Directing Shots

As a storyboard artist, you will often be called on to act as the director when working on a script. This is not to say that you will actually direct the crew, but you will develop shot ideas and arrange the style, look, and staging of the action. Even when the director is calling the shots when going though a script, you may be expected to offer suggestions and solutions to the action in the script. This is particularly true in animation. Television animation board artists are usually the visual directors, determining all the shots. The title of *director* almost always refers to the voice director.

Some directors have training in or a love for graphic arts and may sketch out their own storyboards. In these cases, either you won't have a job or you will be refining their boards. Steven Spielberg has been known to supply rough boards to his artists for some scenes.

Ridley Scott, Martin Scorsese, and Tim Burton also sketch their own boards. Joe Johnston, the director of *Jurassic Park III, Hidalgo*, *Jumanji,* and *The Rocketeer*, started as a storyboard artist. He was also one of the conceptual illustrators on the first *Star Wars*. Even Alfred Hitchcock started in the film industry as a storyboard artist.

On *seaQuest DSV*, two of our directors sketched out boards. One director, Bruce Seth Green, drew out rough boards when he was doing his shot breakdowns and did not need finer boards. This gave me more time to draw conceptual designs for the production designer. The other director, Jesus Trevino, would sketch out thumbnails of some scenes and ask me to redraw them and flesh out the action.

When you are doing your own breakdowns for a script, you need to keep in mind any nuances that a director likes to use, and what type of emotion any one scene is supposed to convey. Some directors like to move the camera and stay mostly with master shots for scenes, for example, Woody Allen. Others prefer a more hectic pace to their editing, for instance, John Woo. Action scenes tend to demand faster edits on key action. Love scenes tend to be paced more slowly, with darker, warmer colors and contrast.

You may also look for shots that are motivated. If the moon is important, show a character looking up and then have a shot of the moon (see Figure 21.3). You can also use a shot to portray the passing of time, such as showing the setting of the sun or slow-moving clouds.

It is crucial that storyboard artists understand the techniques of directing and editing. This knowledge is invaluable in allowing the artist to contribute to the flow

Figure 21.1 *The Creepers* storyboards by Mark Simon of Animatics & Storyboards. I directed the shots based on notes by the creators of the show. (© 2006 Lyons Entertainment, Inc.)

of a project. It is also important that the storyboard artist understand industry lingo and how shots work when a director is giving instructions to an artist. A storyboard artist will probably not be asked back if she doesn't understand the basics of directing. However, if the artist is capable of introducing wonderfully creative directing elements and adds to the visual development of the project, she will do quite well.

The lists that follow describe some concepts to keep in mind while visually directing sequences, which not only tell a story but also are visually stimulating and add movement.

Tell a Visual Story

- Cutaways help define characters. Shots of trophies tell the viewer of a character's success. Family photos help define who is who. A messy or clean home defines characters as well as the type of decorations they have.
- Lonely or scared figures shown from a high angle emphasize that a character feels lonely, scared, or separated from others by showing them alone (see Figure 21.4).
- Quick action cuts build energy in scenes.
- Romantic scenes are best edited with long cuts and dissolves—nothing abrupt.
- Use of shadows helps make scenes mysterious and scary (see Figure 21.5).
- Allowing the viewer to see things that the actors don't see can be scary or humorous. A character lurking unseen in the shadows is scary. A child acting crazy behind a parent who is describing his calm child is humorous.
- Allowing characters to completely exit frame at the end of a scene or enter a scene from off screen allows a perception of passing time. If you need a character to move a long distance from a house to her car, have the character out of frame for a moment and the audience will allow any amount of time to seem to pass.
- Looking up slightly at a character makes the character seem more important.
- Special camera tricks or angles can help tell a story if properly used, but they can also detract from the story if used for no reason.
- Looking up sharply at a character on a ledge or hanging somewhere adds peril to the scene (see Figure 21.6). The same goes for looking straight down past a character seeing a great drop below them. Looking straight at a character who is in
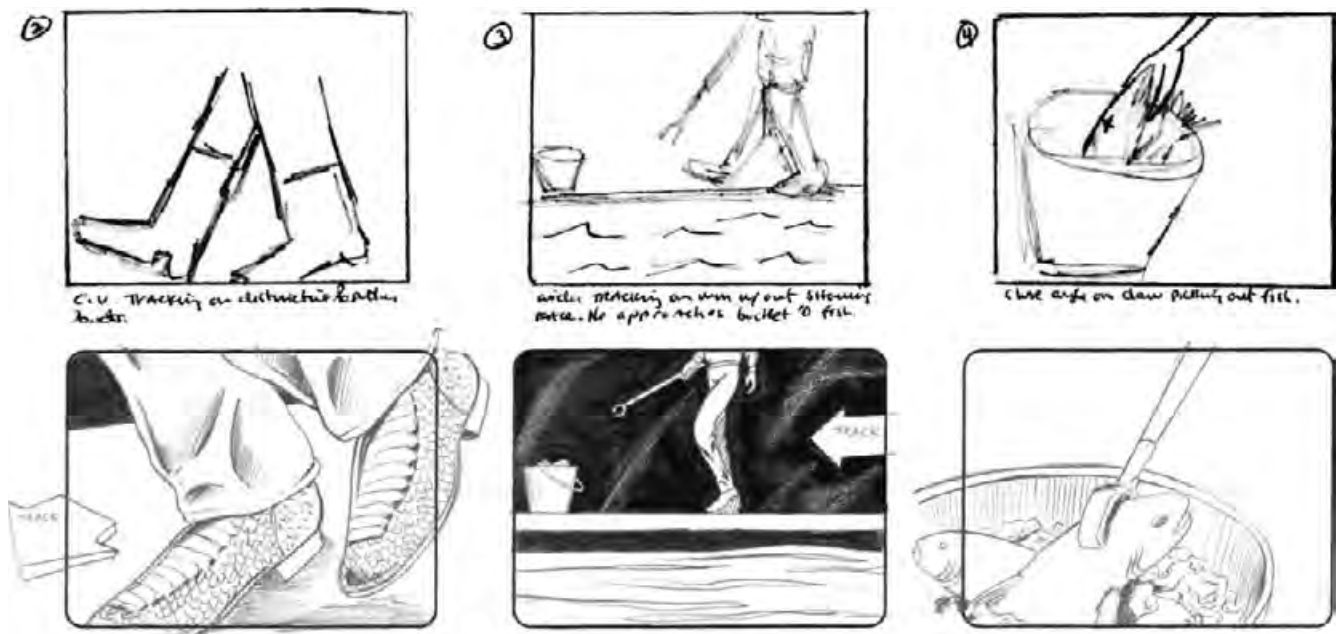
Figure 21.2 *seaQuest DSV* storyboards from the episode "Sincerest Form of Flattery." The director, Jesus Trevino, drew his own thumbnails, shown on top. I went over them with him and drew the panels shown here. (© by Universal City Studios, Inc. Courtesy of MCA Publishing Rights, a Division of MCA, Inc.)

Figure 21.3 Redrawn storyboards from the feature *The Walking Dead*. The soldier looking up motivates the point-of-view (POV) shot of the moon. Boards by Mark Simon.

peril up high does not emphasize why the character is in peril.

- Fast-moving objects need to pass stationary objects to emphasize speed. Planes against a blue sky look like they are just hanging there, but add

clouds and mountains around them and you can see how fast they are moving.

- As you work, lay out your thumbnails and boards so that you can see an entire sequence at once. This allows you to make sure your pacing is good
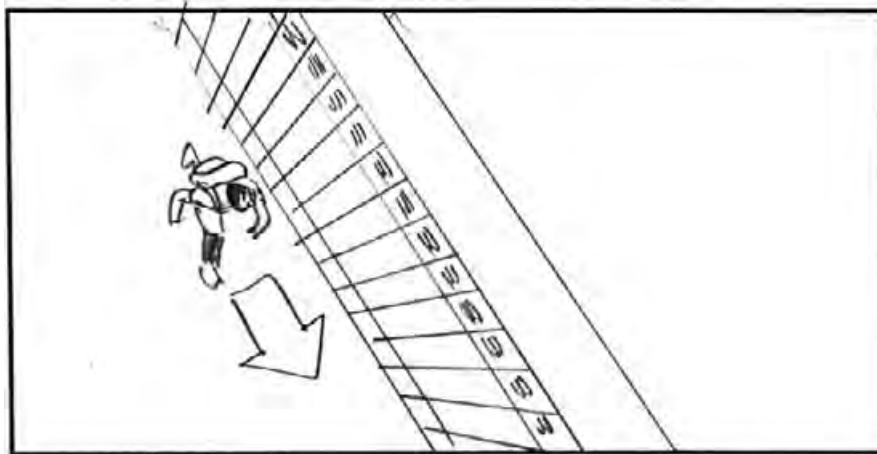
Figure 21.4 *Hoot* storyboards by Alex Saviuk of Animatics & Storyboards, Inc. (Images courtesy of Hoot Prods LLC.)

Figure 21.5 Mysterious storyboard by Alex Saviuk of Animatics & Storyboards, Inc.
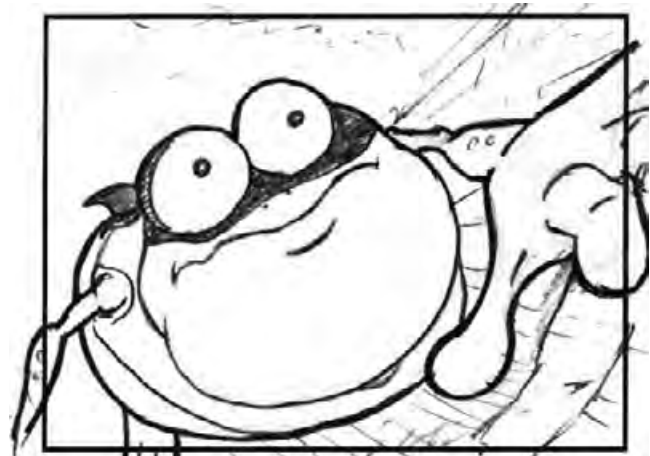

Figure 21.6 High-angle shot showing the peril a character is in. *The Creepers* storyboard by Mark Simon of Animatics & Storyboards, Inc. (© 2006 Lyons Entertainment, Inc.)

and that you don't reuse too many of the same shots. This is one of the difficulties of storyboarding on the computer, referencing an entire sequence in one glance.

Create Visual Interest by Varying Shots

- Use extreme close-ups to heighten emotion. For example, if a character is crying, bring the camera in to see the tears.
- Give the viewer a sense of place by using an *establishing shot*. This is a wide shot showing the layout of the location of the action. This also helps the viewer understand the visual relationships among the actors (see Figure 21.7). This is important when you see a close-up of an

actor talking toward screen right. The establishing shot tells the viewer who is to the actor's right.
- Use over-the-shoulder (OTS) shots during conversations and confrontations to give the viewer a sense of being part of the action.
- Introduce interesting camera angles to disorient viewers or make them feel uncomfortable, when justified by the script. The POV of a shot of a drunk character may be tilted to the side and swayed around to demonstrate his being drunk and off balance (see Figure 21.8). (Angles that are off the horizontal axis are called *canted frames* or

Dutch or *Chinese angles*.) Tilted angles can also intensify scenes of violence.

- POV shots allow the viewer to see what the character is seeing. And POVs always need to be motivated by first showing the character looking at something (see Figure 21.9).
- Vary the distance of your shots. A film becomes visually boring if you always see characters from the same distance.
- Mix wide, medium, and close shots in the same scene. Don't be afraid to really pull the viewer in close if it enhances the scene. Mixing different-width shots can make a scene dynamic.
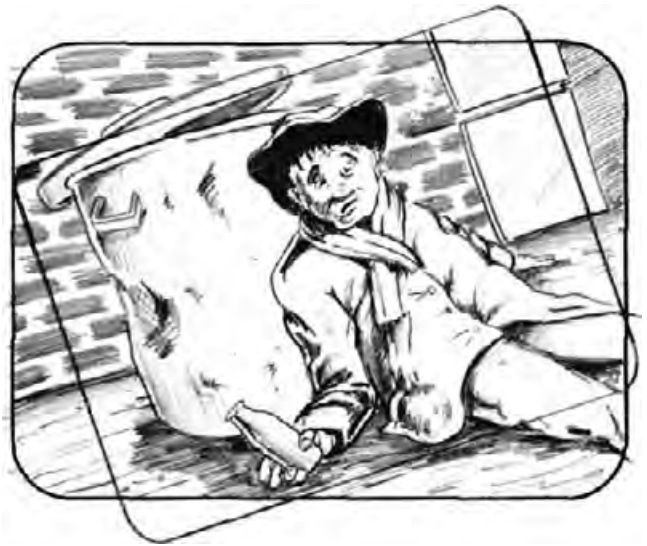

Figure 21.7 The wide shot shows the viewer the spatial relationships among the characters, allowing the viewer to know who the woman is looking at in the next frame. *Lonely Hearts* storyboard by Alex Saviuk of Animatics & Storyboards, Inc.

Figure 21.8 A canted, swaying frame can show that the character is out of sorts.

Figure 21.9 The soldier looking up in the first frame motivates his POV in the second frame.

Figure 21.10 Stay clear of tangents, such as the ones shown here. Tangents draw the eye's attention away and flattens the image.

- Don't have any part of a character *tangent*, or adjacent to, the edge of the frame. It gives the visual impression that the edge of the frame is a wall or floor (see Figure 21.10).

Introduce Movement

- Keep the camera moving to prevent the film from feeling static. The amount of camera movement will depend on the director's style. Camera movement should, however, be used mostly in action scenes or when there is a reason for it. Camera movement should not replace good framing.
- Use 3D arrows to show movement of the camera or of a character (see Figure 21.11). 2D arrows can be misleading because they can't show depth.
- Move the camera to follow or lead a character. The viewer feels a sense of being a part of the scene.
- Pan the camera to track an object as it approaches and passes the viewer, to give a sense of what a character sees, for example, when a car approaches, passes, and recedes into the distance.
- Involve the viewer by moving into the action. For example, in a fight scene, using OTS and POV shots gives the viewer a sense of being in the middle of the action.

Figure 21.11 The 3D arrow shows that the bottle enters from out of frame and slides back to the man.
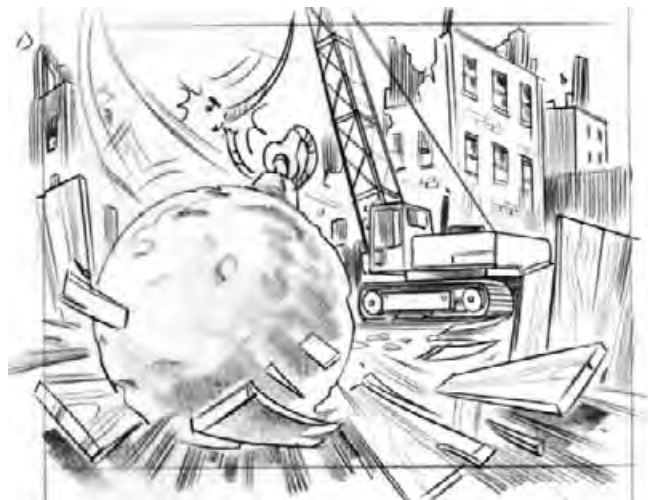

Figure 21.12 The wrecking ball flies right at the camera, putting the viewer in jeopardy. Storyboard panel by Lyle Grant.

- Follow an object or character to lead the camera into a scene. For instance, follow a waiter up to the table featuring your characters.
- Make the viewers feel as if they are in jeopardy by creating shots where objects or people move toward the lens. These are usually POV shots showing a character in peril (see Figure 21.12). More recently in films, debris from an explosion or accident will fly directly at the camera, making the audience want to duck. For instance, in the movie *King Kong*, Kong throws a car directly at the camera during his New York rampage.

Figure 21.13 The camera flying, with the arrow, at a man. Moments like this are memorable effects shots in movies.
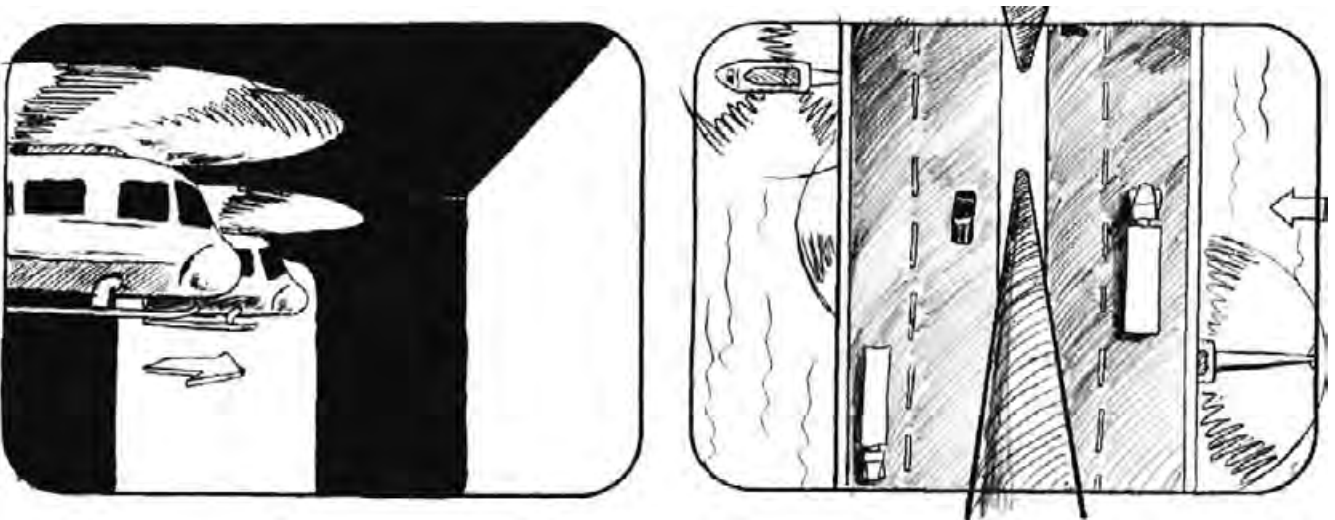

Figure 21.14 The line of action is being crossed. The choppers on the left are moving camera right, and the choppers on the right are moving camera left. In back-to-back shots, objects need to move across the screen in the same direction.

- Move the camera with an object, carrying the viewer along (Figure 21.13). Kevin Costner's *Robin Hood* has a great shot where the camera rides an arrow into the bull's-eye of a target.
- Do not cross the *visual line* or line of action, which means maintain a constant sense of direction for an object or person moving across the screen (see Figure 21.14). It is disorienting to the viewer if the direction of a character or object suddenly appears to change. For instance, if a car travels from the left of the screen to the right in a chase scene and then in the next shot is seen traveling from the right of the screen to the left, the car will look like it quickly turned around. It is easy for this to occur inadvertently when shooting, because these shots may be separated by days during shooting and only appear together when edited. This is precisely the type of problem that can be prevented by using a good storyboard. Straight-on shots are neutral angles that allow movement in either direction to follow. (See Chapter 23, Screen Direction, for more information.)

Working with Directors

Every director has a different method of working with artists. Some write out lists describing each shot, some prefer to tell you what they want to see, and others have no idea in advance what the shots are going to be. In any case, it's up to you to get all the pertinent shot information in such a way that you'll be able to accurately translate it when you're back at your drawing table.

Storyboarding is seldom a one-way street. One of your roles as a storyboard artist is to offer ideas to help the director make the best of each scene with your insight. Jesus Trevino, episodic director of *seaQuest DSV, Tru Calling, The O.C., Prison Break,* and *Star Trek* fame, agrees but cautions artists, as follows, about directors' egos.

> I think that a storyboard artist needs to be sensitive interpersonally to making the director feel comfortable about his participation. I think the worst thing a storyboard artist can do is to come in and start telling him how to shoot the sequence. I do think at the same time that a storyboard artist needs to be courageous enough to say, "You know, you might want to consider what would happen if we did this angle or that angle or if you have an insert shot of this." And I think if you convey that in a collaborative spirit, I think it would be helpful to the director.
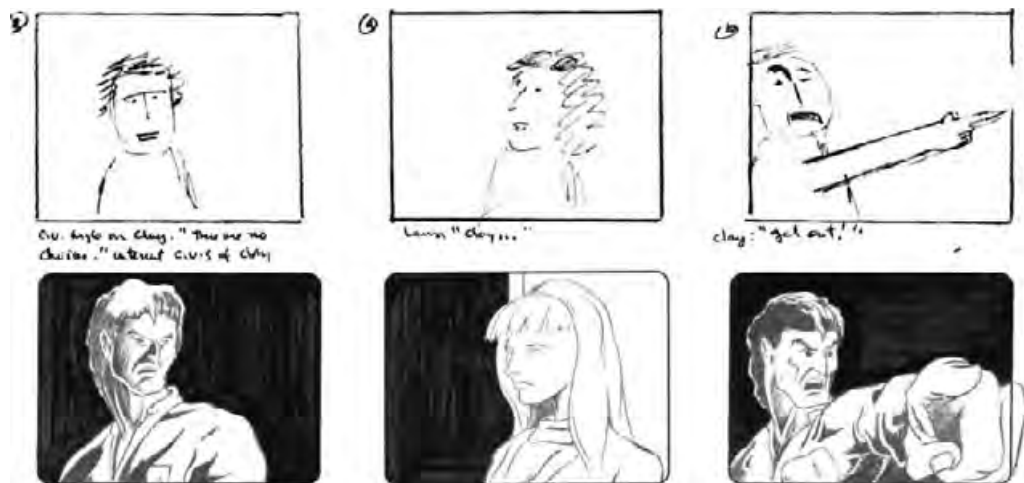

Figure 22.1 *seaQuest DSV* boards showing director Jesus Trevino's thumbnails on top and Mark Simon's below.
(© by Universal City Studios, Inc. Courtesy of MCA Publishing Rights, a Division of MCA, Inc.)

Another of your roles is to understand what the director wants and to illustrate it in the form of storyboards. It is important that you be able to communicate your ideas and understand a director's ideas. You can do this in a number of different ways. The most important way is to have read the script before meeting with the director. You need to know the overall story before you can start on the details. Another way to communicate is acting. You may act out a scene with a director. Other times you may need to sketch thumbnails, refer to movie clips, draw out shot plans, or simply explain an idea verbally.

A great way to start a meeting is by asking the director to quickly explain his vision to you. This should basically be a quick, broad pitch to give you a general feel of his visual direction.

Understanding a director's vision is sometimes like translating a foreign language. Directors communicate and visualize a story in different ways, and you need to understand these variations. Some directors may work well off of plot plans, others use lists, and some only tell you what they need. You may be lucky and have a director who draws her own thumbnails. You may run into a director who only works in concepts. Concepts are easy to misinterpret, so be sure you do everything you can to clarify what it is she wants.

If you don't understand what a director wants, find a happy medium that you both can work with. Thumbnails of storyboards help. If a director can't read plans (overhead views), don't try to work with plot plans. If a director is familiar with plans, this may be your best bet for determining blocking. If you are fast enough, nothing beats a quick thumbnail showing the framing and the blocking.

It helps to understand what a location looks like when working on scenes with a director. When possible, it's always best to walk a location with a director. However, that is often not possible. Location photos then become very important. Always ask for copies of any location photos. You can also ask the art department for any sketches or plans of locations and sets.

Some commercial directors will also use photos from magazines or stock photos to represent a look they wish to achieve. These can be invaluable in understanding what they want.

Flexibility is key. Since each director thinks and works differently, you have to adjust yourself to the particular style. If one of your tricks to get into a director's head doesn't work well, try a different approach.

One thing to be cautious of when working with directors is that some of them use the term *pan* incorrectly. Many people in production use this term for any type of camera movement. Make sure you clarify what someone is asking for when he says that the camera pans. You might hear, "The camera pans up the building." What may be meant is "The camera tilts up to show the building." *Pan* means to rotate the camera on its stationary axis. *Tilt*, in this usage, means the camera rotates its view vertically.

Another common miscommunication happens when directors talk about the size of a shot. There are very specific rules about how close a close-up is versus a medium shot and so on. Very few people stick to those rules, so it will be up to you to make sure you understand exactly how a director wants the shots framed. For example, some people look at a medium-close shot as being closer than a close-up, and others think it's a little wider than a close-up.

The best way to make sure you understand is to thumbnail the framing for the director for approval. In Figure 22.2 you see a graphic demonstrating the standard framing terminology for shooting a character.

Many directors make up camera shot lists when they are breaking down a shooting script. This is a written description of every shot in a scene. You may get a list from a director that looks like the following list. (There are a number of production terms and abbreviations in the shot list: CU is close-up, FG is foreground, POV is point of view, LA is low angle, and HA is high angle. These are explained in greater detail in the Glossary.)

- LA shot behind propeller as Wilde's boat beaches itself up toward the lens.
- Reverse. Wilde's feet drop into frame, CU, as he runs away from camera.
- Track camera left with Blaylock through the trees; see trees pass in FG.
- Track camera left through the trees with Wilde.
- Wilde's POV as he gains on Blaylok; push into a medium shot.
- Back to tracking shot with Wilde as he tackles Blaylok.
- LA from inside a gorge of the men as they fall over the ridge.
- HA of the gorge as the men fall. Pan with the men as they roll past camera down the hill.

This list is much more detailed than you may get from some directors. Often, directors tend to be quite cryptic in their descriptions. Each director is different. Try to get as much visual information as you can.
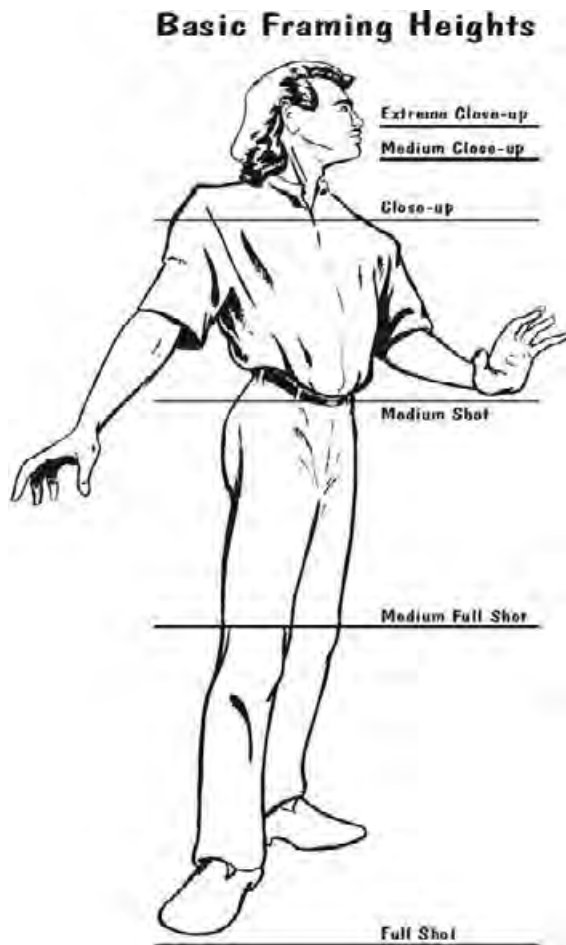
Basic Framing Heights

Extreme Close-up

Medium Close-up

Close-up

Medium Shot

Medium Full Shot

Full Shot

Figure 22.2 Basic shot framing.

will be going over a lot of shots with the director, and it can get very confusing when you sit down at your drafting table hours later.

The following is another director's shot list. It too was missing many important details needed to storyboard the scene the way the director saw it. Asking lots of questions about the shots is the way to better understand her vision. The storyboard artist's notes are added in parentheses. Figure 22.3 shows how the final boards turned out. (You may need to consult the Glossary to decipher the abbreviations.)

- The guy with the Mohawk runs at and past camera. (Low angle. He enters at the far end of the alley and runs right up past camera. He's wearing an unbuttoned Levi jacket. Use multiple frames to show how he runs past camera.)
- Reverse. (Low angle. He runs away from camera toward a dead end.)
- Close-up reaction. (He turns to see the car lights hitting him. Show lighting effect.)
- Car approaches. (Lights flare into lens and car is a silhouette. Canted frame. We never see inside the car.)
- Mohawk keeps running. (HA as the car chases him in its headlights.)
- He runs to the dead end. (He tries to climb the fence as the front fender of the car enters frame.)
- CU struggle to climb. (He is reaching for a handhold. We see the car in BG.)
- Reverse OTS behind car passengers. (Silhouette of guys in car. Mohawk is blinded by headlights beyond.)

The sample director's notes may break down the action shot by shot, but they leave out a lot of information that he may want in the final picture. The director may have many more details in mind, but he may not have written them down. Information that he has left out may include which characters are in which shots and in which direction the action should move. Are the characters happy or angry? Are they looking behind them as they run? What are they wearing?

This is when you need to ask a lot of questions and add your own notes to the shot list. Not asking questions will result in your having to redraw a lot of boards. You should never guess about a shot. Problems arise when the director doesn't give you as much information as he thinks he has and you haven't asked enough questions. Also, don't rely on your memory. Write everything down and you won't have to worry about whether you remembered everything or not. You

The set of storyboards in Figure 22.3 were based on the shots just described. You should refer to the boards while reviewing that shot list.

Many directors will not hand you written shot lists. Half of the time you will be working with a director who has not thought much about the specific shots by the time you meet with him. When you go over a scene to be boarded, the director is then forced to figure out what he wants to see. It is your job to capture what he says and quickly make it legible for yourself for later, when you need to decipher your notes and make sense of the scene.

Commercial director David Nixon works with storyboard artists this way: "I usually like to just give an artist my vision verbally and let him sketch a little bit. I let him start and then we hone it in from there."

When going over scenes with directors, don't worry about taking too many notes. Don't fool yourself to
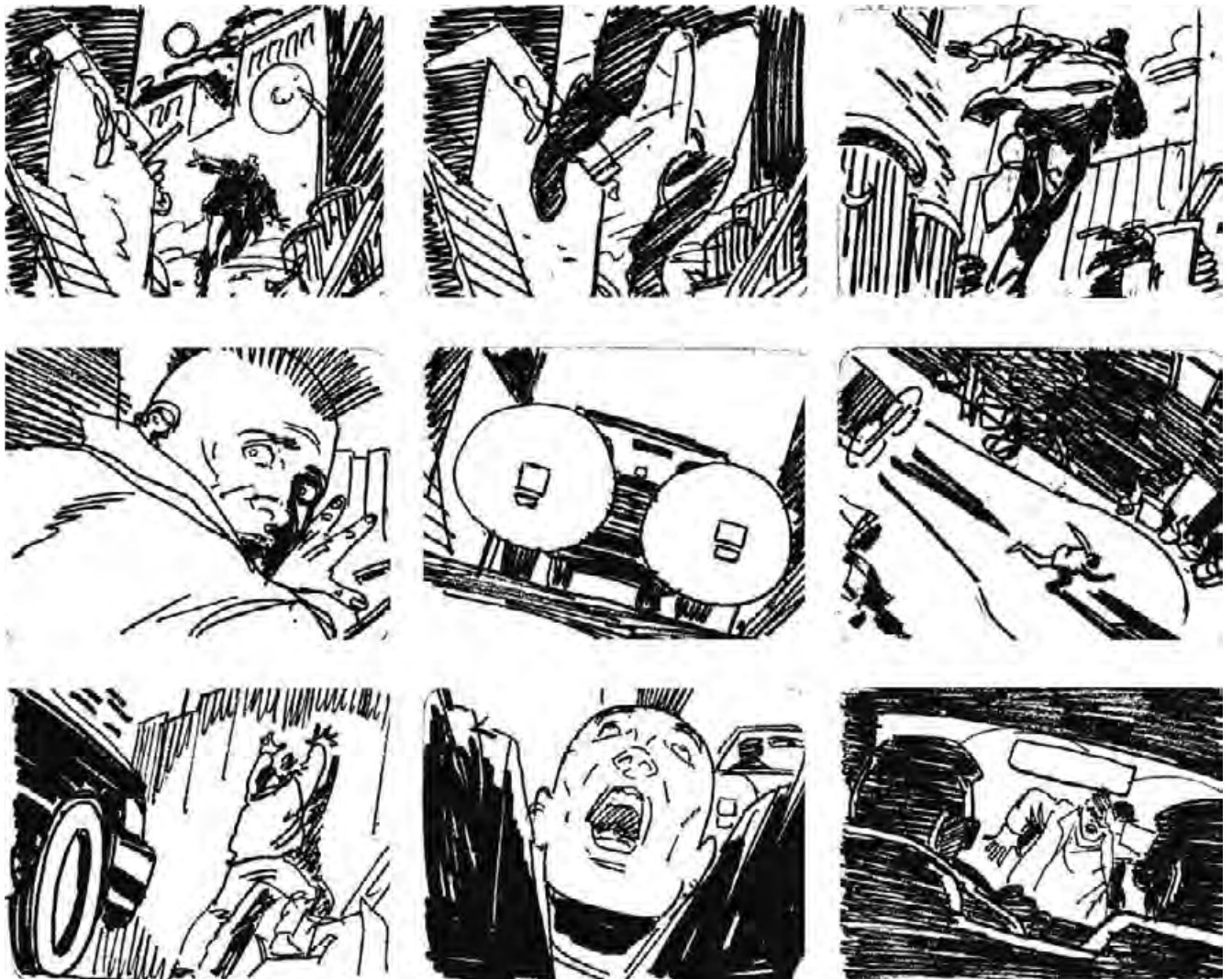
Figure 22.3 Storyboards by Alex Saviuk.

think that you can remember everything a director says. Even though the shots make perfect sense and you can't see any other way to draw the scene when you're with the director, you may very well forget it by the time you're ready to draw your boards.

Between the sheer volume of shots being described to you at once (I've come out of meetings with more than 130 specific panels to draw) and the number of times the director may change shot ideas slightly as she describes them to you, it is all too easy to forget which concept was finally approved and what details were discussed. Don't feel bad about asking her to repeat herself. It's better to be safe than sorry. You may also want to repeat back to her what you've written to make sure you've understood her clearly.

You may also act out scenes with the director to get a feel for the blocking of a scene and how the characters need to interact. On the film *Wilde Life*, the director and I rearranged the furniture in his room to simulate a location. He and I jumped over the furniture and acted like kids as we developed the action in each scene. I have even used toys to block scenes. With toy cars and action figures, we can simulate a scene and view how a camera may see it.

On the film *The Walking Dead*, director Preston Whitmore III wanted his action scenes to have the look of the Hong Kong action director John Woo's films. We looked at different John Woo scenes on video and used those as a reference for how to set up certain shots in our movie.
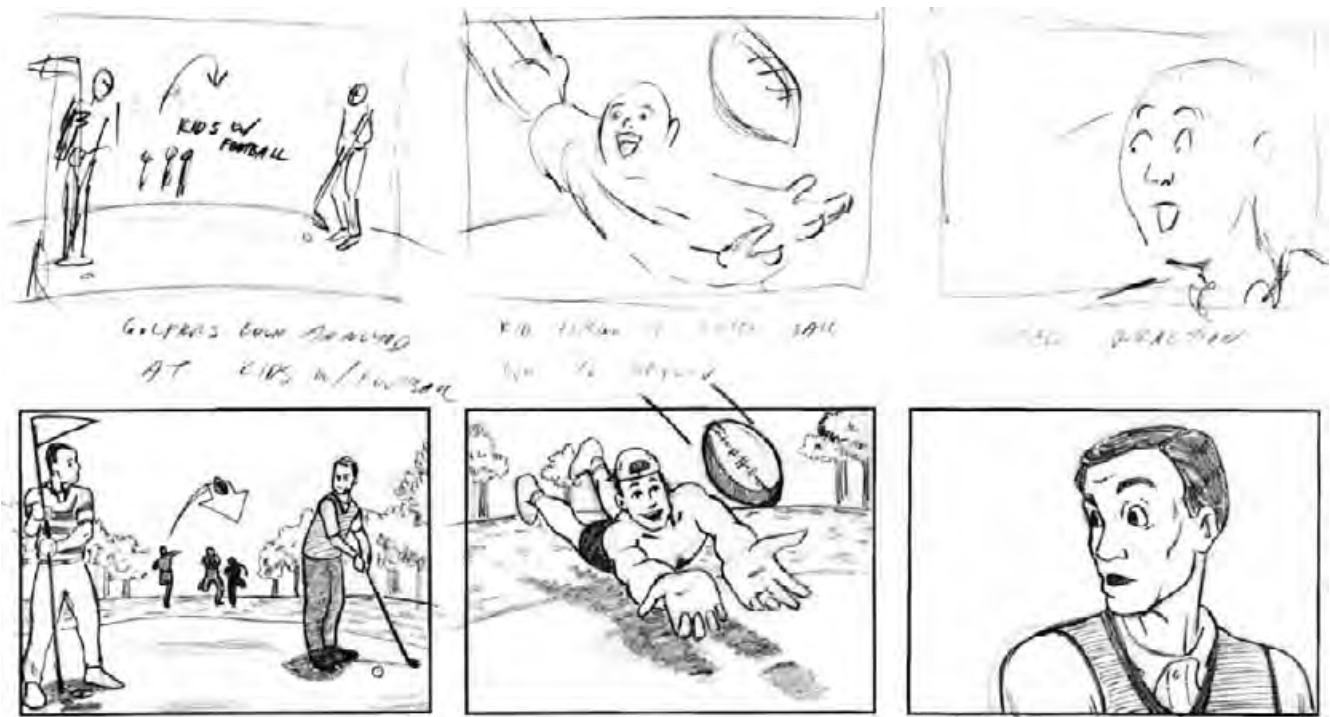
Figure 22.4 The *top* storyboards were thumbnailed by Mark Simon during a meeting with David Nixon. The finals (*bottom row*) were drawn by Mark Simon and Dan Antkowiak of Animatics & Storyboards, Inc.

If you're sketching thumbnails, you can go over the sequences with the director to get a quick OK that you both understand the same concepts and shots.

Thumbnails are quick, rough sketches that are your best notes. If a director does her own sketches, go over them and add your own notes to make sure you understand exactly what she wants. Even with stick figures in your thumbnails, a director can look at them and tell you if the shot is what she had in mind. She may tell you she wants a tighter shot or maybe that the character should face the other way.

If the director wants a frame to be tighter, you simply sketch in a tighter frame inside your thumbnail until it's right (see Figure 22.5). If other elements need to change, you can simply write a few notes about it and change it in your final drawings. You will most likely have fewer changes if the director is able to see sketches before you finish the boards.

I suggest that you combine thumbnails with written notes. I may show the major action in one sketch, but my notes may expand on the action, which may result in more details and drawings in my finished versions. Written notes may also contain a portion of a charac-

ter's dialogue. Notes on my thumbnail sketches may show who is who in my drawing. Thumbnails may need a character's name marked on them to make it clear.

Floor plans are 2D designs of the layout of a set or location. These are also called *plots* or *plot plans*. When camera and actor locations are marked on them, they are often called *shot plans*. When a director is telling you where he wants the camera and where the actors are, it may be difficult to imagine exactly what he is talking about without reference. Use a floor plan, when appropriate, and mark out character and camera positions.

Many directors like to work with floor plans, as does director Jesus Trevino: "The first thing I do when I get on a show is get the floor plans for all of the existing sets. I'll get their floor plan, and then I'll miniaturize them, and then I'll incorporate them into my shot list."

The floor plan can show blocking and camera moves. Don't try to figure out too many shots on one plan; it quickly gets confusing. Make sure you mark each camera position in relation to the shots in your written notes or thumbnails. You should clearly mark
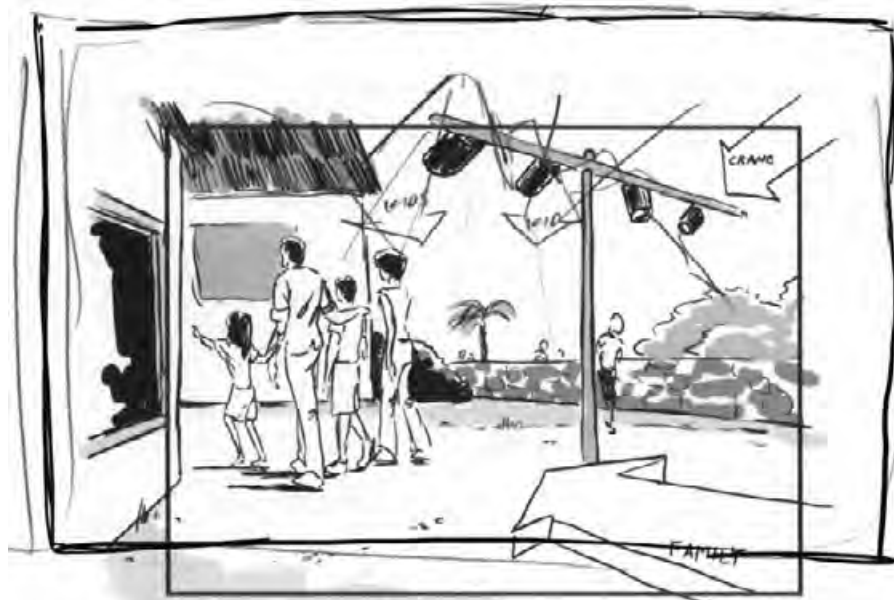
Figure 22.5 The director, Antoine Fuqua, asked for this frame to be wider, which was accomplished by simply drawing a new frame outside of the original frame. Storyboard frame by Mark Simon.
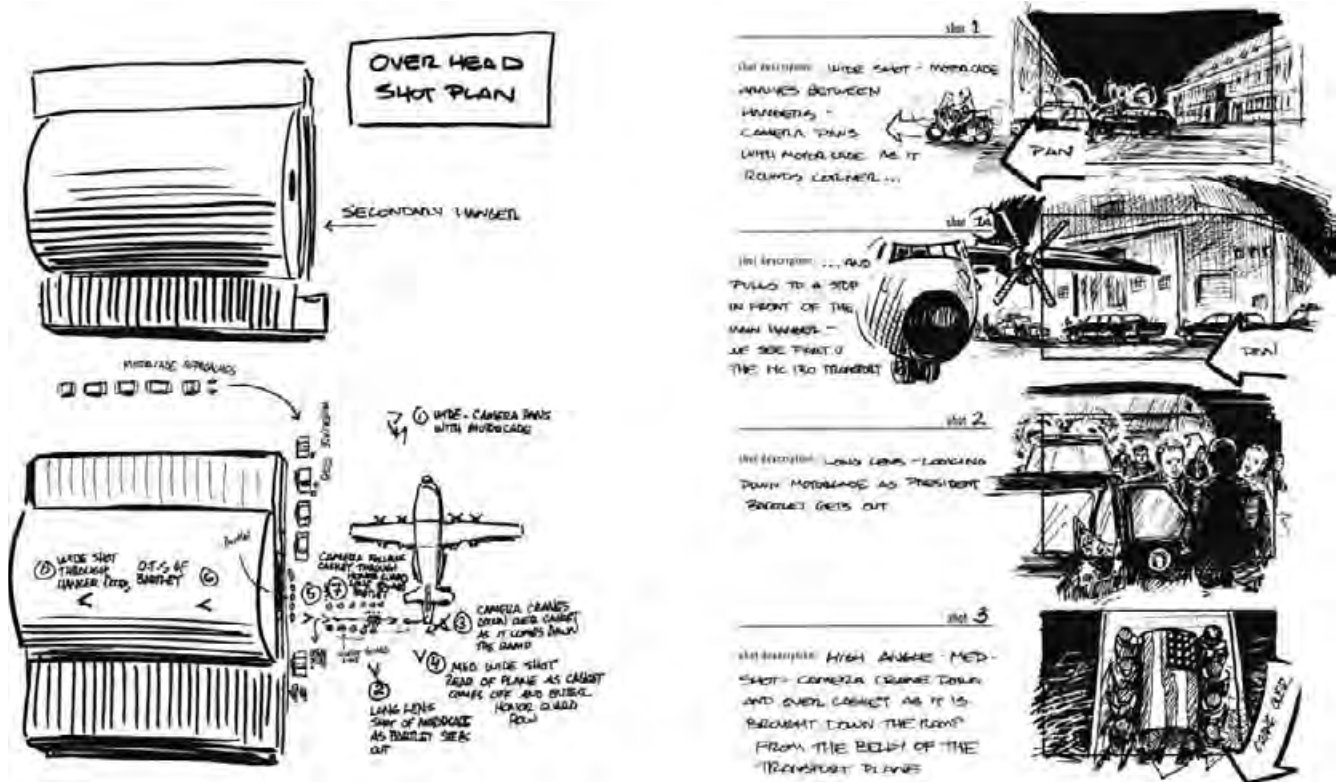

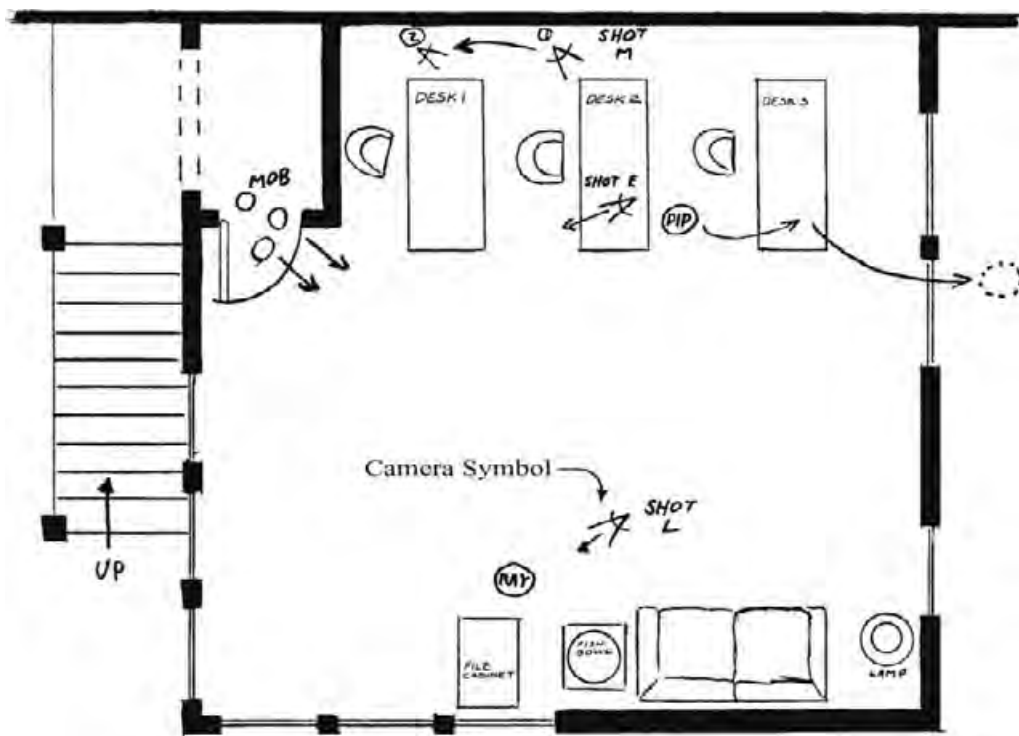**Figure 22.6** *The West Wing* plot plans and storyboards by Josh Hayes. (Images courtesy of Warner Bros.)

Figure 22.7 Redrawn floor plan from *The Walking Dead*. Camera angles, actor blocking, and movement of both the actors and the cameras are plotted. Shot M shows a camera move from Position 1 to Position 2. Notice that the open end of the angle symbol represents the direction the camera is facing.

each character, too. If you use more than one floor plan, label them. By referencing a floor plan you will know exactly who and what the camera will see. Your boards will be that much more accurate and beneficial to the production.

When you work with floor plans, it's a good idea to give a copy of them to the director along with your storyboards. Use of floor plans can help not only you as the artist, but also the rest of the crew. The artist can conceptualize what the camera would see. The director can use it for her shot list. The camera department can use it to plan their setups. The gaffers will know what they need to light. The art department will know what they need to dress and prep.

Figures 22.7 and 22.8 show, respectively, a floor plan and the boards drawn from it.

For the ABC Movie of the Week *The Miami School Bus Hijacking*, the director and I worked with plot plans in a different way. A lot of the movie had to do with car and bus chases. The location scouts had determined the locations for most of the sequences. I took large pieces of paper and drew crude maps of the streets for our major action scenes. The maps were drawn roughly to scale with Hot Wheels cars. I had a school bus, cop cars, and regular cars to play with.

The director and I played with the toy cars on the maps to determine both the actions and the best camera angles. I would mark the locations of the camera, with notes by these locations giving the size of the frame and what action it was recording.

When working with action figures and toys, your hand can become a camera demonstrating camera angles. Holding your fingers in a peace sign serves the purpose of showing where a camera is looking. This is the quickest way to work out shots with the director when using toys and models.

Regardless of how the director likes to communicate his ideas to you, there are a number of questions you may need to ask. While any shot list or group of thumbnails will give you guidance for framing shots, other details important to the story may not be so clear. Following are example questions for directors before you start boarding.

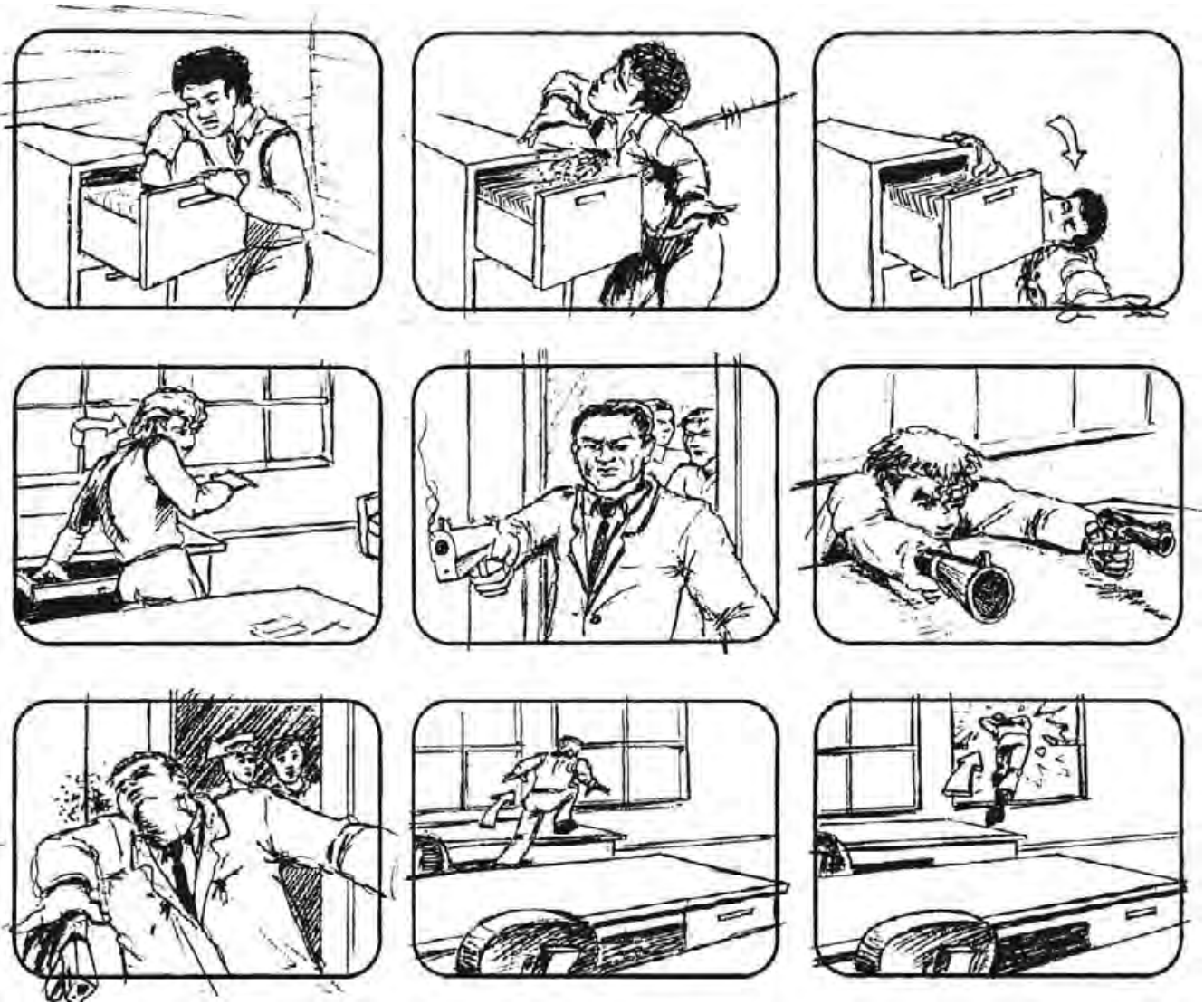• Are the characters happy or sad (or other emotion)?

Figure 22.8 Storyboards based on *The Walking Dead* floor plan.

Figure 22.9 Toy cars on drawn street map used with a director to design shot sequence. Notice the marked camera angles and the one camera move.

Figure 22.10 Your fingers may serve as a camera when demonstrating a camera angle on toys. Notice how the fingers represent the plot plan camera symbol.

- How are they dressed?
- Is it day or night?
- In what screen direction do you want them looking or moving?
- Which location is used in this scene? Do you have photos of it?
- What is the character's reaction to what is happening?
- Have these characters been cast?
- Have the custom props been designed?

- Do you have reference photos of the vehicles you want to use?
- Do you have copies of these product shots and logos?

Not only does working professionally with directors make your storyboards more effective for the production, but you will also enjoy each project more—and you are more likely to be called again for subsequent projects. But it doesn't mean you can't have fun.

CHAPTER 23

Screen Direction

Screen direction refers to the direction that objects or characters move on the screen. Consistent screen direction is important in visual storytelling because it often tells the viewer where a character is going and when the character changes direction. For instance, when Homer Simpson drives to work, in every shot he moves from camera left toward camera right, also stated as *moving camera right*. When he drives home, he *moves camera left*. Even as he walks in the door, he's still moving camera left. If Homer were going to work and was moving camera left in one of the shots, it would look as if he turned around to go back home.

There are rules in filmmaking that help ensure that the camera is not accidentally placed in a position where the characters seem to move in the wrong camera direction. There is an invisible line in a set or location that the camera may not cross. It's called the *line of action*. If the camera is placed on the other side of this line, it's called *crossing the line*, and characters will seem to move or look in the wrong direction, confusing the audience. Once this line of action is established in a scene, it must stay the same unless the character changes relative positions in a shot or the camera physically moves across the line during one shot.

The camera may, however, move onto the line of action. That's called a *neutral position*, where the camera is looking straight at the front or back of a character. Since the characters do not have to look camera left or right, this position will work.

If you look at the way sports are filmed for television, this may become clearer. All sports are filmed by the same rules. All the cameras are placed on the same side of the field and on the line of action.

For instance, in a basketball game the players are constantly running back and forth and up and down the court. It could be difficult to follow whose goal is being advanced on, but it isn't. Why? Because the viewer knows that Team X always goes to the camera-right goal and Team Y always goes to the camera-left goal. If cameras were shooting the action from both sides of the line of action, the viewer wouldn't be able to follow the action. The cameras placed behind the goals are the neutral shots.

The line of action becomes more difficult in scenes with multiple people, especially if they are moving around a set. Let's look at a simpler way of determining screen direction without trying to find that invisible line. The easiest way to keep proper screen direction is to look at your character eye lines. The direction they have to look to see other characters has to stay constant in a scene unless their movements or the camera's movements shift that direction during a shot. The last frame of a shot dictates the screen direction for the following shots.
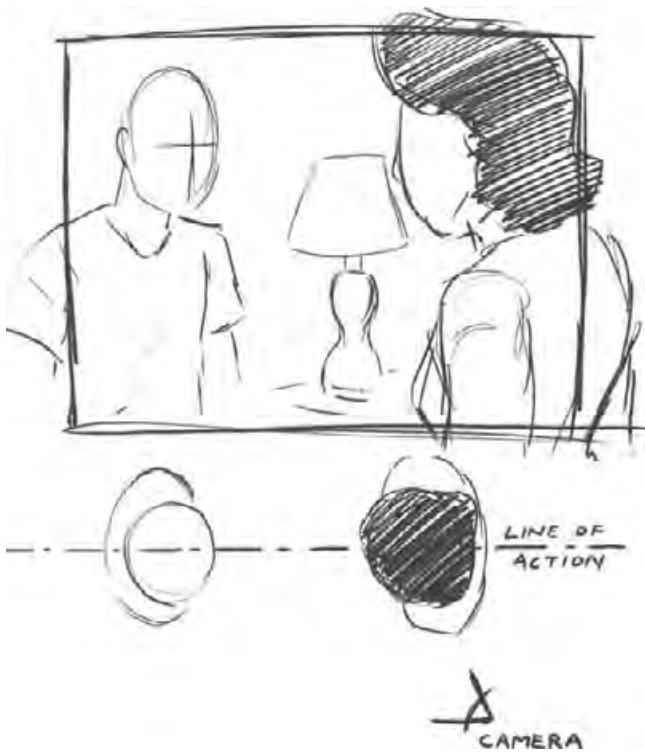
Figure 23.1 Two characters talking. The man is looking camera right to see the woman. The line of action *(dashed)* is drawn on the eye line between them. No camera position may cross that line once it is set. This shows framing and overhead setup.
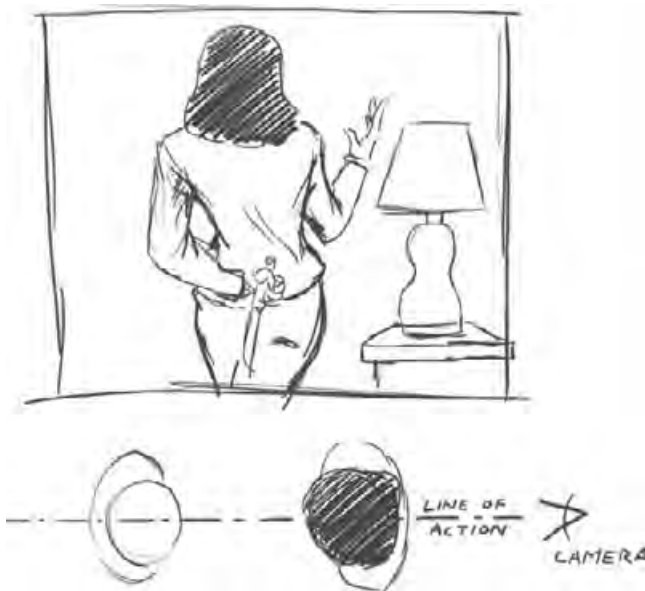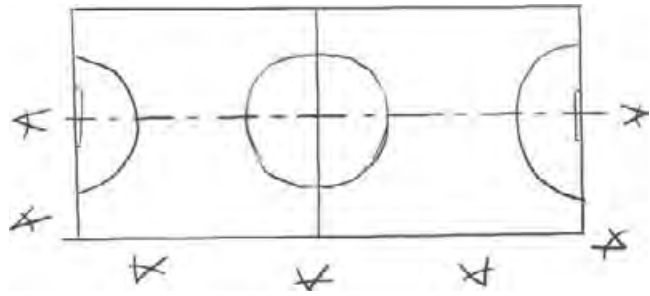

Figure 23.3 This layout of a basketball court shows the line of action and possible camera placements.

If we take a sample living room scene with four people in the room (see Figure 23.4), the wide shot, or establishing shot, shows the audience where the characters are in relation to one another (see Figure 23.5). The wide shot tells us that the person on the couch needs to look camera right to see the person in the doorway. If we place the camera in such a way that the person on the couch looks toward camera left, we've crossed the line of action and the audience will not know who she is talking to (see Figure 23.6).

Let's look at another scene, involving a couple driving in a car. We've all seen shots like this. Figure
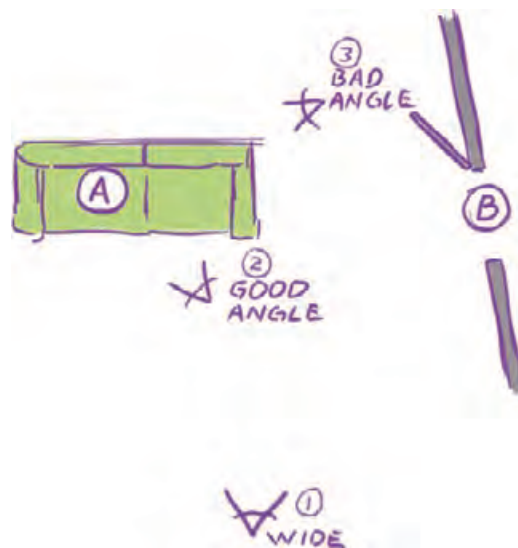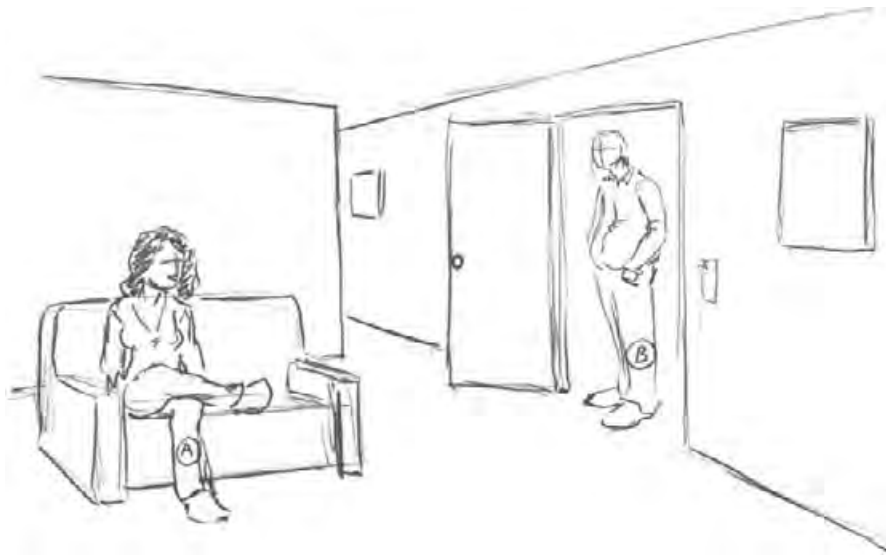

Figure 23.2 The same two characters are speaking, but the camera is now on the line of action looking straight at the woman's back. This is a neutral camera position.

Figure 23.4 A living room plot plan.

Figure 23.5 Camera Angle 1, wide establishing shot. Actor A has to look camera right to see Actor B.
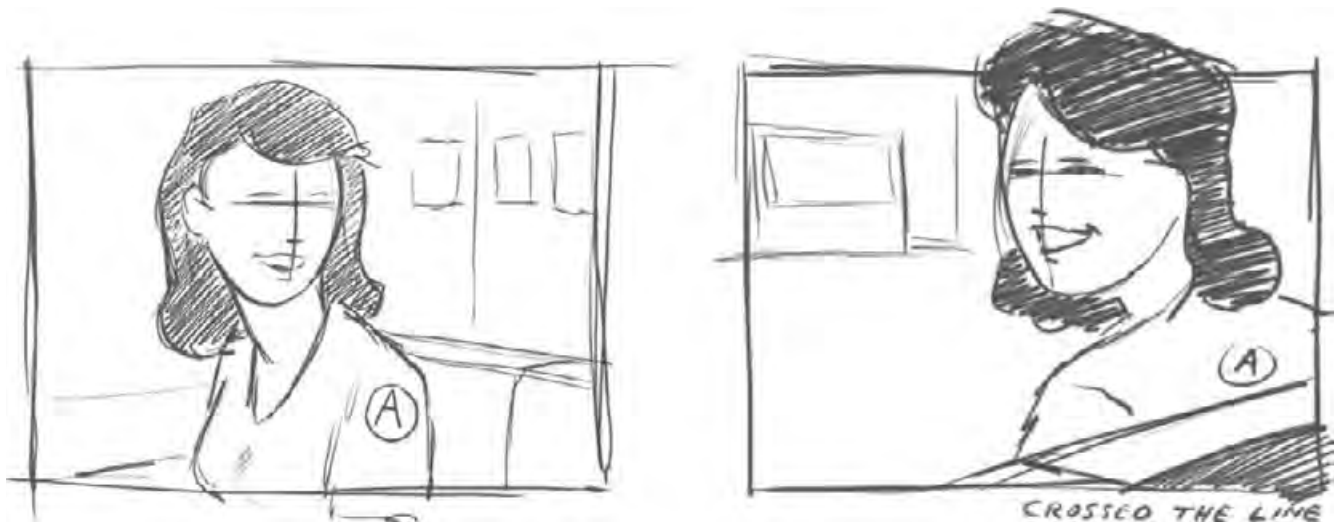

CROSSED THE LINE

Figure 23.6 Camera Angle 2 *(left)* still shows Actor A looking camera right. We know she's looking at Actor B on the right. Camera Angle 3 crosses the line of action. She has to look camera left, confusing the audience as to where she is looking.

23.7 shows some possible camera positions around the car, the driver (D), and the passenger (P). Camera angle 1 will look like Figure 23.8. The driver has to look camera left to see the passenger.

Camera 2, which is on the opposite side of the car, will look like Figure 23.9. Even though the camera moved to the opposite side of the car, the driver still has to look camera left to see the passenger. Cameras 1 and 2 will edit together perfectly. Camera 3 looks straight in through the windshield. The driver still has to look camera left to see the passenger, as shown in Figure 23.10.

Camera 4 shows that the driver will now have to look camera right to see the passenger. The camera has therefore crossed the line of action (see Figure 23.11). This camera shot will not edit together with the other
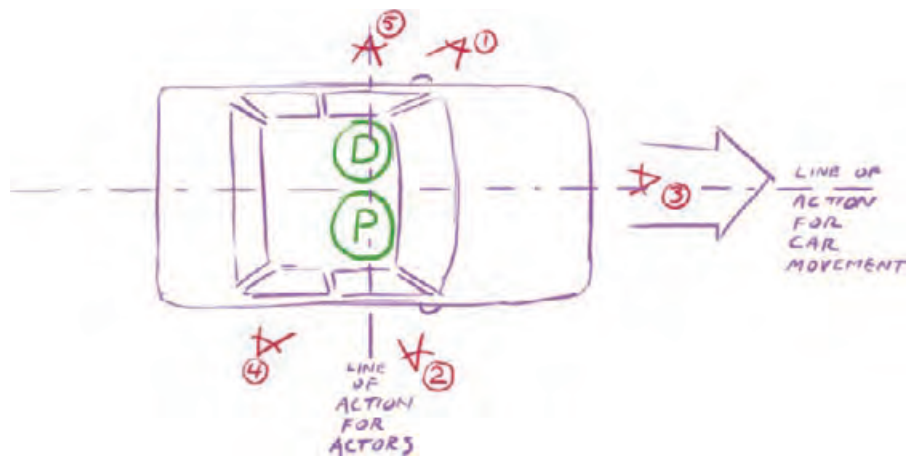
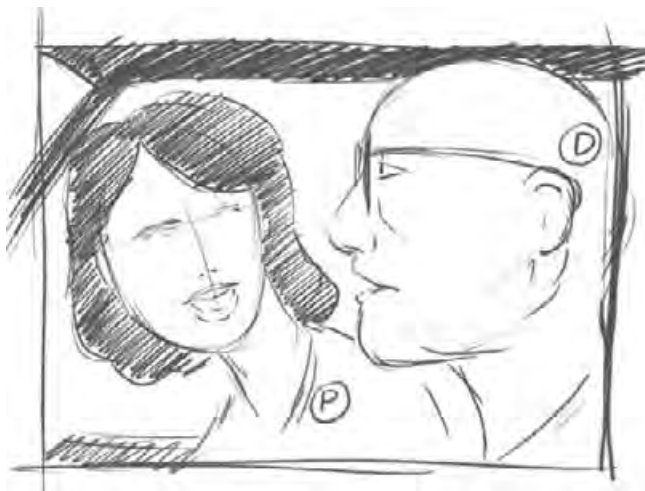**Figure 23.7** Shot plan showing camera positions and actors in the car.

Figure 23.8 Camera angle 1 shows the driver looking camera left to the passenger.

Figure 23.9 Camera angle 2 shows the driver still looking camera left to the passenger.

Figure 23.10 Camera angle 3 shows the driver looking camera left again to see the passenger.
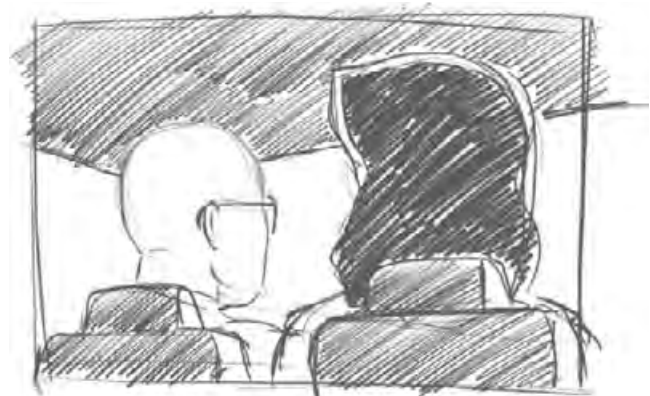

Figure 23.11 Camera angle 4 shows the driver having to look camera right at the passenger. The camera has crossed the line-of-action.

Figure 23.12 Camera 5 is the neutral angle between the actors. The driver has to look away from camera to see the passenger.

Figure 23.13 The first frame sets up the screen direction (camera right) that the car needs to move in this sequence. The middle frame continues the proper screen direction. The last frame shows the car turning toward camera left, setting up a new screen direction for the following scene.

shots. Camera 5 is the neutral angle for the actors (see Figure 23.12). The driver has to look away from camera to see the passenger, which is neither right nor left.

The actors have a line-of-action and the car has a line-of-action. You need to pay attention to eye lines for actors and direction of travel for vehicles. Sometimes, as shown, you will have both in the same scene.

During chase scenes, whether it's planes, trains, or automobiles, the vehicles are turning, skidding, sliding, and changing directions. The line of action still has to be watched in order for the shots to be edited together

properly. The screen direction in which vehicles are moving in subsequent shots has to be the same screen direction; otherwise, it will look as though they are moving away from each other, rather than the scene looking like a chase. The biggest thing to remember is that the last frame of the shot dictates the screen direction of the next shot.

In Figure 23.13 you can see that the car entered the frame moving toward camera right but turned in the shot and is heading camera left on the edit. The next shot needs either to show the car moving camera left or to be a neutral shot (see Figure 23.14).
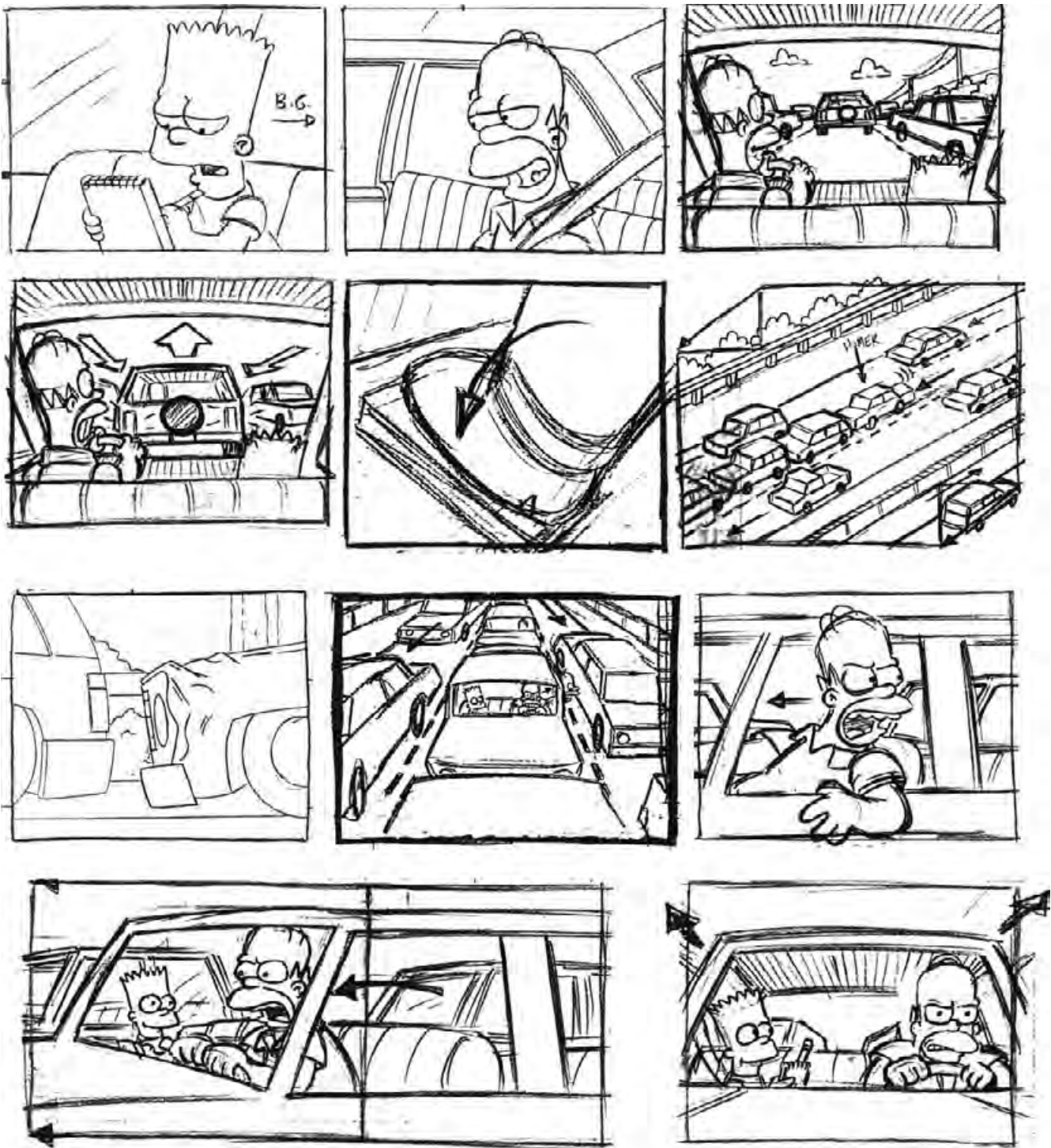
Figure 23.14 All frames of Homer driving either are neutral angles or show him driving camera left. Proper screen direction is followed. (*The Simpsons* boards™. © Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation. All rights reserved.)