a character. It simply means that you are closer to the subject than you would be in the full shot.



It goes without saying that there are shots half way between each of these as well. Between the medium shot and long shot is a "medium long shot" which would cut the characters off around their knees as in the two examples below.



### Closeup and Extreme Closeup

In the closing of the classic film noir *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), faded silent film star Norma Desmond (played by Gloria Swanson) descends a marble staircase as she warns famed movie director Cecil B. DeMille (as Himself) that she is approaching the camera for a closeup: "All right, Mr. DeMille, I'm ready for my closeup." Closeup shots can change the pace of a story, adding important emphasis to emotionally intense scenes. Here are examples from a storyboard, live action, and an animated film. In the animated film, the shot opens with Captain Amelia (a feline), running towards the camera. She moves from a distance (long shot) to an extreme closeup.



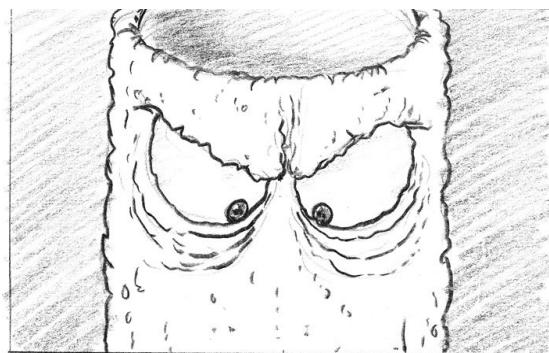
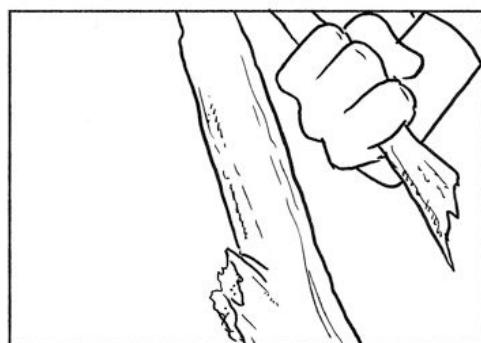
SCENE 11

3/4



SCENE 11

4/4



The extreme close up moves in on the subject even tighter, usually highlighting something specific, like a character's eyes.

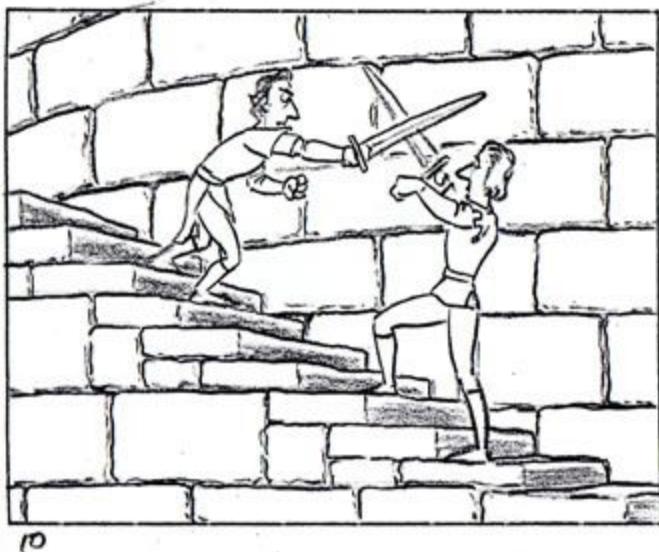


### **Low Angle Shot**

A low angle shot means that the camera is still pointed towards the horizon line but is positioned lower in relation to the subject. It's like an up shot but the camera is not tilted up.

In the example shown below, the horizon line is just below the lowest knee of the character on the right and so the camera is directed at the horizon line but from our point of view, we appear to be looking up at the stairs towards screen left.

Again, this can be combined with the other shots above.



### **High Angle Shot**

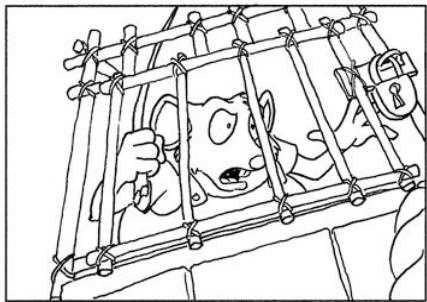
The opposite of the Low angle shot.



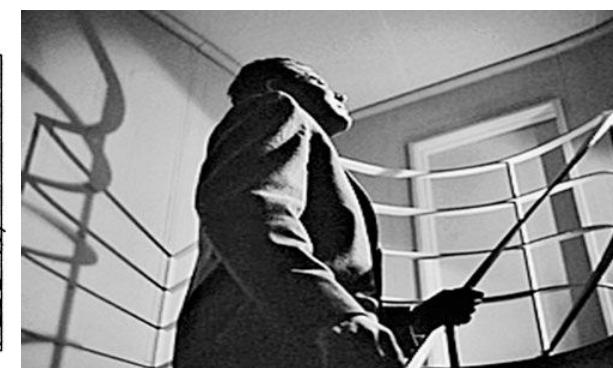
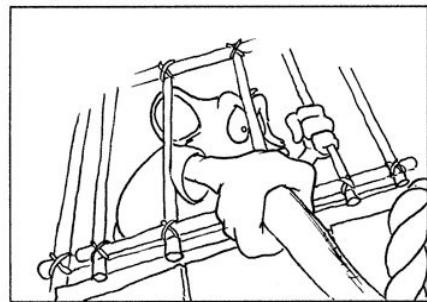
### Up Shot

More severe than a Low Angle Shot, this is where the director tilts the camera so that it is looking up. It can also be used in combination with any of the above shots. This would be a "Medium Up Shot".

SCENE 14  
1/2

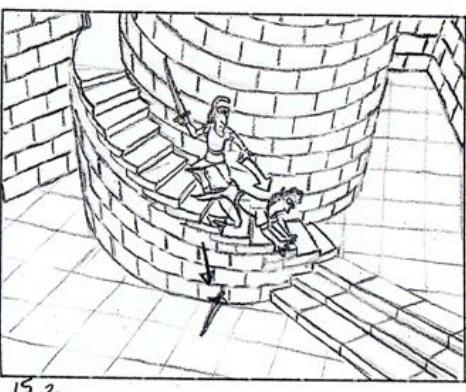
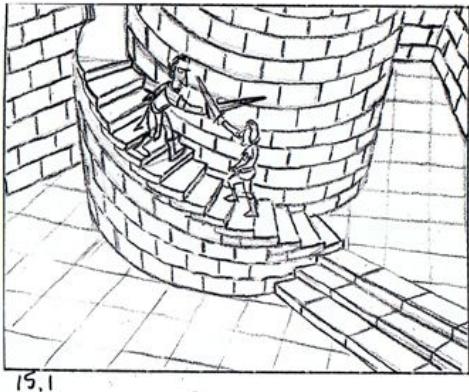


SCENE 14  
2/2



## Down Shot

The exact opposite of the Up shot. The camera is tilted down towards the subject.



## Tilt (Also called a Dutch Angle)

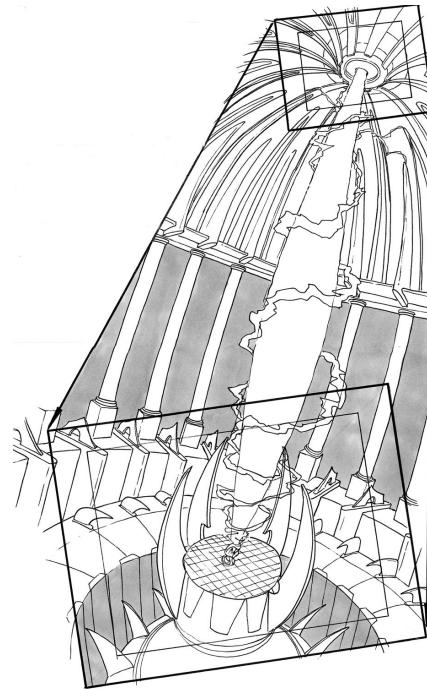
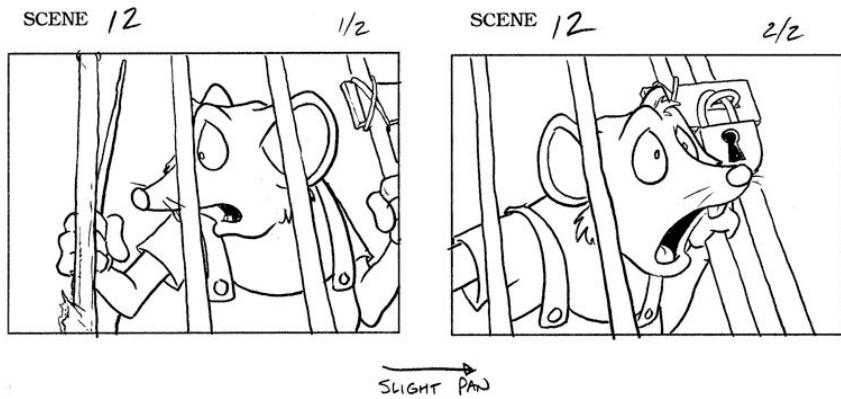
In this type of shot, the camera is tilted to one side or the other and held on that angle. It creates a slightly unsettling feeling that things aren't quite right. It makes you feel off balance as though you're going to fall over. This shot was used extensively in the 1960's television series, *Batman* any time we were in the bad guy's lair.



## Pan Shots, Horizontal & Vertical

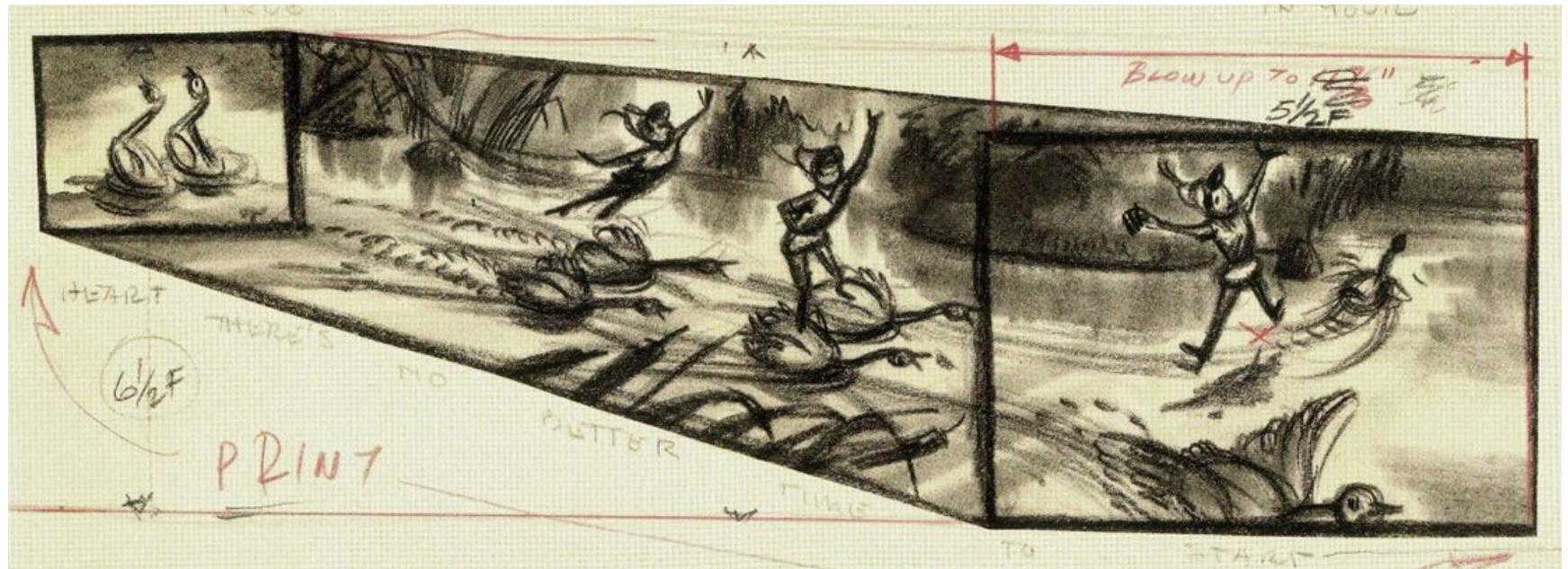
A Pan shot is when the camera physically moves within an environment to either show that a character or subject is moving, or the audience's point of view is changing without a cut.

In the first example shown here, the move is slight to follow the character's head movement as he turns and looks out through the bars of the cage.



## Diagonal Pan

The camera is moving diagonally, both up or down and from one side to another.



## Non-Linear

In a non-linear shot the camera follows the subject wherever they go. These can be seen often in the beginning of a film to try and establish a character's routine, or a character moving through an environment. If you think about the opening to Raiders of the Lost Ark, while credits are rolling, characters are moving through the jungle. The audience does not see the principle protagonist, Indiana Jones, clearly until several minutes into the film. The scene, made up of multiple shots is non linear:



## Camera Movements

A camera movement is something that deals specifically with the movement or manipulation of the camera itself to create the desired visual effect.

### Tracks

The term "Track" is actually an old classical animation term used to indicate a movement that is the same as a pan. On the old animation camera stands there were panning pegbars that allowed you to move up to 4 different elements at different rates. There were times when everything in the scene needed to move together and rather than moving all the

pegbars and risking something moving slightly faster or slower, you'd move the entire table under the camera. This was called a track movement. These days, there is no such thing as the "camera table" as everything is digital inside the computer, and so the term has gone the way of the dinosaur.

The term track is sometimes used in reference to, "track with the character", which means, if the character was walking, the camera would keep pace with them and keep them in field, essentially creating a panning background behind them.

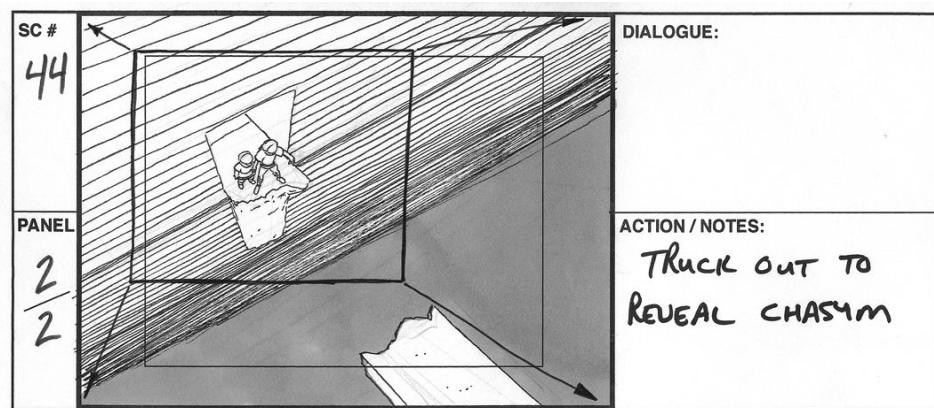
### Truck In (Zoom In)

"Truck in" is another older term which has basically been replaced with "Zoom in". This is where the camera appears to be moving closer to the subject on screen. With your video camera, you use the toggle switch to either zoom in or zoom out. In the old animation camera days, the camera physically moved closer to the artwork on the table creating the same visual effect.

### Truck Out (Zoom Out)

This is the opposite of the Zoom in movement, where the camera appears to be moving away from the subject on screen.

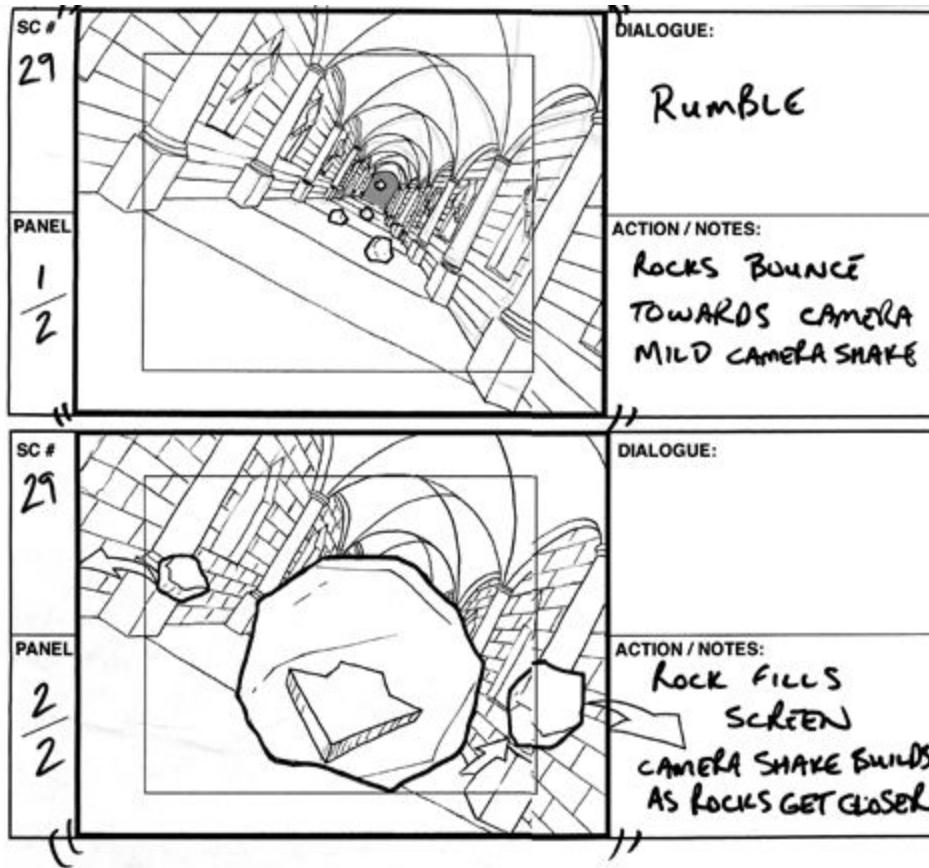
Again, these can be used in combination with any of the other types of shots. They are typically used to draw the audience's focus towards something specific in a Zoom In, or to reveal something that is hidden from the audience in a Zoom Out.



### Rotations

Basically the same thing as a *Tilt* except in a rotation, you're actually moving the camera from one angle to another to make it appear as though there is a spinning or rocking movement during the scene. The movement can be very subtle

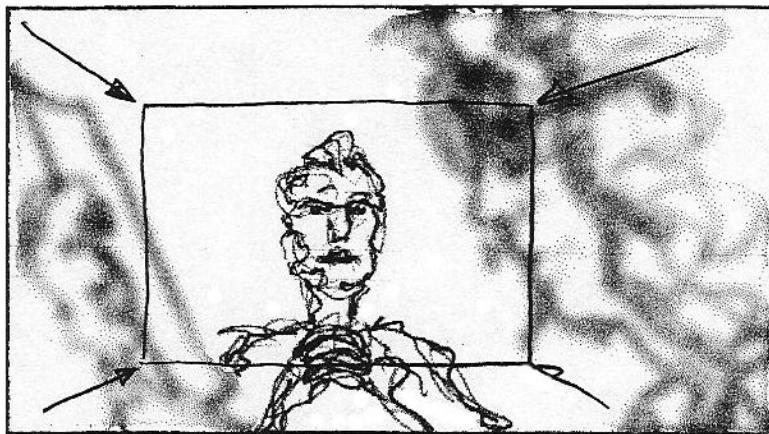
as in a couple of degrees of rotation or it could be a complete 360° turn or more, depending on the effect you want to achieve.



## Rack Focus

This is an in-camera movement where the focus is on one subject while everything else is out of focus and then the focus changes to a different subject within the same scene.

In this example the focus is on the character in the foreground at the start of the scene and then it moves to the character in the center. There is also a truck in indicated here by the smaller box and arrows to indicate the direction.

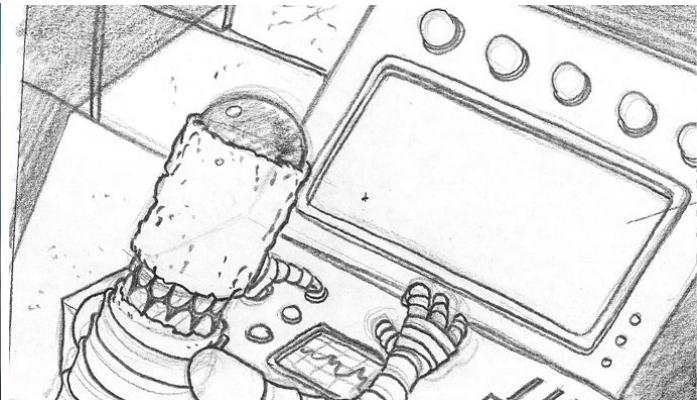


There are a few terms you may come across that are self-explanatory. A ***One Shot*** is a panel with one figure, a ***Two Shot*** has a pair, a ***Three Shot*** has three people, and a ***Crowd Shot*** has four or more.



### **Over-the-Shoulder**

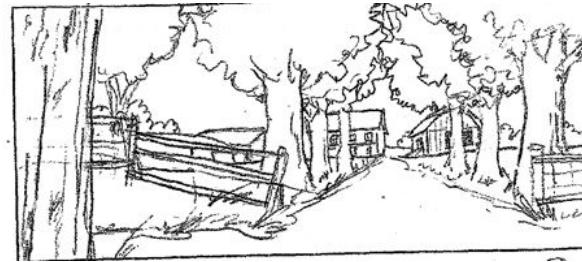
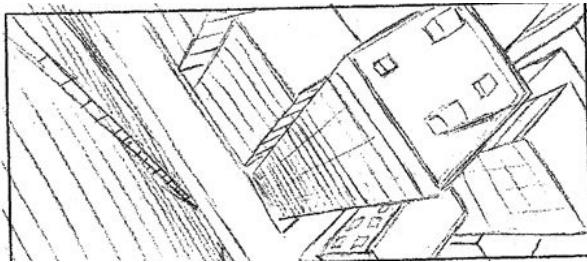
There are many different variations on this one. Basically, it's something really big in the foreground and something smaller that we're focussed on in the background. Usually the foreground character is so close to the camera that we only see a small portion of them and they're usually used as a framing device like in the first example below:



### **Establishing Shot**

An establishing shot is usually used at the very beginning of a sequence to show the audience where the next few scenes will be taking place. It's usually a long shot that shows an environment that is stereotypically recognizable.

The first panel would be: "In the City" while the second would be: "In the country."

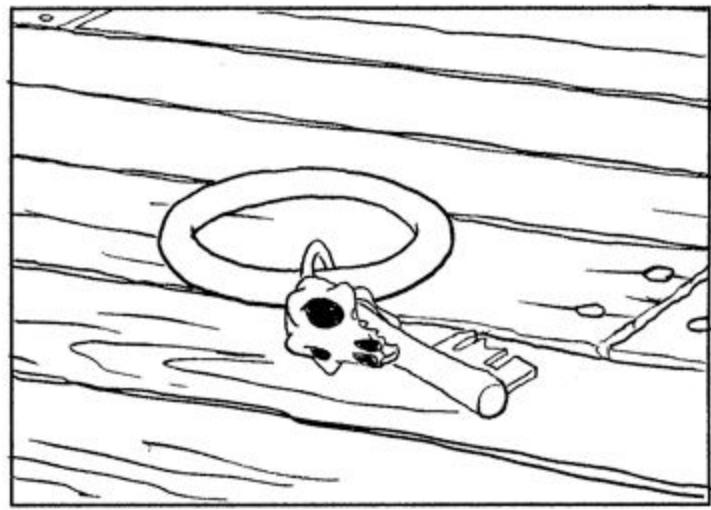


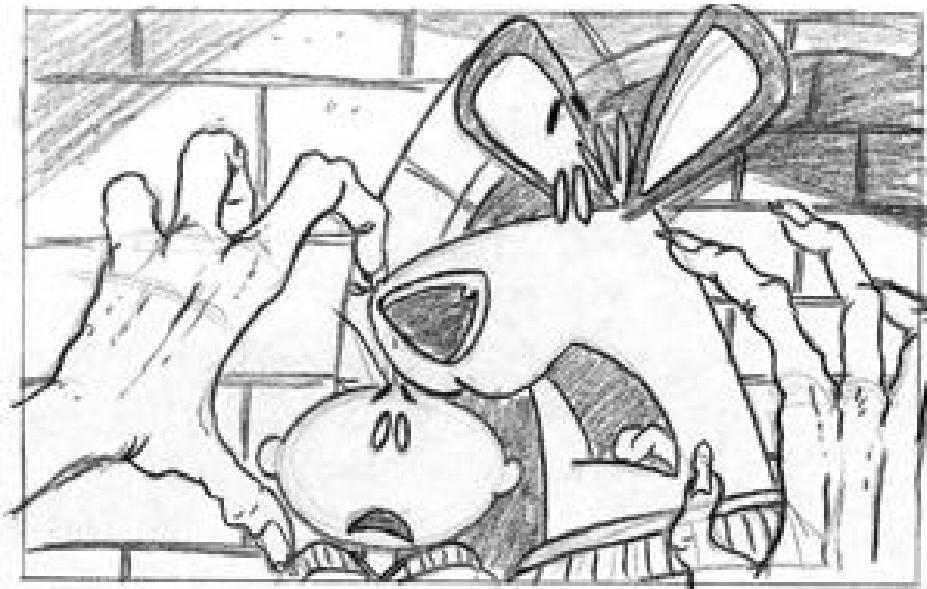
### **Point of View (Subjective)**

This is a shot viewed through a character's eyes. It's what they actually see from their point of view (POV).

SCENE 15

1/2





### **Objective**

The objective point of view is more of a hidden camera within the environment type-of-thing. The characters in the scene are not aware that they are being filmed and do not look at the camera at any point. The objective shot tends to be a bit more impersonal and even voyeuristic to a certain extent. Generally speaking, most movies are filmed from an objective point of view.

## Voyeuristic

Similar in tone to the objective shot, this is almost always from a high angle as though you are the "fly on the wall" looking in on something that you normally would not be able to see. It could also be from a lower angle where you're peeking out from some hiding spot, like behind a couch or under a bed or inside a closet. There are a few filmmakers that are known for this style, most notably, Alfred Hitchcock:



## **Split Screen**

Where the screen is divided up into smaller segments to allow the audience to see more than one thing at a time. A well known example from earlier days is the opening titles of "The Brady Bunch" television show.



## **Types of Scenes**

### **Active**

An active scene is where stuff is happening - characters are moving from one point to another or they are doing something that involves any type of physical movement.

### **Passive**

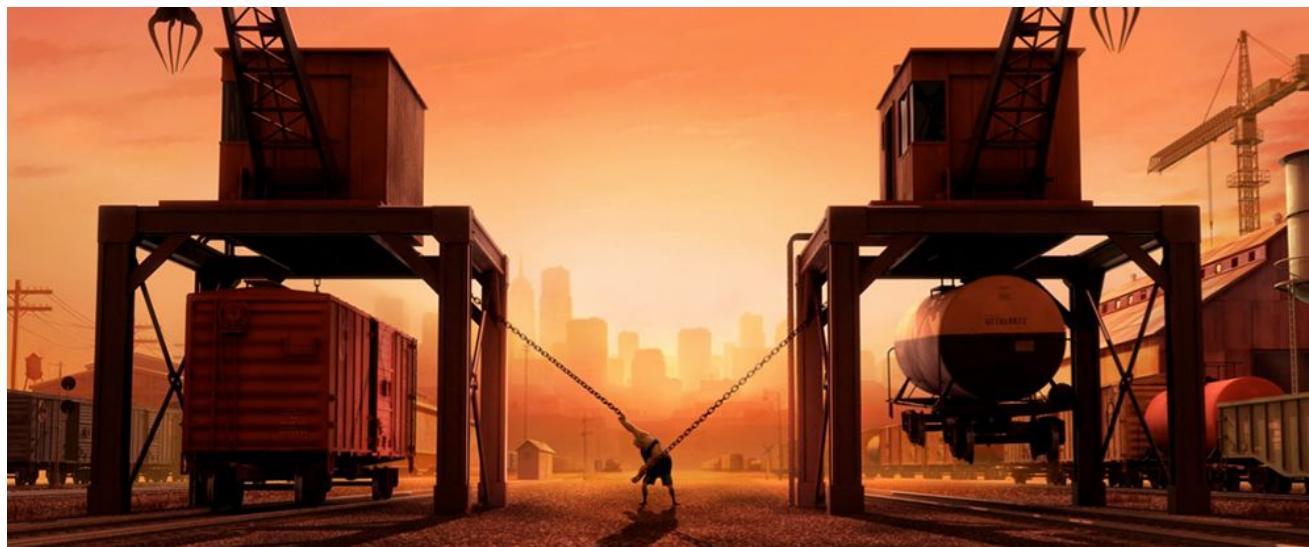
The passive scene is the exact opposite, where there is no movement on the screen and the characters are static within the field of vision. A character or characters might be sitting at a dinner table talking or standing and delivering lines but not moving at all.

### **Dialogue**

This is a shot where one or more characters are talking.

### **Montage**

The word montage is from the French term "to assemble". A montage is a sequence of related scenes that can have large time gaps missing between each of the scenes. An example from the Incredibles, Bob Parr (Mr. Incredible) is getting in shape after years of sitting at a desk. There are a series of cuts that show him working out. This *montage* is a series of actions that might take several minutes or even several hours, in real time. The sequence is condensed down to just the highlight points in a matter of seconds and does not use any dialogue.



## Silhouettes

Often used to make something mysterious or scary. There is a chilling scene from the film Nosferatu, where he is climbing stairs to reach a girl's room - very creepy!



## Transitions

A transition from one scene to the next can be instantaneous as in a "cut" where there is no time lapse at all between the end of one scene, and the beginning of the next, or it can take place over a number of frames depending on the feeling you want to convey to the audience. Here are the basic transitions:

### Cross Dissolve

A cross dissolve is an effect whereby one image on screen is gradually replaced by the overlapping of another image in the next scene. Technically, this is achieved by fading the first image out gradually over a number of frames. If the fade was done over 100 frames, each frame would fade by 1% until it disappears. The next scene fades up from 0% in 1% increments, or the opposite percentage so that both combined add up to 100%.

If the first scene fades out by 1% each frame, the first frame would be 100, then down to 99, then 98, etc. The next scene would start at 0% then move up to 1%, then 2% and so on.

A cross dissolve is usually used to indicate a short passage of time as in, "Later that day..." or a transition to another place.



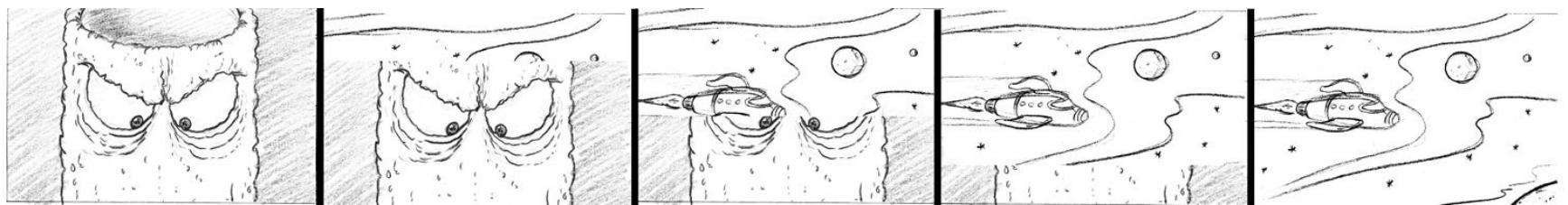
### Ripple Dissolve

This is the same as the cross dissolve but there is a filter laid over the image to cause it to look distorted, in this case as though it is under water. This is sometimes used to indicate a flash back or a dream sequence.



### Wipe

A wipe is created by sliding the image of the second scene directly over top of the first scene. In this example the second scene is sliding down from above. A wipe can move in any direction or from any shape desired. A wipe is typically used to transition to another location and does not infer that any time has passed, as in "Meanwhile, over here..."

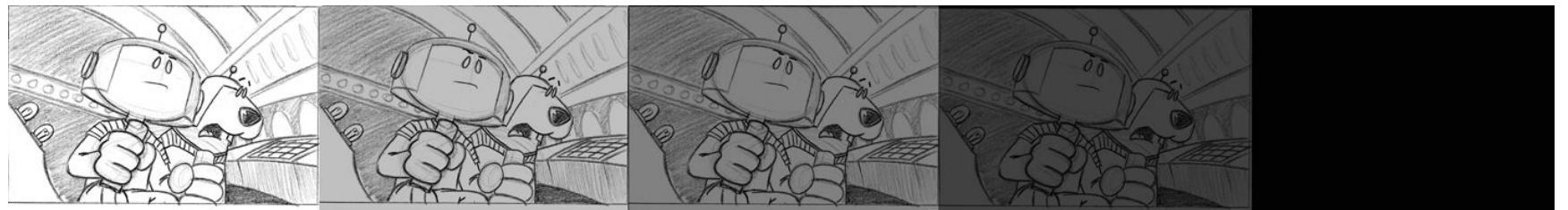


## Fade-to-Black

Technically, this is the same as the cross dissolve except the second scene is just black. You can also fade up from black.

Typically this is used to end a sequence or the entire film. It can also be used as a time transition... kinda like "The next day", because it's like the sun went down and then you fade up and it's the next day... or a week later, or a year later, etc.

You could use a slow fade to black to indicate someone going to sleep and then an abrupt cut to the next scene to indicate the character has been startled awake.



## Strategies, Tips & Tricks

### Your Model

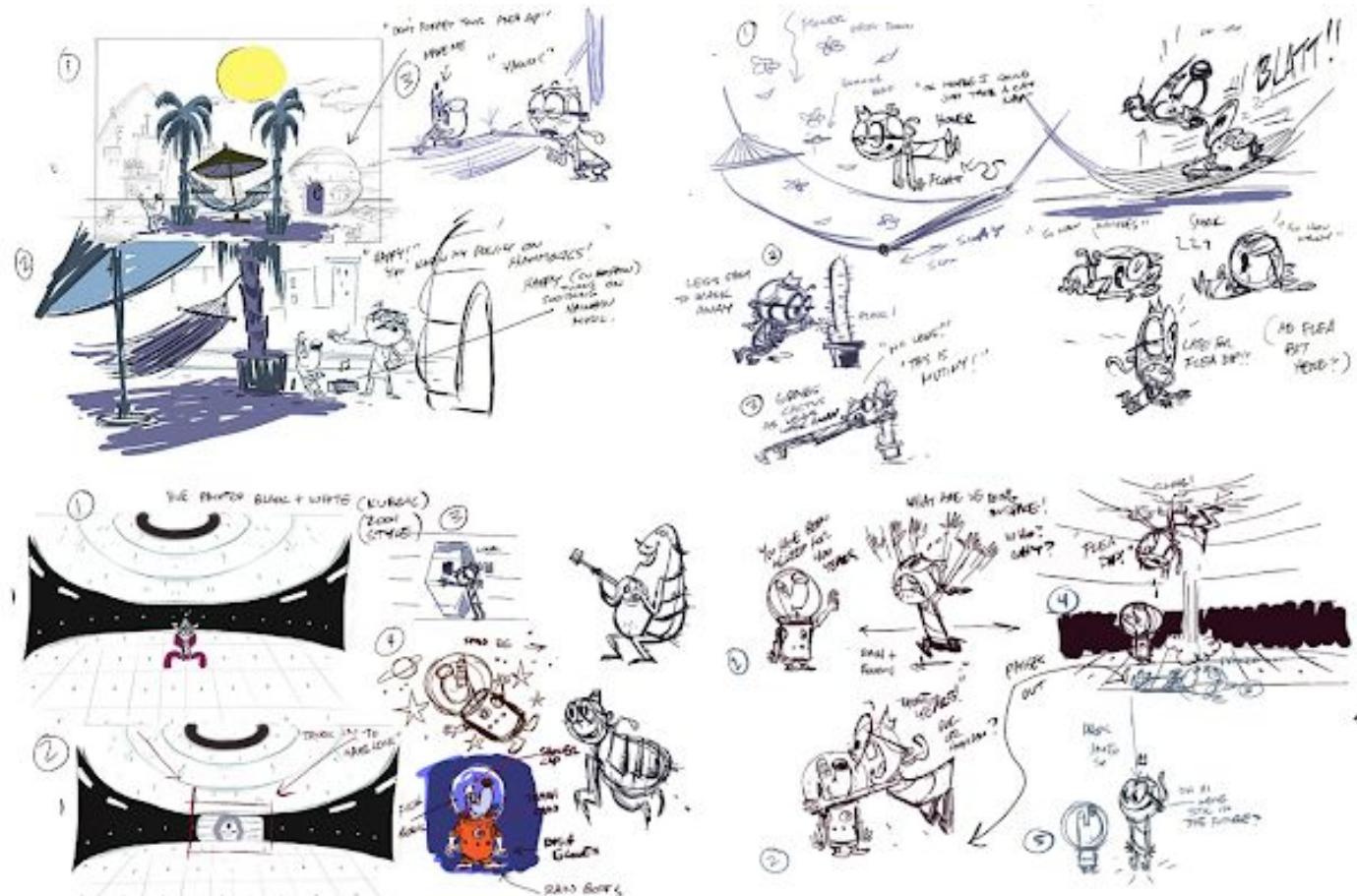
With the basics covered, at least briefly, it's time to consider process. First, a posable figure is a must if you are going to produce storyboards. A posable Spiderman is fully articulated and, I think, a little better than the small wooden artistic manakins that many artists use - Spidey is just a little more flexible.

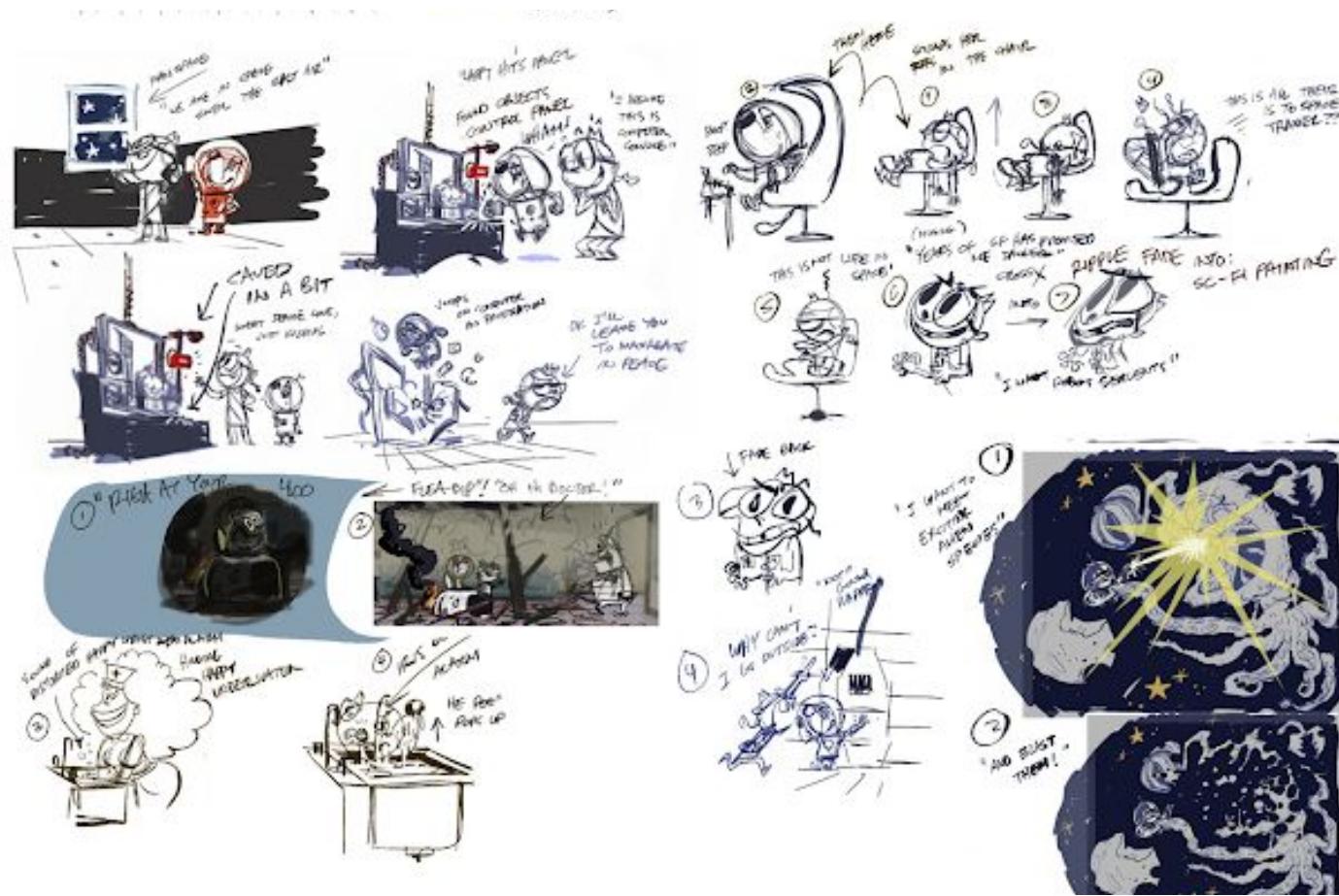
You can use a posable figurine as your model. Of course, you can also grab a roommate, your brother or sister, or a friend and have them pose for you too. Since everyone now carries a digital camera in their pocket, it will be easy to shoot the poses you need. Don't try to storyboard with scrap - a figurine or photos. Taking the time to work with a model will ultimately save you a lot of time. Visualizing your actors scene by scene is an important part of the process.

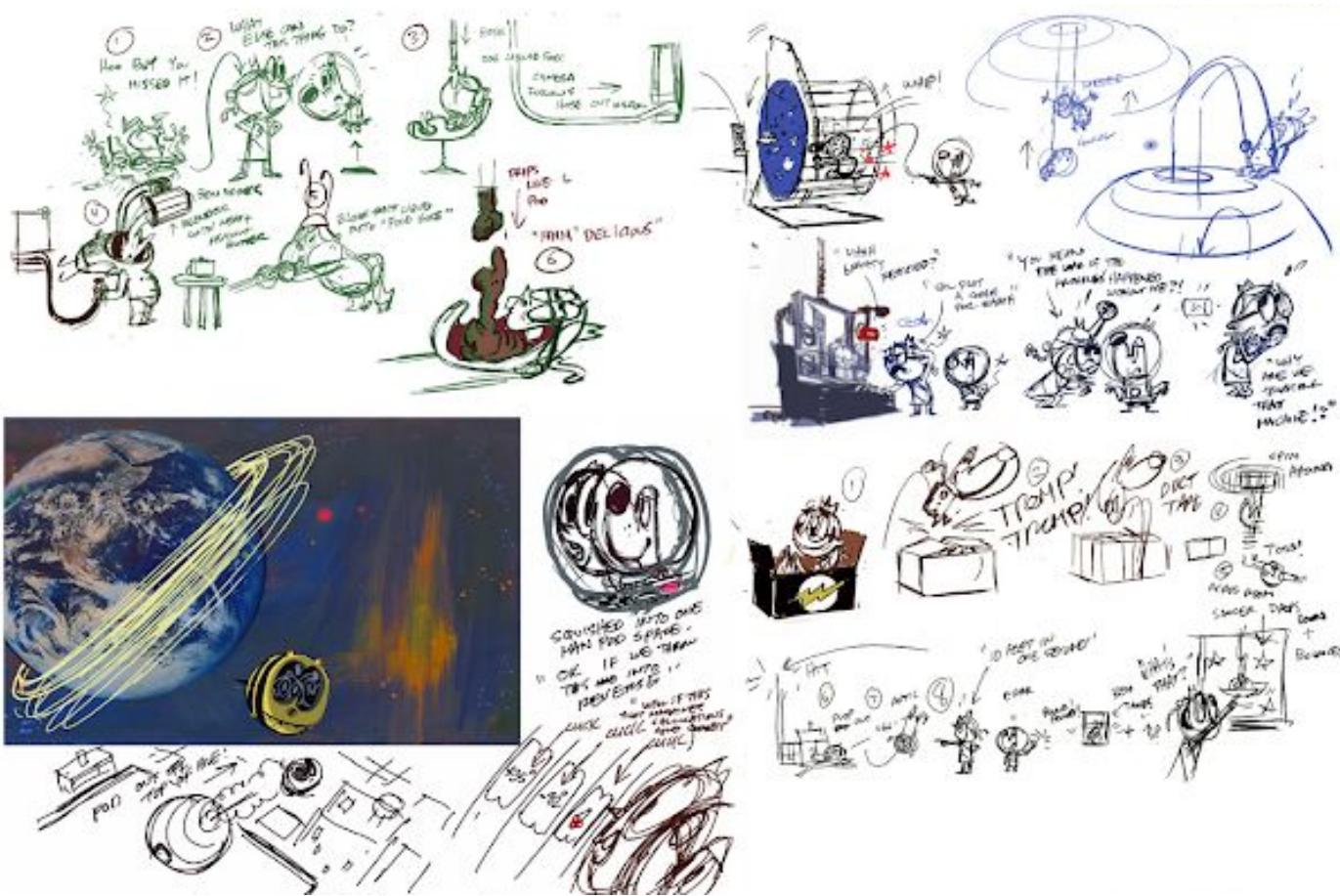


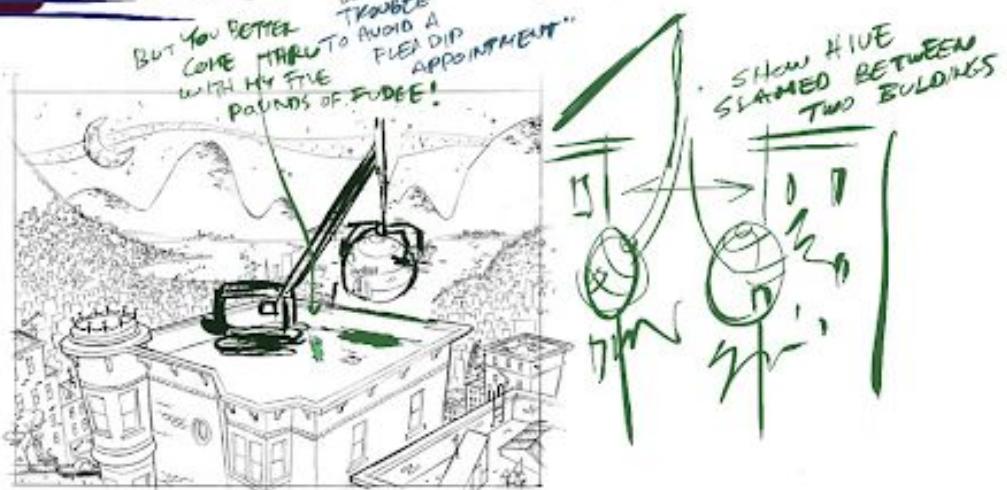
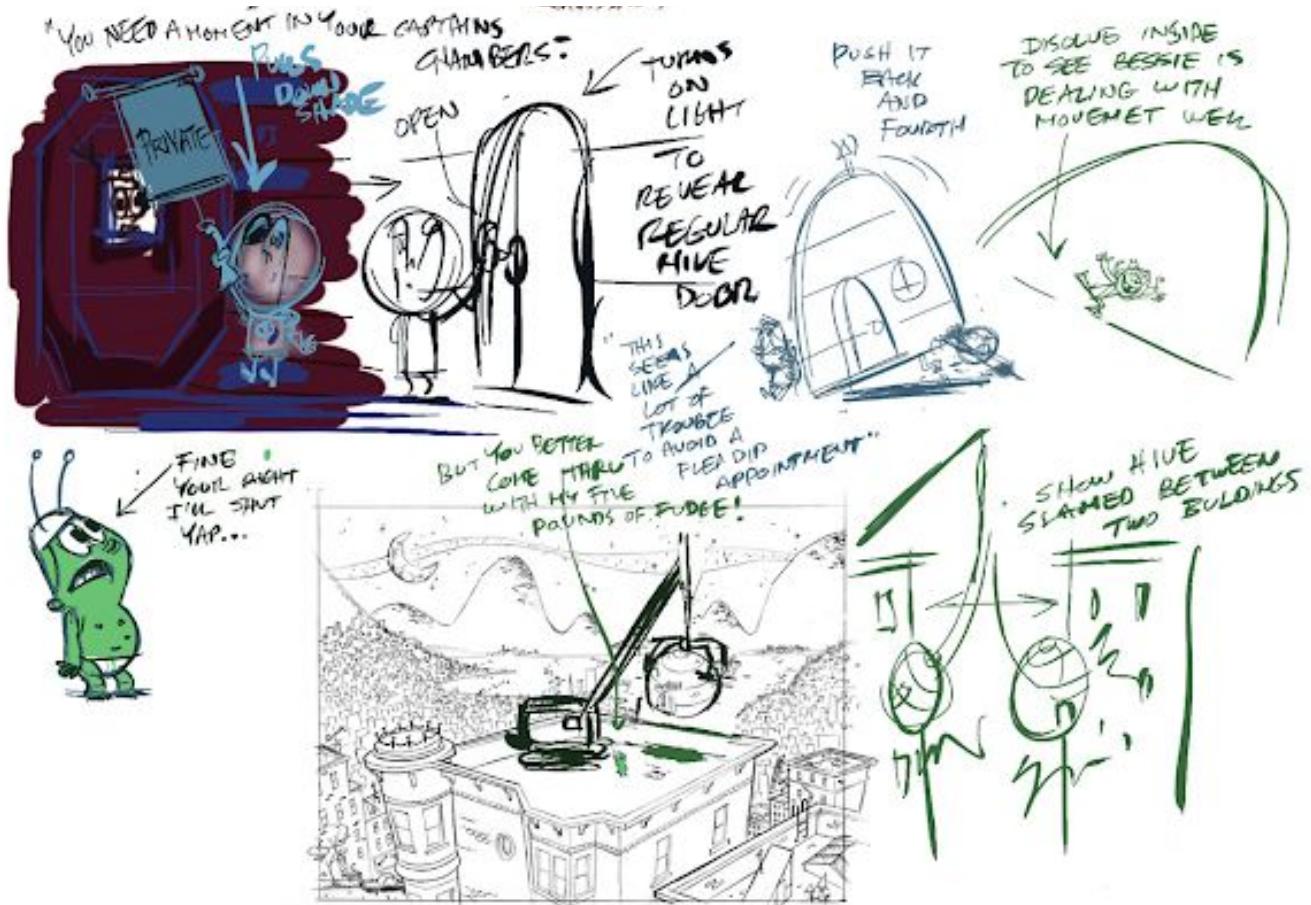
## First Steps

Holding a written script in hand and needing to convert that into a visual story can seem intimidating and overwhelming. So where do you begin? The best way to begin is with a Beatboard. This is just a page where you get to brainstorm the ideas found in the the script. Anything goes on a Beatboard - abstract ideas, color sketches, thumbnails, anything related to the story:









From the Beatboard, the next step is a first pass with the story with thumbnails:



From Thumbnails, once you are satisfied with the story ideas that have been pounded out, move to Storyboard panels. This is not a quick, one-two-three process, it generally takes a lot of thought, multiple iterations, and a lot of feedback. Once the Storyboard panels are complete, they are pinned up and pitched. A Story pitch is the first view the production staff will get at the film. A story session a high-paced, high-energy activity; it is often a long, challenging slog through story points seeking clarity, humor, passion, adventure, excitement, mystery - everything you want in a film, animated or otherwise. Walt Disney himself was a master at the art of the pitch. In the early days of the Disney Studios, he worked with the story team, often suggesting the central theme or direction of a cartoon short. When he wanted to produce a feature film, and decided it should be Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, he made an initial story pitch to his key staff members one evening after work.