



SCREENING  
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I love editing. I think I like it more than any other phase of film making. If I wanted to be frivolous, I might say that everything that precedes editing is merely a waste of time.

# Editing

Stanley Kubrick

Editing is where movies are made or broken. Many a film has been saved and many a film has been ruined in the editing room.

Joe Dante

**An Introduction to Screen Language**

# Editing

- **Editing** is the process of taking individual **shots** and combining them to form **sequences** that, when joined together, tell a screen story that flows and makes sense.
  - The logic of the shots and the flow of the narrative need to have been planned when writing and storyboarding the film.
- Cuts and transitions in films are like written punctuation – they act like full-stops, paragraph breaks and chapter breaks, and give **structure** to the screen narrative.



# Constructing a Screen Narrative

- Screen narratives are created by planning and editing together sequences of shots that follow a system of **active questioning**.
- In other words, each shot **sets a question/builds an expectation** that is then **answered** (fully or in part) by the next shot. Then a new question might be asked.
- In these three shots, active questioning looks like this:
  1. **Q:** Where is the dog going? Why?
  2. **A:** He's bringing someone a letter. **Q:** Who is it?
  3. **A:** It's his owner. **Q:** What's in the letter?
- And so on...



# Editing Activity: Active Questioning

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- Watch the first 45 seconds of this short film:
  - [Archie | CBeebies – BBC](#)
- Play again, freeze-framing on each one of the first ten shots.
- Look at how these match the storyboard.
- What **questions and answers** are being asked and answered in each shot?





1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



6.

BBC



BBC



BBC



7a.

7b.

8.

BBC

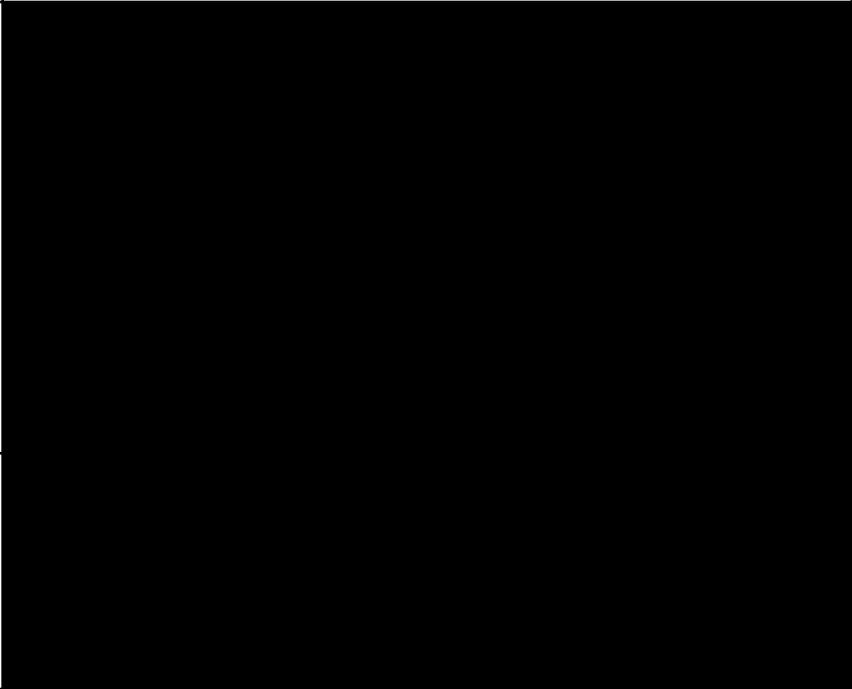


BBC



9.

10.



# The Continuity System

- Active questioning is achieved through the actions/reactions of characters and what the viewer has decided must be happening off-screen.
- It keeps the audience guessing and therefore engaged in the film.
- Active questioning is the basis for the **Continuity System**. This provides a smooth viewing experience (even though the film has been cobbled together from hundreds of clips).
- **Continuity errors** are disruptions in the flow of a scene (e.g. when actions don't match between shots or a prop is in a different place from one shot to the next). These destroy a film's 'reality'.



Lando's badge has switched sides (like Lando did)!

# Editing: Types of Cut



<b>cut</b>	When one shot is instantaneously replaced on screen by another.
<b>hard cut</b>	Cuts from shot to shot without any transition. Most basic type of cut with least meaning.
<b>cross cut</b>	Cuts back and forth between two (or more) scenes happening at the same time in different spaces to tell two simultaneous stories at once. Suggests the two lines of action will connect or collide.
<b>match cut</b>	A cut from one shot to another where the two shots 'match up' somehow.
<b>eyeline match cut</b>	Cuts that match eyelines between characters (e.g. if Sam looks to the right in shot A, Jean will look to the left in shot B).
<b>shot-reverse-shot cut</b>	Usually used for conversation scenes; alternates between over-the-shoulder shots showing each character speaking.
<b>jump cut</b>	A single shot is broken into two parts, removing a piece of footage to quickly give the effect of jumping forward in time or add a sense of speed.
<b>cutaway</b>	Interrupting a continuous action by inserting a view of something else, usually followed by a cut back to the first shot. Can be a sort of commentary to the original scene, usually for comedic effect.
<b>L cut</b>	Viewer hears the sound from the previous shot, even though the film has moved on to another shot. (So, we're looking at clip B but still hearing audio from clip A.)
<b>J cut</b>	Opposite of the L Cut – we're looking at clip A but hearing the new audio from clip B.
<b>montage</b>	A series of shots to show a length of time has passed. Often there will be little or no dialogue/sound but will play <b>non-diegetic music</b> over the sequence.



cross cut



Cuts back and forth between two (or more) scenes happening at the same time in different spaces to tell two simultaneous stories at once. Suggests the two lines of action will connect or collide.

match cut



A cut from one shot to another where the two shots 'match up' somehow.



eyeline match cut



A cut from one shot to another where the two shots 'match up' somehow.



shot-reverse-shot  
cut



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jump cut



A single shot is broken into two parts, removing a piece of footage to quickly give the effect of jumping forward in time or add a sense of speed.

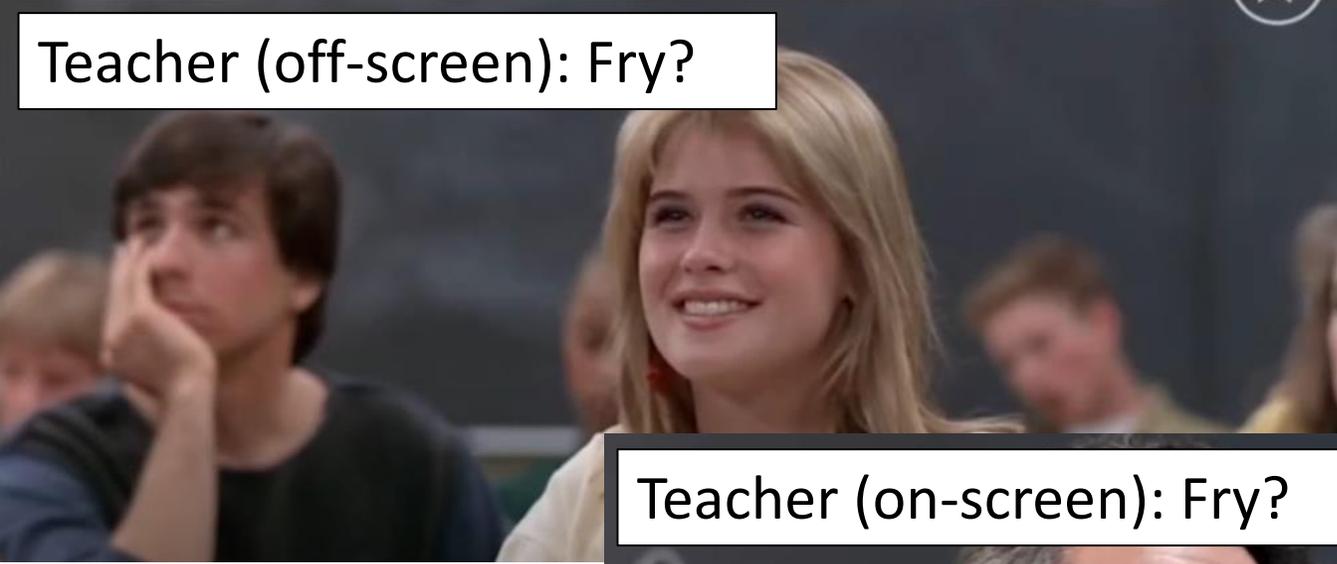




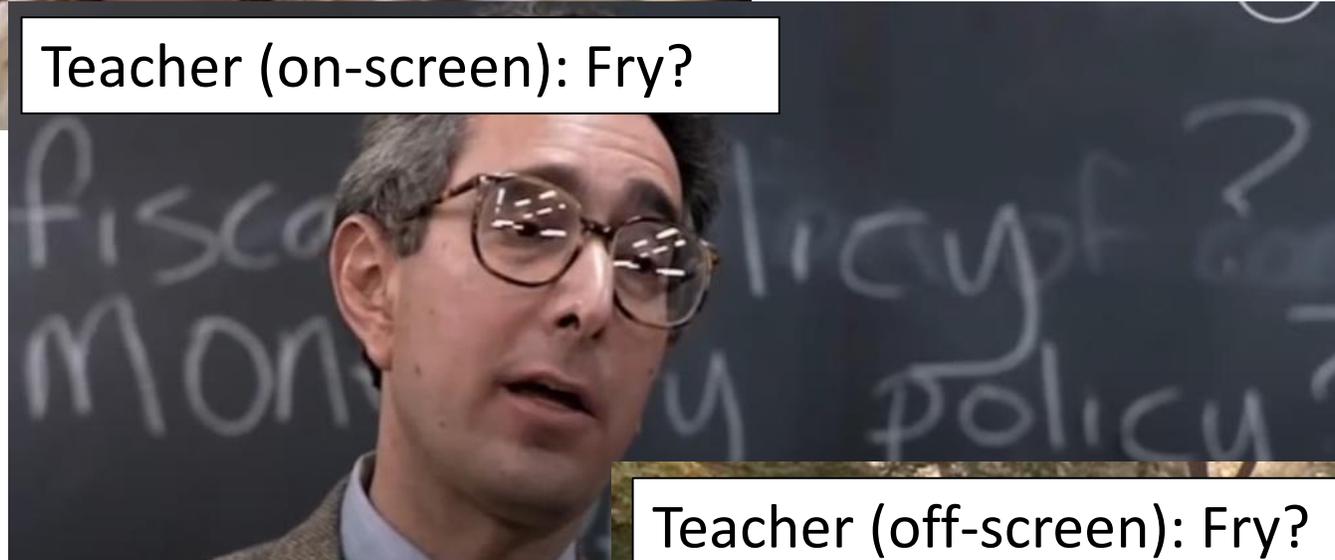
Interrupting a continuous action by inserting a view of something else, usually followed by a cut back to the first shot. Can be a sort of commentary to the original scene, usually for comedic effect.

L cut

Teacher (off-screen): Fry?



Teacher (on-screen): Fry?



Teacher (off-screen): Fry?



Viewer hears the sound from the previous shot, even though the film has moved on to another shot. (So, we're looking at clip B but still hearing audio from clip A.)

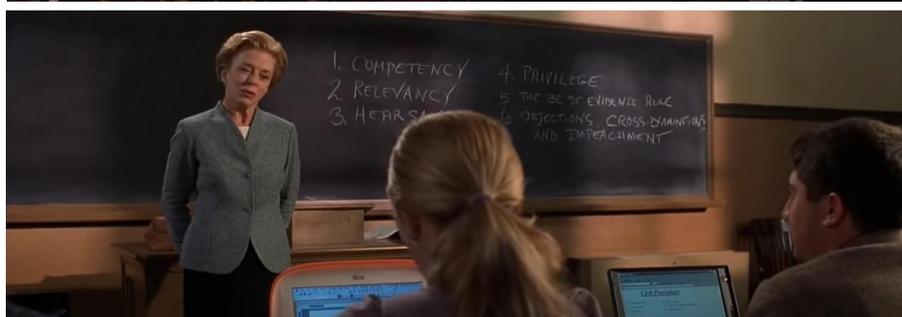
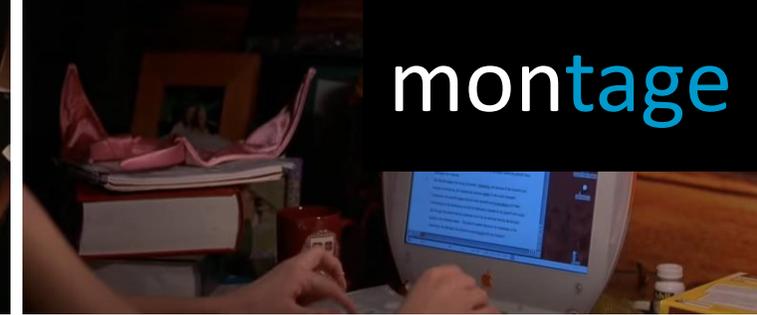
Sound of drumming can be heard

J cut

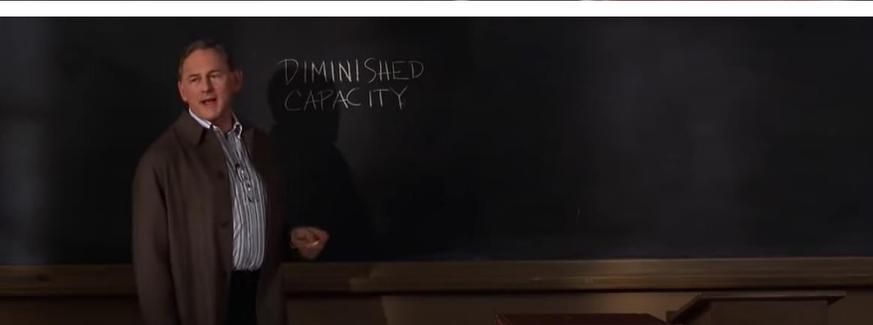
Final drum beat is heard

Opposite of the L Cut –  
we're looking at clip A but  
hearing the new audio  
from clip B.





A series of shots to show a length of time has passed. Often there will be little or no dialogue/sound but will play **non-diegetic music** over the sequence.



[Legally Blonde \(Robert Luketic, 2001\): Montage - Watch Me Shine](#)

# Editing Activity: Cough/Clap Cuts

- Editing is meant to go unnoticed, so it's easy to underestimate how many shots can be needed to make up a sequence or scene.
- Watch one of these film excerpts:
  - 'Jaws' (Steven Spielberg, 1976):  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= 2Ecwm7Alrc>
  - 'The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring' (Peter Jackson, 2001):  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Yy0pPTrHlk>
  - 'Argo' (Ben Affleck, 2012) (from 02:00):  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= 6RGeqNFaQM>
- Cough or clap every time you see a cut!
- The amount of noise made will give you a sense of how many cuts are in the sequence.
- Now, try to identify **five** different types of cut in the sequence.



# Special Editing Techniques

- Special editing techniques are used to, for example, introduce a new character or a completely new sequence.
- These techniques include:
  - specific transitions (e.g. wipes, dissolves...)
  - changes in the music or soundscape
  - title cards
  - voiceover
- These techniques sneakily tell the viewer that something new is happening, to trust that the new thing will soon make sense and that a new Q&A sequence is beginning.



This is a wipe transition.

# Editing Activity: Adding Special Techniques

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- Download some footage from a film that introduces a new character or situation.
  - You can download most of the films found on Screening Shorts: [Screening Shorts](#)
- Using editing software, add your own special editing techniques that tell the viewer something new is happening:
  - **specific transitions (e.g. wipes, dissolves...)**
  - **changes in the music or soundscape**
  - **title cards**
  - **voiceover**
- You could also do this using the still images from ‘Archie’ (slides 5-6) or ‘Legally Blonde’ (slides 18-19) and writing in what transitions you would use.



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# Other Effects of Editing

Apart from creating a smooth narrative, editing can be used to:

- Draw attention to **important parts of mise-en-scène** (character, prop, element of costume, etc.)
- Establish **place or time** (e.g. by adding an establishing shot of a city or a night sky)
- Create **tension, excitement, shock, surprise, intrigue**, etc.
- Give static scenes (like conversations) some **movement** for interest
- Speed up or slow down the **pace** of the action
- Create or imitate a **mood/rhythm**
- Show **time passing** (e.g. montage)

Many of these effects are created in connection with the film's **camerawork**.



# Editing and Camerawork

- It is most effective to analyse editing alongside camerawork – filmmakers design them together when storyboarding.
- Look at this example from 'The Godfather'. Can you identify the editing technique and camera shots used?



# Editing and Camerawork

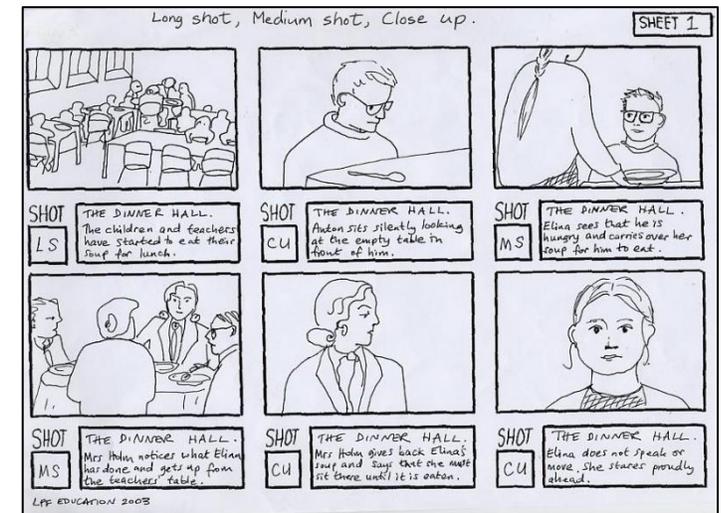
- Shots 1, 2 and 3 are **close-ups**. Shot 3 is a **medium shot**. Shot 4 is a **medium full shot**. The whole sequence is edited using **cross cutting**.
- You now need to consider what each **individual shot** is doing, then the **effect** when they're **combined** in the edit. **Plot** is vital in this process too:
  - The man in close-up is Michael Corleone, who has recently become a mafia boss (or “Godfather”) even though he wanted to lead a crime-free life. He is attending his nephew’s baptism as the baby’s godfather and is reciting his vows to “renounce Satan”. Michael has ordered a series of murders for the first time and we see one of his men shooting some of Michael’s rivals.
- With this knowledge, think of the **effects of each shot** and the effect of how they are **edited together**.

# Example Answer

- The sequence opens with a close-up of Michael's godson being baptised, drawing attention to the baby to emphasise the baby's innocence. By cutting to a close-up of Michael, it creates a contrast between him the baby – one is innocent, and one has organised a series of murders.
- We cross cut to two shots of a murder being carried out: the medium shot introduces the characters but also ensures we can't see who is waiting outside the lift which develops tension; it then cuts to a medium full shot of the characters being murdered by the waiting gunman, allowing us to see the action in full but also giving the viewer some distance from it, as if we're horrified. Cutting back to a close-up of Michael denies him that same distance from the murder.
- By combining all five shots with cross cutting, the overall sense is one of irony, as Michael pledges to "renounce Satan" in a church, in the presence of an innocent child, while simultaneously being part of a terrible crime. We see him be both kinds of godfather at the same time.

# Editing Activity: Shots in Sequence

- Using the pause button, watch and 'transcribe' a short sequence from a film (6-10 shots) by copying each shot off the screen onto a storyboard template.
- Annotate this with notes on camerawork and editing techniques.
- Think about how the shots work together - and apart - to create an effective sequence.
- Question prompts to help can be found here: [Camera and Editing: Shots in Sequence | Screening Shorts](#)




# Editing in Practice

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- Essentially, editing is a **practical** process more than anything else.
- It is really satisfying when you take lots of random shots and put them together in a way that you've chosen, then see it all come together as a whole. And great fun!
- The best way to learn about editing and its effect? Just **have a go!**



# Editing Activities: Practical Tasks

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- Download a film from [Screening Shorts](#) and use the footage to edit a 20-30 second trailer for it.
- Download some footage – or even just some still images – from a film that sits firmly in a certain genre (e.g. romance). Then edit the footage and add transitions, filters, sound effects, music, etc. that changes the genre. Like this very different take on ‘Mary Poppins’: [THE ORIGINAL Scary 'Mary Poppins' Recut Trailer - YouTube](#)



# Credits

Resource developed by Gail Robertson on behalf of Screen Scotland.

For more information on Film Education resources and opportunities, go to [Home | Screen Scotland](#).

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