

## Film terminology for critical writing

Prof. Lincoln Z. Shlensky

(Adapted from the Durham University School of Modern Languages and Cultures film glossary and other sources.)

aerial shot	A camera shot filmed from an airplane, helicopter, blimp, balloon, kite or high building (higher than a crane).
arc shot	A shot in which a moving camera circles round the subject being photographed.
bridging shot	A shot that connects one scene to another by showing a change in time or location. A bridging shot can also be used to connect two shots from the same scene by using a close-up, distant pan or different camera angle thus relating the shots via content.
camera angle	The position of the camera on a vertical continuum relative to the object being shot: eye-level, high-angle (looking down from above), low-angle (looking up from below), Dutch-angle (with the normal vertical axis tilted diagonally). The term can include the perspective given by the camera to the depth of focus, height and width of the particular object and action being photographed.
caption	See titles.
close-up	A shot in which a smallish object (e.g. the human head) fits easily within the frame.
composition	The complete arrangement of a scene by the director. The process includes camera angles, lighting, properties, characters, and the movement of the actors.
continuity editing	The conventions through which the impression of an unbroken continuum of space and time is suggested, constructing a consistent storyline out of takes made at different times.
crane shot	A shot in which the camera rises above the ground on a mobile support.
cross-cutting	Swiftly cutting backwards and forwards between more than one scene.
crossing the line	Breaking the 180° rule typical of continuity editing (see 180° rule).
cutaway	A sudden shift to another scene of action or different viewing angle; or a shot inserted between scenes to effect a transition (as a bridging shot).
depth (of field/focus)	The range of a camera lens. Depth of field refers to the distance furthest away from a lens in which the objects being photographed will remain in focus approaching infinity. Depth of focus refers to the closest proximity to the lens in which the objects being photographed will remain in focus approaching the infinitesimal.
diegesis	All those elements of a film that are seen or understood to be part of the immediate narrative world of the characters (as opposed to non-diegetic elements, which may include the sound track, editing or camera effects, most voice-overs, titles, etc.).
dissolve	The slow fading of one shot into another.
dolly	A trolley on which the camera is pulled along the ground.

dynamic cutting	Combining a series of seemingly unrelated shots, objects, people, situations, details and characters in juxtaposition with one another (a form of montage, opposed to continuity cutting).
editing	The creation of relations of space and time, connection and disconnection, through the juxtaposition of sequential yet different camera shots.
enframed image	All those elements of the film that make up the composition and spatial relations of the image, creating perspective, movement, framing, and point-of-view. Pro-filmic elements are represented to viewers within the enframed image. (Gunning)
establishing shot	A long shot, often the first in a sequence, which establishes the positions of elements relative to each other and identifies the setting.
external diegetic sound	Sound which comes from out of frame, but is understood as belonging within the story space (unlike incidental music, which is extra-diegetic).
extreme close-up	A shot in which a small object (e.g. a part of the body) fits easily within the frame.
flashback	Narrative device in which the action is interrupted by scenes representing a character's memory of events experienced before the time of the action.
flashforward	The opposite of flashback: future events (or events imagined by a character) are shown.
frame	Each individual photographic image making up the film. Also refers to the area of the picture seen on the screen.
framing	The size and position of objects relative to the edges of the screen; the arrangement of objects so that they fit within the actual boundaries of the film.
frontality	The placing of the camera at a 90° angle to the action.
graphic match	A visual rhyme between two successive shots.
iris shot	A shot in which a circular or oblong lens-masking device contracts or expands to isolate or reveal an area of the frame for symbolic or narrative visual effect. (Cook)
jump cut	A rapid, jerky transition from one frame to the next that disrupts the flow of time or movement within a scene by juxtaposing two sequential shots of the same subject taken from the same, or a slightly different, camera angle.
long shot	A shot in which a large object (e.g. a complete human figure) fits easily within the frame.
long take	A shot that is allowed to continue for longer than usual without editing.
match on action	A cut between two shots of the same action from different positions, giving an impression of seamless simultaneity.
medium long shot	A shot in which a largish object (e.g. the human figure from lower leg up) fits easily within the frame.
medium shot	A shot in which a medium-size object (e.g. the top half of a human figure) fits easily within the frame.
mise-en-scène	Everything placed within the frame, including set decoration, costume, and styles of performance (implies an emphasis on psychological and visual unity in a film from one frame to the next). See "pro-filmic elements."

montage	Style of editing involving rapid cutting so that one image is juxtaposed with another or one scene quickly dissolves into the next. Angles, settings and framing are manipulated in a conspicuous way (violating coherent <i>mise-en-scène</i> ) so as to convey a swift passage of time, to create some kind of visual or conceptual continuity, or to generate a distinctive rhythm. (See also dynamic cutting.)
narrativization	The film's use of three different levels of narrative discourse: pro-filmic elements, the enframed image, and editing. Also known as <i>récit</i> or the narrative system (not to be confused with voice-over narration). (Gunning and Heath)
off camera	Out of the boundaries of the camera's field of vision (although a performer's presence may be indicated by the context of the scene or their presence in dialogue).
180° rule	The convention that the camera can be placed in any position as long as it remains on one side of the action.
overhead shot	A shot looking down vertically on the action from above.
pace	The tempo at which the storyline of a film unfolds, affected by various elements including action, the length of scenes, camera angles, colour levels, editing, lighting, composition and sound.
pan	A movement in which the camera turns to right or left on a horizontal axis.
parallel action	Aspects of a story happening simultaneously with the primary performer's situation, edited so that the projected image goes back and forth between the primary and secondary scenes (often leading up to a convergence of the two actions).
passing shot	A shot producing a projected image that travels quickly across the screen, either by moving the subject past a stationary camera or by panning the camera past a stationary subject.
plan américain	Same as medium long shot.
POV (point of view shot)	A shot which is understood to be seen from the point of view of a character within the scene.
pro-filmic element	Any element of the image placed in front of the camera lens: set, lighting, actors, choice of location, and diegetic sound (sound emanating from on screen). (Gunning) Also known as <i>mise-en-scène</i> or diegesis.
racking focus	A shift in focus between planes at different distances from the camera within the same shot.
reaction shot	A close-up in which an actor or group is seen to respond to an event, often accomplished with a cutaway from the primary action to someone viewing the occurrence.
reverse angle	Two successive shots from equal and opposite angles, typically of characters during conversation.
sequence	A series of segments of a film narrative edited together and unified by a common setting, time, event or story-line.
sequence shot	A relatively long and complete scene shot in one take without editing (similar to long take).
set	A constructed environment in which to shoot a scene: often consists of flat backdrops or façades, but can be a

	three-dimensional construction.
shock cut	The immediate juxtaposition of two incongruous shots (e.g. from a sex scene to a religious icon).
shot	A continuously exposed, unedited piece of film of any length: the basic signifying unit of film structure (Cook)
shot/countershot	Same as reverse angle.
subjective camera	A camera shot or film style that provides the audience with the specific vision or perspective of a character in the film (i.e. the technique of using POV).
suture	The 'sewing' together of imaginary and symbolic in Hollywood cinema carried out by continuity editing. It serves to ensure the sense of a unified narrative and subject position.
tilt	A movement by which the camera moves up or down while its support remains fixed.
titles	Any words that appear on the screen to convey information to the audience, including credit titles (identifying personnel), main title (the name of the film), end titles (closing credits), insert titles (announcing scenes or identifying settings) and subtitles (translation of foreign-language dialogue). Insert titles and subtitles can also be referred to as captions.
tracking shot	A shot in which the camera is pushed horizontally along the ground on a dolly.
two shot	A shot in which two actors appear within the frame.
voice-over	Voice heard while an image is projected but not being spoken in sync with one of the characters appearing on screen. Used to suggest a character's thoughts or recall of something said earlier, or to provide objective (extra-diegetic) narrative or commentary.
zoom	The effect of rapid movement either towards or away from the subject being photographed, either by using a specialized zoom lens or by moving the camera on a boom, crane or dolly. Zoom effects can also be achieved and enhanced by the use of an optical printer.