

Glossary ... some useful terms for studying film

Actuality film

A form of documentary film that shows actual places, people and events. Unlike documentary film, actualities do not deliberately present an opinion on the action but rather, record whatever is taking place in front of the camera.

Animation

Any process where artificial movement is created by photographing a series of drawings, objects or computer images one by one. When shown in succession, small changes in position give the illusion of movement.

Camera angle

The position of the camera in relation to the subject being filmed. For example filmed from above, below, on the same level or horizontally.

Close-up

A framing in which the scale of the object filmed is relatively large. For example when a person's head fills the whole screen.

Crane shot

A shot filmed by suspending the camera above the ground and moving it in any direction.

Cut

In filmmaking a cut is when two strips of film are joined (or 'spliced') together. In the finished film, a cut is the change between shots.

Dissolve

A transition between two shots during which the first image gradually disappears while the second image gradually appears.

Documentary

Any non-fiction film that represents a version of real life.

Editing

In filmmaking, editing is the process of selecting and joining sections of the film. In the finished film, editing is the technique used to organise the order of events and structure of the film.

Exposure

The adjustment of the camera in order to control how much light hits each frame of the film. Too much light and the film is overexposed and the image appears too bright; too little and it is underexposed and the image is dark.

Extreme close-up

A framing in which the scale of the object shown is very large. For example when just part of a person's face fills the whole screen.

Extreme long shot

A framing in which the scale of an object is very small. For example when a large crowd of people fill the whole screen.

Fade

A fade-in occurs when a dark screen gradually brightens to reveal a shot. A fade-out occurs when a shot gradually darkens to become a black screen. (Sometimes a fade to white is used in this instance).

Film stock

The strip of film on which individual images are photographed so that, when projected, it gives the illusion of movement. The stock comprises a clear plastic base, covered with a light-sensitive emulsion that records the image.

Frame

A single image on the strip of film.

Framing

The use of the camera to select and compose what will be visible within the frame and therefore onscreen.

Gauge

The width of the film strip, measured in millimetres. Feature films are generally shot on 35mm and the most commonly used 'amateur' gauges are 16mm, Standard and Super 8mm and 9.5mm.

Genre

The type of film, recognisable to the audience by familiar narrative conventions. For example Science Fiction.

Iris

A round, moving mask that can close to end a scene or focus on a detail, or open to begin a scene or reveal surrounding detail.

Long shot

A framing in which the scale of the object filmed is small. For example, a person standing up would just fit within the height of the screen.

Medium close up

A framing in which the scale of the object shown is moderately small. For example a person filmed from shins to head would fill the screen.

Medium long shot

A framing in which the scale of the object filmed is of moderate size. For example a person filmed from the chest up would fill the screen.

Mise-en-scène

All the elements placed in front of the camera to be filmed. This includes settings, props, costumes and make-up, lighting and the behaviour of the characters (or subject if the film does not include people).

Narrative

A chain of events in cause and effect relationship that occur across space and through time.

Pan

A camera movement during which the camera body turns to the left or right. Onscreen it produces a mobile framing which scans the space horizontally.

Point-of-view shot (POV)

A shot filmed when the camera is placed approximately where a character's eyes would be, showing us what they would see.

Scene

A segment in a film that shows continuous action in one place and time. Or, a segment that shows simultaneous action by cutting between two or more places.

Shot

An uninterrupted image with a single static or mobile framing. For example a close up of someone talking, or a pan of a landscape.

Storyboard

Drawings of individual shots or scenes, like a comic strip, with descriptions written below each drawing. The storyboard is used to plan a film production.

Tilt

The vertical movement of the camera from a stationary position – for example resting on a tripod.

Tracking shot

A shot produced by moving the camera along the ground forward, backwards or sideways.

Wipe

A cut between shots in which a line passes across the screen replacing the first shot with the next one.

Zoom

A technique that gives the impression of the camera moving towards (zoom in) or away from (zoom out) the action while keeping the film in focus, achieved using the lens of the camera.

Reference

Bordwell, David and Thompson, Kristin: *Film Art. An Introduction. Fifth Edition* [University of Wisconsin, The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc. 1997]