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# Review on EZ Jibs and Hollywood Camera Work DVD Tutorial

Contributed by David Hurd

After working in the film business for over 30 years, I've evolved from shooting standard handheld and tripod shots to something that looks a little more interesting. In the past, it was both problematic and very expensive to get a working knowledge of jib shots, and the hardware itself. That has all changed. You can now learn the secrets of getting interesting crane and dolly shots using jib equipment that is effective and affordable.

## The Knowledge

Everything that you need to know about high-end blocking and staging is available from Hollywood Camera Work in the form of a nine-hour DVD tutorial. Sure, I learned a lot about shooting over the years, but The Master Course in High-End Blocking and Staging brought it all together for me, filling in the gaps and making the transition from script to blocking natural and fun.

The Master Course is divided into three sections: The first two volumes deal with stationary camera work and focus on getting a better selection of shots. Volumes III and IV build a comprehensive knowledge of dolly and crane moves to help you get great-looking moving images, while volumes V and VI teach you a powerful blocking method that produces repeatable results.

The whole series was created in animation, rather than using actors. At first I found this to be a bit strange, but it does make it easier to see the camera angles and action from different perspectives, without being distracted by human emotions. This is especially true for the Moving Images and Blocking sections.

You can't shoot a scene until you block it, and blocking a scene often forces us to choose between doing great camera work and working with the actors to get great performances. What if blocking became so natural and easy that you could get both great shots, and great performances at the same time? That is the goal of this Master Course.

There is so much information in this series that I had to watch it more than once. Even so, it was a good investment of my time, and I found that it was still easier and cheaper than film school — and I could learn at my leisure.

After watching this tutorial a few times, and practicing a bit, I learned that on-the-job pressure isn't stressful when you have a system that you know will work — and it's more fun to get the exact shot you wanted, instead of reverting to the old "two reverse shots and a master shot" type of deal. Now, when I'm on location and the situation changes, as it often does, I can quickly adapt the script to the changing conditions, instead of having to abandon the great shot I had planned. This series is designed to train you so well that you'll feel comfortable actually using the new techniques. It seems to have worked for me — I now work faster with better-looking images, and less stress.

The Master Course in High-End Blocking and Staging taught me a system that allows me to easily achieve effective blocking for moving shots with the highest production value. Now I can get much more interesting images in about the same amount of time it would have taken me to shoot average-looking scenes.

## The Hardware

Once you have learned the techniques of blocking and shooting moving shots, it's time to find some hardware to mount your camera on.

There are motorized cranes and heads that allow you to get about any shot that you want while recording metadata that will allow you to track the shot in post-production. The problem: if you're on a budget, you probably don't have the tens of thousands of dollars needed to buy this new gear. There's also an added factor involving the learning curve of this new process.

Most inexpensive jibs will tilt up and down but won't pan side to side. A motorized head that allows a camera to pan costs about \$1,600-\$10,000. The head is also operated by a joystick at the back of the jib, so it's a bit like operating a video game, and takes practice to get smooth shots.

I'm always looking for gear that works well and offers a lot of bang for the buck, so when I came across the EZ FX jib/crane system, I got excited. They offer jib arms, four-foot or six-foot arm extensions, a jib handle, remote controls, dollies, tripods and motorized pan/tilt/zoom control heads.

I tried the company's two main products, which are the EZ Jib and the shorter Junior Jib, along with the EZ FX Handle and the Jib Pod tripod. Since I mounted my own Miller tripod head onto the EZ Jib, there was nothing new to learn. This allowed me get some amazing shots with a very short learning curve.

Some jibs are very unstable. I've actually had the job of keeping my hand on the jib when it was not in use, to make sure that it didn't tip over and smash the camera into the ground. So, even though I could have used the EZ Jib on my own tripod, I used the EZ Jib on top of their Jib Pod, just to be extra safe.

The Jib Pod is a really beefy tripod built of aircraft-grade aluminum with double-leg clamps. Its legs are also wider than those of a normal tripod, so any chance of tipping is reduced. When placed on a three-wheel dolly, the whole rig can be easily rolled around a location. It's a really solid piece of gear. During the review process, I found the Jib Pod so reliable that I left the whole rig set up with a camera attached for three weeks.

The EZ Jib arm itself is also pretty impressive. Covered in textured, non-reflective black, it's 24 pounds of high-

grade aluminum in a square, four-column design. The internal bearings and bushings are top quality as well, resulting in a product that delivers very smooth camera movement for cameras up to 50 pounds. With a little practice, the set-up usually took less than five minutes, and by adding just enough weight to the counterweight bar, I achieved a sort of neutral buoyancy that allowed my camera to float easily through each move.

One pet peeve I have with tripod work in a one-camera setup is that you can follow an actor into a room, but, as they sit down, you must tilt down at them (unless you want to retake the "sit down" portion of the shot from the lower camera angle). The EZ Jib makes it much easier to keep actors framed as they sit. I also found that on a smooth surface, and with an assistant, I could roll the rig in front of the actors as they entered a room, then boom down and pan as they were seated. And since the EZ Jib is self-leveling, I could later boom up smoothly to an overhead shot, or move in and out for close-ups. It creates such a nice, fluid way to shoot.

My favorite shot with the EZ Jib is a 360-degree simulated-dolly shot. You can set up in the middle of a dance floor, and boom your camera out in front of your actors as they slow dance in a circle around the tripod. As you push the back of the jib arm around the tripod in a circle, you can get a shot of the actors talking and dancing, all while the background keeps changing. This is very simple to shoot and very impressive to watch — and there's no dolly track to lay.

So far, I've just talked about my experiences with the EZ Jib arm and tripod, but there's another option worth mentioning. The EZ FX Handle option allows for manual pans, tilts and static-camera positioning. The handle attaches to the end of the jib arm and allows for a smooth 300-degree pan and a 125-degree tilt.

By mounting my VariZoom controller on the EZ FX Handle, I had full control of zooms, focus and the iris. And since I was using my Miller head on the EZ FX Handle, it was simply like using a longer pan arm on my normal tripod. The transition from tripod technique to the EZ FX Handle was minimal. The advantage was that I now had all the cool tools of the EZ Jib, including Dutch-angle shots (with a \$29 Dutch Tilt Plate option), booming, and overheads — all the shots that look interesting and impressive.

I found the EZ Jib to be an inexpensive way to get shots that have a "Hollywood" look. You can start with just a jib arm and add a Jib Pod, or add extensions and an EZ FX pedestal to your system, as you get more work. And armed with the training from Hollywood Camera Work, an EZ FX Jib system, and perhaps a dolly and some track, you'll be dangerously creative.

Hollywood Camera Work Master Course

MSRP: \$399

Contact: [www.HollywoodCameraWork.us](http://www.HollywoodCameraWork.us)

EZ FX Jib System

MSRP: starts at \$1,199 (varies with jib arm package)

Contact: (800) 541-5706 [www.ezfx.com](http://www.ezfx.com)

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