

# 3

Lesson Files

Lesson Project Files > Lesson\_03 > 03\_Project\_Start

Media

Media > Friends Of The Family

Time

This lesson takes approximately 120 minutes to complete.

Goals

Learn the basics of editing action sequences

Understand how to work setups and payoffs into your scenes

Begin thinking about how footage affects style

Learn techniques to build tension in a scene

Get familiar with the Trim Edit window

Use dynamic trimming to finesse edit points

Control overall pacing and scene structure

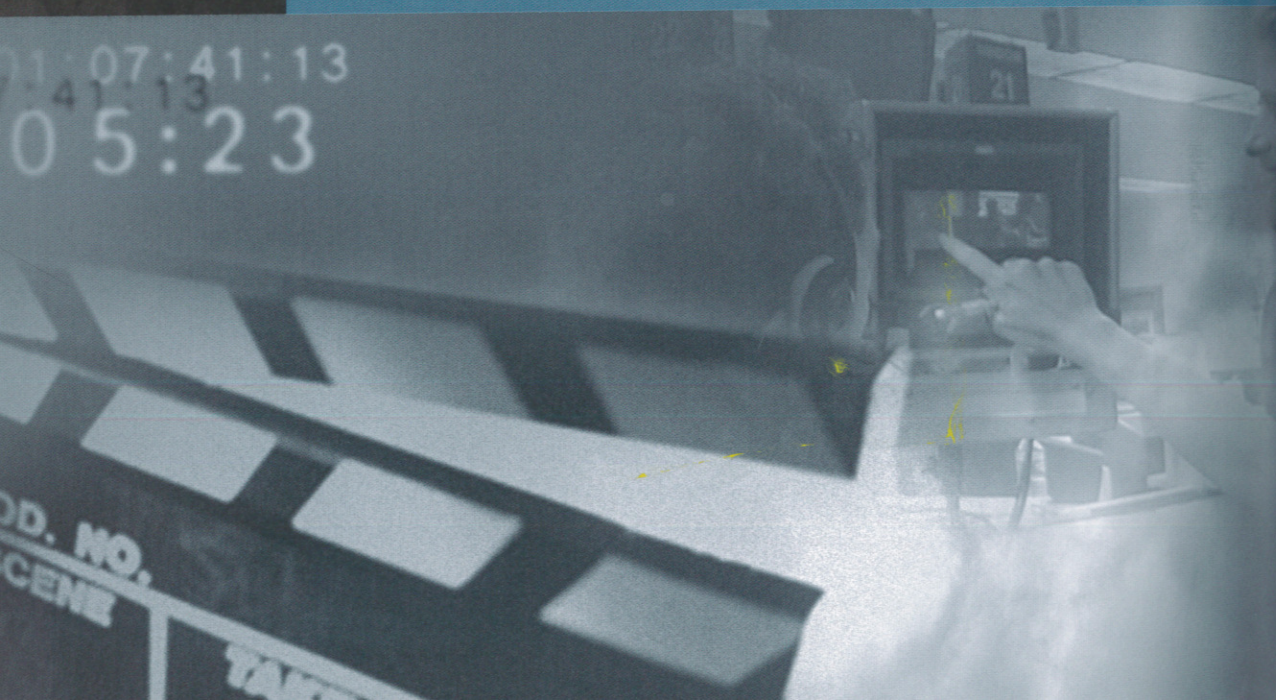
## Lesson 3

# Editing Action

Just as important as learning to cut dialogue is learning to cut basic action sequences. Action scenes come in many shapes and sizes—from something as simple as a demonstration of a coffeemaker to a full-scale laser battle in outer space. But all action scenes have some things in common and once you learn a few concepts and rules, you'll be ready to tackle almost anything.

While all dialogue scenes are nearly identical structurally, action scenes are almost always unique. Some action scenes take place in a large physical space (for example, ballroom dancing), while others focus on tiny details in one location (such as cracking a safe). Some action scenes involve continual movement from one place to another (like delivering milk). In any of these cases the specific details of the action will often call for different types of coverage.

However, while actions scenes are all different, there are common editing patterns you can apply depending on the type of action scene you're cutting. If you can identify your scene as one of a certain type, that can give you clues as to the best way to approach cutting it.



Later, you'll learn to identify common action scene types such as fights, battles, chases, shootouts, and others. But don't think all fights require fisticuffs or that all shootouts require guns. These categories can be applied to all sorts of action scenes, and each has its own set of guidelines and tricks.

## Telling a Story in Action

It's helpful to begin by separating simple actions from complex ones.

A *simple* action scene is one where there is one central activity, usually performed by one person (or thing). This could be as simple as someone practicing their golf swing or tying their kid's shoe, or it could be as complicated as someone taking apart a motorcycle engine or painting a house.

A *complex* scene strings together several simple actions, either sequentially (playing a whole round of golf) or simultaneously (a house-painting competition). As you might expect, complex action scenes require greater organizational forethought in order to cut them quickly and effectively.

Don't forget, however, that your basic charge is still just to tell the story. Most of the basic tenets covered in the dialogue lessons still apply to action scenes. It's usually advantageous to start wide and then move in close; most edits benefit from being split; and, of course, you should still always seek to cut on action within the frame. No matter what the content of the scene, you are still going to use pacing and shot selection to guide the audience's focus.

Most important, don't lose track of the six essential questions. Plenty of zillion-dollar action films fail to engage the audience because they get so caught up in the *what* and the *how* of the action that they don't bother to spend enough time answering the *who* or the *why*. This isn't rocket science—it's campfire storytelling.

As the editor, you are limited to the footage that the production team provides, but it is still up to you to find the best dramatic balance. You set the tempo and pacing of each scene, and choose which questions get answered and which get ignored. Invariably, you will have close-ups of faces and inserts of important details. It's how and where and for how long you use them that ultimately determine the impact of the scene.

Another storytelling concept that you must incorporate into your action scenes is the fundamental idea of the beginning, middle, and end. If you ignore this essential notion, an action scene can quickly become a dense mess of disjointed details without a clear sense of progression.

There may be as many shots of the details of an action as there are pieces of a motorcycle engine. Sure, you can begin with a shot of the assembled engine, and end with a shot of the pieces spread out on the floor; but what about all those shots in between? Assuming you're not making an instructional video about motorcycle maintenance, the truth about how to take apart an engine is irrelevant. You need to determine which shots *tell the story* and arrange them in a way that conveys a sense of progress. Just like a good plot, each shot must depend on the one that precedes it, and it must compel the one that follows.

## Learning Action Fundamentals

There are a few critical concepts you should learn to improve your action cutting skills. These are general principles that can be applied in almost any situation. All of these concepts are based on consciously manipulating the audience's anxiety level to induce an emotional response.

The more you understand how to control that anxiety, the more successful you will be as an editor. While this may sound clinical (or perhaps insidious), it is exactly what makes editing effective. It's no secret that certain images and certain editing techniques have a physical effect on viewers. Whether you are evoking terror or catharsis, the goal is to use that power in the service of your theme.

### Creating a Setup and Payoff

Setup and payoff are broad storytelling concepts that can be applied very concretely in action scenes. Payoff is another word for satisfaction, and the only way to provide satisfaction is to set up an expectation and then deliver it. In terms of editing, this is done with specific shots. A shot of someone picking up a ripe peach is a setup that reaches payoff when she takes a big, juicy bite. Similarly, a shot of a mail truck is a setup that pays off with a shot of a letter being opened.

The peach-biting or letter-opening shots may have significance on their own, but they provide much more satisfaction for the audience when the editor builds up an expectation prior to fulfilling it.

The further you separate the setup from the payoff, the more effectively you hold hostage a part of an audience's brain. This is commonly called *suspense* because you are in effect *suspending* their attention. Providing a setup shot that establishes an expectation raises a sort of tension in the viewer. When you pay it off, you release the tension. The longer you wait to show the payoff, the more the tension builds... but only to a point. If you wait too long, you lose the audience. They either forget about the setup or, worse, they start wondering, "Gee, what was that mail truck shot about?" That means they've stepped out of the story—and the next thing you know they're checking their voicemail.

### Establishing Cause and Effect

This is a subset of the setup and payoff. If you show a shot of a hand grenade, you compel a later shot of an explosion. The longer you wait to show the explosion, the more tension you create. If you never show the explosion at all, you disappoint (or confuse) the audience. If you show the explosion without the shot of the grenade, you miss an opportunity to build tension, and again you might confuse the audience. The grenade/explosion example is very clear cut, but cause and effect is often much more subtle, and you can change the meaning of a scene by rearranging the order of the shots.

For example, a thief is rummaging through a bedroom. You have three shots: an ECU of her picking up a diamond necklace; a MCU where she picks up a framed picture of a happy couple; and a CU of her face looking forlorn.

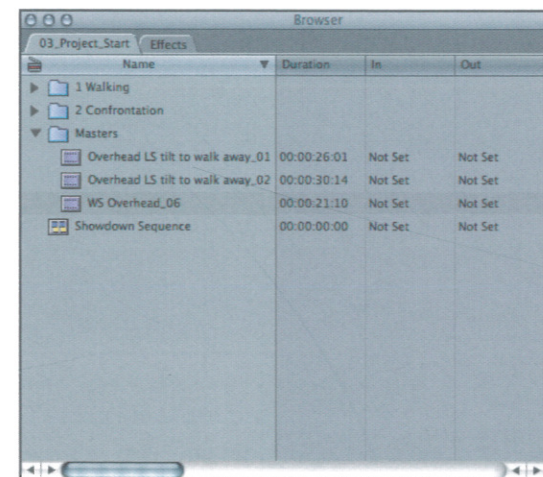
If she finds the necklace first, looks forlorn, then finds the picture, the necklace appears to *cause* the sadness, and her sadness seems to *cause* her to pick up the picture. On the other hand, if she finds the picture first, feels forlorn, and then steals the necklace anyway, you have a very different story. If you omit some of the shots altogether, you have yet another version.

## Cutting an Action Scene

The scene you will cut in this lesson is of moderate complexity. It is a showdown scene that could be categorized as a unique type of action scene. The scene features multiple parties (rival gangs, in this case) preparing for a conflict. This example is very literal, but the showdown technique is applicable to any scene that leads up to a conflict: two parents on their way to a custody hearing; students preparing their projects for the science fair; or a romantic couple finally meeting for their first kiss.

The nature of a showdown is to have a gradual buildup of tension that is relieved when it explodes into a contest or is miraculously diffused at the last second. Common showdown editing techniques include crosscutting, acceleration of cuts, and copious use of reaction shots.

- 1 Open project **03\_Project\_Start**.



Although the scene is one continuous event, the project has been organized into two primary bins, 1 Walking and 2 Confrontation, as well as a third bin called Masters.

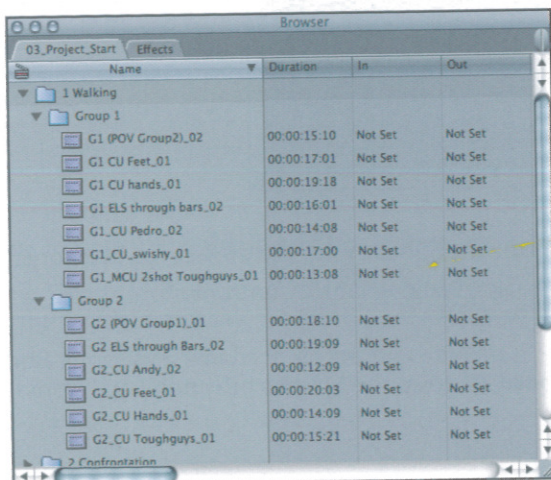
- 2 Double-click **WS Overhead\_06** from the Masters bin and play it from the beginning.



This master shows the main action in the scene: two rival gangs approach each other and, rather than pulling weapons, the leaders pull out baby bottles and they all leave together to tend to their kids.

**NOTE** ▶ This scene is from a fundraising video for Friends of the Family, a charity that has a program specifically designed to help at-risk teen fathers get out of trouble and responsibly raise their children.

- 3 Click the disclosure triangle for the 1 Walking bin.

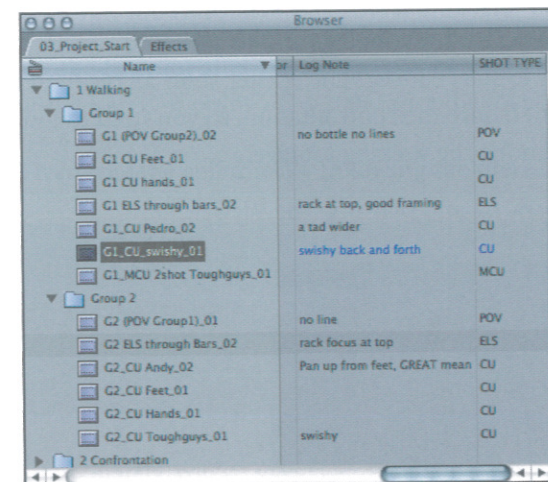


The clips in this bin have been further organized into two sub-bins: Group 1 and Group 2. These will prove to be especially helpful, since many of the shots from the two groups look very similar.

You should notice that the shots for the two groups parallel each other; both groups have "CU\_Feet" and "CU\_Hands" shots, and both have "ELS through bars" shots. In fact, every single shot is half of a pair—one for each gang.

This may look familiar, because it's the same thing you encountered (and took advantage of) when cutting the basic dialogue scene. These pairs of shots let you *match angles*, one of the hallmarks of effective, invisible editing.

- 4 Scroll the browser toward the right until the Log Note field is revealed.



The log notes can provide valuable information about which shots you'll want to use. One repeated word you may notice is "swishy." What does this mean? If you're not sure, you'd best take a look.

- 5 Double-click **G1\_CU\_swishy\_01** and play it in the Viewer.

The camera continually swish pans between the gang members. While you might be inclined to cut around these messy moves, once you recognize that the footage is full of such movements, an idea should spark in your mind. Rather than avoiding that element, you would be better off to

embrace it. In fact, that visual motif provides insight as to how the footage is asking to be cut.

It is always your job as editor to adapt your style to the needs of the footage at hand. Forcing a preconceived editorial style onto footage will just ruin the show. A good editor is one who can be sentimental or gritty, rigid and mathematical, or loose and organic. In this sequence, the director has provided unambiguous cues about how he wanted the scene to look and feel. You'd better respond to it or you'll risk not only the quality of the show, but the opportunity to work with that director again!

- 6 Double-click the Showdown sequence to open it in the Canvas and Timeline.

Once you've gotten familiar with the footage and its tone and style, it's time to figure out where to start editing. The master shots all begin in the middle of the scene, right before the confrontation, so you need to look for a master-type shot among the walking footage.

- 7 Open **G1 ELS through bars\_02** and play it in the Viewer.



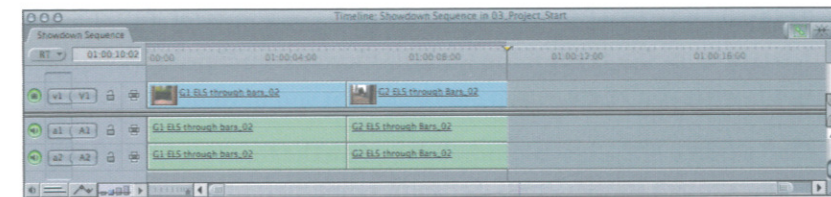
This seems like a great place to start, because it tells you *where* (a playground) and *what* (a gang is on the march). Furthermore, the compositional element of bars in the foreground evokes a prison helping to emphasize the tone of the scene. Also, the rack focus is a great way

to introduce the scene, and will work nicely with the swish-pan style you'll incorporate later.

- 8 Mark an In point just before the first movement is visible from behind the bar (approximately 02:10:09:07) and mark an Out point a few steps after the shot comes into focus (around 14:20).
- 9 Edit the clip into the sequence.
- 10 Open **G2 ELS through Bars\_02**.

This is the matching angle and, at least for starters, is the obvious shot to follow. Rather than starting on an empty frame like the first shot did, however, you can start these guys a little later in the shot.

- 11 Set the In point after the second guy becomes visible (around 02:07:10:20) and set an Out point a few steps after the focus has locked (at 15:07).
- 12 Overwrite the clip directly following the first clip.



Immediately, you've set up the scene. It's clear that there are two groups and, because they're moving toward each other, it's also obvious that they're in conflict. Pretty good work with just two shots.

### Building Tension

Since you've so quickly established that there is a conflict brewing, you have an opportunity to heighten the stakes by immediately ratcheting up audience tension.

One effective way to build tension is with the use of close-ups, especially close-ups of details that the audience can't quite put in context. This is pretty easy to

understand. Whenever a viewer is watching a movie, he is unconsciously making sense of the shots and trying to understand the story. He is assembling the pieces of the puzzle just as fast as you give them out. When you deliberately withhold information, you make his brain work harder, creating tension.

For example, if you begin a scene with close-ups and withhold the long shot to answer the *where* or *when* questions, the viewer remains in a somewhat unsettled state and doesn't quite know his whereabouts.

Similarly, in this scene, the opening shots set up a conflict. They answer the *what* and *where*, but they don't reveal the *who*. Naturally a viewer is going to crave a close-up or at least a medium shot so he can identify who the participants are. Who is the "good guy" and who is the "bad guy"? By withholding that information, you increase that tension. Of course, you can only stretch tension so far before the viewer loses interest, but you've hooked him with the instant conflict. Let's try to leverage that a bit.

**1** Open **G2\_CU Feet\_01**.

This is a close-up of feet. It might be even more powerful if they were all wearing army boots (or more funny if they were in flip-flops); but, alas, this is what you've got.

**2** Find a frame after they begin walking when the front guy's left foot lands on the ground (02:04:36:10). Set an In point there.



**3** Play the clip until the next time the front guy's left foot lands and set an Out point (37:22).

In the Canvas, the guy's feet are mostly obscured by the sand pile, so you can just approximate where his left foot would land.

**4** In the Canvas, set an In point at 01:00:09:20.

You now have a subtle but nonetheless useful bit of movement to cut on within the frame. Since the ELS is so far away, and the guys are not exactly all walking in unison, you could probably have gotten away with almost any In point, but why not do everything you can to make as smooth an edit as possible?

**5** Overwrite the clip into the sequence.

**6** Open **G1\_CU Feet\_01**.

Naturally, the next shot should be the matching version of the shot from the other gang.

Even though their footsteps are not literally in sync with the guys from Group 2, you can have a bit of editorial fun by doing the same kind of matching action from one feet CU to the next.

**7** Find the frame where the front guy's right foot lands and set an In point (02:02:43:00). Let him walk one full stride and mark an Out (44:08).

**8** Overwrite the clip directly after **G2\_CU Feet\_01**.

**9** Press \ to play around the edit.

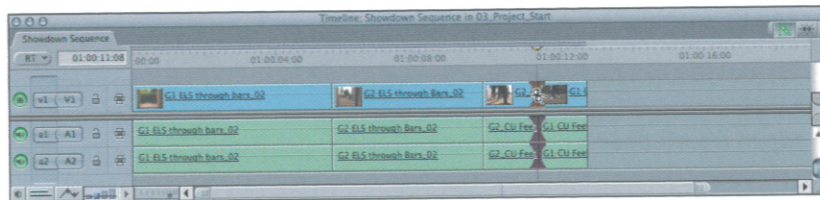
The rhythm lines up nicely but the edit isn't as powerful as it could be. The action is the foot hitting the ground but, once it lands, the action is over (and a new step begins).

The optimal edit would have the foot coming down in the first shot but not landing until after the cut. That way, the viewer's eyes follow the movement across the edit, thereby ignoring it. To make that optimal edit, you would have to guess how far off the ground the foot needs to be

(accounting for momentum) in each shot. This is fairly difficult, especially in a situation like this where the two guys aren't even walking at exactly the same speed.

But there's a trick! And it's one of the most useful tricks you can learn to speed up and improve the quality of your action cuts. Make the edit at the moment when the action ends (like you did in Steps 5 through 9) and then roll the edit back slightly to move the cut midway through the action.

- 10** Press R to select the Roll tool and select the edit between **G2 CU Feet\_01** and **G1\_CU Feet\_01**.



- 11** Drag to the left to roll the edit, watching the Canvas until the foot is halfway to the ground on both sides of the edit (about 10 frames).



It's kind of fun to watch the canvas as you roll back and forth, seeing how the two shots line up, allowing you to choose the best frame for the cut.

By the way, that trick works on any action cut where you have to guess about how the momentum of a movement will play across an edit. If you have two shots of someone slamming a door, make the cut on the frame when the door is closed in both shots, and then roll the edit back so it cuts in mid-slam.

### Crosscutting

From this point in the scene, you will cut back and forth from Group 1 to Group 2 back to Group 1 with nearly every edit. This is called *crosscutting*. Although it is similar to cutting back and forth between characters during a dialogue scene, both groups in this scene are technically still in different locations. Imagine that instead of the groups marching right up to each other in the playground, they were getting ready in separate buildings.

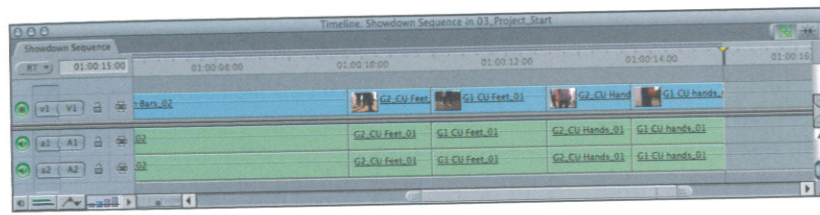
Crosscutting is another technique that builds tension. It asks the audience to keep track of what's going on with Group 1 even as you cut away to Group 2, and vice versa. You're asking them to keep track of twice as much information. This taxes their brains and causes more anxiety. Like other tension-building techniques, you can't keep up that anxiety indefinitely. You have to relieve the stress at some point or risk losing your audience's attention.

Usually in a showdown scenario, the tension is relieved when the two parties finally arrive at the same location. You'll see the same technique employed in Lesson 4 when you cut a chase scene.

- 1 Open **G2\_CU Hands\_01**.
- 2 Watch the Viewer and follow the stride of Andy's left foot. Try to identify the frame where his foot hits the ground and mark an In point (02:04:59:07). Play forward another full footstep and set the Out at 05:00:10.
- 3 Overwrite the clip into the sequence directly after **G1 CU Feet\_01**.
- 4 Open **G1 CU hands\_01**.

It's a little harder to precisely locate the footsteps in this shot, so you'll just have to eyeball it.

- 5 Set an In point around 02:03:08:06 and an Out point at around 09:12.
- 6 Overwrite the clip directly after **G2\_CU Hands\_01**.



Now it's finally time to reveal the gang members' faces. You must decide if you want to show all of the guys' faces or just go straight to the leaders. Since the previous two exchanges focused mainly on the leaders, holding out even longer before showing their faces might try the audience's patience.

- 7 Open **G2\_CU Andy\_02**.

Here's your first opportunity to work in one of those swish pans.

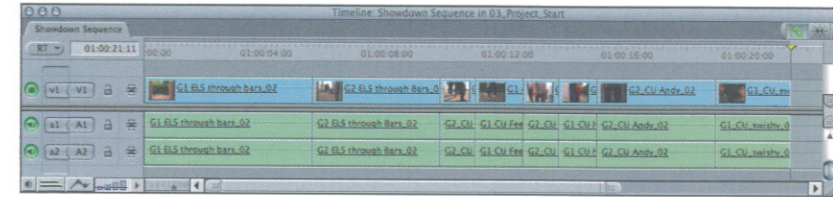
- 8 Set an In just as the camera begins moving up from his feet (approximately 02:05:35:02) and set an Out point after he makes that great scowl around 39:00.
- 9 Overwrite the clip into the sequence directly after **G1\_CU hands\_01**.
- 10 Open the matching single from Group 1: **G1\_CU Pedro\_02**.

This shot is a nice matching single of Pedro (the Group 1 leader), but it lacks any of that nice swish pan stuff. Perhaps there's something better in one of the other shots.

- 11 Open **G1\_CU\_swishy\_01**.

This shot contains a great lateral swish onto Pedro that matches the one that introduced Andy, making it a great choice (not to mention that Pedro's performance is better in this take than in his single).

- 12 Mark an In just after the camera begins its swish toward Pedro and set the Out just before it starts to swish back (In: 02:04:24:04, Out: 26:15).
- 13 Overwrite the clip into the sequence directly after **G2\_CU Andy\_02**.



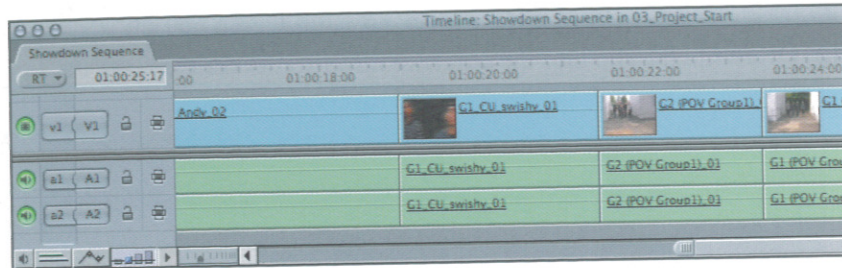
This is the first instance when you are deliberately choosing not to hide the edit as completely as possible. There are several reasons for this. First of all, the swish pans and rack focus shots and handheld camera work all draw attention to the means of production, so you have more incentive to complement those techniques with some similarly self-referential editorial choices. Furthermore, in this specific case, swishing onto the leads (especially if accompanied by a cool sound effect) gives them a much more powerful introduction than a straight cut.

The only problem is that you've moved so quickly into close-ups you need a way to justify stepping back out to a wider shot to show the two gangs coming together in the next section of the scene. Fortunately, you have matching POV shots that can be cut directly from the close-ups since they presumably are what the gang leaders are seeing.

- 14 Open **G2 (POV Group1)\_01**.
- 15 Mark an In point around 02:01:16:18 and an Out point around 18:17.
- 16 Overwrite the clip into the sequence directly after **G1\_CU\_swishy\_01**.
- 17 Open **G1 (POV Group2)\_02**.
- 18 Mark an In point around 02:02:26:02 and an Out point around 28:07.



- 19 Overwrite the clip into the sequence directly after **G2 (POV Group1)\_01**.



Having moved out from the close-ups to these POV long shots, you've implied that the groups are now in close proximity of each other. It's time to bring the two into the same location.

- 20 Open **WS\_Overhead\_06** from the Masters bin.
- 21 Mark an In just as the two groups cross the frameline threshold (approximately 01:55:35:01) and set an Out just before they come to a complete stop (around 37:00).
- 22 Overwrite the clip into the sequence directly after **G1 (POV Group2)\_02**.
- 23 Use the Recent Clips menu to open **G2 (POV Group1)\_01**.



- 24 Mark the area just before and after the group comes to a stop (In; 02:01:21:17, Out; 23:06) and overwrite the clip into the sequence directly after **WS\_Overhead\_06**.

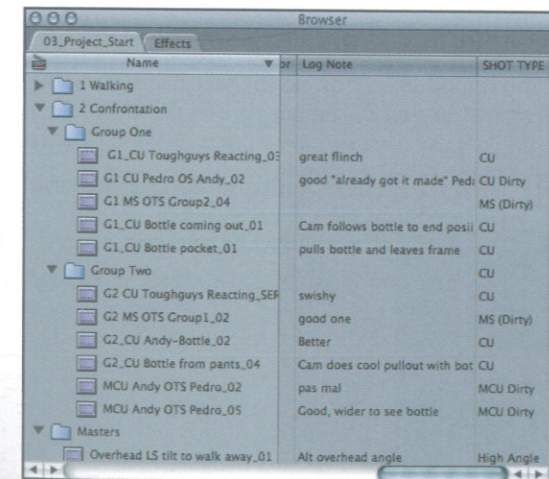
- 25 Play back the sequence up to this point.

### Ignore the Audio

Now you'll move from the walking part of the scene to the confrontation. To enhance the suspense during this section, you will need to spread out the dialogue a bit. During production, the guys bantered their few lines so quickly that it sucked the tension out of the scene; if these were rival gangs squaring off, they wouldn't speak to each other quite so easily. It's up to you to create pacing that makes the moment as menacing as possible.

Ordinarily when cutting dialogue, you always get the flow of the audio worked out before you worry about the picture edit, but in this case you will do the reverse. Don't worry about all the overlapping or repeated dialogue that happens during these next few edits. You'll go back and clean it up once the picture is in and the pacing feels right.

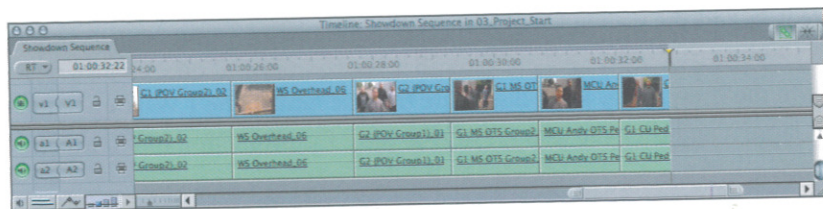
- 1 In the Browser, click the disclosure triangle next to the 1 Walking bin to collapse it and click the triangle next to the 2 Confrontation bin to expand it.



- 2 Open **G1 MS OTS Group2\_04**. Mark the area from before Pedro says, “So what’s up?” until after he clasps his hands (In: 01:57:47:04, Out: 48:15).

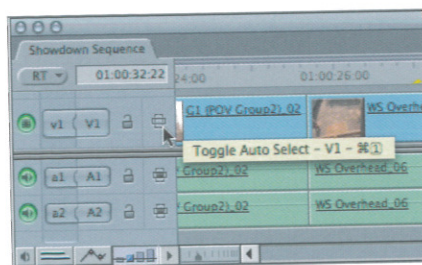
**NOTE** ▶ Although it’s not ideal to back out to a wider shot here, performance trumps matching angles, and this shot had the best performance with the least problems.

- 3 Overwrite the clip into the sequence directly after **G2 (POV Group1)\_01**.
- 4 Open **MCU Andy OTS Pedro\_02**. Set an In point at 02:10:50:04 and an Out point at 51:11.
- 5 Overwrite the clip into the sequence directly after **G1 MS OTS Group2\_04**.
- 6 Open **G1 CU Pedro OS Andy\_02**. Set an In point at 02:17:14:16 and an Out point at 15:11.
- 7 Overwrite the clip into the sequence directly after **MCU Andy OTS Pedro\_02**.

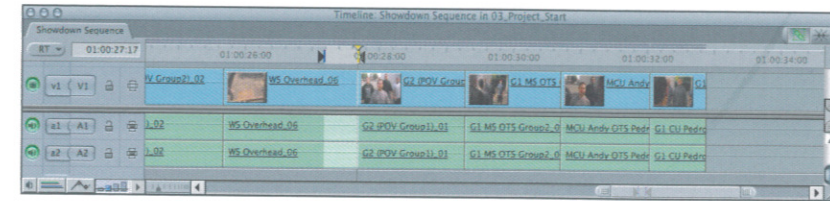


With the main shots for the dialogue section of the scene laid in with approximate timing, you can now clean up the audio.

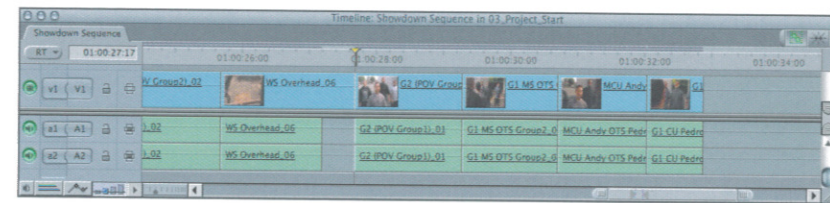
- 8 Click the Auto Select icon for V1 to turn it off.



- 9 Place the playhead at the beginning of **WS\_Overhead\_06** and begin to play it.
- 10 Mark an In point before Andy says, “What’s up?” around 01:00:26:19. Mark an Out point at the end of the clip.



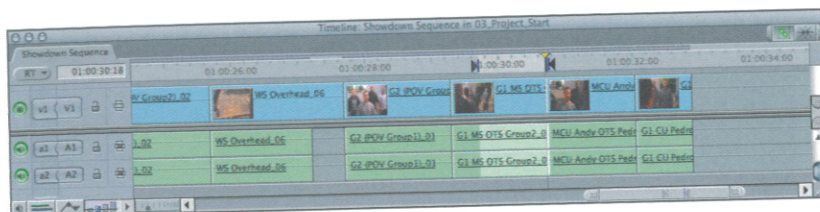
- 11 Press Command-Shift-A to deselect all and press Delete to remove that section of the audio tracks.



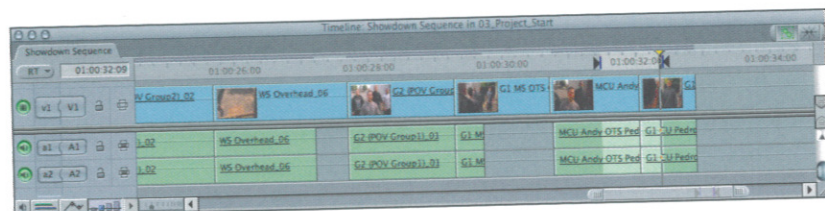
Because Auto Select is Off for track V1, only the audio tracks are deleted. Now, instead of Andy saying something as he approaches, you heighten the moment by having him just step up and stare. Although it’s a subtle editing difference, you can see it has a dramatic effect on how the scene plays. Also, although you are leaving a gap of total silence, this can easily be addressed later using *room tone* (an audio ambiance track recording on location) and other sound design elements.

- 12 Play forward past the next clip into **G1 MS OTS Group2\_04**. Set an In point right after Pedro says, “S’up?” but before Andy says anything (around 01:00:29:18).

- 13 Press Down Arrow to move the playhead to the next edit and set an Out point there.



- 14 Press Delete to remove the extra dialogue.
- 15 Play forward and mark an In point just after Andy says, “We gonna do this?”
- 16 Play over Pedro’s “Si mon,” and into the next clip. Mark the Out just after Andy (again) says, “We gonna do this?” but before Pedro speaks.



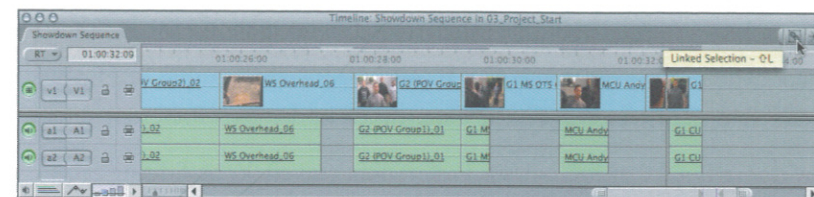
- 17 Press Delete to remove the repeated lines.
- 18 Move the playhead back to the beginning of **WS\_Overhead\_06** and play the section.

### Using Dynamic Trimming

The scene is looking okay, but the edits are all occurring right on each guy’s lines. I’m sure you’ve already realized that the scene would feel a little more fluid if the edits were split. This is a great time to become familiar with dynamic trimming.

- 1 Turn on Auto Select for track V1.

- 2 Click the Linking icon in the button bar or press Shift-L to disable Linked Selection.



This step isn’t necessary to make use of dynamic trimming, but in this instance, you’re only going to be trimming the video and this makes it easier to avoid accidentally selecting tracks you don’t want to adjust.

- 3 Double-click the edit point on V1 between **G2 (POV Group1)\_01** and **G1 MS OTS Group2\_04**.

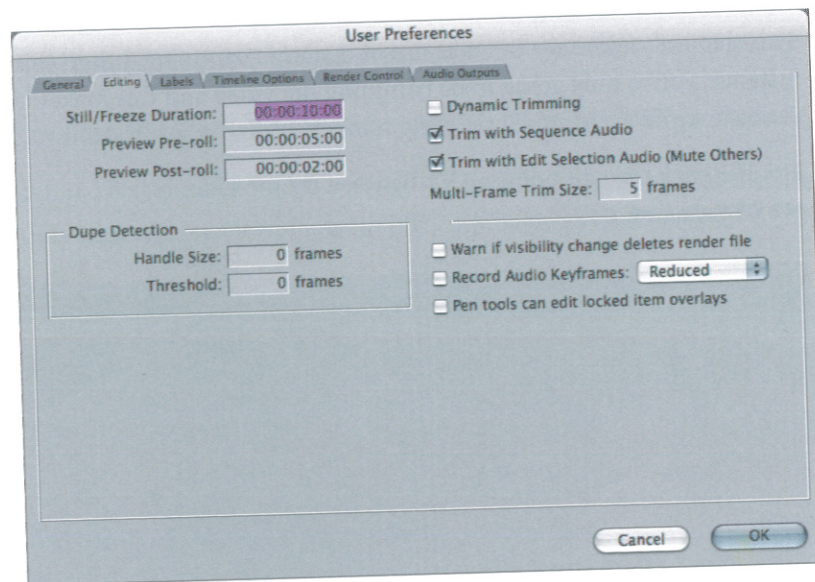


The edit is selected and the Trim Edit window opens.

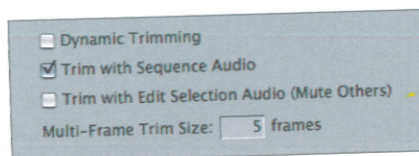
Trimming an edit in the Trim Edit window is identical to trimming it in the Timeline. You can roll the edit or ripple either side. The Trim Edit window just provides more detailed information, such as how many frames you have trimmed and how much media is left in each of the clips.

In order to trim effectively, you need to know which audio will be played in the Trim Edit window. This is determined in the User Preferences window.

- 4 Choose Final Cut Pro > User Preferences and click the Editing tab.



- 5 Make sure Trim with Sequence Audio is selected and Trim with Edit Selection Audio (Mute Others) is deselected.



For now, leave Dynamic Trimming deselected.

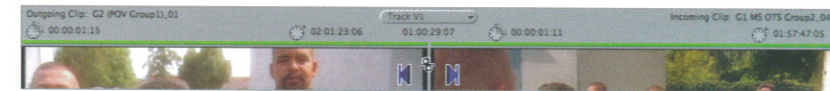
- 6 Click OK to close the User Preferences window.

- 7 Make sure the Trim Edit window is active and press the spacebar.

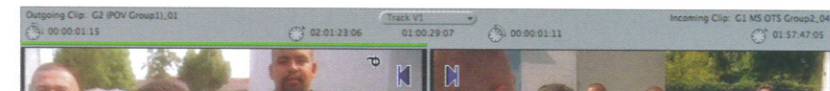
The spacebar works differently in the Trim Edit window than it does elsewhere. Here, it performs a Play Around Edit and it automatically loops. If you want to play forward (or backward) without looping, use the J, K, and L keys.

- 8 Press the spacebar again to stop the loop.

Before turning on the Dynamic Trimming feature, you should become familiar with how the Trim Edit window works (if you aren't already). The type of edit is indicated by the green bars at the top of the window. A green bar on both sides means roll:



One bar indicates a ripple edit on the side where the bar appears:

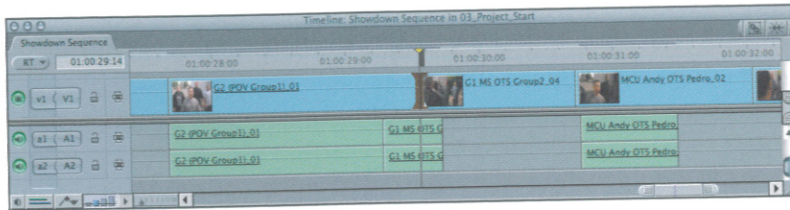


If you're ever in doubt, you can also always check the selection in the Timeline.

While you trim in the Timeline by dragging the edit point or typing in numbers, in the Trim Edit window, you can type in numbers or you can click the trim buttons.



- 9 Make sure the edit is selected as a roll and click the +5 button once and then the +1 button twice.



The edit is rolled forward by seven frames.

- 10 Press the spacebar to play around the edit and see how the trim improved the edit. Press the spacebar again to stop.

This edit works, but it would have been just as easy, and taken fewer clicks, to just type +7 without ever opening the Trim Edit window.

The real reason the Trim Edit window exists is because it allows you to trim on the fly, also known as dynamic trimming. Dynamic trimming is very simple; when you press the J or L key the sequence plays, moving the edit point with the playhead. When you press K to stop playback, the edit is updated to the new point.

This method of trimming is far more intuitive than typing a number of frames, and it's far more useful than dragging an edit point in the Timeline.

All edit decisions should be made while playing. That's why you should always set Ins, Outs, and markers while the video is moving.

This is a very fundamental and critical point. Editing is about timing. An edit is right when it *feels* right—not when it is adjusted by a specific number of frames. And it's impossible to feel the timing of an edit while dragging an edit point in the Timeline or typing in a number of frames. But it is possible to feel the edit if you are changing it while playing. Enter dynamic trimming.

- 11 Click the Dynamic checkbox.



- 12 Press J to move the edit backward.

- 13 Press K to stop the edit.

- 14 Press L to move the edit forward.

It takes some getting used to. Don't be afraid. You can go back in the other direction if you go too far, and there's always Undo.

- 15 Use the J, K, and L keys to move the edit around and get familiar with how it feels.

This is a pretty short shot to practice with, but it's a real world situation. Plenty of times you'll be trimming edits with only a couple of frames to spare.

**IMPORTANT** ▶ If you have pressed J or L and want to abort the trim operation, press the spacebar instead of K. That will stop playback, and return the edit to its previous location.

- 16 Once you've got the hang of it, press L and play the edit until just after Pedro begins talking. Then press K to complete the trim.

Aim to put the edit after "So" and just as Pedro says, "What" in "What's up?" You are creating a standard J-edit, beginning Pedro's line while looking at Andy, then cutting to Pedro as if in response. This is the same type of split edit you did again and again in Lessons 1 and 2. The difference now is that you're using a new tool to do it.

- 17 After you think you've got the edit right, press the spacebar to play around the edit.

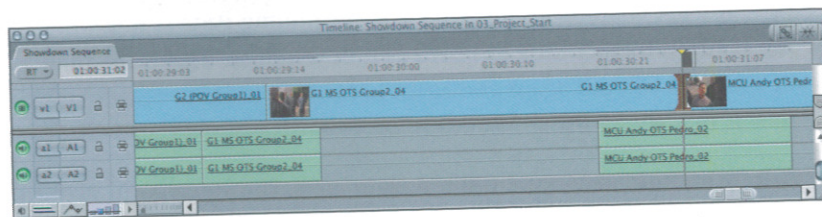
Eventually this will become a habit. J... L... K... spacebar... J... K... L... K... spacebar. It will become second nature and you will intuitively begin editing by feel.

- 18 Once you're satisfied with this edit, press Down Arrow to shift to the next edit point.

The Trim Edit window stays active, but now you're manipulating the edit point between **G1 MS OTS Group2\_04** and **MCU Andy OTS Pedro\_02**.



- 19 Again, use the J, K, and L keys to trim the edit dynamically, until you've created a J-cut, where you cut back to Andy just before he says, "Do this."



- 20 Press the spacebar to play around the edit.
- 21 Once you're satisfied, press Down Arrow again to move to the last edit.
- 22 Use J, K, L, and the spacebar to adjust this edit to your liking.

You may choose to cut to Pedro before he says, "Si mon," or just after "Si" and before "mon." There is no correct answer; just place the edit where it feels right.

As you can see, it's very easy to adjust one edit, then move on to the next and adjust that one, and so on. This is one of the reasons it makes sense to get your edits approximately right, but wait until most of the clips are in place before doing the final trimming. As you get more comfortable with dynamic trimming, you'll use it all the time.

There is a misperception that dynamic trimming is an "advanced" editing feature. It's not. It's wonderfully easy to do and, once you get the hang of it, it's fun, too! The only obstacle is that you have to know what you are trying to achieve before using it.

### Stretch Out the Climax

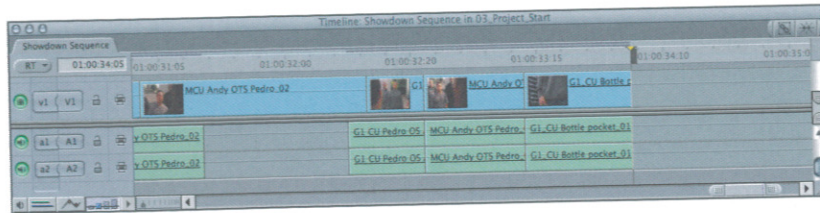
The next event in the scene is the two leaders pull out their weapons, which turn out to be baby bottles. You could simply show this action in one shot, but to maximize the effect and enhance the surprise, you should stretch out this event as long as possible. Fortunately you have quite a bit of coverage to work with.

- 1 Open **MCU Andy OTS Pedro\_05**. Mark the area where Andy goes for his weapon but don't include any frames where you can see what it is (In: 02:12:03:18, Out: 04:08).

This is a classic setup shot. As soon as the audience sees him going for a weapon, a host of expectations are established. The longer you can wait before paying off on the setup, the more tension you create, and the more comedy when the expectation turns out to be wrong.

- 2 Overwrite the clip into the sequence directly after **G1 CU Pedro OS Andy\_02**.
- 3 Open **G1\_CU Bottle pocket\_01**. Set the In on the first frame where his hand moves, and set the Out just before you can identify what it is he's grabbing (In: 02:21:56:19, Out: 57:10).

- 4 Overwrite the clip into the sequence directly after **MCU Andy OTS Pedro\_05**.



- 5 Open **G2\_CU Bottle from pants\_04** and mark the In point as he's reaching for the bottle and set the Out point once the bottle is out and held still (In: 03:03:49:00, Out: 50:00).

This is an instance when you can overlap the action slightly to stretch out the moment. This is commonly called double-cutting and you see it done all the time with explosions. In reality, it probably only takes Andy four to five frames to whip out that bottle, but here you've managed to stretch it out to almost 2 seconds!

- 6 Overwrite the clip into the sequence directly after **G1\_CU Bottle pocket\_01**.
- 7 Press \ to play around the last few edits.

Not bad, but you can do better. Sure, you've stretched out the moment when the bottles come out, but you can stretch it even further and make it more suspenseful and funnier.

### Bring in the Witness

The idea of a witness is an essential element of successful action scenes. Adding shots of someone in the room watching events unfold provides several benefits. First, it provides an emotional point of view for the viewers to identify with. Typically with most action scenes, the people performing the action are so busy doing that they don't have much time to be feeling or reacting. A witness (especially if it's a character that the audience already knows and relates to) is a perfect solution to this. It's scary to see the hero strapped to a log-cutting machine, moving inch-by-inch toward the spinning blade. But it's

twice as moving if you can show that the woman who he was supposed to save tied to a chair nearby watching helplessly. Similarly, even the most mind-numbing corporate speech is made more engaging by cutting to a shot of an audience member in rapt attention.

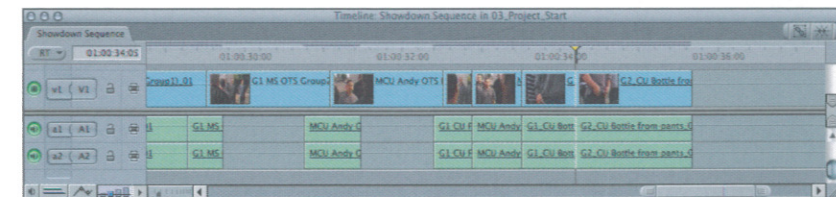
Furthermore, the witness has another, more technical benefit. It provides a guaranteed cutaway. In the midst of a scene, there may be many reasons why you need to cut away from the action at hand. You might need to change angles or cut around a moment when the make-up artist needed to apply some fake blood. Action scenes are complicated to shoot and they frequently are broken up into many shots. Sometimes you need to divert the audience's attention just for a moment, so you can cut around a hole in the action, or make the scene seem more seamless.

Finally, cutting away to a witness gives you the opportunity to stretch out a moment far longer than it might have been in reality. And this is exactly what you will do at this point in the scene.

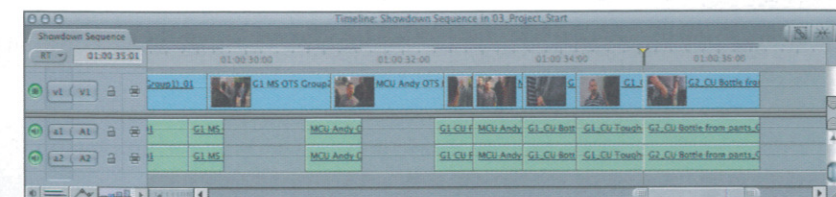
- 8 Open **G1\_CU Toughguys Reacting\_03**.

A section of the shot is already marked.

- 9 Move the sequence playhead back to the second-to-last edit.



- 10 Insert the clip into the sequence.



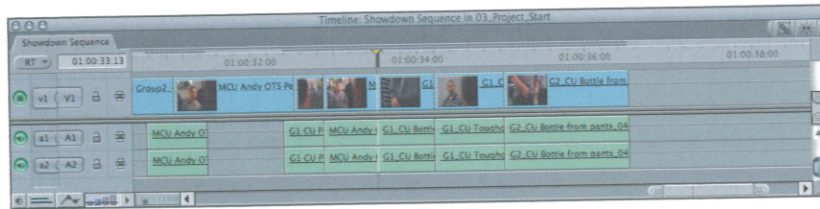
- 11 Play this section of the scene.

Seeing the guy's reaction definitely improves the scene and further suspends the payoff. But there's no reason to stop there!

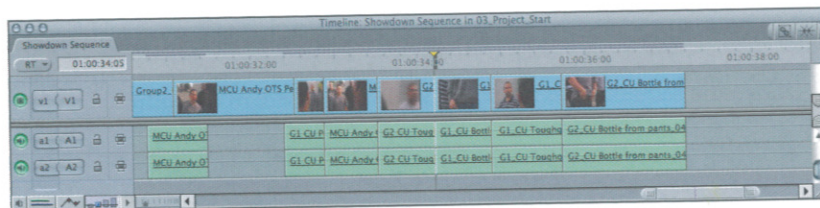
- 12 Open **G2 CU Toughguys Reacting\_SERIES**.

A section of this clip has also been marked.

- 13 Move the sequence playhead back until it is in between **MCU Andy OTS Pedro\_05** and **G1\_CU Bottle pocket\_01**.



- 14 Insert the cutaway between those two clips.



- 15 Play back this section of the scene.

Amazingly you have stretched this tiny moment to almost 4 seconds—and you're not done yet! You've probably stretched the buildup as much as possible, but the event itself, the revealing of the bottles, can be extended a bit as well.

- 16 Put the sequence playhead midway through the last clip, while Andy's arm is still moving (at about 01:00:36:10).

- 17 Open **Overhead LS tilt to walk away\_02** from the Masters bin.

A section of the clip has already been marked.

- 18 Overwrite that clip into the sequence.

Because there is a camera move in both shots and because Andy's arm movement begins in shot 1 and finishes in shot 2, this makes for an exciting (maybe even dizzying) edit. Yes, the action is doubled slightly, but this is exactly the place to do it, as it draws added attention to this pivotal moment. How exciting!

However, while all of those elements would likely be the same whether they were pulling out switchblades or bananas, in fact they are pulling out baby bottles. This is an unexpected surprise and will almost certainly elicit a laugh from the audience. You can milk that laugh (sorry for the pun) by adding another shot or two of the bottles. That gives the audience a chance to laugh, plus it emphasizes the silliness of the event.

- 19 Open **G1\_CU Bottle coming out\_01**.

An area of the clip has already been marked.



- 20 Overwrite the clip into the sequence directly after **Overhead LS tilt to walk away\_02**.

It would be nice to complement this CU with a matching CU of Andy's bottle, but another option is to go back to the MS of Andy holding the bottle.

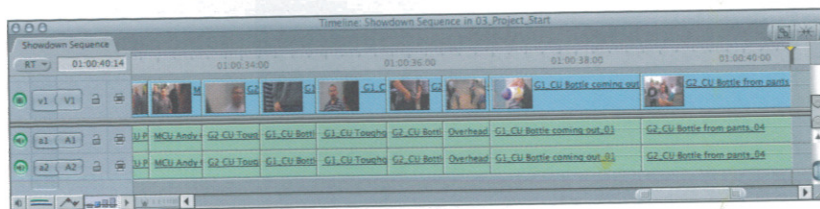


## 21 Open **G2\_CU Bottle from pants\_04**.



While this breaks the matching angles rule, another CU of a baby bottle would potentially wear out the joke. It's not like there's any new information learned by seeing a close-up of Andy's bottle. Instead, this angle gives you the added humor of seeing the tough guys lined up behind this absurd display (not to mention Andy's delightfully serious expression).

## 22 Mark an In point at 03:03:51:00 and an Out point at 52:19, and overwrite the clip into the sequence directly after **G1\_CU Bottle coming out\_01**.



Before you dismiss this climax, there is one other element that you set up earlier that has yet to pay off. Any guess what that is? Well, remember the frightened looks on the part of the witnesses just as the boys were whipping out their weapons? What happened when they found out it was only milk?

## 23 Open **G1\_CU Toughguys Reacting\_04**.

24 Play forward past the witness's frightened reaction to see his smile of relief when he sees the bottles. Mark an In at 02:20:20:23 and an Out at 22:17.

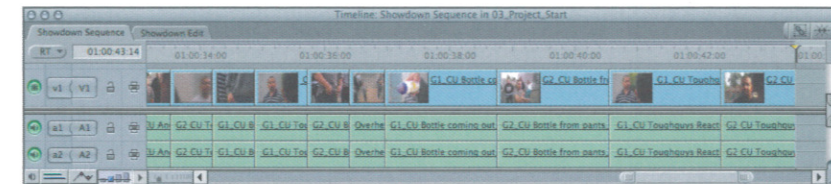
## 25 Overwrite the clip into the sequence directly after **G2\_CU Bottle from pants\_04**.

That resolves his story, but what about the other guy?

## 26 Open **G2 CU Toughguys Reacting\_SERIES**. Shuttle through it looking for anything that might work.

Unfortunately, this guy is so stoic that he really has no reaction to the bottle at all. However, there is still hope: At the very end of the shot, unable to keep playing the role, he breaks character and smiles. Guess what? That will work perfectly!

## 27 Mark an In at 02:13:05:23 and an Out at 07:02 and overwrite the clip onto the end of the sequence.

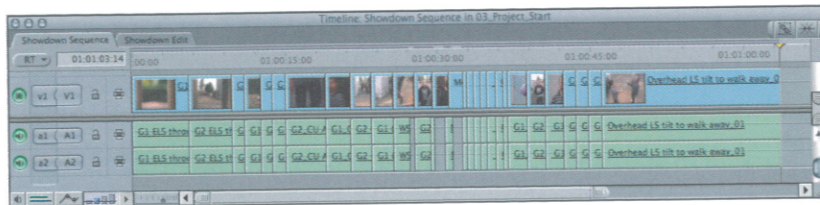


## Finishing the Scene

Just like a dialogue scene, once the turning point has been reached, the right thing to do is get out quickly. This scene has a couple more lines of dialogue and then a final payoff, showing the picnic where the boys' families are all waiting.

## 1 Open **G2 MS OTS Group1\_02**. Mark the area where Andy says, "Hey man, I'm out of formula" (In: 01:58:55:03, Out: 56:07).

- 2 Overwrite it onto the end of the sequence.
- 3 Open the reverse, **G1 CU Pedro OS Andy\_02**. Mark the area where Pedro says, "I already got it made" (In: 02:17:17:22, Out: 19:06).
- 4 Overwrite the clip into the sequence.
- 5 Open **Overhead LS tilt to walk away\_01**. A section of the clip has already been marked. Overwrite it onto the end of the sequence.
- 6 Make sure the Timeline window is active and press Shift-Z to zoom the whole sequence to fit.



You can see that the overall pacing of the show illustrates a natural progression. The early cuts are mostly of a similar length; the cuts then speed up dramatically as you reach the climax, and they slow back down in a denouement. While not all scenes are the same, looking at the big picture like this can give you clues about the pacing. Are your shot lengths generally consistent? Do they vary randomly or is there a visible arc that matches the storyline?

- 7 Play the whole show and admire your work.

Of course, your work with this scene isn't done. There's loads of audio work to do, to make the scene really come alive. In addition to adding room tone and environmental sounds to fill in the empty gaps you left when you cut the dialogue, you could also add military type marching for the footsteps as the gangs come together, a gasp or two as the bottles come out, and maybe a corresponding sigh of relief once the truth is revealed. Top it all with an urban-flavored rap song that comes to a suspenseful climax at just the right moment and you've got yourself a pretty amazing scene!

## Lesson Review

1. What is an action scene?
2. What is a complex action scene?
3. What are setup and payoff shots?
4. What is the advantage of working in the Trim Edit window?
5. What are three common ways to increase tension?
6. What is a quick and effective trick to easily account for momentum when cutting on an action?
7. What is crosscutting?
8. What does the spacebar do in the Trim Edit window?
9. How can you use dynamic trimming?

## Answers

1. Any scene where the focus of the scene is an activity.
2. A scene where multiple activities happen, either in sequence, or simultaneously.
3. A setup is a shot that elicits an expectation from the viewer. A payoff is a shot that resolves such an expectation.
4. The Trim Edit window provides detailed information, such as how many frames are trimmed and how much media is left in each clip.
5. Using close-ups without context, crosscutting, and speeding up the edits.
6. By first making the edit on the end of the action, then rolling the edit back to just before it happens.
7. Cutting back and forth between two locations, usually for action that is occurring simultaneously.
8. Play Around Edit Loop. It also aborts a dynamic trim operation.
9. Activate Dynamic Trimming in User preferences by using the Trim Edit window to perform roll or ripple edits while the sequence plays. This enables you to make timing decisions in the ideal context of the flow and pacing of the video.