

Film Analysis Guide



Basic Terms

- Shot** One continuous piece of film footage, ending with an edit.
- Sequence** A series of shots combined to represent a discrete set of actions or a coherent narrative section.
- Trope** A common convention repeated in many films. A symbolic visual, auditory, or narrative element with a predictable meaning.
- Motif** Anything repeated more than a few times in a film. A motif can be visual (an image or cinematic technique), sonic (a sound or piece of music), or rhetorical (a word, phrase, metaphor, etc.).

Categories of Analysis

- Cinematography** A term used to define the ways in which the camera captures the shot. Under the heading of cinematography, we speak of such things as the different lenses used by the camera, how the camera frames the shot, the angle of the camera relative to the action, and how the camera moves.
- Editing** Refers to how the individual shots are spliced together. The norm here is “continuity editing,” in which shots are put together to achieve narrative continuity—to make the action appear to flow logically and naturally from shot to shot.
- Mise-en-scène** Literally meaning “put into the scene,” this term refers to the arrangement of actors and objects in front of the camera. Setting, lighting, costuming, and acting are aspects of mise-en-scène.
- Sound** Refers to both the sounds that come from the scene itself, such as spoken dialogue or ambient noise, and the sounds that are imposed on the scene, such as voice-overs or musical scores.

Cinematography

Camera Distance

- Extreme Long Shot** A shot of a character's full figure at a great distance, including a panoramic view of the surroundings.
- Long Shot** A shot that includes a character's full figure as well as the surroundings.
- Medium Shot** A shot that captures a figure from the waist up.
- Close-Up** The frame is filled primarily by the subject's face, including little to no background.
- Extreme Close-Up** A shot filled entirely by a small part of the subject's body.

Camera Angle

- High Angle** The camera looks down at the subject.
- Low Angle** The camera looks up at the subject.
- Canted Angle** A shot in which the framing is tipped, or no longer horizontal.

Mobile Framing

- Pan** The camera scans horizontally from a fixed axis.
- Tilt** The camera scans vertically from a fixed axis.
- Track** The camera follows the action, travelling along a parallel path to capture the movement.

Lenses and Focus

Long Lens	Also called a “telephoto lens,” this long focal length lens is used to capture subjects at a distance. It foreshortens the distance between background and foreground.
Wide Lens	A short focal length lens that emphasizes the distance between foreground and background.
Deep Focus	Objects in the background and foreground are equally in focus.
Shallow Focus	Only objects in one plane are in focus, while others are out of focus.
Rack Focus	A shift from one plane of focus to another within a shot.
Zoom	Changes focal length to create motion towards or away from the subject.

Process Shots

Superimposition	Images are overlaid within the frame.
Digital Animation	Images created or modified by computer software.
Title Cards	Text from outside the world of the narrative appearing on screen to supply information to the audience.

Editing

Basic Terms

Continuity Editing	The process of putting shots together to create the impression of continuous narrative time and/or visually coherent space.
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Cut	An immediate transition from one shot to the next, with no dissolve, fade, or wipe. Straight cuts usually imply continuous action between one shot and the next.
Dissolve	A shot slowly disappears at the same time the next appears, featuring a time during which one shot is briefly superimposed on another. Dissolves often imply some distance in time or space between one shot and the next.
Fade	A shot slowly becomes darker until the entire screen is black (“fade out” or “fade to black”). This can be done in reverse: the shot slowly gets brighter until the entire screen is white. A fade out is often paired with a “fade in” in which the next shot slowly emerges from the black or white screen. Fades often imply a greater distance in time and/or place between one sequence and the next.
Wipe	One shot “wipes” another from the screen, usually from one side of the screen to the other, bottom to top, or top to bottom. Expanding or contracting shapes (such as stars, circles, or hearts) can also be used to wipe one shot from the screen and reveal the next.

Graphic and Temporal Relations

180 Degree Rule	A principle of continuity editing dictating that the camera remains on one side of the action to maintain the viewer’s perspective and understanding of the left-right spatial relationship between characters.
Shot/ Reverse Shot	Alternating shots between subjects, usually in conversation, viewed from different camera positions.
Crosscutting	Transitioning back and forth between two or more action sequences taking place simultaneously.
Eyeline Match	A cut between a shot of a person looking towards an object and a shot of the object being viewed.

Match on Action	A cut that transitions between two different views of the same action so that the action appears continuous from one shot to the next.
Graphic match	A cut that relates consecutive shots through repeated compositional features (shapes, colors, patterns, etc.).
Jump Cut	A cut that distorts continuity, causing a skip ahead in time or space.

Mise-en-scène

Basic Terms

Composition	The arrangement of subjects, props, and environments within a shot.
Costumes	Clothing designed to express character, social setting, and/or mythos.
Decor	The set design, whether in studio or on location. Includes colors, styles, textures, architecture, props and the sociocultural locations or psychological states they are intended to evoke.

Lighting

Three Point Lighting	Standard lighting using three light sources: a <i>key light</i> to provide the main source of illumination along with a <i>fill light</i> from another side and <i>back light</i> from behind.
High Key	Nearly all parts of the image are brightly illuminated.
Low Key	Extreme contrast between light and dark within an image.
Chiaroscuro	The use of strong contrasts between light and dark to create a sense of visual drama or a sense of volume and dimension to the space and the figures within it.

Sound

Basic Terms

Diegetic Sound Sound produced in the world of the film, taking place within the narrative (dialogue, sound effects, etc.).

Extradiegetic Sound Sound originating from outside the narrative, not produced in the on-screen setting (voice-overs, soundtrack, etc.).

Sound Transition

Sound Bridge A transition assisted by a continuous sound from one scene to the next, often to introduce a new scene before it appears visually.

Edit on Sound A cut made on a sound cue.