

The Film Experience

By Timothy Corrigan and Patricia White

Available Free
for Students

A Quick Film Terminology Reference

- ▶ MISE-EN-SCÈNE
- ▶ CINEMATOGRAPHY
- ▶ EDITING
- ▶ SOUND
- ▶ NARRATIVE

MISE-EN-SCÈNE

backlighting A highlighting technique that illuminates the person or object from behind, tending to silhouette the subject; sometimes called **edgelifting** [Figure 1].

blocking The arrangement and movement of actors in relation to each other within the mise-en-scène [Figure 2].

fill lighting A lighting technique using secondary fill lights to balance the **key lighting** by removing shadows or to emphasize other spaces and objects in the scene [Figure 3].

key lighting The main source of non-natural lighting in a scene. High-key light is even (the ratio between key and fill light is high); low-key light shows strong contrast (the ratio between key and fill light is low) [Figure 4].

mise-en-scène A French theatrical term meaning literally “put on stage,” used in film studies to refer to all the elements of a movie scene that are organized, often by the director, to be filmed and that are later visible on-screen. They include the scenic elements of a movie—such as actors, lighting, sets, costumes, make-up—and other features of the image that exist independently of the camera and the processes of filming and editing.



Figure 1
Sweet Smell of Success (1957).
Backlighting.

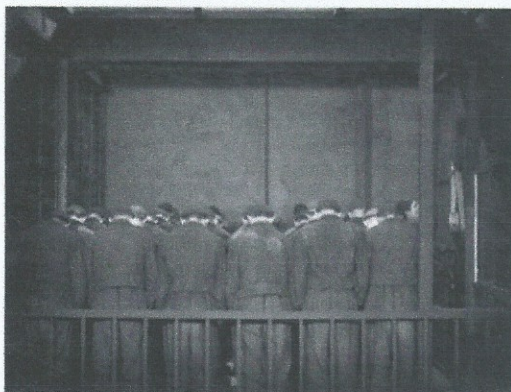


Figure 2
Metropolis (1927).
Blocking.



Figure 3
Sweet Smell of Success (1957).
Fill lighting.



Figure 4
Sweet Smell of Success (1957).
Low-key lighting.

CINEMATOGRAPHY

deep focus A focus in which multiple planes in the shot are all in focus simultaneously [Figure 5].

depth of field The range or distance before and behind the main focus of a shot within which objects remain relatively sharp and clear.

framing The selection through the camera viewfinder of a portion of the subject; a measure of the portion of the filmed subject that appears within the borders of the frame and correlates with camera distance, e.g., long shot or medium close-up [Figure 6].

high angle A shot directed at a downward angle on individuals or a scene.

low angle A shot from a position lower than its subject.

offscreen space The implied space or world that exists outside the boundaries of the film frame.

pan A horizontal movement of the camera, whose tripod or mount remains in a fixed position [Figure 7].

process shot A shot in which actors are filmed in front of a projected background.

tracking shot A shot that changes the position of the point of view by moving forward, backward, or around the subject, usually on tracks that have been constructed in advance or on a dolly that follows a determined course; also called a **dolly shot** or a **traveling shot** [Figure 8].

EDITING

continuity editing The institutionalized system of Hollywood editing that uses cuts and other transitions to establish verisimilitude, to construct a coherent time and space, and to tell stories clearly and efficiently. Continuity editing follows the basic principle that each shot or scene has a continuous relationship to the next; sometimes called **invisible editing**.

disjunctive editing In contrast with Hollywood **continuity editing**, this term refers not to a single editing system but rather to a variety of alternative practices that call attention to the cut. It may be organized around any number of different aspects of editing, such as spatial tension, temporal experimentation, or rhythmic or graphic patterns, and serve a variety of aesthetic, conceptual, ideological, or psychological purposes, including disorienting, or viscerally affecting, the viewer, or engaging the viewer's thought processes.



Figure 5 *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946). Deep focus.



Figure 6 *Vertigo* (1958). Framing.



Figure 7 *Death in Venice* (1970). Pan.



Figure 8 *Goodfellas* (1990). Tracking shot.

establishing shot Generally, an initial long shot that establishes the location and setting and that orients the viewer in space to a clear view of the action [Figure 9].

eyeline match A principle in **continuity editing** that calls for following a shot of a character looking **off-screen** with a shot of a subject whose screen position matches the gaze of the first character.

shot/reverse shot An editing pattern that begins with a shot of one character taken from an angle at one end of the axis of action, follows with a shot of the second character from the "reverse" angle at the other end of the line, and continues back and forth through the sequence [Figures 10 and 11].

SOUND

diegetic sound Sound that has its source in the narrative world of the film, whose characters are presumed to be able to hear it [Figure 12].

nondiegetic sound Sound that does not have an identifiable source in the characters' world and that the consequently the characters cannot hear.

NARRATIVE

alternative film narrative Film narratives that deviate from or challenge the linearity of **classical film narrative**, often undermining the centrality of a main character, the continuity of the plot, or the verisimilitude of the narration.

classical film narrative A style of filmmaking in which narratives are centered on one or more central characters who propel the plot with a cause-and-effect logic wherein an action generates a reaction. Normally the plots are developed with linear chronologies directed at certain definite goals, and the film employs an omniscient or a limited third-person narration that suggests some degree of realism.

diegesis A term that refers to the world of the film's story (its characters, places, and events), including not only what is shown but also what is implied to have taken place. It comes from the Greek word meaning "narration."

narration The telling of a story or description of a situation; the emotional, physical, or intellectual perspective through which the characters, events, and action of the plot are conveyed. In film, narration is most explicit when provided as asynchronous verbal commentary on the action or images, but it can also designate the story-telling function of the camera, the editing, and verbal and other soundtracks.



Figure 9 *Clueless* (1995). Establishing shot.



Figure 10 *The Big Sleep* (1946). Shot . . .



Figure 11 *The Big Sleep* (1946). . . . reverse shot.



Figure 12 *Blazing Saddles* (1974). Diegetic sound.



ESSENTIAL VIEWING CUES

Preliminaries

- Consider your expectations about the film you are about to see. What do you know in advance about it? The genre to which it belongs? The historical period or culture that produced it? Is it a big-budget film or a more modest production? Do you know other films by the same director or star?

Mise-en-scène

- What are the most significant elements in the mise-en-scène of the movie? Settings or sets? A particular prop or other object? Costumes or clothing? Make-up? Lighting? The performance of an actor? Why?

Cinematography

- What are the two or three most important shots in this movie? Describe them.
- Is there a pattern of certain kinds of shots in this film? If so, consider the significance of that pattern.
- How do the colors (including black and white) of particular images in this film communicate certain emotions, attitudes, or even ideas?

Editing

- Select a scene and tap each time a cut appears. Would you have noticed each cut if you had not been attempting this exercise?
- Find an example of continuity editing. Are there cuts that are more disjunctive? What are their effects?

Sound

- Listen carefully to the musical score. Try to identify a motif associated with a particular character, setting, or situation.

Narrative Films

- How does the plot construct the story? Is it a linear plot? If not, how would you describe it? What information is highlighted? Omitted? Delayed?

Experimental or Documentary Films

- If the film you are watching is a documentary or experimental film, how would you describe its organization? Is it expositional, imaginative, or rhetorical—or a combination of these?

Overview

- How would you describe the main argument or chief themes of the film? Can you relate them to the style and structure of the film?
- Why might this film be historically or culturally important? What are its main achievements? Its shortcomings?
- Is there a particular topic that would lead to an illuminating or interesting essay about this movie?

Copyright © 2004 by Bedford St. Martin's

ISBN: 0-312-41473-0

To order this card with each student copy of *The Film Experience*, please use the following ISBN: 0-312-41917-1

ISBN 0-312-41473-0



9 780312 414733

TEN QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

1. Do I understand the film or films I intend to discuss?
2. Are my notes clear and complete, allowing me to describe and respond to key images, scenes, and other elements in the film?
3. Does my opening paragraph lead to a specific and precisely formulated thesis that anticipates the main points of the argument of the essay?
4. Do my topic sentences reflect a logical development of that thesis?
5. Are there smooth transitions between paragraphs and sentences?
6. Do paragraphs cohere, usually around a single idea?
7. Is the meaning of each sentence clear, and are the structures of sentences varied?
8. Are general or abstract observations supported with concrete examples?
9. Have I carefully proofread and revised for grammatical, spelling, and typographical errors?
10. Have footnotes and quotations been double-checked for accuracy and proper placement?