

# KEY ELEMENTS OF FILM

**Structure:** Films are narratives – they tell a story. Like most stories they usually follow the typical plot arc:

- Orientation – establish setting & characters
- Complication – problem arises
- Climax – key scene where problem is faced
- Resolution – return to order

**Editing:** Editing is the way the way shots are pieced together: what order, the length & transitions.

## Transitions

- **Cut** – Switch to new scene immediately. Suggests no time has passed
- **Cutaway** – Switch to a new scene & then back to first. Gives new information
- **Cut-in** – Switch to a zoomed-in portion of the same scene. Draws attention to a new aspect of the scene
- **Cross-cutting** – Switching back and forth between two scenes. Shows they're linked
- **Dissolve** – Slow transition between scenes. Implies time has passed or the new scene is a dream or memory

## Shot Length

- **Short takes** – camera switches rapidly between many quick shots. Good for fast-paced action, create tension. Mashup of many short takes is called a montage
- **Long takes** - camera keeps filming without jumping to any other scene. Allows time for conversations, character development. Can seem relaxed, unhurried, peaceful. Can linger too long on painful scenes to create feeling of discomfort

**Genre:** The genre is the category or type of film, e.g. comedy, drama, action. Genres have conventions: characters, themes, or styles that are nearly always seen in films of that type. E.g. Sci-fi films are often about the dangers of new technology, while westerns are often about revenge and often have an 'anti-hero'. Knowing a film's genre can help you figure out the big ideas like the themes & overall message

**Cinematography:** Camera work – including the angle, movement, and zoom of each shot.

## 3 basic shots

- **Long shot** – gives information about the setting. Where are we? How does the character relate to this place?
- **Mid shot** – gives information about relationships between characters e.g. body language, how do they react to each other?
- **Close-up** – gives information about one character – subtle expressions are easier to see. Creates intimacy, helps audience relate to them & share their emotions.

## 3 basic angles:

- **Eye level angle** – realistic, immersive. See things from all characters' angles.
- **Low angle** – Makes subject seem scary or powerful, looming above
- **High angle** – Makes subject seem alone, tiny, vulnerable/powerless

### 3 basic movements:

- **Dollying** – camera moves along ground, follows characters as they move, keep pace with action. Fast dollying creates frantic pace, slow can create sense of peace, gently drifting through scenery
- **Tilting** – movement upwards or downwards. Often starts at normal angle & tilts up or down  
Can show scale or add info about the setting
- **Panning** – movement from side to side introduces new information. Can create humour or suspense, revealing information slowly

**Mise en scene:** means “setting the stage”. Refers to set design & all visual elements. Involves a combination of things that create the overall look.

### Props & Costumes

- **Show time & place** – Gives clues where & when it’s set, e.g. typewriter = historical. Robot = future
- **Believable** – Even in a fantasy setting, props & costumes make you feel like it’s a real place
- **Symbolism** – Some objects are associated with ideas or feelings in people’s minds, e.g. snakes = evil, clue that Slytherin are baddies. Director can use repeated shots of a certain prop throughout a film to symbolise something within the film

Lighting: 3-point light setup: key lights, fill lights & back lights. Can be adjusted to create mood.

- **High Key lighting** – all 3 lights are on full, creates bright relaxing mood. We can see everything, no lurking shadows.
- **Low key lighting** – high contrast, bright lights and dark shadows. Often used in thrillers & crime films. Can symbolise contrast in a character – light & shadow. Can be used to highlight/draw attention.
- **Backlighting** – low overall light, stronger backlight, weak key & fill lights. Shadowy silhouettes, create mystery, fear. Can’t see faces.  
Use of space (proxemics)

Proxemics (use of space): How characters & props are arranged in the shot. Position onscreen in relation to each other. Reflects dynamics between characters, how they feel about each other. Body language – close or far apart? Does one loom over the other? Clashing head-on? Also shows how characters feel about or relate to the setting e.g. small and insignificant compared to it, or hugging the ground in relief

## **Sound**

### Diegetic

- Can be heard by characters in the film. Car driving, radio playing, insects buzzing etc
- Creates realism, makes us feel like we’re there

### Non-diegetic

- Layered on top. Can’t be heard by characters in the film. Only the audience can hear it.  
Voice-over narration & movie soundtrack
- Music builds emotion & creates mood
- Voice-over can help explain what’s happening OR subvert (say the opposite of what’s on the screen)