

Film vocabulary

Aerial shot: A shot taken from a crane, plane, or helicopter, restricted to exterior locations.

Close-up: The subject is as large as or larger than the frame; reveals much detail.

Dutch tilt (shot): A shot in which the camera angle is deliberately slanted to one side. This can be used for dramatic effect and helps portray unease, disorientation, frantic or desperate action, intoxication or madness.

Extreme close-up: The subject is much larger than the frame; provides more detail than a close-up.

Flashback / Flashforward: A jump backwards or forwards in time. With the use of flashback / flashforward the order of events in the plot no longer matches the order of events in the story.

Handheld shot: The camera is held by the camera operator. Hand-held shots are often associated with a certain look, which is shaky, and most people associate the hand-held shot with a kind of documentary realism. Narrative films and television often use the hand-held for this reason, as they are able to create a sense of gritty realism.

Long shot: A camera shot from a great distance, usually showing the characters as very small in comparison to their surroundings.

Medium close-up: The subject is closer than a medium shot and further than a close-up.

Medium shot: A camera shot from a medium distance, usually showing the characters from the waist up; allows the audience to see body language, but not as much facial expression.

Montage: A series of shots edited together to show a longer activity evolving in a shorter amount of time or to show a series of related activities. A sports film, for instance, might have a training montage, where the character becomes much better at the sport (the film might condense three months of training, for instance, into a two-minute montage of jogging, lifting weights, etc.).

POV shot: “Point of View” shot. In this kind of shot, we are looking through the eyes of a character; you have probably seen a POV shot when a character who has been rendered unconscious is waking (the other characters look directly into the camera, in a low-angle shot (see below), and say “Are you okay?” as the edges of the frame are blurred and the speech has an echo effect).

Wide shot (also called establishing shot): The first shot of a new scene and establishes location.

Sources

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