

# ***THE UNIT*** ***PHOTOGRAPHY*** ***COVERAGE*** ***GUIDE***

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# UNIT PHOTOGRAPHY HAS BEEN BROKEN SINCE MOVIES BEGAN. WANNA FIX IT?

1

Effective unit photography coverage is critical to the success of marketing a film - so why is limited coverage so often an issue?

Even with a highly talented unit photographer and the dedicated best efforts from marketing, PR and creative, there is often a lack of usable coverage when it comes time to get the marketing machine rolling. When coverage is lacking, the marketing campaign will be negatively impacted as a result.

**A myriad of factors contribute to the all-too-frequent lack of coverage:**

- Production priorities
- Scheduling issues
- Lack of resources
- Budgets

Many of the above factors are outside the control of the marketing team and unit photographer.

Whether you're a marketer, publicist, unit photographer or producer - **this guide contains a list of shot categories and reference examples for different unit stills typically required for the various film genres.** This booklet covers the 'bare essentials' that marketing will likely need and is by no means exhaustive.

**The examples included in this book will save you time and hassle during the briefing process.** People will more easily understand exactly what you want (or don't want) as you have reference examples, right at your fingertips. Now marketing & PR can quickly communicate what they need to sell the movie, so that everyone can get back to doing awesome work.

Together, we can work to lift the standardization of process around unit photography and fix this part of the industry.

With love,  
the team at dsf.

## What is the Solution?

**The answer is streamlining the unit photography briefing process on an industry-wide scale.** Less variability in process equals less variability in outcome. By using this booklet, you are maximizing the standard and consistency of the unit photography you will receive. **With stronger processes underpinning the gathering of unit photography - everyone wins.**



## WHAT ARE THE STEPS?

### 1 Get the Team in Sync

This section contains a super basic briefing checklist next time you're caught briefing on the fly.

### 2 Choose Your Moments

Contains reference examples and shot categories for the most common shots needed for marketing & PR. Separated by genre and also numbered for ease of use.

- Gallery Shoot/Special Shoot
- Action/Adventure
- Drama/Romance
- Comedy
- Horror/Thriller

### 3 Select the Best

Here's where we introduce you to our secret system for rapidly separating the wheat from the chaff and getting your image selects down to the top 500.

## GET IN TOUCH

This booklet is the starting-off point of an evolving dialog. If you are reading this and see anything we missed or have valuable information that could be added to the next edition - I strongly encourage you to get in touch with us. Make sure to email me at [james@dsf.la](mailto:james@dsf.la).



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# ***GETTING IN SYNC***

# HERE'S A SUPER BASIC BRIEFING CHECKLIST FOR NEXT THE TIME YOU'RE CAUGHT BRIEFING ON THE FLY.

dsf.

The unit photographer wants great shots. The publicist wants extensive coverage. And the marketing team just want usable images so they can make that little thing called key art. With the team in sync, creative nirvana is only around the corner.

## 1 Main Target List

Have a prioritized list of key cast the UP can focus on, to save time unnecessarily spent on minor cast and crew.

## 2 Narrative

Check that someone, somewhere, has read the script and understands key themes, characters and story points to be communicated.

## 3 Coverage

List the different scenes, costumes, characters & set pieces you want, to maximize shot variety.

## 4 Character Relationships

Discuss the main characters' relationships - smitten lovers, jilted-ex, parent/child, good guy/bad guy, etc.

## 5 Genre Shot List

Mention any genre-specific instructions or shot requests.

## 6 Target Audience

Clarify which elements within the film will be most appealing to the target audience, e.g. sex, guns, romance, etc.

## 7 Creative Notes

Detail any other creative angles and/or notes about style, framing, tone, etc.

## 8 Scheduling

Double-check any scheduling issues, potential delays and last-minute dates you'll require for key coverage.

## 9 Things to Avoid

List any specific items to avoid in the coverage. (Refer to The Kill List on pg. 49)

## 10 Meet the Team

Double check contact info, chain of command and any approvals, image hosting or access requirements.

## 11 Special Shoot

Identify any schedule gaps that could be used for a quick special shoot if that won't be possible later. Ideally shot against a white background, well-lit, posed and in costume. (Refer to Special Shoot section on pg. 9)



3

# ***GALLERY SHOOT / SPECIAL SHOOT***

***REFERENCE EXAMPLES***



Lead Close-Up

S1



Lead Close-Up Profile

S2

## ***SHOOT FOR KEY ART***

Many smaller films without A-List cast will sell (or not sell) based on the artwork. So all you need to worry about is shooting for the key art - even if the shots aren't necessarily in line with the tone of the movie. The unit photography can sometimes be more important than the film itself.

## ***SMILE - YOU'RE ON CAMERA!***

For Close-Ups make sure the actors run through as many facial expressions as possible. A wide range of looks gives marketing more flexibility when creating materials.



Lead Two Thirds Mid Shot

S3

## ***KEEP MARKETING IN MIND***

Keep in mind the context of how your marketing team will be using these shots. What elements and posing will be most useful for a poster or press release? For example, guns, set pieces, emotional conflict etc. These are the elements your marketing team will always want more of - so give 'em what they want!



Lead Two Thirds Over Shoulder

S4



Lead Full Body

S5

## ***UP THE DRAMA***

When conducting a special shoot consider that these images are intended for key art. Images need a cinematic look with actors convincingly in character. It's not a passport photo, it's a dramatic still. Facial expressions that communicate drama, emotion and implied conflict are essential.



Lead Full Body

S6

## FOCAL LENGTH

Different focal lengths are very useful to give the marketing team flexibility over what which artwork concepts can be executed. A solid range of close-ups, mid shots and full body shots enables maximum wriggle room for creative.

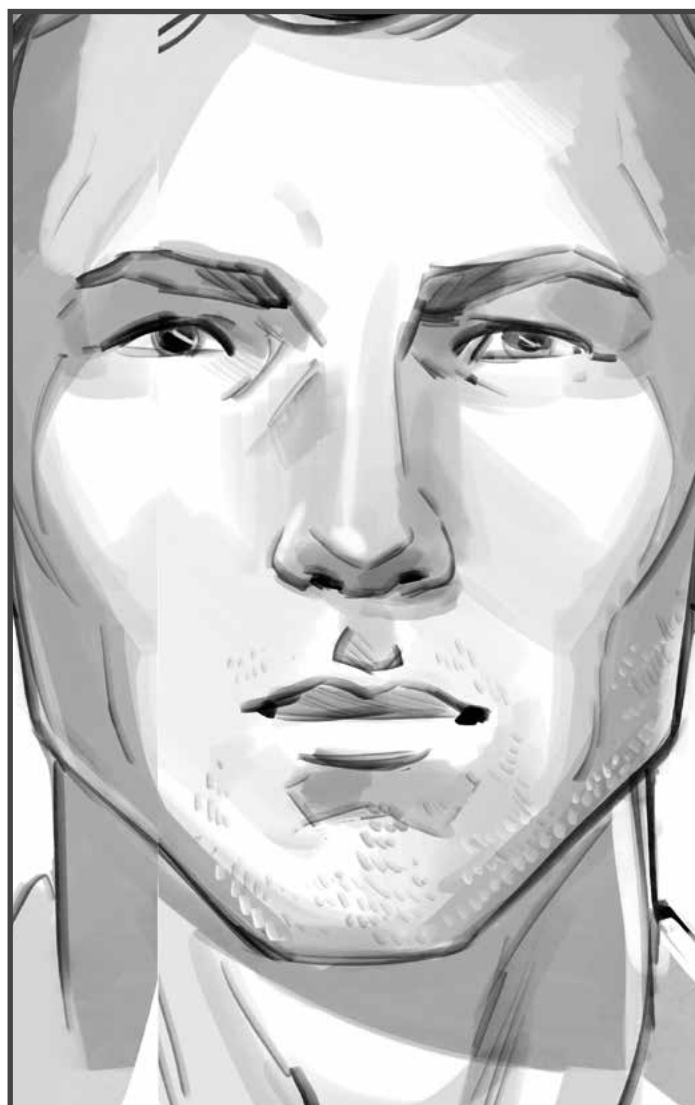


Lead Heroic Close-Up

S7

## WHERE'S THE SET?

If your film is VFX heavy, then a special shoot is even more important than usual. The on-set photography will provide little in the way of set-pieces and location shots compared to a standard film. A great special shoot with characters in costume and theatrical type posing will keep your marketing team happy and your future campaign in great shape.



Lead Extreme Close-Up

S8

## WHITE BACKGROUND

For the best artwork, make sure actors are shot on a white or grey background. Even a sheet or white wall will do. The cleaner the background, the better the contouring and ability for us to key out the actors and place them naturally in the key art composition.



Lead Pointing Gun Mid Shot

S9



Lead with Gun Full Body

S11



Ensemble Cast Long Shot

C10

**“ IF ALL ELSE FAILS,  
GET THESE POSES.  
SHOOT FOR THE KEY ART. ”**

JEFF PESTELL  
ENTERTAINMENT ONE



Lead With Gun/Weapon in Action

S12

## ***STRIKE A POSE***

To make the most of the short time you'll have the actors, get as much variation of poses, looks, expressions and costumes as possible. We won't know until later which ones will be used for marketing - by which time it's too late to recapture assets.



Lead Staged Action Pose

S13



Comedy Leads Close-Up Pose

S14

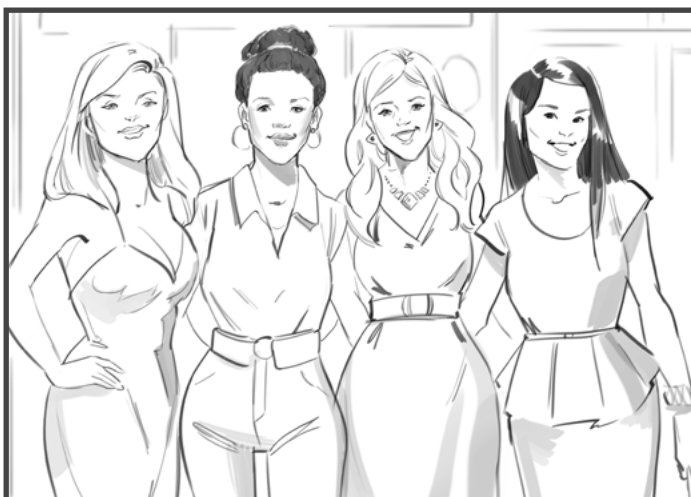


Comedy Leads Two Thirds

S15

## SCREEN GRABS...

'They can just use screen grabs' is the equivalent of 'We'll fix it in post'. Everyone's favorite one liner, but unfortunately easier said than done. Screen grabs are a last resort as they are often too grainy for key art and their landscape format makes them unsuitable for places like IMDB. Relying on screen grabs limits the conceptual exploration for key art which ultimately impacts the quality of your sales and marketing campaign.

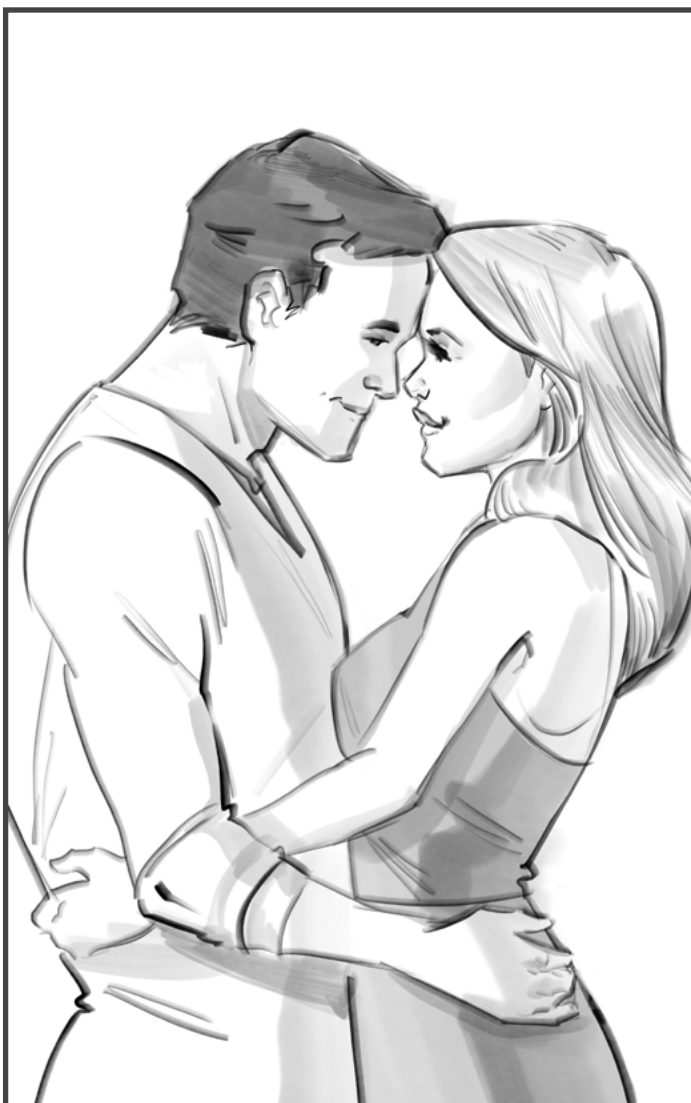


Female Leads Mid Shot

C16

## ***MORE MORE MORE***

Always take way more shots than necessary. Something as simple as an undetectable eye movement from your actor can be the difference between a usable and an unusable image for creating key art.



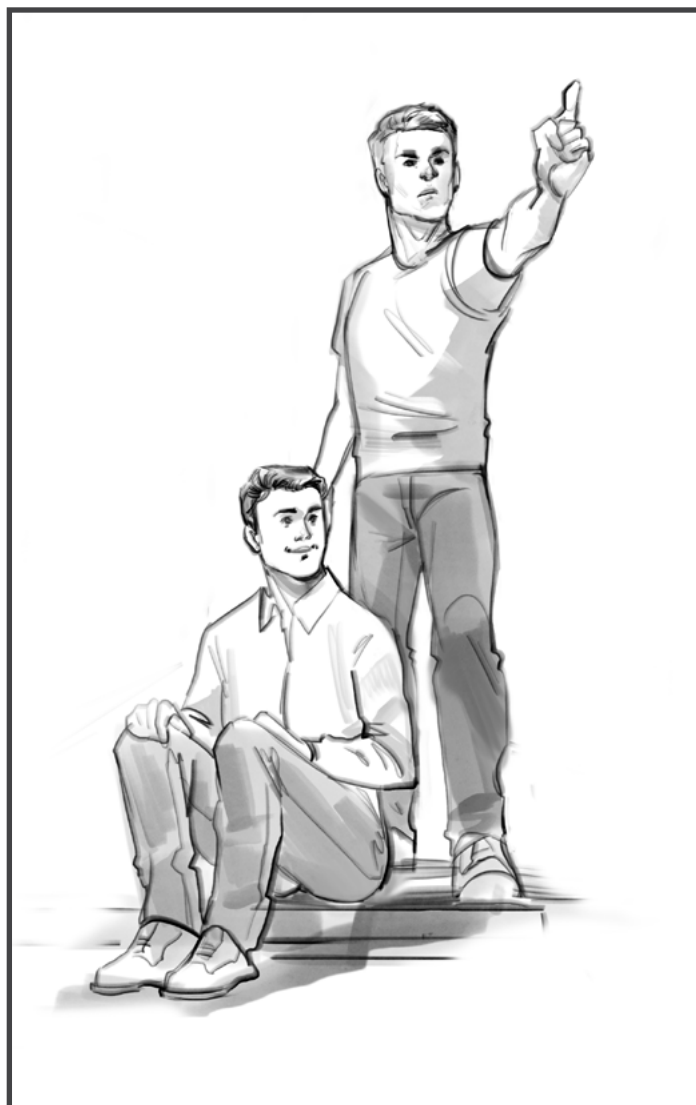
Romantic Leads Two Thirds

**S17**



Romantic Leads Full Body

**S18**



Comedy Leads Full Body

S19

## THE ENSEMBLE SHOT

Ideally your cast will be interacting together in the group shots to communicate story, tone and relationships. This is especially useful for comedy as catching the actors interacting in character creates natural moments that are impossible to digitally replicate.



Ensemble Full Body

S20



4

# ***ACTION /ADVENTURE***

***REFERENCE EXAMPLES***



Male Lead Epic Hero Pose With Gun

A1



Female Lead Mid Shot

A2



Male and Female Leads Mid Shot

A3

## AND...ACTION!

The best action movie stills communicate dynamism, movement and...action. Your movie may not have a bar fight or car chase like in this guide, but the takeaway here is to communicate a sense of dynamism and kinetic energy in your stills.



Male Leads Mid Fight Shot

**A4**



Male Lead Mid Shot

**A5**

## ***SET PIECES - \$\$\$***

Including set pieces will improve perception of production values to your audience. Get the set pieces in wide angle and from a few vantage points. If there is a large iconic building or set on location, get some cool shots of it, both with and without actors.



Male Lead "Run and Gun" Mid Shot

**A6**



Ensemble Cast Action Wide Shot

**A7**



Male and Female Leads Action Shot

**A8**



Male Lead Pensive Profile Mid Shot

**A09**



Ensemble Cast with Location Wide Shot

**A10**



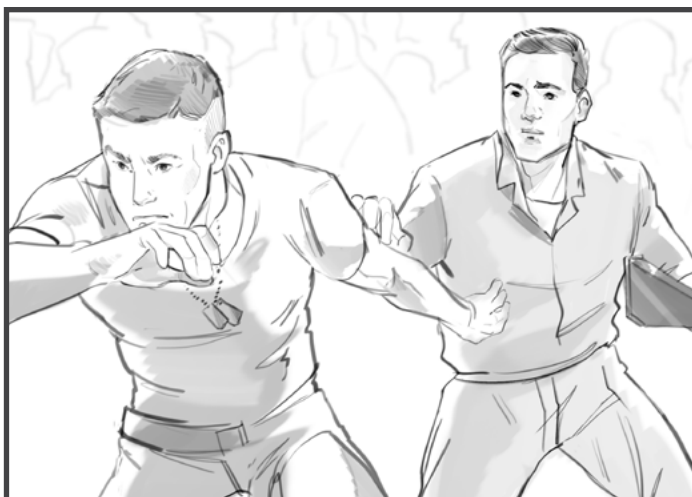
Female Lead Dramatic Close-Up

A11



Hero Chase Action Wide Shot

A12



Hero Chase Mid Shot

A13

## ***THIS IS A 'PRODUCTION ELEMENTS' FREE ZONE***

Avoid allowing cameras, lights or microphones to obstruct photos at all costs. If there are production elements that are difficult to crop from the frame, leave those shots on the cutting room floor.



Male Lead Pensive Mid Shot

A14

“  
IF YOU DON'T GIVE ME THE  
SHOTS I NEED, YOU'RE GOING TO  
SCREW UP MY CAMPAIGN!

PAUL WILAMOSKI  
THE WEINSTEIN COMPANY

”



Male and Female Lead Dynamic Action Shot

**A15**

## ***OFF WITH THEIR HEADS***

As a general rule, keep arms, heads and hands in the shots. For key art this is especially necessary. The photos can always be cropped later to tighten the frame. A missing arm can make the best image unusable.



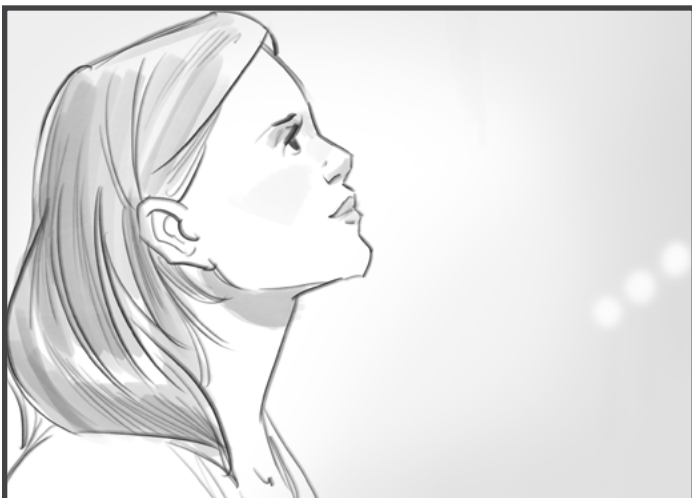
Male Lead Pointing Gun Off Camera Mid Shot

**A16**



Female Lead Fight Sequence

**A17**



Female Lead Close-Up

A18



Male Lead Mid Shot

A19



Female Lead Mid Shot

A20



Cast with Set Mid Shot

A21

## ALL ABOUT THOSE LEADS

In terms of what shots are most important, we want leads, leads and more leads. Shots with two people in the frame will ideally be your lead and supporting actors. A few shots focused on just the supporting characters are fine.

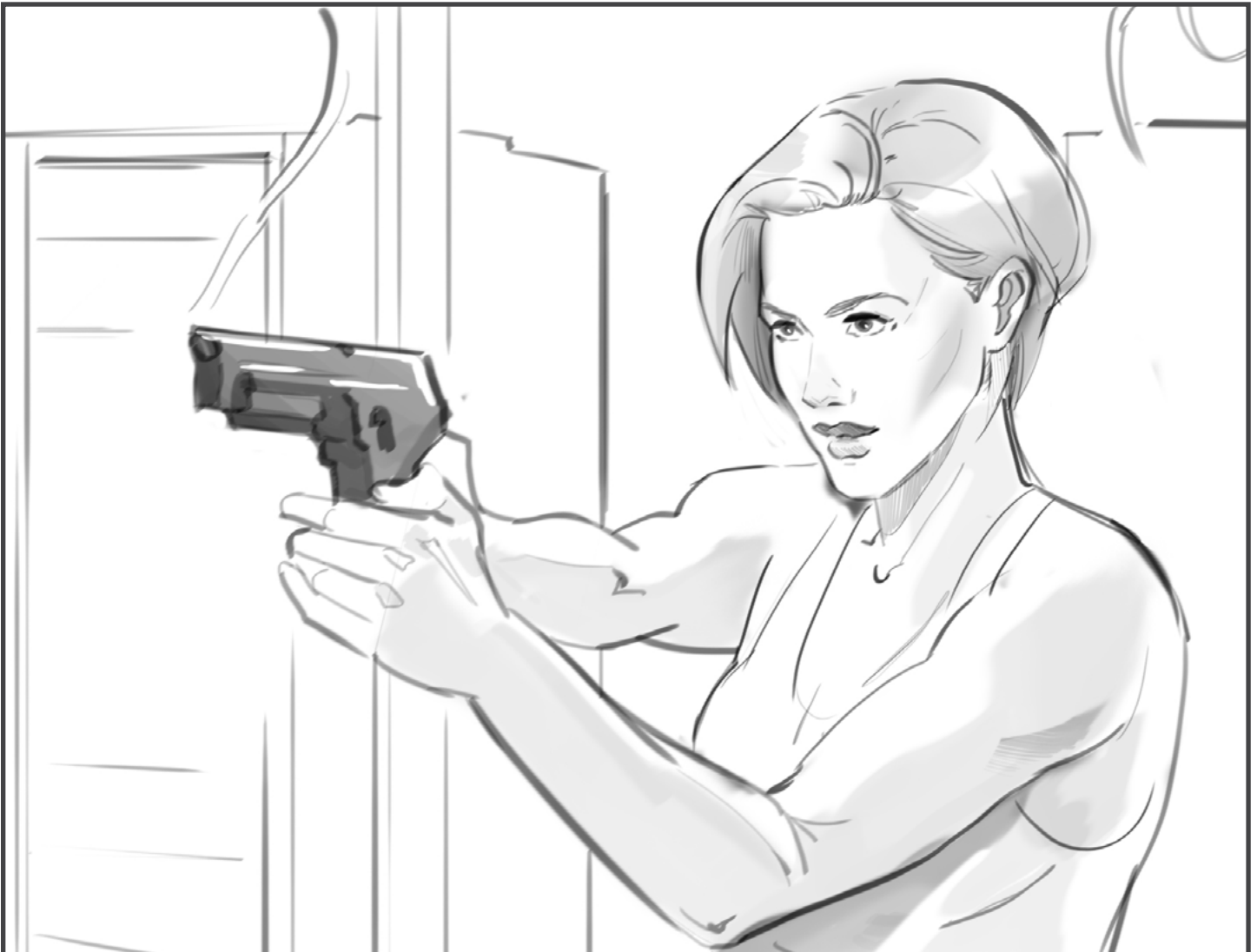
## ***SHOW THE ACTION PLEEZ***

Try to catch any stunts or intense moments that emphasize dynamism or movement. Too many head shots and portraits make the images look static and less exciting.



Male Lead Gun Pointing Off Camera Close-Up

**A22**



Female Lead Gun Pointing Off Camera Mid Shot

**A23**

5

# ***DRAMA***

***REFERENCE EXAMPLES***





Male Lead Pensive Mid Shot

D1



Male Lead Movement Mid Shot

D2

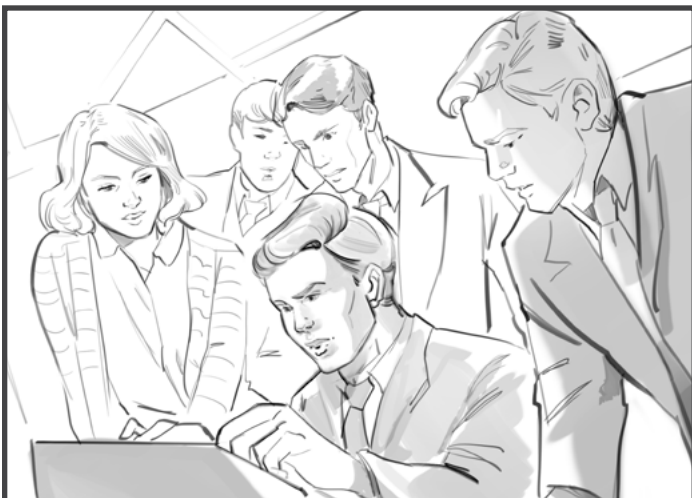


Cast Discussion Mid Shot

D3

## FEEL THE LURRRVE

Moments between characters that are intimate or emotional are high-value shots. These will be the ones you see on IMDB as they create an emotional connection with the your audience.



Cast Planning Mid Shot

D4

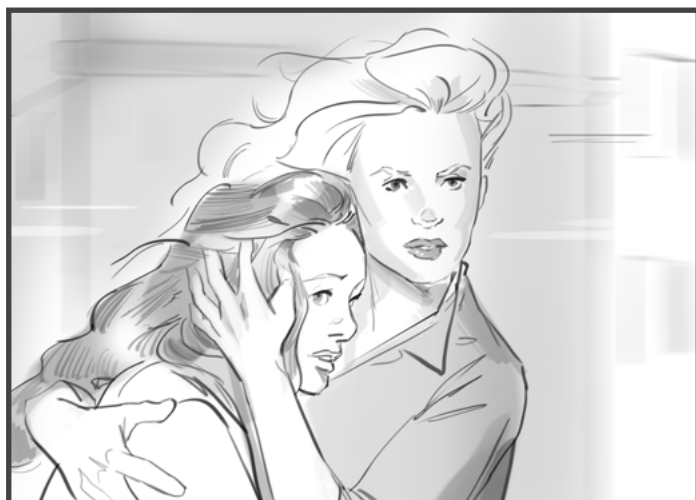
## ***CAPTURE THE MOOD***

Drama calls for a more varied approach as we are often looking for shots that capture emotion through composition, expression and lighting. Take a more lateral approach here to capture shots that convey emotion and mood.



Male Lead Argument Mid Shot

D5



Female Leads Embracing Mid Shot

D6



Male and Female Leads Consoling Mid Shot

**D7**



Male and Female Leads Driving Close-Up

**D8**



Main Cast Research Scene Mid Shot

**D9**



Male Leads Investigating Mid Shot

**D10**

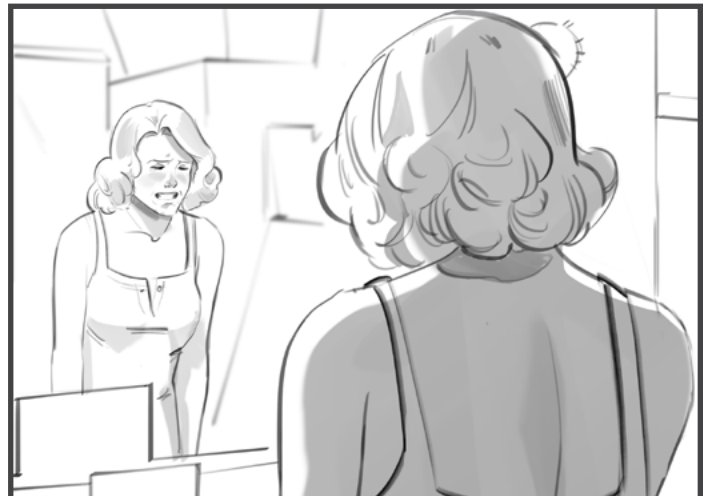


Male and Female Leads Walking Mid Shot

**D11**

## ***SHOW THE PAGEANTRY***

When there is a special setting (e.g. opera house), activity (e.g. ballet) or costume (e.g. period dress) get good coverage of those events. These show production values and make the film visually unique.



Lead Distressed Mid Shot

**D12**

**“ QUANTITY IS KEY.  
THE MORE COVERAGE WE HAVE,  
THE BETTER ”**

TIFFANY SHINN  
LAKESHORE ENTERTAINMENT



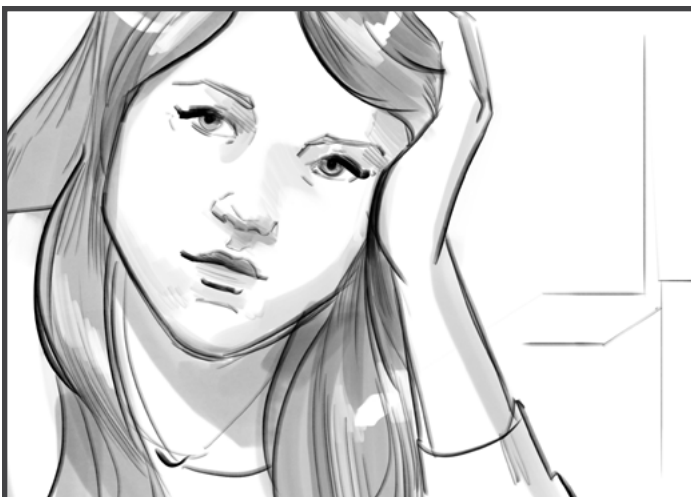
Male Lead Walking Wide Shot

D13



Male Lead Dramatic Close-Up

D14



Female Lead Dramatic Close-Up

D15

## ***I'M READY FOR MY CLOSE-UP***

Drama requires great Close-Ups more than any other genre as your audience wants to come on the emotional journey with the actors - so let's give them what they want. Extra points for intimate close-ups of main cast.

## ***AND THEN THERE WAS ONE***

Get as many individual character shots as possible, as separating people digitally after the fact can be difficult (and expensive). Something as simple as two characters leaning against each other can eliminate an otherwise perfect shot for your poster or require days of photoshop work to rebuild body parts.



6

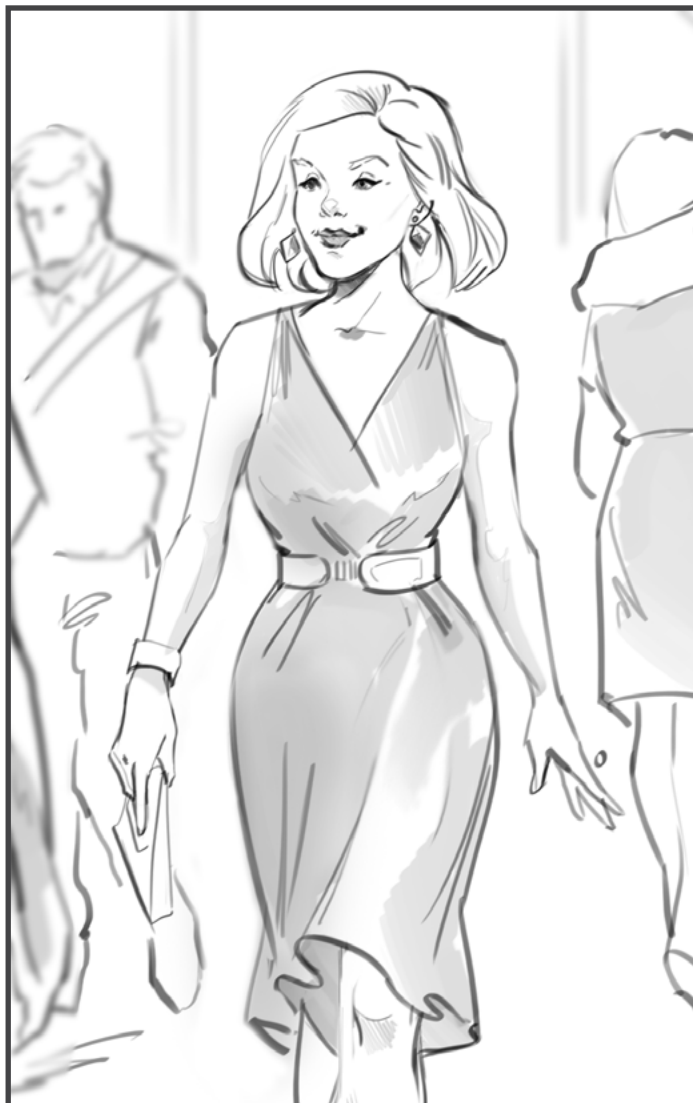
# ***COMEDY***

***REFERENCE EXAMPLES***



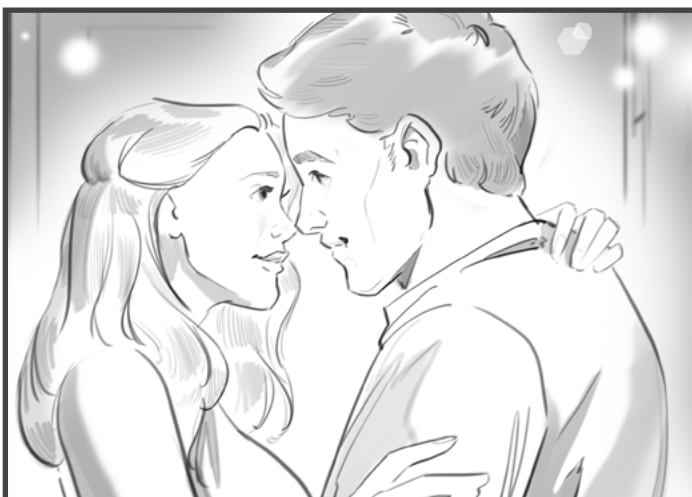
Female Lead Social Close-Up

C1



Female Lead Confident Walk Mid Shot

C2

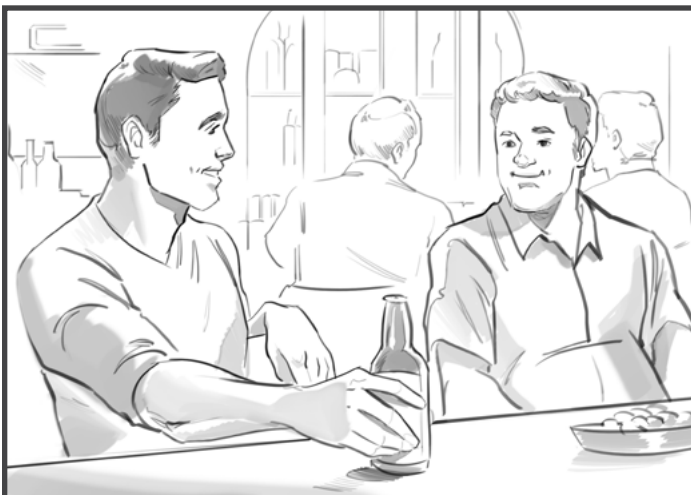


Male and Female Leads Romantic Mid Shot

C3

## ***BUDDY SLAPSTICK***

The funniest shots for comedy are the slapstick moments between central characters. A physical interaction between the characters is impossible to create artificially. Ensure there are moments where the characters are physically interacting with each other.



Male Leads Best Buddies Mid Shot

C4



Male Leads Buddies Interacting Mid Shot

C5



Male and Female Leads Dance Mid Shot

C6



Male Leads Buddy Interaction Mid Shot

C7

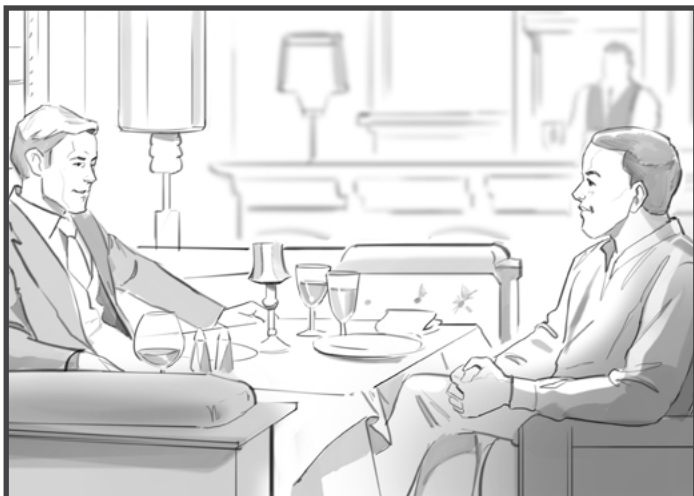


Ensemble Cast Joking Mid Shot

C8

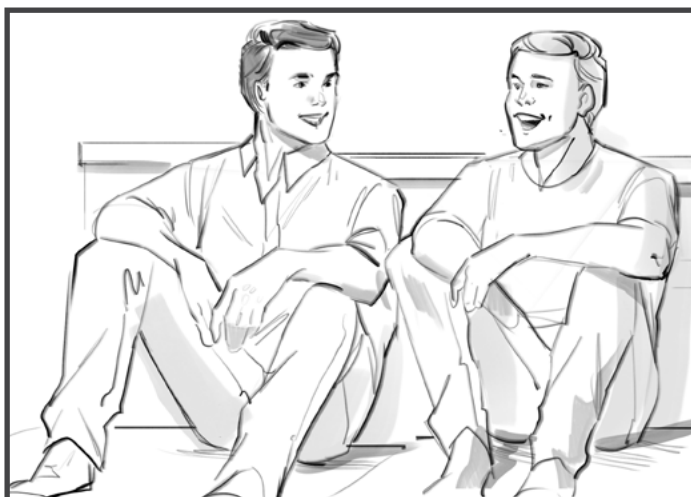
## GO BIG!

Characters mid-reaction are high value shots. The more expressive, the better. If they're shocked, laughing, crying, or have any big reactions - we want 'em!



Male Leads Conversation Mid Shot

C9



Leads Romantic Mid Shot

C10



Male and Female Leads Love Close-Up

C11



Male and Female Leads Clowning Mid Shot

C12



Male Leads Dancing Mid Shot

C13

## POSE FOR THE POSTER

Get the actors to pose in front of a white background for a mini special-shoot. This is especially important for comedy as we're normally relying on expressive faces and comedic tone for marketing.



Main Cast Shocked Mid Shot

C14



Male Leads Scared Comical Mid Shot

C15



Ensemble Scared Comical Wide Shot

C16

“

**YOU CAN'T GO BACK  
AND RECAPTURE WHAT  
HAPPENED ON SET**

BONNIE VOLAND  
IM GLOBAL

”

1

# ***HORROR /THRILLER***

***REFERENCE EXAMPLES***





Villain/Monster Full Body

H1



Female Lead Close-Up

H2



Huddled Family Mid Shot

H3

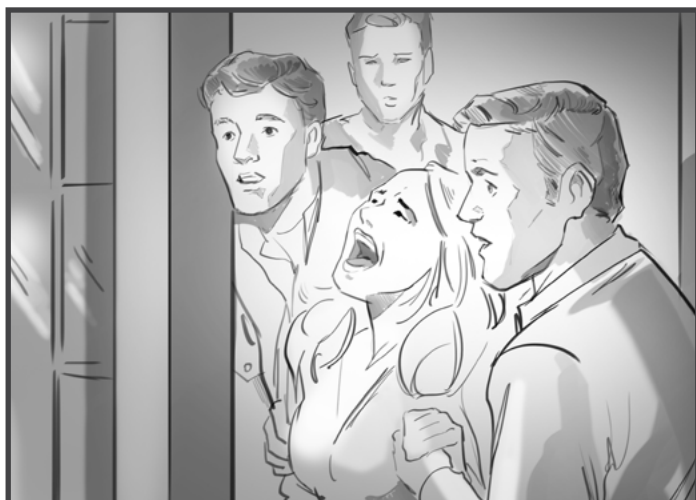
## SELLING THE SIZZLE

A small horror film without A-List cast will sell (or not sell) based on the artwork. So all you need to worry about is shooting for the key art - even if the shots aren't necessarily in line with the tone of the movie. The photography is equally important, if not more important, than the film itself.



Child/Monster Wide Shot

H4



Cast Possessed Friend Mid Shot

H5

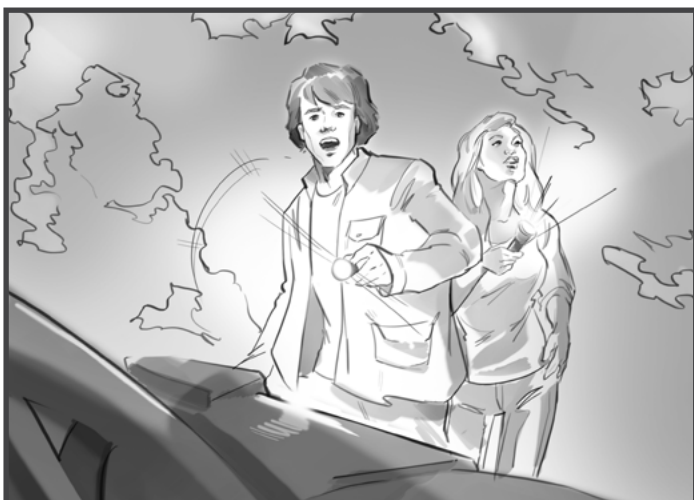
## ANOTHER HAUNTED HOUSE

Horror film posters are often conceptual rather than cast driven. So it's great to have a selection of wide shots of any creepy locations like the house, forest, cave, etc. to choose among when building the poster.



Male and Female Leads Ambush Mid Shot

H6



Male and Female Leads Investigation Mid Shot

H7



Ensemble Ritual Wide Shot

H8

## ***OOOOH, A SEANCE!***

You know the drill - there's often some type of ritual in many horror films. Like an exorcism, seance or possession. Get plenty of great shots of these events. Often they involve lots of characters and are the more exciting and visually spectacular moments in the film.



Scared Child Close-Up

**H9**



Scared Mother and Child Mid Shot

**H10**

**“**  
**SHOW THE ACTION, NOT**  
**JUST HEADS AND PORTRAITS**  
**”**

INC PAGILUCA  
RED GRANITE



Female Lead Investigation Mid Shot

H11

## THE SCARY MONSTER SHOT

If there's a creepy kid, monster or Chupacabra - we want it. Take some full body, mid and close-up shots. These are super handy for key art as the monster or bad guy is often the focus of horror key art.



Female Lead Investigation Close-Up

H12



Male Lead Suspicious Close-Up

H13



Male Lead Investigation Mid Shot

H14



Creepy Kid/Monster Full Body

H15

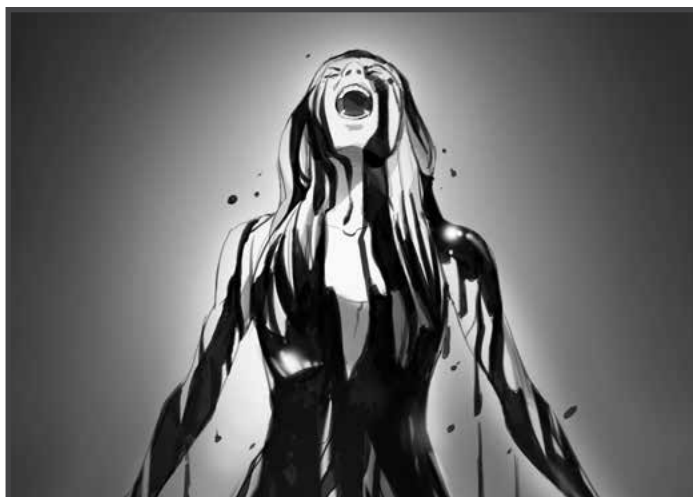


Haunted House Wide Shot

H16

## SCARE THE S#%T OUT OF THEM

We want plenty of scared people running, screaming, crying and/or frightened. These are the best shots for marketing as the audience can feel the fear and will start empathizing with the characters.



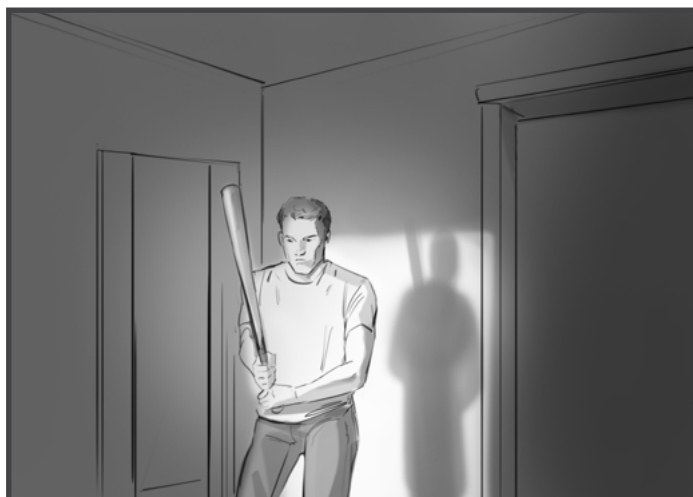
Female Lead Bloody Scream Mid Shot

H17



Female Lead Wielding Weapon Mid Shot

H18



Male Lead Wielding Weapon Mid Shot

H19

# ***IMAGE SELECTION***



# RAPID SELECTION SYSTEM

Here's where we separate the wheat from the chaff, with a typical 5-star pass photo selection system to enable fast sorting through large numbers of images.

- 1 First, load the photos into your photo-managing software (Lightroom, Adobe Bridge, Aperture etc).
- 2 Locate the panel that lets you grade each photo by star levels.
- 3 Preview your photos one-by-one in Quick View.

## THE KILL LIST

500 photos is generally the magic number to submit. Depending on personal preference or contractuals yours may be higher or lower. Either way, the final 500 is reserved for the best of the best. Any images that meet the following criteria are not part of our elite squad:

- ✗ Too overexposed
- ✗ Too underexposed
- ✗ Out of focus
- ✗ Actors with their backs to the camera
- ✗ Actors obstructed by crew
- ✗ Actors obstructed by equipment
- ✗ Actors clearly not in character (unless talking to the director)
- ✗ Overt nudity
- ✗ Actors partially clipped out of the frame
- ✗ Actors in awkward or unflattering poses
- ✗ Production elements in the shots blocking characters
- ✗ Posed shots of the crew
- ✗ Unnecessary people in the frame

## 1. TECHNICAL PASS

*Cull any shots that are clearly unusable due to technical reasons.*

- ★ **Star**  
Anything not on the The Kill List.
- ✗ **Don't Star**  
Anything on The Kill List.

## 2. BASIC CHARACTER PASS

*Set your filter to show photos with one star or above.*

- ★★ **Star**  
Only photos with good lighting, good expression and at least one lead cast member. Cast are clearly visible, well framed and in character.
- ✗ **Don't Star**  
Any photos where your actor is facing away from the camera, has a strange facial expression, unflattering pose or is out of character.

## 3. KEY ELEMENTS PASS

*Set your filter to show photos with two stars or above. Now we're at the business end of the scale.*

- ★★★ **Star**  
Any photos that capture key themes, relationships and locations. Most photos are medium to close-up shots of your main cast. Include some great scenery shots too.
- ✗ **Don't Star**  
Any mediocre photos that aren't dynamic or interesting. If there are duplicate photos, pick the ones with the best pose and expression.

## 4. GOLD STAR PASS

*Set your filter to three stars and above. Now we are looking only for the best.*

- ★★★★ **Star**  
Any photos that emphasize the relationships between your main characters. Look for variety of scene coverage and appealing elements based on your genre.
- ✗ **Don't Star**  
Anything that doesn't represent your film, cast and unit photographer in the best light possible. Four stars is only for the best of the best.

# KNOW SOMEONE WHO NEEDS THIS? SHARE IT **DSF.LA/UPG**

Ever have complaints about the quality of unit photography you receive?

We made this booklet to fix a problem that you told us about.

The lack of standardized processes for capturing unit photography based on strategic marketing objectives causes significant issues for marketing, PR and creative.

Streamlining the process increases the standardization across the board of the unit photography that you're going to receive. Therefore improving the end quality of the marketing materials you're able to create.

By sharing this booklet you are helping to solve an industry wide problem that has existed since movies began.

## This is a conversation.

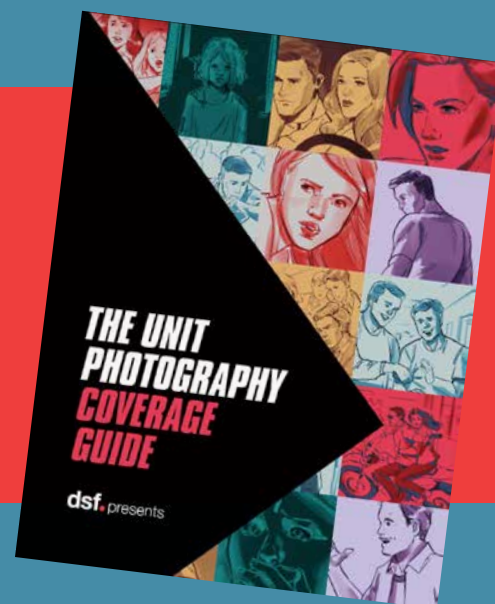
We've written this to start a conversation around how to increase the standardization of unit photography.

If you are a unit photographer, producer or marketing executive and notice something we missed, or have valuable information that could be added to the next edition, we would love to hear from you. Make sure to email [james@dsf.la](mailto:james@dsf.la)

## Share the love.

To get a digital PDF copy or order more free physical copies go to:

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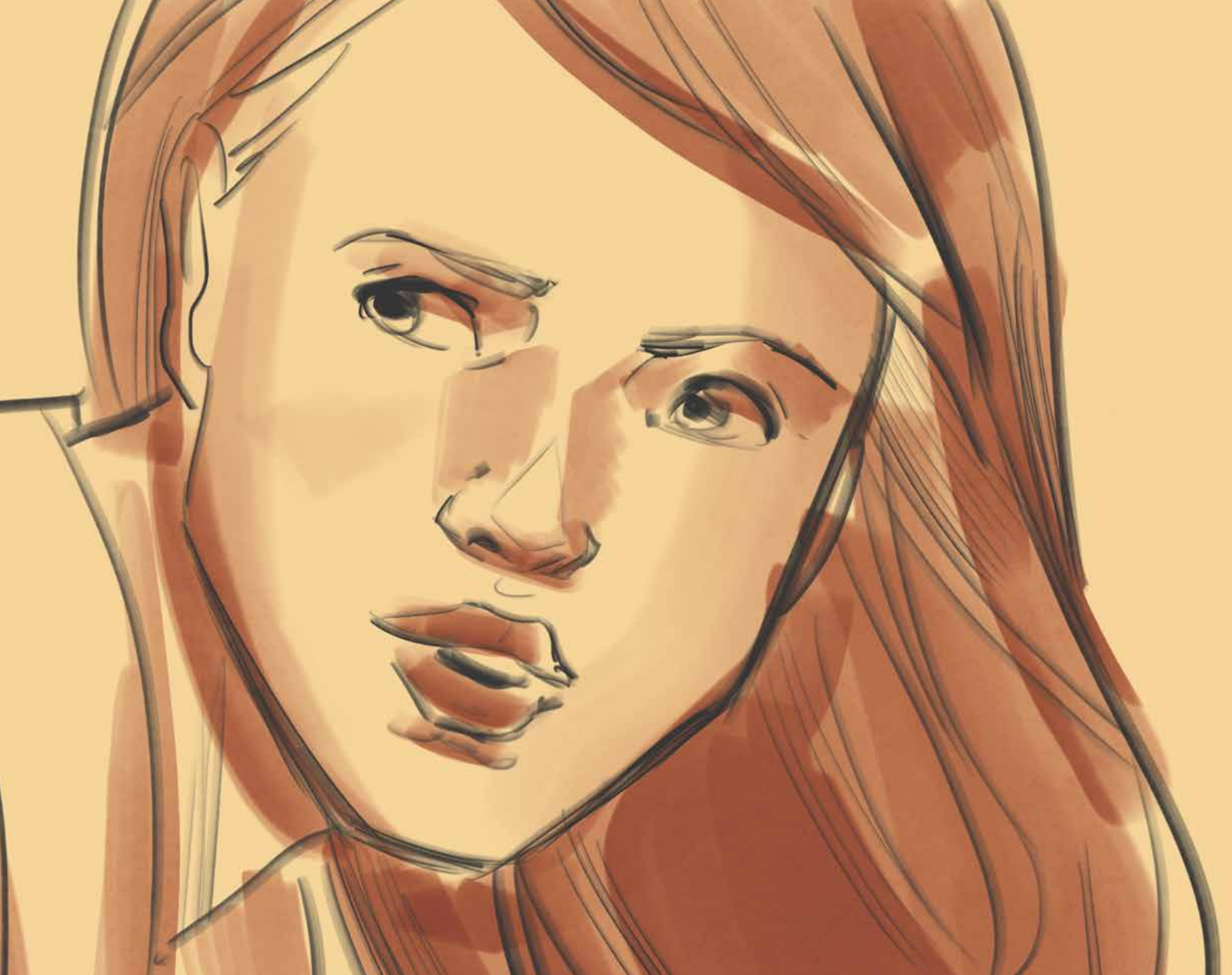
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All project enquiries can be directed to [chris@dsf.la](mailto:chris@dsf.la)  
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