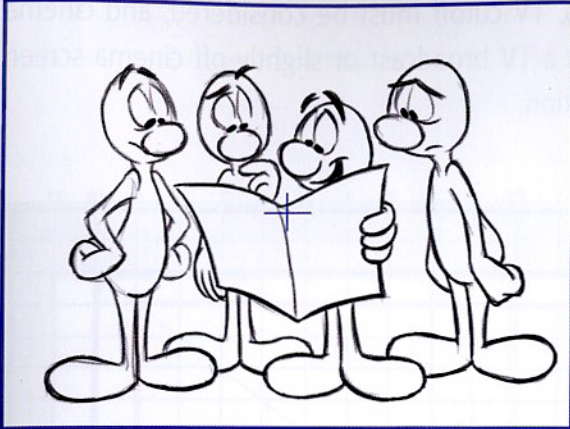
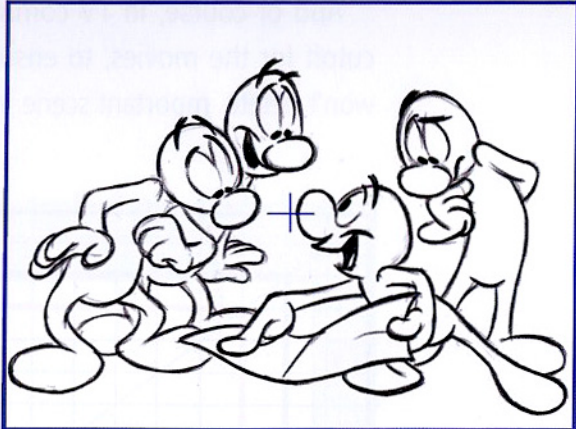


■ **Composition**

- Consider the design of the overall frame – what makes a pleasing combination of large and small shapes, light and dark, angles and straights against curves, etc.? Not everything that is important must be center-screen; often a major character can look better in a composition to one side or another, if the BG elements are designed to lead your eye to him.
- Allow certain areas of the layout to be less cluttered so your characters are in a visually “quiet” area of the frame for maximum readability. Don’t compose a BG layout without considering character placement and movement; you can make a very pleasing and artful BG layout that works well by itself but looks lousy on film when characters are placed on it. Also, the length of screen time has direct bearing on the amount of detail you can include – the longer the scene, the more chance the audience has to see interesting details; the shorter the scene, the simpler the composition should be.
- Consider the characters themselves as compositional design elements: their shapes, sizes, and placement may be the major design points of a scene (especially a group scene).

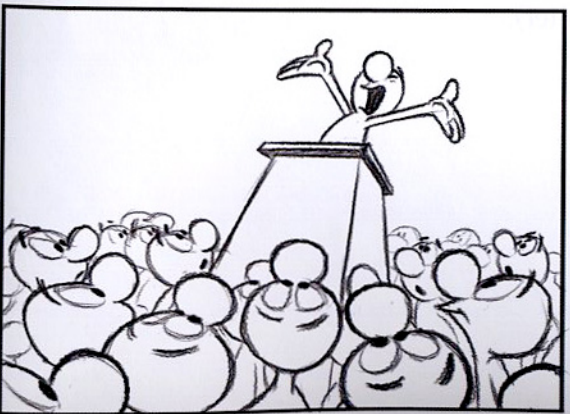
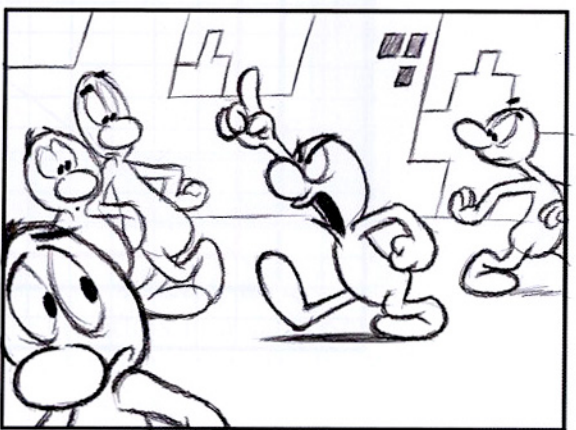
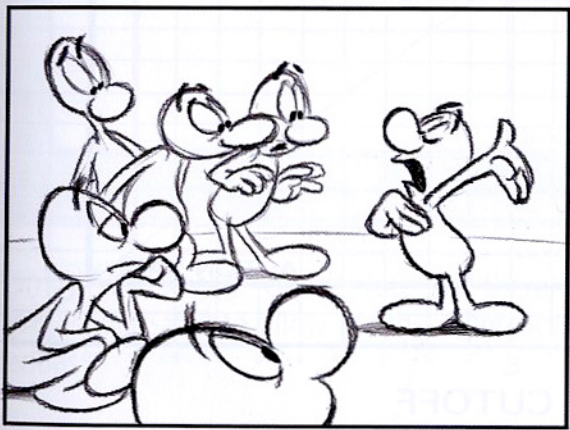


Instead of a dull composition like this...



... try a dynamically staged one like this!

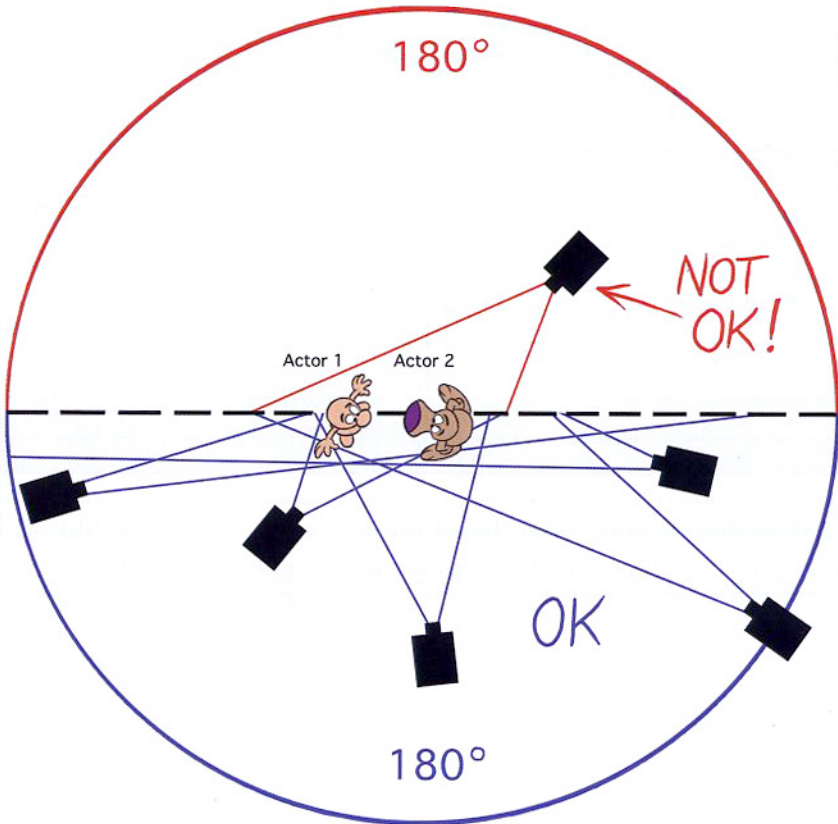
Further examples:



■ Geography

Establish an overall plan of the environment in which your characters will be moving (perhaps a top view and a front view) and imagine the camera stationed around it to give the various shots needed in the sequence. Most filmmakers prefer not to break the 180° arc:

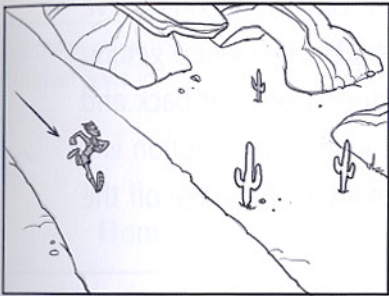
Where you place the camera depends on how elaborate your staging should be for readability and visual interest:



- “Proscenium arch” – Imagine the set like a theater stage, where all the action takes place behind the proscenium arch and imagine the camera panning, cutting from close-up to long shot, etc., directly in front of the action. This is the simplest form of camera placement.

- More elaborate framing requires more consideration of various elements. Establish screen direction: If your characters are moving and facing from left to right, don't throw in a scene where the character relationships are thrown into complete reverse; it will look as if the characters are swapping places in the room rather than the camera changing its point of view. Even if your camera placement differs radically from scene to scene, screen direction can be the cohesive element.

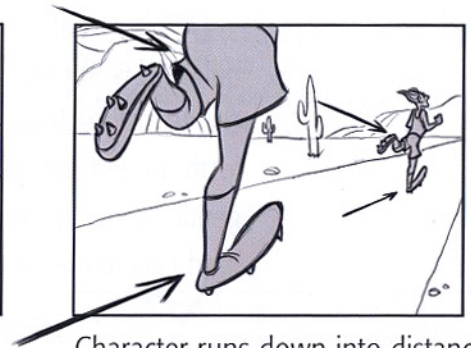
Example:



Top view of character running in desert

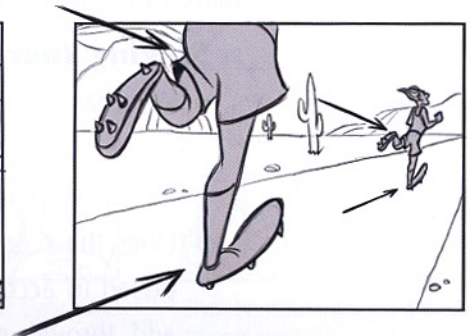
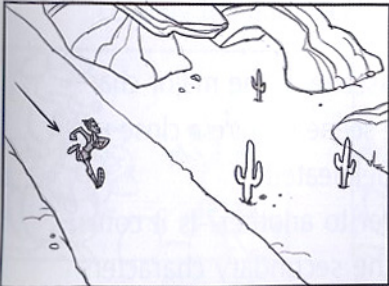


M.C.U. of character center screen while BG pans past



Character runs down into distance, having entered from screen left.

By keeping the screen direction generally left to right, these scenes cut together fluidly even though the camera placement shifts radically. But imagine audience confusion if the second scene were flopped:



Establish logic of camera placement: If, for example, you're dealing with small characters, you may want the camera close to the ground with them at all times. If your sequence deals with speed (a typical Road Runner chase, for example), you may want a succession of scenes with characters center-screen and BGs rushing past (rather than interrupting the flow with, say, one scene in the middle of the action with a stationary camera and the characters whizzing past the lens). If you want a "fragmented," offbeat look, you may want to use discontinuous scenes with a variety of angles. Or, as with the runner, you may want to make a series of interestingly composed shots with the movement of the character as the logical thread that holds the sequence together.

Do you want a moving or a stationary shot? Basically, the camera needn't move unless it is integral to telling the story. Don't stick in a 5-field truck-in when getting closer to the character doesn't illuminate the scene any further. Don't cut back and forth, in and out, just for the sake of moving the camera around. The exception is a gentle "moving camera," quiet 1- or 2-field trucks or pans that take the edge off the hard cuts and lend production value.

Staging

Staging in animation is about communicating effectively to your audience, utilizing elements of layout, background, composition, and organization of characters.

A large part of staging is layout and film grammar: knowing when to use a close-up, when to pan, when to truck in or out, when to cut from one scene to another. Much of this can be learned from watching live-action editing and seeing how the camera is placed (and why!). Knowing how screen geography works is also a necessary tool.

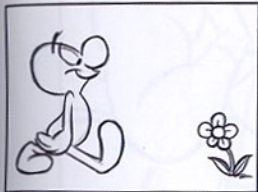
■ Staging Your Characters

- Who has the main action in the scene? If it is a group scene, is the major character in a clear enough area to do his acting? Does the scene require a close-up for him to punch his point home? Are the poses well-delineated?
- Does the scene shift in importance from one character to another? Is it composed to account for this shift in importance? Can the secondary characters add, through movement, importance to this shift through head turns, changes of posture, reactions to what is being said, etc.?
- Has *continuity* of characters from scene to scene (which ones are included, their postures and movements) been accounted for? Is there continuity from scene

to scene of the character's relationship to the BG? (If a character is standing in front of a door in the medium shot, is a piece of the door and its relationship to the character shown in the close-up?)

- Leading the audience's eye in a two-character sequence:

Around a frame:



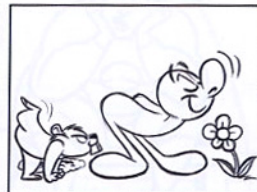
1st major movement – Norman walks in.



2nd major movement – Norman leans down to sniff.



3rd major movement – Gopher pops up during restricted sniffing movement.



4th major movement – Gopher rears back during continued sniffing.



5th major movement – Gopher kicks butt. Both move broadly.

From scene to scene:



As above



As above



Cut to C.U. as Gopher pops up, retaining piece of Norman as continuity.



Gopher rears back and kicks. Norman shifts in reaction.



Cut back out as Gopher comes out of kick and Norman is in mid-air.

Leading the audience's eye in a group shot:



Little mouse says, "Listen, fellers! The cat is our friend!" Other mice nod appreciatively.



Cynic mouse turns around in the opposite direction and snaps, "Ah, horse chestnuts!" Other mice turn to him in reaction.



Cut to medium C.U.: Cynic waits until he's sure all eyes are upon him.



Then he wheels around and says, "Cats is rats!!"

- Stage your characters as interesting compositional elements within the scene. Contrast tall and short, near and far, lit and shaded, etc.

Example: Hero is sad, Sidekick is sympathetic. Hero has the dialogue.



OK, but kind of boring profile.

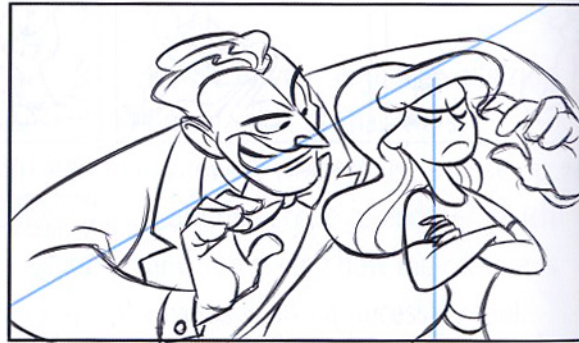


Better, because it emphasizes Hero, and helps you feel more about what *he* is feeling. Also, by making Sidekick even smaller, he looks even more helpless.

Example: Slimeball is trying to force his charms upon unwilling Gal.



Dull

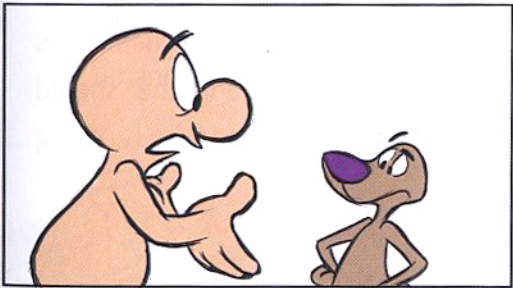
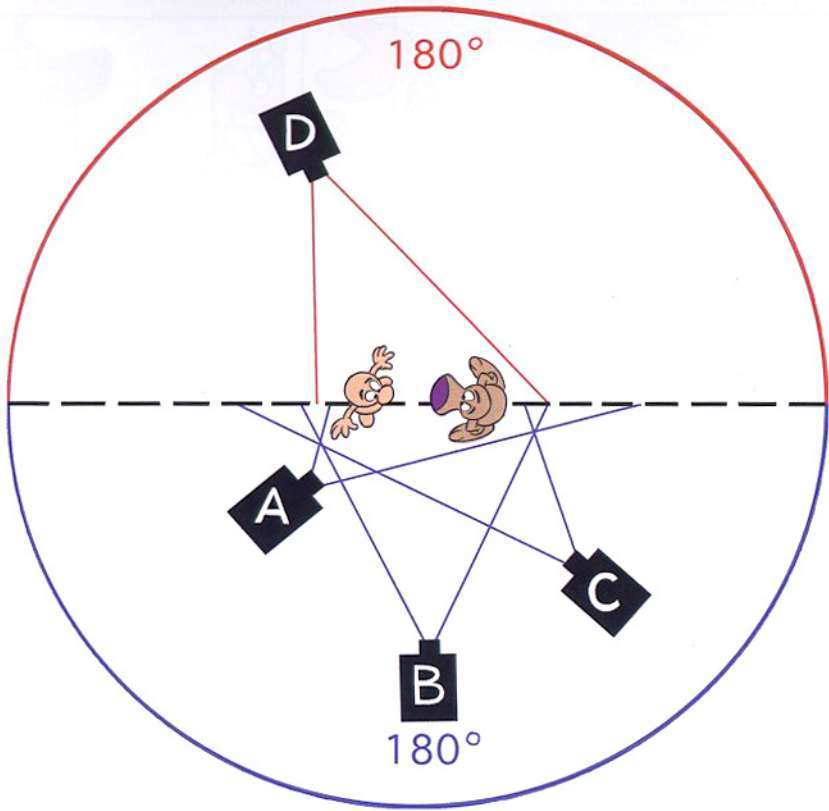


Better, because Slimeball's diagonal thrust contrasts Gal's straight vertical. Also better because Gal no longer is facing Slimeball – her physical refusal to listen makes him have to work harder and get closer!

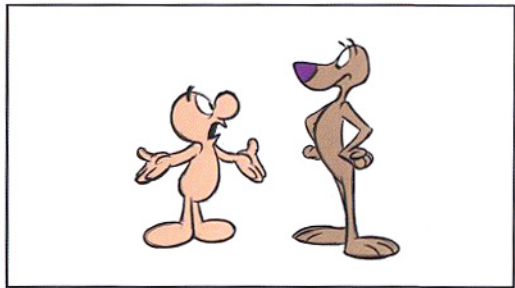
■ Staging Your Characters in a Dialogue Scene

- Allow enough time for what one character is saying or doing to sink in to the other character's brain. Don't have the "listening" character react too soon or he'll step on the active character's performance.

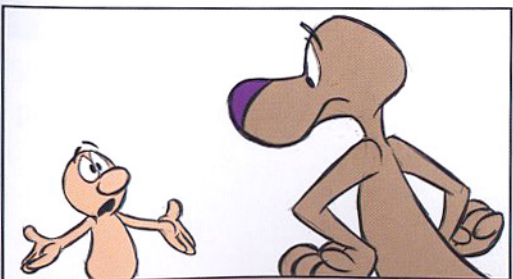
- Don't break the 180° line when planning compositions or cuts.



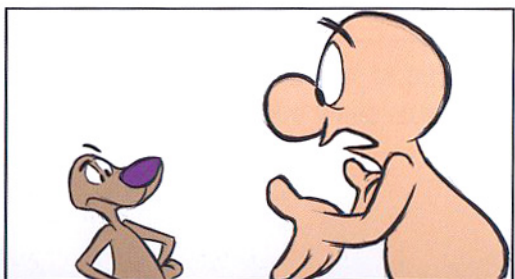
CAMERA (A) OK



CAMERA (B) OK

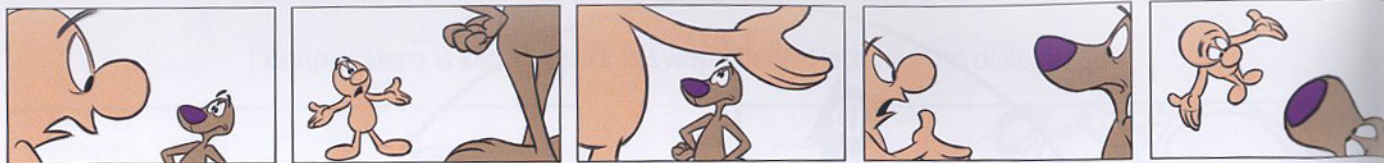


CAMERA (C) OK



CAMERA (D) N/G!!

Other more extreme but OK cuts might be:



The occasional off-screen reaction (someone listening to the main speaker) is nice, too, but remember to keep them facing in the right direction to the established relationship:



Right!



Wrong!



Best!

Plan your characters' actions so they overlap the cuts a little.



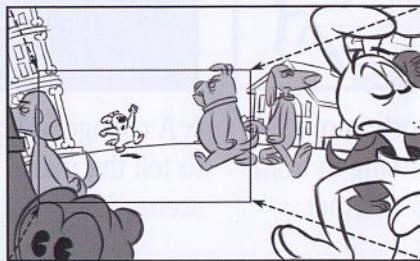
Shot 1: Hero's head turns toward Sidekick as he finishes his line.



Shot 2: Sidekick says his line, while Hero's head resolves into a hold to watch.

■ Staging Multiple Character Scenes

- What do you want your audience to see? If you're trying to highlight a particular character amongst a crowd, a few things might help: brighter colors on that character, a drifting camera move toward the character, other characters animated to reveal your lead character.
- Does the focus shift in the scene? Perhaps you want to start with one character walking through a scene amongst a crowd of people and you then want to pick up another character trying to follow him. Example:



Shot 1: Starts as dog walks toward screen right. Camera drifts in to pick up little puppy coming toward us.

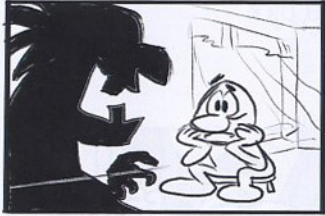
Shot 2: Cut to puppy center screen while crowd and BG pass by.

- Can camera moves help you to lead the audience? Perhaps a gentle drift, if not an out-and-out truck-in, toward where you want the audience to look would be enough. Maybe your scene starts as an establishing shot with many characters as the camera moves toward the hero. Perhaps a character turns quickly and you whip-pan to what he sees.
- Are there actions that can be read as general activity in a multiple character shot? If the impression you want to convey is one of general hubbub, you can plan the scene for fairly contained movement without accents that are too strong, for two reasons:
 - No two viewers will necessarily settle on the same crowd character. Have a few minor accents to chew on but nothing too outrageous.
 - If you have your hero in the shot, you can then afford to give him more distinctive movement to draw the audience's attention.

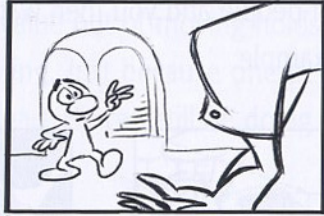
■ Economy of Staging

- Find ways of making a two- or three-character situation into essentially one-character shots. Establish the situation, then use close-ups to focus in.
- Are there times an effect can tell the story?

Examples:



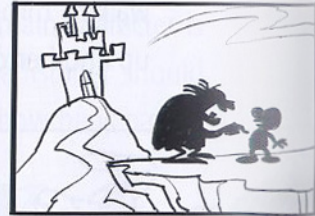
a. A cast shadow of a character against a wall and the other character watching.



b. A large portion of a character passing in front of a character farther back.



c. A change in lighting to tell the mood of the scene.



d. Characters in silhouette.

- Does the camera need to move? Can you tell the story effectively with simple cutting and composition? In other words, use the camera movement for specific storytelling reasons, not just for the sake of moving it.

Optional exercise: A little boy is wandering in a crowded city. He gets lost in the shuffle until he shouts, "Stop!" and the crowd freezes. He then asks the anxiously awaiting multitudes: "Where's the bathroom?" Stage the sequence in rough storyboard form.