

GLOSSARY OF CINEMATIC TERMS

angle	The position of the camera in relation to the subject being filmed. If the camera is above the subject, it is at a high angle; if beneath, it is at a low angle.
auteur	The director (who often also is the screenwriter) as the primary creator of film art who is involved in every aspect of the filmmaking process and thus gives each work his/her distinctive style.
backlighting	Lighting emanating from behind the actors thus putting them into heavy shadow or even silhouette in the foreground.
blocking	The planning and directing of the actors' movements and positions prior to filming.
cinematographer	The individual who plans a scene (usually with the director) and then shoots it.
close-up shot	A shot of a character's head or face, for example, that fills the screen.
composition	The arrangement of the actors, three dimensional objects (manufactured and natural), and other visual components that form the image within a frame.
crane shot	A shot taken from high above the characters and the action by using a mechanical crane.
cut	An abrupt change (break) from one continuous set of images to another.
deep-focus shot	A shot with the visual field in sharp focus: foreground, background, and everything in between.
dissolve	A slow fading out of one shot followed by the slow fading in of another where the images are superimposed at midpoint.
editing	The act of putting together (splicing) images of film that have not been shot sequentially.
fade	A transitional effect (also called fade-out/fade-in) where the last image from the previous scene fades to black then gradually, as the light increases, becomes the first image of the next scene.
film noir	A genre of mainly American mystery films of the 1940s and 1950s characterized by a pessimistic tone, low-key lighting, and motifs of violence, betrayal, deception, and corrupted passion.
frame	Like composition in its concern with the elements within a shot; however, here the emphasis is with the borders of that shot.
freeze frame	The reprinting of the same frame a number of times giving the effect of freezing the action into a still photograph on the screen.
full shot	A medium long shot that shows a complete person from head to foot.
genre	A category of motion picture, such as the western, the comedy, the melodrama,

the action epic.

hand-held shot	A shot that follows a character moving—usually through a crowd—using a hand-held camera and characterized by a jumpiness not present in a mounted camera.
long shot	A shot taken at considerable distance from the subject.
medium shot	A shot of a person from the knees or waist up.
mise-en-scène	All the theatrical elements necessary in composing a scene to be filmed: props, sets, lighting, sound effects, costumes, make-up, actors' placement (blocking).
montage	A series of abruptly juxtaposed shots using short, edited sequences and music, often interrelated by theme and/or events, denoting the passage of time.
motif	An image, object, or idea repeated throughout a film usually to lend a thematic effect.
narrative	The storyline or sequential plot of a film.
New Wave	A group of young French directors during the 1950s. Among them are François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, and Alain Resnais, whose films are characterized by shooting scripts written directly for the screen, urban location shooting, improvisation, naturalistic acting, and allusions to earlier films.
pan shot	A shot taken from a mounted camera moving horizontally on a fixed axis.
period piece	A film that does not use a contemporary setting but rather that of an earlier historical era.
point of view	Either a subjective (first-person) or objective vantage from which everything is observed and interpreted. The subjective viewpoint would be from the perspective of one of the characters. The objective viewpoint would be more neutral and not from any one character's perspective.
prop	A three-dimensional object used by an actor or present on a set.
reaction shot	A shot of a character's reaction to what has been said or done in the previous shot.
scenarist	The person who adapts a literary source for a movie by writing the screenplay, or who writes a script directly for a film; a screenwriter.
scene	A series of shots unified in action or established location and time (setting).
score	Music—either originally composed for the film or not—used in a motion picture.
sequence	A series of interrelated scenes that establish a certain prolonged effect with a decided beginning, middle, and ending.
set	A soundstage decorated for shooting or any other site prepared for filming to occur.

shooting script	The movie storyline broken down to its individual shots, often with technical instructions.
shot	The basic unit of filming, which is the unedited, continuously exposed image of any duration made up of any number of frames.
sound effects	Sounds—neither musical nor dialogue—that are made to realistically approximate a desired noise.
special effects	Various photographic, artistic, animated, or computerized effects that are filmed to approximate reality or produce a sense of the surreal.
star	An actor, actress, or celebrity having great popular appeal.
star system	Filmmaking that capitalizes on the mass commercial appeal of certain performers to assure maximum box-office appeal.
star vehicle	A film produced with maximum publicity to demonstrate the talents or appeal of a specific star.
symbol	As with literature, a device in which an object or event means more than its narrow literal meaning.
tilt shot	A shot taken from a mounted camera moving vertically on a fixed axis.
tracking shot	A shot of a subject filmed by a camera mounted on a moving vehicle.
voice-over	Narration offscreen while a series of shots unfold onscreen.
zoom shot	An ongoing shot through a stationary camera where through the continuous action of the lens, a long shot can very rapidly convert to a close-up as zoom in. A close-up reverting to a long shot is a zoom out.