

MTA 253 – Directing for Film/Video, Second Half of the Course  
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The second half of MTA 253 is dedicated to “translating” the scene that you have prepared for stage to single-camera filming. Because single-camera filming involves so many setups, and is such a complex process, it is strongly recommended that your entire scene not exceed three (3) minutes in length. Since you have already staged this scene, your actors are familiar with it and know their lines. To translate from stage to film, your cast usually will need to bring their performances “down” by reigning in their gestures, expressions, and voice projection. The biggest challenge for inexperienced cast members, however, may be to get them to ignore the camera and its placement. Try to keep you cast performing to each other without regard for the camera. Frequently you will need to block an actor to cheat a bit so that the camera has better coverage on him/her. Remember that camera placement is your responsibility, and try to provide instructions and sustain a dialogue with your actors that will let you work with them by *minimizing* their attention to the camera, microphone, or other technical processes of filming the scene. The actors need to concentrate on their roles and their interactions with other characters.

I believe that it is helpful to *always* address actors by their character’s names in rehearsals and on sets or locations. Some may disagree with this advice, but *anything* that can help to keep an actor in character is useful. When you are putting numerous scenes together for a film or video production--which you will eventually be doing--keep in mind that since shooting is out-of-sequence that the film/video director has special responsibilities for helping actors to keep in character and for helping each character to achieve and maintain his or her arc. You will not confront this issue so directly in the single scene you are filming for 253, but even at this point it is valuable to be thinking about this issue.

The aesthetic of film/video requires enhanced “naturalism;” its photographic nature is unforgiving. What a viewer might accept in a stage production most likely will not be acceptable to his/her eye or ear on screen. As you move into the second half of MTA 253, start thinking cinematically. Jean Cocteau, the renowned French writer, poet, stage director, film director, and essayist observed: “A stage no matter how large is always limited in terms of time and space; a screen, no matter how small, never is!” This statement cuts to the core of your challenge in the film/video section of MTA 253 and how you need to approach the second half of this course. At a stage performance, the viewer has a fixed position in his/her seat. The stage director blocks and stages a play in order to open his/her set and the action to the greatest number of audience members. Movie-goers, likewise, don’t move or change seats, but the choice of shots in the film/video constantly changes their perspective on the scene for them. In film/video, the director controls what the viewer sees and how he/she sees it. A film/video director takes over for the viewer’s eyes through the camera. To “see cinematically” means to understand the essence of your scene so well that you can shift what the viewer sees and be confident that this is the interpretation of the scene that you desire. I suggest that as soon as you have finished your stage scene exercise for 253 that you begin thinking “cinematically” about the scene.

What is the “look” that you want for your scene? The choice of a location, furnishings, props, and costuming is vital. Think of each scene in terms of “**G.I.F.**”: **Geography**: Where are we and what are the spatial relations between the characters? What selection of shots will best

capture the physical space, necessary props, and the characters physical relationship to one another? **Information:** What story content, plot details, or foreshadowing must be clearly conveyed in this scene? What, if any, knowledge is to be conveyed to the viewer in addition to information contained in the dialogue? **Feeling:** What are the mood, the pace, and the emotion in this scene. When any of these elements changes how is that to be made clear? Often, such changes are called “beats.”

One of the ways to steer yourself from concept into actual filming is by storyboarding. Don't worry about your ability or inability to draw; storyboarding is a conceptual device. Treat your script as a blueprint for the scene, not as a work of dramatic literature. Translate your scene from a stage play into a ‘shooting script.’ I recommend that you use the example from Chapter 6, pp. 79-87, in the assigned electronic reserve reading by Nicholas Proferes, and restructure your script as a split page for this exercise. Alternatively, however, you may wish to use the example of shot notations on a film script page as found on page 339 in the assigned e-reserve reading by Michael Rabinger from Chapter 27 in his book. (The example in Rabinger's book may be more typical of the way a shooting script for a feature film looks, but the way Proferes approaches the shooting script is advantageous for organization and clarity. For directors in MTA 253, I recommend copying the Proferes version.) Once you have finalized a shooting script, prepare a floor plan of your set. Be sure you have included all pieces of furniture and any major pieces of set dressing in it. On the floor plan (an example of which you find in Rabinger, Chapter 27, p. 351), indicate each camera set-up sequentially. (This may be done by numbering, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, etc. or lettering A, B, C, D, E, etc. Your numbering or lettering sequence should begin with your longest shot.)

At its most basic, single-camera film/video directing consists of “coverage.” You need to have long, medium, and close shots to give to the editor, and do not neglect to film some cutaways, or inserts, before you wrap. Coverage alone, however, is an inadequate way to approach the concept of directing. Many directors believe that even beginners can easily *over-emphasize* coverage and, by so doing, sacrifice the essence of the scene. Effective directing never *simply* “covers” a scene. I suggest that you run through the scene once in its entirety, which in classical film style was photographed as a “master take.” Whether *you* actually choose to film this master or not, this complete run through is important to your cast and crew in order to get a complete sense for and feel of the scene before you get into your camera set-ups. Whether to actually film this master or not should be a decision that you make knowingly and in a manner consistent with your production design for the scene, your storyboards, and your perception of **G.I.F.** for the scene. Finally, after your storyboards, shooting script, and floor plan are completed make yourself “Crib Notes” or “Crib Sheets.” I suggest preparing 3x5” note cards to take with you onto the set. (See, Rabinger, Ch. 27, p. 349).