

Film Glossary

Bird's eye view. A shot in which the camera photographs a scene from directly overhead.

Close-up, Close shot. A detailed view of a person or object, usually without much context provided.

Continuity. The kind of logic implied in the association of ideas between edited shots. "Cutting to continuity" emphasizes smooth transitions between shots, in which space and time are unobtrusively condensed. "Classical cutting" emphasizes dramatic or emotional logic between shots rather than one based strictly on considerations of time and space. In "thematic montage" the continuity is based entirely on ideas, irrespective of literal time and space. In some instances, "continuity" refers to the space-time continuum of reality before it is photographed.

Crane shot. A shot taken from a special device called a crane, which resembles a huge mechanical arm. The crane carries the camera and cameraman, and can move in virtually any direction.

Cross cutting. The alternating of shots from two sequences, often in different locales, to suggest the sequences are taking place simultaneously.

Deep focus. A technique of photography which permits all distance planes to remain clearly in focus, from close-up range to infinity.

Dissolve, lap dissolve. These terms refer to the slow fading out of one shot and the gradual fading in of its successor, with a superimposition of images, usually at the midpoint.

Dolly shot, tracking shot, trucking shot. A shot taken from a moving vehicle. Originally tracks were laid on the set to permit a smoother movement of the camera. Today even a smooth hand-held traveling shot is considered a variation of the dolly shot.

Editing. The joining of one shot (strip of film) with another. The shots can picture events and objects in different places at different times. Editing is also called montage.

Establishing shot. Usually an extreme long or long shot offered at the beginning of a scene or sequence providing the viewer with the context of the subsequent closer shots.

Extreme close-up. A minutely detailed view of an object or a person. An extreme close-up of an actor generally includes only his eyes, or his mouth.

Extreme long shot. A panoramic view of an exterior location, photographed from a great distance, often as far as a quarter-mile away.

Eye-level shot. The placement of the camera approximately 5 to 6 feet from the ground corresponding to the height of an observer on the scene.

Fish-eye lens. An extreme wide angle lens, which distorts the image so radically that the edges seem wrapped into a sphere.

Flash-editing, flash-cutting. Editing sequences so that the durations of the shots are very brief.

Full shot. A type of long shot which includes the human body in full, with the head near the top of the frame and the feet near the bottom.

High angle shot. A shot in which the subject is photographed from above.

Long shot. Includes an amount of picture within the frame which roughly corresponds to the audience's view of the area within the proscenium arch of the legitimate theater.

Long take. A shot of lengthy duration.

Loose framing. Usually in longer shots. The mise-en-scène is so spaciouly distributed that the subject photographed has considerable latitude of movement.

Low angle shot. A shot in which the subject is photographed from below.

Master shot. A single uninterrupted shot, usually taken from a long or full shot range, which contains an entire scene. Later, the closer shots are photographed, and an edited sequence, composed of a variety of different shots, is subsequently constructed on the editor's bench.

Medium shot. A relatively close shot, revealing a moderate amount of detail. A medium shot of a figure generally includes the body from the knees or waist up.

Mise-en-scène. The arrangement of volumes and movements within a given space. In the cinema, the space is defined by the frame; in the legitimate theater, usually by the proscenium arch.

from Andrew Sarris:

As I wrote some years ago, I would suggest a definition of mise-en-scène that includes all the means available to a director to express his attitude toward his subject. This takes in cutting, camera movement, pacing, the direction of players and their placement in the decor, the angle and distance of the camera, and even the content of the shot. Mise-en-scène as an attitude tends to accept the cinema as it is and enjoy it for what it is -- a sensuous conglomeration of all the other arts.

Montage. Transitional sequences of rapidly edited images, used to suggest the lapse of time or the passing of events. Often employs dissolves and multiple exposures. In Europe "montage" means editing.

Oblique angle. A shot which is photographed by a tilted camera. When the image is projected on the screen, the subject itself seems to be tilted on its side.

Open forms. Used primarily by realist film directors, these techniques are likely to be subtle and unobtrusive, with an emphasis on informal compositions and apparently haphazard designs. The frame generally is exploited to suggest a temporary masking which arbitrarily cuts off part of the action.

Over-the-shoulder shot. A medium shot, useful in dialogue scenes, in which one actor is photographed head-on from over the shoulder of another actor.

Point-of-view shot. Any shot which is taken from the vantage point of a character in the film. Also known as the first person camera.

Pull-back dolly. A technique used to surprise the viewer by withdrawing from a scene to reveal an object or character that was previously out of the frame.

Rack focusing, selective focusing. The blurring of focal planes in sequence, forcing the viewer's eye to "travel" with those areas of an image that remain in sharp focus.

Reaction shot. A cut to a shot of a character's reaction to the contents of the preceding shot.

Reverse angle shot. A shot taken from an angle 180° opposed to the previous shot -- that is, the camera is placed opposite its previous position.

Scene. A unit of film composed of a number of interrelated shots, unified usually by a central concern -- a location, an incident, or a minor dramatic climax.

Set-up. The positioning of the camera and lights for a specific shot.

Shot. Those images which are recorded continuously from the time the camera starts to the time it stops. That is, an unedited, uncut strip of film.

Sub-text. A term used in drama and film to signify the dramatic implications beneath the language of a play or movie. Often the sub-text concerns ideas and emotions that are totally independent of the language of a text.

Telephoto lens, long lens. A lens which acts as a telescope, magnifying the size of objects at a great distance. A significant side effect is tendency to flatten perspective.

Three-shot. A medium shot, featuring three actors.

Tight framing. Usually in close shots. The mise-en-scène is so carefully balanced and harmonized that the subject photographed has little or no freedom of movement.

Two-shot. A medium shot, featuring two actors.

Wide angle lens, short lens. A lens which permits the camera to photograph a wider area than a normal lens. A significant side effect is its tendency to exaggerate perspective. Also used for deep-focus photography.

Wipe. An editing device, usually a line which travels across the screen, "pushing off" one image and revealing another.

Zoom lens. A lens of variable focal length which permits the cameraman to change from wide angle to telephoto shots (and vice versa) in one continuous movement.

Zoom shot. A shot taken with the aid of a zoom lens. The lens changes focal length during the shot so that a dolly or crane shot is suggested.