Camera Shots & Angles Cheat Sheet

The visual language of film: name it, spot it, use it.

Shot sizes

Shot	What you see	Why directors use it
Extreme wide (EWS)	Vast landscape; people are tiny	Shows scale, isolation or a new location
Wide / long (WS)	Whole body and surroundings	Establishes where characters are
Medium (MS)	Waist up	Conversations; balances body language and face
Medium close-up (MCU)	Chest up	Focus on the speaker with some context
Close-up (CU)	Face fills the frame	Emotion and reaction
Extreme close-up (ECU)	Eyes, hands or an object	Tension; a crucial detail
Insert	A key object	Information the audience must notice

Camera angles

Angle	Effect
Eye level	Neutral and natural; we meet the character as equals
Low angle (looking up)	Makes a subject powerful or threatening
High angle (looking down)	Makes a subject small, weak or vulnerable
Overhead / bird's-eye	Pattern, scale, or a god-like view
Dutch tilt	Unease, disorientation, something is wrong
Over-the-shoulder (OTS)	Places us in a conversation
Point of view (POV)	We see exactly what the character sees

Camera movement

Move	How	Feeling
Pan	Camera turns left or right	Following, revealing
Tilt	Camera turns up or down	Revealing height or power
Dolly / push in	Camera moves towards the subject	Rising importance or tension
Pull out	Camera moves away	Isolation, ending, context
Tracking	Camera moves alongside	Energy, journey
Handheld	Held by the operator	Realism, chaos, urgency
Zoom	Lens changes focal length	Sudden attention, a 1970s feel

Composition rules

- **Rule of thirds:** place eyes and horizons on the third lines, not the centre.
- **Lead room:** leave space in the direction a character looks or moves.
- **Headroom:** a little space above the head; too much makes people look small.
- **Depth:** include foreground, middle and background layers.
- **180-degree rule:** keep the camera on one side of two people talking so they stay on consistent sides of the screen.

Use it in your reviews

Naming a technique makes a review credible: "The slow push-in on her face as the call ends is devastating" tells readers more than "the scene was sad".