

Cinematography: Capturing Landscapes

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Everyone remembers a great piece of landscape cinematography. The sweeping vistas fill us with hope, fear or despair depending on the effect that the director is trying to make. But, how do you create such memorable scenes. Learn more about the best techniques here.

Classic Cinematography

Good cinematography is memorable because of its intrinsic beauty. You remember it because it moves you, disturbs you in some way or just transports you to another place. But, there are certain elements that are required to create great, memorable cinematography.

One of the most classic examples of great landscape photography came from an unlikely, but not altogether surprising source: Hitchcock. In *Vertigo*, Jimmy Stewart's and Kim Novack's characters visit the Big Basin Redwoods State Park in California. The scene is beautifully shot with the sun shining through the trees.

But, that's not really the sun creating this effect. To make the lighting just perfect, special lights had to be brought in to simulate this effect. The trees themselves blotted out all the sunlight. So, to create a great cinematographic effect sometimes you need to assist Mother Nature to make the shot look right. You'll love how amazing landscapes look on the screen and what it adds to your film.

Landscape Cinematography Overview

This type of cinematography involves more than just stock footage. It needs to match the action perfectly. You can film beautiful outside scenes, but if they don't match your action, they just look out of place. Just look at the old black and white movies where the stock footage of animals or sweeping vistas do not exactly match where the actors are or what they are doing.

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Your cinematography needs to meld seamlessly into your action. Actors can be taught to react to the cinematography. Nowadays, blue or green screen helps with this process as they can [easily](#) react to something that is not there, and this can be edited into the overall film.

When trying to capture great landscapes, a good camcorder and a great stabilizing system are necessary. The two stabilizing systems that are most used are the Tiffen

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Steadicam and Panavision's Panaglide. These systems [help](#) steady the camcorder and help the cameraman focus more exclusively on

the scene or action. But these systems are not for the faint of budget, they start at around \$700. You can make your own [DIY jib crane](#). While these won't give you the advanced movements of the paid for camcorder stabilizers, you'll still be able to keep your camera steady as you raise or lower it, or tilt or pan.

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Camera Elements

Cinematography can be broken down into six main camera elements:

- Field of View
- Transitions
- Camera Angle
- Camera Moves
- Zooming In and Out
- Depth of Field

Field of view is the cone of what can be seen from the camera angle. The different shots that make of FOV are extreme long shot, long shot, medium shot, close-up and extreme close-up. For this genre of cinematography, you will most likely be using extreme long shot. This shot allows you to showcase landscape scenes while the characters appear very small.

A transition does what it says it does; it connects one shot with the another. You can use different types of cuts. For example, a straight cut basically swiftly moves you between one scene and the next while fade causes your scene to move from one color to a next.

When creating landscape photography, your camera angle should be at eye level. This makes your audience feel like they are actually there and

observing the scene. If your camera angle is too high, it could cause your audience to become uncomfortable.

As far as camera movement goes, you should stick with panning. This is where you gently survey your scene with your camcorder. This shouldn't be jerky or too fast. This could cause your audience to become sick.

Constantly zooming in and out should be avoided as well no matter what type of film that you are creating. It has a dizzying effect on everyone who is watching your film.

The depth of field is the section of a shot that is in focus. When shooting landscapes, you want a large DOF. You can determine DOF by judging the distance to your subject (i.e. mountain), the focal length (how well your lens focuses on or disperses light) of your camera lens and the relative aperture (where light is admitted into your camera).

While these hints will help you take amazing cinematography, if you are serious about the craft, it may do well to take a few classes. It will help you sharpen your skills and give you more practice into perfecting your craft.

Practice any time that you get the chance. Even if you think you've gotten good at capturing great landscape cinematography, practice will make you even better. Plus, you'll love getting out there and playing around with your equipment. I guarantee it.

References

- [Panavision](#)
- Image credit: [Steadicam](#)
- [Steadicam](#)

