

A very small Depth of Field (DOF). Or Depth of Focus. Follow-focus gear and personnel.

Follow Focus:

The Techniques and Equipment

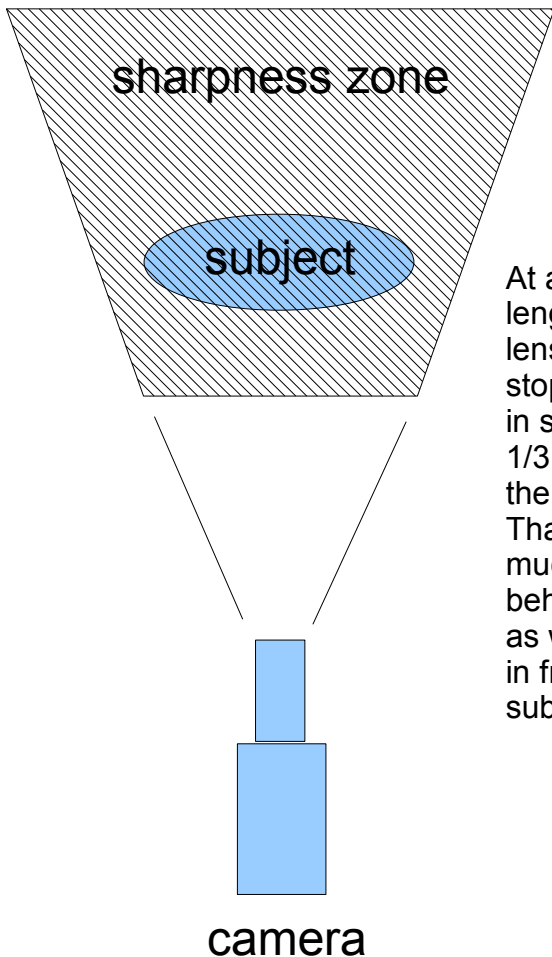
We call ourselves *media professionals*. That means more than just getting paid for what we do. We need to be at least acquainted with what the Big Guys do. And in Hollywood, where the big features are created and where the big salaries are made, the Big Guys DO use

Yet exotic follow-focus equipment is not absolutely essential to good productions: lots of people earn a good living without using these things. But **Follow Focus** techniques do allow an operator to be more precise – and therefore able to get that high-end cinematic look unavailable otherwise.

FOCUS is what distinguishes the outstanding from the merely good-enough.

Focus is the concentration, the intensity, the *obsessive* drive to make every element (writing and lighting, performance and camera, sound, music, environment -- all of it) come to FOCUS on a single, outcome. Now that's almost never easy. And it is no accident. Personal focus is intentional, manipulative, directed. It often demands intensity. Focus is taking infinite pains to get the Insanely Great

Here's a PEP TALK: If you say you are – or want to be -- a media professional, then you are willing to push harder, work longer, sweat the details, do it again. You're willing to do it the hard way – only if that way gets a truly superior result on the screen -- if it makes the audience care.



At any focal length of a zoom lens -- at any f-stop -- the subject in sharp focus is 1/3 of the way in the zone. That is, twice as much is in focus behind the subject as what is in focus in front of the subject.

Now for the *craft* of Follow Focus with a camera. The Big Guys *use* the restrictions of the lens -- they control the depth of focus. And they manage that control with special gear and technique. Follow focus equipment is usually operated by another crew member, a Focus Puller (often called the 1st Assistant Camera, or 1AC). The act of changing focus is called "racking focus" or "pulling focus." It's focus that directs the viewer's attention.

A follow focus mechanism works through a set of gears that are attached to teeth on the lens focus ring. These gears mesh with a wheel which is turned by a Focus Puller standing alongside the camera -- or even adjusting focus from a distance, by remote control.

A focus puller often uses a tape to correctly measure the distance from the lens to the subject, allowing for precise marking of the disk.

"Cinema Procedures Move to HD: Why It Takes Two Pros to Follow Focus Well."

NOTE: Pros do NOT always get it right the first time (nor the 2nd nor 3rd). They are unashamed to keep repeating the process until it's just right (perfect?)

Check out these on-line videos for more information: All the following are at www.freshdv.com

Introduction and Chrosziel DV Follow Focus Review [8:57m]:

Cinetech Titanium SL Follow Focus Review [5:32m]:

Redrock Micro Follow Focus Review [5:33m]:

Petroff Mini Follow Focus Review [7:27m]:

Indifocus Follow Focus Review [9:51m]:

Follow Focus Accessories [2:16m]:

Chrosziel unit Demo 8:45

Introduction to Slating and Script Management Part 1 (Video)

Introduction to Slating and Script Management Part 2 (Video)

And here's a good review: Follow Focus Shootout at

http://www.dv.com/reviews/reviews_item.php?articleId=196603447

Portrait of a 1AC, Bob Sanchez

In Film and Video Production in Chicago for over 30 yrs
Works on feature films, commercials, documentaries, corporate productions, music videos. Film and video.
He's a 1AC – a First Assistant Camera, a Focus-puller
Started as a truck driver who volunteered as a location scout (no salary) on a low-budget feature – “hired” because he knew Chicago streets
Then volunteered as a Production Assistant (again no salary) “I kept my truck-driving job.”
Today good 1ACs make \$550/day – that's a 10 hr day

The 1AC assembles the camera, keeps it clean inside and out
Responsible for all the camera cases (up to 30 pieces on a feature film), but has help to transport them: 2AC, Loader
Learns to eyeball distances – then check with a tape
Must develop delicate touch – cannot bump operator's moves
Demanding job: if you “buzz 'em” and ruin the shoot, could add another day

A GREAT OLD TRICK/TIP. Lacking such Follow Focus gear, try this old snap-focus trick using gaffer tape. Rehearse your shot so you have set lens focus at the most critical spot. Attach a 6” x 1/2” piece of gaffer tape to the focus ring and stick the other end to a fixed part of your lens. When you turn the focus ring back to your starting position, the gaffer tape will bulge out. Later when you turn the focus ring toward your critical focus point, the length of gaffer tape will “stop” the focus ring at that precise spot (avoiding “overshoot”).

“Why not just use Autofocus?”

It's okay at some camera moves:

Tilt up from VCU to VLS

Slowly-panned searches (across classroom)

But not so good for:

Swish-pans (hood ornament over to nameplate)

Surprises: talent steps into scene (autofocus “hunts”)

Low light shots (autofocus cannot settle)

Intricately- patterned subjects (autofocus “pumps”, even fails)

Subjects with low contrast (autofocus “hunts”)

Selective focus situations (birds on wires beyond the trees)

Timing: the autofocus mechanism shifts when it wants to, not when we'd like it to.

To make matters worse, most autofocus lenses with a manual focus ring are not true manual focus lenses at all. Turning that ring does not directly move the elements inside the lens; it actuates electronics inside the camera which predict how the focus should go -- depending on how fast or how far the ring was turned. Such lenses make precise and repeatable focus pulls almost impossible. They are sometimes called "servo" focus lenses or "focus by wire" cameras.

