FILM ANALYSIS

Framing

When you look at **framing** in a film, you look at how the images are cropped. **Framing** helps set the mood of a film and draws the viewer's focus to specific objects in the film. Here are some examples of different types of **framing**:

Extreme close-up:

- An extreme close-up usually shows only one part of an object or a character's face.
- Creates a powerful mood.
- Provides a closer connection between the audience and the character.
- Enables the audience to see deeper emotions.

Extreme close-up

Close-up:

- Only the character's face is shown.
- The audience can read emotions from the facial expressions.
- Can be used to create empathy for the character.
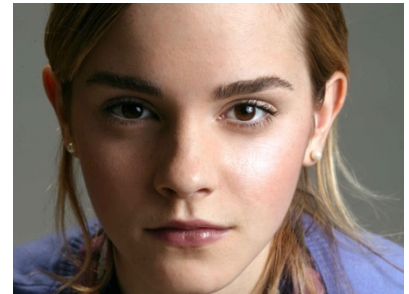
Close-up

Medium shot:

- Can contain one or multiple characters seen from the waist up.
- We can still see their faces as well as their interaction with other characters.
- Often establishes relationships between characters.

Medium Shot

Long shot:

- Gives the audience an idea of the setting.
- It is often used to show parts of the landscapes, buildings and other settings in which the action takes place.

Long Shot

Extreme long shot:

- Shows the majority of a landscape.
- Is often used at the beginning of a film to establish the common location. This is also called an **establishing shot**.

Extreme long shot

Camera angles

Camera angles can influence the way the viewer perceives the character or thing shown.

Low-angle shot: makes a character seem big and powerful.

Low angle shot

Eye-level: makes the viewer feel on the same level as the character

Eye Level Shot

High-angle shot: makes a character seem small and weak

High-angle shot

Composition

The way you position your objects and characters can affect the atmosphere of the film.

Rule of thirds: Creates a balanced image and draws the
viewer's attention to the character/object placed
on the horizontal or vertical lines.

Horizontal lines: calmness, stability

Vertical lines: power, grandiosity

Diagonal lines: disorder, action. The lines are slanted
and the images become chaotic and unbalanced

Lighting

Low-key lighting: dark, contrast-filled, heavy shadows.

High-key lighting: brightly lit, few or no shadows.

Colours

The colour of props, make-up, costumes etc. can sometimes have a symbolical meaning Colours should always be interpreted in their contexts; sometimes the colour red is a symbol of love/passion or anger/hate, sometimes a warning of bad things to come, and sometimes red is just red.
When looking at colours in films, it is not just the colours of the objects which are of interest, the ***colour grading*** of the images should be considered as well. ***Colour grading*** is the tint which is added to the film on an overall level. Dramas often use cool grey or blue colours while comedies use warm yellows and oranges to emphasise the atmosphere in the film.

Below is a list of possible symbolical interpretations of colours, both negative and positive. This is not a perfect guide, since there are numerous interpretations of each colour, however, this gives you an insight into the world of colours and their symbolism

- Red
    - Positive: Passion, romance, sensuality, caring feelings.
    - Negative: Murder, anger, jealousy and drama.
- White
    - Positive: Virginity, purity, goodness and peace.
    - Negative: Death, coldness, sterility.
- Black
    - Positive: Mysterious, elegant, neutral
    - Negative: Darkness, sadness, fear
- Green
    - Positive: Youth, hope, spring, freshness.
    - Negative: Nervousness, envy, corruption
- Yellow
    - Positive: Optimism, joy, a love of life, creativity.
    - Negative: Deceitfulness, falseness, illness, infidelity.
- Blue
    - Positive: Security, intellect, knowledge, quality.
    - Negative: Coldness, impersonal, sadness

Sound

When analysing sound, it is important to take note of both what you hear and what you *don't* hear, because **silence** can be just as effective as sound.
Sound can be divided into two categories:

Diegetic sound: the sound from the film's location, e.g. dialogue, music from a radio, traffic, wind etc.

Non-diegetic sound: sound added to the film which the characters cannot hear. Non-diegetic sound adds to the audience's experience, and includes elements such as background music, sound effects, voice over, etc.

- Background music: The music in a film can either reflect the mood of the scenes (e.g. slow, romantic music played during a romantic dinner) or stand in contrast to images we see (e.g. happy music playing during a murder scene). This we call **contrapuntal sound** and it often creates an atmosphere of chaos and insanity.

Camera Movements

Static camera: The camera is mounted on a tripod and does not move.

Pan: The camera turns from side to side while staying in place.

Tilt: The camera tilts up and down while staying in place.

Travelling: The camera moves around the scene either by using a dolly or a steady-cam. This creates smooth camera movements.

Hand-held camera: a hand-held camera is often used to create more chaotic shots, because the movements become shakier compared to using a dolly (a "tripod on wheels") or Steadicam (a type of shoulder rig to keep it level all times). Hand-held cameras are often used in documentaries.

Point of View: The camera is placed so that it seems like we are looking through the eyes of a character.

Editing

The pace of a film can be influenced by the way it is edited. You can either use long takes to make the film calm or slow, or to draw attention to a specific moment in the story by lingering at one or more takes, or you can use short takes to quicken the pace and make the scenes more dramatic or action packed.

Cut on action: The audience hardly notices this time of editing because it follows the movements of the characters in a logical order. E.g. when a character walks through a door, drinks a cup of coffee and places the coffee back down again etc.

Cross-cutting: Cutting between two scenes happening at the same time. It is also used to cut between two characters in a dialogue.

Montage: a series of shots are edited together to show the passing of time, a development of a character or other information.

Dramaturgy

Films do not just consist of a series of random images flashing before the viewers eyes but are put together using various plot devices. You can analyse a film using different models, which you might also know from analysing short stories and novels. In the following pages you'll find a selection of different models that are useful when looking at the plot of a film. Remember that not all models should be used simultaneously, instead you must choose which model(s) fit best with the film you're analysing

Plot Devices

In order to make a story move along the director makes use of various plot devices to ensure that the viewer remains interested in the film and its development. These are just a few examples of how you can make a story interesting and keep the plot moving forward.

Plot/sub-plot

A film usually consists of a plot and some sub-plots. A plot is simply the film boiled down to its most basic elements. When you divide a story into the main plot and sub-plots you differentiate between the main story which evolves around the main character, and the minor stories which are not (too) important in relation to getting the main character from A to B in the film. Sub-plots often mirror the main plot and tell small stories to emphasize the message which the main plot strives to convey.

Suspense and surprise

The great film director Alfred Hitchcock described the difference between suspense and surprise by using an example of a couple sitting at a café drinking coffee. In the first version, the couple drinks their coffee peacefully when suddenly a bomb goes off. This is called "surprise", because neither the couple nor the viewer knew there'd be a bomb at the café. In the second version, the couple still drinks their coffee peacefully, but this time the viewer is shown that there's a bomb hidden under a table. Now the viewer hopes that the couple will realise they are in danger and get out in time. This is suspense, because the viewer knows more than the characters. Suspense is simply that feeling you get when you're at the edge of your seat knowing something is going to happen, but you can't do anything but wait and see how the film unfolds.

Time lock

Another device related to suspense is the time lock. Time locks are elements put in the film to create a sense of urgency. In its essence it means that there is a limited time for a character to achieve something. This could either be the count down to a bomb going off, running across town trying to reach the love of your life before she gets on a train and leaves forever, or telling a parent that you love them before they pass away.

Set up/pay off

Set ups and pay offs tie a film together. A set up is something which might seem insignificant at the beginning of the film but turns out to be the key to unlocking some conflict at the end of the film. An example of this could be a character randomly putting a rope in their bag before going out on an adventure, and at the end of the film this rope turns out to save everyone's lives when they need to climb out of a cave, they're stuck in. In a horror film it could be a woman chopping vegetables with a knife which later turns out to be the weapon the killer uses to murder her with.

The Actantial Model

The actantial model can be used to identify which role the different characters play in the film, and how they either help or obstruct the main character in achieving their goal.
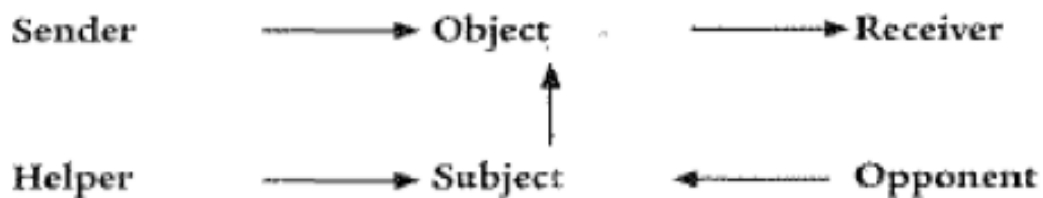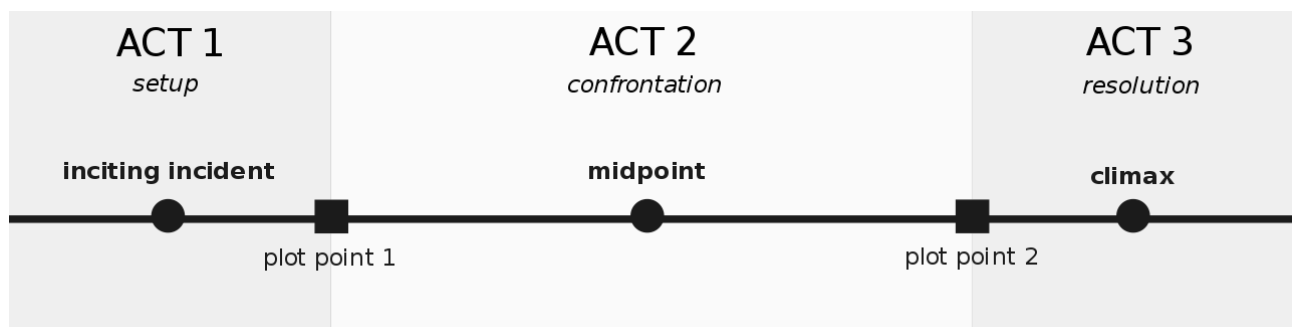
The three-act structure

A film can often be divided into three acts (parts):

- Act 1: Setup – here the characters, their relationships, and the setting are presented.
  - *Inciting incident*: Somewhere throughout act 1 something happens to the protagonist, which leads up to the next dramatic situation: *plot point 1.*
  - *Plot point 1:* Signifies the end of act 1. Here something happens which changes the protagonist's life and calls them to take action.
- Act 2: Confrontation – the action rises and the character tries to solve the problems which arose during plot point 1.
  - *Midpoint*: In the middle of act one something happens which changes the course of events. This is called the *midpoint*.
  - *Plot point 2*: Like in act 1, act 2 ends with another plot point, which marks the beginning of the end. Often the protagonist makes a decision to face their problems and tries to end a conflict.
- Act 3: Resolution – The film reaches its final moments and the protagonist stands face to face with the results of act 1 and 2. The action rises, and the conflict culminates in the *climax*.
  - *Climax:* This is the final confrontation and the scene(s) in which the conflict comes to an end. The action of the film reaches its peak and the outcome of all the hardship is decided.

Syd Field's three-act structure

The Hollywood Model

The Hollywood model can be used to describe the dramaturgy (the way a story is composed) of many films, however, mainly feature films (films that are more than an hour and 30 minutes long). It is called the Hollywood model because most Hollywood films follow this dramaturgic composition. The model is divided into seven different stages that describe how the film moves forward in time, and how the action rises and falls. Below you can see a brief explanation of the seven stages.

1: Opening

This stage includes the opening scene(s) of the film where the purpose is to attract the attention of the audience. The film's theme, style and atmosphere are introduced.

2: Presentation
The audience is introduced to the characters, their relationship to each other, the environment they live in, and the conflicts they have to deal with.

3: Elaboration
The theme and the conflicts of the film are unfolded, and we get to know the characters in a more nuanced way.

4: Point of no return
This stage is the turning point of the film. Something happens in the story which makes the conflict clear to us. At this point there is no way back for the main character. She or he has to fight and deal with the conflict.

5: Conflict escalation:
The conflict is further intensified. The conflicts might occur more frequently between the fighting characters, and it all points toward a conclusive clash.
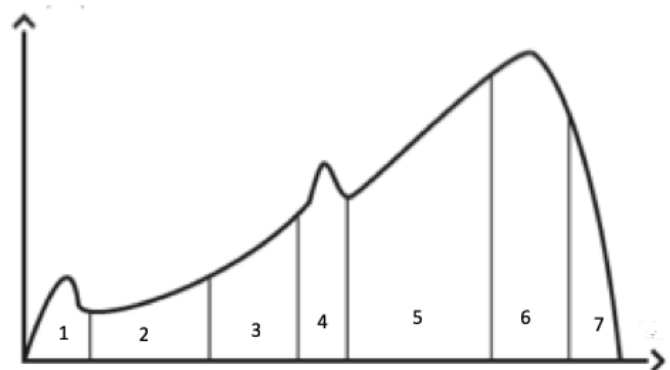
6: Climax
This stage includes the final test of strength where the conflict is settled in some way.

7: Resolution
In this stage the story is rounded off and the old order, or a new, is established. The audience digests the impressions and feels sympathy or triumph with the characters, according to how the film ends.

Short films

Short films differ from feature films in several areas. Below you'll find a list highlighting some of the main characteristics of a short film. It is important to remember a lot of the dramaturgic models can be used for both feature and short films, however, in the next pages you'll find some that work especially well with short films.

- Runtime: approx. 5-10 minutes.
- The focus is on one or few characters.
- Focuses on character moments rather than character development.
- Simply story.
- Few locations.
- Short films have as few lines as possible, and when there's dialogue it's often used to define a character.
- Short films can be compared to poems since they are short but condensed stories. This puts emphasis on even the smallest detail in the film.
- Cinematic techniques play an important role in telling the story.

The Simplified Hollywood Model

While the Hollywood model with its 7 stages work well when analysing a feature film, you must change and adapt it to fit a short film. A short film often starts in medias res and thereby throws you into the middle of a situation where the character(s), setting, conflict etc is presented. It is therefore interesting to look at the following parts from the Hollywood model:

1: Presentation
2: Point of No Return
3: Conflict Escalation
4: Climax