



PREPARING FOR A-LEVEL

FILM STUDIES

Film is one of the main cultural innovations of the twentieth century and a major art form of the last hundred years. In your study of films from around the world, including different historical periods, you will need to make use of important film-related vocabulary words so that you can appreciate film as an art form and analyze how directors create, and spectators respond to, film in unique ways. Film form is everything that filmmakers take into consideration when making a film. It is how the narrative is expressed, rather than the story itself.

The elements of film form include the following:

- **mise-en-scene:** meaning 'what's in the frame' includes all the elements placed in a shot. These include setting, characters, props, costume, make-up, hair, use of colour, character movement and on and off-screen space.
- **Cinematography:** a type of shot such as a close-up, medium or long shot; camera angles such as high or low angle shots, aerial or eye-level shots; camera movement such as tilted, canted or Dutch angle, whip pan, tracking, hand-held or Steadicam movements; lighting such as key, back, front, under lighting, black and white, colour, light grading and chiaroscuro lighting. Sometimes lighting is also used in discussion of mise-en-scene. For your exam, you will need to discuss lighting with cinematography.
- **Sound:** diegetic (the sounds of the world of the film) or non-diegetic sound (filmmusic, voiceover), foley sounds (sometimes referred to as pleonastic sound or exaggerated sound), ambient, parallel and contrapuntal sound.
- **Editing:** this is how time and place is arranged and it is unique to film. Continuity (invisible cuts between shots) and discontinuity editing (a noticeable cut such as a dissolve shot or a fade in or out or a freeze frame); 180-degree rule, cross-cutting, match on action; shot/reverse shot.
- **Performance:** verbal and non-verbal communication, body codes such as general appearance of characters, eye movement, facial expressions, body language and posture, aspects of speech such as pitch, pace or tempo, volume, pauses. Performance styles could also be classified as: realist, classical or formalist; improvisation and method acting.

All of these elements of film form will contribute to a film's overall **aesthetic** (look and feel of a film) and you will also learn how directors are considered to be **auteurs** (essentially authors of distinctive work because they have a strong aesthetic). Directors such as Quentin Tarantino, Wes Anderson, and Tim Burton are all prominent auteurs but there are many others too.

Please watch the following clips below from a variety of classical and global films (from the Columbia Film Language Glossary online) to help you understand the elements of film form mentioned above. Part of your study of film will also include how films have changed over time. Watch the videos with the commentary on and re-watch them so that you can understand and begin to see how important these elements are in creating different meaning and responses in spectators.

- Mise-en-scene: <https://filmglossary.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/term/mise-en-scene/>
- Cinematography: <https://filmglossary.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/term/cinematography/>
 - Lighting: <https://filmglossary.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/term/lighting/>
 - Camera movement: <https://filmglossary.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/term/camera-movement/>
 - Camera angles: <https://filmglossary.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/term/camera-angle/>
<https://filmglossary.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/term/canted-angle-dutch-angle/>
 - Types of shots: (long shot) <https://filmglossary.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/term/long-shot/>
(deep focus) <https://filmglossary.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/term/deep-focus/>
(close up) <https://filmglossary.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/term/close-up/>
- Sound: <https://filmglossary.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/term/sound/>
 - Diegetic sound: <https://filmglossary.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/term/diegetic-sound/>
 - Non-diegetic sound: <https://filmglossary.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/term/non-diegetic-sound/>
 - Voice over: <https://filmglossary.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/term/voice-over/>
 - Dialogue: <https://filmglossary.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/term/dialogue/>
- Editing: <https://filmglossary.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/term/editing/>
 - 180-degree rule: <https://filmglossary.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/term/180-degree-rule/>
 - Swish-pan: <https://filmglossary.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/term/swish-pan/>
 - Wipe: <https://filmglossary.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/term/wipe/>
 - Long take: <https://filmglossary.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/term/long-take/>
 - Dissolve: <https://filmglossary.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/term/dissolve/>
 - Freeze-frame: <https://filmglossary.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/term/freeze-frame/>
 - Split Screen: <https://filmglossary.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/term/split-screen/>

After the introduction to the creative uses of film form above, try and watch a variety of film genres including foreign language films. Make sure that you watch *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006), *House of Flying Daggers* (Zhang, 2004) and *Amy* (Kapadia, 2015). These films will be studied within the first term of your A level course.

Familiarise yourself with film reviews and film reviewers. Before you watch a film – read a review. You can find film reviews on the podcasts made by Mark Kermode and Simon Mayo (Kermode & Mayo's Take) or read Peter Bradshaw's film reviews at: www.theguardian.com/profile/peterbradshaw

Familiarise yourself with the following websites and what they have to offer students of film, those interested in cinema history and film criticism:

- BFI (British Film Institute, London): <https://www.bfi.org.uk/>
- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/>
- Empire Online: <https://www.empireonline.com/>

Specific tasks whilst watching films:

- Take notes on the opening and final sequences of *Pan's Labyrinth* (initial and final 10 minutes of the film). What do you notice about the elements of film form and how they create meaning for the spectator? Use your emerging knowledge of film form to inform your response.
- Use film vocabulary such as mise-en-scene, cinematography, sound and editing, for example, when explaining your ideas. How does the combination of music, voiceover and colour work to enforce the fairy tale fantasy world of 1940's Spain in combination with its reality?
- Watch other films and take notes on opening sequences (first 10 minutes) and explore how one element of film form creates suspense, tension, humour, romance, mystery for the spectator.
- Read film reviews on the three films mentioned above that you will study as part of your A level curriculum.

You could also watch the following films to help you understand aspects of narrative and genre:

- Narrative structure - *Rear Window* (1954) and *Memento* (2000)
- Early Hollywood, the silent era, stardom but with a modern twist - *The Artist* (2011)
- Film noir but with a critique on the Hollywood star system - *Sunset Boulevard* (1954). You will also be studying Billy Wilder's other famous film 'Some Like it Hot' too.