

A glossary for teaching film

A

Aerial shot: A shot filmed from up high on a crane or in a plane. See CRANE SHOT.

Ambient light: The natural light that surrounds the character.

Angle of view: The angle captured by the lens. A telephoto lens has a narrow angle of view, while a wide-angle lens has a broad angle of view. Not to be confused with CAMERA ANGLE.

Animation: Methods for moving inanimate objects so as to give the appearance of life on the screen.

Art director: The person in charge of costumes, sets and major props. They are important to the overall look of a film.

Auteur: The principal composer of the film. Usually used in reference to a filmmaker with a distinct style.

B

Backlighting: The main source of light is aimed at the camera from behind the subject, silhouetting it.

Blue screen: A process where two separate filmed images appear to be melded together using chroma key technology. This process enables Superman to appear to fly.

Boom: An extendable arm used for holding a microphone above the actors and outside the frame.

B picture: A cheap, ordinary picture made to fill in the bottom half of the bill when double features were in vogue.

Bridging shot: A shot used to cover discontinuity or a change in time or place.

C

Camera angle: The angle at which the camera is pointed at the subject. The angle can be low, level, high or canted.

Canted framing: The action appears tilted or at an angle.

Cinematographer: The person responsible for the camera, lighting and ultimately the image captured on film stock. Also known as the Director of Photography.

Cinema verite: A style of documentary filmmaking that uses a lightweight, hand-held camera.

Close-up: 1. A shot of the character's face fills the entire frame.
2. Any equivalent shot of similar dimensions.

Continuity: The person in charge of making sure that all the relevant details from each scene match each other so as not to disrupt the narrative flow.

Crane shot: A shot taken from a crane or cherry picker.

Crosslighting: Lighting a scene from the side of the frame.

Cut: A switch directly from one shot to another.

Cut-away: A shot that is inserted to show action away from the main scene. It often covers a break in the main take.

Cut-in: A cut-in is a shift from distant framing to a closer shot of the same action.

D

Deep focus: A technique that has both the characters close to the camera and those in the background in focus at the same time.

Diegetic sound: Any sound, voice or piece of music that comes from within the world of the narrative.

Dissolve: The layering of a FADE-OUT over a FADE-IN.

Docudrama: A semi-fictionalised version of actual events.

Documentary: A term used to describe films that deal with non-fiction.

Dolly shot: A shot taken from a camera support which has wheels to give it mobility. Used in TRACKING shots.

Dub: To record dialogue over the original footage after it has been shot.

E

Editor: The person in charge of splicing together the shots that will make up the finished film. With the director, this person has an important say over the narrative structure of the film.

Establishing shot: Often a LONG SHOT that provides essential relational, spatial and background detail to the audience at the beginning of a film or sequence.

External diegetic sound: Sound that comes from an external source within the space of the narrative. Characters in the scene can hear these sounds.

Extreme long shot: A shot in which the scale framed is very small. Typically a wide landscape, cityscape or a crowd of people would fill the screen.

F

Fade in: A dark screen gradually brightens to full strength and the shot appears.

Fade out: The shot gradually darkens and the screen goes black.

Fast motion: Film that is shot at less than 24 frames per second and then projected at normal speed.

Feature: Any film that is regarded as being full length. This is usually more than 75 minutes.

Fill lighting: Lighting that is used to soften shadows within a scene. Used in conjunction with Key Lighting.

Film noir: A French term meaning "dark film". A detective genre film that includes dark and shadowy lighting, a dirty urban setting, mysterious characters.

Filmstock: Unused strips of film.

Filter: A piece of glass or gelatine that alters the quality of light when placed in front of a camera lens.

Final cut: The edited film as it will be released. Some directors maintain the right to this final cut, but largely that right belongs to the producer. Hence many "director's cuts" turn up years later when the director is finally famous and powerful.

Flashback: A SCENE inserted into a film that deals with past events. This is the past tense of a film.

Flip: A type of WIPE.

Focus: The sharpness of the image in the camera lens.

Focus in/out: The image gradually moves either in or out of focus as a method of transition.

Focus pull: To refocus during a TAKE.

Follow shot: A shot that follows a character as he or she moves. Usually a TRACKING shot or ZOOM.

Frame: 1. A frame is a single image on a length of film.
2. How a director chooses to position the camera frame to capture the action.

Full shot: A shot of the character that includes the entire body and little else.

G

Gaffer: The gaffer is the chief electrician on the set, in charge of lighting.

General release: The exhibition of a film with many prints in circulation.

Genre: A type of film that follows certain narrative conventions i.e. the western, science fiction or romantic comedy.

German Expressionism: A style of film that came out of Germany in the twenties and is the forerunner of the horror film. Examples include *Nosferatu* and *Metropolis*.

Grip: The person in charge of props on the set.

H

Hand-held camera: The camera operator uses his/her own body as a support for the camera instead of a tripod. Often this approach creates a bumpy or shaky image that reflects a subjective point of view.

Hard lighting: Lighting that creates a stark contrast between shadowy and well-lit areas of the mise en scene.

Height of framing: The distance of the camera above the ground.

I

Internal diegetic sound: Sound that comes from the mind of a character within the narrative. Other characters in the scene cannot hear it.

Insert shot: A detail shot that provides specific information required to understand the scene.

J

Jump cut: A jarring cut between similar shots that disrupts the flow of the narrative. It is often used to highlight the process of filmmaking or to cause the viewer to feel uncomfortable.

K

Key lighting: The main lighting source in a scene. Used in conjunction with fill lighting and backlighting to create a three-point system.

L

Lens: A piece of glass with curved sides that gathers and focuses rays of light.

Linearity: This refers to the degree to which a narrative progresses without digressions or delays.

Long shot: A shot that frames the entire figure of a human as filling most of the frame. The background is a significant part of a long shot.

M

Match on action: A process of cutting a sequence of the same action together to make it appear seamless. A technique used in continuity editing.

Medium or mid shot: A shot that is framed from the waist up and fills most of the screen.

Mise en scene: A French term that means "staging" or "production". Its literal meaning is "putting on stage". It refers to all the elements that are placed in front of the camera. These include costumes, lighting, make-up, props and character behaviour.

Mobile frame: The effect on screen of a moving camera frame. This is achieved through pan, tilt, zoom, tracking etc.

Montage: The filmic version of collage. A sequence of film that juxtaposes different shots together to create new meaning not present in either original shot.

N

Non-diegetic insert: A shot or shots cut into a sequence that shows objects or actions outside the space of the narrative.

Non-diegetic sound: Sounds, such as music or a narrator's voices that come from outside the space of the narrative.

P

Pace: The rhythm of a film.

Pan: The camera is positioned on a stationary tripod and moves horizontally to the left or right, creating a mobile frame.

Point of view shot (POV): A shot where the camera is positioned to show a character's perspective. Usually placed after a shot of the character looking at something.

Production: The action of making a film. Production can be divided into pre-production, production and post-production.

R

Rate: The number of frames exposed per second by the camera during filming. Action will appear normal on the screen if it is projected at the same rate.

Rear projection: The process of acting in the foreground, while other action is screened in the background.

Re-establishing shot: A repeat shot of the entire scene that occurs after a number of other closer shots within the scene.

Rushes: Prints of the day's shooting are viewed to ensure that they are correct before the next day.

S

Scene: A single segment in a film that takes place in one place and time.

Screenplay: The script for a film. Often it includes rough descriptions and camera movements.

Second unit: An auxiliary film crew whose job is to shoot background footage not handled by the main crew.

Sequence: A significant segment of a film that deals completely with one aspect of the narrative.

Set: The location of a scene.

Shallow focus: Only those areas closer to the camera are in focus. This is the opposite of deep focus.

Shot: One uninterrupted run of the camera.

Shot/Reverse shot: A basic production technique used during conversations to show each character delivering his or her dialogue. One shot will show character A speaking, while the reverse will show character B.

Soft lighting: Lighting that does not emphasise bright light or dramatic shadow. A gradual transition between light and dark is used.

Sound stage: A specially designed building in which sets are built for filming.

Special effects: An artificial manipulation of the elements of a shot.

Steadicam: A device that gives hand-held shots a steady image.

Split screen: Two or more separate images side by side on a screen but not overlapping.

Stock shot: A library shot borrowed from a collection.

Storyboard: Drawings of a sequence of shots used to plan and describe what is needed by the director to film them. A storyboard usually looks like a comic strip.

T

Take: One single shot captured by the camera is called a take.

Telephoto lens: A lens with a long focal length that enlarges distant planes.

Three-point lighting: A combination of key, fill and backlighting.

Tilt: The camera creates a mobile frame by moving up or down while on a stationary tripod.

Top lighting: Lighting that comes from above the characters to help separate them from the background.

Tracking shot: The camera actually moves through space on tracks to create a mobile frame.

Treatment: A general description of a film. Shorter than a screenplay but longer than an outline.

Two-shot: A shot of two people.

U

Undercrank: To slow down a camera to less than 24 frames per second so that, the film when screened at a standard pace, appears in fast motion.

Underlighting: Lighting a character from below.

Under shot: A shot taken from below the subject, looking up.

V

Viewfinder: The eyepiece through which the camera operator views the image.

Voice-over: The narrator's voice when the narrator does not appear in the film.

W

Wide-angle lens: A lens of short focal length that exaggerates distance.

Wipe: A wipe is a transition between scenes. A line passes across the screen, wiping off the first image and replacing it with another.

Z

Zoom: Zooming is the process of adjusting a lens to move between telephoto and wide-angle during a take.