

The Grammar Of Film



- Just like languages, films have grammar—'rules' to communicate with us.
- The good news is most of us are in on it already.

Shot: Any strip of film containing one camera motion or angle

- There are several types of shots that filmmakers use to communicate ideas to us.



Long Shot



- Also called an *establishing shot*, the camera is often a long way away from the subject.

Medium Shot



- On actors, a shot generally from the waist up
- Provides details, yet can show action, too.

Close Up

- When the camera gets close to reveal detail.
- Message: There's something here you have to see.



Extreme Close Up



- When the camera gets *really* close.
- Often emphasizes important plot details.

Scene: A series of related shots put together to tell one part of the story in a film (like a chapter in a book).



Transition Shots




- These are shots designed to help orient the audience and *transition* from scene to scene.

Lap Dissolve: When one picture dissolves (or seems to melt into)...



...another picture (often to show the passage of time).





Fade In: When the screen starts out all black..

...then a picture gradually appears.



Fade Out: The opposite of a fade in.





The picture gradually goes
to black.

Split Screen: When two ideas are developed at once in the same shot.



Wipe: When one picture..



...is 'wiped' away by another.



Jump Cut: When one scene suddenly 'jumps'...



...to another scene.



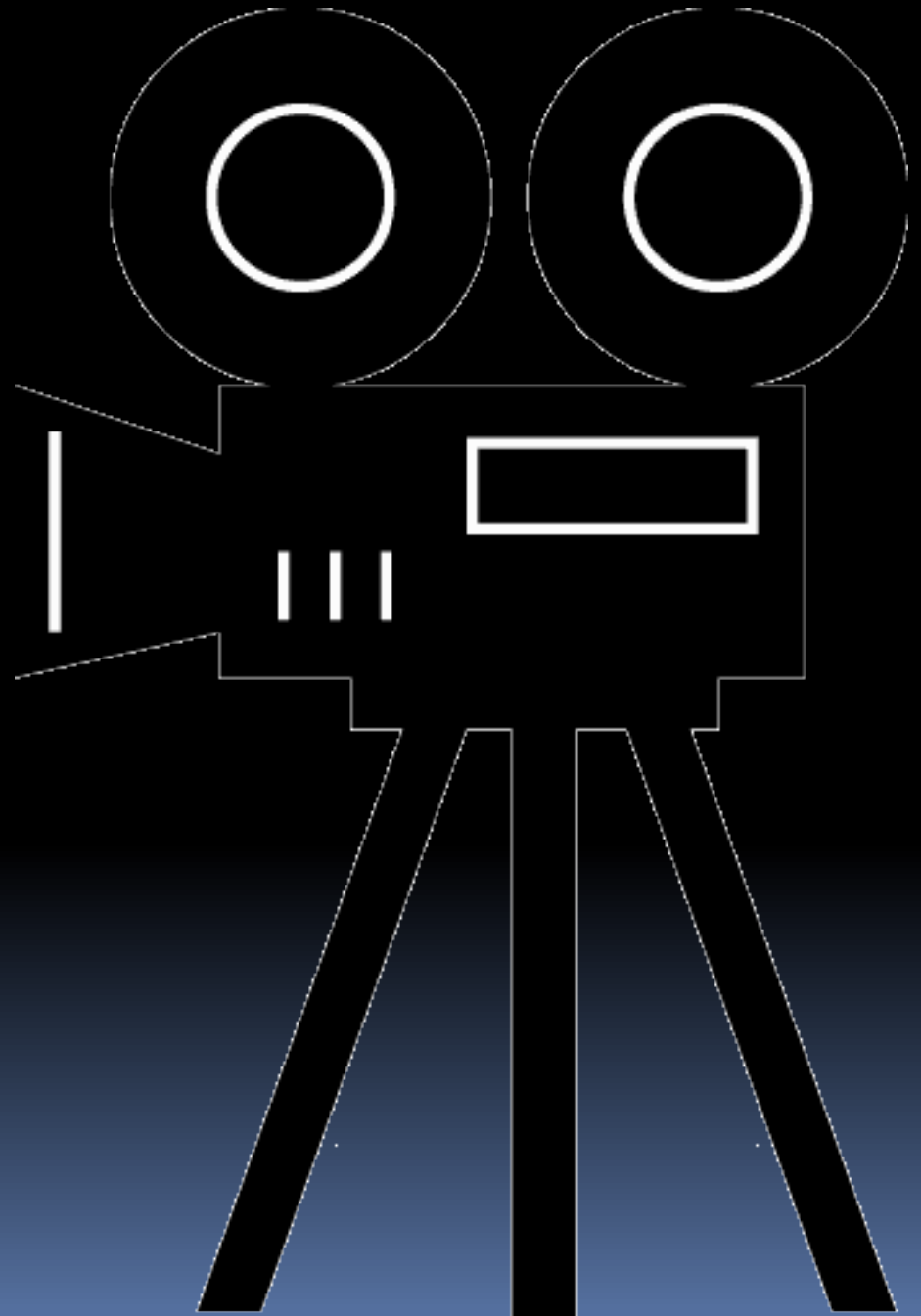
Montage: When a series of shots condense a lot of action into a small amount of time.



Montages are often accompanied by music, like music videos.



Camera Angles:
Where the
camera is set
up can also
communicate
information.



Low Camera Angle



- Camera is below the subject, forcing the viewer to look up
- Indicates size and power

High Camera Angle



- Camera is above the subject, forcing the viewer to look down
- Indicates weakness and vulnerability

1st Person POV Camera Angle



- Forces the viewer to see what a character sees
- Indicates an identification with the character
- Has a “You Are There” feel

Crane Shots: Moving shots where the camera is mounted on a crane.



Tracking Shots: Moving shots where the camera is moved on track.



Dolly Shots: Moving shots where the camera can roll on its own.



Steadicam: Moving shots achieved by strapping the camera to the cinematographer



Process/Matte Shot: Any shot where live action is combined with Special Effects



There are more, of course,
but these are the basics.

