

CINEMATOGRAPHY TERMS

EVERY FILMMAKER SHOULD KNOW

180-degree rule

A system used to orient the viewer within a scene. Action in a scene should advance along a straight line, keeping the camera on just a single side of that action. Also called the axis of action.

30-degree rule

A principle used to prevent awkward jump cuts. When two sequential shots focus on the same character or object, the camera should be moved at least 30 degrees from the original setup to feel like a different perspective.

60/30/10 rule

An approach to how much of a certain color is being used in a scene. It theorizes that visual harmony can be achieved by assigning 60% of a composition to a main color, 30% to a secondary color, and 10% to an accent color.

Aerial shot

A type of shot that films a scene from an aircraft, drone, crane or other high, overhead apparatus. Also called a bird's-eye view shot.

Backlight

Part of the often used three-point lighting system in filmmaking. A backlight is a light that emanates from the back of the set. Creates separation between the subject and background.

Close-Up

A type of shot that frames a character's face and sometimes shoulders. Used to convey the character's expressions and emotional state.

Deep focus

A way of filming a shot through use of a particular lens that allows all elements in the shot, including the foreground, background and in-between, to be in focus.

Diegetic lighting

A light source that exists within the story world. For example, a lamp within the set decor or a flashlight held by a character are both instances of diegetic lighting.

Dolly shot

A type of shot that uses a camera affixed to a wheeled apparatus to allow camera movement on a single plane. Also known as a tracking shot.

Dutch angle shot

A type of shot that films a character with a tilted camera. May be used to reflect the character's imbalanced state of mind or an imbalanced world.

Extreme close-up

A type of shot that frames only a part of a character's face, such as the eyes or lips.

Extreme long shot

A type of shot that is typically used as an establishing shot, especially with a scene taking place in a new location or environment. Used to convey scale and distance. Also called an extreme wide shot.

Fill light

Part of the often used three-point lighting system in filmmaking. A fill light is a secondary light that helps to soften the harsh shadows created by the primary light, or key light.

Floodlight

A type of lamp that creates a diffused light.

Hand-held camera

A technique used when the camera is not affixed to a tripod or other stabilizing apparatus. Rather, it is held by the cinematographer or camera operator for a deliberately shaky effect.

High angle shot

A type of shot where the subject is filmed from above.

High-key lighting

A type of lighting scheme that produces little contrast between the darks and lights in a shot.

Key light

Part of the often used three-point lighting system in filmmaking. A key light is the primary light source in a shot.

Lighting ratio

The relationship or balance between the key and fill lights used in a shot.

Long shot

A type of shot that includes the character's full body, as well as some of their immediate surroundings. Also called a wide shot.

Low angle shot

A type of shot where the subject is filmed from below.

Low-key lighting

A type of lighting scheme that produces strong contrast between the darks and lights in a shot. Results in deep shadows and is sometimes referred to as chiaroscuro lighting.

Medium shot

A type of shot that frames a character from the waist up. Most frequently used shot in filmmaking.

Over-the-shoulder shot

A type of shot that frames two characters with the camera placed behind the shoulder of one character who is directly facing the other character.

Non-diegetic lighting

A light source that doesn't exist within the storyworld, but still helps light the scene. This could include studio lights, camera-lights, and reflectors.

Pan

A type of camera movement with the camera affixed to a stabilizing apparatus. While on this apparatus, the cinematographer can move the camera from left to right or right to left.

Point-of-view shot

A type of shot that allows the viewer to see what a character sees from their point of view.

Steadicam

A type of camera that is carried by a cinematographer or camera operator to move with a character or through a set without the shaky effect of a hand-held camera.

Three-point lighting system

A popular filmmaking lighting scheme that uses key, fill, and backlights. The key is the primary lighting source with fills to reduce the harshness of the key and backlights to create depth in the shot.

Tilt

A type of camera movement with the camera affixed to a stabilizing apparatus. While on this apparatus, the cinematographer can move the camera from up to down or down to up.

Two shot

A type of shot that frames two characters. Usually a medium shot.

Zoom shot

A type of shot where the subject is magnified by manipulation of the lens.