

WJEC Eduqas
GCSE

Film Studies

Revised
Edition

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Sample pages from Part 1 Exploring Film

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Contents



How to use this book

Knowledge and understanding	6
Part 1: Exploring film	6
Part 2: Film form	6
The case studies	7
Part 3: Component 1: US film	8
Part 4: Component 2: Global film	9
Part 5: Component 3: Production	9
Part 6: Exam skills	9



Part 1: Exploring film

Studying film	10
Why do we study film?	10



Part 2: Film form

Introduction	12
The key elements of film form	13
Cinematography	14
Sound	22
Editing	26
Mise-en-scène	28
Conclusion	32
How film form is used: the structural elements of film form	33
Genre	33
Narrative	42
How is film form used?	50
Representation	50
The aesthetic qualities of film	59
How we make sense of film	64
Specialist writing on film, including film criticism	76



Part 3: Component 1: Key developments in US film

Sections A and B: The comparative study and key developments in film and film technology	82
Introduction	82
Why study mainstream US film?	83
Mainstream Hollywood: a brief overview	84
Film timeline – Part 1	86
Film in the 1930s	87
Film timeline – Part 2	90
Film in the 1980s	92
Film timeline – Part 3	95
Two decades and beyond: Hollywood in the twenty-first century	98
The wider historical, social, cultural, political and economic context	101
Context: a brief comparison	107
Case study: <i>Dracula</i> and <i>The Lost Boys</i>	108
The key elements of film form	108
Cinematography in <i>Dracula</i>	109
Cinematography in <i>The Lost Boys</i>	111
Mise-en-scène in <i>Dracula</i>	114
Mise-en-scène in <i>The Lost Boys</i>	115
Editing in <i>Dracula</i>	117
Editing in <i>The Lost Boys</i>	118
Sound in <i>Dracula</i>	118
Sound in <i>The Lost Boys</i>	119
Aesthetics	120
The structural elements of film form	122
Further reading and research	131
Component 1 exam insight	131

Section C: US independent films	133	Section C: Contemporary UK film	202
Introduction	133	Contemporary British cinema: an introduction	202
Why study US independent film?	134	Case study: <i>Blinded by the Light</i>	203
Case study: <i>The Hate U Give</i>	135	Introduction	203
What do we understand by US indie film?	135	Key contexts	203
Context	137	The key elements of film form	211
The world and film in 2018	141	Mise-en-scène, colour and lighting	214
The key elements of film form	142	Sound	217
Cinematography and lighting	145	Editing	220
Mise-en-scène	149	Cinematography	222
Editing	153	Representation	225
Sound	156	Narrative	230
Specialist writing on independent film	158	Aesthetics	232
 Part 4: Component 2: Global film 160		 Part 5: Component 3: Production 240	
Introduction	160	Introduction	240
Section A: Global English-language film	162	The brief	241
Case study: <i>Jojo Rabbit</i>	162	Assessment	242
Introduction	162	Suggested approach	242
Key contexts	163	Screenwriting option	242
The key elements of film form	168	Filmmaking option	257
Cinematography	168	Evaluative analysis	264
Mise-en-scène	170	 Part 6: Exam skills 268	
Editing	171	Component 1: Key developments in US film	266
Sound	173	Component 2: Global film: narrative, representation and film style	276
Narrative	173	Glossary	285
Section B: Global non-English-language film	179	Index	293
Case study: <i>Girlhood</i>	179	Acknowledgements	0
Introduction	179		
Key contexts	179		
The key elements of film form	186		
Cinematography	186		
Editing	190		
Sound	192		
Mise-en-scène	194		
Representation	196		

Part 1

Exploring film

Key terms



Educate

Teaching about and giving experience of particular subject matters or life lessons.

Debate

Discussions between people in which they express different opinions.

Audio-visual

Using both sight and sound, typically in the form of images and recorded speech or music.

Studying film

Film is often considered to be the most important art form of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The use of film and its explorations have progressed steadily since the 1800s. It is a major industry in most developed countries and an important part of people's cultural experience. It has become a major influence on society today.

Films entertain and **educate** us, and provoke **debate**. They can affect the way we live, the way we speak, the way we act and more. We watch films, are moved by them, talk about them, write and read about them. Those who choose to study film usually bring with them a passion and enthusiasm for the subject.

There can be no doubt that film is a powerful medium that can inspire a range of responses, from the 'emotional' to the 'reflective'. Viewers are drawn into the world of the characters, their stories and the issues that are raised. Film offers a compelling **audio-visual** experience: incorporating the power of the visual image with the power of music and sound.

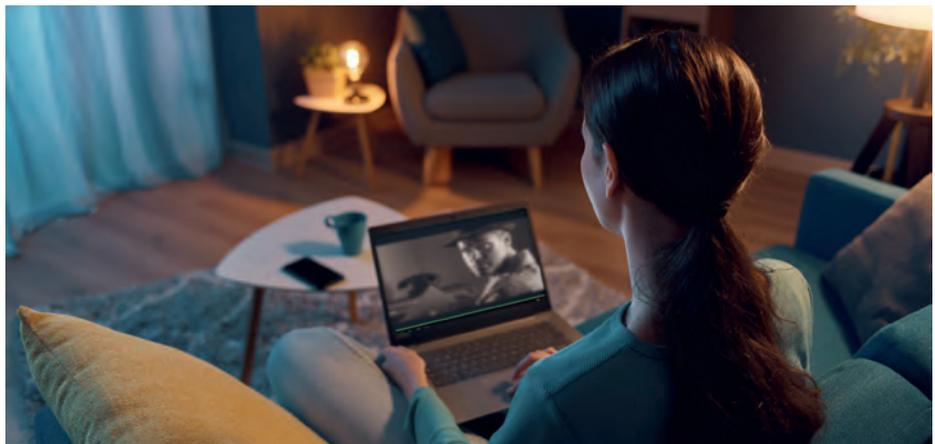


Quick Question

1.1

Think about the last film you watched. Did it educate you or provoke debate in any way, or did it simply entertain you? Do you believe films should make you think about important issues or just provide an escape from them?

Why do we study film?



There are many academic reasons for studying film. Certainly, it is one of today's most important media and art forms and reaches wide global markets; so, it is crucial that you understand how and what it communicates to that mass audience. However, let's not forget one of

the most important reasons for studying film. It may be the reason that you chose to. One Film Studies student expressed it in the following terms. Perhaps you feel the same way.

“Because we love it. We love it so much that we want to know and understand everything about it; to investigate it inside and out. We want to understand how a shift in lighting, a line of dialogue, a note of music can change a scene.

We want to build meaning out of it; not just the meaning of the plot, but the meaning that lies below the plot, that lies with every choice the director, the actor, the cinematographer and the scriptwriter made. What's more, we want to build multiple meanings, multiple understandings of the same work of art.

We want to understand how cinema affects our lives, our culture. It is the art form of the 20th century, and, like any art, it does mean something beyond its entertainment value.



Quick Question

1.2

Write down the reasons you have chosen to study film. Share some of these with the rest of the group.

What do we study and why do we study it?

The WJEC Eduqas GCSE Film Studies specification has been designed to build on your enthusiasm for and interest in film. It covers a wide variety of cinematic experiences by exploring films that have been important at different points during the development of film and film technology. You will study one US mainstream film made between 1930 and 1960 and one made between 1961 and 1990 in order to examine how Hollywood has developed over time. You will also study at least four recent films – these may be films you have already seen and liked (or disliked), or films you have never heard of before. One will be an **independent film** from the USA; the others will have been made in other countries, including the UK, South Africa and China.

You will be encouraged to develop your knowledge and understanding of these films by analysing how they are constructed and organised into structure, and how they are used artistically as a way of communicating ideas and issues. You will also explore how key aspects of the history of film, its relevant contexts and specialist writing on film can help the viewer to make sense of what they are watching.

Given the power and scope of film in today's **global society**, it is little wonder that the study of film as an academic discipline is an important option in our education system. A report commissioned by the UK government in 2012, called 'A Future for British Film: It begins with the audience ...' (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/78460/DCMS_film_policy_review_report-2012_update.pdf), advised that young people in every school should be taught the mechanics of filmmaking in order to encourage a new generation of scriptwriters, directors and behind-the-camera technicians. The course you have opted for is designed to motivate you to broaden your knowledge of film and film technology. It may, or may not, encourage you to go on to a career in the film industry, but it will certainly make you aware of the strength and breadth of film as an industry and art form in today's world.

Given all these answers to the question 'Why do we study film?', perhaps the definitive answer is 'Because we love it – it inspires and excites us and we want to learn more about it.'

Key terms



Independent film

One that receives less than 50 per cent of its funding from one of the 'big six' major film studios. Typically, with a relatively small budget, the filmmaker gets to tell the story they want to tell in the way they want to tell it.

Global society

A modern society where people across the world see that they have things in common with one another and so can make links with and understand one another better.



Part 2

Film form

Introduction



▲ Before advanced CGI, puppeteers worked the face of the alien in *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982, Steven Spielberg)

Key term



Story

What happens *when* and *who* is involved.

The study of film is about much more than simply watching films and talking about why you thought they were good – although that is part of it. In order to fully express your knowledge and understanding about films and how they work, it is essential to have a vocabulary in which you can discuss in detail why and how a film tells its **story**.

There are not many amazing, fantastical places that cannot be visualised by cinematography or created on a green screen. Technology such as drones and CGI mean there are many different ways in which a film camera can move and many things it can show us.

When studying film, you need to piece together how different elements of film form create meaning and emotions for those watching. You also need to consider other aspects that might affect your reaction to the film and how audiences (at the time the films were made or in the countries they were made) may well have a different perspective on the film from you. For example, the film *Dracula* in the specification was made in 1931, when sound and colour had only been used in film production for four years, so it is important to consider how this new technology affected how the film looked and sounded.

Filmmaking techniques used before the 1960s reflected not just technical limitations, but new innovations and ideas too. Screens were becoming wider and colour was introduced, which in turn made a difference to cinematography because of the impact on lighting and colour. You will be discussing themes and representation where historical context is much more important, but you also need to take into account the importance of historical time to the style of filmmaking.



▲ Bela Lugosi pauses by Helen Chandler in *Dracula* (1931, Tod Browning)

The key elements of film form

Film both reflects and creates the emotions of audiences, and this is achieved not just through narrative content and ideas, but by the technical elements of film production.

Film language, and how to analyse it, will be a key area of the films you look at. It should be at the heart of your studies, as it is the vocabulary that films use to communicate. The key elements are:

- cinematography (which includes lighting)
- sound
- editing
- mise-en-scène.

In this chapter, each element of film language will be considered with reference to some of the films from the specification. When discussing key ideas from these films, you will discuss the shots, editing and sound that are used to create meaning.

Quick Question 2.1

Look at these two film stills.

What camera shots can you identify?

How are they being used to effectively portray the characters' emotions?

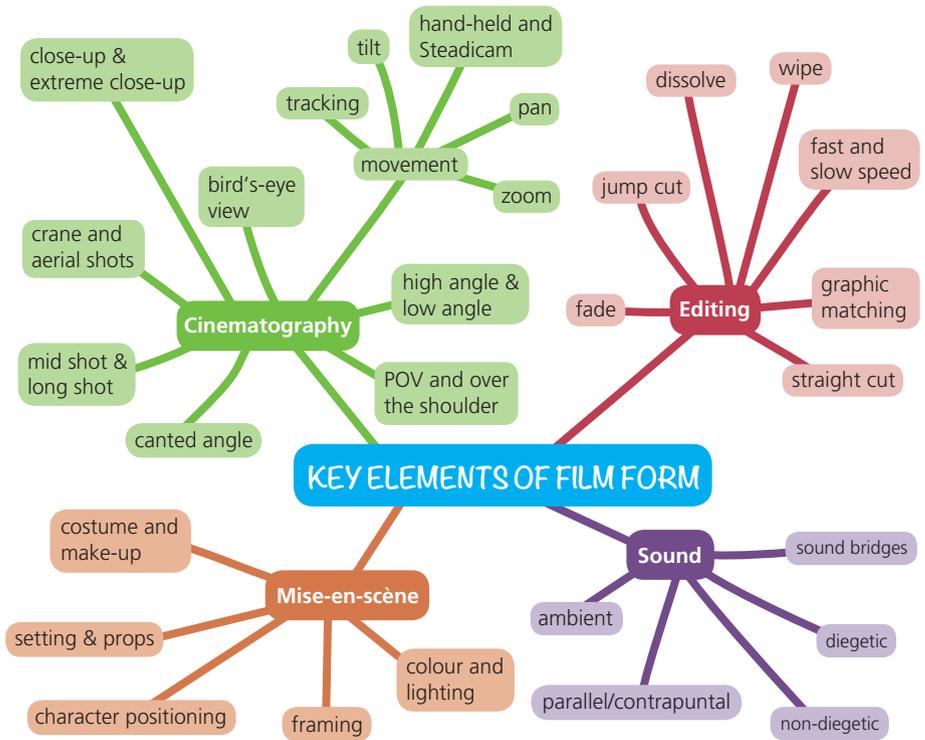
How do you think the audience are meant to respond to these shots?



▲ *Dracula*



▲ *Blinded by the Light* (2019, Gurinder Chadha)



Cinematography

The term **cinematography** refers to the moving images within a film: the camera shots and the camera movement. The shots the cinematographer arranges have a big impact on how we read the film at particular moments. When analysing cinematography, you will need to consider how an image is framed and how the camera moves to create the emotional impact of the scene. You will use the following terms:

Types of shot	Camera movements	Camera angles	Depth of field
Close-up	Pan	Bird's-eye view	Shallow
Medium shot	Tilt	High angle	Deep
Long shot	Hand-held	Low angle	
	Tracking	Canted	
	Zoom		

▲ Cinematography toolkit

Camera shots are probably the main element in a film that draw our attention to emotions in the film. They also create strong emotional responses in audiences. Film is a visual medium and, although the sounds and pace of a film have their own way of creating impact, what we see is often more likely to shock us, make us laugh or make us cry. So, how do film shots do this?

The close-up

A **close-up** shot brings our attention to a character's facial expression or focuses our attention on a significant prop. It is used to draw us into how a character is feeling about a particular narrative event. It brings us closer to their reaction than we would get in real life, and so perhaps offers the audience an insight into the character's **motivations** that other characters in the film might not see.

Task 2.1

Watch the opening sequence of *Tsotsi* (2005, Gavin Hood).

How many close-ups are used and what do they show? They are all significant and chosen for a particular reason. Why do you think these close-ups are used here?



▲ A close-up of Presley Chweneyagae in *Tsotsi*

An **extreme close-up** is even more focused on a particular detail, such as eyes or a mouth. Extreme close-ups are often used to cause discomfort in the audience as we would not normally be so close. The image might be tightly framed, making us feel claustrophobic and therefore more affected by the situation.



▲ An extreme close-up shows us a wide eye

Key terms



Close-up

A shot that focuses in on the head and shoulders and therefore draws our attention to a character's emotions. Or, a close-in shot of an object that is significant to the plot.

Motivation

A reason or reasons for acting or behaving in a particular way.

Extreme close-up

A shot that is extremely close and focuses on one thing that fills the frame, such as an eye, a ring.

Key terms

**Establishing shot**

A shot that marks the beginning of a scene within the film, usually establishing setting through the use of a wide, long shot.

Long shot

A broad shot framed from a distance.

Pan

Horizontal movement in which the camera moves slowly from one side of the setting to the other. (If done quickly, this is a whip pan.)

Costume

A character's clothing and styling.

Plot

Why the story happens and how.

The Babadook (2014, Jennifer Kent), for example, uses many close-ups and extreme close-ups to increase the tension and discomfort we expect from the horror genre. Even in the sequence where Samuel is simply being checked over by the Doctor, we have tense feelings, as the shot seems intrusive, and we might recall other films where shots like this have been used just before something makes us jump!

Longer shots

An **establishing shot** marks the beginning of a scene within a film, usually establishing the setting through the use of a wide, **long shot**.

This is often combined with a sweeping **pan** to give the audience a chance to take in the setting and immerse themselves within it. Setting in particular often gives us a strong sense of the film's genre, so establishing shots are common at the beginning of films or when a section of the narrative moves to a different place.

Long shots also enable us to view a character or group of characters within a setting so that we have clues to the coming action within the narrative and their role within it, with **costume** playing a big part in our understanding. These shots are often used because there is a lot of action going on, or to show some action between characters. There may be a number of things happening relevant to the **plot** within a long shot.

There are many long shots used when showing the vampire gang in *The Lost Boys*. This may be because it is their unity that lures in the protagonist of the film, so it is important that the gang are frequently seen together. It also separates them from the main character and his smaller group of friends. Their bikes and costumes signify their rebelliousness, and it is important that we see these along with the setting of their hideout, as it is those features that attract the protagonist, but they also give us clues to the gang's true nature.



▲ A long shot in *The Lost Boys* (1987, Joel Schumacher)

Medium shots

Mid shots are the most commonly used, but they can still be used in interesting ways – framing the action to make a significant point about relationships or to give us clues to the narrative. The mid shot here is used in a very typical way – giving us a sense of setting and of the relationship between the two main characters. The choice not to use a close-up shows there is no one else around, making their conversation seem more secretive.



▲ A mid shot in *The Hate U Give* (2018, George Tillman Jr)

Shots can also be angled above or below the subject being filmed to create additional affects. In a **low-angle shot**, the camera is placed below or lower than the subject being filmed, making it appear bigger and therefore more dominant; maybe even threatening. In contrast, a **high-angle shot** shows the subject from above and makes it look smaller, less significant and weaker.

These, of course, are not rules, and filmmakers often go against our expectations so that genre films do not become stale and predictable.



Key terms



Mid shot

A shot that usually shows a character from the waist up and is often used where dialogue is the most important factor in the scene.

Low-angle shot

The camera is placed below the subject, making it look bigger and dominant.

High-angle shot

The camera is positioned above the subject to make it look smaller and therefore weaker.

- ◀ A low-angle shot can make people look powerful and intimidating, as in this picture of Moses and the gang in *Attack the Block* (2011, Joe Cornish)

This use of a high angle in this scene from *Rocks* (2019, Sarah Gavron) gives us the perspective of being across the rooftop with Rocks and her friends. It adds to the hopeful, positive feeling of the image as they seem stronger because of this angle.



▲ Rocks and her friends in *Rocks*

Key terms



High key lighting

When bright colour is created through the use of filler lights.

Low key lighting

When fewer filler lights are used, creating pools of shadows.

Colour palette

The 'look' of the scene or film as created by the choice of colours.

Lighting and framing

Lighting and camera framing are also important elements of cinematography that you should analyse when studying your focus films.

The main two ways to discuss lighting are **high key** and **low key**, but having a simple understanding of how lights are used within the framing of a shot will also help you to understand how lights work. It is rare that lighting is not manipulated within a shot. Even in broad daylight, lights might be used to affect the **colour palette** of a sequence and influence how shadows do or do not fall.

Task 2.2



Analyse how colour and lighting are used in these images from *When Harry Met Sally* (1989, Rob Reiner) and *The Babadook*.

What colours have been chosen and why?

How does the lighting affect the mood and give us clues about genre and narrative?

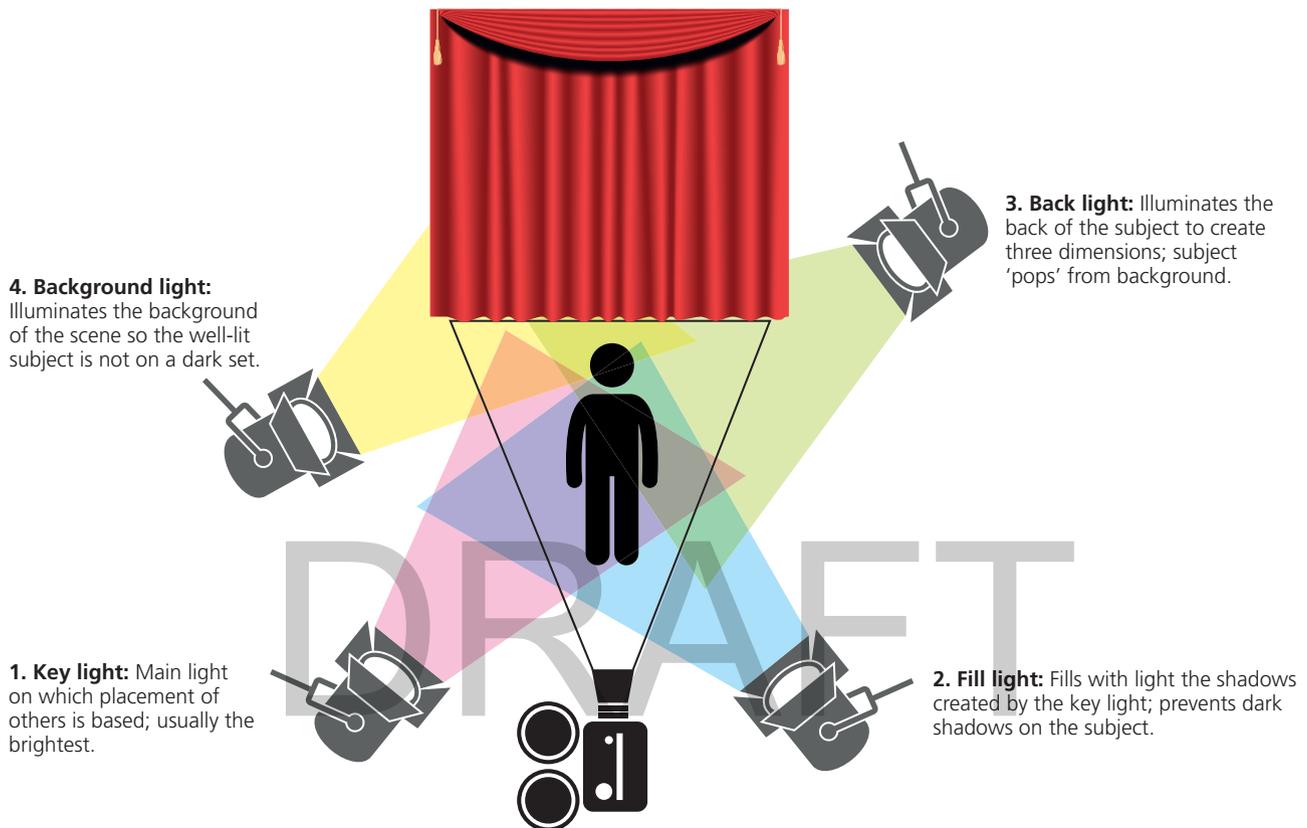


Stretch and challenge 2.1



Looking at the images above, write a paragraph on why you think the shots have been framed in this way. What impact does it have on the audience? What does it tell us about the characters?

Basic four-point lighting



Lighting and colour are often used to create atmosphere within a setting and together they create the overall colour palette.

The colour palette of a film is often linked to genre, setting or both. *The Babadook*, for example, makes use of typical lighting and colour conventions of the horror genre – low key lighting and shades of blue, black and a strong use of contrasting white. It feels almost black and white in places, as there is so little colour, but there are lots of shadows too; all helping to create a sense of fear and nightmare.

In total contrast, *When Harry Met Sally* is a romantic comedy and so uses lots of colour at times, such as the autumnal shots in Central Park, and shots of Meg Ryan surrounded by flowers. These are the kind of shots that audiences relate to romance and love scenes.

Task 2.3



Experiment with lighting and colour using a camera or mobile phone. Take photographs of different settings or people and see what difference colour and lighting make to the atmosphere or mood.



▲ *Citizen Kane* (1941, Orson Welles)

Key terms



Shallow focus

When the camera only focuses on the subject(s) in the **foreground**, and the background is blurred out.

Foreground

The front of the frame.

Deep focus

When all of the background, middle and foreground details are in focus.

Bird's-eye view

A shot where the camera is directly above a subject, often at height, looking straight down.

Eye level

A shot in which the camera is placed at approximately the same level as a character's eyes.



Quick Question

2.2

Watch the opening sequences of *Lady Bird* and *Slumdog Millionaire*. Why do you think the bird's-eye-view shots were chosen?

Focus

You may also need to consider the use of focus within cinematography, which is categorised as either deep or shallow. **Shallow focus** is the most commonly used as it replicates what our eyes do. Shallow focus closes in on the subject at the front of the frame, ignoring the background, which allows the audience to concentrate on the main action or dialogue.

With **deep focus**, our attention is drawn to everything else in the frame, making the background significant to the action. It is not used very often, as it can feel strange and is too much information for our eyes to take in. When it is used, it is for a particular reason.

Task 2.4



The image above is a good example of deep focus.

- Why do you think it was used? (Think about how much of the shot can be seen clearly.)
- What do you think might be happening in the narrative?

Viewpoints

Slumdog Millionaire (2008, Danny Boyle) and *Lady Bird* (2017, Greta Gerwig) both use a **bird's-eye-view** shot in their openings, but in contrasting ways and for very different reasons. A bird's-eye view gets its name from imagining a bird flying over and looking straight down at the scene or object below.



▲ A bird's-eye-view shot

An **eye-level** shot works in the same way as a hand-held camera or point-of-view shot – it puts the viewer on the same level as the character, showing us things much more from their perspective. A point-of-view shot is also at eye level, but, with an eye-level shot, perspective can still be shown without being specifically from the main character's viewpoint all of the time.

Task 2.5



Create a storyboard for a film sequence using as many different camera shots as you can to create a dramatic or emotional part of a story.

Camera movement

The way the camera moves brings an audience into the action in particular ways. The main camera movements are:

- zoom in/out
- pan (side to side)
- tilt (up and down)
- using a hand-held camera
- canted angle
- tracking shots.

A camera panning or **tilting** mimics what we would do when looking at something. Panning around allows the audience to see more of a setting – a room, a landscape, a group of alien spaceships about to attack Earth. Tilting up from the floor allows us take in the size of a monstrous dinosaur or a tall skyscraper. All of these things we would naturally do if we were in a similar situation to that of the scene.

A **zoom**, however, works in a way our eye could not and therefore is a narrative device. A zoom in is in effect saying, 'Here, look at this a bit more closely,' and a zoom out, 'Let's get away!' This sort of movement allows the filmmaker to draw our attention to important aspects of the action that will be key to our understanding of the situation.

At a **canted angle**, the camera is not level, but is tilted to one side. It is usually used to indicate that things are not quite right in the scene – it feels strange when we view a setting from an unusual angle. It might be used to represent a character's emotional or physical disturbance, or simply to show an unusual physical change, such as a ship sinking or a building after an earthquake.

A **tracking** shot follows or tracks the action; it runs alongside it. Today, cameras can be manoeuvred flexibly by being mounted on cars, helicopters and increasingly on drones, but these are very modern techniques, and wouldn't have been available to earlier filmmakers like those who created *Dracula* in the 1930s, when a camera may have been mounted on equipment that moved along tracks.



- ▲ A tracking shot has been following the car as it races around the circuit. This canted angle now suggests that something may be wrong with the driver or the car...

Key terms



Tilt

The shot moves up or down.

Zoom

The camera shot moves closer to or further away from the subject.

Canted angle

An image on an angle rather than on a straight horizontal line.

Tracking

The camera moves alongside the subject it is filming.

Key terms

**Hand-held camera**

When the shot does not remain still, but is shaky, as if held in the hand rather than mounted on steady equipment.

Diegetic

Sound that occurs within the context of the story and can be heard by the characters.

Non-diegetic

Sound that has a source external to the context of the story, and is not heard by the characters.

Sound effects

Diegetic sound that is created artificially to emphasise action, such as tyres screeching, punches landing, and explosions.

Dialogue

The words spoken by the characters.

Sound level

How loud or quiet a sound is, including in comparison to other sounds.

Pleonastic

Sound that is exaggerated or added for emphasis.



- ▲ *Singin' in the Rain*: Debbie Reynolds and Gene Kelly on the set of the film within the film, with a microphone in the background

The use of **hand-held** cameras is becoming increasingly important in some genres or in some aspects of narrative action. If a character is running away, for example, or if a fight sequence is filmed, hand-held cameras can give the viewer a greater sense of being part of this dramatic moment. Some films have gone even further and used this shaky camera technique throughout the film, thus giving the impression that footage filmed by the protagonists has been found. *The Blair Witch Project* (1999, Daniel Myrick, Eduardo Sánchez) was one of the first films to be constructed like this.

Task 2.6

Discuss:

- Why do you think the hand-held technique is popular in some modern films?
- What effect do you think it has on audiences?

Task 2.7

Watch the first three minutes of *The Lost Boys*.

- Why do you think there is so much camera movement in this opening?
- What clues does it give us about the gang and the fact they are vampires?

Sound

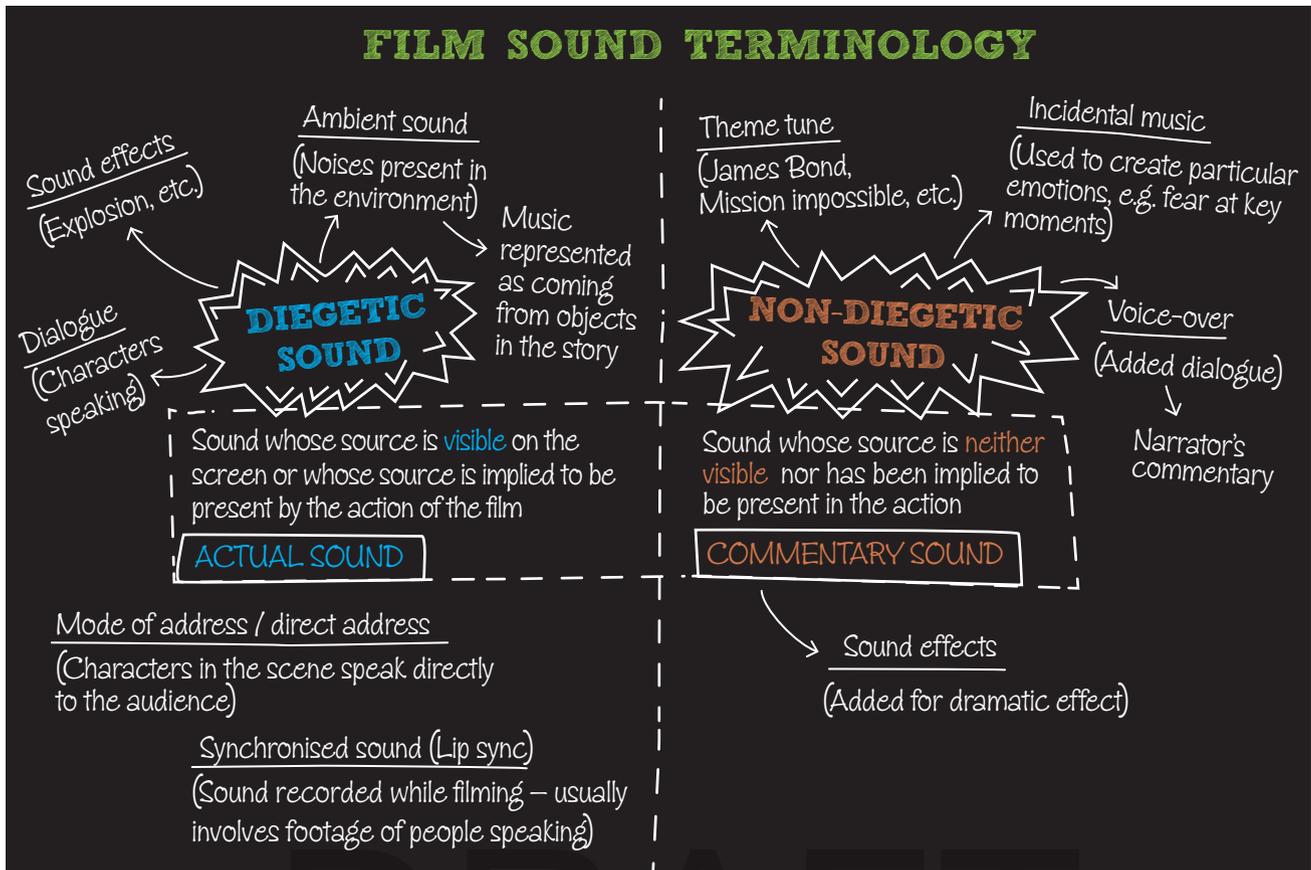
The first Hollywood film to have sound was *The Jazz Singer* (1927, Alan Crosland), produced by Warner Bros and starring Al Jolson. It makes perfect sense that early sound films contained a lot of music, because people were used to seeing musical shows at the theatre.

Singin' in the Rain (1952, Stanley Donen, Gene Kelly), one of the focus films, is about the introduction of sound into film and explores the impact this had on performers and producers in a somewhat light-hearted way.

The first way to break down the use of sound in film is into **diegetic** and **non-diegetic**.

Sound that is diegetic is heard within the world of the film. Non-diegetic sound can be heard only by the audience – usually music and narrative voice-overs. Diegetic sound includes **sound effects** and **dialogue** and is important in creating the 'realism' of a scene – providing all the sounds that help you to 'believe' the scene is real, even if it is set on an alien spaceship or in a different world.

Sound can be broken down into these terms for analytical purposes, but all sound in a film works together to create the atmosphere and tension within sequences and to influence and manipulate our responses. You should also be aware of **sound levels**. Diegetic sounds within a sequence won't all be at the same level or volume. If they were, we would never be able to pick out dialogue. Noises like shotguns and punches are often emphasised for dramatic effect. This is known as **pleonastic** sound.



The soundtrack in *Blinded by the Light* is integral to the narrative, as it is the protagonist's discovery of Bruce Springsteen's music that helps him to find himself. Therefore, the director Gurinder Chadha uses music from the 1980s to create mood and atmosphere throughout the film.

Task 2.8

Watch the sequence of *Blinded by the Light* where Javed and Roops break into the school radio station. Listen to the music.

- Is it diegetic or non-diegetic? Or is it both?
- Where and why does it change?
- How important do you think the music is to the action of this sequence?

Slumdog Millionaire uses non-diegetic music throughout and director Danny Boyle draws on music from various genres, including some well-known pop songs from different eras. These songs have not been created specifically for the film but, like many **soundtracks**, still work to create excitement and fun in some scenes and add drama or romantic ambience in others.

Stretch and challenge 2.2

Watch the scene in *Slumdog Millionaire* where Jamal and Salim start their train journey. This is a good example of how a **soundscape** is created through a combination of diegetic and non-diegetic sound. Make notes on how the music in this scene reflects this period in the boys' lives.

Key terms

Soundtrack

Often referred to as the recording of the musical accompaniment of a film.

Soundscape

A combination of sounds that blend together to create a particular environment or atmosphere.

**Quick Question**

2.3

Many films begin with little to no dialogue, including *Skyfall* (2012, Sam Mendes), *Tsotsi* and *Slumdog Millionaire*. Why do you think this is?

Soundtrack

The film's full soundtrack can include:

- dialogue
- sound effects
- music
- silence.

Dialogue

Dialogue is speech; the main way of communicating within the film. The dialogue might not be where most of the action happens. In fact, action and dialogue move the narrative on in different ways. The role of dialogue is to help us learn more about the characters and their relationships with each other. It is where the significance of events within the narrative comes to light. The cool one-liners of James Bond, the romantic innocence of Jamal in *Slumdog Millionaire*, or even how little a character might speak, give us important knowledge about their place within the film's narrative.

Task 2.9



Watch the opening two minutes of *Skyfall*, *Tsotsi* and *Slumdog Millionaire*.

- Why has the director chosen not to use dialogue?
- What other aspects of film form allow the films to speak without words?

Sound effects

Sound effects can be on or off screen, but are still used to help create a particular ambience. Sound effects are diegetic sounds, as they create sound from within the world of the film.

Key term



Voice-over

A piece of narration not accompanied by images of the speaker, often about the character's thoughts or memories.

The opening of *The Hate U Give*, for example, uses enhanced diegetic sound, alongside camera movement, to draw us into the relative calm and quiet of a very serious conversation going on in the house. Non-diegetic music eventually underscores the family talk before the narrative **voice-over** and more upbeat music takes over. This is an example of diegetic and non-diegetic sound combining to create a really effective opening with a clear sense of place.

Silence can be also be just as important as sound in a film sequence. It can have a huge impact on an audience and usually signifies something really important has happened or that we or the characters are shocked.

Task 2.10



Listen to any sequence from one of your chosen films and see how many sound effects you can identify. If you do it without looking, you are likely to notice more!

Music

Many films have a musical soundtrack, and this is different from the use of music to create specific responses in the audience. However, music can be part of what creates our emotional reaction to events in the narrative. In horror films, for example, suitable music can enhance our fear and help to create those moments that make us jump. In sad moments, it might be the music that makes us cry. Before films had dialogue, they had music, because music can say so much without words being necessary.

Unless you are a musician, you might find it difficult to write about musical pieces and instruments and how different sounds are created when you talk about music in films, but no one expects you to be an expert on musical genres or how an orchestra works. Instead, you could comment on how sound increases in pace or volume. When does the music get louder, for example? When does it become quiet, and why?

You may only have a limited knowledge of music, but, with some careful listening, you should be able to distinguish the use of string instruments, brass instruments, percussion and rhythms and how these are created. For example, you might notice that high screeching sounds are created by string instruments or identify big booming sounds as brass instruments and drums.

You will also start to realise that different kinds of musical sounds tend to accompany particular genres and this will help you discuss music within film with more confidence. One significant aspect of music is to recognise major and minor keys. If it makes you feel sad, the music is likely to be in a minor key. If it is more upbeat and jolly, it will be in a major key.



▲ The musical soundtrack to *La La Land*

Task 2.11

Watch (and more importantly listen to) the sequence in *Skyfall* where Bond arrives at the casino in Macau and then fights Patrice in the skyscraper.

Try to identify the musical instruments that are being used, and then write about how the music adds to the atmosphere and mood of the sequence.

Task 2.12

Listen to (but don't watch) a section of a film where music is used and see if you can guess what is happening.

Task 2.13

Watch a sequence from a horror film without the sound on, and then again with it on.

Consider what elements create the tension and drama. Is it volume? Particular instruments?

Key terms **Sound bridge**

Sound(s) that carry over from one scene to another to aid continuity.

Contrapuntal sound

Sounds that seem to 'clash' with the on-screen action, therefore creating a particular effect on the viewer.

Parallel sound

Music that matches the action on screen.

Score

Music composed specifically for the film (rather than songs and pieces that already exist).

Musical motif

A short, repeated pattern of music, usually associated with a certain character, setting or theme.

Ambient sound

Sound used to create the atmosphere in a sequence.

Sound bridges link two frames together, even if the setting or narrative action has changed. They are often used to give a sense of continuity or to keep a connection in the audience's mind.

Another interesting way to consider sound is using the terms **contrapuntal** and **parallel** sound. Parallel sound (when the sounds, music and effects used match the action on screen) are the sounds we would expect to hear. Contrapuntal sound is the opposite. For example, music may be used that seems to work against the on-screen action and therefore creates new meanings for the audience.

Musical motifs

A film often repeats a section of the **score** at various moments within the film, and this **musical motif** indicates to the audience that the action on screen is particularly important to the overall narrative or central theme. You will probably be aware of the Bond theme and that, when this plays in the film, it gives a signal that something particularly cool or exciting is about to happen. *Slumdog Millionaire* also has a repeated refrain of music – a softer, gentler section that is used in moments of calm. This is usually when Jamal sees or thinks about Latika, as the whole purpose of his actions throughout the film is to find her.

Task 2.14 

Pick a sequence from one of your close-study films where you have noticed lots of different kinds of sound.

- How is diegetic sound used to inform you about the narrative and create atmosphere or emotion? You should use the key words **ambient sound**, *dialogue* and *sound effects*.
- Then consider non-diegetic sound. Discuss the music and how it works alongside the diegetic sound, to enhance it or make the scene more emotional or dramatic. Where does the music increase? Speed up? Build? Trace the music throughout the sequence and consider how it develops alongside the action.

Editing

In simple terms, editing is the process of cutting all the different shots that have been filmed into a package of shots that then create the narrative. Editing is the most important part of the filmmaking process because it is where the filmed material is put in order. Filmmakers do not film in sequential order. They may film all of one character's scenes at once because of other commitments, or, if the beginning and end of a film are set in one country, miles away from the other locations, they will film these sections all at once for practical and financial reasons.

Editing is not just about putting all the shots together in the right order, however. Editing also creates pace – making sure the audience feel excitement, sadness and fear at the right times.

Type of edit	Speed of edit	Style of edit
Straight cut	Fast paced	Continuity
Fade	Slow paced	Cross-cutting
Dissolve		Graphic match
Wipe		Montage
Jump cut		

▲ Terminology tool kit

Types of edit

The **straight cut** is the most commonly used **transition**. It is designed not to be noticed, as it doesn't draw attention to itself, and just takes us from one image to the next. The straight cut is one element of **continuity editing**, as it allows the narrative to be read in a continuous way, without interruption, and therefore feels more realistic. The use of **shot-reverse-shot** is another technique used as a principle of continuity editing for the same reason.



▲ Shot-reverse-shot is particularly useful for showing dialogue that gives the audience the feeling they are watching the conversation in a 'real' way (*Four Weddings and a Funeral*, 1994, Mike Newell)

In a **fade**, the screen fades to black (or sometimes white) and is most often used to signify a character is drifting out of consciousness. This fade signifies an ending of some sort – informing the audience that another part of the narrative is coming into play or that a change of setting is about to occur. The **dissolve**, however, is a transition that maintains a certain level of connection, as one shot blends into another.

A **wipe** is used less frequently than other types of editing as it feels so unnatural. You are more likely to see it in a trailer or a film that is not concerned with realism. There are quite a few used in the first *Star Wars* film to move between settings – mainly because George Lucas liked them!

A **jump cut** is a jerky transition that is quite abrupt and draws the audience's attention to the fact that an edit is being used. It is therefore a little uncomfortable for the audience and is often used for this purpose or within an action or violent sequence to shock the audience.

The ending of *The Babadook* uses jump cuts to make seemingly normal events strange. The mother and son seem to be doing ordinary things in the garden (planting flowers, playing darts, collecting worms) and then the mother enters the basement. There are other elements that make this sequence strange, such as the colour palette and the lack of non-diegetic sound, but the jump cuts are an important feature in the build up to her encountering the monster.

Key terms



Straight cut

A smooth cut between one shot and the next.

Transition

The choice of edit between shots.

Continuity editing

Editing that appears 'seamless', giving flow to the narrative.

Shot-reverse-shot

A back-and-forth between perspectives, commonly used in conversations, for example when a character is talking to a character off screen and then the shot swaps to that character.

Fade

A shot gradually turning to black or white.

Dissolve

A transition where a shot slowly emerges from beneath another one.

Wipe

An edit that wipes a shot off the screen with another shot.

Jump cut

An abrupt transition, typically in a sequential clip that makes the subject appear to jump from one spot to the other, without continuity.

Key term **Parallel editing**

When two narrative events are happening at the same time and the film cuts between the two, often to create tension.

Pace

If your focus film does not use lots of different types of edit, but you want to discuss this element of film form, you can talk about how editing (or the lack of it) creates pace. You may wish to discuss things like **parallel editing** and cross cutting too. Cross cutting is an important editing technique used to create dramatic tension. It shows two different things going on at the same time and is a great way to involve audiences in the action, as we know more than the characters on screen – who cannot be in two places at once.

The speed of editing generally correlates with the speed of the action and can often relate to genre. It is not by accident that *Skyfall* begins at such a fast pace, as that is the kind of action an audience for this film will be expecting. It won't be like this all the way through, as that would be exhausting and wouldn't allow for any narrative. That may suit other similar films, but is not what a Bond audience would expect.

Task 2.15 

Watch the ending sequence of *Slumdog Millionaire* as Latika rushes to the studio to find Jamal. This is a particularly effective use of cross cutting.

Why do you think the sequence is filmed using this technique?

Mise-en-scène

Mise-en-scène is a French term meaning 'everything in the frame', so it more or less means that you can analyse everything you can see. Namely:

- setting and props
- costume and make-up
- character positioning and facial expressions
- lighting and colour.

Although, as with all film language, these aspects can be separated for discussion, they work together to inform the audience about the narrative, characters and genre. Mise-en-scène is also used to create a particular style.

Detailed mise-en-scène helps to immerse the audience in the world of the film and it is important to get the details right. You may have seen some films or shows where mistakes have been made – such as a wristwatch in a biblical film or a mobile phone in a 1950s gangster film. Getting a detail wrong like this can affect an audience's enjoyment and their confidence in a filmmaker. In addition, a film that is set in the past and is based on true events must stay true to the details of the original narrative or this could upset the people affected by what happened or wrongly depict how things were, which could cause offence.

Location is important to Bond films, where the exotic is part of the appeal, and to *Lady Bird*, where Gerwig was keen to present the place where she grew up; but any filmmaker will want to be in control of the

mise-en-scène and will place props and people in a way that frames the shot perfectly. If filming in a studio or using special effects, they will still need to ensure the details are right and consistently used so that the audience remains immersed in the world of the film.

Setting

The **setting** of a scene refers to the place in which it takes place. This could be a room in a house, a city in the UK, a tunnel underground, or a spooky castle in Transylvania. The setting could be created using CGI, or it could be a purpose-built set, or it could even exist in real life – depending on the **production budget** or sense of realism the filmmaker wants to create. Often the setting of a film is established in the opening sequence.

Attack the Block, for example, starts with one of the main characters walking through the streets of London. The inclusion of a street market, a tube station and a few streets makes the scene recognisable to many audiences, as British films are often set in London. The streets are busy at first, but then become quieter and darker as Sam gets closer to home, so, when the gang appear, we recognise the threat instantly. She may be in a city, but she is all alone.

The Lost Boys also establishes the setting of the fairground, used throughout the film, right in the opening, from a vampire's eye view! This image **foreshadows** the attack on the security guard later in the sequence and creates enigma for the audience as, at this stage, the link between the gang and the vampires is only hinted at.

Key terms



Setting

The place or type of surroundings where the events take place.

Production budget

The money allowed to be spent on making a film project.

Foreshadow

An event or clue in the narrative that signals a major event.

Task 2.16



How is the setting established by the background details in these two images?



▲ *Juno* (2007, Jason Reitman)



▲ *Skyfall*

Key term



Props

Objects that are always purposefully placed in films, either to create an accurate and believable setting or to tell us about character.

Props

Props inform us about a character or the story. They might be items in the setting or objects used by the characters. Props are used effectively throughout *Tsotsi*, for example, to give us clues to each character and the narrative action. *Tsotsi* always carries a gun and uses it to threaten people or shoot them. Butcher has his knife, which shows he is ruthless and threatening, and Teacher has his bottle, as he is an alcoholic – all giving the audience clear indicators to their personalities.

Task 2.17



Study a scene from *Tsotsi* that takes place in Miriam's shack. Look at all the different props you can see.

What do they tell you about Miriam and the way she lives?

Contrast that with a scene at *Tsotsi's* place.

Note how *mise-en-scène* can tell us a lot about character as well as setting and narrative.

Costume

Costume is, basically, what a character is wearing. It can be hugely significant: telling us, for example, how powerful a character is, how much money they have, if they are from a different time period or even a different planet.

In *Tsotsi*, costume is used symbolically in certain places to remind us of the differences between the characters. Miriam wears traditional African dress, showing pride in her appearance and her nationality, whereas Aap wears his old prison outfit certainly with no sense of pride. Many students pick up on how *Tsotsi's* outfit changes from the beginning to the end as he wears dark colours at the beginning and the warning colours of red and black, but later dons a clean, white shirt and neutral tones, perhaps symbolising his redemption.



▲ Costume in *Blinded by the Light* reflects the setting in an British Indian household in the 1980s

Costume is also important in defining historical time and a character's situation in life. In *Jojo Rabbit*, the boy's uniform is integral to his identity as a member of the Nazi Youth, and therefore to our understanding of his character. In *Blinded by the Light*, costume is used in the same way as well as to signify cultural differences. So, for example, Javed and Shavia wear jumpers typical of 1980s fashions in the UK, but their mother wears a traditional Indian outfit, signifying differences between generations and **cultures**.

Make-up

When the term **make-up** is referred to, your first thought might be of glamorous female stars wearing red lipstick and lots of mascara, but make-up can mean the exact opposite in film and can turn an actor into an alien or a zombie or age someone so they appear much older than their years. Make-up works closely with costume to create a character in a particular situation.

Facial expressions and gesture

Actors' **facial expressions** and **gestures** are two elements of mise-en-scène that clearly link to performance as they rely on the actor bringing these aspects to life, revealing aspects of character and how they are responding emotionally to events around them. Compare how they are used in some key moments in the focus films.



Quick Question

2.4

How has make-up been used for very different purposes in these two images?



▲ *Pillow Talk*



▲ *The Lost Boys*

Key terms



Culture

The customs, standards and beliefs of a particular community or civilisation.

Make-up

The way the character is made to look; including everyday make-up, such as mascara and lipstick, but also prosthetics or ways in which a character has been made to look a certain way.

Facial expression

The face showing emotion by, for example, smiling, having sad eyes, frowning.

Gesture

A movement made by a character's body, such as shrugging, hunching over, waving arms, clenching fists.

Task 2.18



Choose contrasting images from three of your focus films.

Make notes on how the actors use their faces and bodies to show their emotions or reveal aspects of narrative.

Key terms



Positioning

Where a character is placed in the frame/shot.

Framing

How the mise-en-scène is 'framed' or positioned on the screen. Think of the cinema or television screen as the frame. How are the things inside it shown to you?

Framing and positioning

Character **positioning** within the frame is also an important part of mise-en-scène. It is not always something you will notice, but it is something the director will have thought about. The **framing** of certain characters or scenes will have been a conscious choice. For example, a character might be positioned above another to show dominance or in a way that reflects conflicting emotions. Perhaps the protagonist is central in the frame with other characters behind them or surrounding them. Where a character is placed in the frame is an important aspect of how the shot works, and you should think about why these choices have been made.

So, for example, *Rocks* has quite tight framing: Rocks is not always central in the frame and other friends in her group are not always seen in full. This is to give us a sense of realism, as if we are another member of her friendship group. *Wadjda* (2012, Haifaa Al-Mansour), on the other hand, is often filmed outside, in long shots, to show the harsh, hot environment in which Wadjda lives and perhaps to make her seem smaller to signify the size of the fight she has to gain her independence.

If you are asked to comment on mise-en-scène, you may want to break down your analysis into separate sections or you may wish to look at all elements together.

Stretch and challenge 2.3



Below are film stills from *Jojo Rabbit* and *The Farewell* (2019, Lulu Wang).

Consider how all aspects of mise-en-scène give you clues as to what is happening, where it is happening and how the people in the frame feel about it.



Conclusion

Analysing key sequences in the films you have studied is key to your success and is one of the most interesting parts of your studies, allowing you to really think about how and why all the different elements of the film work. It is really what Film Studies is all about. Remember though, that while you may discuss different elements of film form individually, it is important to also understand how they work together to convey meanings for the audience and evoke responses.