

Improving Engagement With Better Shot Selection

Consider what our eyes and brains do naturally when we're seeing. They work together to take in a broad look, then pick something of interest, then examine that something more closely. If you mimic this human trait with your shots, your viewers will be effectively "pulled in" to the experience.

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Whether shooting with one camera or six, video production staff tend to carve their own ruts with regards to camera shot selection and video direction. This tech tip will focus on the how (and why) of changing up your shots to add variety and interest to your videos.

First, a short disclaimer. If you shoot your church's services for recording or real-time distribution outside the sanctuary, the shots you choose can go a long way toward making your viewers feel like they are a part of the celebration. If your church projects video for image magnification (IMAG) only, your options are more limited--but you'll still find something here of value. Just remember that wider shots are redundant for IMAG, as they closely mimic what the unaided eye is already seeing.

Learn Your Shots

Though the terminology varies, video producers define and label a continuum of shots based on how the subject (usually a person) fills the frame. Unless the camera itself is mobile, these shots are established by "zooming" to change focal length. It's important that everyone on your video team uses the same terminology, so here are a few labels for common shots you'll find useful in your church video productions:

Whether you have one camera or eight, it can be tempting to fall into the trap of over-using the same shot in your video productions.

•**Wide Shot (or Long Shot)** – A very wide shot that takes in the whole stage or venue.

•**Full Shot** – This shot captures a person or subject from head to toe (you see their full body). This shot establishes the point of interest. It will often include more than one person.

•**Mid Shot (or Medium Shot)** – This shot pushes in to show part of the person, usually upper body and head from about the waist up.

•**Medium Close-Up** – The face fills the frame more, with shoulders and chest visible below.

•**Close-Up** – The face fills the frame, sometimes with the bottom of the chin and top of the forehead cropped out.

•**Extreme Close-Up** – Emphasizes just one portion of the face, usually the eyes or mouth.

Once you know the names of the shots, you should consider how these shots affect the viewer. As you move from wide shot to close-up, details become more apparent and the subject becomes more compelling. Engagement with the subject is hard to create with a wide shot, and hard to avoid with a close-up.

Change Up Your Shots

Whether you have one camera or eight, it can be tempting to fall into the trap of over-using the same shot in your video productions. Here we'll run back through the shot types and discuss how they should be used, and what happens when they're over-used.

Wide Shot (or Long Shot)

Use it: Give the viewer crucial perspective and establishes their place in the locale. When placed at the front of a shot sequence, this is aptly called an “establishing shot”.

Over-use it: Keep your viewers at a distance and disengaged (yawn). Deprive them of details and connection with those on the stage.

Full Shot

Use it: Center up your subject in a full shot to tell the viewer what matters at that moment. Show ample background to maintain a strong sense of space and location. Transition through this shot to something closer.

Over-use it: Pique your viewers' interest, but still keep them largely unengaged.

Mid Shot (or Medium Shot)

Use it: Perfect for engaging the viewer without being uncomfortably close. Requires less tracking of a moving subject than the closer shots. A workhorse shot.

Over-use it: Turn everyone on stage into moving torsos. Don't establish a strong sense of place or context.

Medium Close-Up

Use it: Engage your viewers with an up-close view of the subject. Show them expression, emotion, detail. Another workhorse shot.

Over-use it: Strip away even more sense of place and context. Make other people on the stage invisible or out-of-focus background elements.

Close-Up

Use it: Give viewers a detailed, intimate view of the subject (person, instrument, prop). Make emotion and expression larger-than-life. Make the viewer engage whether they want to or not.

Over-use it: Create your own visual cliché. Render everything else going on irrelevant. Make viewers queasy if the subject is moving or your tripod/shooting skills are lacking.

Extreme Close-Up

Use it: Show your viewers striking detail and texture. Use only rarely, and not on people unless for dramatic effect. Instead, use the extreme close-up for fingers, frets, keys, props, etc.

Over-use it: Give viewers claustrophobia and nausea, reveal every flaw, create a “too close to care anymore” detachment.

How to Mix it Up

During the music portion of a service, your shooting task is to feature the singers and instrumentalists on the stage in the best-possible light, and to create an engaging worship experience. Mixing up your shots can help you reach that goal, especially if you think in terms of shot sequences.

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Remember that every transition between camera shots should result in a significant change to what's on the screen.

For example: during an instrumental break, start a shot sequence with a wide shot that covers the whole stage and the first few rows of the congregation. Cut to a full shot of a few members of the rhythm section. Cut to a medium shot of the guitarist taking the solo. Cut to a close-up of his guitar. Cut to an extreme close-up of his fingers. As the solo finishes, cut back to a full shot featuring the worship leader and those folks on either side. Cut to a

medium shot of the worship leader. And so on. This shot sequence is used frequently in movies for good reason: it's very effective. Try this approach, then change things up and create your own style.

During the message, add variety to your shots by alternating wider shots and closer ones. Cut from a full shot to a close up to a wide shot to a medium shot, for example. If you have just one camera, use any presentation slides that appear on-screen to cover a focal length change. Each time you come back from a slide, have a different shot framed and focused. Spend more time on closer shots to keep engagement.

If you have two cameras, it often works best to lock one down on a master or “fallback” shot that doesn't move. Frame it to capture everyone currently on the stage in a full (head to toe) shot. Cut back to this shot when you want to change your shots with the second camera.

Don't Be Subtle

Remember that every transition between camera shots should result in a significant change to what's on the screen. If the shots don't differ in focal length, the subject should change. If you don't change your subject, the focal length or angle should differ significantly. In the editing world, changing between shots that differ only slightly is called a “jump cut”. If the shots are too similar, the subject seems to jump from one spot of the frame to another. Though YouTube has made this an acceptable practice for some, it still looks like a mistake in a live shoot.

As with all things worth doing, varying your shots takes practice to do well. Whether your video is distributed or recorded, however, the skill will help many more people tap into and engage with your worship services. That makes it well worth the effort.