

Over-the-Shoulder Shot

See the [Over-the-Shoulder Show](#) in the video clips above the link to this article.

The over-the-shoulder shot is a type of cutaway shot often used in scenes where two people are conversing. Interviews are a particularly good time to utilize the over-the-shoulder shot.

The purpose of the OTS shot is primarily to cover an edit when no other cutaway shot is available or applicable. If you make an edit in a section of dialogue, the video is going to abruptly change at the point of the edit – a jump cut. This is because a person moves around a bit as they speak. Typically a cutaway shot is used to cover this type of edit. The person's voice is still heard (and if the edit is good, the viewer will not realize there has been an edit in the audio track). The video of the person talking, which contains the jump cut, is covered by some other piece of video. So if the subject is talking about motorcycles, a shot of a motorcycle could be used as the cutaway video, and it would be seen at the time that the edit in the subject's video/audio takes place, so we don't see that edit happen. It is covered by the cutaway video.

But what if you don't have a shot of a motorcycle or whatever the subject matter is. Or maybe the scene is a dramatic dialogue in a movie, and a cutaway to some other object is not appropriate. A reaction shot of the other person can be used, and that is sort of what the over-the-shoulder shot is. It simply is a shot of the other person (the interviewer in the case of an interview) seen over the subject's shoulder. It allows us to see both people in the shot. The beauty of it, however, is that the viewer can't see the subject's mouth moving, so we can't tell that there is an edit in the audio track going on.

In fact, in an interview, the interview is often shot with only one camera facing the subject. So the over-the-shoulder shot is done after the interview. The subject is talking about the weather or something possibly unrelated to the interview, the interviewer is sitting there looking interested, and that then can be used as a cutaway in the interview during the edit session. If it is done well, the viewer will never know.

If you watch the Over-the-Shoulder Show, you will see four complete versions of the scene:

1. The edited interview with nothing cut out. There is a mention of 3 trillion dollars.
2. The edited interview with the mention of 3 trillion dollars cut out. You will see a definite jump cut here.
3. The same thing with an over-the-shoulder shot covering the edit.
4. The same thing with a bad over-the-shoulder shot. In the good OTS shot, Dane's head is moving and it looks like he is talking, although you can't see his mouth. A.J. is listening. In the bad example, A.J. is talking (although we are still hearing Dane's audio), and it is obviously the wrong piece of video to use in the situation. There are also a couple of completely random cutaways used which don't make sense.

Hopefully this has helped you understand the proper and typical use of the over-the-shoulder shot. It can save your neck if you shoot an interview and need to cover an edit, and it can do it in a very realistic way.

-Dane Tate