

Film Analysis Terminology

Don't panic! In order to analyze film deeply, we need to better understand film. To better understand film, we need to know some of the terminology. I have tried to assemble a list here that has the depth of vocabulary that you may use but will not overwhelm you. Let's be clear about expectations. You don't need to memorize this list. In this unit, you won't have to use every one of these terms or even most of them. Ideally your analysis of a film would include some elements of each of the big categories (framing, shots and angles, camera, sound, lighting, and editing). What's important to me is that you can apply the relevant vocabulary to enhance your argument about whatever shot/scene/sequence you are analyzing.

Term	Definition	Optional Example (picture? sentence?)
Framing		
Mise-en-scène	Stage design and arrangement of the actors in scenes.	Settings, lighting, actors, decor, makeup
Framing	How the elements are arranged in the frames. Framing allows you to emphasize or show emotions, thoughts, sensations and ideas.	
Rule of thirds	The basic rule of composition in film production. The frame is divided visually into thirds horizontally and vertically, so the image is divided into nine equal parts, which creates control points. The main objects are placed along or within these lines, or their intersection.	
Shots and Angles		
Shot	The moment the camera starts rolling until it stops rolling.	
Establishing shot	Introducing new scenes, telling the viewers when and where something is happening.	
Long shot	A view of a scene from a long distance, allowing the viewers to see the landscape.	

Medium shot	A view that shows that subject from the waist and above.	
Close up	A shot that tightly frames a person or object, focusing on mainly the subject.	
Extreme close up	A very close up shot of the subject, the outer portions are usually cut off by the edges of the frame. This mainly focuses on a person's emotion or reaction.	
Two shot	A frame encompasses two people, often creating suspense or tension.	
Over-the-shoulder shot	The camera angle is placed above the back of the shoulder or head of a subject.	
Reaction shot	A shot which cuts away from the main scene to show the reaction of a character.	
Low-angle shot	The camera positioned at a low angle, looking up towards the subject.	
High-angle shot	The camera positioned at a high angle, looking down at the subject.	
Overhead shot	The camera angle is placed directly above the subject, around a 90° angle.	
Shot v. Scene v. Sequence (how do they differ?)	A shot, scene, and sequence together make up the larger dramatic narrative of film; scenes are composed of shots, sequences are composed of scenes, and films are composed of sequences.	
Camera Movements		
Pan	Movements to turn, or pan (from the word panorama), the camera horizontally so that it sweeps around the scene. It can also be tilted up or down in a vertical panning shot or in	

	a diagonal pan, as when it follows an actor up a stairway.	
Tilt	The camera stays in a fixed position but rotates up/down in a vertical plane. Tilting the camera results in a motion similar to someone raising or lowering their head to look up or down.	
Dolly/Tracking	The camera can move forward, backward, or alongside a subject. A tracking shot is a shot that follows alongside a subject throughout a scene, keeping them in the frame. While some types of dolly shots are tracking shots, not all tracking shots are shot on a dolly.	
Boom/Crane	A crane shot is a shot taken by a camera on a moving crane or jib. Most cranes accommodate both the camera and an operator, but some can be moved by remote control.	
Sound		
Diegetic	Sound that can be heard by the characters	Footsteps, door knocking
Non-diegetic	Sound that cannot be heard by the characters	Background music
Lighting		
High key	Brightly lit subjects with more fill light and softer shadows. Fill lights are used to increase the amount of ambient light in a scene and reduce the contrast. Where to use high-key	

	lighting. High-key lighting is often used in commercials for food and beauty products.	
Low key	A type of lighting style used in photography, film, and television that accentuates shadows, high contrast, and dark tones. The visual aesthetic of low-key lighting is usually achieved by using hard sources or key lights with minimal to no fill light.	
Bottom/Side lighting	Direct lighting comes from below or the side.	
Front/Back lighting	A backlight is often used to separate an object or an actor from a dark background and give the subject more shape and depth	
Editing Techniques		
Cut	A film transition from one scene to another.	
Fade	An opening shot or transition technique film editors use to ease viewers into new imagery, rather than using a sudden cut from scene to scene.	
Dissolve	A type of film transition in which one sequence fades over another.	
Wipe	The viewer's eyes will follow the movement of the wipe and this can help lead their attention where the director wants it to go.	
Flashback	A narrative technique of interrupting the chronological sequence of events to interject events of earlier occurrence.	
Shot-reverse shot	Starts with a shot of a character, and then cuts to a shot of what or who that character is looking at (the reverse of the	

	angle from the first shot), and finally cuts back to the initial shot to show the character's reaction.	
Cross cutting	The main action is cut together with two (or often more) different sets of action that appear to the audience as either happening at the same time or at different times.	
Eyeline match	A film editing technique to indicate to the audience what a character is seeing. Eyeline match allows the audience to believe that they're looking at something through the eyes of the character.	
Special effects	Mechanical or artificial visual effects that contribute heavily to the visual experience of the audience.	
Montage	The editing technique of assembling separate pieces of thematically related film and putting them together into a sequence.	
Theatrical Elements		
Props	Objects used on stage or screen by actors during a performance.	
Costumes	An outfit, which can help tell the story.	
Sets	Artificially constructed scenery in a film or play.	
Acting choices	Approaching the script with different base emotions to see (and feel) how different energy or emotions change the meaning of the scripted words and actions.	

