

Micro Film Form: A Basic Glossary of The Terms

The micro (small scale) elements of film form (film-making) can be broken down into four basic areas:

- Cinematography:** Camera work – framing, camera movement, camera angles, film speed, zooms, focus, depth of field, field of vision and any other issues directly related to the handling or functioning of the camera, or the film within it, is considered to be part of this aspect of film-making.
- Editing:** The way in which images are combined. This operates like the syntax and grammar of film language, organising images in a way that produces a developing meaning for the audience.
- Mise en Scene:** French for “put in the scene” this term means everything that can be seen on the screen by the audience and includes the performers, set, props, lighting, colour and the relationship of all these things to one another within the shot. In essence mise en scene is the complete visual content of any given frame or shot within a film.
- Sound:** Sound has become a key aspect of what is generally regarded as a visual medium. Music, sound effects and dialogue (amongst other things) have a big role to play in manipulating the responses and understanding of the audience.

What follows is a glossary of terms for the most commonly used techniques in film-making. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but does provide the basic vocabulary essential for detailed discussion of film-making.

Cinematography

- aerial shot:** A shot taken from an extremely high vantage point and usually at considerable distance from the subject. Generally these shots are taken from an aircraft or drone of some description. A bird’s-eye-view effect is frequently generated by such shots.
- canted framing:** Tilting the camera sideways so that the final image shows a world in which everything is slanting to the left or the right.
- crane shot** A shot taken from a small crane with a camera mounted on it. These shots allow the camera to start low to the ground and then swoop up high over the scene or do the reverse.
- establishing shot** Usually a wide shot designed to show the general location in which a scene’s action is going to play out. These shots are usually used at the beginning of a sequence and are designed to enable the audience to orientate themselves within the film world.
- eye-line match** A camera angle which produces a shot which approximates a character’s point of view without actually being a p.o.v.
- following shot** A shot in which the camera is positioned behind an object or character and follows them as they move. Often used in horror films when a victim is being stalked by the killer.
- framing** Framing is a way of describing the size of the subject within the shot. There are seven main framings which are illustrated on the following page (images taken from Kassovitz’s 1995 film; *La Haine*):

extreme close up (ECU):



close up (CU):



medium close up (MC):



medium/mid shot (MS):



medium long shot (MLS):



long shot (LS)



extreme long shot (ELS):



hand held camera:

A style of cinematography where the camera is held in the hands of the camera-person. The shake in the image produced by body movements gives a greater sense of immediacy and realism.

high angle:

Positioning the camera so that it is above the subject looking down.

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| low angle | Positioning the camera so that it is below the subject looking up at it. |
| objective camera | Cinematography in which the camera is an impartial observer of the action with no special connection to any particular character. |
| pan | The camera turning from right to left or left to right (usually on a tripod) in order to follow action or reveal a scene. |
| point of view shot (PoV) | An example of subjective cinematography in which the camera provides us with a shot showing exactly what a character is seeing. For the audience to understand that we are taking a character's perspective this shot has to be edited together with a shot of that character looking at something off-screen. |
| pull-out | Using a zoom lens to draw back from a close up shot to a wider shot. |
| pulling focus | Switching focus in an otherwise blurred shot from one object to another. |
| reveal | A camera movement which suddenly shows something which was previously hidden from view. |
| shock/snap zoom | A very quick and jarring zoom into an object/character. |
| static camera | A still camera |
| steadicam | A method of moving the camera on a specially designed mount worn by the camera operator which allows it to glide through a shot moving smoothly up and down as it does so. |
| subjective camera | Cinematography which connects directly to a character and their experiences. A point of view shot is the most extreme example as it places us directly in the position of a character, but dream sequences or shots which depict the world in a way that reflects how it appears to a character all fall into this kind of cinematography. |
| tilt | A shot in which the camera tilts up or down. |
| tracking shot | A shot in which a camera is moved over tracking on a small trolley. The result is very smooth linear movement which can be anything from very slow to extremely rapid. |
| two-shot | A shot which includes two characters – often facing one another in conversation. |
| whip-pan | A very quick panning movement, often designed to build tension and disorientation in the audience. |
| zoom | A lens which allows the camera to increase or decrease its magnification on a certain part of the shot producing an effect similar to moving towards or away from the subject. |

Editing

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| continuity editing | Editing designed to put shots in a sequence which does nothing to confuse us or challenge our sense of time and space. This is by far the most frequently used editing style in both film and television. |
| cross-cutting | see "inter-cutting" |
| cut | The moment at which one shot changes into another. Deciding where to cut is the most important job of a good editor. |
| cut-away | A shot of some detail or other which momentarily takes us away from the main action or space within a scene. During a scene of a party in a building that has a bomb in it we might, for instance, have a cut-away to a shot of the bomb's timer counting down to zero. |
| discontinuity editing | Editing which interrupts the natural flow of time and space. Cutting between two different time lines would be a simple kind of discontinuity editing. |
| dissolve | An editing device which allows an existing shot to bleed into the next shot and then be replaced by it. This is an alternative to a straight |

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| | cut and can impart a number of different meanings to an audience – the passage of time for instance. |
| editing device | Any feature of film-making designed to motivate, draw attention to or mask a cut. For instance in <i>La Haine</i> a frequently used editing device is the sound of a gun firing at the point at which the film cuts from one scene to another. |
| elliptical edit | A cut between shots that are separated by the passage of time – in other words an edit that misses a period of time out. |
| fade | A cut in which the image simply fades out and a new image replaces it – often by fading in. The most common fades are “fade to black” and fade to white” where the names colour dominates the screen for a time before the next shot arrives. |
| graphic match | Cutting between two shots which resemble one another in terms of the shapes and/or composition they include. |
| inter-cutting | Repeatedly cutting between two parallel strands of action within a film – for instance between the a bank robbery being carried out and the police cars racing across the city towards the location of the crime. |
| jump cut | A cut which interrupts the flow of a take by cutting a small section of time out of what is in fact a single shot. The result is a sudden jerk in the flow of the shot on screen producing a jarring effect fro the audience. |
| match on action | Cutting between two shots which resemble each other in terms of the direction, speed and nature of the movement occurring in them. Kubrick’s cut between a bone spinning through the air at the dawn of man and a tubular space station spinning through space in <i>2001: A Space Odyssey</i> is one of the most famous examples of this technique. |
| montage editing | A fast and aggressive editing style pioneered in Soviet Russia. It relies on drawing attention to editing by combining images which strongly contrast with one another. It also works closely with rapid editing rhythms. It is frequently used during action sequences to promote a sense of excitement. It is also one of the key editing techniques in music videos and advertising. Montage editing on a more subtle level is also about combining images in unusual ways which encourage the audience to interpret the relationships which exist between one image and another on an intellectual and ideological basis. |
| overlapping editing | An editing technique which shows an event through a number of shots which actually repeat part of the action of the previous shot. As a result the beginning of each successive shot starts at a point in time just before the end of the preceding shot. The result is a drawn out and emphasised focus on the action. |
| shot-reverse-shot | The standard way in narrative film-making to shoot a conversation between two people. One shot shows character A from character B’s side and another shot show the reverse angle. Cutting between these two positions allows an audience to see both sides of the dialogue. |
| vertical wipe | An editing device in which the first shot appears to be pushed off the screen by the next shot rising from the bottom or descending from the top of the screen. |
| wipe | Like a vertical wipe but with a sideways motion. |

Mise en Scene

On the whole there is no need for specialist language to describe features of mise en scene, though discussing colour and lighting does involve technical terminology:

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| background | The most distant layer of space at the rear of a shot |
| bias | The tendency of specific types of filter or film stock to emphasise a particular colour range – yellow and blue biases are quite commonly used. Film with no bias (neutral colour) is dominant in cinema. |
| de-saturated colour | A technique producing muted and/or bleached-out colours. |
| internal framing | Creating a frame around an object or character within the shot by using a door frame or window for instance. |
| available/natural light | Natural rather than artificial light. |
| back light | Light originating from behind the subject of the shot. |
| chiaroscuro lighting | Complex and highly contrasting patterns of light and shadow. |
| foreground | The layer of space closest to the camera. |
| expressionistic lighting | Lighting from a single source, producing complex patterns of light and distorting shadows (particularly used in horror and film noir). |
| mid-ground | The middle layer of space in a shot. |
| off-screen space | the space which exists outside the frame but which we are constantly aware of in our imagination |
| saturated colour | intense colour produced by film stock, processing or digital effects. |
| single source lighting | Providing the lighting in a shot from just one direction/light source often producing a dark and expressionistic look. |
| three point lighting | The standard lighting in mainstream film-making providing light from three sources to give a bright, balanced “naturalistic” image. |

Sound

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| ambient sound | Also known as “background sound” – this is made up of all the sounds coming from the general environment of a scene. Traffic noises in a street scene are an example of this kind of sound. |
| contrapuntal sound | Sound (usually non-diegetic) which is at odds with the visuals – for instance tense music playing over images of children at play. |
| diegetic sound | Sound originating from within the world of the narrative. Basically if a character in the film is able to hear a sound it is diegetic. |
| non-diegetic sound | Sound which is laid over the top of the film world rather than originating within it. Voice-overs and incidental music are good examples of this kind of sound. This sound is something the audience are aware of while characters within the film are not. |
| parallel sound | Sound (usually non-diegetic) which is carefully matched to the action and/or image on the screen; for instance the use of conventional horror film music in a suspense building scene. |
| pleonastic sound | Sound which is exaggerated in its volume or qualities in order to emphasise elements of action or atmosphere in a shot/sequence |
| score | Specifically the musical aspect of a sound track. |
| voice-over | Narration usually provided by a character within the film, but not originating from the world of the story itself. |
| sound-bridge | sound from one shot/scene which overlaps and continues to play (at least for a moment) in the next shot/scene |
| sound-track | While we have become used to thinking of film soundtracks as being CDs with the score from a film on, in fact the soundtrack really includes everything that can be heard in the film – it is an all-encompassing term for the complete sound recording of a film. |