Cinematic Techniques

Shots and Framing

**Shot:** A shot is a single piece of film uninterrupted by cuts.

**Establishing Shot:** Often a long shot or a series of shots that sets the scene, this technique is used to establish setting and to show transitions between locations.

**Long Shot (LS):** A shot from some distance. If the shot is of a person, the full body is shown. A long shot may show the isolation or vulnerability of a character.

**Medium Shot (MS):** The most common shot. The camera seems to be a medium distance from the object being filmed. A medium shot shows a person from the waist up. The effect is to ground the story.

**Close-up Shot (CS):** The image being shot takes up at least 80 percent of the frame.

**Extreme Close-up:** The image being shot is part of a whole, such as an eye or a hand.

**Two Shot:** A scene between two people shot exclusively from an angle that includes both characters more or less equally; it is used in scenes where interaction between the two characters is important.

Camera Angles

**Eye Level:** A shot taken from a normal height—that is, at the character’s eye level. Ninety to ninety-five percent of the shots seen are eye level because it is the most natural angle.

**High Angle:** The camera is above the subject. This angle usually has the effect of making the subject look smaller than normal, giving the character the appearance of being weak, powerless, and/or trapped.

**Low Angle:** The camera films the subject from below. This angle usually has the effect of making the subject look larger than normal, and thus strong, powerful, and/or threatening.

Camera Movements

**Pan:** A stationary camera moves from side to side on a horizontal axis.

**Tilt:** A stationary camera moves up or down along a vertical axis.

**Zoom:** A stationary camera in which the lens moves to make an object seem to move closer to or further away from the camera. With this technique, moving into a character is often a personal or revealing movement, while moving away distances or separates the audience from the character.

**Dolly/Tracking:** The camera is on a track that allows it to move with the action. The term also refers to any camera mounted on a car, truck, or helicopter.

**Boom/Crane:** The camera is on a crane over the action. This position is used to create overhead shots.

Lighting

**High Key:** The scene is flooded with light, creating a bright and open-looking scene.

**Low Key:** The scene is flooded with shadows and darkness, creating suspense or suspicion.

**Bottom or Side Lighting:** Direct lighting comes from below or the side, which often makes the subject appear dangerous or evil.

**Front or Back Lighting:** Soft lighting on an actor’s face or from behind gives the appearance of innocence or goodness—a halo effect.
Editing Techniques

Cut: The most common editing technique; two pieces of film are spliced together to “cut” to another image.

Fade: A gradual change in the light to move from one scene to another. A fade can begin in darkness and gradually assume full brightness (fade in) or the image may gradually get darker (fade out). A fade often implies that time has passed, or it may signify the end of a scene.

Dissolve: A type of fade in which one image is slowly replaced by another. It can create a connection between images.

Wipe: A new image wipes off the previous image. A wipe is more fluid than a cut and quicker than a dissolve.

Flashback: A cut or dissolve to an action that happened in the past.

Shot-Reverse Shot: A shot of one subject, then another, and then back to the first. This technique is often used for conversation or reaction shots.

Cross Cutting: A cut into action that is happening simultaneously. This technique is also called parallel editing. It can create tension or suspense and can form a connection between scenes.

Eye-Line Match: A cut from an object to a person. This technique shows what a person seems to be looking at and can help reveal a character’s thoughts.

Sound

Diegetic: This type of sound could logically be heard by the characters in the film.

Non-diegetic: This type of sound cannot be heard by the characters. It is designed for audience reaction only. An example might be ominous music to foreshadow an event.