SHOOTING AND EDITING PROJECTS[1]

As you work through the 5th edition of *Directing: Film Techniques and Aesthetics* you might find yourself wanting to jump right into the "doing" part. The book's design should encourage you to do this. Use these exercises to start production whenever you wish—you can always refer to the appropriate chapters in the book to solve problems as you encounter them. Some like to read, understand, and be thoroughly prepared before entering practical work, whereas others (myself included) learn best by doing things in order to discover what's involved. That, after all, is how film history evolved.

   The projects below explore different techniques of expression, but by all means try to make each a vehicle for your own ideas and tastes. I have included a list of skills you can expect to learn, discussion suggestions, and questions to elicit your work's aspects, strengths, and weaknesses. These projects and their variations represent a huge filmmaking workout. Pick and choose to build the particular skills you want—there are far too many otherwise. Use them particularly to explore building a character, a situation, and the audience's involvement through nonverbal, behavioral means. When you can develop the disparate perspectives of the characters and build a Storyteller's point of view, you are doing advanced work.

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[1] These projects were previously published as *Chapter 6: Shooting Projects* in the 4th edition of *Directing: Film Techniques and Aesthetics.*

OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT

Outcomes assessment is a tool that helps both teacher and learner—for it rates not what students know in their heads, but what they can put on the screen. Note that criteria expect conceptual and creative outcomes, and not just the usual technical ones. Students appreciate that it focuses on desirable and positive outcomes. By stating a full range of criteria, the teacher sets a broad ground for discussion. If you are working without a mentor, use the assessments to rate yourself on each aspect of your work.

Over several months, scan your project assessments to see how your skills are developing. The circled scores make this easy because they represent a bar graph. Rejoice in your accomplishments, and focus on lifting your deficiencies. Many teachers like students to get practice at scoring each other's work because it helps the scorers become more realistic at evaluating their own work.

Figure SP-1 is a sample outcomes assessment form. You can download the outcomes assessment forms for all of the projects below on this website in the "Projects" section. (Filename: **Outcomes Assessment Forms.pdf**)

ASSESSMENT Proj. 1A, B (EDITING)

Editing	Action match cuts are smooth and natural-looking.	0 1 2 3 4 5
	Uses match cuts on major moments of action to bridge shots wherever possible.	0 1 2 3 4 5
	Match-cuts between two sizes of same action use an image size change that is large enough to make a natural-looking cut (if size-change is too small it looks like a messy jump cut).	0 1 2 3 4 5
	Rhythm of footsteps is perfectly matched.	0 1 2 3 4 5
	Cutting from angle to angle feels natural and motivated.	0 1 2 3 4 5
	Overall editing rhythm feels natural.	0 1 2 3 4 5
Camera operating	Camera movements are so smooth they seem entirely motivated by the subject's movements.	0 1 2 3 4 5
	Pans and tilts sync with motivating action, neither ahead nor behind.	0 1 2 3 4 5
Composition	Camera height is varied to create interesting angles.	0 1 2 3 4 5
	Framing and composition on static shots is excellent.	0 1 2 3 4 5
	Compositions create maximum perspective and depth	0 1 2 3 4 5
	Lead space ahead of subject is well judged.	0 1 2 3 4 5
	Compositional proportions around subject are maintained between images of different sizes.	0 1 2 3 4 5
Blocking	Screen direction of subject remains logical.	0 1 2 3 4 5
	Does not "cross the line"? (If you did, try using safety coverage such as close shots of feet walking to space out and disguise the mismatched shots.)	0 1 2 3 4 5
Human presence and continuity	Actor looks so unselfconscious that footage could pass for documentary.	0 1 2 3 4 5
	Nature and speed of actions is consistent from angle to angle.	0 1 2 3 4 5
	Mood changes and development makes a character of compelling interest.	0 1 2 3 4 5
	Where she's come from and where she is going is suggested interestingly by acting, props, costuming, etc.	0 1 2 3 4 5
Dramaturgy	Sequence has a natural and satisfying arc of development and conclusion.	0 1 2 3 4 5
	TOTAL	

SCORING METHOD

Each Outcomes Assessment Form contains a list of desirable facets for you or your group to assess according to agreement. Circle the appropriate score. Numbers aren't in themselves useful, but having to make decisions about relative quality is. The five-point scale of agreement is:

Not true or not applicable	0
Only minimally true	1
Somewhat so	2
Average and acceptably so	3
Considerably so	4
Unusually and strikingly so	5

ON DEVELOPING YOUR ABILITIES

Techniques: The projects that follow will help you develop a broad and representative range of directing and editing skills. Experimental films are sometimes about film technique, but in more mainstream fiction, technique is seldom an end in itself. "Art," said Thomas Hardy, "is the secret of how to produce by a false thing the effect of a true." This could be said about the artifice that goes into most screen narrative. Good technique is transparent, and goes unnoticed by the audience because the film grips the viewer's imagination. Poor technique or virtuosity misapplied is technique that intrudes itself and confounds the film's purpose—unless, of course, the film is a formalist one about filming.

The first projects explore basic technique and embody modest subject matter, but do not be deceived into thinking they are beneath you. I have supplied requirements, procedures, and hints, but I leave much of the problem solving—always the most rewarding area of learning—to your ingenuity and resourcefulness. Where a project requires lighting, keep it simple so you avoid getting sidetracked by the delights of cinematography.

Critique sessions: Assess finished projects in a group or class if you can, so you get used to working with collaborators, and to giving and taking critique. If a project has many assessment criteria, have each person watch for a few particular facets. This ensures a discussion in depth from which everyone learns. The maker's job is to listen, take notes about the audience reaction, and say nothing. Never explain what the audience should have understood; your "say" is your film, and you must correct it in the light of what your audience missed.

Further help: For additional information, use the table of contents at the front of the part dealing with the appropriate production phase, or the index at the book's end.

Also, if you desire additional coaching on the technical and creative details of film or DV production? Excellent at explaining filmmaking technology and expressive concepts is Mick Hurbis-Cherrier's *Voice & Vision: A Creative Approach to Narrative Film and DV Production,* 2nd ed. (Focal Press, 2011). Also excellent is Kris Malkiewicz and M. David Mullen's *Cinematography,* 3rd ed. (Fireside, 2005).

PROJECT 1: BASIC TECHNIQUES—"GOING AND RETURNING"

This project is without dialogue, and asks you to establish the character and situation of a woman who looks forward to arriving at a building, but discovers she has lost her keys. During the discovery and returning to her car to look for them, she can go through a range of subtle emotions—irritation, anxiety, relief, perhaps even amusement. Expect a workout in film grammar basics such as preserving the screen direction of characters and action, and of making action match cuts work. (See "Making an action match cut" and "Match cut guide" subheadings in Project 1A.)
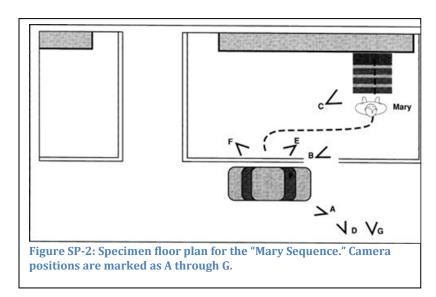
Skills to develop:

- Maintaining relevant screen direction.
- Panning and tilting to follow action.
- Picture framing and composition to suggest depth.
- Editing: action match cutting, cutting together different sizes of similar images using action as a bridge, cutting together complementary angles on the same action.
- Telling a story through action and behavior, not words.
- Ellipsis (compressing real time into cinematic shorthand).
- Editing to music.
- Making a long, loose version (first assembly) and a tight, short version (fine cut).

1A: Plan, Shoot, and Edit the Long Version

Assessment: Use Assessment 1A/B (Editing) from **Outcomes Assessment Forms.pdf**

Action: A car draws up. Mary, its occupant, gets out and approaches a house, looking up at a window in anticipation. She mounts a flight of steps to the front door, where she finds she does not have her keys. Perplexed, she returns to her car, expecting it to be open. Finding the door locked, she reacts in alarm, thinking her keys are locked in. But looking with difficulty inside, she sees the ignition is empty. Patting her pockets and looking around in consternation, she spots her keys lying in the gutter. She picks them up, relieved, and returns to the house.
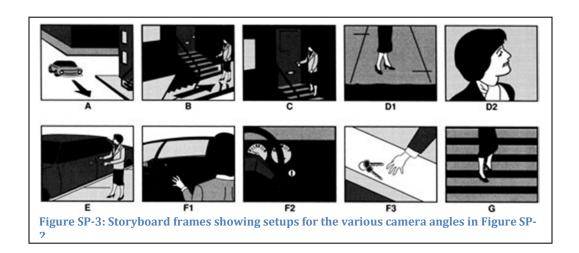
　　Figure SP-2 is a specimen floor plan. Adapt yours to your location (mine is a one-way street to allow the driver to drop her keys in the nearside gutter). The floor plan shows Mary's walk and the basic camera positions to cover the various parts of the action. No sound is necessary.

Figure SP-2: Specimen floor plan for the "Mary Sequence." Camera positions are marked as A through G.

Figure SP-3 is a storyboard of representative frames for each camera position.

For your coverage, make your own ground plan and show camera positions and storyboard key frames. Here is a sample shot list related to the ground plan and key frames A through G:

- Establishing shot of locale from camera position A with car arriving as in Frame A.
- Medium shot (MS) panning with Mary left to right (L-R). When she turns the corner in the path, she changes her effective screen direction, ending up as in Frame B.
- Medium close shot (MCS) of Mary's feet walking R-L and L-R on sidewalk and up steps as an all-purpose cut-in (also called insert) shot as in Frame D1.
- Big close-up (BCU) panning, telephoto shot of Mary's head as she walks, looking up at window as in D2.
- Feet enter shot descending steps; camera tilts down to follow action, Frame G.
- Over the shoulder (OTS) shot of empty ignition, F1.
- Point-of-view (POV) shot, F2.
- BCU keys in gutter, hand reaches into frame and takes them, F3.

Figure SP-3: Storyboard frames showing setups for the various camera angles in Figure SP-2

In its simplest edited form, the abbreviated sequence might look something like this:

Camera Position	Shot #	Action
A	1	Car arrives, Mary gets out, slams door, exits bottom right of frame.
B	2a	Mary enters L-R, begins crossing frame.
D2	3	CU Mary looks up at window.
B	2b	This is the rest of Shot 2a. Mary continues L-R, turns corner of path, walks R-L toward steps and up them.
C	3	Mary rises into frame from R-L, fumbles for keys, can't find them, looks back at car, turns back out of frame.
B	4	Mary descending steps across frame L-R, turns corner, crosses frame R-L.
E	5a	Mary arrives from screen R, walking R-L toward car, fails to open door, curses.
F1	6	She crosses frame, repositions herself looking R-L to see if key is in ignition, peers inside.
F2	7	Her POV of empty ignition.
E	5b	Mary straightens up, pats pockets, sees something out of frame on the ground.
F3	8a	CU keys lying in gutter from Mary's POV.
E	5c	Mary reacts, stoops down.
F3	8b	CU of keys, hand enters frame, takes them back up.
E	5d	Mary straightens up, looking relieved, and exits into camera, making frame go black. End of sequence.

Notice that Shot 2 is intercut with a CU, whereas the action in Shot 5 has been intercut three times. When directing for intercutting like this, don't waste time shooting individual reactions; instead, shoot a larger section or even the whole action in the two different sizes of shot. Afterward, during editing, select the fragments you require from the continuous take. The more sustained the acting, the more your actors will stay in *focus;* that is, stay unself-consciously lost in their characters' realities.

Notice how, at the end of Shot 5, when Mary returns with the keys, her movement is used to black out the screen by walking right up to the camera lens. To continue the transition in the following shot, back the actor up against the lens and, on "Action," have her walk away from the camera. In the transition, the screen goes from action to black, then from black to a new scene. This is one of many transitional devices; the simplest being the humble cut. Overuse the fancy ones and you run the risk of being tricksy.

- Cut this first, long version together, taking into account cutting from Shot 2a to Shot 3.
- Maintain Mary's walking rhythm across cuts, and be careful you don't make the poor woman take two steps on the same foot. You need rhythm consciousness to edit walking shots, and indeed for anything where rhythms are involved.
- When cutting from Shot 5a to Shot 6, there will probably be an action match. Here are some of the few rules in filmmaking.

Making an action match cut: A cut during action is always preferable to one during stasis. When action flows across a cut, the eye hardly notices the changes of composition or subject. Action matches work best *when the outgoing shot does no more than initiate the movement, and the incoming shot takes over and completes* most of the action.

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Match cut guide: For the best action match, follow these steps:

   Step 1: Let the outgoing shot run until the start of the action is established. Use no more of the action than we need to recognize the nature of action (standing up, reaching for doorknob, combing hair, etc.). This is important because the eye stops being critical whenever we know what is happening next.

   Step 2: Complete the majority of the action with the incoming (closer or longer) shot, but be aware that *if the action flowing across the cut is at all fast, you must repeat three or four frames of the action at the head of the incoming shot*. This overlap is necessary because the eye does not register the first three or four frames of any new image. Of course, a frame-by-frame analysis shows a slight action repeat, but shown at normal speed, the action will appear smooth and continuous.

Cutting from Shot 5c to Shot 8b, use the same principle. Let Mary just begin to stoop, and then cut to keys with hand entering at top of frame shortly afterward. If you leave too much footage before the incoming hand appears, you will imply that Mary is 8 feet tall.

Criteria: Run your cut version. Make an exact minutes-and-seconds count of its length. Rate the criteria in Assessment 1A/B (Editing) from **Outcomes Assessment Forms.pdf**. The scores show where your technique is strong and where it needs improvement.

1B: Editing a More Compressed Version

Assessment: Use Assessment 1A/B (Editing). Run your cut and consider which moments in the action are vital and which are link material. Surely a lot of the walking is of secondary importance. If, for instance, Mary turns to look back in the direction of the car, we don't need to see her cover every inch of ground to arrive there. Amend the first cut by making a compressed version. The unused bridging close-ups will now be useful. In this new, abbreviated list, they are printed in bold:

Camera Position	Shot #	Action
A	1	Car arrives, Mary gets out, slams door, exits bottom right of frame.
B	2a	Mary enters L-R, begins crossing frame.
D2	3	CU Mary looks up at window.
B	2b	This is the rest of Shot 2a. Mary continues L-R, turns corner of path, walks R-L toward steps and up them.
C	3	Mary rises into frame from R-L, fumbles for keys, can't find them, looks back at car, and turns.
G		**Feet descending a couple of steps.**
D1		**CS feet walking on sidewalk R-L.**
B	4	Mary descending steps across frame L-R, turns corner, crosses frame R-L.
E	5a	Mary arrives from screen R, walking R-L toward car, fails to open door, curses.
F1	6	She crosses frame, repositions herself looking R-L to see if key is in ignition, peers inside.
F2	7	Her POV of empty ignition.
E	5b	Mary straightens up, pats pockets, sees something out of frame on the ground.
F3	8a	CU keys lying in gutter from Mary's POV.
E	5c	Mary reacts, stoops down.
F3	8b	CU of keys, hand enters frame, takes them back up.
E	5d	Mary straightens up looking relieved and exits into camera, making frame go black. End of sequence.

Discussion: How long is the sequence now? It should lose nothing of narrative importance, yet be 30 to 50 percent shorter. See if you can cut it to perhaps as little as 30 to 60 seconds overall. Run and rerun your film until you see shots or parts of shots that can be eliminated. Set the audience up to infer whatever you can, so the audience actively uses its imagination to fill in points of elision. Treat your audience as active, intelligent collaborators rather than passive vessels needing exhaustive information.

1C: Setting It to Music

Having discovered how much leeway there is to many shots' length, you can now turn Mary into a musical star. Find a piece of music with a strong beat that enhances the mood of the sequence. Reedit the materials, placing your cuts and major pieces of action on the beat or on the music's instrumental changes. Be aware that *for any cut to appear on the beat, it must occur three or four frames before the actual beat point*. This is owing to the perceptual lag inherent when you cut to a new image. The only nonnegotiable aspects of your earlier cut are the action match cuts. There will be only one optimal cutting place.

Assessment: Use Assessment 1C (Music) from **Outcomes Assessment Forms.pdf**

Discussion:

- How tightly does the action fit the music?
- Does cutting on the beat become predictable? If so, try cutting on a musical subdivision.
- How much compromise did you have to make with the tight version to adjust the action to fit the music?
- What does the music add to the earlier version's impact?

PROJECT 2: CHARACTER STUDY

Skills to develop:

- Revealing a character through action.
- Using mobile *cinéma vérité* handheld coverage.
- Blocking camera and actor for mutual accommodation.
- Developing counterpoint between words and action.
- Imposing a second point of view.

2A: Plan, Rehearse, and Shoot Long Take of Character-Revealing Action

Alan makes breakfast alone in his own unique way. Depending on your actor, this is an opportunity to show someone amusingly smart, dreamy, pressured, ultra-methodical, or slovenly who makes his breakfast in a particular state of mind and emotion. Develop your ideas in rehearsal:

- First decide what Alan's character is going to be.
- Then decide on his situation.
- Then figure out how to externalize these as action without telegraphing what the audience is meant to notice. Put the accent on credibility as though this were reality being shot by a hidden camera.

Camera coverage should adapt to what director and actor develop, and blocking evolves from mutual accommodation between camera and actor. Fast actions, those shot close, won't look normal on the screen unless slowed down by up to a third.

You may need to reblock the action—that is, have the actor turn some actions into the camera or have him move away from a close position to a marked point so the whole of the action is visible without the camera having to move or make choices. You may need some lighting. For this semidocumentary approach, try placing light stands in a tight group against the least interesting wall so your camera has maximum freedom to move around without picking up telltale stands and supply wires. Bounce the light off a white ceiling or reflector so you work relatively shadowlessly under soft light.

Have fun with this shoot, and in your coverage incorporate:

- Action of about four minutes that is emotionally revealing of Alan's basic character, particular mood, and immediate past and future.
- Idiosyncratic interaction with objects (no other people, no phone conversations).
- A single, nonstop, handheld take using wide-angle lens only.
- Camera movement (pan, tilt, handheld tracking shot, etc.) to follow or reveal as necessary.
- Close and long shots produced by altering subject-to-camera distance as necessary. This may be done by moving the camera in and out, or by blocking Alan to move closer or farther from a static camera.
- Thorough exploitation of the domestic setting.
- Lots of rehearsal with camera, so that all the above look smooth and natural.
- Safety cutaways, point-of-view shots, and inserts.

The difference between an insert, cutaway, and point-of-view shot is that:

- *An insert* takes detail already inside the main shot and magnifies it usefully.
- *A cutaway* shows something outside the main shot's framing.
- *A point-of-view (POV) shot* replicates what a character sees from his or her eye line.

If they are not to look arbitrary and contrived, cutaways, insert shots, and POV shots must

be *motivated* by a character's actions or through a consistent logic of storytelling. If, for instance, Alan glances up and out of the frame in wide shot, you can use this glance to motivate cutting to his point of view (and a cutaway shot) of a bird alighting on the windowsill.

Assessment: Use Assessment 2A (Blocking, Acting, and Camerawork) from **Outcomes Assessment Forms.pdf**

Discussion: Try to extract findings from the specifics of your work.
- What in general can make fluid camerawork intrusive or objectionable?
- What is the drawback of long-take coverage?
- What are its advantages?
- What is the difference in feeling when the action takes place across the frame instead of back and forth in its depth?
- What are the consequences of framing and camera movement?
- When can the camera look away from Alan and take its own initiative, make its own revelations? (It might, for instance, show that while Alan is searching for eggs, the frying pan is smoking ominously.)
- When is it legitimate for the camera to be caught by surprise or to show it knows what is going to happen next?
- Does the audience feel it is spying on Alan unawares, or is there guidance, a feeling that the camera has its own ideas about him and is deliberately showing particular aspects of him?
- What might determine which storytelling mode to use?
- How much of the take is dramatically interesting, and where are the flat spots of dead or link material?

2B: Adding an Interior Monologue

Going further: Now add an interior monologue track as a voice-over (VO) in which we hear Alan's thought process. In planning this, you will need to consider the following:

- Which actions does he do automatically from long habit?
- Which actions require thought?
- On what grounds is each decision made?
- At what points are a character's thoughts in the present?
- At what points do they fly away elsewhere, and why?
- When do we consciously note what we are doing, and why?

Do not forget to shoot monologue "presence track" or atmosphere (also known as buzz track or room tone) to serve as a necessary "sound spacer" should you want to extend pauses in the VO. Room tone (also known as buzz track or presence track) is a simple recording of the set at prior recording level, when no action or dialogue is happening. Every sound location has its own relative silence; you can't extend a track with a silence from another place or even microphone position because they will sound different.

Assessment: Use Assessment 2BC (Interior Monologue) from **Outcomes Assessment Forms.pdf**

When you have completed the assignment, assess or discuss the following:

- Where the interior monologue voice may be overinforming the audience.

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- Where it is under-informing.
- Is there redundancy in what you hear because it can be inferred from the action?
- Is VO used skillfully to set up the audience to notice or interpret something that would otherwise be missed? Could it have been?
- Did you show, then tell—or tell, then show? Which is better?
- Are any losses offset by gains in information, humor, or other aspects?
- Did you use too much or too little VO overall?

2C: Vocal Counterpoint and Point of View

Going further: Working again with the original piece, now write and record an alternative voice-over (VO) track that, instead of complementing what you see, contrasts revealingly with it. When action suggests one meaning, and Alan's VO another, the conjunction of the two yields a more complex set of possibilities. The aim here is to develop tensions between picture and sound, a series of deliberate ambiguities or even contradictions that invite the audience to develop its own ideas about the discrepancies. Now you impel the audience to actively develop ideas about Alan's character. Suggested voices are:

- Alan telling his psychiatrist how his compulsions are going away, when clearly they aren't.
- Alan rehearsing how to convey his efficiency and foresight in an upcoming and important job interview.
- Alan's mother telling him how to eat well now that he is on his own.
- Alan's wife loyally telling a friend how easy it is to live with him.
- A Homeland Security officer interpreting Alan's culpability from his innocuous actions.

Unless your character is reading from a diary or letter, you will want to avoid the mechanical sound of an actor reading. Even the most professional actors have trouble making a text sound like spontaneous thought. Happily, there is an easy way around this. Show the actor the ideas and discuss them, then interview him while recording as he improvises his thoughts. Do several versions and redirect your actor between takes. Edit them to the action. This reliably produces spontaneity. Do not forget to shoot room tone as the necessary sound spacer should you want to extend pauses in the VO.

Of course there is ample scope for comedy here, but did you create sympathy for your central character, or does he come off as a buffoon? The VO has to be carefully developed and rehearsed. Be aware that though the first two options are apparently Alan's view of himself, they should allow the audience to develop an independent sense of Alan that might confirm what a psychiatrist or job interviewer suspected. The remaining three suggestions are perspectives that might better serve to profile the speaker than to profile Alan.

Assessment: Use Assessment 2BC (Interior Monologue) from **Outcomes Assessment Forms.pdf**

Discussion:

- Did VO lift interest in periods of bridging action? (Use VO to raise the dull parts; let eloquent actions speak for themselves.)
- Did you leave interesting sound effects in the clear (say, Alan dropping his shoes)? Lay in VO as a secondary track, leaving salient portions of the sync or original "in the clear." Raise sync track levels between blocks of VO. The *foregrounded track* may either be VO, featured dialogue, sound effects, or action from the sync track.

PROJECT 3: EXPLOITING A LOCATION

Skills to develop:

- Developing a mood.
- Shifting the mood from objective to subjective.
- Making use of cause and effect.
- Capitalizing upon inherent rhythms.
- Implying both a point of view and a state of mind.
- Suggesting a development.
- Using sync sound as effects.
- Using music to heighten or interpret the environment.

3A: Dramatizing an Environment

This assignment has strong research aspects, and you will need to spend some hours just observing with a notebook in hand. Select an interesting location such as a harbor, motorcyclists' café, farmyard, fairground, bookstore, or airport lounge. You want a physical entity rather than a human event. Work your observations into a script incorporating your best material. You can even work in an acted POV character so long as he or she is a credible presence. With no speaking characters, develop a mood sequence of about two minutes that has a structure organic to the location's daily life and that changes and intensifies. In planning your sequence, consider the following:

- What is inherently present that might structure the sequence? (Passengers arriving in an airport, then leaving at the departure gate? Time progression? Increasing complexity in the action? Forward exploratory movement of camera?)
- What cause-and-effect shots can you group together into subsequences? (Within a winter forest scene, you establish icicles melting, drops of water falling past a shack's window, drops falling in a pool, rivulet of water flowing through ice, etc.)
- Are there inherent rhythms to be exploited (water dripping, cars passing, a street vendor's repeated cry, dog barking, etc.)?
- Do the sequences move from micro to macro view, or the reverse? (Start with ECU water droplets, and develop to view of entire forest; or conversely, start with an aerial view of the city, and end on a single, overfilled trash can.)
- Can you create a turning point that marks the onset of a heightened or altered sensibility? (For instance, in a deserted sandy cove, the camera discovers a single, smoking cigarette butt. Thereafter, coverage suggests an uneasy awareness of a lurking human presence.)

Here, fiction merges with documentary; the environment has become a character studied and relished by the Storyteller. We make the same dramaturgic demands, asking that the view of the location grow and change so it draws us into reacting and becoming involved. The classic three-act structure (see Chapter 4) was developed in theater, but can, as we said, be applied to the contents of a single sequence, a short film, or even a full-length fiction film.

As always, contrasts and contradictions are the richest stimulant to awareness. In a seaside scene, it might be the juxtaposition of frenetic game players with corpulent sun worshippers that provides the astringent comparisons, or the waves compared with the stillness of the rocks. Every setting, like every character, contains *dialectical tensions* whose oppositions define the subject's scope, and subjective meaning to whoever is watching.

Depending on your storytelling Observer (a child, an old man, a foreigner, a cat, an explorer, someone revisiting his past, etc.), the environment can be interpreted very

differently. Through what you show, you can suggest the observing consciousness of a particular person in a particular mood, even though that person is seldom or never seen.

Assessment: Use Assessment 3A (Dramatizing an Environment) from **Outcomes Assessment Forms.pdf**

Discussion:

- Did the sequence depend on images and activities or on a central human subject?
- Were inherent rhythms well exploited?
- Was there a symphonic beginning, middle, and end? (Ideally, developments come from the rhythms and activities inherent in the setting.)
- Was the sequence mainly a response to, or an imposition on, the location?

3B: Adding Music

Going further: Now add music, but no songs. Aim to work with emotional associations and behavioral narration, not a verbal one. Audition different pieces against your scene before choosing the best and adjusting your film around it. When you lay music:

- Let special sounds bleed through the music in appropriate places.
- Decide where and why you want pure music, with no diegetic sound at all. Making these decisions raises important points about when music needs to be "pure," and when its impact and meaning are enhanced by sounds from the "real" world.
- Be ready to adjust shot lengths and cutting points to accommodate the structure of the music you've chosen. Music is never just applied; there should always be mutual responsiveness between visuals, diegetic sound (where used), and music.

Music can do the following:

- Augment what has been created pictorially and act illustratively.
- Suggest something hidden that the audience must hunt for (example: a peaceful harvest scene accompanied by an ominous marching tune, or abandoned houses in a blighted urban area seen against an impassioned Bach chorale).
- Suggest what is subjective either to a character in the film or to the Storyteller (example: that young farm workers go off to die on foreign battlefields, or that poverty and failure are somehow part of God's plan for mankind).

Music is easy to begin and a lot less easy to conclude. The start and stop of a camera movement or subject movement can motivate music in-points and out-points, as can the ending or beginning of a strong diegetic sound effect. Study feature films for further guidance.

Assessment: Reuse Assessment 1C (Music).

Discussion:

- When is it legitimate to use music, when not?
- When is music being used creatively rather than programmatically (that is, as mere illustration)?
- What should music's relationship be to dialogue?
- How should music relate to diegetic sound effects (that is, effects natural to the scene)?
- When should music belong to the world of the characters, and when can it come from beyond their world?
- Can music be motivated by the storytelling "voice" of the film?
- Can you mix periods (use modern music on a historic subject, for instance)?
- What determines the texture and instrumentation of a music piece?

PROJECT 4: EDITED TWO-CHARACTER DIALOGUE SCENE

Skills to develop:
- Planning and shooting dialogue exchanges.
- Camera placement.
- Using verbal rhythms and operative words in editing.
- Controlling the scene's point of view.

4A: Multiple Coverage

Overview: This project, though short, covers a lot of ground and will take invention and organization. If you can, read all the way through PART 7: PRODUCTION. You can learn much from making plans, carrying them out, and then deciding what you'd do differently next time.

1. Write a short dialogue scene (approximately three minutes) that makes use of an active indoor game. One character must realize that the other is bluffing and doesn't know how to play. Justify how this situation has arisen, and develop what it means to each person.
2. Mark the shooting script with your intended pattern of cutting. During shooting, you can overlook portions of shots that you don't intend to use, and can call for another take on important matters.
3. Shoot the whole scene from at least three angles. This style of coverage was once the Hollywood norm. The editor would find a point of view later from multiple coverage. Today, this is considered decisionless coverage that wastes actors' energies, crew time, and film stock. Broad coverage is useful here because it lets you experiment in editing.

Pacing a scene: If it is to look right on the screen, comedy should be paced about a third faster than things would happen in real life. Conversely, serious scenes often must be slowed, particularly at beat points, so that pauses, silences, eye-line shifts, or an exchange of glances can be fully exploited. Experienced directors know where the truly high points are in a scene, and how to alter the pacing to their advantage. Beginners often reverse these priorities, and strive to ensure that no silence, or silent action, ever threatens to "bore" the audience. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Stretching or compressing time: Having double coverage in the cutting room lets you double a pregnant moment when it isn't pregnant enough. To do this, use all of the moment in the outgoing shot, then cut to the matching, incoming one at the beginning of the moment. That way, you can double its screen duration, a key technique for stretching time at strategic points. Conversely, if the moment was held overlong in a shot, you can abbreviate it by cutting tight to the matching angles and using editing as an elision device.

Actions, reactions, and subtexts: Although editors cannot speed up or slow down the way words in a sentence emerge, they can control the rhythm and balance of action and reaction, which is a huge part of implying a subtext. Sure-footed editing can make a vast difference to the degree of thought and feeling the audience attributes to each character, and can greatly improve the sense of integration and consistency in the acting.

Steps:

- Cast the actors.
- Decide the location.
- Write a script that implies the characters' backstory (where they have come from) and where they might be going next.
- Mark one script copy with the beats.
- Rehearse the scene and develop the accompanying action, going beyond what the script calls for.
- Make a floor plan showing characters' moves and intended camera positions (see **Figure SP-2** as an example).
- Define what the scene should accomplish and whose POV the audience is to (a) mainly and (b) partially share and understand.
- Using another script copy and a color for each camera position, mark up the script with your intended editing plan (see **Figure SP-4**).
- Use major subject movements as action match cutting places so cuts disappear behind compelling action.
- Shoot the whole scene through in each major angle to allow experiment during editing.
- Edit strictly according to plan and solicit audience critique.
- Reedit according to what you now feel should be done and solicit new critique.
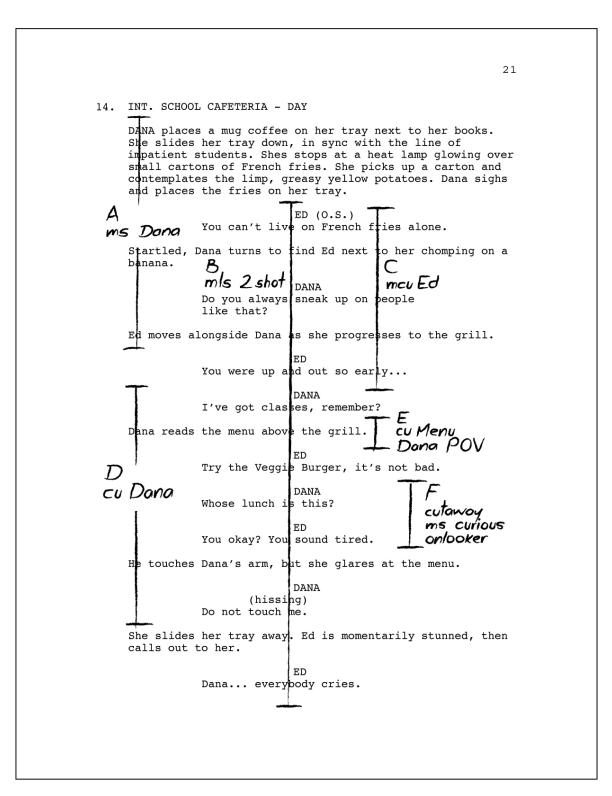- Write guidelines for your next project based on what you learned.

14. INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA - DAY

DANA places a mug coffee on her tray next to her books.
She slides her tray down, in sync with the line of
impatient students. Shes stops at a heat lamp glowing over
small cartons of French fries. She picks up a carton and
contemplates the limp, greasy yellow potatoes. Dana sighs
and places the fries on her tray.

A
ms Dana

                         ED (O.S.)
              You can't live on French fries alone.

Startled, Dana turns to find Ed next to her chomping on a
banana.
              B
              mls 2 shot   DANA   *C*
                                          mcu Ed
              Do you always sneak up on people
              like that?

Ed moves alongside Dana as she progresses to the grill.

                         ED
              You were up and out so early...

                         DANA
              I've got classes, remember?

Dana reads the menu above the grill.   *E*
                                       cu Menu
                                       Dana POV
                         ED
              Try the Veggie Burger, it's not bad.

D   DANA
cu Dana   Whose lunch is this?   *F*
                                            cutaway
                         ED   *ms curious*
              You okay? You sound tired.   *onlooker*

He touches Dana's arm, but she glares at the menu.

                         DANA
                      (hissing)
              Do not touch me.

She slides her tray away. Ed is momentarily stunned, then
calls out to her.

                         ED
              Dana... everybody cries.

Figure SP-4: Marked-up script showing intended cut and generous overlaps to allow action matches and other kinds of alternatives in editing.

Assessment: Use Assessment 4AB from **Outcomes Assessment Forms.pdf**

Discussion: Directing and editing a convincing dialogue scene is one of the most challenging tasks a director faces. How did you do?

- How difficult was it to achieve consistent success throughout a take?
- How right was the pacing of the scene?
- Were the significant moments effectively exploited, and if not, why not?
- How did your writing sound in the mouths of your actors?
- Would the acting in this scene pass as documentary shot with a hidden camera?
- What did you learn about directing actors from this experience?
- What did you learn about directing from a text?

4B: Editing for an Alternative Point of View

Use your generous coverage to reedit and make the audience identify with a different POV, such as a secondary character's or omniscient Storyteller's POV.

Assessment: Use Assessment 4AB from **Outcomes Assessment Forms.pdf**. See if you did better the second time around.

PROJECT 5: AUTHORSHIP THROUGH IMPROVISATION

Skills to develop:

- Involving actors in script idea development.
- Spontaneous and creative interaction between actors and director.
- Directing an event where actors must merge (for example, with an uncontrollable public event).
- Editing documentary-style coverage.
- Script development from taped improvisations.
- Stylistic decision making.
- Working intuitively and thinking on your feet.

5A: Developing a Short Scene

Authorial goals: Set up guidelines for a three- to four-minute improvised scene between two people that incorporates an emotional transition in one character from cheerful to angry. The goal is not to produce great drama, but to experiment with camera coverage and editing. Should you need guidance in directing an "improv," read the introductory part of Chapter 22, then follow the instructions for Exercise IMP-15: Bridging Emotions. Once your scene has become reasonably stable and secure, cover the scene handheld. Do this at least three times, favoring Character A, Character B, then both in two-shot. This, by the way, is how Larry David's comedy television series *Curb Your Enthusiasm* (2000) is shot.

　The goal is to obtain sufficient coverage so you can cut the scene together and then cope with the variations inherent in improvised work. Bring your camera operator in early, because you rely on him or her during improv for the quality of the coverage. In direct cinema documentary, also known as observational camera coverage, the director cannot line up each shot, so creative initiative passes to the camera operator, who must have the mind of a dramatist, not just that of a technician or still photographer. A director quickly finds out whether the operator sees only composition through the viewfinder, or whether he or she is finding dramatic meaning and focus within a scene. Some do and some can learn, but beware—some camera operators will remain detached visual designers.

Camera use: With the advance of Steadicam use, and with high-definition (HD) video being used increasingly in feature films, handheld coverage is increasingly common. Stylistically, it usually projects a strong feeling of spontaneous human observation, as opposed to the godlike omniscience implied by the tripod's perfect composition and rock steadiness. It also injects an interesting sense of fallibility and subjectivity into the coverage. Sometimes, of course, this is intrusively wrong—for instance, during a sequence of misty mountain landscape shots at daybreak when nobody is supposed to be about. In that case, tripod shots are a must.

Sound coverage: Here it's catch-as-catch-can, and a real challenge for the mike operator. While the camera adapts to the action, the microphone operator must stay out of frame and pick up good sound in a swiftly changing, unpredictable situation. Pay attention to sound balance before you show your work to an audience, or discrepancies will make them misread the piece's inherent qualities. One solution is to use a multi-track recorder and put a wireless microphone on everyone who speaks, recording each on a separate channel.

Editing: Edit together a complete version, keeping to the form and length of the original.

Assessment: Use Assessment 5ABC (Improvised Scene) from **Outcomes Assessment Forms.pdf**

Discussion:

Exposition:

- Was expository detail included so the audience understands the situation? (It is fatally easy in improv to overlook something vital.)
- Was each new piece of expository information concealed artfully enough?
- Did the information come too early or too late in the edited piece?

Camera coverage:

- When was mobile, handheld footage stylistically appropriate, and when not?
- What guidelines can you draw for the future?
- Was spontaneous coverage good, or was the operator caught by surprise?
- What effect do these moments have?
- How much were you able to feature the characters' environment?
- Does composition reveal relationship between people (crestfallen son, for instance, in foreground, angry mother in background)?
- How can you construct a more integrated point of view?
- Did you manage to grab enough close detail?

Sound:

- How acceptable is the dialogue track?
- How hard was it to cover speakers whose movements are spontaneous?

Point of view:

- Whose scene is it?
- Does POV arise mainly from performance or from camera treatment? (Hard to pinpoint, but too important to neglect.)

Improvising:

- What did you gain, what did you lose, from improvising a scene?
- What did you gain, what did you lose, from handheld coverage?
- How credible were the characters?
- How well did the scene "problem" develop, and how well did it resolve?
- How consistent was pacing, and how much do you need to edit around plateaus in the pacing or development?

Time your first cut for comparison with the next assignment.

5B: Editing a Shorter Version

Going further: Now edit down your initial cut, trying to make it tighter and more functional by eliminating verbal and behavioral padding. Feel free to restructure the piece should repositioning exposition or other elements improve the dramatic curve. You must decide the necessity of much that is said and done on the screen, and find ways to eliminate whatever doesn't deserve to be there.

Assessment: Use Assessment5ABC (Improvised Scene) again.

Discussion:

- What percentage of the original length did you eliminate?
- What is gained, what is lost, in the new cut?

- How consistent is the pace of dramatic development now?
- What did you feel about the acting?
- What would you do differently?

Improvisation's strength is the spontaneity and realism of the acting and the conviction of the characters. Discuss which of the following weaknesses turned up in your work and how they might be eliminated:

- The difficulty of achieving a satisfying development. Improv often suffers from irregularly paced dramatic growth, with long plateaus during which both actors and audience feel the pressure for something to happen.
- The temptation for actors, when desperate, to resort to manipulating moments to get the piece moving again.
- The difficulty of reliably hiding exposition inside ongoing events.

You do not want your audience to feel the presence of an editorializing hand during verbal exchanges, feeding such giveaway lines as, "Isn't it rough being out of work for three months, Ted?" and, "The last time we met—you remember—it was at the supermarket. You got mad because I couldn't give you back the money you lent me in September."

Even if no clumsy authorial hand comes occasionally crashing through the backdrop, you will probably be dissatisfied with the dialogue. At times, it is skimpy and overcompressed; at other times, prolix and flaccid. Though editing can usually remove padding, it may also reveal inadequate joints and structural problems. However, if things go reasonably well, you end up with interestingly developed characters and a story line. Whatever you have by now is the basis for the next stage.

5C: From Improv to Script

Transcribe the previous exercise and rewrite it, keeping the flavor of the dialogue, but compressing verbiage into pithy lines. Distribute and camouflage any expository information, and wherever possible, transform dialogue into actions that do not require accompanying words—that way, characters can show their feelings instead of narrating them to each other. Now, using the same cast and location, rehearse and shoot the scene as in Project 6.

Assessment: Use Assessment 5ABC (Improvised Scene) again.

Discussion: Compare the two versions of the same scene.

- What was lost, what was gained, by turning an improvised performance into a scripted and more formally controlled scene?
- How did your cast handle their lines and action this time?
- What have you learned about authorship and directing from this project?

PROJECT 6: PARALLEL STORYTELLING

Skills to develop:

- Advancing two story lines concurrently so each acts as a cutaway for the other and both are kept to brief essentials.
- Counterpointing two moods or activities to imply a storytelling commentary.
- Making separate, concurrent events develop toward convergence.

6A: Seeing the Scenes as Separate Entities

Either write or improvise two whole scenes with content that will intercut meaningfully and provoke the audience to see a connection. Suggested pairs of subjects:

- Man getting ready for a date/woman in very different mood getting ready for the same date.
- Burglars getting ready to rob a house/detectives making preparations to trap them.
- Man rehearsing how he will ask for a raise/two managers discussing how they will fire him.

Write each as a complete, three-minute, stand-alone scene. Cast, shoot, and edit each scene separately, and assemble them so that one whole scene follows the other. Do a reasonably tight edit on each sequence, and then consider them as in the discussion below.

Assessment: Use Assessment 6ABCD (Parallel Storytelling), but omit the last section, Parallel Stories.

Discussion:

- What difference is there in implication when you run the sequences as AB or BA? (The detectives, for example, may have arrived too late, and the firing may follow the request for a raise, instead of precede it.)
- How long is each sequence?
- What do you gain in dramatic buildup by staying with each unbroken sequence?

6B: Long Intercut Version

Going further: Intercut the two sequences, losing nothing of the original material.

Assessment: Use Assessment 6ABCD (Parallel Storytelling), this time including the last section, Parallel Stories.

Discussion:

- What ironies were you able to create? (Say, the woman preparing for the date has a new dress, whereas the man forgets to clean his shoes.)
- What meaningful comparisons do you create? (Both the man asking for a raise and his managers think he is underpaid.)
- What causes and effects does the audience link together? (Both detectives and burglars have radios.)
- Do both sequences appear to be happening at the same time, or is one retrospective in comparison with the other? (For instance, a son from abroad searching for his parents finds that his father is already dead. His father's death is intercut with his mother's account of it, which is softened to spare the son's feelings.)
- Does one sequence foretell the outcome of the other? (Nicolas Roeg's *Don't Look Now*, 1973, the lovemaking scene is poignantly intercut with the couple getting dressed afterward.)

6C: Short Version

Going further: Now reassess the cut. Because it is no longer necessary to maintain the illusion of continuous time, you can pare away anything the audience can infer and that is thus nonessential. You will probably see new and improved points at which to cut between the parallel stories.

Assessment: Use Assessment 6ABCD (Parallel Storytelling) with the last section, Parallel Stories.

Discussion:
- How much shorter is the new version?
- How many of the ideas for your new cut arose from the shooting, blocking, and playing of the scene?
- How many of your intercutting ideas were germinated while writing, and how many came afterward?
- What dramatic capital was gained, and what lost, through intercutting?
- How might a writer plan raw materials for such sequences?

6D: Discontinuity and Using Jump Cuts

Going further: Experimentally reassemble each sequence in chronological order, retaining only the pieces you chose for the intercut version as a discontinuity version using jump cuts. A *jump cut* is any discontinuous edit that signals that a significant piece of time has been discarded between the scenes and that we have jumped forward in time. By doing this, you are moving from continuity narrative to an episodic narrative using discontinuous time.

Assessment: Use Assessment 6ABCD (Parallel Storytelling), but not Parallel Stories section.

Discussion: What are the effects of eliminating the slack material between the high points? Surely this accelerates the story, and by discarding objective time, it probably accentuates an authorial attitude toward what moments matter. Flat-footed realism and linear, continuous time have given way to something more impressionistic and subjective.

If you hate this version of your sequences, it may be because the jump cuts make ugly visual leaps. How true would this be had you designed each jump cut's composition with this in mind? Here are some options to consider:

Similarity of frame: You might, for instance, have cut from a bed with two people reading, to the same bed with them asleep, to a morning shot with one still there and the other dressing in the background. Older convention would dictate a long, slow dissolve between the three setups (which should be taken with the camera locked down in the exact same position so each composition is exactly the same), but the same narrative content can be conveyed in a fraction of the time by jump cutting. This makes the jump cut a formal storytelling device of great agility.

Difference of frame: With a bold difference of composition, you can simply jump-cut elsewhere in space and possibly in time as well. During a wide shot of people preparing to fire a piece of pottery, you can cut to a close shot of the oven. Somebody opens it, and the pot is already fired. We understand that time has been eliminated, even though dialogue continues with an unbroken sentence across the cut into the new time plane. The TV commercial has familiarized audiences with cinematic shorthand like this.

Freed from the literalness and "objectivity" of present-tense realism, discontinuity allows a wealth of possibilities for a fleeter and more staccato storytelling style. These developments are very significant if you want to co-opt the audience's imagination by using a cinematic language of greater flexibility. In *Breathless* (1959), Jean-Luc Godard

was the first director to use this style intensively.