

**Specialist Writing Option A:
'Finding the Frame'**

[Adapted from *The Filmmaker's Eye: Learning (and breaking) the rules of cinematic composition* (pp.1-3) by **Gustavo Mercado**, 2010, Focal Press]

A key convention of visual storytelling is that **anything and everything that is included in the composition or frame of a shot is there for a specific purpose**. This is necessary for an audience to understand the story they are watching.

The framing of a shot conveys meaning through the arrangement of visual elements. These include camera distance and angle, what should be included and excluded from the frame and which elements should dominate. These elements then create the meaning to be conveyed by the shot. The process is called 'composition'.



<http://mikecapuzzi.com/wp-content/uploads/mike-capuzzi-godfather.jpg>

Take a look at the shot above taken from *The Godfather* (1972). It is an extreme long shot that shows a car parked on a deserted road with someone in the back seat pointing a gun at someone in the front seat. In the distance, the Statue of Liberty is visible above a bank of wild grass. This seemingly simple composition has a very clear meaning: someone is being murdered inside a car on a deserted road. But, if everything in the frame is meant to be meaningful and necessary to understand the story, then why is the Statue of Liberty part of the composition of this shot? Is it there simply to establish the location of the murder? Why is it so distant and tiny in the frame? You will see that the statue is facing away from the car where the murder is taking place. Could this be a meaningful detail? If it is in the frame, then everything about it, from its placement to the angle from which it was shot has to be meaningful. The inclusion of the Statue of Liberty from that particular angle, at that particular size and placement in the frame conveys much more than the murder of the man inside the

car. Think about what the inclusion of such a recognisable symbol of freedom, hope and the American Dream says about the killing of the man in the car.

A strategy to decoding the meaning of a composition or frame is to identify the themes and ideas that lie at the heart of the film; its essence; its core ideas. Effective stories have strong core ideas that add emotional depth, allowing the audience to connect with the film. For example *Rocky* (1976) tells the story of one man's fight for the boxing heavyweight championship, only this isn't what the story is about. Rocky is about one man's struggle to 'be somebody'; to gain self-respect and the respect of others. The composition behind every shot supports this theme. For example, the placement of the character within the film matches his journey towards self-respect, so that he is placed off centre in unbalanced compositions at the start of the film and central to the frame or larger within the frame as he becomes stronger and more confident.

Every shot counts no matter how inconsequential it may seem.

Acknowledgement

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