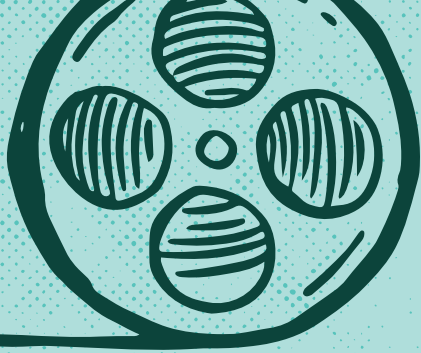# WJEC Eduqas

Film Studies

for A Level & AS

Revised Edition

Laura Barbey
Ellen Cheshire
Maxine Crampton
Mark Ramey
Jenny Stewart
Lisa Wardle-Sharp

Consultant editor:
Lisa Wardle-Sharp

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Contents

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Introduction

This book is designed to guide you through the WJEC Eduqas 2017 Film Studies AS and A level courses. These qualifications were designed to encourage you to explore the power and beauty of cinema by examining films from a range of eras and countries, from the mainstream to the experimental, the silent era to the contemporary. This textbook is structured to support the specification and incorporates guidance on the areas of study that can be applied to any of the set films plus in-depth case studies of at least one film for each module.

How to use this book

Part 1 offers a very detailed exploration of the core study areas:

★ film form
★ meaning
★ response and context.

It can be used as an in-depth glossary to help you understand some of the terminology associated with Film Studies and it also includes some case studies from the specification to show you how this new knowledge can be applied. In the examination, knowledge of these core areas could be tested for any film, so a clear understanding of them is crucial.

Part 2 of the book contains the detailed case studies. These case studies take you through the analysis of a film, applying the core areas and the relevant specialist areas outlined by the specification. If the chapter is not on a film you are studying it will still offer relevant theoretical information and context, which can be applied to your chosen film. This part of the book also offers guidance on the production module.
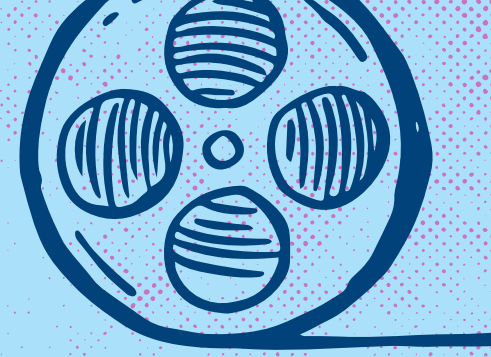
Part 3, the and final part, is a brief overview of study skills and revision techniques to help you get the most out of the qualification and achieve your potential.

The book includes **Independent activities** (IAs) and opportunities for **Stretch & challenge** (S&C). To make the most of this publication you should strive to do as many of these as possible.

Film form

Film form is everything that filmmakers take into consideration when making a film. It is how the content is expressed, rather than the story itself.

By **studying**, or **reading**, a film, you will see what techniques filmmakers use to:

★ further narrative and character
★ stimulate an emotional response
★ reveal further layers of meaning
★ place the film within a particular genre or style.

Once you have gained an understanding of the fundamentals of film form you will develop your own way of studying a film. Your method may differ from other people's way of studying. You will find that a group studying the same scene will each see and interpret it differently. This is OK.

Why study film form?

A starting point for studying film is to consider all the **essential decisions** the director and key creative personnel use when planning the visual and aural elements of a film.

These elements, known as film form, are:

★ cinematography
★ mise-en-scène
★ editing
★ sound
★ performance.

By examining these in close detail, you will gain further insights into the characters, narrative structure, themes and messages that you may have missed the first time you watched the film.

These elements serve to create a mood and add to the overall **aesthetic** of the film.

Form and meaning

Meaning, in this context, is an interpretation of the narrative based on what we see and hear (**form**). This meaning may be explicit (what the film is about, i.e. the plot) or implicit (what is lying beneath the surface).

As active film viewers, we look for the 'hidden' meanings, and studying **film form** helps us to achieve a deeper understanding of them.

Aesthetic: the style adopted by an artist (in a film's case the filmmaker) or a film movement. For example, despite the different settings of *Trainspotting* (Boyle, 1996) and *Slumdog Millionaire* (Boyle, 2009), both films share a visual look and feel, created by the director's high-energy visual style, by way of his choice of camerawork, editing and music. German Expressionism was an artistic movement that encompassed theatre, dance, architecture, painting, sculpture and film. The aesthetic shared between expressionist films included exaggeration in performance, setting, lighting and disorientating camera angles.

The director

You only have to sit through the end credits of a film to see how many people are involved in the making of it. It is not possible for a director to carry out every aspect of **production**. **The director is responsible for the artistic and dramatic aspects of turning a written script into a film.**

One way of studying film is to look at the body of a work of a director. You will begin to see recurring visual styles and motifs in it. Directors with a strong **aesthetic** have become known as **auteurs**.

Some directors, for example Alfred Hitchcock, relish the notion of the auteur and their place within the pantheon of auteur directors, while others completely disown the auteur theory, acknowledging the input of everyone involved in the filmmaking process.

Case study: Film form

Film form is used to add meaning and response to a scene. The terms used here will be explored in detail in this section.

This Is England (Meadows, 2006) — the party scene (00:36:42–40:16)

By analysing a scene, drawing on all its component elements, you will develop further layers of meaning. The party scene, where Combo and his friend turn up, from *This Is England* signals the tipping point from the touching and warm-hearted first half to a more aggressive and bleaker second half of the film.

As we return to the party, it is clear from the first shot that the atmosphere has changed. Combo is placed in the **centre of the frame**, potentially displacing Woody as the leader of the group. Combo is dressed in white, which draws the eye to him. There is no **diegetic** music; all the people have been silenced by Combo, who now dominates the conversation.

Their shared **costuming**, **hair styling** and **presentation** mark them as a group with a mutual connection. However, Combo and his friend Banjo's appearance, with much closer shaven hair and tattoos, is far more aggressive, indicating a more threatening presence.

Tattoos are an important part of each character's costuming. Woody and Combo both have identical crosses on their forehead, which infers a shared past. The cross appears to be Woody's only tattoo, but Combo also has a teardrop, a spider's web and a swallow, all of which are symbols associated with 'doing time' in jail.

The scene is largely filmed from **eye-level** and is **subjective**, as though we, the viewers, are sitting with them.

Combo's face is predominantly held in **close-up** to emphasise his face, which is animated with large movements around his eyes and mouth. He takes up more **physical space** than the others do, and the **midshots** show his wide hand gestures as he becomes engrossed with his prison anecdote about a black prisoner stealing his pudding.

The others are listening, all attention is focused on him, their **body movements** are smaller and their **micro-expressions** betray many emotions, from concern (downcast eyes) to enjoyment (nodding and laughing).

When Combo uses the derogatory word 'wog', **stress** is placed on it for emphasis and the shock of its use is shown in **reaction shots**.

The tension is momentarily broken when Shaun and Smell enter the room. The camera remains at the seated eye-level and becomes a **point-of-view (POV) shot** as Combo takes in this young boy (Shaun). The shot means that Smell's head and shoulders are not in shot, which amplifies how small Shaun is, as he can still be seen in full.

At first Combo is aggressive towards Shaun, before teasing and then dismissing him, to continue with his story. The introduction of plaintive **non-diegetic music** initially underscores his dialogue, and then overwhelms it, leaving just the sombre music to accompany a close-up of Combo, which seems slightly slowed down. Unable to hear what he is saying, we rely on his body movements and facial expression for meaning, and **cutaways** to the other characters (single and grouped).

The music continues at the end of the scene into the next scene, thereby making an **aural link** that the downbeat mood has lingered to the next day.

Cinematography

Types of shot (i)

Cinematography (the **framing** and **design** of shots) encompasses a range of processes and techniques that come together to give the film its visual look and convey messages and values.

The director will have a vision of what they want the film to look like, and during **pre-production** the **cinematographer** will make dozens of decisions in order to create this vision and reality.

The five key areas of cinematography are:

★ shot types and camera angles (from which viewpoint we see the camera)
★ camera movement (how the camera moves around the action)
★ lighting (how the shot is lit)
★ colour (how colour is used to communicate additional information)
★ composition (the way people and objects are placed within the shot).

Other aspects to be considered are:

★ **film stock:** 16mm, 35mm, 70mm, 3D, IMAX (although, today, shooting digitally is the primary method)
★ **aspect ratio:** the standard ratios in use are 2:35:1 or 1:85:1. Usually, 2:35:1 is used for action/blockbusters, 1:85:1 for character-led films. Until the 1950s, 4:3 was the standard
★ frame rate: the standard is 24 **frames per second (fps)**, but there have been 48fps and 120fps releases.

Types of shot

Most scenes/sequences are made up of a series of **shots**, showing the action from different angles and points of view.

The most regularly used shot types are as follows.

Extreme long shot (ELS) or establishing shot

Filmed from a very long way away, an extreme long shot will often be a view of an exterior location. It is often used as an establishing shot to show a panoramic view of where the film is set. Such shots are the cinematographer's equivalent of a landscape painting: full of shape and hue but with little precise detail, although usually just enough to provide clues to the film's genre and setting.

Extreme long shot (ELS; *Nomadland*, Zhao, 2020)

Pre-production: the period prior to filming, where key decisions are made, including securing funding, selecting actors and creative personnel, choosing locations, building sets, designing costumes and determining the film's aesthetic, and planning the production schedule.

Cinematographer: responsible for the look of the film; in charge of the camera technique and translates the director's vision onto the screen, advising the director on camera angles, lighting and special effects.

Film stock: the type of film used to shoot the film on.

Aspect ratio: the shape of the image; this affects the composition of the shots. The first aspect ratio used was 4:3: the first number refers to the width of the screen and the second to the height. Therefore, for every 4 inches in width, there will be 3 inches height.

Frames per second (fps): the frame rate, or the speed that individual frames are projected to give the allusion of movement.

Shot: used to mean different aspects of the filmmaking process.

● For the cinematographer a shot is from the moment the camera starts rolling (action) to the end (cut).
● For the editor a shot is a continuous scene or sequences between two cuts or edits.
● Refers to the process of shooting a film, e.g. 'we shot four minutes of screen time today'.
● There are different types of shot, which refer to the distance between the camera and the subject.

Long shot (LS)

A long shot clearly features the main character or characters, but will also offer a fair amount of background. This shot is useful for showing us who the central characters in the scene are and where it is set.

Long shot (LS; *Joker*, **Phillips, 2019)**

Medium-long shot (MLS)

A medium-long shot focuses on the main part of the characters, but probably cuts them off at the knees. It can be comfortably used to show two figures walking, talking, dancing, etc.

Medium shot (MS) or midshot

A medium shot, or midshot, shows a character's upper body, arms and head. If there are two figures they have to be quite close to each other in order to fit them both in the shot. This sort of shot therefore implies a certain intimacy between characters and between the characters and the viewers.

Medium shot (MS; *Shaun of the Dead*, **Wright, 2004)**

Independent study questions

Q When you are assessing a shot, how much of the subject can you see in it?

Q Can you only see their eyes, their full body or are they just a distant figure?

Q What do you learn about the characters and setting from these shot types?

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Cinematography

Types of shot (ii)

Two-shot

A two-shot shows two characters who are not necessarily side-by-side, but are clearly the two central characters in a scene. Their proximity and the framing of the shot are indicators of the characters' relationship. They can be placed in the **foreground (FG)** or the **background (BG)**, and the **depth of field** can be adjusted to highlight and draw focus of one element of the image over another.

> ### Image search
>
> Choose a film and search for a **medium close-up shot image** from that film. Discuss with a partner what makes your image a two-shot image and why the director would use it at this point in the scene.

Medium close-up (MCU)

A medium close-up (MCU) is used to direct the viewer's attention entirely onto one character by focusing on their head and shoulders. This shot is used to deliver powerful/emotional lines of dialogue or for more nuanced facial expressions.

> ### Image search
>
> Choose a film and search for a **medium close-up shot image** from that film. What makes it a medium shot image? Discuss with a partner why the director would use this type of shot in the scene.

Close-up (CU)

A close-up is perhaps the most important shot in the development of cinematography and the moment that the power is taken away from the viewer. The director is drawing attention to where they want you to focus.

This is a shot where the whole of the actor's face fills the full frame while showing their emotions, delivering key lines or simply showing their best side.

In shots that don't involve actors, close-ups give the viewer the opportunity to have a good look at one particular detail, which could be part of the unravelling of the narrative or to help create a mood.

Close-up (CU; *Mulholland Drive*, **Lynch, 2001)**

Foreground (FG): people, objects or action closest to the camera.

Background (BG): in contrast to the FG, the depth of field is altered by the cinematographer, which can add further meaning.

Depth of field: the distance between the nearest and furthest objects in a scene that are in sharp focus in a shot.

Further information

A **deep focus** shot has a great depth of field from front to back, with the foreground, middle ground and background ALL remaining in sharp focus. The placement of objects or actors in the plane of vision allows for the manipulation of size and scale. If an object in the foreground looms larger than anything else in the frame then this is likely to be of greater importance.

Image search

Search for a **deep focus image** from a film you are studying. Discuss with a partner what makes your image deep focus, and what is in the background that requires a deep focus.

The opposite of deep focus is shallow focus, where the small depth field has one plane in focus (i.e. the foreground) and the background out of focus. The eye is drawn to the object or actor in the foreground that is in sharp focus, rather than the blurred image in the background.

The Worst Person in the World (Trier, 2021)

Extreme close-up (ECU)

Extreme close-ups (ECUs) get you almost too close to an actor, allowing the viewer into the character's intimate space to reveal detail or emotions that would otherwise go unnoticed.

Developments in macro-photography have enabled extreme close-ups of individual flecks of colour in an actor's iris or something reflected in them.

Image search

Choose a film and search for an **extreme close-up shot**. What makes your image an extreme close-up? With a partner, discuss why the director would cut to an extreme close-up at this point in the scene. What effect is created?

Cinematography

Camera angles and perspectives

A camera angle is simply the angle from which the camera 'sees' the subject. There are several angles, all of which provide different effects.

Aerial shot

An aerial is often used as an establishing shot or at the opening of a film. It offers a bird's-eye view, swooping over a landscape. An aerial shot is designed to be impressive and is best used at the beginning of a film before the characters and narrative have been established. If used later on, it could remind the audience they are watching a film and break the 'spell'.

Overhead shot

This shot is literally taken from up high, looking down. Again, it is most frequently used as an establishing shot to set the scene. Although the shot begins as an overhead, it often moves down and inwards towards the characters – drawing the viewer quite literally into the story.
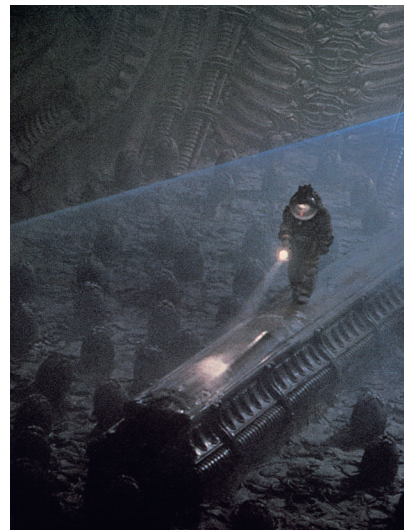
Aerial shot (*Alien*, Scott, 1979)

Overhead shot (*Night of the Living Dead*, Romero, 1968)

Eye-level shot

An eye-level shot is taken using the most natural camera angle. The eye-level chosen is usually that of the dominant character. This helps you identify with them, as though you are seeing the world as the character sees it.

Over-the-shoulder shot

Usually used to shoot a conversation, the camera is positioned behind one of the characters, taking in their shoulder, while filming the other. This is often part of a shot/reverse shot (see Editing, page 28).

Over-the-shoulder shot (*Little Women*, Gerwig, 2019)

High-angle shot

A high-angle shot is usually taken from just above head-height. Using this shot is a good way of making someone look small and insignificant, simply because we are looking down on them. However, not all high-angle shots serve this purpose.

High-angle shot (*Do the Right Thing*, Lee, 1989)

Low-angle shot (*City of God*, Meirelles, 2002)

Low-angle shot

Simply by setting the camera lower than eye-level and looking up at the subject, a low-angle shot can be employed to make a character (or object) dominate the frame, making them more threatening or heroic.

Objective

With an objective camera angle you are viewing the scene through the eye of an unseen observer. The viewpoint doesn't belong to any of the characters, therefore it can be seen as impersonal.

Subjective

With a subjective camera angle (also known as a **point-of-view (POV) shot**) the viewer is placed in the action either as an active participant or by trading place with a character. This is typically used when the camera replaces the viewpoint of a character looking at someone from afar. In a horror film it could indicate the killer stalking their victim, or it can be used when one character is admiring another.

Independent activity

Watch a scene from any film and note how the camera angles help shape your view of characters or spaces.

Subjective or POV shot (*Portrait of a Lady on Fire*, Sciamma, 2019)

Cinematography

Camera movements

If the angle of view in the shot is to change without there being an edit, the camera has to move. This can be done in several ways.

Fixed axis

When a camera is attached to a fixed axis it stays rooted to the spot but can turn to follow the action, as when used in:

★ a **pan**: when the camera moves from left to right or vice versa. This technique is used to follow a person as they walk across a room or to swing from one part of the frame to another
★ a **whip pan**: uses the same movement as a pan but at speed. However, its increased speed often blurs the image
★ a **tilt** is when the camera moves its lens up or down. This type of shot may be used to look slowly upwards at a building – thereby emphasising how tall it is.

Shifting axis

When the whole camera moves it is said to have a shifting axis. This type of shot is used when the camera needs to move in a very precise direction. There are different methods for moving the camera:

★ **Dolly shot:** the camera is mounted on a wheeled platform called a 'dolly', which is used to move the camera through a space in a relatively straight line. The dolly's wheels have tyres for smooth movement and it can only be used on very flat surfaces.
★ **Tracking shot:** the dolly is mounted on a track, which has been laid out in a specific route through the action, and follows a subject from behind, alongside or in front.

Zoom

A zoom isn't an actual camera movement as such, but it does create the illusion of movement by starting off viewing its subject from a distance then zooming in (using a lens with a variable focus length) to look at a small part of it in much greater detail or vice versa. A **crash zoom** is the same movement but quicker.

Track **Zoom** **Pan** **Tilt**
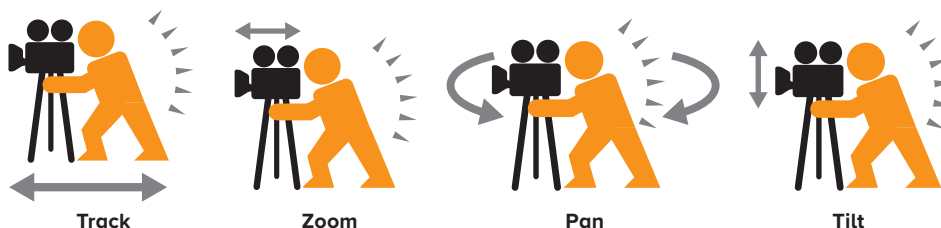
Camera movements

Crane shot

A crane shot is when the camera is mounted on a crane or boom arm and is lowered, raised or swung sideways – like a vertical tracking shot. By using a crane, you can move the camera around the action from one level to another.

Originally, a camera operator would sit at the top of the crane, along with the camera. Today, cameras can be controlled remotely via drones, lightweight/manoeuvrable boom arms and cranes. A camera can now travel up the outside of a wall and pass

Independent activity

Select two films you are studying. Watch the opening sequences multiple times and make notes on the following elements of film form:

● the use of sound
● the use of music
● the camera angles
● the camera movement
● the pace and style of editing.

Then answer the following questions:

1 Do you think this is the work of a director with a strong aesthetic? If so, why?
2 What genre/film movement do you think this film belongs to? Why do you think this?
3 What else struck you about this opening sequence?
4 Who do you think the intended audience for this film would be?

through a half-open window with very little effort, where once that would have required the building of a special wall that could be pulled apart instantly to let the camera and camera operator pass through.

Hand-held

In the early days of filmmaking when films were made on lightweight 16mm film stock, it was easy to pick up a camera and film hand-held.

With the introduction of 35mm and sound, cameras became more difficult to manoeuvre. It wasn't until the 1950s that professional cameras were made small enough to carry and hand-held camerawork could once again be considered.

Initially, documentary filmmakers used hand-held cameras, as this created a sense of reality – it reminds the viewer of home movies that are also usually hand-held – with shaky photography, shifting focus and off-kilter framing. This style became known as **cinéma vérité**.

A camera operator holding a camera can follow the action wherever it goes, creating an immediate 'this is real-life' feel. With hand-held technology, it is possible to film in the most cramped conditions or from the most oblique angles. If you want an incredibly low-level shot, just lie on the floor with your hand-held camera and film from there.

In the late 1950s, fiction filmmakers borrowed this approach to filmmaking, including a group of young French film critics turned directors, who became known as the **French New Wave**. Their influence has had an impact on films' visual styles, particularly for more intimate 'indie' movies, such as *Moonlight* (Jenkins, 2016).

Further information

French New Wave

In the late 1950s a group of French filmmakers emerged, many of whom were writing for French film journals including *Cahiers du Cinema*. Starved of foreign films during and immediately after the Second World War, when film import restrictions were lifted in the early 1950s they absorbed themselves in films of the Hollywood Golden Age. As a consequence, their films are full of artistic references to other films.

Films considered part of the French New Wave were renowned for being shot hand-held, using natural lighting on the streets. The performance style was natural, often improvised, by a youthful cast. They were concerned with how the film was shot and edited, rather than the story itself, and through their experimentations with editing and shooting they reinvented narrative techniques.

The key period of this film movement was 1958–1968, and directors associated with French New Wave are François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Louis Malle and Agnès Varda. This movement has inspired and influenced many American film directors, including Quentin Tarantino, who named his production company A Band Apart after Godard's film *Bande à part* (1964).

Steadicam

The year 1975 saw the introduction of the Steadicam camera (invented by Garrett Brown). A Steadicam is a type of camera mount that uses weights and counter-balances to keep a camera level, even while hand-held. The Steadicam operator can keep the camera steady for a tracking shot, or can gently move the camera up and down, to create a floating effect, which generates a sense of unease.

Cinematography

Lighting (i)

When watching a film, you are usually attracted to the most brightly illuminated area of the screen. Filmmakers play on this when lighting a shot.

There are two key elements you need to consider when studying how a scene is lit and what further information you can draw from the lighting, as discussed below.

Element 1: Source

Is the cinematographer using natural **available light** or are they filling the frame with deliberately placed **artificial light**?

If they are using artificial light they will usually be employing a **three-point lighting** combination:

★ Point 1: **Key light** – the brightest primary light source; the one that acts like the sun in the sky. The key light throws the dominant shadows, if there are to be any. The intensity of this light leads the film's lighting design.

★ Point 2: **Fill light** – this will be approximately 50–75% of the key light. It is often provided by a reflector bouncing back a softened beam of key light or from a lower angle than the key light. Sometimes the shadows cast by the key light can be too dark and obscure detail – such as expressions on a human face – so the fill light softens the edges of shadows and puts back some of the detail. Using more or less key light can be an aesthetic choice known as **chiaroscuro lighting**, which could be low-key or high-contrast lighting.

★ Point 3: **Back light** – shines from behind (and usually the side) and gives foreground objects an outline, which helps them to stand out from the background.

Most shots are lit using a combination of the above three types of lighting.

An example of chiaroscuro lighting (*Spione*, Lang, 1928)

Chiaroscuro lighting: this term is borrowed from painting, and refers to the bold use of dark and light. It was a favourite for filmmakers whose work falls into film movements or styles that were filming in black and white, particularly German Expressionism (pages 243–253), horror and film noir. It is a kind of painting with light and shadow that makes dramatic moments impactful. It tends to lose its dramatic impact in colour.
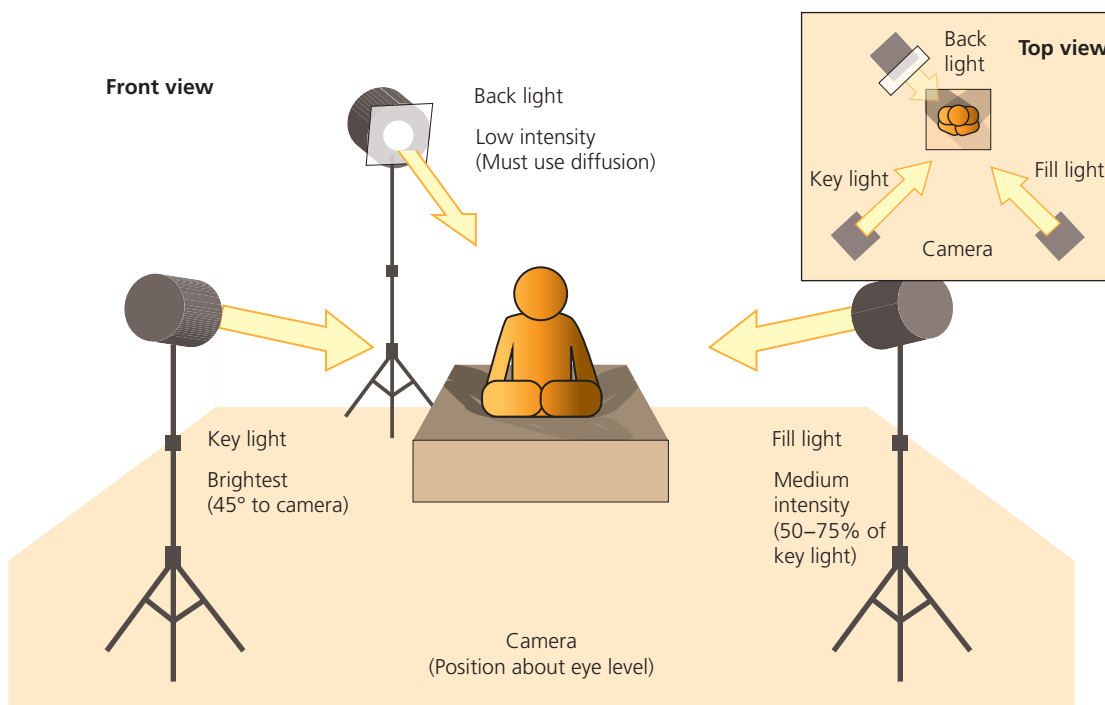
Basic three-point lighting set-up

Further information

Film noir

Film noirs look and feel just like their literal meaning, 'dark films', both in their narrative content and visual style. A film noir world is one of darkness, disillusionment, betrayal, pessimism and moral corruption. The plots often involve murder and the brutality of life.

The use of high contrasting black and whites and obtuse camera angles were prolific and give the films a distorted view of the world. A world of dark streets, lit intermittently by neon signs and car headlights, and the frequent lighting of cigarettes. Made during the decade following the Second World War, these films share strong visual motifs, narrative strands, characters and mood, and mirror concerns in the post-war America over a man's place in society and women's emancipation.

The extremes of both dark and light lighting support or develop:

★ narrative themes of good versus evil
★ characters' situations, e.g. a sense of peril (if well lit) and wrong-doing (if in the shade)
★ a physical allusion to characters' psychological state of mind
★ themes of duplicity, claustrophobia and fatalism.

Independent study questions

Q When watching a scene from any film, make notes of what is illuminated and what is in the shadow. How have the filmmakers used lighting to develop the character or mood?

Element 2: Direction

The direction the light travels from source to the object it is illuminating creates different moods. Several different types are used to create distinct effects.

★ **Front lighting:** tends to eliminate shadows and creates a 'flatter' image. This is the kind of lighting that is easiest to work with quickly, so is often found in low-budget or hand-held filmmaking.

Front lighting (*Another Round*, Vinterberg, 2020)

★ **Side lighting:** uses one strong light source on one side, which creates shadows on the opposite side. This creates mystery and intrigue: what is being hidden in the shadow?
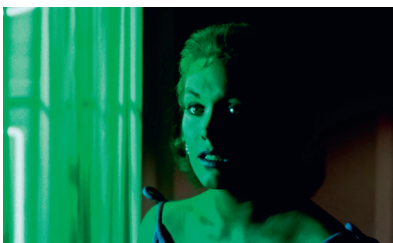
Side lighting (*Vertigo*, Hitchcock, 1958)

* ★ **Back lighting:** when the light is behind the object or person being photographed, therefore creating a silhouette. Depending on the strength of light used, this can also create a 'halo' of light around the edge of the silhouetted shape.
* ★ **Under lighting:** when the light (or a reflector) is positioned under the object. This can throw a large shadow behind it and may have a distorting effect on the object or person.

Back lighting (*Belfast*, Branagh, 2021)

Under lighting (*Alien*, Scott, 1979)

* ★ **Top lighting:** rarely used on its own as it just throws a light over a whole scene, with other lights filling in the details. When used in isolation, such as on a human face, the shadows fill the eye-sockets and look very menacing.

Top lighting (*Spione*, Lang, 1928)

Cinematography

Lighting (ii)

Cinematographers also have to consider:

* ★ **Intensity** of the lighting. Is the lighting bright or dim? Consider the difference in lighting in a moody horror such as *Night of the Living Dead* (Romero, 1968) or a sci-fi such as *Alien* (Scott, 1979), with a bright musical such as *La La Land* (Chazelle, 2016).
* ★ **Quality** of the lighting. Is it hard or soft? Does it create harsh shadows or subtle shading? Hard lighting is created from multiple small light sources, whereas soft is created by larger ones.

Element 3: Colour

The cinematographer's use of colour is an important part of the film's aesthetic and is discussed further in the mise-en-scène section on page 21.

Throwing a vivid red light, or a chilly blue, onto a scene can affect the way the viewer responds to what they see. Subtler effects are created by throwing differently coloured lights onto coloured walls or coloured costumes to indicate different times of year. Primary, muted or highly saturated colours are most effective when used to dominate a scene.

This can be done either during production or in **post-production** by **grading**.

Post-production: the work that is required to complete the film, after shooting, including the edit, sound mix, music composition, colour grading and computer-generated imagery (CGI) special effects.

Grading: colour film always needed to be graded to make sure that colours remain consistent. Like lighting, grading affects the mood and feel of a film. Documentaries are often 'ungraded' and appear flat and lifeless. By grading, filmmakers draw emphasis to colour themes, such as red in *Shaun of the Dead*, or visually emphasise the mood of a scene by taking out the red, to leave a scene looking blue and chilly. With digital technology it is possible to manipulate the colour palette of a scene or even a whole film.

Case study: Colour in *City of God* (Meirelles, 2002)

Meirelles (director) and Charlone (cinematographer) use two different colour palettes in *City of God* (2002).

The first half of the film, told in flashback, is golden in hue, which indicates the heat of Brazil, as well as the nostalgia of the 'Golden Age' of life in the favelas, when the children had hope, ambition and innocence. The colour reflects their optimism and enthusiasm for life.

The film's second half is narratively darker; the bright lighting has gone and is replaced with darker browns, and greys. These reflect the change in fortune for the young people who are now embedded in the criminal underworld, with little opportunity for escape.

Image search
Darker tones in City of God

Watch the opening scene of *City of God* and note how the colour tones change before and after the flashback. What does this change in colour palette connote about the world and how it has changed?

Black and white
Filming in black and white was the default format in early cinema, although from the outset filmmakers were keen to have colour in the film. Hand-colouring frame by frame or tinting entire sequences a colour to match its mood were early experiments in colour. It wasn't until the 1930s that filming in colour became viable. Colour and black and white were both in use until the early 1970s, when colour dominated.

When shooting in black and white, it is not the hue of the colour that makes an impact but the brightness (how dark or light it is). For instance, to get a deep black a very dark orange colour is most effective, rather than black itself.

Independent activity

Contemporary black and white films hark back to the glamour of the Golden Age of Hollywood or the rebellious French New Wave. But what does releasing a film in black and white mean today? Is it nostalgia? A marker of a film's artiness? An aesthetic consideration? Have a look at some contemporary black and white films then research and read about the directors' intentions.

Casablanca **(Curtiz, 1942)**

Cinematography

Composition

Composition is the arrangement of all the visual elements of mise-en-scène in the frame. The choice of camera angle and lighting, combined with the placement of people and objects within the setting, creates the composition of a shot.

As viewing a film is an emotional experience, the way scenes are composed will stimulate an audience's response.

The rule of thirds

The **rule of thirds** is a central premise of composition. If you divide the frame into thirds (using four lines), your main character or object should fall at the intersection of two of these lines. This will draw your eye to the main object, but leave space for further information to be communicated.
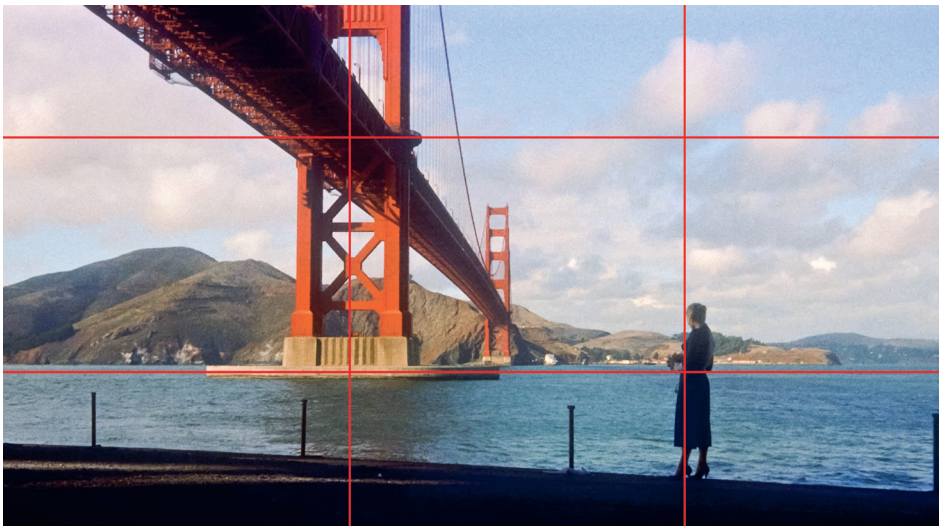
The rule of thirds (*Vertigo*, Hitchcock, 1958)

Balance and symmetry

Formal or **symmetrical balanced** composition is used to depict a quiet, restful, static scene. In a two-shot, which uses formal balance, audience interest will naturally shift from one character to the other as each speaks. Having the images displayed evenly within the frame conveys a sense of calm and order.

Formal or symmetrical balance (*Saint Maud*, Glass, 2019)

Informal or **asymmetrical unbalanced** composition is used to challenge or attract attention. You can make a character appear more dominant by positioning them higher or lower in a frame, as well as through lighting and camera angle. Unbalanced compositions are associated with chaos and tension.

**Informal or asymmetrical balance (*Saint Maud*, Glass, 2019)**

Lines

Compositional lines are the contours of objects, people, props, buildings, trees, vehicles, furniture and so on, and are expressed in straight, curved, vertical, horizontal or diagonal lines.

Lines serve many purposes in visual composition. Combinations of lines may influence each other and convey different meanings. They can divide the composition, direct the viewer's eye, define shapes and lead the viewer to a particular interpretation.

Here are the key types of lines:

★ **Vertical lines** create a strong impression, suggesting power and stability.
★ **Horizontal lines** can also indicate strength but in a more restful way, leaning towards balance and harmony. They can also lead to finality or a sense of ending.
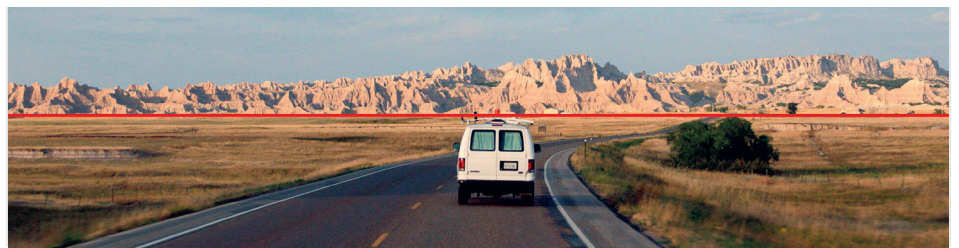
Horizontal lines (*Nomadland*, Zhao, 2020)

★ **Diagonal lines** suggest a sense of action and movement. Opposing diagonal lines suggest conflict and forcefulness.
★ **Organic lines** are lines found in nature. Depending on the way they are used, they can introduce feelings of chaos, complexity or beauty.

The above four types of line are all actual lines. The fifth doesn't visually exist at all, we merely imagine the line:

★ **Implied lines** are created/implied through directional elements such as a hand gesture or the gaze between two people.

Form

Physical forms (such as people and objects) are easy to spot, but filmmakers can also create the illusion of form in the viewer's eye by grouping people or objects

together to create **abstract forms**. This link is often made in a triangular movement, allowing the eye to move from one object to another, to create subliminal links.

A triangle pointing upwards suggests strength, stability and solidarity (imagine a mountain). This allows the eye to go from point to point in an upwards movement with ease, reinforcing positive attributes. An inverted triangle lacks stability and suggests weakness and fragility.

Physical forms, inverted triangle (*Trainspotting*, Boyle, 1996)

Mise-en-scène

The term **mise-en-scène** was first used in the theatre, where it refers to all the elements placed on a stage that contribute to the setting or mood the creative team were working towards. In film, it refers to everything on the screen in front of the camera, from the colours and style of the clothes worn by the actors, to the settings and locations, to the feeling created by the lighting (see Cinematography, pages 15–18) and the positioning of the characters in relation to one another.

Everything you see **on screen** (and the six off-screen spaces – for more on these spaces see page 27) has been considered and deliberately chosen to be there. If you can see it, it is there because the filmmaker wants you to see it. How you interpret this information will take time and practice; you can view a film multiple times and find new information on each viewing.

Your response to a film may well be different from others. Your gender, ethnicity, age, life experiences, the books you have read, and the other films, theatre, paintings, photographs and music you have seen/heard or studied all play a part in your interpretation of a film.

Colour

Colour is integral to the cinematographer's repertoire of resources for creating mood and conveying meaning. Colour is an important part of the mise-en-scène to signal a character's mood or also personality, to enhance the narrative arc, to draw attention to something, support a colour motif or to elicit psychological reactions in the viewer. Here, it would be the responsibility of the production and costume designer.

The psychology of colour

★ Red: anger, violence, danger, love, excitement
★ Pink: femininity, sweetness, innocence, playfulness
★ Orange: warmth, happiness, friendly, exoticness
★ Yellow: sickness, madness, idyllic, insecurity
★ Green: nature, renewal, hope, darkness, envy, ominous

★ Blue: cold, calm, melancholy, cerebral
★ Purple: fantasy, mystical, ethereal, ominous
★ Black: fear, grief, sophistication
★ White: sincerity, purity