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Five shot sequence: Tutorial and example

Posted on

4–5 minutes

Five shot sequence is a popular filming technique that uses five different shots to depict an activity. In my open online course [Audio Slideshow Storytelling](#), students need to study a tutorial and create a sequence. I want to share the five-shot tutorial we use and an exemplary student work.

The five-shot tutorial in our online course

I put together a short tutorial on five-shot sequence by drawing on two online sources: an article titled [How journalists can improve video stories with shot sequences](#), and [a tip sheet by Lam Thuy Vo](#). Below is the tutorial:

Five-shot sequence shooting is a popular filming technique in video and slideshow productions. This sequence, popularized by video journalist [Michael Rosenblum](#), relies on wide, medium and close-up shots, while introducing the idea of perspective.

In a five-shot sequence, the first shot is a close-up of a subject's hands — a pianist, for example, tickling the ivories. The next shot is a close-up of the subject's face. For the third shot, move back from the action and capture a medium shot of the subject. Next, move to an “over-the-shoulder” shot. Standing just behind the subject, shoot downward toward the action — hands on the keyboard, for example — showing what's happening from a point-of-view.

For the final shot, think of the most creative composition possible. You might use an unusual angle, shooting from the ground or high above the subject's head, or you might move far away and capture an extreme wide-angle shot. You could capture the pianist from the other end of the room or stage, for example.

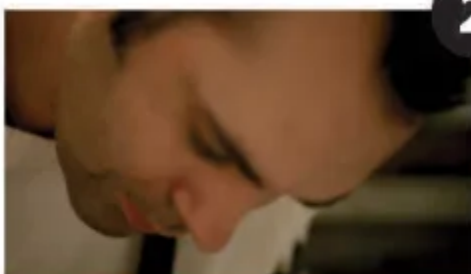
Once these patterns are mastered, you can mix and match them in lots of creative ways to create more complex sequences. Multiple sequences make scenes. And

long-form video stories — even feature-length films — are ultimately made from lots of short shot sequences arranged back-to-back to build complex, multi-part scenes.



1 Closeup of the hands

What is being done? Some mystery is fine by going in very close up: engages the viewer



2 Closeup of the face

Who's doing it? Frame it well, give "talk space" in front of eyes/nose. OK to cut off top of head, but not chin. SHOW TWO EYES!



3 Wide shot

Where is it being done? Get context, environment, mood and location information of the subject and surroundings



4 Over the shoulder

How is it done? Combine previous three ideas into one shot. Get right over shoulder for point-of-view (POV).



5 Unusual/alternative

What else should viewer know? Be imaginative: stand on a chair, crawl on your belly, vary what's in the foreground or background. This will be particular to your location or story.



6

Interview

Additional shot: interview the subject to get good usable audio for voiceover and to intercut with b-roll. (See interview hints in sidebar)

Sample work from my open online course

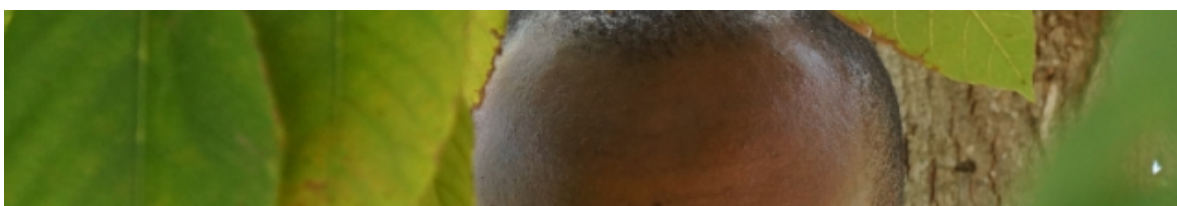
This five-shot sequence is made by course participant Pirita Juppi, a journalism lecturer from Finland. The sequence portrays Tanzanian safari tour guide Zacharia Mligo showing his favorite animal in a guide book.

Below are the five photos Pirita took; read the descriptions she wrote for each shot, and see how she opens with a mysterious shot and continues to build up the sequence.

1. Close-up of the hands (the mystery has to do only with what is on the page...)



2. Close-up of the face to introduce the person





3. Medium shot to show the context: what is going on and where. I did not use a wide shot, since I did not show the environment too much (because this is not the actual scene of the story...)



4. Over the shoulder shot (to show what is being looked at)





5. The unusual shot (from the “bird perspective”, the photo is taken from a tree)



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About Mu Lin

Dr. Mu Lin is a digital journalism professional and educator in New Jersey, United States. Dr. Lin manages an online marketing company. He also manages MulinBlog Online J-School (www.mulinblog.com/mooc), a free online journalism training program, which offers courses such as Audio Slideshow Storytelling; Introduction to Social Media Marketing; Writing for the Web; Google Mapping for Communicators; Introduction to Data Visualization; Introduction to Web Metrics and Google Analytics.

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