

Crib Sheet: Single Set Up Scenes

Single set ups are used to: Shoot a scene in a single set up. They can be complex or simple. They can be a fast and efficient ways to cover a scene and save time in production. They are often favoured by low-budget filmmakers. Single set ups simplify continuity for a scene because there is no need for actors to break a scene down into separate set ups that overlap and therefore produce a number of shots that need to match in terms of continuity of action, props and dialogue. Single set up scenes can be dynamic, complex and may require a high degree of skill. They allow actors to show off their talents, because actors can change their performance for each take.

There are three approaches to single set ups with a growing level of difficulty at each stage: **One:** Keep the camera movement simple; static, pan, track, and move the actors rather than the camera. It is easier for a person to move and change direction in a complex path than a camera. **Two:** Use complex camera movements; twisting, curving, following, panning, tilting, etc., but keep the movements of the actors simple; standing, walking, etc. **Three:** Use complex camera movements and complex actor's movements where both need to be highly choreographed and co-ordinated.

How to plan single set up scenes:

Plan your set up in advance of shooting using a floor plan of the location and small models for the actors and camera positions. Plan the scene in a rehearsal prior to shooting where the actors, or stand-ins for the actors, and a camera person work slowly through the scene and the camera positions. This will take time and effort. Do not try to prepare a long single set up on a production day with a full crew in attendance as it results in time being wasted and is often frustrating. What you need to identify are the **key frames** for each part of the single set up. These are the framings that match the camera position to the actor's positions in relation to the action and the dialogue at key parts of the scene. These can then be noted on the script so that the set up as practised on paper or in rehearsals can be reproduced on set. A good single set up will clearly show the action and reactions of the actors in the scene; it will help tell the story. It will control the pace and dynamism of the story, because single set ups can be frantic, formal, stately, chaotic etc., depending on the camerawork used.

On set single set ups will be prepared by actors slowly walking through the action and dialogue for the scene with the camera movements being made at the same time and marks being put down for the positions of the camera and actors for the key frames. Remember: Keeping the camera movement simple and moving the actors is the first level of skill for shooting single set ups. If you make a set up too complex it will fail.

A Single Set Ups Scene will be a success if:

It is properly planned in advance and the key frames identified. If the set up is planned within the skills and experience of the cast and crew. If the actors know their lines. If the camera operator is competent, concentrated and prepared.

Single set ups will fail if:

If the single set up is only imagined/planned in the mind and there is no physical planning or rehearsal for the set up. If the set up is too complex for the camera operator and the cast to perform. If actors do not know their lines or their performance is inconsistent during the shooting of a take.

Directors to look at for single set ups:

Jean Renoir, Max Ophuls, Hitchcock, Orson Welles, Brian de Palma, Martin Scorsese, Oliver Stone, Spike Lee, Rainer Werner Fassbinder.