

Glossary of Film Terms

Definitions from David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 7th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004).

angle of framing	The position of the frame in relation to the subject it shows: above it, looking down (a high angle); horizontal, on the same level (a straight-on angle); looking up (a low angle). Also called camera angle.
animation	Any process whereby artificial movement is created by photographing a series of drawings (see also <i>cel animation</i>), objects, or computer images one by one. Small changes in position, recorded frame by frame, create the illusion of movement.
aspect ratio	The relationship of the frame's width to its height.
backlighting	Illumination cast onto the figures in the scene from the side opposite the camera, usually creating a thin outline of highlighting on those figures.
canted framing	A view in which the frame is not level; either the right or left side is lower than the other, causing objects in the scene to appear slanted out of an upright position.
cinematography	A general term for all the manipulations of the film strip by the camera in the shooting phase and by the laboratory in the developing phase.
close-up	A framing in which the scale of the object shown is relatively large; most commonly a person's head seen from the neck up, or an object of a comparable size that fills most of the screen.
contrast	In cinematography, the difference between the brightest and darkest areas within the frame.
crane shot	A shot with a change in framing accomplished by having the camera above the ground and moving through the air in any direction.
crosscutting	Editing that alternates shots of two or more lines of action occurring in different places, usually simultaneously.
cut	1. In filmmaking, the joining of two strips of film together with a splice. 2. In the finished film, an instantaneous change from one framing to another. See also <i>jump cut</i> .
cut-in	An instantaneous shift from a distant framing to a closer view of some portion of the same space.
deep focus	A use of the camera lens and lighting that keeps both the close and distant planes being photographed in sharp focus.
deep space	An arrangement of mise-en-scene elements so that there is a considerable distance between the plane closest to the camera and the one farthest away. Any or all of these planes may be in focus. (See <i>shallow space</i> .)
depth of field	The measurements of the closest and farthest planes in front of the camera lens between which everything will be in sharp focus. A depth of field from 5 to 16 feet, for example, would mean everything closer than 5 feet and farther than 16 feet would be out of focus.
diegesis	In a narrative film, the world of the film's story. The diegesis includes events that are presumed to have occurred and actions and spaces not shown onscreen.
diegetic sound	Any voice, musical passage, or sound effect presented as originating from a source within the film's world. See also <i>nondiegetic sound</i> .
dissolve	A transition between two shots during which the first image gradually disappears while the second image gradually appears; for a moment the two images blend in <i>superimposition</i> .
editing	1. In filmmaking, the task of selecting and joining camera takes. 2. In the finished film, the set of techniques that governs the relations among shots.
establishing shot	A shot, usually involving a distant framing, that shows the spatial relations among

	the important figures, objects, and setting in a scene.
eyeline match	A cut obeying the <i>axis of action</i> principle, in which the first shot shows a person looking off in one direction and the second shows a nearby space containing what he or she sees. If the person looks left, the following shot should imply that the looker is offscreen right.
fade	1. <i>Fade-in</i> : A dark screen that gradually brightens as a shot appears. 2. <i>Fade-out</i> : A shot gradually disappears as the screen darkens. Occasionally, fade-outs brighten to pure white or to a color.
following shot frame	A shot with framing that shifts to keep a moving figure onscreen. A single image on the strip of film. When a series of frames is projected onto a screen in quick succession, an illusion of movement is created.
framing	The use of the edges of the film frame to select and to compose what will be visible onscreen.
genres	Various types of films that audiences and filmmakers recognize by their familiar narrative conventions. Common genres are musical, gangster, and Western films.
graphic match	Two successive shots joined so as to create a strong similarity of compositional elements (e.g., color, shape).
hard lighting	Illumination that creates sharp-edged shadows.
height of framing	The distance of the camera above the ground, regardless of the <i>angle of framing</i> .
iris	A round, moving <i>mask</i> that can close down to end a scene (iris-out) or emphasize a detail, or that can open to begin a scene (iris-in) or to reveal more space around a detail.
jump cut	An elliptical cut that appears to be an interruption of a single shot. Either the figures seem to change instantly against a constant background, or the background changes instantly while the figures remain constant.
long shot	A framing in which the scale of the object shown is small; a standing human figure would appear nearly the height of the screen.
long take	A shot that continues for an unusually lengthy time before the transition to the next shot.
mask	An opaque screen placed in the camera or printer that blocks part of the frame off and changes the shape of the photographed image, leaving part of the frame a solid color. As seen on the screen, most masks are black, although they can be white or colored.
medium close-up	A framing in which the scale of the object shown is fairly large; a human figure seen from the chest up would fill most of the screen.
medium long shot	A framing at a distance that makes an object about four or five feet high appear to fill most of the screen vertically. See also <i>plan américain</i> , the special term for a medium long shot depicting human figures.
medium shot	A framing in which the scale of the object shown is of moderate size; a human figure seen from the waist up would fill most of the screen.
mise-en-scène	All of the elements placed in front of the camera to be photographed: the settings and props, lighting, costumes and makeup, and figure behavior.
montage	1. A synonym for <i>editing</i> . 2. An approach to editing developed by the Soviet filmmakers of the 1920s; it emphasizes dynamic, often discontinuous, relationships between shots and the juxtaposition of images to create ideas not present in either shot by itself
montage sequence	A segment of a film that summarizes a topic or compresses a passage of time into brief symbolic or typical images. Frequently <i>dissolves</i> , <i>fades</i> , <i>superimpositions</i> , and <i>wipes</i> are used to link the images in a montage sequence.

narrative form	A type of filmic organization in which the parts relate to each other through a series of causally related events taking place in time and space.
nondiegetic sound	Sound, such as mood music or a narrator's commentary, represented as coming from a source outside the space of the narrative.
pan	A camera movement with the camera body turning to the right or left. On the screen, it produces a mobile framing that scans the space horizontally.
point-of-view shot (POV shot)	A shot taken with the camera placed approximately where the character's eyes would be, showing what the character would see; usually cut in before or after a shot of the character looking.
racking focus	Shifting the area of sharp focus from one plane to another during a shot; the effect on the screen is called rack-focus.
rate	In shooting, the number of frames exposed per second; in projection, the number of frames thrown on the screen per second. If the two are the same, the speed of the action will appear normal, while a disparity will create slow or fast motion. The standard rate in sound cinema is 24 frames per second for both shooting and projection.
scene	A segment in a narrative film that takes place in one time and space or that uses crosscutting to show two or more simultaneous actions.
sequence	Term commonly used for a moderately large segment of film, involving one complete stretch of action. In a narrative film, often equivalent to a <i>scene</i> .
shallow focus	A restricted <i>depth of field</i> , which keeps only one plane in sharp focus; the opposite of <i>deep focus</i> .
shallow space	Staging the action in relatively few planes of depth; the opposite of <i>deep space</i> .
shot	1. In shooting, one uninterrupted run of the camera to expose a series of frames. Also called a <i>take</i> . 2. In the finished film, one uninterrupted image with a single static or mobile framing.
shot/reverse shot	Two or more shots edited together that alternate characters, typically in a conversation situation. Over-the-shoulder framings are common in shot/reverse-shot editing.
superimposition	The exposure of more than one image on the same film strip.
take	In filmmaking, the shot produced by one uninterrupted run of the camera. One shot in the final film may be chosen from among several takes of the same action.
tilt	A camera movement with the camera body swiveling upward or downward on a stationary support. It produces a mobile framing that scans the space vertically.
tracking shot	A mobile framing that travels through space forward, backward, or laterally. See also <i>crane shot</i> , <i>pan</i> , and <i>tilt</i> .
wipe	A transition between shots in which a line passes across the screen, eliminating one shot as it goes and replacing it with the next one.
zoom lens	A lens with a focal length that can be changed during a shot. A shift toward the telephoto range [<i>zoom in</i>] enlarges the image and flattens its planes together, giving an impression of magnifying the scene's space, while a shift toward the wide-angle range [<i>zoom out</i>] does the opposite.