

Camera Movement

A director may choose to move action along by telling the story as a series of cuts, going from one shot to another, or they may decide to move the camera with the action. Moving the camera often takes a great deal of time, and makes the action seem slower, as it takes several seconds for a moving camera shot to be effective, when the same information may be placed on screen in a series of fast cuts. Not only must the style of movement be chosen, but the method of actually moving the camera must be selected too. There are seven basic methods:

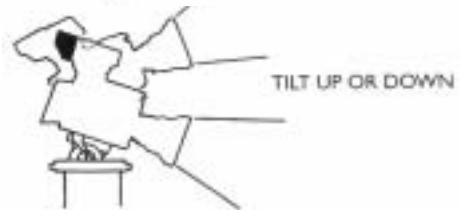
1. Pans

A movement which scans a scene horizontally. The camera is placed on a tripod, which operates as a stationary axis point as the camera is turned, often to follow a moving object which is kept in the middle of the frame.



2. Tilts

A movement which scans a scene vertically, otherwise similar to a pan.

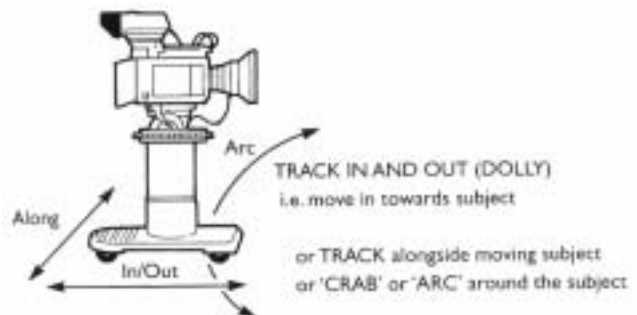


3. Hand-held shots

The hand-held camera (despite its name, a heavy, awkward piece of machinery which is attached to its operator by a harness) was invented in the 1950s to allow the camera operator to move in and out of scenes with greater speed. It gives a jerky, ragged effect, totally at odds with the organised smoothness of a dolly shot, and is favoured by filmmakers looking for a gritty realism (eg Scorsese), which involves the viewer very closely with a scene. Much favoured by the makers of *NYPD Blue*.

4. Tracking Shots

Sometimes called TRUCKING or DOLLY shots. The camera is placed on a moving vehicle and moves alongside the action, generally following a moving figure or object. Complicated tracking shots will involve a track being laid on set for the camera to follow, hence the name. The camera might be mounted on a car, a plane, or even a shopping trolley (good method for independent film-makers looking to save a few dollars). A tracking shot may be a good way of portraying movement, the journey of a character for instance, or for moving from a long shot to a close-up, gradually focusing the audience on a particular object or character.



5. Crane Shots

Basically, tracking-shots-in-the-air. A crane is a useful way of moving a camera - it can move up, down, left, right, swooping in on action or moving diagonally out of it.



6. Zoom Lenses

The zoom lens means that the camera need not be moved (and saves a lot of time and trouble). The zoom lens can zip a camera in or out of a scene very quickly. The drawbacks include the fact that while a dolly shot involves a steady movement similar to the focusing change in the human eye, the zoom lens tends to be jerky (unless used very slowly) and to distort an image, making objects appear closer together than they really are. Zoom lenses are also drastically over-used by many directors (including those holding palmcoders), who try to give the impression of movement and excitement in a scene where it does not exist.

7. The Aerial Shot

An exciting variation of a crane shot, usually taken from a helicopter. This is often used at the beginning of a film, in order to establish setting and movement. A helicopter is like a particularly flexible sort of crane - it can go anywhere, keep up with anything, move in and out of a scene, and convey real drama and exhilaration.