

Part Two

6.0 - Camera Techniques and Positioning

Let's have a look at some more things you will need to consider when operating or directing cameras at a wrestling show.

When possible, you want to keep other camera operators out of your shot. The longer you work together with the same operators the better you will get, but there are rules you can follow to help each other out when shooting with multiple operated cameras.

First is your home position. Here's a diagram from part one of the course:

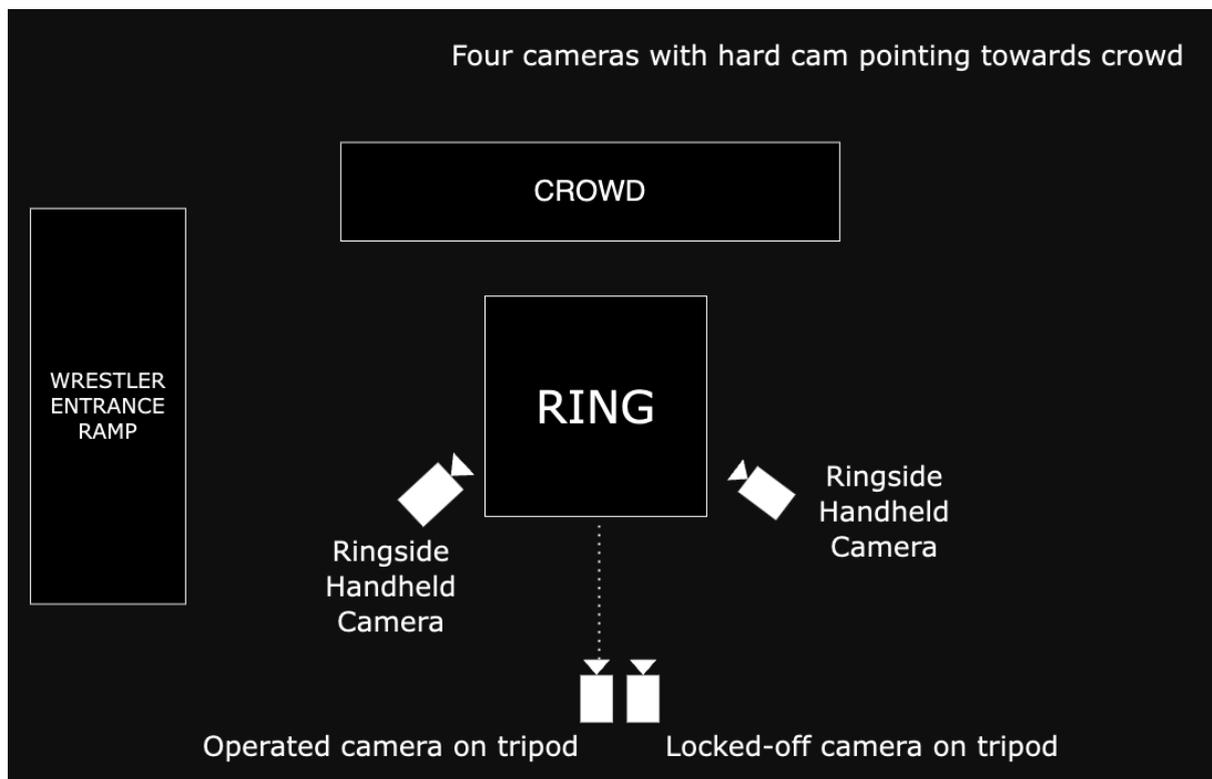


Figure 1: Home position for ringside cameras

This is your most basic way of keeping each other out of shot, or at least inconspicuous. In general, most of the action in the ring takes place in the middle, and so at worst in these situations you will be a small black figure in the corner of your colleague's frame.

6.1 – Crossing the line

These home positions also help us not to “cross the line”. This is a term used in TV drama, film, sports and other categories of broadcast. It is also known as the 180 Degree Rule. Basically, it means that the camera should stay on one side of an imaginary line between two subjects, so that they are kept on opposite sides of the

frame. If the camera crosses this line, it can be confusing for the viewer. A wrestler who is running from right to left is suddenly running from left to right, which is very disorientating. Imagine you were watching a game of football with one team shooting right and the other left. If one of the cameras was positioned on the other side of the stadium from the others, it would show each team shooting the other way and would be confusing. Such an angle *can* be used of course, but it needs to be in isolation or as part of a replay, or in a particular sequence that helps it make sense to the viewer.

To complicate this though, wrestling is often covered in 360 degrees. Particularly with the “indy style” setup we discussed previously, there will be times when you need to cross the line and shoot backwards for example.

6.2 - Talking Segments

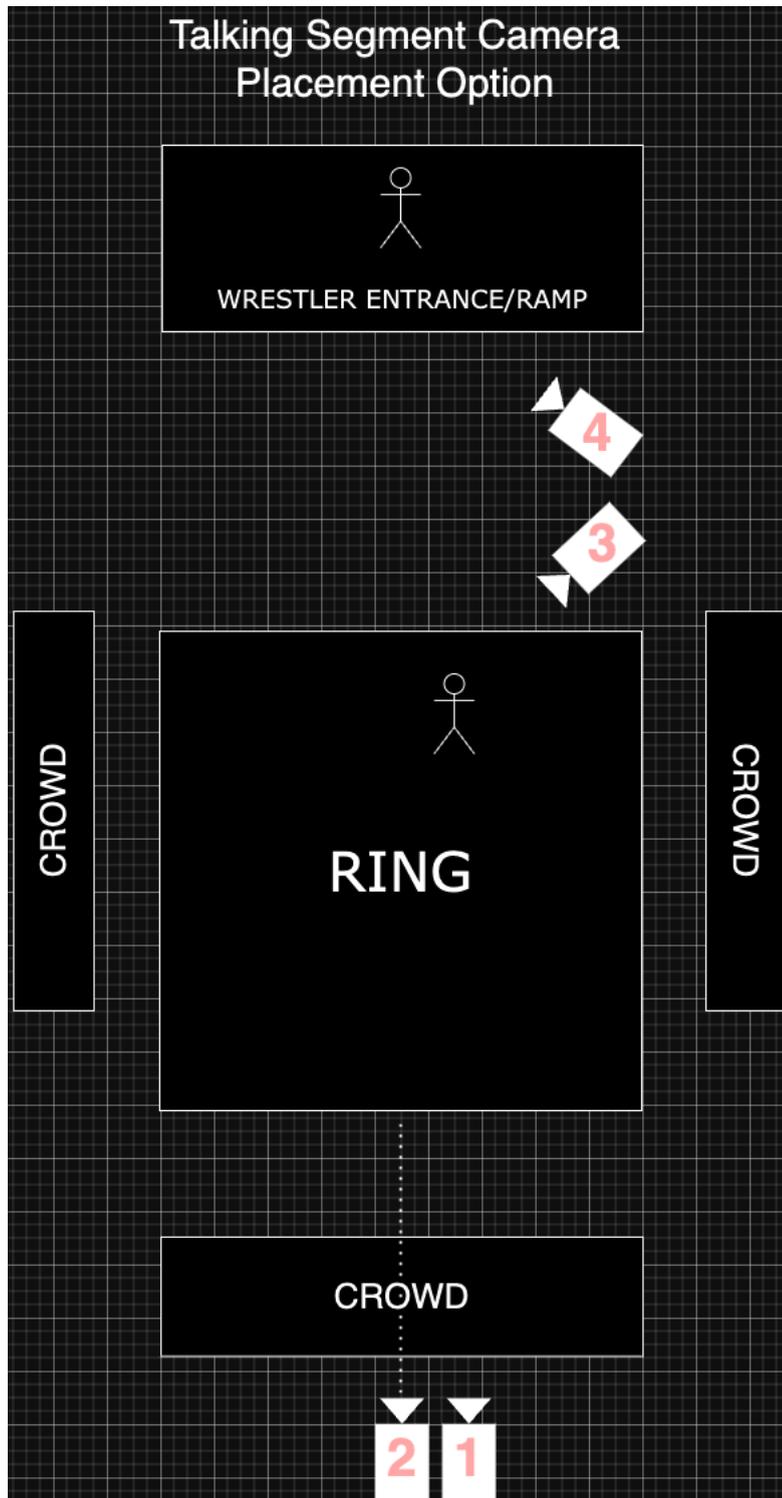


Figure 2: Talking Segment

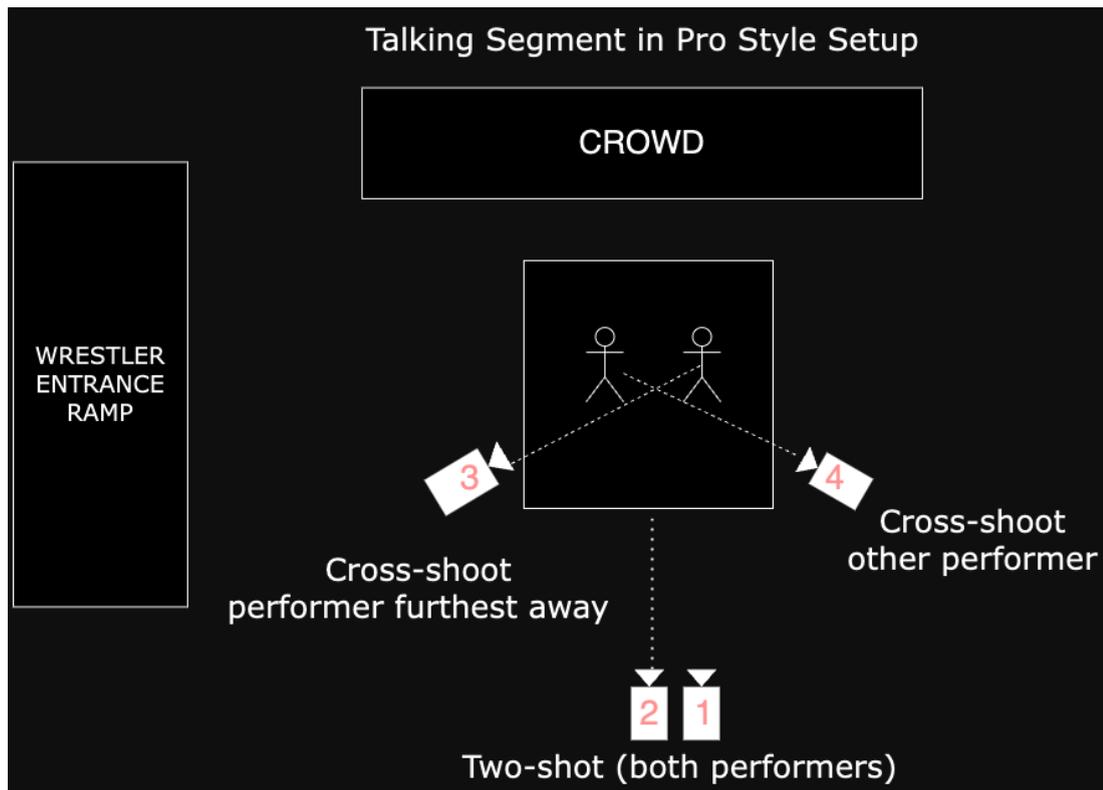
Consider this image. You are shooting a show with a talking segment. A wrestler on the stage is talking to a wrestler in the ring. Due to the setup of the venue, you have chosen to point the cameras towards the stage. With two people talking to each

other, you want a wide shot that includes them both, and two “singles” – a tighter shot of each wrestler you can cut between. It will depend on how many cameras you have, but in situations like this you will have to come up with ways of getting the shots you need even when the conditions are not exactly how you’d like them.

In the setup in Figure 3, you will have managed to get camera 3 and 4 both round to the camera right side of the ring. Ideally you do this without having the camera 3 operator being seen in shot running from his home position. You could do this by cutting to a tight shot on another camera and telling the camera 3 operator to move at that time. We will cover this kind of thing more later when talking about directing. Cameras 3 and 4 now having singles of the relevant performers and have created a new imaginary line that they are staying on the correct side of. In an ideal world you would then have a wide shot with each performer on the left and right of frame, but in this setup your wide shot will be from camera 1 or 2 and will have performers in the foreground and background.

If you only have one ringside camera here, you could use it to get both singles, either by doing a dynamic but smooth pan from one wrestler to another, or by cutting back to camera 1 or 2 and getting your ringside operator to change his shot during that time. If you are shooting a show yourself without direction, knowing that you will be editing it together later, think about how you will be able to cut what you are shooting.

Talking segments become easier when you are shooting in the “pro style” setup.



Camera 2 has a “two-shot”. This means it has both performers in the frame. This can be head-to-toe, a mid-shot or even a close-up depending on the situation. Cameras 3 and 4 are cross-shooting. This means they are shooting the wrestler furthest away from them while the other ringside operator gets the other wrestler. Here’s an example from WWE:

<https://youtu.be/P80uyYhnj6E?si=cwxYXq4nOqdQYoE2&t=87>

The shots are not always the exact same throughout the segment. Most often the singles (shots with just one performer in them) are “clean”. This means you see only one performer. If you look around 5:05 on this video however, you will see an example of a “dirty single”.



Figure 3: Dirty single

A shot being “dirty” in this instance means that the person in the foreground is also in it, although they are not the main subject of the shot. Consider throwing in a mix of clean and dirty shots when shooting these segments.

If you only have one ringside camera then you will have a choice to make about who you feature. If you know you’re likely to get a better performance from one wrestler than the other, then that’s worth considering for who to feature. You could also make the decision to position yourself at the front of the ring to give you the ability to get singles of both performers. It’s not perfect as you are likely going to be in the hard cam shot, but it could be worth it to get the shots you need.

6.3 - Positioning cameras for action outside of the ring

When the action spills out of the ring, you want to be able to cover it while not crossing the line and keeping your other camera operators out of shot as much as possible. The theory behind this is called “Working The 90”. This refers to the 90-degree angle that you should try to keep between you and your fellow ringside camera operator.

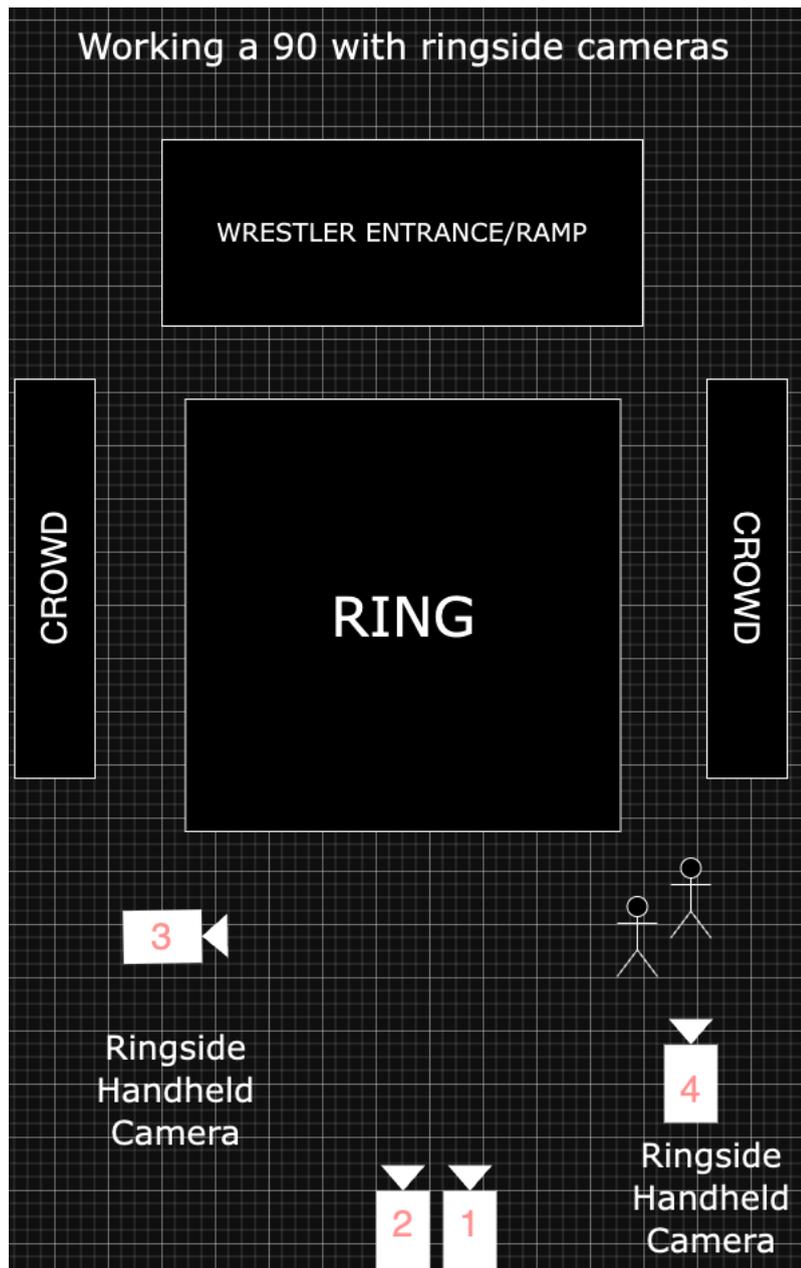


Figure 4: Working The 90

Look at the positioning of cameras 3 and 4. They have both moved round to the front of the ring to capture the action between the two wrestlers on the outside. If they stay in their home positions, then their shots are compromised. They would be shooting back towards hard cam, which is generally not a good idea. Not only will you be showing the camera equipment and operators at hard cam, you may also be showing an area of the building without crowd as well as the Front of House (FOH) area with the venue's equipment. This is particularly important at bigger shows with more equipment.

You can notice all this when watching AEW and WWE. AEW in particular at this time does not have any fans on hard cam side, and so it is not desirable for the ringside

camera operators to shoot back towards that side. Even in WWE with larger crowds at the moment, they do not often show the hard cam and FOH area from ringside.

When you are working the 90, you will have to consider that the action may well move around, and that you will have to try your best to keep that angle. You are also likely to have audience members near you, and so you will have to think of ways to navigate them and keep them safe. When operating ringside in WWE in these situations, I often have to jump over the barrier to get the shot I need and jump back over once the action has moved on. In an independent show this could look different. It could mean tucking yourself into a barrier to get the shot and stay out of the other camera's frame, or it could mean being forced to cross the line and keep your shot tight to avoid showing things in the building that you don't want to show. You also have to consider your own safety here, as well as the safety of the wrestlers. No shot is worth putting yourself at risk for. At the same time, your presence at ringside should not hinder the wrestlers performing the spot they are in, and so you need to think about how you are staying out of their way too. Being a fan of wrestling helps here. If two performers are on the outside area, and performing an Irish Whip in your direction, you should have the knowledge and foresight to get out of the way, while still getting the shot.

6.4 - Ringside shots from front side

There will be times when it's desirable to get a shot from the ringside camera at the front side of the ring. Perhaps a wrestler is posing there as part of their entrance, or they are in a submission and are on the mat reaching for the front rope. Here's an example of a shot during an entrance:

https://www.youtube.com/live/gYT2DgUVNXU?si=HGNFOw0V1MBXVn_7&t=4905

What's important here is getting the shot without the ringside operator getting in the way of one of the other camera's shots. It's particularly noticeable if a ringside operator walks straight into the middle of a hard cam shot. It looks terrible and gives the impression that the director and crew are not in control, or are not conscious of the problem they are causing.

The way around it is positioning and timing. If you are directing the operator, you can tell him to come round front but to wait next to the right-hand post. You can then cut to his camera and they can move into the central position needed for the shot. They can do this "on-camera", by which I mean they can do it while maintaining a useable shot that is going out live.

If the show is not being directed then you again just have to keep in mind how you are going to cut it together later. I would suggest the same movement. Get into position at the post, frame up and then move yourself in, on-camera, to get the shot

you need. You can then reverse the process to get yourself out of there without being seen in the hard cam shot. Your hard cam could also provide a tight shot of the wrestler in the ring that would let your ringside operator move back to their home position without being seen, as is the case in the above video.

6.5 - "Working" the shot at ringside

There are techniques you can use as a ringside operator to help with the look and feel of the show, and in particular the moves being performed.

A good example is a wrestler on the ground in the corner of the ring, with their opponent standing above them and kicking or stomping away. You could just take a step back and hold a static shot of this happening. Much more dynamic and interesting though is to put some quick movement into the shot. You could do quick tilts up and down showing the movement of the legs of the aggressor, as well as showing their face and then tilting down quickly to the face of their victim. You can physically "dunt" the camera a little on your shoulder. By this I mean giving it a slight shake or bump – timed with the impact of the move being performed – to give the feeling of it being even more impactful than it is.

This technique can also be used to hide weak shots, perhaps from a less experienced performer. If a director tells you to "work it" a little then this is probably what he or she is referring to. I also like to use the technique when a wrestler is whipped into a corner. I will track them as they move across the ring and then perform a snap pan to match their movements as they hit the turnbuckle pad.

As wrestling fans, we are often able to see what is coming next in a match, and if we can use that to inform the way we operate camera, then we can help to improve the product.

6.6 - "Faces!"

After a big moment in a match, it's important to convey the emotion of what's going on to your viewer. The wrestlers will usually be effective at 'selling' moves to the crowd. 'Selling' means they are, through their actions, body language and voice, showing us all that the move or moves they have taken hurt. They will show their pain, triumph, despair etc. to the people in attendance. This also gives you as camera operator the opportunity to capture it. The ringside cameras are the best for doing this. If a wrestler is two feet from you, selling a big move, it's vital to capture that. This is a discussion you can have with performers. Let them know where your cameras are. Let them know that the home positions are in the front corners, and that these are the best cameras for them to sell to.

A common direction you will hear over headset after a big move is “Faces!”. This means your director wants close ups of the faces of the wrestlers in the match. It’s your job at these points to help tell the story of the match. You could crash-zoom in for these. Perhaps you were wide for the impact of the move and then have crashed in on the zoom to capture the reaction of the wrestler facing you. Dynamic moves like these can add to the drama of the match.

6.7 - Entrances

The way in which you shoot entrances can give the viewer a good idea about the production levels of the show. Most of the low-level shows that you will find online have entrances shot in unimaginative ways. If you can use the resources available to create interesting entrance shots you can set yourself apart from other camera operators and editors in the field.

What I see so often is that when a wrestler’s music hits, we get a shot of a black curtain for 10-15 seconds, and then eventually a wrestler emerges. They’ve probably waited for a drop in their entrance music to time their appearance to. This is fine for the spectators in attendance, but it looks boring and unprofessional to a TV audience.

There are techniques we can use to make these entrances much more interesting.

If you can talk to wrestlers first or get to know their entrances after shooting them multiple times, then this will help. If not, it is still easy to create dynamic entrance shots.

If your setup consists of a static hard cam and you at ringside, you can shoot moving close-ups of the lights around the entrance. You can tilt the camera while doing so, or defocus it to create an abstract image. Instantly the viewer is presented with something more professional and interesting than a black curtain. Have a look at this:

<https://youtu.be/bLWCP86PCNk?si=9BniKucxKX5qSekD&t=852>

For Stevie James’ entrance here, I have faded between a locked-off hard cam shot and shots of lights and the entrance video. Think of ways you can do something similar when shooting other shows.

For the entrance of the second wrestler, you can also consider putting in shots of the first wrestler already in the ring. If they are used to working for TV they will know that there’s always a camera on them, and that they should be working even when it’s their opponents entrance going on. This is a great time to get a shot of them looking determined, scared etc. as they wait on the arrival of their opponent. I would call this a “look back” when directing. What’s handy is that if you are in position for the

entrance of the second wrestler, you are likely in a good position to get this look back on the first. Adding these shots into your show again helps tell the story of the match and improve the overall product.

6.8 - Promos

Promos are a huge part of wrestling and can often be a great way to get yourself known to wrestlers and promoters. With phone cameras being as good as they are now, it is certainly easier for talent to shoot their own material. However, there is still often the need for talent to have someone else shoot their promos. While likely not well-paying at first, shooting promos for wrestlers and getting to know them can be an invaluable way into the industry.

I have shot many kinds of promos over the years. They have ranged from someone talking in front of a wall to elaborate outdoor music video setups with multiple performers and a long edit afterwards.

Probably the most common type of promo in modern TV wrestling is an interviewer and performer in front of a screen like this:

<https://youtu.be/-57eGqAIK5Q?si=uZF9n9m5q3renpLI&t=2217>

These promos are great for improving your lighting skills, as well as making sure you are up to speed with microphone and audio settings. This example is shot from a tripod, but you could shoot this hand-held too. Think about how the lighting compares to the brightness levels on the TV too. You don't want the TV blown out (too bright) because the setting is wrong, or the lights on your talent are not bright enough.

What's probably most interesting with promos though, is how you choose to set up the world in which they exist. For me, a decision must be made about the "invisible" camera. Over the years many promos have been shot with talent seemingly unaware that there is a camera pointing at them, even though it is obviously only feet away. It may be that on the show you are shooting, you've received no direction about how promos should be shot. At this point it may be left up to you as to how they are.

A style of shooting promos I really appreciated was from the 2010's in TNA:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wbm08GhgKEg&ab_channel=TNAWrestling

The talent here are presented as not being aware they are being shot, and so to me there is a realism about the whole thing. It would be so easy to just be in the office right next to Hogan and Jarrett here, but then should the viewer expect them to act as if they were in private?

Deciding on how you want to shoot promos can be an exciting way to have creative input on a product.

7.0 – Etiquette on Shoot Days

How you conduct yourself on a job you are working on is vital and can decide whether you will be hired again.

Wrestling has some nuances in etiquette in comparison to other shoots I have worked on. I was aware of these early on having trained to be a wrestler for several years, but they are not always obvious to those new to shooting wrestling.

First, it's a good idea to greet and shake hands with anyone you come into contact with at a show. By this I mean wrestlers, promoters, venue staff and other crew. While most TV jobs have expectations like this, I end up shaking hands with a lot more people at wrestling shows than on other jobs. Due to the nature of wrestling, you are going to be in close contact with talent (i.e. wrestlers, performers), and you are likely going to be privy to things that they and the promoter do not want to be public. You need to demonstrate that you are trustworthy and are not going to post online about what you have seen or heard.



This photo was posted in the days before the WWE Bash in Berlin show in August 2024. It was taken during rehearsals when talent and crew run through spots in matches, seemingly by someone working at the show.

It should go without saying that you should not ever take photos like this, and you should never post or repost anything like this online. If you were found to be taking and sharing this image as a paid member of crew or production staff, you would absolutely lose your job and wouldn't get it back.

Figure 5: CM Punk and Drew McIntyre in Berlin

When you are working on a wrestling show, you are no longer a fan.

This doesn't mean you can't watch or enjoy wrestling on TV anymore – of course not. It means that your mindset must become professional when you are at a show. You are there to work.

When you cross that barrier that separates the audience and the talent and crew, your role changes and you must act accordingly. This means you do not take photos with or of talent and you do not hassle talent and ask them about sensitive subjects. I have brought people onto some of my jobs who have done these things. I've had them ask wrestlers about private matters regarding to their relationship with WWE, and I've had them ask me details about ICW's dealings with WWE that are clearly private by design. Do not be one of these people.

The longer you work in the business the more important this becomes. If you create a professional mindset from the beginning, then you will become accustomed to it for the future. The same rules apply at independent shows and at shows for bigger companies. Even at WWE, as a camera operator you are sometimes sharing a changing room with talent. I have done so with very famous wrestlers and talent.

They need to know that you are trustworthy and are not going to annoy or pester them while you are both working. Doing so will be a good way to make sure you don't get asked back for the next job.

Basically, to use a term everyone is probably familiar with – don't mark out in front of the wrestlers!

7.1 - Dress Code

What you wear to a shoot is important. In general, dark clothing is the way to go.

Ringside camera operators should wear all black. That means long black sleeves, black trousers and shoes, and a black hat if you have light or no hair.

If you are directing or performing other production duties, I would still recommend dark clothing, even if it's not essential for you to be totally covered like it is for the ringside operators. If your bright yellow t-shirt shows up in the back of shot somehow, it's not going to matter if you *thought* you wouldn't be visible. It's best to be safe and wear black anyway. It also gives a more professional impression to those you are working for and with, which as we have discussed is important.

7.2 - Working With Talent

As we have discussed, it is important to stay professional and not hassle wrestlers when working a show. This does not mean though, that you can't talk to them. Indeed, it can be important to do so in order to help plan out spots in matches, entrances and other important parts of the show.

It may be that the first shows you work on are small, and that talent aren't used to talking to camera operators or directors about what they're going to do. This isn't a disaster; it's just going to keep you on your toes during the show. Without advanced warning then it is more difficult to prepare for what is coming, but it will help you become more accustomed to where you should be for big moves, dives etc.

If you can talk to talent about their matches, then consider asking them about anything they'd like to be highlighted. Not everyone is tech-minded or knowledgeable about cameras. If you can discuss with the talent when and where particular high spots are likely to happen, you can get the shot you need, and they'll be happy that their efforts have been showcased.

