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HANDOUT

MCD501

TV Direction

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MCD501

TV Direction

The Art and Craft of Television Direction — Study Handout

This handout covers MCD501 TV Direction: the director's role in television — from script to screen — including visualization, working with cameras, actors and crew, studio and field production, and the grammar of the television image. Pakistan's television tradition (PTV classics to modern private channels) is used for examples.

Think like a director in exams: every question asks what YOU would do — justify choices with the principles in each unit (motivation, clarity, pacing, coverage).

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Unit 1: The Director's Role in Television

Lectures 1–4

Learning Objectives

- Define direction and the TV director's responsibilities
- Distinguish the director from the producer
- Explain the director's preparation: script analysis
- Describe qualities of an effective director

What a Director Does

The director is the **creative authority** on a production: interpreting the script, visualizing it as images and sound, guiding actors' performances, deciding camera coverage and editing rhythm, and unifying every department's work into one coherent program. In television the director often works faster and with fewer resources than in film — decisiveness is a professional requirement, not a personality trait.

Director vs Producer

Producer — logistics, budget, schedule, hiring, the business side; owns the production.

Director — creative execution; owns the screen result.

- In Pakistani TV the roles often overlap (producer-directors), but the functions stay distinct — exam answers should separate them even when one person does both.

Script Analysis

Preparation steps: 1) read for **story and theme** (what is it really about?), 2) break into **beats and objectives** (what does each character want in each scene?), 3) identify **turning points and climax**, 4) note **visual opportunities** (what must be SEEN, not said), 5) mark **practical demands** (locations, cast size, effects, night shoots). A director who hasn't analyzed the script directs traffic, not drama.

- **Director's qualities:** visual imagination, leadership under pressure, communication clarity, decisiveness, technical literacy, empathy with actors, and stamina.

Case: a director arrives on set not knowing the script's climax. Consequences: wrong emphasis in coverage (close-ups on trivia, wide shots on the emotional peak), actors given contradictory motivations, wasted shoot hours. The exam moral: preparation is direction; everything else is reaction.

Unit Summary

- Director = creative authority unifying script, performance, camera and crew into one screen vision.
- Producer handles business/logistics; director handles creative execution.
- Script analysis (theme, beats, turning points, visual opportunities, logistics) precedes everything.

Exam Pointers

- ★ Distinguish the director's and producer's functions.
- ★ List the steps of script analysis with one line each.
- ★ Why is indecision the TV director's cardinal sin?

Unit 2: The Television Image: Shot Grammar

Lectures 5–8

Learning Objectives

- Identify shot sizes and their dramatic functions
- Explain camera angles and movement
- Apply composition rules: thirds, headroom, looking space
- Use shots to control audience attention and emotion

Shot Sizes

Extreme long shot — setting, isolation, scale. **Long/full shot** — whole body, action geography.

Medium long (knee) / medium (waist) — conversation standard. **Medium close-up (chest)** — TV's workhorse.

Close-up — face, emotion, important detail. **Extreme close-up** — eyes, object detail; high intensity.

- Rule of thumb: **wider = context, tighter = emotion**. TV historically favors tighter shots than cinema (small screens).

Angles and Movement

- **Angles:** eye-level (neutral), low (power), high (vulnerability), bird's-eye (patterns/fate), Dutch tilt (unease).
- **Movement:** pan/tilt (reframe), dolly/track (move through space — motivated by character), crane (reveal), zoom (magnify attention — use sparingly; it flattens space), handheld (urgency, documentary feel), Steadicam (fluid following).

Composition

- **Rule of thirds:** place subjects on third-lines/intersections, not dead center.
- **Headroom and looking space:** space above the head modest; space in front of the gaze generous — the audience looks where the character looks.
- **180-degree rule:** keep the camera on one side of the action axis or characters flip sides confusingly; cross the line only with a neutral shot or motivated move.
- **Depth:** foreground/midground/background layers; leading lines; avoid flat 'mugshot' framing.

Direct a confrontation: start on a two-shot (geography), push to alternating close-ups as tension rises (emotion), go handheld slightly for instability, end on an extreme close-up of the decisive eyes. Every choice motivated by the scene's emotional arc — that justification is what exams mark.

Unit Summary

- Shot sizes: wide for context, tight for emotion; TV lives in medium close-ups.
- Angles assign power; movements must be motivated; handheld = urgency.

- Compose with thirds, headroom, looking space, the 180° rule and depth.

Exam Pointers

- ★ Name six shot sizes with one dramatic function each.
- ★ Explain the 180-degree rule and how to cross the line.
- ★ Direct a 30-second emotional scene: list your shots with justification.

Unit 3: Working with Actors

Lectures 9–12

Learning Objectives

- Explain casting and auditions
- Direct performance: objectives, actions, beats
- Conduct rehearsals effectively
- Handle non-actors and difficult performers

Casting

Casting is **80% of directing**: the right actor makes scenes work, the wrong one makes them unfixable. Audition with actual script sides (not monologues alone), test **chemistry** between leads, and check range (can they do the quiet scenes, not just the loud ones?). In Pakistani TV, type-casting is common — a good director casts against type thoughtfully or uses type meaningfully.

Directing Performance

- Give **playable actions**, not results: not 'be sadder' but 'try to make her stay' — actors play actions, not emotions.
- Work in **objectives and beats**: each character wants something in each beat; when the tactic changes, the beat changes.
- **Adjustments** redirect energy: 'do it as if you've just heard great news' — concrete, playable, instant.
- Protect actors' vulnerability: never humiliate; give notes privately; praise specifically.

Rehearsal Process

Stages: **read-through** (story clarity), **blocking** (movement mapped to camera), **working rehearsals** (beats, actions, adjustments), **technical/dress** (with cameras, costumes, lights). TV schedules compress this brutally — the director must prioritize: rehearse the **emotional turning points**, block the rest efficiently.

Problem performer case: a star actor plays every scene at full volume. Diagnosis: no beat variation, playing emotion not action. Direction: break the scene into beats with distinct objectives ('first you charm, then you threaten'), forbid the loud choice in rehearsal ('do the whole scene in a whisper'), rebuild dynamics. Never say 'less' — give a positive playable alternative.

Unit Summary

- Casting decides most outcomes; audition with sides and chemistry tests.
- Direct with playable actions and beat objectives — never 'be more emotional'.
- Rehearse in stages; under TV pressure, prioritize turning points.

Exam Pointers

- ★ Why is casting called 80% of directing?
- ★ Contrast 'playable action' direction with 'result' direction (examples).
- ★ An actor overacts every scene. Give three directorial remedies.

Unit 4: The Camera Department and Lighting

Lectures 10–14

Learning Objectives

- Describe camera crew roles
- Explain lenses: focal length, depth of field, aperture
- Design three-point lighting and its TV variants
- Match lighting to mood and genre

Camera Crew

Director of Photography (DOP) — visual design, lighting, camera team lead.

Camera operators — execute the shots; in multi-camera, each owns a camera number and shot list.

Focus puller, grip (movement rigs), DIT/data wrangler (digital workflow). —

Lenses and Exposure

- **Focal length:** wide (expansive, deep focus, distortion) vs telephoto (compressed, shallow focus, intimate).
- **Depth of field:** controlled by aperture, focal length, distance — shallow DOF isolates subjects (interviews, emotion); deep DOF shows context.
- **Aperture/iris:** f-stops balance exposure; TV shoots fast — the DOP protects skin-tone exposure above all.

Lighting

Three-point: key (main source, models the face), fill (softens shadows), backlight (separates from background). TV variants: **high-key** (bright, low contrast — sitcoms, morning shows), **low-key** (dark, dramatic — crime, suspense), **motivated/naturalistic** (drama). Multi-camera studios light for **all angles at once** (flatter); single-camera lights per setup (more cinematic).

Mood exercise: a confession scene. Choice: low-key, single soft key from the side (half the face in shadow = inner conflict), shallow DOF close-up, slow push-in. Justify each element against the scene's psychology — lighting as storytelling, not decoration.

Unit Summary

- DOP designs the image; operators execute; focus/grip/data support.
- Lenses: wide = context, telephoto = intimacy; aperture + focal length control depth of field.
- Three-point lighting; high-key vs low-key vs naturalistic matched to genre and mood.

Exam Pointers

- ★ Explain three-point lighting with each light's function.
- ★ When would you choose shallow vs deep depth of field?
- ★ Design lighting for a horror scene vs a morning show (contrast).

Unit 5: Sound and Music for Television

Lectures 15–17

Learning Objectives

- Describe the TV sound chain: dialogue, effects, music
- Explain microphone types and placement
- Use sound design dramatically
- Direct the music: score vs source, OST culture

The Three Tracks

Dialogue — king of TV sound; must be intelligible above everything.

Effects — ambience (room tone, streets), spot effects (doors, footsteps/Foley), design elements.

Music — score (emotional guidance) and source music (playing within the scene).

- The mix hierarchy: dialogue first, then story-critical effects, then music — muddy dialogue kills TV drama fastest.

Microphones

- **Lavalier:** clipped on talent — consistent level, standard for interviews/talk shows; hide carefully for drama.
- **Boom/shotgun:** overhead directional — natural sound, needs a skilled operator shadowing action.
- **Handheld:** reporters, audience questions. **Plant mics** for fixed positions.

Sound as Storytelling

Sound creates **off-screen space** (a dog barking implies the street), **subjectivity** (muffled sound = character's daze), and **rhythm** (silence before a revelation is louder than music). Pakistani drama OSTs are a cultural phenomenon — title songs that carry the drama's emotional brand; direct their picturization as carefully as any scene.

Problem: location dialogue drowned by traffic. Solutions ladder: 1) choose quieter takes/angles, 2) ADR (re-record in studio) the worst lines, 3) design: lower ambience under dialogue frequencies in the mix, 4) prevention next time: scout sound, not just visuals. Directing includes hearing the location.

Unit Summary

- Dialogue rules TV sound; effects build world; music guides emotion.
- Lavaliers, booms, handhelds — right mic for the situation.
- Sound design creates off-screen space and subjectivity; silence is a tool.

Exam Pointers

- ★ Rank the three sound tracks by mix priority and justify.

- ★ Choose mics for: talk show, drama scene, street report.
- ★ How can sound (not image) tell story? Give three techniques.

Unit 6: Studio Production: Multi-Camera Direction

Lectures 18–21

Learning Objectives

- Describe the TV studio: floor, control room, roles
- Direct multi-camera: shot lists, calling shots
- Explain talk shows, news and drama studio formats
- Manage live and as-live production

The Studio Machine

- **Studio floor:** cameras (usually 3–4, pedestal-mounted), lights grid, sets, mics, floor manager (director's voice on the floor).
- **Control room:** director (calls shots), vision mixer/switcher (cuts), PA (timings, running order), graphics, sound, lighting, VT/playback operators.

Calling a Multi-Camera Show

Preparation: **shot list / camera cards** — every shot numbered per camera ('Cam 2: MCU guest'). During recording the director **cues** ('standby Cam 2... take Cam 2'), building the program live in the switcher. Talk shows and news run this way — the director edits in real time. Skills: anticipating action, clear concise commands, calm under live pressure.

Formats and Live Discipline

- **Talk shows:** host/guest coverage patterns, audience reaction shots, insert VTs.
- **News:** bulletins, packages, live crosses, ticker discipline — accuracy under deadline.
- **Studio drama/sitcom:** rehearsed then recorded as-live in sequence.
- **Live rules:** running order is law, timings to the second, backup plans for every link, never dead air — the floor manager counts down talent while the director counts down the nation.

Talk-show segment plan: open wide (energy) → host MCU (question) → guest MCU (answer) → two-shot (rapport moment) → audience cutaway (laughter) → VT insert (evidence) → back to host (wrap). Pre-planned but flexed live — multi-camera direction is composed improvisation.

Unit Summary

- Studio = floor (cameras, sets, floor manager) + control room (director, switcher, PA, support).
- Multi-camera directing = pre-planned shot lists executed via live shot-calling.
- Live discipline: running order, precise timings, backups, no dead air.

Exam Pointers

- ★ List control-room roles and one function each.
- ★ What is shot-calling? Write five sample director commands.
- ★ Plan camera coverage for a 5-minute talk-show segment.

Unit 7: Field Production: Single-Camera Direction

Lectures 22–25

Learning Objectives

- Contrast single-camera with multi-camera working
- Plan location shoots: recce, permits, logistics
- Direct for the edit: coverage and continuity
- Handle documentaries and ENG/news field work

Single-Camera Logic

One camera shoots each setup from each angle in turn — **coverage** is built shot by shot for later assembly. Slower, more cinematic, more flexible on location. The director must **think in edited sequences** while shooting fragments: every setup needs its matching reverse, its cutaways, its establishing context.

Location Discipline

- **Recce:** visit first — light at shoot hours, sound environment, power, access, permissions, safety, weather plan.
- **Shooting order:** schedule by location/actor availability, not story order — the call sheet rules the day.
- **Continuity:** match costumes, props, hair, weather, screen direction across days — the script supervisor's log is sacred.

Coverage Formula (Drama)

Standard scene coverage: **master wide** (whole scene geography) → **medium two-shots** → **close-ups/singles** per character → **cutaways/inserts** (hands, objects, reactions). Shoot the master first (performance reference), then punch in. Always get **more** than you think you need — pickups are expensive.

- **Documentary/ENG:** real events don't repeat — shoot wide safety + tight detail simultaneously if possible, gather actuality sound, interview with proper coverage (noddy shots, cutaways for editing).

Continuity trap: an actor drinks from a glass — in the wide shot it's half full, in the close-up (shot 3 hours later) it's full. The editor can't cut between them. Prevention: script supervisor photos + the director's own vigilance. Television audiences forgive many things; visible discontinuity isn't one.

Unit Summary

- Single-camera builds coverage shot-by-shot for the edit; the director thinks in sequences.
- Recce, call sheets, and continuity logs make location work possible.
- Drama coverage: master → mediums → singles → cutaways; documentary: safety wide + detail + actuality.

Exam Pointers

- ★ Contrast single-camera and multi-camera production (4 points).
- ★ List the standard drama coverage order and why masters come first.
- ★ What does a recce check? (6 items)

Unit 8: Editing: The Final Rewrite

Lectures 26–29

Learning Objectives

- Explain the director's role in the edit
- Describe the editing workflow: assembly to final cut
- Apply cutting principles: motivation, rhythm, continuity
- Use transitions, pacing and montage

Director in the Edit Suite

The **editor's cut** assembles the story; the **director's cut** refines performance and rhythm; the producer/broadcaster approves the **final cut**. The director must know editing grammar to shoot correctly — and must defend the story's spine while accepting that killing darlings (beloved but unnecessary shots) improves pace.

Workflow

- Ingest/logging → **assembly** (story order, all selects) → **rough cut** (structure works?) → **fine cut** (frame-accurate rhythm) → **picture lock** → sound design/mix + grade + graphics → master.

Cutting Principles

- **Cut on motivation:** every cut answered by 'why now?' — new information, reaction, or energy shift.
- **Continuity editing:** match action, eyeline and screen direction; the 30-degree rule (change angle enough to justify the cut).
- **Rhythm:** cutting rate = emotional tempo; quick cuts excite, long takes solemnize. TV drama typically cuts faster than film.
- **Montage:** compress time and build meaning by collision (training sequence, passage of seasons).
- **Transitions:** straight cut (default), dissolve (time/softness), fade (major breaks), wipe (stylized — use rarely).

Pacing diagnosis: a scene feels slow. Checklist: does every shot add new information? Can heads/tails of shots be trimmed? Would a reaction shot replace an explanatory line? Is the music fighting the rhythm? Fix in that order — most 'slow' scenes are information-poor, not cut-poor.

Unit Summary

- Edit stages: assembly → rough → fine → lock → sound/grade/master; director shapes the director's cut.
- Cut on motivation; maintain continuity (match action, 30° rule); rhythm = emotion.
- Transitions are punctuation — the straight cut is the full stop you use most.

Exam Pointers

- ★ Describe the editing workflow stages.
- ★ What does 'cut on motivation' mean? Give three valid motivations.
- ★ A scene drags. List four diagnostic questions and fixes.

Unit 9: Genres, Ethics and the Director's Career

Lectures 30–33

Learning Objectives

- Direct across genres: drama, comedy, news, documentary, children's
- Explain media ethics for directors
- Describe the Pakistani TV industry landscape
- Plan a directing career path

Genre Direction

Drama/serial — performance truth, emotional pacing, visual consistency across episodes (PTV classics set the bar).

Comedy — timing is everything; hold the wide shot for physical gags, don't cut the laugh.

News/current affairs — accuracy, fairness, legal safety; no directorial flourishes that distort.

Documentary — truth to reality; reconstructions labeled; subjects' dignity protected.

Children's — energy, clarity, safety, positive modeling.

Ethics

- No deception presented as fact (staged 'reality' labeled), consent for vulnerable subjects, respect for grief/tragedy, cultural and religious sensitivity, no plagiarism of formats/scripts.
- Representation: casting and stories that reflect society fairly — the director shapes what millions see as normal.

Industry and Career

Pakistan's landscape: **PTV** (heritage, national reach), private entertainment channels (Hum, ARY, Geo), news channels, growing **digital/OTT** and YouTube production. Entry: assist directors, direct shorts/student work, build a **showreel** (3–5 minutes of your best-directed sequences), network on sets. The career ladder: AD → episode director → series director → creative head; or independent: commercials, music videos, digital content.

Showreel advice: open with your strongest 20 seconds, show range (one emotional scene, one dynamic sequence), keep it short, credit your role honestly, and update it yearly. Nobody hires a director without seeing directed work — the reel IS the CV.

Unit Summary

- Each genre has its directing grammar: drama (truth), comedy (timing), news (accuracy), documentary (integrity).
- Ethics: honesty with audiences, dignity of subjects, fair representation.
- Career: assist → direct → showreel → series; Pakistan offers PTV, private channels and digital paths.

Exam Pointers

- ★ How does directing comedy differ from directing drama? (3 points)
- ★ State four ethical duties of a TV director.
- ★ Outline a career path from student to series director.

Key Terms Glossary

All key terms from this handout in one place — use for quick revision.

Producer — logistics, budget, schedule, hiring, the business side; owns the production.

Director — creative execution; owns the screen result.

Extreme long shot — setting, isolation, scale. Long/full shot — whole body, action geography.

Medium long (knee) / medium (waist) — conversation standard. Medium close-up (chest) — TV's workhorse.

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