

Types of Continuity

- Content – everything visible in the scene must match from one take to the next this includes placement of objects on the set, details of hair and clothing, as well as details of action
- Movement – anything moving in one shot must have movement in the next shot to provide a seamless continuation of movement. Examples include opening a door, an actor picking up an object, movement of a car, etc. The rule is to shoot more of the action – let the camera roll for a few seconds before and after the action is complete to give the editor better options for lining up the shot.
- Position – when props are moved within the scene and you are shooting multiple takes, make note of where they start and where they end up so that it is the same in each take. This allows you to choose the best parts of multiple takes to construct the action.
- Time – refers to the flow of time within the scene. An action must make sense in terms of the amount of time it takes. If an actor is walking down a long street, the cuts should reflect the amount of time it would take. Or if the scene requires someone walking up the stairs, you may not want to follow the action entirely. Instead, let the actor walk out of the frame, at s/he first begins to walk up the stairs, and then enter the frame again at the top of the stairs. If the actor exits the frame on the right side of the screen, s/he must enter the next frame on the left side. This preserves movement continuity as well as creating a normal sense of time passing – we don't see the in-between time but accept that time has passed from exiting the frame in one shot and entering it from the opposite side of the frame in the next.

Screen Direction

The 180° rule – The audience is always on the same side of the screen (except in VR). If the camera stays within 180° of the action, i.e. does not cross an imaginary line across the circle, or axis, of action, the orientation of actor to the set, the action, and the audience remains the same.

If you want to move the camera to the other side of the 180° line, you should shoot the camera movement, as in using a dolly shot so that the change in orientation of actors to scene can be followed by the audience without creating confusion.

The Eyeline Match

When you are shooting a conversation to create a shot and reverse shot type of edit, you have to make sure that your actors look like they are looking at each other's eyes, as in normal conversation. This is called eyeline matching.

The 180° rule comes into play here because you are, once again, using an imaginary line between the two actors to set up shots of each of the actors. The actors, in order to appear to be looking at each other, must each be facing the opposite direction within the frame.

For example, actor A must be looking off-frame to the left of the frame, and actor B must be looking off-frame to the right of the frame. They cannot be both looking in the same direction or the conversation won't make sense – they'll appear to be looking together at something else entirely.

To create an eyeline match, you should put both camera positions at a similar distance from the 180° axis. You should frame the shots with 'looking space' or nose room (more space in the direction they are looking). If one character is higher/taller than another, the higher character should be looking down and the lower/shorter character should be looking up.

An eyeline match also refers to matching the apparent direction of the actor's gaze to whatever s/he is gazing at offscreen – a sunset, a computer screen, an airplane, something nearby, something far away – matching the eyeline means matching the angle of the actor's gaze to the angle and placement of the object being looked at. Looking down at shoes? Then the next shot is a high angle shot of the shoes. Looking up at the Eiffel Tower? Then the next shot is a low angle of the Eiffel Tower.

Eyeline matching enables you to shoot actors in the same conversation at different times or even on different days. It enables you to shoot actors entirely separately from the things they are looking at.

Directional Conventions

If your film involves any kind of geography, even interior geography, you will avoid confusion if each point in that geography is represented as being approached from the same direction in the frame.

For example, if the main door on the set is on the right-hand side of the frame, to avoid continuity problems, make sure that the door is on the right-hand side in all shots, so that when your actors move into the frame from the right, or move out of the frame towards the right, the audience knows that they are coming and going through that door.

The convention is to see the frame as having north, south, east and west points be in the same relationship to the frame as these directions are to a map. Therefore, north is at the top of the frame, south the bottom, east is the right side of the frame, and west is the left side of the frame. You don't have to stick to this but if your film involves a wider geography, knowing where you are placing north, south, east and west will give your film order and make it easier to organize the direction of the action in your scenes.

Making Exceptions Work

The 180° rule – exceptions work if we see the change in direction occur within the shot, i.e. with camera movement across the 180° line during the shot.

If you shoot actors together in a long shot and then cut to the reverse of that shot, breaking the 180° rule, your audience will understand that you have switched POV and the actors are still in the same directional relationship to one another.

If you cut away to something completely different, when you come back to the shot, you can change the order without confusing the audience.

You can shoot from a neutral axis point, i.e. with your subject directly in the middle of the frame and facing the camera, and then switch to either side of the 180° line, or even to a shot showing the subject in the center of the frame and shot from the back, without causing confusion. The audience accepts the change in POV.

Working with Actors

Blocking the scene and determining lighting

The director and DP/cinematographer decide camera placement

The director tells the DP what s/he needs in terms of lighting (what parts of the scene, the main acting area, any background lighting, high or low key lighting)

The 2nd assistant camera places actor marks on the floor – where the actors will begin, move into, and end up in the scene

The DP tells the gaffer where to place the lights and how to angle them

The first part of the set to be lit is the main acting area, which is the end mark of the scene

The floor is taped at the spot where the actor/s will stop after entering the scene. This is the end mark of the scene

Someone must stand in for the actor/s to set the lights because we cannot light the air.

Once the end mark (main acting area) is lit you then light the start mark of the scene, where the moving actor enters the scene

Once again, someone must stand in for the actor/s to set the lights at the start mark

The speed of the actor's movement to the end mark determines how much attention to give to the start mark. If the actor is moving quickly into the main acting area, you may not need to give the start mark too much attention.

If the actor pauses or moves more slowly into the main area, you will need to make sure there is enough light on them when they first enter. The lighting at the beginning point of the scene does not have to match the lighting of the main acting area

Once the end mark (main acting area) and start marks (where the actor enters the scene) are lit, you determine what lighting may be needed along the path from start to end

Once lighting and actor marks and movements have been established, rehearse the scene to make sure it works

Lighting will guide the viewer's attention, so make sure you set the lights on what matters in the scene

Common Scenario

Actors enter a scene, walk up to and stop at a place where most of the scene happens.

Since this spot is the primary acting area in the scene, it gets the most lighting attention and should be lit first, using cross key or 3-point lighting, or a combination

The floor is taped at the spot where the actor/s will stop after entering the scene. This is the end mark of the scene

Someone must stand in for the actor/s to set the lights because we cannot light the air.

You will need to set the lights for as many actors as there are in the scene. Everyone in the primary acting area must be properly lit. The original lighting must take into consideration everyone who will end up in the scene, even if they do not start out in the scene.

Exercises

1. Not so difficult: eyeline matching

a. A conversation between two actors using close-ups (CU), two-shots, and a long shot

- Observe the 180° rule
- Observe/create eyeline matching

b. Move the camera to the opposite side of the conversation using a medium shot (MS), across the 180° axis, and continue the shot without causing confusion about the directionality of the actors. Is eyeline matching still an issue?

2. Not so easy: actors and movement within a scene

Lighting:

Cross-key lighting

Background lighting

Available and ambient light

Add other lighting as desired

Keep in mind:

180° rule

Establishing the eyeline

Block the scene: use the white board (walls) to make a diagram of the scene showing action, actors, lights, main area, entrance, camera.

Place tape on the floor to mark main area of action – where will each actor be for the scene?

Set up camera, set up lights and rehearse the scene

Shoot the scene

The action:

Actors A & B enter the scene, one after the other, and stop at the primary acting area.

Shoot this using a long shot (LS)

They have a short conversation. Using the following shots:

- a LS two-shot
- close up (CU) actor A
- reverse CU actor B
- also use OTS shot
- and medium two-shot

Actor A leaves, the camera follows his/her movement

Shoot for editing – the scene is to be cut to show actor A leaving

- then LS of actor B remaining in main area
- then CU of actor B as s/he watches actor A walk away

END OF SCENE