

# DRAMA SHOOT CHECKLIST

*(The following checklist is based on the most common errors beginning students make when shooting a drama production for the first time. Before filming a scene, check the following six points to make sure you're not making one of these easily avoidable "beginner's errors" which can cost you a lot of extra time and grief in the editing room.)*

1. **180 Rule / 4<sup>th</sup> Wall** - before shooting any part of a particular scene, first establish "the 180 line" in your mind as the director, and communicate it to the camera operator and the crew. Mark it on the floor even if you have to use gaffer's tape or objects...just don't cross the line when shooting the master, OS or CU's! First, establish a theater audience view of the stage or scene. You can place the camera anywhere that there are theater audience seats (*proper 180 hemisphere*), but don't place the camera anywhere back stage pointing at the audience (*the opposite 180 hemisphere*) because this will cause the position of each actor to "flip" or switch to the opposite side of the frame on camera. Always establish nose direction for each actor in the scene and don't let the nose directions switch throughout the scene unless we see the actor physically move to the other side of the scene. Remember that in most TV shows, you never get to see the "4<sup>th</sup> Wall" of the "I Love Lucy" apartment because the fourth wall does not exist. That's where the camera crew and audience seats are located, so if you cross the 180 line, you would see the camera and crew.
2. **Required Shots for Each Scene** - for each scene, make sure that you get the required camera coverage, i.e., the "standard set of shots" you'll need to effectively edit the scene. This should always include:

**Establishing Shot (Master)** - widest shot that shows all "essential" action.

**OS** - shot of each speaking actor's face seen over the shoulder of the other actor (back of head).

**CU** - tighter shot of each actor's face without seeing the back of the head of the other actor.

**Cut Away** - shot of something else in scene or someone else's reaction to help with continuity.

Of course, you can also include low angle, high angle, pan, truck, dolly, and arc shots, but you should always shoot at least the aforementioned shots so that you'll have the fundamental angles and footage for properly editing the scene. When shooting a scene, you have to get ALL of the shots for that scene done in one setup; otherwise, it is too difficult to go back another day and match the lighting, not to mention having to get all the actors and crew together again. This is just not practical and much too expensive when you consider your time, budget, and resources.

3. **Continuity** - take cell phone photos of the master shot staging of the actors to refer to when setting up the camera and actors for the next shots such as OS and CU's. Make sure that the head position, posture, hair, and clothing match the master shot. Pay special attention to props in the scene that will change such as drinks, cigarettes, and food, etc.
4. **Overlapping Heads on OS Shots** - when framing OS shots, do not let the heads of each of the two actors overlap in the center of the shot. Arc the camera away from the 180 line and you'll see the two actors start to separate with more space between them, thus getting rid of the overlap of heads in the center of the frame.
5. **Empty "Side Space" on OS Shot Framing** - when framing an OS shot, adjust the frame by putting the edge of each actor's body at opposite sides of the frame instead of having one actor at one edge of the frame and the speaking actor smack dab in the center of the frame with a big empty space at the other end of the frame. Pan the camera and zoom in a little to eat up the empty space.
6. **No Back Light on the Talent** - the actors in the scene do not have adequate back light which causes their hair and bodies to blend into the background. This gives the scene an amateurish, two-dimensional look.
7. **Ear Bisection** - when framing a master shot with two or more actors, make sure that you zoom out wide enough to avoid having the frame cross through any of the actors' ears in the shot. The frame should be wide enough to clear each actor's head. You should not bisect any part of the actors' heads on the sides of the frame unless it is possibly the back of the head of one the actors in an OS shot that has very shallow depth of field.