

Get Closer, Stand Back: Crafting Connection with Shot Types

These are the show notes for the Shootorials Podcast, Episode 02. To listen to the podcast go to <https://shootorials.com>.

Generally speaking, we refer to the framing that we get as we move closer or away from our subject as a “shot type.” For example, the type of shot we typically get when we are far away from our subject is a “wide shot” and the type of shot we get when we’re close is a “closeup.”



Shot types are a way of classifying types of framing. Shot types are related to the proximity to the subject, that is, how close or how far we appear to be from the person in the frame.

There are two ways we can change the perceived distance to the subject. We can:

1. Zoom in or out with our lens (i.e. use different focal lengths)
2. Physically move closer or further

Each of these have different effects on the final image. Zooming out to a wide shot or standing further away from the subject both make the subject look more distant, but because of the optics of lenses, these two methods will affect the relationship between the background and the subject in different ways. And the resulting images will look quite different from one another. We’ll look at this idea more closely in another podcast.

Also note that just as the terms portrait and landscape can refer to image orientation, subject matter, and shooting modes, the terms used for shot types can also loosely refer to lens focal lengths, ex. wide shot vs. a wide lens. But the two are not the same thing. You can take a wide shot with either a wide lens or a telephoto lens depending on the overall look you want to get.

Distance Effects Our Perceived Intimacy with the Subject

Before talking about shot types, I want to emphasize the idea that the camera is the eyes of the viewer. The viewpoint of the camera will tend to make the viewer respond emotionally as though they would by having that same perspective in real life.

For example, if a shot is long or wide with the subject in the distance, the viewer will feel more like an objective observer. They are removed physically and emotionally from the character.

On the other hand, if you are very close to someone, their face takes up your field of view, which would be the equivalent of what we'll call a closeup. You don't get this close to someone unless you are intimate with them. So a closeup will give the viewer a feeling of knowing the subject and sharing an intimate moment.



Compare these two images. In the first image, a wide shot, you're observing the subject from a distance. Do you feel connected to this person when you look at this image? Compare that to the close-up on the right. This is your field of view if you are standing very close to someone in real life. Do you feel a greater sense of intimacy from this perspective as you look at the image?



How close or distant your subject is framed in the camera will affect how close or distant your viewer will feel emotionally toward the subject.

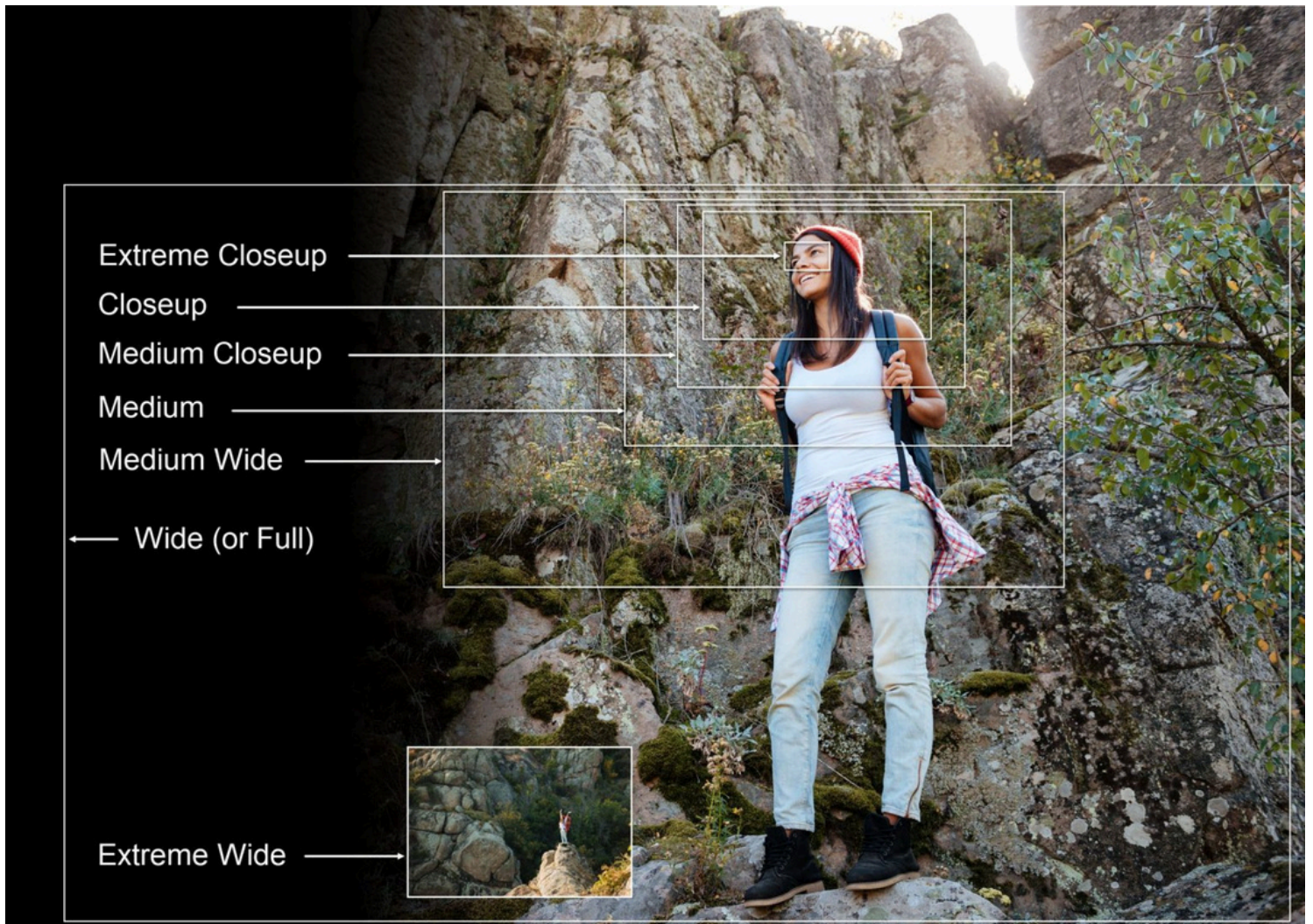
A Quick Overview

We'll explore shot types in detail in other Shootorial podcasts, but let's take a 30,000 foot view first to orient ourselves. We can say for practical purposes that there are essentially three types of shots:

- **Wide shot:** Going wide gives the viewer a sense for the environment, not the subject. In photography a wide shot provides context for the viewer. In film, it can be used as a master shot, an establishing shot or simply to show the majesty of an environment.
- **Closeup shot:** In this type of shot the subject's face takes up the largest part of the frame, so it is ideal for communicating emotion and intimacy.
- **Medium shot:** If a closeup and wide shot had a baby, it would be the medium shot. It typically includes the subject's upper body. It's close enough that we can observe both their body language and the emotion in their face. At the same time we can see the environment or context in which the subject lives. Because the shot provides such a wide range of information, it is well suited for narrative photography and is the most commonly used shot in movies.

All other shots (ex. extreme wide, medium full, medium closeup) are all variations that fall along the range, from extreme wide to extreme closeup.

A visual summary of the various types of shots we'll be discussing can be seen below...



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