

## **Setting the Scene for the Total Picture**

The reader needs to know where they are in every chapter and scene you write. It isn't enough to tell about the location at the beginning of the story/chapter. Ground your reader at intervals so you maintain a clear vivid picture for the reader at all times. Movies give you a few handy techniques to achieve scene setting. At all times ask yourself, "Where is the camera?"

### **Vista to Close-up**

In many stories, the camera begins in a panoramic or vista mode. You, the reader, see a larger picture, as if you are riding a jet to the story location. At first you see to the horizon. The camera smoothly pans and then begins to focus on a particular place, coming closer and closer. Finally you land in a place where the action takes place.

### **Close-up to Zoom Out**

The opposite may occur to build tension or mystery. The camera is very close so only a character (or his face) is visible. You don't know where you are. Then (slowly or quickly, depending on desired effect) camera zooms out to reveal the mystery. The larger action (by one or more characters) occurs.

### **Mid-range Camera Reframing**

Three or more Characters in a scene can cause confusion or overwhelm. In movies, this is remedied by **shifting the frame** so that a different set of characters are visible. In writing you can accomplish the same effect by shifting the main character's focus to different characters at different times. A good rule is to keep three characters in the frame, including the protagonist. Don't forget to reference the surrounding setting to ground the reader.

### **Fast Cuts**

Camera cuts between close-up of one character and the other engaged in dialogue or action. In writing, this can quickly turn into "talking heads." Surround your dialogue with "cuts away" to the setting by using sensory clues to remind the reader of what picture you want to portray. Fast cuts are good to show high action too. Think car chase.

### **Slow-Mo**

The camera lingers and draws action out. In writing, this can slow the action for emphasis or draw attention to an important moment for the character. Implies the reader is inside the narrator's head, as he/she processes the moment. Be sure to include the background as part of that moment, and don't rely exclusively on sight. Sounds, smells, etc. can help the reader get the **Total Picture**.