

# Glossary of Film Terms

**aerial shot:** A camera shot filmed in an exterior location from far above the camera's object; from a bird's-eye view.

**angle of framing:** The position of the camera in relation to the object that it shows. There are multiple angles (looking up from below – a low angle, normal or straight on, and oblique or tilted), each defined by the field and the vertex of the take.

**art-house film:** In contrast to commercial films, art-house films are often low-budget, foreign-language, “independent,” or non-mainstream films that are considered to have artistic, conceptual, or aesthetic merit and/or pretensions; mostly shown in specialized theaters.

**audio bridge:** A sound, dialogue, or sound effect in one scene that continues over into a new image or shot.

**auteur (or auteur theory):** Literally, the French word for “author.” Used in film criticism, the term attributes personal vision, identifiable style, thematic aspects, and techniques of the film to its director (auteur), rather than to the collaborative efforts of all involved. It was introduced in the 1950s by Francois Truffaut and the editors of the celebrated French film journal *Cahiers du Cinéma*.

**avant-garde film:** A type of film, often experimental and abstract, that self-consciously emphasizes technique over substance and challenges conventional filmmaking.

**black/dark comedy:** A type of comedy film, first popular during the late 1950s and early 1960s, in which normally serious subjects are treated with macabre humor.

**camera angle:** The angle chosen from which to film a shot. The most common angles are looking up from below – a low angle, normal or straight on, and oblique or tilted, each defined by the field and the vertex of the take. Directly related to the angle of framing.

**cinematic identification:** The process through which the spectator personally identifies with a character's situation or experience.

**cinematographer:** The person expert in and responsible for filming or photographing moving images.

**cinematography:** Activities and elements related to the making and study of film. Specifically refers to the art and technique of film photography, the capture of images, and lighting effects.

**close-up:** A close-range view, particularly of a person or object, that details expression. The scale of the object is magnified, appears relatively large, and fills the entire frame. The most common close-ups are of a character's head from the neck up.

**closure:** The degree to which the film closes and ends the film's narrative.

**continuity editing:** The systematic procedure of editing cuts to preserve the continuity, space, and time of the action.

**crane shot:** A shot filmed from a mechanical apparatus called a crane. The crane moves the camera and the cinematographer (in some cases the director) in different directions. Crane shots usually provide an overhead view of a scene.

**crosscutting:** Alternating shots of two sequences in different locations, often occurring simultaneously.

**cut (or cutting):** An abrupt or sudden change in camera angle, location, placement, or time, from one shot to another; consists of a transition from one scene to another (a visual cut) or from one soundtrack to another (a sound cut).

**depth of field:** The depth of composition of a shot, comprised of several planes: foreground, middle-ground, and background. Depth of field specifically refers to the area, range of distance, or field (between the closest and farthest planes) in which the elements captured in a camera image appear in focus.

**diegesis:** A film's fictionalized, narrative world. Designates the action, occurrences, events, and spaces that constitute the film's story.

**diegetic sound:** Any kind of sound (voices, sound effects, background music, etc.) that manifests in, constitutes, and originates from the film's universe.

**direct sound:** Sound effects, conversations, music, or noise that are recorded simultaneously as the film is being shot.

**dissolve:** In the transition between takes, the superimposition of one image on another. The second image appears superimposed over the first, which slowly disappears.

**dolly (shot):** A moving shot taken from a camera that is mounted on a hydraulically powered wheeled camera platform (sometimes referred to as a truck or dolly), pushed on rails (special tracks) and moved smoothly and noiselessly during filming while the camera is running.

**dubbing:** Replacing the voice from an original dialogue with another. This process can serve to correct recording errors, but it mainly functions to present the dialogue in the spectator's native language.

**editing:** The technical and logistical composing of the film. This process joins shots and orders the film's story and its visual and sound elements.

**ellipsis:** A temporal jump or omission of a period of time in the film's narration. This jump is indicated either visually, or simply through character dialogue.

**elliptical editing:** Shot transitions that omit part of the events, causing an ellipsis in the plot and story.

**establishing shot:** Usually a long (wide-angle or full) shot, almost always the first in an edited sequence. Taken from a considerable distance, the shot establishes the spatial relations between the important figures, objects, and setting of the film's scene.

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

**extreme close-up:** A shot in which a small object (like a body part or an insect) occupies the entire frame.

**fade-in:** The gradual brightening of a dark screen, from complete black to full exposure, as an image or shot appears. Also refers to a gradual change in the intensity of sound.

**fade-out; fade-to-black:** The gradual darkening or disappearance of an image or scene. Also refers to a gradual change in the intensity of sound.

**frame:** A single image, the smallest single piece that makes up the film's structure. A series of frames juxtaposed and shown in rapid succession make up a motion (or moving) picture.

**framing:** The space demarcated by the edges or limits of the camera, which is used to select and compose the visual picture.

**freeze (or freeze-frame):** An optical printing effect in which a single frame image is identically repeated or replicated over several frames when projected; gives the illusion of a still photograph.

**graphic match:** A visual correlation between the compositional elements of two successive takes.

**high-angle shot:** A shot in which the subject or scene is filmed from above; contrast with the low-angle shot.

**jump-cut:** A cut in film editing that joins two similar shots together, causing a jump in continuity, camera position, or time.

**long shot:** A camera view of an object or character from a considerable distance so that it appears relatively small in the frame. A long shot often serves as an establishing shot.

**long-take:** A shot that continues longer than normal without an edit.

**low-angle shot:** A shot in which the subject is filmed directly from below, making the subject appear larger than life; contrast with the high-angle shot.

**match on action:** A cut between two shots of the same action taken from two different positions in order to achieve the illusion of simultaneity.

**medium long shot:** A shot in which a fairly large object (like a human body seen from the ground up) fills the entire screen.

**medium shot:** A shot between a close shot and a long shot. Roughly half of a fairly large object (like a human body from the waist or knees up) fills up the screen.

**mise-en-scène:** A term for referencing all of the elements placed in front of the camera to be photographed and included in the sequence: settings and props, lighting, costume, make-up, and the action of the characters.

**montage:** 1. A French word literally meaning “editing,” “putting together,” or “assembling shots.” Refers to a filming technique, editing style, or form of movie collage consisting of a series of short shots or images that are rapidly connected into a coherent sequence to create a composite picture. 2. A particular style of editing developed by Russian filmmakers during the 1920s that emphasizes dynamic discontinuities, the relationship between takes, and the juxtaposition of images to create new visual concepts in the film.

**offscreen sound:** Simultaneous sound that comes from a source that is assumed to be within the space of the scene but in an area outside of the visible space of the screen. The classic example of this is the voice-over (which in some cases assumes the role of narration).

**pan (or panning shot):** An abbreviation of “panorama shot”; the horizontal scan, movement, rotation, or turning of the camera in one direction (to the right or left) around a fixed axis while filming.

**reverse angle shot:** A basic camera angle composed of a shot photographed from the opposite side of a subject to provide a different perspective. The alternating pattern between two characters’ points of view is known as shot/reverse shot.

**scene:** Usually a shot (or series of shots) that together comprise a single, complete, and unified dramatic event, action, unit, or element of film narration.

**screen direction:** The direction in which actors or objects appear to be moving on the screen from the point of view of the camera or the audience. Common screen directions include “camera left” (movement to the left) or “camera right” (movement to the right); a neutral shot is a head-on shot of a subject with no evident screen direction; a jump-cut often indicates a change in screen direction. The screen direction creates the continuity of the shot.

**slapstick (comedy):** A boisterous form of comedy involving exaggerated physical violence (usually harmless), activities, or pantomime.

**sound:** The audio portion of a film including dialogue, music, and sound effects.

**subjective point of view (POV):** The viewer seeing or interpreting events from the point of view of either a character or the author. Also refers to a film in which the narrator has a limited point of view regarding the characters, events, action, or places.

**telephoto shot:** An image shot with an extremely long lens, making distant objects appear nearer and thus larger.

**tracking shot:** A smooth shot that follows a line horizontal to the ground, alongside the subject. On the screen this produces a mobile frame that moves through the cinematic space, relative to the scene or action: forward, backward, or side-to-side.

**voice-over:** Recorded dialogue, usually narration, that comes from an unseen, offscreen voice, character, or narrator that can be heard by the audience but not by the film characters themselves. Voice-over often conveys a character's thoughts.

**wide-angle lens:** A lens with a focal reach of at least 25 mm used with 16 mm film, or of 50 mm used with 35 mm film. This lens produces a wider, or more extended, view than a normal lens.

**wide-angle shot:** A shot taken with a lens that is able to take in a wider field of view to capture more of the scene's elements or objects than a regular or normal lens.

**zoom:** The movement of a lens of variable focal length that can be changed during the shot. It enables a smooth transition from wide-angle to telephoto shots without actually moving the camera.