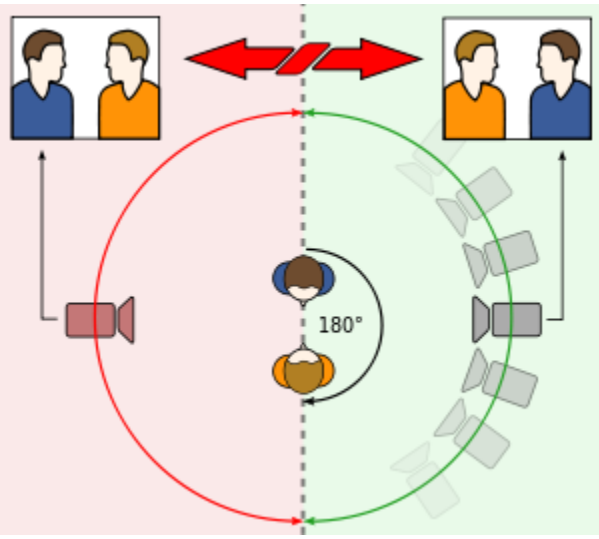
Topic 108

TV Production-180 Degree Rule

Continuity is a big part of filmmaking. If you're shooting a short film or interview, it's important to set the scene and establish your characters in space and time in order for the viewer to follow the action. One of the most basic continuity rules is the 180 Degree Rule.

The 180 Degree Rule states that two characters in a scene should always have the same left/right relationship to each other. If you don't follow the 180 Degree Rule, or break it intentionally, it disrupts the scene disorients the audience. When you break the 180 line, a person who was originally facing left in a scene is all of the sudden facing right. Wait! When did they switch places?



This schematic shows the axis between two characters and the 180° arc on which cameras may be positioned (green). When cutting from the green arc to the red arc, the characters switch places on the screen.

In a dialogue scene between two characters, Daniel (orange shirt, frame left in the diagram) and Lucas (blue shirt, frame right), the camera may be placed anywhere on the green 180° arc and the spatial relationship between the two characters will be consistent from shot to shot, even when one of the characters is not on screen. Shifting to the other side of the characters on a cut, so that Lucas is now on the left side and Daniel is on the right, may disorient the audience.

The rule also applies to the movement of a character as the "line" created by the path of the character. For example, if a character is walking in a leftward direction and is to be picked up by another camera, the character must exit the first shot on frame left and enter the next shot frame right. A jump cut can be used to denote time. If a character leaves the frame on the left side and enters the frame on the left in a different location, it can give the illusion of an extended amount of time passing.

Another example could be a car chase: If a vehicle leaves the right side of the frame in one shot, it should enter from the left side of the frame in the next shot. Leaving from the right and entering from the right creates a similar sense of disorientation as in the dialogue example.

Usage

The 180-degree rule enables the audience to visually connect with unseen movement happening around and behind the immediate subject and is important in the narration of battle scenes.

Pitfalls

The imaginary line allows viewers to orient themselves with the position and direction of action in a scene. If a shot following an earlier shot in a sequence is located on the opposite side of the 180-degree line, then it is called a "reverse cut." Reverse cuts disorient the viewer by presenting

an opposing viewpoint of the action in a scene and consequently altering the perspective of the action and the spatial orientation established in the original shot.

Solutions

There are a variety of ways to avoid confusion related to crossing the line due to particular situations caused by actions or situations in a scene that would necessitate breaking the 180-degree line.

Prevention

Either alter the movement in a scene, or set up the cameras on one side of the scene so that all the shots reflect the view from that side of the 180-degree line.

Camera Arch move

One way to allow for crossing the line is to have several shots with the camera arching from one side of the line to the other during the scene. That shot can be used to orient the audience to the fact that we are looking at the scene from another angle. In the case of movement, if a character is seen walking into frame from behind on the left side walking towards a building corner on the right, as they walk around the corner of the building, the camera can catch them coming towards the camera on the other side of the building entering the frame from the left side and then walk straight at the camera and then exit the left side of the frame.

Buffer shot

To minimize the "jolt" between shots in a sequence on either sides of the 180-degree line, shoot a buffer shot along the 180-degree line separating each side. This lets the viewer visually comprehend the change in viewpoint expressed in the sequence.