

Film Vocabulary

From David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, **Film Art: An Introduction** (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993):

Story: In a narrative film, all the events that we see and hear, plus all those that we infer or assume to have occurred, arranged in their presumed causal relations, chronological order, duration, frequency, and spatial locations. Opposed to plot, which is the film's actual presentation of certain events in the narrative.

Plot: In a narrative film, all the events that are directly presented to us, including their causal relations, chronological order, duration, frequency, and spatial locations. Opposed to story which is the viewer's imaginary construction of all events in the narrative.

Narration: The process through which the plot conveys or withholds story information. The narration can be more or less restricted to character knowledge and more or less deep in presenting characters' mental perceptions and thoughts.

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.

Nondiegetic insert: A shot or a series of shots cut into a sequence, showing objects represented as being outside the space of the narrative.

Diegetic sound: Any voice, musical passage, or sound effect presented as originating from a source within the film's world.

Nondiegetic sound: Sound, such as mood music or narrator's commentary, represented as coming from a source outside the space of the narrative.

From [The All-Movie Guide Film Glossary](#):

1. "Incarnations of the Story"

Diegesis: The narrative elements of a film that are shown or immediately inferred from the content of a film. Though implication is not the primary focus, diegesis is a methodological analysis for discerning the exact nature of the film including all of the action and dialogue.

{**"Diegetic"** -- refers to things which exist within the "world" of the film's narrative. Non-diegetic or extra-diegetic elements of a film do not "exist" or "take place" in the same plane of reality that the character's inhabit. For example, presumably the characters within an action film do not "hear" the rousing theme music that accompanies their exploits. that music is extra-diegetic, but still part of the film.}

Narrative: A term denoting a story in any form of human expression where no single individual is telling the story.

Narrative Film: Narrative films can include a large corpus of fiction and nonfiction films including documentaries and dramas though the genre is predominantly fictitious. Narrative films primarily concentrate on story lines and can include character development but the drama and usual fiction are emphasized.

Plot: The events in an individual narrative and how they are arranged. Arguably the plot and the story are not the same. {Narrative includes everything that is supposed to have happened in the "story"; plot is more concretely the scenes that are presented in the film, in the precise order in which they are presented. -- Hank}

Story: The specific unfolding of a sequence of events in a film. It includes character involvement, settings, and an order that superimposed in an arbitrary manner by the screen writer or by a parallel historical sequence through which the themes are developed. The story is general whereas the plot is specific and includes both internal and external relations to the work.

2. "Basic Elements of a Film"

Frame: Frames in essence are still images that are collected in quick succession, developed, and projected giving the illusion of motion. Each individual, or still, image on motion picture film is referred to as a frame.

Shot: In the process of photographing a scene a shot refers to one constant take by the camera. It is most often filmed at one time with a solo camera.

Sequence: Segments of a film narrative that are edited together and unified by a common setting, time, event or story-line.

Sound Track: That portion of the sound film medium to which are recorded the dialogue, music, narration and sound effects. The sound head and film gate on a film projector are physically separated from one another. This gap is covered during the recording of a sound-film by keeping the soundtrack recording a few frames head of the photographic image. The sound passes over the projector head at the same time the photographic image passes before the projector's light aperture/lens (the film gate).

3. "Basic Manipulations, and Assemblings of the Basic Elements"

Cutting {a.k.a. Editing}: The process of changing from one shot to another accomplished through the camera or by the splicing of shots together by the cutter (editor). This is also referred to as editing, the preferred term, and includes the decisions, controls, sensibilities, vision and integrative capabilities of the individual editing (cutting) artist.

Invisible Cutting: Editing procedures that are so well-formed that the viewer is not aware that a splice has taken place. This is particularly important in action sequences because the audience is psychologically intent on the moving images that a cut in the film -- an unobtrusive cut -- is not noticed. This can easily be contrasted with Eisenstein's technique of quick cuts and jump

cuts from one scene to the next without transition so as to unnerve the audience and evoke emotional responses in them.

{From the [Complete Film Dictionary](#): **Shot/Reverse Shot Technique**: A technique of cutting developed by the Hollywood studios in which the camera switches between two conversants or interacting individuals. ... See invisible cutting.}

Montage: In the production and editing of film this term has come to refer to a seemingly unrelated series of frames combined so that one scene quickly dissolves into the next, shifting categories, effects and settings in such a manner as to convey a quick passage of time or an abstract unity through thematic devices such as meter, rhythm, tonality, and intellectuality (viz Eisenstein). Continuity, if it exists, is not captured in a frame by frame juxtaposition but rather through an abstraction. (Also see "mise-en-scene".)

Synchronization: Correctly aligning the photographic and audio portions of a film so that the image and sound is heard and seen simultaneously.

Framing: Properly surrounding the subject of a shot by the edges of the actual boundaries of the film. All that is seen in the viewfinder of a camera does not always translate directly into the proper centering of the subject. Framing is a technical nuance learned in the process of photography. {Involves camera angle, distance, and arrangement of objects and people in front of the camera (the "mise-en-scene". Important in framing is the way that the edges of the screen make a sharp distinction between what is seen and what is not seen, what is included and what is excluded, in a particular frame.)}

4. "Basic Elements of the Camera Setup"

Camera Angle: This term refers to the point of view held by the focal point of the camera when it is positioned for shooting. Included in the angle is the perspective given by the camera to the depth of focus, height and width of the particular object and action being photographed. The angle also refers to whether the

shot is taken from behind, in front, from the side or from the top or bottom of the particular view. Terms appropriated for these various angles include eye-level angle, high-angle, low-angle, sideview angle and the "Dutch" angle.

Distance: Distance refers to the amount of relational space between the audience and the character on the screen. Though the characters are two-dimensional and the audience is distinctly separate from the screen by dead space (virtual reality in the theatre has not yet been developed) the camera's perspective, in effect, attempts to provide the amount of space desired subject to the director's discretion. This space often results in the interaction and psychological connection between the characters and the audience. The connection is achieved through the dynamics and varying degrees between long shots, medium shots and close-ups.

Establishing Shot {a.k.a. "Master Shot"} At the beginning of a film, episode or scene within a film, a wide-angle or "full-shot" is photographed for the purpose of identifying the location or setting. Thus the audience has established, or been given the opportunity to surmise an orientation. It also helps to establish the distinctions between the general locale and the specific details -- from subsequent shots -- within the general context.

{The Establishing shot is a wide-angle shot and/or a long shot. -
- Hank}

Perspective: Spatial relationships. In film (painting, photography, theatrical performances, et cetera) perspective refers to the accurate depiction of three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface. (In experimental forms of film, of course, the accurate depiction is redefined.) Height and breadth come naturally to the surface but the added dimension of depth must be constructed through cameras, lenses, sets, and designs during composition. (See "anamorphic lens" and "composition".)

5. "Basic Camera Movements"

Camera Movement: Conventional uses of the camera to obtain camera angles and various perspectives while filming include panning, tilting, tracking or zooming of the camera. These camera ploys are also known as camera movement and rarely does the camera remain static. When a movement does occur, however, the camera comes to a rest providing a smooth transition to the scene. Movements are coordinated with the action in a scene so that the camera does not go in the opposite direction of the action (i.e. action left-to-right.) Of course, many alternative and experimental methods are used in the film industry and camera movement is no exception.

Dolly: Cameras and other equipment, such as microphones and lights, are often carried around the set on movable platforms. These are dollies and are independently moved by the dolly grip so that the technician, be s/he cameraman, audio or lighting technician, can keep their concerns focused. Dollies are often run on tracks for special dolly pans, chinese dollies, or for mere structural smoothness. Most of the time, dollies are used for camera work and can include booms for the cameras which allows for the lowering, raising and pivoting of the camera. All of these shots can be achieved simultaneously with an horizontal movement of the camera upon the dolly track.

Dolly Shot: A camera perspective, on a moving or stationary subject, obtained while the camera is in motion on either a dolly or a camera truck. When the camera is so mounted and moves toward a closer proximity of the subject it is called "dolly-in"; likewise, when the camera is so mounted and moves away from the subject it is referred to as "dolly-out".

{From the [Complete Film Dictionary](#): **Tracking Shot:** ... So called because it is sometimes photographed from a dolly that moves on tracks, also refers particularly to a shot in which the camera follows the movement of a subject.}

Crane: A large camera dolly that can raise the camera as much as twenty feet above the ground. The crane has the capacity to

move forward and backward and is usually operated by electronic controls. Motions are generally silent and the crane allows shots to be made over a wide ranging area providing great access to cover shots.

Pan: From the Greek "pan" meaning "all" this movement of the camera is achieved by moving the camera while turning it on an horizontal axis. At least four functions are served by this technique including an all encompassing view of the scene, a device for leading the audience to a particular person or place, following a person or vehicle across a distant scene, or giving the audience the visual images and perspective as seen by a character when turning her/his head. {A turn of the camera up or down on the vertical axis is called a "tilt." -- Hank}

{From the [Complete Film Dictionary](#): **Zoom Shot:** A shot taken with a zoom lens in which the focal length of the lens changes from wide angle to long focus or the reverse so that the camera seems to move in to (i.e., "zoom in" to) or away from (i.e., "zoom out" from) the subject while the camera actually remains stationary.}

Konigsberg, Ira. **The Complete Film Dictionary**. New York: Meridian, 1987.

*This Film Vocabulary Guide was compiled by Professor Judith Weisenfeld at Vassar College