

Film terms

Using these terms will help you to analyse and explain moving image sequences in film, television or advertising.

Framing

What's included and excluded in an individual shot.

Very long shot/wide shot

A shot in which figures appear small in the landscape. Often used at the beginning of a film or sequence as an 'establishing shot' to show where the action is taking place; also used to make a figure appear small or isolated.

Long shot

A shot in which a figure can be seen from head to toe.

Mid shot

Shows the figure from approximately the waist to the head. In a mid shot, you can easily recognise an individual but you can also see what they are doing with their hands.

Medium close up

From chest to head

Close-up

Head and shoulders, enabling you to easily see facial expressions, so you can see what characters are thinking and feeling

Big close up

Head only, used when expressions are important

Extreme close-up

From just above the eyebrows to just below the mouth, or even closer: used to emphasise facial expression or to make the subject appear threatening.

Other useful terms for shots are:

Two shot

Any shot with two people in it

Point of view shot

A shot from a character's point of view

Reaction shot

A shot showing a character's expression as they react to something

Noddy

A type of reaction shot used in interviews, where we see the interviewer apparently reacting to the interviewee

Over-the-shoulder shot

A shot in which we see a character over another's shoulder, often used in interviews or dialogues

Lens

The type of lens, and how it's used, can make a big difference to the meaning of a shot.

Wide-angle shot (taken with a wide-angle lens)

This has the effect of seeming to exaggerate perspective. It's often used to make the viewer feel that they are close to the action. If it's used for closeups, it makes the nose look bigger and the ears smaller - an effect usually used for comedy.

Telephoto shot

Like using a telescope, a telephoto lens appears to bring the subject closer and flatten out perspective. It also usually reduces *depth of field*.

Zoom lenses

These can vary the angle of view, from wideangle to telephoto, so that the subject appears to move closer (or further away) without the camera itself moving.

Depth of field

This means how much of the shot seems to be in focus, in front of and behind the subject.

Deep focus

Everything in the shot appears to be in focus, which means that we can be looking at action taking place in the foreground, middle ground and background.

Shallow focus

Isolates the subject from the background.

Camera position

Where the camera is in relation to the subject.

Low angle shot

The camera points upwards, usually making the subject or setting seem grand or threatening.

High angle shot

The camera looks down, making the subject look vulnerable or insignificant.

Bird's eye shot

Looks vertically down at the subject.

Camera movements

Track

Moving the camera itself towards or away from the subject, or to follow a moving subject. (Not to be confused with a zoom, where the camera's lens is varied to give the impression of moving closer to, or away from the subject.)

Pan

Pivoting the camera to the side to scan a scene or to follow a moving subject.

Whip pan

A sudden, fast pan.

Tilt

Pivoting the camera vertically up or down.

Arc

Moving the camera in an arc around the subject.

Crane shot

A shot where the camera itself moves up or down.

Hand-held shot

This is used to convey a sense of immediacy.

Lighting

Lighting can be high or low contrast and can vary in colour and direction.

High-key

The lighting is bright and relatively low in contrast - often used for Hollywood musical comedies.

Low-key

Much more pronounced shadows and dramatic contrasts.

Lighting from below

This can be used to make a subject appear threatening or horrific.

Backlighting

Produces a 'halo' effect around the edges of the subject.

Colour

Cold or blueish lighting can convey a sense of cold, alienation or technology, while *warm* or yellowish lighting can be used to convey comfort, sunset and so on. If colours are very rich and intense they are described as *saturated*.

Black-and-white or sepia can be used to show that a scene is set in the past, or to suggest sophistication.

Mise-en-scène

This means the way in which objects, scenery and the location are shown by using light and dark, pattern, colour, camera position and angle, and movement within the frame. Mise-en-scene establishes mood and atmosphere, and can express the inner life of characters through the way in which their settings are depicted on screen.

Editing

How the individual shots are put together.

There are two main types of editing which you will encounter in mainstream films and TV programmes:

Continuity editing

The majority of film sequences are edited so that time seems to flow, uninterrupted, from shot to shot. Within a 'continuity editing' sequence, only cuts will be used. Continuity editing can also involve 'cross-cutting', where a sequence cuts between two different settings where action is taking place at the same time.

Montage

In montage, different images are assembled to build up an impression. This is often used in title sequences. The most famous example of this technique is the Odessa Steps sequence from Battleship Potemkin.

Editing can vary both in *pace* (how long individual shots stay on the screen for) and in the *transitions* between shots.

Transitions describe the way in which one shot replaces the previous one:

Cut

One image is suddenly replaced by another, without a visible transition.

Cross-dissolve

One image dissolves into another. This can be used to make a montage sequence - eg the title sequence - flow smoothly; it can also be used in continuity editing to show that we have moved forwards in time and/or space.

Fade up

An image gradually fades in

Fade out

An image gradually fades out.

Fades to and from black usually mean that time has passed

Wipe

One image replaces another without dissolving, with the border between the images moving across or around the screen.

Sound

Diegetic sound

Sound that we think is part of what's going on on the screen - horse's hooves, the sound of thunder, and so on - even though many of these will have been added later by a 'Foley artist'.

Non-diegetic sound

Sound that we know is not part of what's on screen, such as music (unless there's an orchestra in shot!) and voiceover.

Sound bridge

This uses sound to link two scenes, by having the picture and the diegetic sound change at different points. Usually the sound from the second scene is heard before we start to see the picture from that scene.