

Glossary of film terms

Students should be familiar with the following cinematic words and phrases.

Ambient sound	Natural background noise on television, film or radio. In the same manner, ambient light refers to natural, available light that is not enhanced in any way.
Audience	All those who receive or interact with any media product. A target audience is the group of people to whom a product is particularly aimed. This may be identified as either “mass” (or mainstream) if it is targeted at a very large number of people, or “niche” if it is targeted at a smaller, more specific group of people.
Camera angle	The position of the camera in relation to the main subject. It could be a high angle, low angle, worm’s-eye view or aerial view.
Cinematographer	The person responsible for camera and lighting. Often referred to as the “director of photography”.
Continuity editing	Sometimes referred to as “invisible” or “academic” editing, this is the unobtrusive style of editing developed by Hollywood that is still the basis of most commercial productions. The basis of continuity editing is to cut on action so that the whole sequence looks natural.
Diegetic non-diegetic sound	/ Diegetic sound is that which appears to come from a recognizable source within the narrative world of a film, radio or television text. Non-diegetic sound is that which appears to come from a source unconnected to the narrative world of a text. An example of non-diegetic sound would be a film musical score. Diegetic sound would be the sound of crashing waves on cliffs or birdsong, even though these may be added in post production.
Digital	The conversion of sound and visual to transmit information in a code using the numbers zero and one.

Dubbing	A process whereby sound is added to film. This may take the form of adding music or additional sound to dialogue, or it may refer to the addition of an entire soundtrack, including dialogue.
Editing	The selection of material to make a coherent whole. In film and television an editor uses a variety of methods to move from one sequence to another. This is referred to as a “transition”.
Form	The structure, or skeleton, of a text and the narrative framework around which it is based. For example, a feature film commonly has a three-act structure. Some structures are determined by a genre and its corresponding codes and conventions.
Frame	As a noun, this refers to the single area on a strip of film that holds a single image (or a single still image on video). As a verb, it means to adjust the position of the camera or to adjust the camera lens to compose the required image. An image can be framed to construct a close-up shot, long shot or medium shot.
Genre	The classification of any media text into a category or type, for example: news, horror, documentary, soap opera and so on. Genres tend to have identifiable codes and conventions that have developed over time and for which audiences may have developed particular expectations. Media texts that are a mixture of more than one genre are called “generic hybrids”.
Mise-en-scène	Literally, everything that is “put in the scene”, or put in the frame to be photographed (appropriate to the time and era portrayed). This usually includes production design, set, location, actors, costumes, make-up, gesture, proxemics and blocking, extras, props, use of color, contrast and filter. Lighting is often included within mise-en-scène. Camera shot composition, framing, angle and movement are also sometimes referred to as mise-en-shot.
Montage	The term is taken from the French “to assemble”. It has several meanings in the context of film and is not

exclusively used to refer to “Soviet Montage”. (1) It is used as a synonym for editing. (2) In Hollywood cinema it means to edit a concentrated sequence using a series of brief transitions creating the effect of the passage of time or movement over large distances or for expressionistic moods. (3) Thematic or “Soviet” montage was developed by Sergei Eisenstein by arranging striking juxtapositions of individual shots to suggest an idea that goes beyond meanings within an individual shot. He called this “collision montage”. (4) Any sequence that creates a particularly significant effect mainly through its editing. The shower scene in Psycho would be such an example.

Narrative	The way in which a plot or story is told, by whom and in what order. Flashbacks, flash forwards and ellipsis may be used as narrative devices. Tsvetan Todorov, Bordwell and Thompson and Robert McKee have all presented interesting ideas about narrative development.
Post-production	The period and the processes that come between the completion of principal photography and the completed film or program. This includes the editing of a film or program, along with titles, graphics, special effects and so on.
Pre-production	The entire range of preparations that takes place before a film or television program can begin shooting.
Primary research	Research information or data that you collect yourself. Sources for this may include interviews, questionnaires, and analysis of films or television programs that you undertake yourself. (See also secondary research.)
Production	Either the product itself or the actual process of filming.
Qualitative research	Research undertaken through observation, analyzing texts and documents, interviews, open-ended questionnaires and case studies. It is reasoned argument that is not based upon simple statistical information. Overall, qualitative research enables researchers to study psychological, cultural and social phenomena. (See also quantitative research.)

Quantitative Research

Primarily, this is statistical data most frequently obtained from closed questions in questionnaires or structured interviews. Quantitative research may calculate how many males in the 15 to 25 years age range watch a particular television soap opera, for example, but qualitative research is necessary to determine why they watch it.

Realism

The dominant mode of representation in television, mainstream films and print. The term usually implies that the media text attempts to represent an external reality: a film or television program is “realistic” because it gives the impression that it accurately reproduces that part of the real world to which it is referring. However, the concept is much more complex than this brief definition. One suggestion is to think of “realisms” rather than realism.

Representation

The process of making meaning in still or moving images and in words and sounds. In its simplest form, it means to present or show someone or something. However, as a concept for debate, it is used to describe the process by which an image can be used to represent or stand in for someone or something, for example, a person, place or idea. Inherent in this second definition is the notion that there may be a responsibility on the part of the producer of any representation, with regard to accuracy, “truth” and the viewpoints and opinions that such a representation may perpetuate. Representation is used to describe the manner in which segments or individuals in society (for example, women, the elderly, ethnic minorities) are portrayed in the media.

Secondary research

Research information taken from sources other than your own work, such as academic studies, reviews or essays, whether in printed format or from other film texts such as documentaries or interviews.

Stereotype

An oversimplified representation of people, places or issues, giving a narrow and/or exaggerated set of attributes. Stereotypes are frequently thought to be entirely negative but this is not necessarily the case.

Style	The “look” of a media text; its surface appearance. It can be recognized by the use of color, mise-en-scène, lighting, music, camera angle, movement, framing, dialogue, editing and so on.
Synchronous asynchronous sound	/ Synchronous sound is where the sound matches the action or speech in film or television. Asynchronous sound is when there is a mismatch—the most obvious example occurs when lip-synch is out, that is, when the words spoken and the lip movement of the actor on screen do not match.
Teaser trailers	Short film or television trailers shown before a full-length trailer.
Tone	The overall impression that is given by a media text—serious, comic, romantic, sensationalist and so on.