

# GENERATOR

## Production: Editing

Education Resources



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## EDITING

As the production phase draws to its conclusion and all scenes have been captured, the post-production crew begins the challenging task of cataloguing and assembling the raw footage. In practice, this often occurs simultaneously with the shoot. An essential part of this process is the careful selection of shots by the film editor in consultation with the director, in preparation for the raw material to be edited together.

To develop the narrative and tell the story, the editor coordinates, assembles and layers the footage to achieve a logical and meaningful relationship between shots, scenes, dialogue and music. The editor also eliminates unwanted footage to ensure that the final cut is coherent, engaging and – most importantly – seamless.

The primary role of the editor is to:

- Review and watch all the ‘dailies’ or ‘rushes’ (the raw or unedited footage)
- Check for obvious problems in the footage, including framing, continuity, focus, exposure and so on
- Consult with the director on which takes to use
- Work with the sound editor to develop the soundtrack
- Assemble the footage into a rough cut
- Consult with the director when building the final cut

Creative decisions made by the editor and director contribute to the overall aesthetic quality of a production. The editor’s ability to manipulate or challenge traditional editing approaches can result in the production of dynamic imagery that conveys complex ideas and information. Contemporary editors have explored new ways to draw influence from more traditional forms, genres or production styles, resulting in innovative ways of blending existing conventions to emotionally engage their audience.

Some forms or genres that have had a significant influence on reshaping contemporary editing approaches include:

- Music video clips
- Reality television
- Print media
- Documentary

### THE PURPOSE OF EDITING

Editing is used in film production for the following purposes:

#### Developing the story

Editing allows clips – images and sound – to be selected and arranged in a particular order to pace the action and effectively tell the film’s story. This is an important creative aspect of filmmaking, and the editor constantly makes decisions about particular shots working better than others to convey the film’s meaning.

### Evoking emotion

Editing shots to a particular style can shape a viewer's impression of a scene, profoundly affecting its meaning and mood and the audience's emotional reaction to it. The pace of the editing can build or diffuse tension – for example, a car chase or an action scene will almost always be edited in short abrupt cuts, whereas a romantic scene will be edited with longer shots and slow dissolves.

### Controlling time

Editing controls the rhythm and timing of the film and the manner in which the narrative is revealed. The order and arrangement of shots can be used to condense time or scramble the story through flashbacks or flash-forwards.

### Establishing point of view

Editing from different points of view causes viewers to identify with particular characters. When editing for this purpose, think about which character's point of view we see most. Which character do we see most of? Who is in the close-up shots?

## EDITING TECHNOLOGY

The availability of digital non-linear editing systems has drastically reshaped the editing process for filmmakers. Editors no longer need to spend hours or days trawling through large amounts of raw footage and splicing film by hand. Digital technology has simplified and sped up this process for the editor as raw footage is now stored on a hard-drive database and any part of it can be readily accessed on demand.

For small-scale production work, a number of affordable editing software programs are available on both PC and Mac platforms. All Mac computers come preloaded with iMovie, an easy-to-use editing package, and built-in FireWire sockets for connecting a digital video camera to the computer. On PCs, the current operating systems include the basic video editing package Movie Maker. Other well-known popular editing programs include Final Cut Pro, Adobe Premiere and Vegas Video.

When deciding on which editing software to purchase, it is important to investigate and research the cost and technical requirements of different packages. An editing software package should enable you to capture, store and arrange your footage. In addition to this, an editing workspace or timeline will allow you to edit and assemble your footage and apply transitions, effects and titles. To support the software capabilities it is essential that your computer has:

- Sufficient processing memory
- Sufficient hard disk storage space
- A digital video capture device
- A FireWire socket

## EDITING TIPS

When starting a new project, be sure to:

- Check the editing program's default audio and video settings, and change them according to your project's specifications.
- Give 'untitled' clips a name and take number so you do not waste time trawling through hundreds of 'untitled' clips to find the ones you need.
- Label, file and store the footage so it can be easily located and accessed on demand. If the software allows you to create storage 'bins', use these to arrange your footage according to scenes or sequences.

As you begin to select, edit and cut clips:

- Assemble clips on the timeline in chronological order according to the events of each sequence. As the timeline grows in size and length, locating and editing selected areas can become difficult and confusing. Depending on the duration of your project, consider allocating separate timelines for each scene or sequence.
- Consider layering video and audio sequences on multiple tracks to create complex visual ideas.
- Save new changes frequently. There is nothing worse than editing for hours and losing valuable work if your computer crashes.

When cutting footage, make sure you:

- Have a really good reason to make the cut.
- Cut on action where possible.
- Begin and conclude a scene with action.
- Think about what you want your audience to see and feel.
- Cut according to the 180-degree rule.
- Match shots according to eye-line.
- Only use transitions that are appropriate to the style of your production.

## IN-CAMERA EDITING

In-camera editing can be a quick and effective way to produce a short film without using editing software. This technique requires the camera operator to film all shots and scenes in the order in which they will be seen on screen. Timing takes on greater importance during the filming process, so careful planning is essential to ensure that each shot and scene is filmed in sequential order without mistakes or continuity flaws.

For successful in-camera editing, you will need to:

- Set up your camera for the first shot or scene, bearing in mind title shot, shot type, composition and camera distance.
- Ensure that the actors are in position and ready to go on your signal.
- Press record, then allow a few seconds of footage capture before you direct the actors to move.
- Allow a few seconds before you stop recording once the scene or shot has been captured.
- Repeat and follow these steps for the remaining scenes in chronological order.
- Remember to use a variety of shot types. Consider what you want the audience to see and select the appropriate shot type to frame the desired movement or action. Frame for emotion!
- Use a tripod to avoid shaky camera work that looks amateurish and unpolished.



## LOGGING AND PAPER EDITS

Editors spend a lot of time making editing decisions. To make this process as efficient as possible, view all raw footage and log or record a description and time code for each scene. This allows the editor to select and plan the order of the shots by noting the in and out points, saving editing time and cutting down on the amount of disk drive space required to store footage as only the footage required will be digitised (downloaded from the camera).

## GRAPHIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SHOTS

As the editor joins images together during the editing process, he or she strives to match colour, shape, movement and composition between shots to ensure visual continuity. This aspect of editing positions audiences to make meaning from shots that are similar in compositional content. The audience compares and contrasts the visual details of each shot, establishing the relationship between them and therefore the progression of the narrative.

When shots within a scene are juxtaposed against each other, similarities or differences in colour, shape, movement or composition establish either a continuous flow or a direct contrast between shots. A 'graphic match' can be used as a transitional device between scenes to smooth the shift between two shots, emphasising similarities between two shots and positioning the audience to make comparisons between people, places or objects. Conversely, a strong impact may result when the director or editor purposefully avoids graphic continuity between shots. The intentional clashing of graphic styles between assembled shots, achieved through montage editing styles, can alter and shift the overall mood and tone of a scene.

## SHOT DURATION AND RHYTHMIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SHOTS

The editor's ability to control shot duration can drastically alter the rhythm and pace of a scene or sequence. Although rhythm is often associated with shot duration, mise en scène, camera movement and camera position are also important contributing factors. The following editing techniques can assist in controlling the rhythmic relationship between shots:

- Joining shots together quickly to increase the pace and intensity of the on-screen action.
- Using slow, drawn-out shots to establish a serious tone (often used in romantic or more sombre moments in films).
- Repetition of shot length to establish a pattern or rhythmic beat to the scene, which can be used to create either a more dynamic pace or a slower tempo.
- Using rhythmic transitions between shots to establish pace or tempo, such as dissolves and wipes.
- Matching shot duration with shot type – for example, a long shot is traditionally held longer than a close-up as there is more detail in the shot for the audience to absorb and interpret.

## TRANSITIONS

Transitional devices are used by editors to control the pace of shifting between shots, conveying the passage of time. It is important to select transitions for their appropriateness

to the event or action taking place in the shot or scene. Longer transitions are often used to signal the end of one scene and the beginning of the next.

Carefully analyse each scene and decide where and when to use a shot transition. With consideration to both sound and visual details, use one of the following shot transitions to shift or alter the meaning conveyed by a scene:

<b>Cut</b>	The cut is the most commonly used transition. Its effect is to instantly or quickly change from one shot to the next. When cutting between shots or scenes, consider what you want the audience to see and when you want them to see it. Cutting on action or dialogue can distract the audience from abrupt shot changes.
<b>Fade shot</b>	The fade shot (often referred to as a fade-in or fade-out) is longest type of transition between shots. A fade-in commences with black screen and gradually lightens to reveal an image; the fade-out works in reverse.
<b>Dissolve</b>	A dissolve is a transition between two shots where the first image gradually disappears as the second image simultaneously begins to appear. The images appear to overlap or dissolve into each other. Although this can be a disruptive transition, a dissolve can link two scenes together in a smooth and subtle manner.
<b>Wipe</b>	A wipe is where a line appears to 'wipe' or pass across the existing image, replacing it with a new image. This is an unnatural and noticeable transition that is mostly used in documentaries, action or adventure genres.

When deciding where and when to use a shot transition, consider:

- Making cuts that correspond with the dialogue.
- Cutting on action or visual cues, establishing a relationship between the characters or events.
- The character's gaze: what are they looking at and who is looking back at them?

## TIME RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SHOTS

The editor controls the narrative by the way in which they order the on-screen events, often relying on creative editing strategies to manipulate time. There are a number of ways in which editors can shape an audience's perception of time:

<b>Condensing time</b>	Real-time action is shortened through editing out unnecessary actions or events. The audience is presented with only the useful or important information that contributes to plot development. Attention is directed towards the main conflict to prevent the audience from losing interest in the story and its characters. A montage sequence can be used to suggest a passage of time: selected shots from different points in time
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are joined together to condense hours or years into a few seconds or minutes.

### **Expanding time**

The time taken up by the action or events is expanded or exaggerated. Events or actions are drawn out or repeated, and gestures or actions are exaggerated to prolong the suspense, heightening the emotional intensity of the scene.

### **Suggesting simultaneous events**

Multiple sequences are assembled together to present action or events unfolding simultaneously in different locations. By cross-cutting back and forth between two or more locations, the audience understands that the events are happening at the same time. As the sequences draw to their conclusion, there is an expectation that the events will converge.

The editor can also rearrange sequences and alter the order in which events are depicted through the use of:

### **Flashbacks**

An event or action within a scene is juxtaposed with scenes from the past. The sudden shift in chronology allows the audience to make comparisons between the two scenes and to consider the impact that past events have had on the present motivations of characters in the narrative.

### **Flash-forwards**

Like flashbacks, a flash-forward interrupts present events with a scene that takes place in the future. Although a less common device, the flash-forward can be used to visually signify character desire or a prediction of future or upcoming events.

## **SPATIAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SHOTS**

The flatness of the screen and its fixed boundaries present the editor with a number of major limitations when attempting to recreate the illusion of on-screen space. The audience's viewing context and distance from the screen can prove just as problematic. In order to overcome these obstacles and distract the audience from their viewing context, varying editing techniques are used to manipulate the on-screen space, strengthening the illusion of spatial depth and perspective and deepening the connection between the audience and the on-screen world.

## **CONTINUITY EDITING**

Often referred to as the invisible style, continuity editing – made popular during the classical Hollywood period of filmmaking – relies on techniques or guidelines that maintain the principle of narrative continuity. Shots are assembled together in a seamless manner to ensure that the progression of the narrative is clear, well organised and coherent. Continuity editing relies on the following rules or techniques:

- Maintaining graphic matching between shots – for example, subjects and objects are balanced, lighting is consistent and the action is central to the screen.
- Cutting according to the shot type – for example, long shots are held longer than mid shots and mid shots are held longer than close-ups.



- Appropriate shot progression – for example, a scene begins with a long-shot, which is followed by a mid shot, then a close-up.
- Cutting on action or movement to distract the audience from the obvious cut.
- Ensuring that positions in the frame remain consistent.
- Eye-line matches between characters – for example, if a character is looking at another character to their right, the following shot should reveal the second character looking to their left.
- Consistent screen direction and action according to the 180-degree rule – for example, a character walking left to right in one shot should be followed by the corresponding action in the opposite shot.
- Shot/reverse shots during conversations.
- Establishing shots to highlight the spatial relationship between characters and the setting. Scenes often begin with (and are established by) the use of a long shot or extreme long shot.

The following shot progressions and editing techniques are used to maintain continuity and the illusion of a three-dimensional on-screen space:

**Shot/reverse shot** One of the most established editing conventions in cinema, the shot/reverse shot is traditionally used during conversation or dialogue sequences between characters. This technique relies on a pattern of editing two or more shots together that alternate between the characters speaking. The first shot establishes the character speaking; this is followed by a second shot from the reverse angle revealing the second character's response. The shot/reverse shot can be used in a more expressive, meaningful manner when editors explore the potential of alternating shot types and their placement within a scene.

**Cross-cutting or parallel editing** Alternating between shots of action located in two or more different locations suggests to the audience that the actions are linked or connected in some way. Time is manipulated, as parallel editing is interpreted as simultaneous action by the audience.

**Cut-in/cutaway** A cutaway is an instant shift in continuous filmed action to cut away and reveal something else outside the frame. The shot is usually followed by a return to the first shot. A cut-in will cut to a closer perspective of the action within the initial frame. A cutaway to a secondary object or action can be used to hide continuity flaws or mismatched action. Both can be used to avoid jump-cuts and obvious gaps in footage.

## ALTERNATIVES TO CONTINUITY EDITING

Challenging traditional filmmaking techniques and intentionally breaking the rules of continuity editing can result in the production of thought-provoking and potentially groundbreaking work. Experimenting with production style, early surrealist and French new wave filmmakers drew attention to their work through the intentional rejection or

manipulation of continuity norms. Inspired by these innovative approaches, contemporary filmmakers continue to challenge audiences' expectations of the film form by pushing the limits of editing approaches to produce highly stylised works.

Films that challenge traditional continuity norms may use some of the following techniques to experiment with production style:

- Frequent use of transitions for visual effect.
- Incoherent juxtaposition of images to provoke particular intellectual ideas or responses.
- Manipulating narrative chronology – for example, using non-linear structures or circular narratives that challenge the audience's expectations of narrative progression.
- Crossing the action axis and violating the 180-degree rule – for example, making unexpected changes to the background.
- Using jump-cuts – that is, deliberately and abruptly removing unwanted footage without cutting to distract the audience from the jump in action.

### ASSOCIATIONAL EDITING – MONTAGE

Montage is a powerful and persuasive editing technique in which individual images are assembled and juxtaposed side by side to convey complex ideas, resulting in highly expressive and thought-provoking sequences. Early Soviet filmmakers of the 1920s believed that editing should exploit the differences between shots to produce new meanings. Through a collision of images the audience is challenged to interpret the different images and associations between them. Montage can also be used as a narrative device to manipulate the time and duration of a scene, enabling different perspectives of the action to be depicted in a dramatic and engaging way.

#### YOUR NOTES

