Basic Cinematic Techniques

Cinematic techniques have been given unique names. Although you can call them whatever you want, the advantage of knowing their correct name and usage allows you to identify them in films you watch and use them in films you make. This skill will greatly enhance your ability to learn from actively watching films, rather than only passively enjoying them.

CINEMATOGRAPHY

1) CAMERA MOVEMENT
   a. Pan – horizontal camera movement; commonly used to look across a very wide panorama that doesn’t fit within the camera frame or to see what a character is looking at
   b. Tilt – vertical camera movement; used to look at tall objects/people
   c. Dolly & tracking shot – camera moves through space and watches the world go by; a natural camera movement as we can also do this. Generally uses some kind of platform with wheels and tracks if available. Also, Steadicam or handheld/shaky cam. Dolly: in & out; tracking: left & right.
   d. Zoom – frame transitions form a wide shot to a close-up (or vice-versa) without moving the camera; an unnatural camera movement because our eyes cannot do this. Varying the speeds of zooms can be used to draw attention to objects and add dramatic effect.
   e. Focus pull (a.k.a. rack focus) – focus on something close or far away while maintaining other subject out of focus then adjust the focus to switch between subjects

2) FRAMING TERMS – How much of the subject is on screen? Subjects can be actors AND inanimate objects; directors capture a collection of master shots, medium shots, and close-ups to provide a variety of footage during editing. Use the rule of thirds and provide breathing room in close-ups unless you are creating a sense of claustrophobia:
   a. Master/establishing shot – reveals where the scene is taking place and helps orient the audience; usually a wide shot (WS)
   b. Full shot (FS) – shows the full subject in relation to its surroundings; usually head to toe
   c. Medium shot (MS) – usually shows a character from belly button to slightly above the actor’s head; more intimate than a full shot but provides more breathing space than a close-up
   d. Medium close-up (MCU) – shows a subject’s head and shoulders without getting uncomfortably close
   e. Close-up (CU) – shows a subject’s neck to just slightly above the top of his head; creates a sense of intimacy and reveals intense emotions.
   f. Extreme close-up (ECU) – camera goes in tighter than a close-up: e.g. a subject’s eyes
3) **CAMERA ANGLES & SHOTS** – Where is the camera placed?
   a. Eye level/straight on - most commonly used camera angle. This angle is the "personal view" and shows the subject as we expect to see them in real life
   b. High angle - subject feels diminished
   c. Low angle - subject feels tall & powerful
   d. Tilted horizon (a.k.a. Dutch tilt, canted angle) – tipping the camera slightly to the side in order to create tension/imbalance in a scene
   e. **POV (point of view)** – the audience sees exactly what the subject sees; used to increase the audience’s emotional attachment to the character

**EDITING**

4) **TRANSITION** – Any method for switching from one image to another.
   a. Cut: simplest transition; maybe subtle or harsh
   b. Dissolve: gradually layers a new image over the old one
   c. Fade: slowly changing from an image to color is called a fade out (opposite is fade in); black is the most common but other colors are used for symbolism/imagery: e.g. white: ascending to heaven or explosion, red: blood or love

5) **CROSS CUT** – cuts back and forth between separate scenes that are occurring in different places usually at the same time; shows the relationship between the scenes

6) **INSERT** - a shot of part of a scene filmed from a different angle from the master shot. Inserts cover action already covered in the master shot, but emphasize a different aspect of that action due to the different framing. An insert differs from a cutaway as cutaways cover action not covered in the master shot.

7) **CUTAWAY** – a cut away from the main action in a scene to something of importance in the scene (e.g. an object)

8) **MONTAGE SEQUENCE** – specific sequence of images in a film usually without dialogue and set to music; used to express the passage of time or a sequence of events with little or no dialogue

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**Frame, Shot, Scene, Sequence for Dummies**

**Frame**: single still image (letter)

**Shot**: single continuous recording made by a camera (word)

**Scene**: a series of related shots (sentence)

**Sequence**: a series of scenes which together tell a major part of the story (paragraph)

Therefore, a movie would be equivalent to ______.