

Film Techniques

Film techniques are used to describe the ways that meaning is created in film. Directors use a range of techniques to deliberately communicate ideas to the audience. They also use them to manipulate the viewer's feelings and responses to the text.

Camera Shots

A camera shot is the amount of space that is seen in one shot or frame. Camera shots are used to demonstrate different aspects of a film's setting, characters and themes. As a result, camera shots are very important in shaping meaning in a film.

An **extreme long shot (ELS)** contains a large amount of landscape. It is often used at the beginning of a scene or a film to establish general **location** (setting). This is also known as an establishing shot.

A **wide shot (WS)** full views of an exterior or interior location. Human figures if they appear at all are a minor part of the composition (shot make up).

A **long shot (LS)** contains landscape but gives the viewer a more specific idea of setting. A long shot may show the viewers the building where the action will take place.

A **medium wide shot (MWS)** partial view of an exterior or interior location. Human figures if present are full length but not a dominant part of the composition.

A **full shot (FS)** contains a complete view of the **characters**. From this shot, viewers can take in the costumes of characters and may also help to demonstrate the relationships between characters.

A **medium long shot (MLS)** view of subject(s) from head to knees

A **medium shot (MS)** contains the characters or a **character from the waist up**. From this shot, viewers can see the characters' faces more clearly as well as their interaction with other characters.

A **medium close up (MCU)** view of subject(s) from head to mid chest

A **close-up** contains just one character's face or object. This enables viewers to understand the actor's emotions and also allows them to feel empathy for the character. This is also known as a personal shot.

An **extreme close-up** contains one part of a character's face or other object. This technique is quite common in horror films. This type of shot creates an intense mood and provides interaction between the audience and the viewer.

Over the shoulder shot

Looking from behind a person at the subject.

Point of view shot

Shows a view from the subject's perspective. When analysing a film you should always think about the different camera shots and why they are being used. The next time that you are at the cinema or watching television see what camera shots are being used. **Important:** These camera shots are used in all forms of visual texts including postcards, posters and print advertisements.

Camera angles

It is important that you do not confuse camera angles and camera shots. Camera shots are used to demonstrate different aspects of setting, themes and characters. Camera angles are used to position the viewer so that they can understand the relationships between the characters. These are very important for shaping meaning in film as well as in other visual texts.

The following examples will help you to understand the differences between the different camera angles

A **bird's eye angle** is an angle that looks **directly down upon a scene**. This angle is often used as an establishing angle, along with an extreme long shot, to establish setting.

A **high angle** is a camera angle that looks **down upon a subject**. A character shot with a high angle will look vulnerable or small. These angles are often used to demonstrate to the audience a perspective of a particular character.

An **eye-level angle** puts the audience on **an equal footing with the character/s**. This is the most commonly used angle in most films as it allows the viewers to feel comfortable with the characters.

A **low angle** is a camera angle that **looks up at a character**. This is the opposite of a high angle and makes a character look more powerful. This can make the audience feel vulnerable and small by looking up at the character. This can help the responder feel empathy if they are viewing the frame from another character's point of view.

Camera movement

Composers of films also use camera movement to shape meaning. The following are some examples of common camera movements and how they can be used to shape meaning in films.

A **crane shot** is often used by composers of films to signify the end of a film or scene. The effect is achieved by the camera being put on a crane that can move upwards

A **tracking shot** and a **dolly shot** have the same effect. A tracking shot moves on tracks or any moving vehicle and a dolly shot is mounted on a trolley to achieve the effect of movement. This camera movement is used in a number of ways. By using a tracking shot or a dolly shot the composer of a film gives the viewer a detailed tour of a situation. It can also be used to follow a character. A good example of this is in a car chase scene.

Panning is used to give the viewer a panoramic view of a set or setting. This can be used to establish a scene

Lighting

Lighting is a very important aspect for shaping meaning in films. What kind of atmosphere is created in a room lit by candles? Have you ever heard of mood lighting? A room that is brightly lit by neon lights might seem to be sterile or a shadowy room might be eerie or scary. The lighting technicians in a film crew have the task of creating lighting to suit the mood and atmosphere of each scene in a film.

Remember that lighting is used in still image visual texts as well as in films.

Cinematography

Cinematography is the combination of the techniques described in these notes. This includes camera shots, camera angles, camera movement and lighting. Use the term cinematography to group all of these together. Eg: 'The cinematography in that film was exceptional.'

Mise en Scene

Mise en scene refers to all the objects and characters in a particular frame. More specifically, it refers to the composition of the frame. When you use the term mise en scene, you are discussing where the composer or director has placed all the elements of the scene within the frame.

Sound, Soundtrack and Music

The sound, soundtrack and music in a film are very important to the impact of films and play a major role in shaping meaning in the text. Next time you view

a film try to imagine a suspenseful scene without the music. Does it have the same effect? There are a number of factors to consider when analysing sound in a film. Speech, sound effects and music are used to convey the story or create atmosphere.

Diegetic sound is sound that occurs in film that is natural. These sounds include doors opening and closing, footsteps, dialogue (the voices of the actors if they are talking on screen), any music that comes from radios in the film or played on musical instruments, thunderstorms, tyres screeching and explosions. Any sound that is caused by actions or actually happens in the course of the film is diegetic sound. Imagine that the film is real. If you could hear that sound in real life, it is diegetic.

Non-Diegetic sound is sound that is added to the film during editing. These sounds include music and songs that are added to the film, music that sets mood for films (such as screeching violins at suspenseful moments), narration (voiceovers) and sounds added as special effects, especially in slapstick (comedy using exaggerated physical violence) sequences. (the "boing!" sound as a character is hit over the head - *The Three Stooges* is a classic example of this kind of sound).

Any sound that would not occur if the film were real is non diegetic sound. For example, when you are sad, violins do not suddenly start playing! Sound can also be enhanced through processes such as reverberation.

The difference between sound, soundtrack and music is as follows.

- Sound is generally referred to as diegetic sounds.
- Soundtracks are any songs used during the film.
- Music is the incidental mood music known as the film score.

Think about the influence sound has on the impact and meaning of film.

Other techniques

Establishing Shot: A beginning shot of a new scene that shows an overall view of the new setting and the relative position of the actors in that setting.

Jump Cut: A disconcerting cut joining of two shots that do not match in action and continuity. Fast paced change between shots.

Scene: A series of shots joined so that they communicate a unified action taking place **at one time and place**.

Superimposition: A shot in which one or more images are printed on top of one another, as in ghost effects or titles.

Sequence: A series of scenes joined in such a way that they make up a significant part of a film's dramatic structure. **Can have different times and places**

Voice-over Narration: The technique of using an off-screen voice to convey necessary background information, fill in gaps in the narrative, and comment on the action. Often the actor is not seen and is used as an extended or whole film flashback.

Motifs: Images, patterns, or ideas that are repeated throughout the film and are variations or aspects of the major theme.

Special Effects (SFX): an artificial way to create an image or illusion. Technologically advanced techniques used to stimulate our imaginations; blue screen, green screen, creation of monsters, robots, and spaceship battles, Computer Generated Images, film rate.