A Scholarly Project: Film as an Introductory Academic Literacy

Johanna Schmertz

> Our colleges and universities, by and large, have failed to involve basic writing students in scholarly projects, projects that would allow them to act as though they were colleagues in an academic enterprise. Much of the written works students do... places them outside the working discourse of the academic community... (Bartholomae 11).

Students who arrive in basic writing classes are often "burnt-out" on instructional methods that have failed to work as well as they should. Making matters worse, students are sometimes kept from the real work of the academy while they are in this transition, confined to writing personal narratives, or, worse, writing "practice" paragraphs on unrelated topics. They do better with teaching approaches that do not treat them and their knowledge base as deficient, approaches that challenge them to embrace academic ways of thinking and writing as exciting and useful.

In this essay, I contend that learning any academic discourse involves learning to think critically and rhetorically, and that film in particular works especially well to introduce students to academic discourse—partly because it is fresh and partly because students already know something about it. In a class that uses film in the ways I will discuss here, basic writing students can begin to see their understanding and appreciation of film as an academic asset. The awareness of film they bring to the basic writing classroom can be added onto, so that students begin to see what it

means to share in a professional, specialized academic language. Their familiarity with film—a kind of shared, "lay" literacy—becomes an important resource that enables them to speed up their acquisition of a more professional, academic film literacy. And when they join this new discourse community, students become more aware that there are different levels of discourse, and that a way of communicating is also a way of seeing and representing reality. In short, when we encourage students to undergo a process of de- and re-familiarizing themselves with a medium they've known all their lives, we ask them to engage in the kind of intellectual "project" that will prepare them to understand the value of academic disciplines as different rhetorics of reality.

In "Inventing the University," David Bartholomae suggests that all students enter the university as novices, novices who are expected to think and behave as members of a number of disciplinary communities long before they know the rules, codes, and expectations of those communities. Success depends on how well and accurately the student imagines those communities, and basic writers should be encouraged to imaginatively construct those communities from the beginning. Agreeing wholeheartedly with Bartholomae, I hope to show that a student's willingness to try on an academic discourse during a freshman writing course may ultimately matter more than the degree of writing skill she or he presents at the outset of that course. In this essay I will discuss two case studies: "Carrie," a fairly adept writer, and "Chuck," a student who had been required to take developmental classes in reading and writing prior to his arrival in the freshman composition course they both took with me. Counter to what one might expect, Chuck did better than Carrie on a film analysis paper because the assignment was able to provide him with a clear academic purpose and vocabulary. He was able to think critically and analytically about the rhetoric of film and to arrange and develop his findings in effective ways. The teaching strategies I describe below, which were focused on enhancing students' film literacy, provided him with a disciplinary language—or, in

Bartholomae's terms, a "project to participate in"(17). This sense of having a real, purposeful academic project transformed his writing, helping him to develop his work in ways persuasive to university audiences.

Teaching a Basic Film Literacy

Students, including basic writers, already possess a "lay" literacy of film gained by watching television and film for most of their lives. And they are increasingly literate now that digital cameras and editing technologies have entered the mass market. But their literacies remain more tacit than explicit because film, more than any other medium, works within a rhetoric of transparency that veils its own mechanisms and technologies. As the medium of film evolved over time, the camera's job became to make itself invisible and to merge with the naked eye. The camera's presence in the midst of what it films guarantees a certain unmediated authenticity to the resulting filmed product, and conventions of continuity (developed largely by D.W. Griffith in the early days of the medium) mean that the filmed image is carefully framed, processed, and edited in ways intended to verify the authenticity of the image and mimic the natural perceptions of the eye (Chatman; Pudovkin). The result is that we can read film without realizing we are reading through a set of complex conventions.

A more sophisticated way of reading film is available, however, one which, I would argue, mirrors the sort of literacy students take on when they learn to read the world through any academic discipline. When students learn to read something as familiar as film through a new, more specialized lens, they are doing the work of the university. To the extent that an academic discipline is a rhetoric of reality, students will more successfully "invent the university," in Bartholomae's terms, if they are aware that it is composed of multiple rhetorics. As we will see later, students who have developed an understanding of the rhetorical features specific to film will be able to use that understanding to analyze and describe the processes by which directors convey their

meaning and intentions to audiences. Their readings are clearly constructed and mediated by specific academic terminologies and methodologies, and their ability to name these new ways of reading in their writing argues for their ability to take on other disciplinary discourses.[1]

Students can easily be taught to recognize the role of rhetoric in shaping the conventions and technologies of film into a product that they can understand and enjoy: teaching a basic film literacy can take less than a week of class time. And for teachers who see writing courses as a place where students learn to take on specific academic discourses, the ease and speed with which film literacy may be acquired is one of the main benefits of bringing film into the classroom. First, I hand out a basic film glossary on the first day we discuss film and go through a short film clip from a movie they've already seen (usually a segment less than two minutes long and consisting of 20-30 consecutive shots). All introductory film texts have such glossaries, but I have appended my own version to this essay for teachers who wish to replicate my approach. I stop the clip periodically to identify common types of shots—e.g. low angle, crane shot, closeup—pointing to their definitions in the glossary. I explain to students how to tell when a shot begins and ends and help them count aloud to discover how many shots the clip contains. They are generally surprised to find out how many shots can be packed into a minute or so of film. Once students have learned to isolate specific shots, it is relatively easy for them to judge where the camera must be placed to get those shots, and find appropriate terms for those shots. I do the same thing the next class day, but in this case we identify types of sound, using the same film clip and glossary.

At the second half of the second class period, I break students into groups and ask them to "direct" a very short scene set in our classroom. They immediately set to work arguing about how many shots they need to tell the story, where the camera should be placed and angled for each shot, and what should be shown in closeup and in long view. I hear the students use the terminology from the glossary immediately and watch them describe their

"visions" of the scene to each other. The group notetaker writes down a description of each shot in the proper order, being specific because we won't be returning to the scene until the next class period. (That way at least one person in the group has a certain rhetorical exigency to learn how to take clear, elaborated notes.)

On the third class day, each group describes how it would shoot the scene and writes it shot-by-shot on the board, and then we talk about similarities and differences among the groups' renderings of the same scene. The similarities among the treatments (say, using an establishing shot of some sort to set the scene, or a closeup to register a facial reaction) alert students to the rhetorical purpose and function of specific kinds of shots. The differences (say an overhead establishing shot versus a straight-on establishing shot for the same setting) become an opportunity to talk about how a director may achieve the same goal via more than one method. When each group has gone through the shot sequence it has placed on the board, I generally talk about each group's work in terms of the gains and losses afforded by each rhetorical choice, so that each group may be said to have made "correct" choices. For example, I might suggest that what group A gains in crosscutting between the two lines of action, group B achieves through the split-screen method, but that to make clear the two lines of action are simultaneous, both groups must make the choice to sacrifice continuity in the central character's action—a continuity emphasized in group C's extended following shot of the primary character's movement through space. The challenge of imparting the vision in their heads through verbal language alone generally raises important clarifying questions within the group, as each member of the group tries to see the scene through the same imaginary "viewfinder."

The Students and Their Assignment

The lessons in film rhetoric I discuss above were embedded in a freshman writing course that posed the question "What is education?" Hence, in addition to the readings I assigned—most of them from the education section of *Rereading America*—I

showed films related to that topic. *My Fair Lady*, for example, depicts a cockney student (Eliza Doolittle) who apprentices herself to a speech teacher (Henry Higgins) in hopes that learning more upper-class British codes of speech and behavior will help her own a flower shop one day. *Higher Learning* depicts the racial conflicts that can occur when students from different backgrounds come together for the first time on a college campus, and challenges students to think about what the phrase "higher learning" might mean in such a context. The course asked students to recognize both the costs and benefits of receiving a college education, partly as a way of helping students imagine and invent their own future academic careers. When my students completed the week of film literacy I have described, they were ready to embark on a project in close reading and rhetorical analysis in which they put their skills to use. The assignment prompt that follows refers specifically to the movie *Higher Learning*, but students were allowed to pick any movie we discussed in class. ("Carrie," discussed below, picked *My Fair Lady*.)

Film Analysis Assignment

> Isolate a clip of 10-25 consecutive shots from *Higher Learning* that you had an emotional reaction to, or that caught your attention for some reason.
>
> Write a paper about that clip in which you do the following in some fashion:
> —Describe the clip, particularly where it begins and ends.
> —Assume that writer-director John Singleton planned or had a hand in all the details, from the script to the shooting to the soundtrack. Examine the decisions which probably were made in putting together the clip you've chosen.
> —Analyze your reaction to the clip in terms of those directorial choices as well as your own prior feelings or experiences.

A heuristic for generating ideas for this assignment:
(Although you don't have to include answers to all of these in the paper itself, you should be able to answer them for yourself before beginning your final draft .)

1. How does your clip function in its surrounding context—both its immediate context and scenes similar to it throughout the movie? (Hint: think of what would be lost if your clip had been edited out of the movie.)

2. What kinds of shots does Singleton choose? Why are they effective or ineffective? (Hint: play around with other possible ways of shooting the same scene—try mentally substituting closeups for long shots, following shots for overhead shots, etc.)

3. How does the audio portion of the film link up with the images? (Hint: after several screenings, cover or turn off the screen to listen to the sound alone. Make sure you can link changes in the soundtrack to specific images or events.)

You should have a reaction of some sort to the clip, and some questions about why you had the reaction you did. As I said above, your paper must, in some fashion, explain and acknowledge Singleton's choices. However, your reaction may also come partly from your own experiences, beliefs, knowledge, experience of similar films, etc. That is, your reaction—as with anything you read—will to some extent be particular to you and to some extent a result of how Singleton has presented his film.

You will be graded according to how effectively you present and explain the film clip and your reading of it. Imagine a reader outside this class—someone who is curious about

> *Higher Learning* and willing to accept your expertise—as your primary audience.

I used this assignment at a rural school in Oklahoma. The section on film literacy was placed mid-semester, so students had already written several thesis-driven essays on the subject of education. My first analysis of responses to this assignment involves "Carrie," a student whose essay shows little awareness of the rhetorical structures of film. Whether she failed the assignment or it failed her, Carrie does not account for how she is able to see what she sees. As a result, she gets stuck in surface generalizations. She has no "project to participate in," in Bartholomae's terms, and therefore little to say.

Compared to her peers at this school, Carrie has very few problems with mechanics or syntax. She was not required to take the university's developmental reading or writing courses prior to entering my class. Her writing from the beginning of my experience with her showed a certain technical proficiency and accuracy, but little sense of who her audience might be. She begins her film analysis as follows:

> The clips I have chosen come from *My Fair Lady*. It begins at the horse races when Professor Higgins motions Eliza to sit in the chair pulled out for her. He almost has to sit down in the chair himself because Eliza does not realize what to do. Professor Higgins' mother then asks about the weather. Eliza responds with her famous quote that the Professor has taught her to say, "The rain in Spain stays mainly in the plain." After she has said this, Professor Higgins begins to dance. He, himself, does not seem to care what others think of him, he is only worried about his pupil, Eliza. As Eliza continues speaking with others, a young man named Freddie, who is also in the conversation, begins to become very fond of Eliza and thinks she is wonderful. Another lady in the scene speaks of how she hopes the weather will stay nice because her family is so succeptable to influenza.

Carrie continues this paragraph for nine more sentences, reporting all major actions and exchanges of dialog, until she reaches the last action before the horse races—Freddie giving Eliza his betting ticket. Most of the rest of Carrie's paper follows the same pattern she adopts in this first paragraph: a narrative retelling of the scene. She has completed the first objective of the assignment, which asked for a simple description of her chosen clip, but leaves the rest of the assignment unfulfilled.

As we can see from her first paragraph, Carrie begins by diving directly into the assignment, with no introductory framing: "The clips I have chosen come from My Fair Lady." Carrie reports on her "clips" as one might report on an actual incident for a police report, in a clear but mechanical voice. She moves easily among various verb tenses to indicate how various actions relate to one another on a timeline, but is less successful with academic conventions. For example, she has learned the literary convention of using the present tense to describe actions that take place within a text, but her occasional slips into past tense demonstrate some conflict with the convention, and, perhaps, a preference to see the events on screen in the same light as real-life events. The last sentence of Carrie's first paragraph is as follows: "Freddie then *insists* that Eliza should take his ticket, in which he had placed a bet on a horse named Dover. He *explained* that it would make the race much more enjoyable" (italics mine).

Carrie was certainly familiar with the concept of introductions. She had used introductions to lead into a thesis in previous papers in which she was required to follow a basic academic argument format, so the lack of one in this particular assignment is significant. She seems not to have gained the film concepts and terminology covered in the class, concepts and terms required to successfully execute the assignment. This leaves her unable to fulfill the last two objectives of the assignment: "Examine the decisions which probably were made in putting together the clip you've chosen" and "Analyze your reaction to the clip in terms of those directorial choices as well as your own prior feelings or experiences." And her lack of introductory framing suggests that

she does not see herself as addressing a specific audience with specific needs and rhetorical assumptions.

Because Carrie has skipped the analysis aspect of the assignment, she also has difficulty imagining an effective structure for her paper. The second paragraph breaks into her narrative recounting of the scene's events to talk very briefly about the music in the scene; and in third paragraph, Carrie resumes her account where she left off—at the beginning of the horse race. She finishes her account of the scene and then, in her fourth, final paragraph, summarizes why the scene is important to the movie. When she summarizes the scene's importance, she focuses on the film's main characters: "It was necessary for Eliza because she needed to practice what she had been taught by Professor Higgins, before she went to the Embassy Ball to pretend she was a Duchess . . . It was as well important and necessary for Professor Higgins teachings. If they had not been at the races, the professor would not have known what to improve on in Eliza's manners when they went to the Embassy Ball" (3). When Carrie talks about what makes her scene "necessary," she talks as if it is necessary for the characters—not necessary to the movie. Carrie is really not talking about the scene's importance to the film at all, but rather about the scene as a real "event" that Eliza and Higgins personally needed to undergo.

In general, Carrie's transformation of the scene for the reader misses the assignment's point. What she delivers is an extremely accurate report on the events transpiring on screen—succeeding in imagining an audience who has not seen the film, as I suggested, but failing to imagine an audience who might also be genuinely interested in her interpretation and analysis of the scene she discusses. In Bartholomae's terms, Carrie exemplifies the sort of beginning college writer who tries to assume rhetorical authority by imagining her readers as students or apprentices who require a "Lesson on Life," rather than as colleagues in a shared academic discourse (Bartholomae 7).

Based on my examination of Carrie's response to the film analysis assignment, her failure to imagine and interest an

academic reader is the result of her failure to master a particular academic language and way of looking. Carrie has not learned to look through the lens of film literacy, as is evident from the absence of any film terminology or references to the director and his methods or intentions. As I mentioned, she placed out of developmental English because her grammar, mechanics, and basic syntactical fluency are perfectly acceptable. In another academic setting Carrie might have been placed in a developmental writing course at the beginning of her college career because she does not move from the level of description to any larger generalizations about her own reading. Unfortunately, the placement exam at this university mostly stressed surface issues like mechanics, and on those grounds she was deemed ready for college writing.

Fortunately, however, most students hit the key requirements of the assignment. In this process, they join the discourse community implied within its parameters, invoking and addressing an audience aware of how films are composed and interested in their reading of their selected clip. Chuck presents an example of a developmental writer who succeeded and benefited from this assignment. Chuck missed class more than most of his peers. He had been required to take developmental classes in both reading and English prior to taking freshman composition. His mechanical errors are plentiful. It is very unlikely that he has internalized a conception of himself as a successful student; in fact, his diagnostic essay was the shortest in the class and full of scratchouts and scribbles and rewrites that didn't seem to make any improvement over what had gone before.

Chuck's film analysis is poorly proofread-- if he proofread it at all. But he successfully "passes" as a member of an academic community in several ways that Carrie does not. He organizes his essay into readable chunks following a clear pattern of organization—eight short paragraphs averaging seven to ten lines each, taking the reader through the clip chronologically and shifting paragraphs with major shifts in action. Each paragraph describes a specific shot sequence and moves fairly easily between

descriptions of what is happening on screen (where Carrie's analysis left off), identification of the kinds of camera actions and sounds used to convey those events, and speculations as to the reasons for the director's rhetorical choices. He begins his essay with an introduction that explains the rationale and parameters of what he refers to as his "study." It is clear he is responding to an assignment but also that he is also trying to claim that assignment as his own project. This is his introduction:

> I have isolated a clip from the movie "Higher Learning" that I had an emotional reaction to, and because it caught my attention. The clip that I have chose starts when Remy [a college student who has become a white supremacist] fires the first gun shot at the peace rally from the roof of the building. The clip ends when he is finished shooting at the crowd and he puts the gun down. In this clip their is much drama and sound which the director John Singleton wanted to make it more emotional for the viewer.

Unlike Carrie, Chuck has an introduction, and it introduces his paper, not just the clip. When he talks about the clip, he discusses its purpose within the framework of his paper ("I have isolated a clip . . . that I had an emotional reaction to and because it caught my attention"). And although the assignment does not require one, there is a thesis of sorts summarizing the purpose of the clip within the framework of the movie as well: "In this clip their [sic] is much drama and sound which the director John Singleton wanted to make it more emotional for the viewer." As we see from this concluding sentence to his introduction, Chuck, unlike Carrie, realizes that his audience might need to know who the director is (and therefore that his audience is more than just me). Chuck mentions Singleton by name (Carrie never mentions the director of *My Fair Lady*, George Cukor) and ascribes a purpose to his methods. Chuck also realizes, unlike Carrie, that his audience might be interested in his interpretation of Singleton's choices. He clearly realizes that Singleton's choices

are rhetorical, geared toward producing specific responses in the viewer ("[D]irector John Singleton wanted to make it more emotional for the viewer").

Chuck uses the film terminology he has learned to describe what he sees, but he does not let it overwhelm the description of the events on screen and their significance. In Chuck's description of the clip he has chosen, the characters, the viewer, the camera, the sound, and Singleton himself are all protagonists of sorts in creating the drama that appears on screen. Paragraph five demonstrates Chuck's ease in shifting in and out of multiple perspectives on a scene:

> The next shot is a pan shot which shows the crowd from an aerial perspective running and screaming around the Columbus Statue. Malik carries Deja behind the statue to hide from the gun shots. He looks down at her and he can tell she is hurt badly. The camera goes back to Malik in an angle of frame looking up at him. He has blood all over his shirt and he is looking around for help. The next shot shows Deja coughing up blood which I think added a little more to the severity of the situation. The music in the back ground is a really dreary and the screaming is muffled. Malik leans down and holds Deja, with her head shaking back and forth. Malik leans back and looks down at her as she gasps for air she screams in a leery voice, why? The music changes key to a low note and I think Singleton wanted you to think about what this whole thing was over.

The verbs in Chuck's writing are not restricted to the actions of the characters in the scene he describes, as was the case with Carrie. Instead, rhetorical/technical elements involved in depicting the characters become agents of the action. The camera "goes" back to Malik and is "looking up" at him; the shot "shows" the crowd, or Deja; the music "changes" key; Singleton "wanted" his audience to respond in a specific way.

Over the course of the semester, Chuck was slow to adopt some of the traditional structures of academic argument, specifically the necessity to isolate and develop specific claims. Chuck's previous paper before this film analysis was chaotic, and I required that he rewrite it because he had failed to organize it into paragraphs. But for this assignment, he has no problem finding a logical structure and isolating his points within that structure. Although Chuck goes through his selected clip in the order in which Singleton presents it, as Carrie did, he reorganizes it to some degree as well, considering the needs of the reader and the necessity to be selective in his description. He knows that it is not enough to describe Singleton's arrangement of the text; he must rearrange Singleton's arrangement, focusing on specific shots and aspects of sound that tell his version of the story best. Chuck seems to have made great strides in developing and elaborating on specific claims. His film analysis makes and fleshes out claims better than any of his previous papers did, even though he structures the paper to follow the clip's own narrative.

In spite of the fact that Carrie writes with ease and fluency, she does not use the assignment to engage with any specific academic audience. In contrast, Chuck's writing registers a struggle. Yet he manages many academic moves that Carrie does not, successfully imagining a way of talking appropriate to academic communities. He can think through the "lens" film literacy has offered him and talk coherently and persuasively about what he has discovered through that lens. In a way, Chuck did no more than follow the assignment as instructed. The academic discourse he employs emerges naturally from the assignment's parameters. Still, I think the assignment gives him more than just a way of looking and a way of structuring his essay. It enables him to make a contribution of sorts, a way of discovering and transmitting that discovery. I do not know if what he learned helped him when he received less structured writing assignments in future classes in his major. (I now teach at a different university). But I do know he at least had the experience of taking an academic stance, and that that stance was made easier for him by the fact that film was the subject under analysis.

Conclusion: Building Bridges into the University

In her 1998 *College English* essay, Winifred Wood discusses a WAC writing class in which she used film to shift her intermediate-level Wellesley students from the perspectives of the lay viewer to those of the professional film critic. Through the course of the semester, Wood's students learned to see movies as "authored" texts informed by specific conventions and ideologies. As they gained more knowledge of film studies as a discipline, they "experimented in their writing with different critical distances, and with a variety of languages," ultimately adopting the stance of informed film critics (298). The excerpts of student writing Wood provides her readers show a critical sophistication unusual in college students (even students at Wellesley).

As useful as film may be in a WAC setting—and Woods' account is quite convincing—we should not overlook film's potential for teaching beginning writers (Schmertz 2006, 2007). Developmental writing students, in particular, may be able to analyze a film text as successfully as the rest of their freshman peers can. Chuck's success was replicated later, at the university where I currently teach. I gave students enrolled in a linked course in developmental writing and reading the same three-day exposure to film I've described above, this time using a film they chose for themselves (*Home Alone*, a bit to my chagrin). Students wrote a paper analyzing self-chosen clips from that movie, and all were able to analyze individual shots, describe how those shots contributed to the clip's rhetorical effectiveness, and link their clip to the larger framework of the film. Like Chuck, they used the terms and methods they had learned in their three-day crash course as organizing principles for their papers. In addition, they mentioned director John Hughes frequently and tied his choices—such as specific camera movements and angles or sound linkages—to the rhetorical purpose of their chosen clip. At times, students stretched their written syntax to its boundaries, as they attempted to include everything they saw in sentences that could not fit what they needed to describe. As many teachers of developmental writing have noted, the process of mastering an academic

discourse may mean an increase in surface errors for students. This increase needs to be worked through, rather than seen as a cause for alarm, as the sense of expertise gained from such attempts is important and depends on the challenge a new way of looking presents. Therefore, I saw the packed sentences of my students as clear evidence that they were taking on an academic discourse. And in fact, the struggle to say everything they saw provided students with clear opportunities for revision: students saw their difficulty and worked to make their meaning clear.

When students learn the terminologies of filmmaking, they also learn a way of seeing. Sometimes they "complain"—with some pride—about their new way of seeing, saying that they find themselves unconsciously counting shots or thinking about the placement of the cameras or annoying their viewing companions by talking about film differently. But they also talk of how they have extended their awareness of film conventions into their daily viewing practices. For example, students tell me they now pay attention to how television news footage is selected, shot, and edited in ways that shape how the stories are told. And that may be the point of the specialized discourses of the academy: to bring new critical perspectives to the experiences of daily life.

Notes

[1] Beatriz Amaya-Anderson has recently examined the use of film in the composition class as a tool of "critical academic literacy" (v).

Works Cited

Amaya-Anderson, Beatriz. "Film in Composition: Developing Critical Thinking Skills Through the Study of Film in First-Year Composition." Diss. Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 2008.

Bartholomae, David. "Inventing the University." *Journal of Basic Writing* 5.1 (1986): 4-22.

Colombo, Gary, Robert Cullen, and Bonnie Lisle. *Rereading America: Cultural Contexts for Critical Thinking and Writing*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004.
Chatman, Seymour. "What Novels Can Do That Film Can't (And Vice Versa)." *Critical Inquiry* 7.1 (1981): 121-40.
Higher Learning. Dir. John Singleton. Columbia Pictures, 1995.
My Fair Lady. Dir. George Cukor. Twentieth Century Fox, 1964.
Pudovkin, Vsevolod. "From *Film Technique*." *Film Theory and Criticism*. Eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen. 6th ed. Oxford University Press, 2004.
Schmertz, Johanna. "Exploring Ambiguity and Intention: *Higher Learning* for First-Year Readers and Writers." *Pedagogy* 6.1 (2006): 123-127.
______. "Movies of the Reader's Mind: Re-Mediating Interpretation with Film." *Modern Language Studies* 36.1 (2007): 88-104.
Wood, Winifred. "Double Desire: Overlapping Discourses in a Film Writing Course." *College English* 60.3 (1998): 278-300.

Glossary of Film Terms

Angle of framing: the position of the frame in relation to the subject it shows: above it, looking down (a high angle); horizontal, on the same level (a straight-on angle); looking up (a low angle). Also called "camera angle."

Closeup: a framing in which the scale of the object shown is relatively large: a head seen from the neck up, or an object of comparable size would fill most of the screen.

Crane shot: a shot with a change of framing accomplished by having the camera above the ground and moving through the air in any direction.

Crosscutting: editing that alternates shots of two or more lines of action going on in different places, usually simultaneously.

Cut: 1. in filmmaking, the joining of two strips of film together with a splice. 2. In the finished film, an instantaneous change from one framing to another.

Diegetic sound: any voice, musical passage, or sound effect presented as originating from a source within the film's world.

Dissolve: a transition between two shots during which the first image gradually disappears while the second image gradually appears. For a moment the two images are blended, or superimposed.

Distance of framing: the apparent distance of the frame from the mise-en-scene elements. Also called "camera distance."

Editing: 1. in filmmaking, the task of selecting and joining camera takes. 2. in the finished film, the set of techniques that governs the relations among shots.

Establishing shot: a shot, usually involving a distant framing, that shows the spatial relations among the important figures, objects and setting in a scene.

Eyeline match: a cut in which the first shot shows a person looking off in one direction and the second shows a nearby space containing what he or she sees.

Following shot: a shot with framing that shifts to keep a moving figure on screen.

Frame: a single image on the strip of film. When a series of frames are projected onto a screen in quick succession, an illusion of movement is created by the spectator.

Framing: the use of the edges of the film to select and to compose what will be visible on screen.

Long shot: a framing in which the scale of the object shown is small. A standing human figure would appear nearly the height of the screen.

Match on action: a continuity cut which places two different framings of the same action together at the same moment in the gesture, making it seem to continue uninterrupted.

Medium shot: a framing in which the scale of the object shown is of moderate size; a human figure seen from the waist up would fill most of the screen.

Mise-en-scene: all of the elements placed in front of the camera to be photographed: the settings and props, lighting, costumes and makeup, and figure behavior.

Nondiegetic sound: sound, such as mood music or a narrator's commentary, represented as coming from a source outside the space of the narrative.

Offscreen sound: simultaneous sound from a source assumed to be in the space of the scene but in an area outside what is visible onscreen.

Pan: a camera movement with the camera turning to the right or left on a stationary tripod. On the screen, it produces a mobile framing which scans the space horizontally.

Point-of-view shot (POV): a shot taken with the camera placed approximately where the character's eyes would be, showing what the camera would see; usually cut in before or after a shot of a person looking.

Racking focus: shifting the area of sharp focus from one plane to another during a shot. The effect on the screen is called "rack focus."

Scene: a segment in a narrative that takes place in one time and space.

Shot: 1. in shooting, one uninterrupted run of the camera to expose a series of frames. 2. in the finished film, one uninterrupted image with a single static or mobile framing.

Simultaneous sound: diegetic sound that is represented as occurring at the same time in the story as the image it accompanies.

Sound bridge: at the beginning of one scene, the sound from the previous scene carrying over briefly before the sound from the new scene begins. Alternatively, the sound from the new scene could begin in the old scene.

Storyboard: a tool used in planning film production, consisting of comic-strip-like drawings of individual shots or phases of shots with descriptions written below each drawing.

Take: in filmmaking, the shot produced by one interrupted run of the camera. One shot in the final film may be chosen from among several takes of the same action.

Tilt: a camera movement with the camera body swiveling upward or downward on a stationary support. It produces a mobile framing that scans the space vertically.