SHOT LISTER'S ULTIMATE GUIDE TO BUILDING A GREAT SHOT LIST

VOLUME 1

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What Is a Shot List?

Simply put, a shot list is a list of shots that you want to shoot in a scene. But a great shot list is a lot more than that. When done right, it can become the essential document that you and your team will use to decide what to shoot and when. A tool to plan what needs to be prepared and in what order. And when done correctly, a great shot list shows the crew you are prepared and helps gain their confidence.

This document will teach you everything you need to know to create a great shot list.

What's Important?

Before you can write a shot list, study the scene in your script. Pay attention to what makes this scene important, ask yourself why is this scene in the movie, what is the scene communicating to the audience?

Equally important is identifying what isn't important in the scene, the best directors know what matters, and what doesn't. Memorize that for every scene. Every decision that follows is based on what you decide at this step.

Take Notes

Start writing notes at this stage. In the comfort of prep you have all the time you need to reflect and decide what is important. In the heat of the moment on set, having concise notes to return to when everyone is panicking will be very valuable. The best place to write notes is on the script itself, you will always have the script handy while shooting, and it's helpful to have your thoughts on the same page.

Scriptation is the best app for annotating scripts. Its key feature is that you can transfer your notes to each new draft without having to rewrite everything. This can save a huge amount of time.

Download it here.

Visualize

Now that you know what is important and you've annotated your script, you need to start visualizing the scene. Read the script and watch the images in your head. What does it feel like? What does the key moment look like? Is the camera moving or locked off? Is the lighting bright or dark? Don't worry about details you can't figure out, just write down the key images you want to achieve. These will be your guideposts.

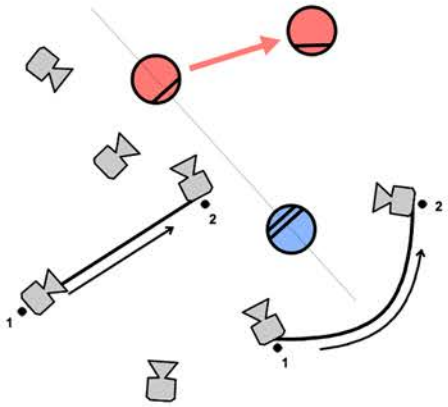
Blocking

Now that you've visualized the scene in your head, you need to start getting specific about where the actors are going to stand, and where and how they will move through the scene. Blocking can be very simple, or it can be very intricate and complex. It's your job to ask yourself how can I make this scene special just by where the characters are in the room and how they move through the scene. Don't worry too much about the camera yet, but you may naturally start thinking of where the camera moves as well. Write that down.

Think about what else is in the room. What set dressing, props, or characters do you want to reveal to the audience through the movement of characters or the camera? Also consider how your scene is lit. Most scenes are shot into the source of light, for example shooting towards a window or the sun. So you'll probably want to block the characters between the light and camera, or next to a window.

Overheads

When thinking about blocking it is very helpful to illustrate the character's movement in an overhead. This is like a blueprint of the scene and will become very handy as you continue to get more and more detailed. Overheads are also very helpful for crew members to visualize the blocking and plan ahead for where equipment, lights and cameras will need to go.

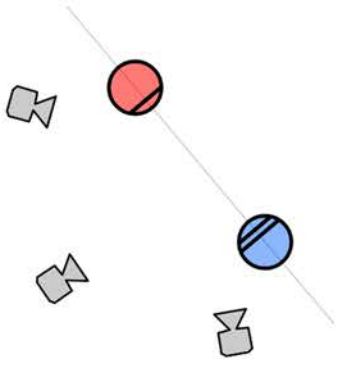


Overheads do not need to be very detailed. Start with a rough outline of the location with rough marks for the characters, and the path that they move through the scene. Once you start shot listing, it will also be helpful to mark all the camera positions on the overhead as you work.

Shot Designer is the best app for building overheads. It allows you to quickly plop down cameras and characters on your tablet or computer and move them around while you figure out your scene. Download it here.

Axis of Symmetry

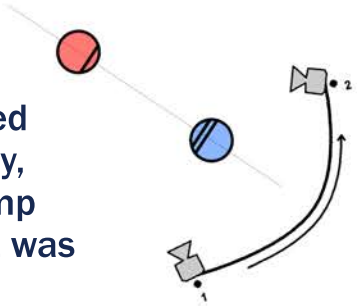
If you have more than one character in the scene you'll need to think about "The Line" or the "Axis of Symmetry". This is an imaginary line that you can draw down the middle of your scene and all your camera angles will likely exist on one side of that line.



In the most simple example, imagine two characters facing each other. The line would be drawn from one belly button to the other, and no matter where they move in the scene, the line will continue to be drawn between them. If you keep all the cameras on one side of the line then when you edit all the shots together, the characters will always appear to be looking at each other.

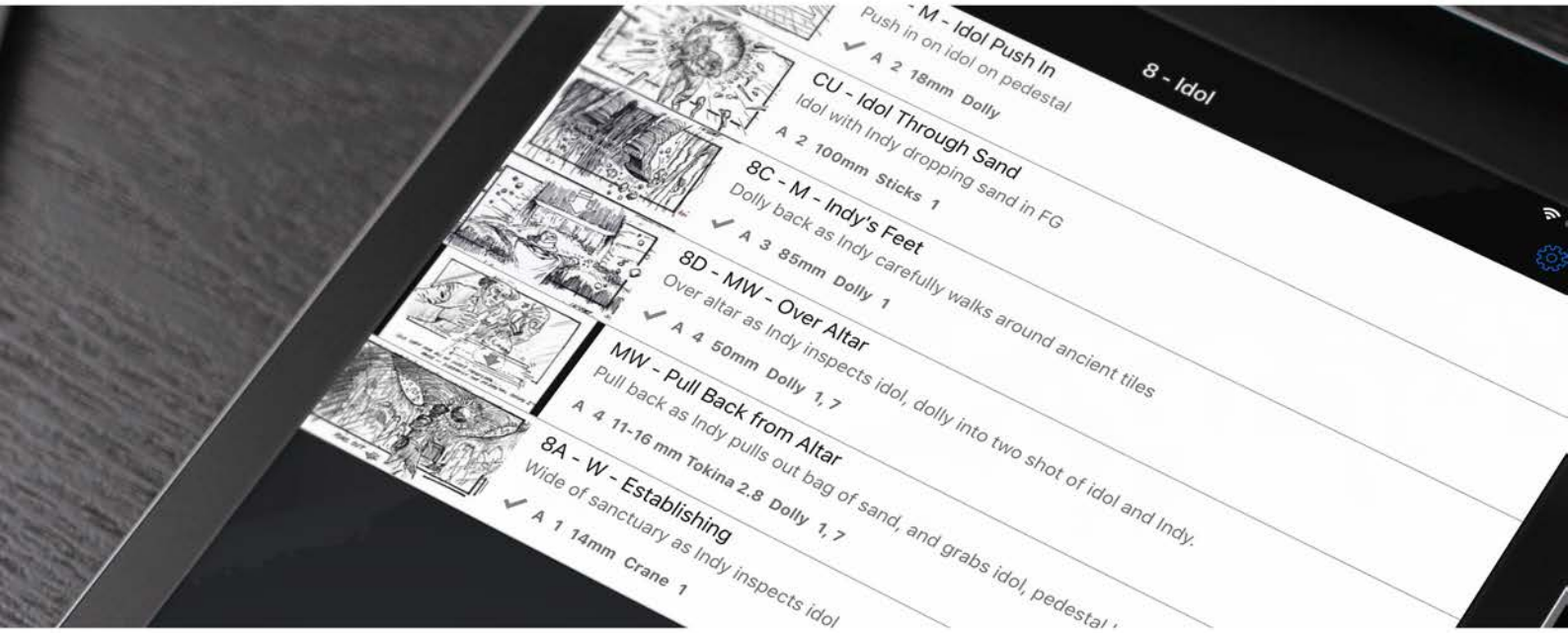
If you put a shot on the "other side of the line" you can end up with an edit where both characters are looking the same way and it won't look like they are looking at each other. This starts to get more and more complex as you add characters. If you are unfamiliar with this concept, do some research online. It is very simple but as scenes grow in complexity, it can become challenging to keep track of the line.

Breaking the Line



Like all rules, the Axis of Symmetry is meant to be mastered and then broken. The best directors use the axis to tell story, and they "break the line" to help tell the story. You can "jump the axis" to suddenly reveal the other side of the room that was previously unseen for dramatic effect.

Also, you may encounter times that you need a scene to start on one side of a line and transition to the other side for the rest of the scene, this is called "Crossing the Line". To achieve this you'll want to design a camera move that starts on one side of the line, then moves around the characters to the other side of the line without cutting. The only downside to this is you'll likely need to cover your characters from both side of the axis, which doubles your shot count.



List Shots

OK! You now know what is important about this scene, you've visualized it and figured out where the characters are going to go so you can start writing down shots. Don't worry about the schedule yet, just write down all the angles and shots you think you'll need to tell the story. A scene can have one shot, or hundreds of shots, it all depends on what you want the audience to see and feel.

Go through the script and read each sentence or line. Think about where the camera should go to achieve that line best. Consider the placement of the camera and the size of the frame. Is it far away or close up? Is it a wide lens or a on a long lens? Is the camera moving or is it locked off? Can you see all the characters or just one?

Designing shots is truly a creative process. In general it's good to have a wide shot that shows all the blocking, and close ups of each character and their dialogue. Write down the obvious shots, then start thinking of shots that could only be done in this project. Think back to what is most important in the scene and how you will show that with just the camera.

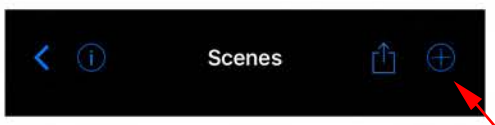
When designing shots, be clear as to whose perspective you're establishing in the scene. Whose perspective or point of view (POV) is this scene coming from? How can you communicate that just by the choice of the shots. If it's a child, maybe the shots are low to the ground looking up. If it's someone who is lonely, maybe it's a wide angle to show all the empty space around them.

Shot Lister

Shot Lister is the best app for building a shot list. You can download it for your Mac, or for iOS or Android here: http://www.shotlister.com After opening the app, create a project by either clicking on New Project in the Quick Start Window on your Mac or, if you're on mobile, by touching the + Icon at the top of the screen on the Home Projects List page.

Next open your new project and create a scene by clicking the + Icon. This is the same for both the Mac and mobile.

Open the scene and add shots by again clicking the + Icon on both Mac or mobile.



Give each shot a nickname, description, and how the camera moves through the scene. Be brief and easily understood in your descriptions - when your crew is under the gun on set, you'll be thankful that your descriptions are short, precise and easily understood.

Customize

Shot Lister allows you to customize all the Shot Categories for your project. Click the Gear Icon in the top right to open the Shot Category window. You can turn on and off categories you think will be helpful to track. You can also create your own custom category to track whatever is specific to your project using the User Category.

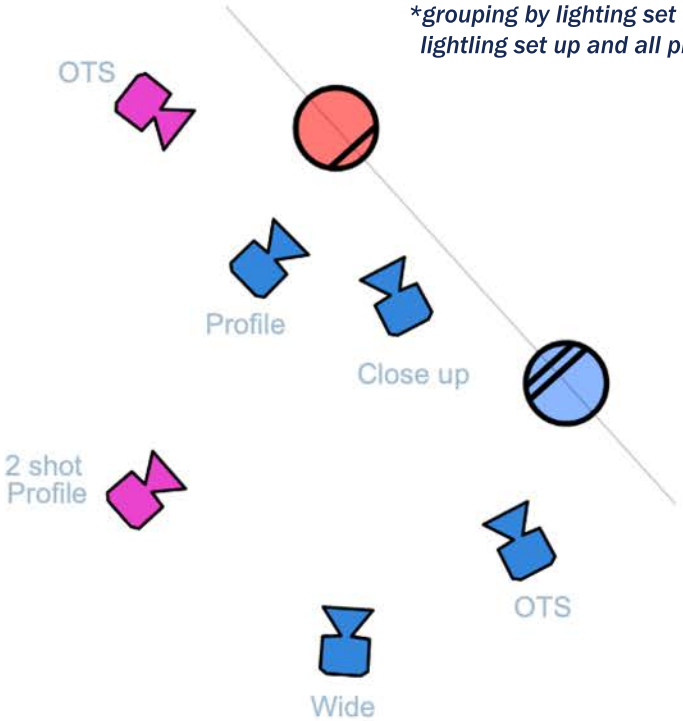
Grouping by Lighting Set Ups

Now that you've filled out all your shots, it's time to start grouping them together and sorting their order. This will help you be the most efficient you can possibly be on set which will result in more shooting time. The first way to group shots is to consider your lighting setups. If you don't have much experience with lighting, discuss grouping your shots with your Cinematographer.

In most cases, your cinematographer is going to place lights in the set to light one direction. This gear will be outside of where the cameras are looking and each time you move to a new angle, the lighting gear needs to move as well. This costs time. To minimize how many times all the lighting gear needs to be moved, the general rule of thumb is to "shoot out one side" of a scene, then "turn around" and shoot the other side.

So when sorting your shots, group together all the angles that look the same way. You can use the Setup field in Shot Lister to help track this. Give a number to represent each lighting direction and move all those shots together.

**grouping by lighting set up - all blue cameras is one lightling set up and all pink cameras is anther set up.*

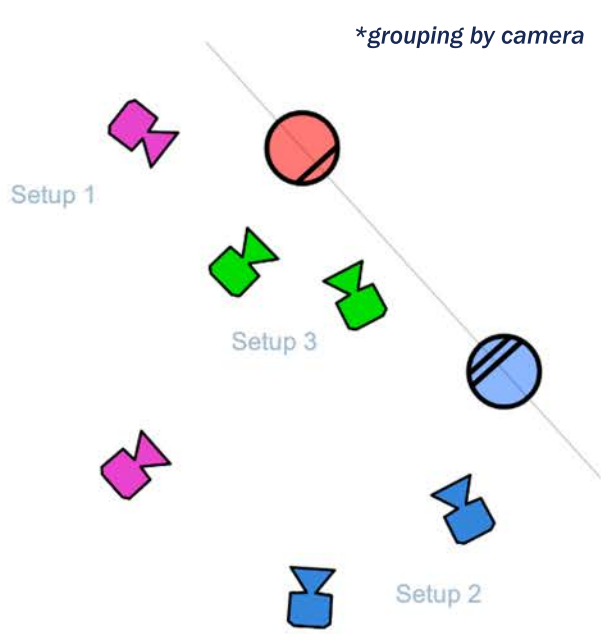


Grouping Multiple Cameras

The second thing to consider when grouping shots is shooting with multiple cameras. You want to group cameras together that are shooting in the same direction. That way they won't get in each other's way and the cinematographer doesn't have to light two directions at once.

Placing all your angles in your overhead can be a great way to quickly see which angles can be shot at the same time. Make sure that they won't move into each other's frames and that there is enough room for both of them to operate.

**grouping by camera*



Inside Shot Lister you can indicate which angles will be shot at the same time by "linking" shots. Move the shots so that they are next to each other in the shot list, select the first one and then select "Link with Next". You will see that the line separating them disappears and that if you move one of the shots, the others linked to it will follow. You can link as many shots together as you want.

Also it can be helpful to use the Camera category to indicate each camera by letter. Do this by opening your shot and selecting the letter under Shot Settings.

Grouping by Gear

The last thing to consider when grouping shots is the gear you will be using. It takes time to set up special gear or to remove it, so generally you want to shoot out the specialized gear together. For example if you put a camera on a steadicam, you will want to stay on the steadicam until you have done all the steadicam shots.

In Shot Lister you can mark gear using the Gear Category. You can customize the list with all the specific gear that is in your package.

Prioritize

Now it's time to prioritize. You don't have to cut shots at this point, but mark which shots are your “must haves” and which ones are optional. Chances are you are going to be running out of time and it's very helpful to identify ahead of time what are the most important shots to tell your story. That way when you're under the gun, you don't run out of time for what matters most.

In Shot Lister you can mark priority in a few ways. One is to use the Flag Category which adds a star next to your shots. You can either star your important shot or flag the ones you need to drop. Another way is to use the Color Category to color code your shots based on priority.

Scheduling

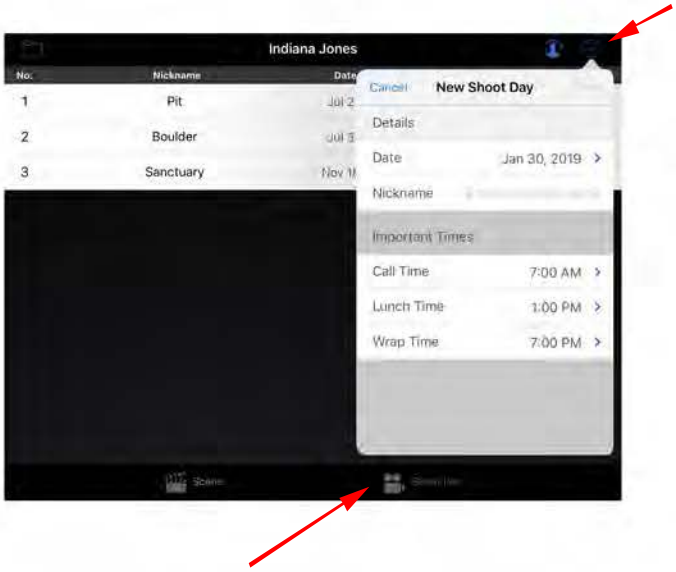
Congrats, you've built a great shot list for your scene, repeat these steps for every scene in your project and you'll be super prepared and ready to shoot your film. BUT you're only half done. The secret super power of Shot Lister is its ability to make a shooting schedule from your shot list.

This is where you mature from someone who can make a shot lists, to a Shot Lister. Ok that was terrible... apologies, but seriously this next part is really cool.

Create a Shoot Day

In Shot Lister click the tab called Shoot Day. This is the section that lists all the Shoot Days in your production. Likely your A.D. has already built a schedule or "one liner" that lists what scenes are going to be shot on what days. Have that handy.

Create a Shoot Day by clicking the + icon in the top right. Enter in the date, the nickname, such as Day 1, the Call Time, Lunch Time and Wrap Time.



Add Scenes

Open your Shoot Day and add scenes by clicking + Icon. They will appear in script order. The first step is to sort the scenes by the order you are going to shoot them. Click the "Stripboard" icon on the top right.

This shows you all the scenes without the shots, grab the hamburger icon ≡ and sort the scenes into the shooting order. Click done and return to your shot list.

Estimate Time

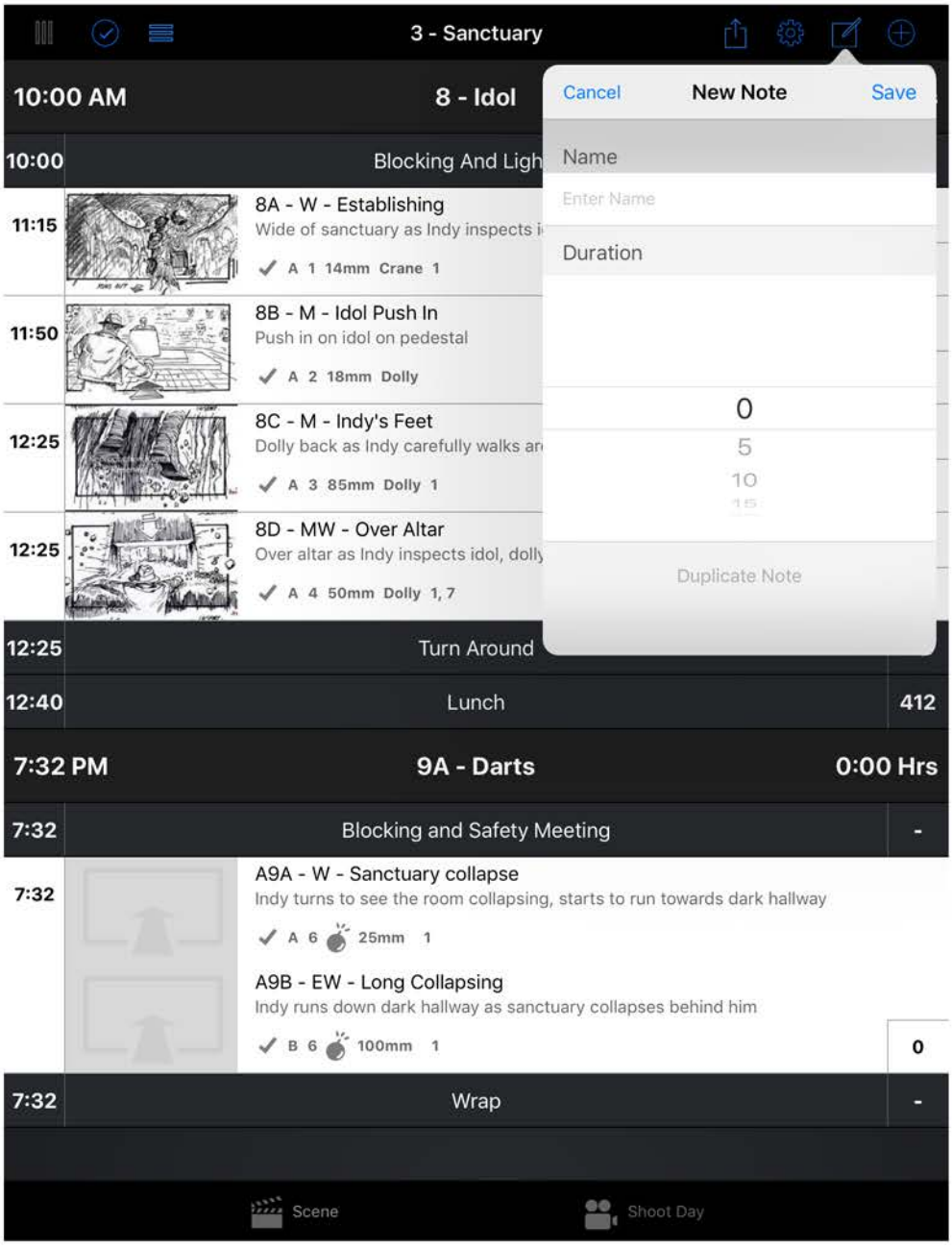
You will notice that there is a new category on the right side of your Shot List called Time. This is where you estimate how long each shot, or group of shots, is going to take. This is only an estimate and the more you shoot the better you will get at estimating. In general the first shot is going to take a lot longer to set up than the last one.

Pay attention to your lighting setups. Each shot that requires a new lighting setup will take a lot longer than a close up with the same lighting. Also consider the complexity of what is being filmed. Blowing up a house is going to take a lot longer than an insert of someone pressing the red button.

Add Notes

In Shot Lister you can select the Note icon to add notes to your shot list. These can be used for a wide variety of things, and if you want, Notes can have time associated with them. You can add a note for "Set up" at the beginning of the day, or one for "Lunch" or as just a reminder of something you need to do, like "Start building camera crane".

Once created, Notes will appear at the bottom of your Shoot Day, click and drag them up to the place you want them to appear.



Duplicating

A quick tip when you are building a Shoot Day is to use the "Duplicate" function on shots and notes. This will quickly create a new note or shot right next to the one you are working on. This saves you from having to go back to Scene Mode to create new shots, or having to scroll to the bottom of the shot list for new notes.

Prioritizing

So after you estimate how long all your shots and notes are going to take, you're probably freaking out that your day is impossibly long. Shot Lister shows the available time by calculating the duration between Call time and Wrap time in the Shoot Day settings. It will glow red when you go over. This is just a guide, but now is when things get real.

All those shots you marked as optional, either delete them or set their time to "0" so they are still in the shot list, but not taking up any time. If you're ahead of schedule on shoot day, you will still have them in your shot list to remind you.

Another smart thing is to put your most important scenes and shots early in the Shoot Day, that way you won't be running out of time on the most important shots. Insert shots are often the easiest to shoot and don't require a lot of crew or equipment, put them at the end of your day. They will take four times longer to shoot at the beginning of your day when everyone is being precious and artistic.

Collaborate

The shooting schedule is most powerful when shared with your crew. Sit down with your Cinematographer and AD and go over the shots you want to get. Discuss how realistic it is. Listen to their concerns and ideas and reflect that by refining the shooting schedule together. Find out from your department heads what is going to be the biggest delays on set ahead of time and plan around them. If it's going to take two hours for a giant bouncy castle to inflate, put two hours of shots before that. If your team can agree on a plan that satisfies both the creative vision and logistical reality ahead of time, you will have a great chance of shooting something special.

You can share your shot list out of Shot Lister in several ways. You can export a .pdf, shl, or csv file by clicking the Export icon. Then select whether you want to send your file via Dropbox or Email.

You can also share your shot list using Crew Sync, which allows your crew to keep up to date with the shot list as it changes on their own personal devices. You don't need to be a Shot Lister Pro subscriber to receive “view only” projects, you only need to subscribe in order to publish them.

Live Mode

Game day! It's time to shoot. Shot Lister transforms into "Live mode". The app will enter Live Mode as soon as you pass your Shoot Day call time. At that point the app will start counting down the estimate of your first shot or note.

You will see two clocks appear in the top of the app. One is the Shot Clock, and one is the Wrap Clock.

Wrap Clock

The Wrap Clock tells you how far ahead or behind you are right now. The app adds up all your remaining estimated work and tells you how over or under you are from the wrap time. So if you have an hour of work left, and wrap time is in half an hour, it will say Wrap T+30. Meaning you are 30 mins over. Everytime you complete a shot, delete a shot or revise an estimate, the clock will update.

Shot Clock

The Shot Clock tells you how far ahead or behind you will be if you complete the current shot right now. So if you were 10 minutes behind schedule the Wrap Clock would say T+10, if you begin a shot that was estimated for 30 minutes, the Shot Clock would start at T-20. That means you will be 20 minutes ahead of schedule if you complete this shot right now. It's a handy tool when deciding if you should move on or not.

Changing the Plan

During your shoot day the plan will change. That's why Shot Lister exists. You can change the order of shots, delete shots or combine shots as you go. If you get significantly behind schedule, just remember what we started with. What is the most important thing in this scene? You wrote that on your script and you've marked the shots in your shot list. Concentrate on getting what's most important and you'll be fine.

For more helpful hints on using Shot Lister, visit our FAQ: http://www.shotlister.com/faq.html which are all based on user questions.

Good luck and Happy Shot Listing.

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