

CRANE TECHNIQUES

Cranes and jibs are mechanical devices, commonly used in filmmaking (see the “Mechanical” technique for more information). These machines can range in size from something that fits in the back of a truck to cranes that tower high into the air. The largest cranes are used to create very wide, sweeping camera movements.

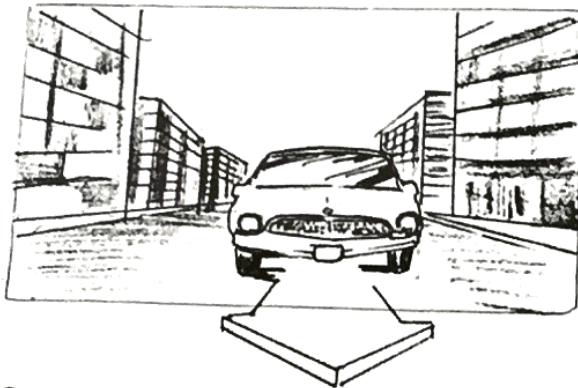
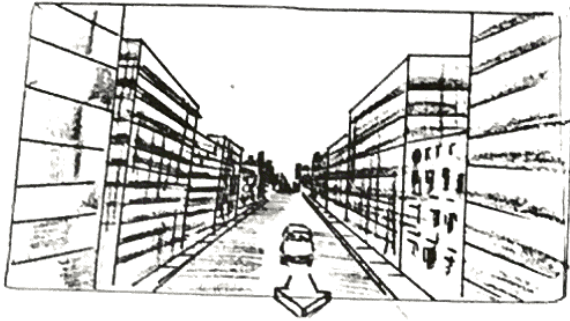
A crane movement often adds a certain dramatic impact to a scene. Because of its grand nature, a crane technique will always be noticed by an audience. When used in combination with a dolly movement or a camera technique, a crane movement can provide an effect even greater than the sum of its parts.

If we were to reduce crane movement to its basic forms, we might say that there are only two crane techniques: crane up and crane down. However, there are many factors involved with crane techniques that allow each of these simple movements to convey a wide variety of expressions and emotions to an audience.

CRANE UP, MOVE AWAY, CRANE DOWN, MOVE TOWARD

What does it look like?

With *Crane Up, Move Away*, the camera starts at "eye level" with a scene that contains moving objects. For example: an actor on horseback or in a vehicle. As the actor, or object, moves away from us into the background, the camera cranes up. This combination of movements intensifies the action.

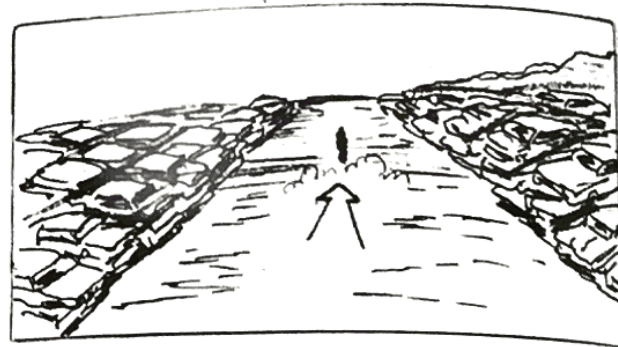
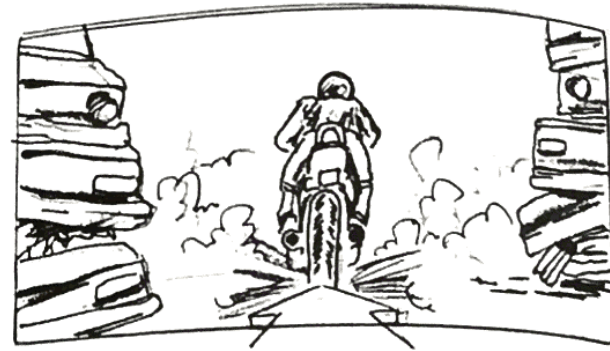


Crane Down, Move Toward

Crane Down, Move Toward is just the opposite. The subject starts far away from the crane and moves toward the camera. As the object gets closer, the camera cranes down until its height is at ground level.

Where can I see it?

Both of these techniques are evident in Thelma and Louise and The Untouchables. *Crane Up, Move Away* can be seen when Harry and Sally drive away from college in When Harry Met Sally, and when Matilda walks away from a gunfight at the end of The Professional.



Crane Up, Move Away

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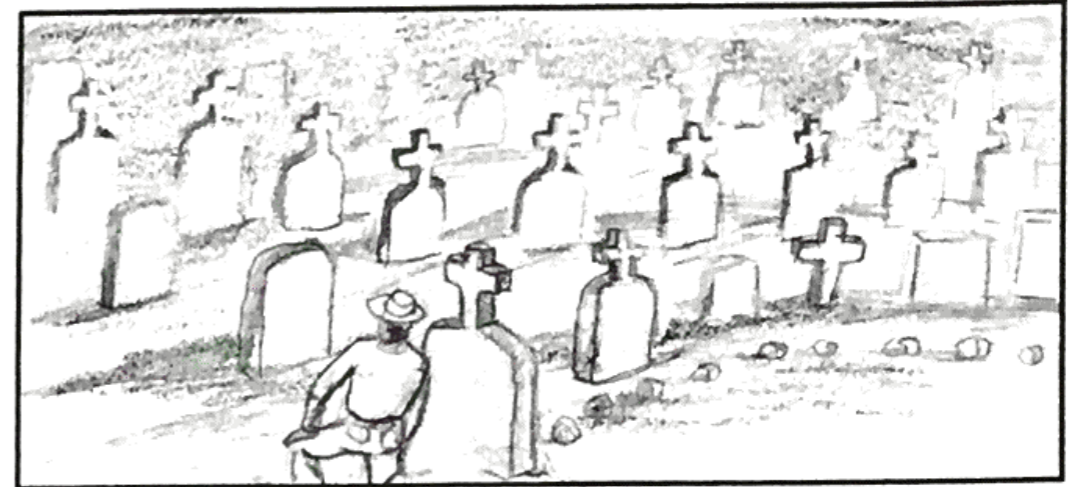
SEARCHING CRANE

What does it look like?

Searching Crane is a specialized crane technique. As a character onscreen searches for something, the camera slowly cranes upward, gradually revealing the magnitude of the search.

Where can I see it?

In *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*, the camera cranes back slightly to reveal the extent of a graveyard that must be searched to find the gold. In *House*, the camera cranes up from the pool as the main character searches for his son. *Labyrinth* uses a *Searching Crane* as Sarah searches through the labyrinth.



Searching Crane

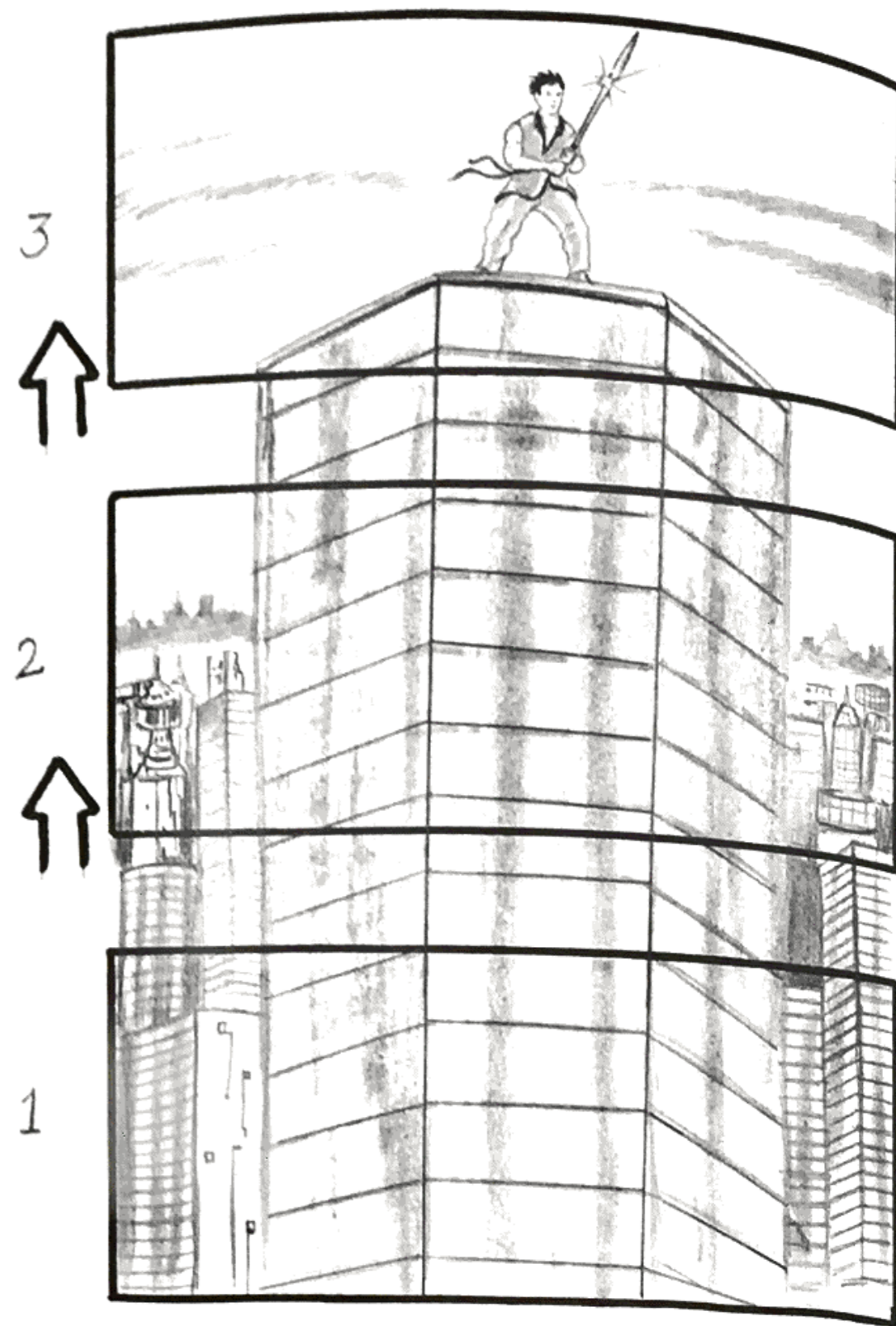
RISE UP

What does it look like?

With *Rise Up*, the camera rises vertically. It rises toward something—a character's close-up, for example. *Rise Up* is often used to look over an obstruction—a railing or a fence—from the perspective of someone standing up.

Where can I see it?

At the end of Batman, the camera *Rises Up* through the city to reveal Batman standing at the top. At the end of Batman Returns, the camera *Rises Up* through the city superstructures to reveal Catwoman at the top. In Desperado, the camera *Rises Up* from the bar after El Mariachi reloads his gun in a shoot-out scene.



Rise Up

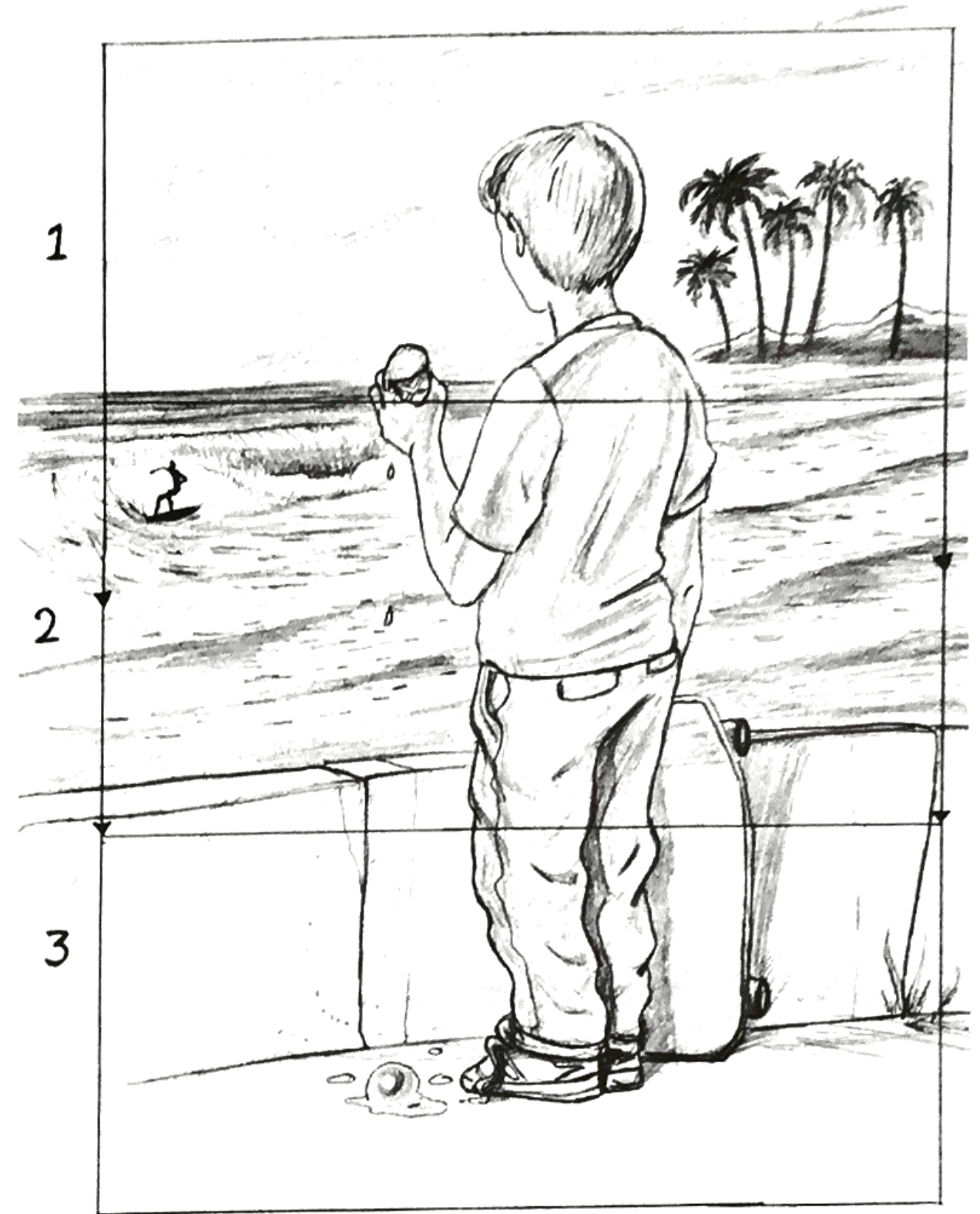
FALL DOWN

What does it look like?

Fall Down involves moving the camera vertically downward. Sometimes used to look at something on the ground by lowering the camera to ground level, *Fall Down* can also create a hiding effect. When the camera moves vertically behind an object, the effect is that the audience's perspective is hidden.

Where can I see it?

In Red, the camera *Falls Down* to reveal a man hiding behind a lower wall, from his ex-girlfriend. The camera *Falls Down* through the city in The Matrix.



Fall Down

CRANE FRONT-TO-TOP

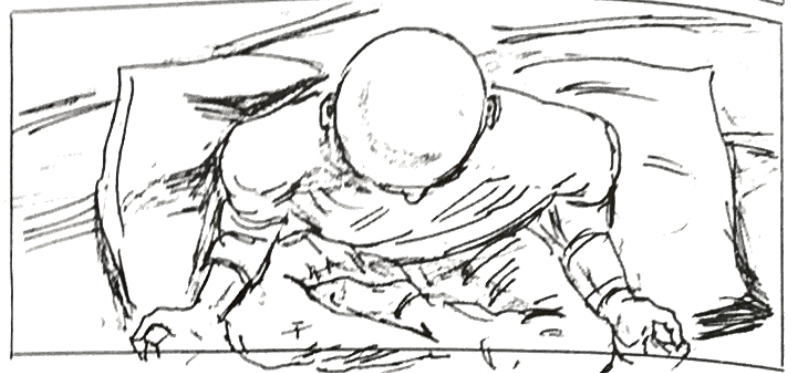
What does it look like?

For *Crane Front-To-Top*, the camera starts out directly in front of a character or an object. The camera begins to move forward and rises up at the same time, pivoting downward to keep the subject in frame. When the movement is finished, the camera sits directly above the subject, looking down from above.

Crane Front-To-Top is a nice dramatic movement that can add character to a scene.

Where can I see it?

Check out the meditation scene in [Hellraiser](#). You can also see this in the temple scene at the beginning of [The Fifth Element](#), where the focus of the camera movement is a statue of the perfect being.



Crane Front-To-Top

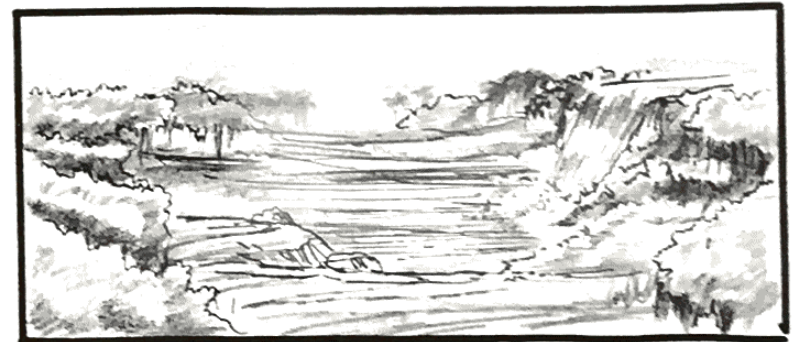
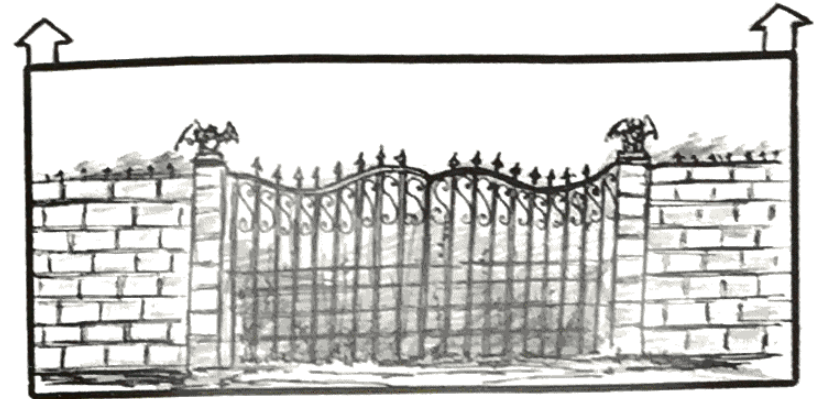
CRANE UP ENTRANCE

What does it look like?

Crane Up Entrance is often seen in explorer/adventure films, used when characters enter a town, village, or habitation. As the characters enter, the camera stops at the entrance and cranes upward. A view of the entire city is revealed to the audience as the camera rises. This can provide the audience with clues about what the characters will be facing on their journey.

Where can I see it?

In the beginning of Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan, Lord of the Apes, *Crane Up Entrance* focus on a group of horse riders as they enter the Earl's courtyard. In King Solomon's Mines, *Crane Up Entrance* is used as the characters enter a village. In Once Upon a Time in the West, the camera cranes up from a train station to reveal a bustling western town.



Crane Up Entrance

CRANE UP EXPRESSION

What does it look like?

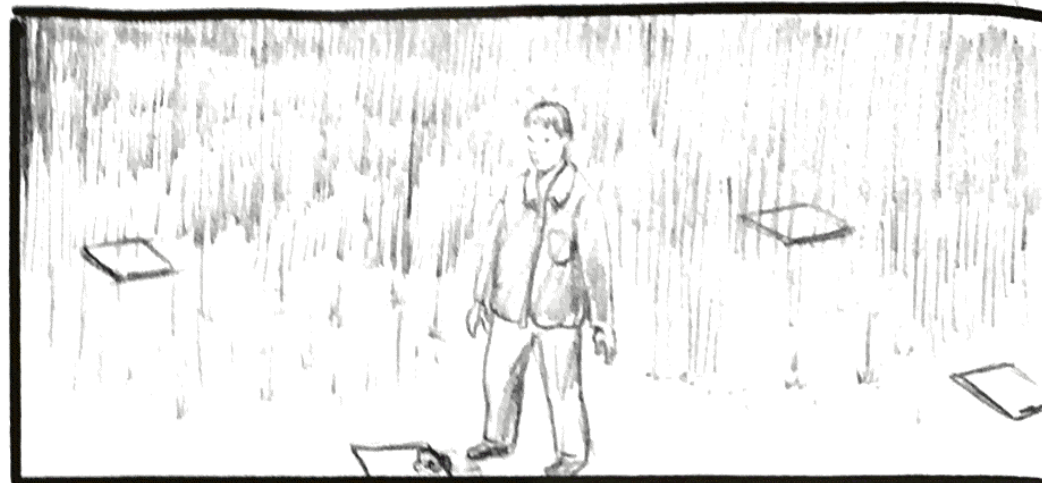
In addition to emphasizing depth, movement, and perspective, the camera can be moved in such a way that it invokes a purely emotional response.

Crane Up Expression works by craning the camera quickly upward during a time of a character's emotional distress.

This upward ascension can invoke a kind of psychological detachment or an expression of the grand nature of life.

Where can I see it?

In *The Crow*, *Crane Up Expression* is used as Eric Draven crawls out from his grave. In the 90's remake of *Great Expectations*, the camera cranes up quickly to express Finnegan's sorrow. In *Pleasantville*, the camera cranes up as Bud celebrates the newly born rain.



Crane Up Expression

CRANE UP, LOOK DOWN

What does it look like?

With *Crane Up, Look Down*, the camera rises above the subjects onscreen and tilts down.

The camera ends up looking down from a dramatic angle above. As an added benefit, this technique allows the audience to see what is on the ground below.

Where can I see it?

In *The Matrix*, *Crane Up, Look Down* shows us Neo standing on a skyscraper ledge. The camera cranes up to show how far the drop is to the ground below.



Crane Up, Look Down

CRANE DOWN, LOOK UP

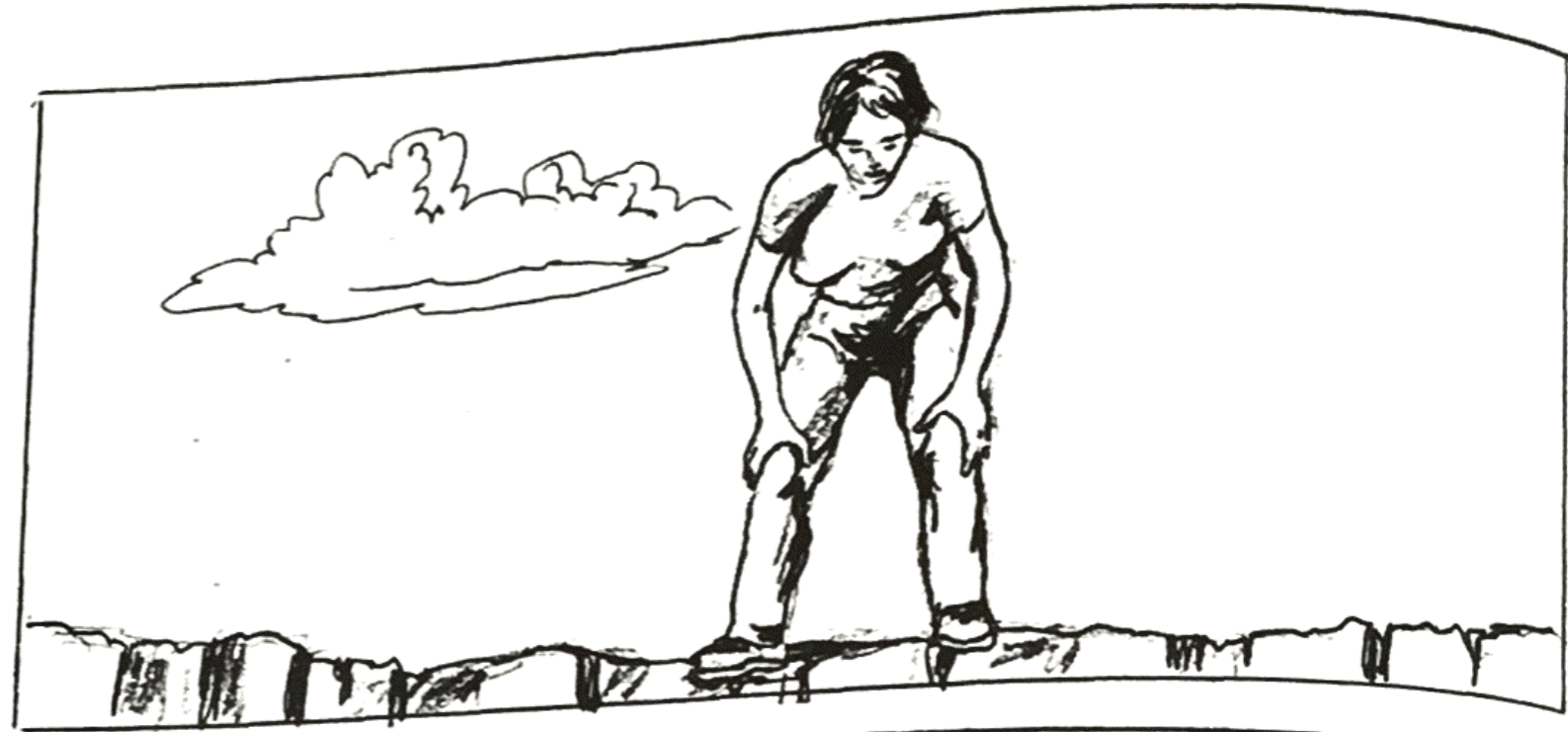
What does it look like?

Crane Down, Look Up starts out with a level camera angle, facing the subject onscreen. The camera then moves down as it tilts up.

The scene transitions from a static angle to an exciting, dramatic angle from below.

Where can I see it?

In *Labyrinth*, *Crane Down, Look Up* is used when Sarah looks down over a precipice inside of the castle. In *Ed Wood*, the camera cranes down to look up at Bela Lugosi as he delivers a dramatic monologue. In *Jurassic Park*, the camera cranes down to look up at a cow being hoisted over the Raptor pen.



Crane Down, Look Up

EXERCISES

- **Visualize crane techniques.** You probably won't be able to get your hands on a crane, but you might be able to simulate the experience by finding a platform that moves in a similar way. Something as simple as a see-saw could be used to visualize small crane movements.
- **Read a book that talks about the mechanics of cranes, jibs, booms, and other equipment.** Learn what they look like so that you can identify them as you study filmmaking.
- **Watch for crane movements in films.** Observe how the director uses a simple crane up or crane down to express an idea, an emotion, or a plot point. Observe how the camera moves forward, tilts, or zooms during a crane movement for more variety.