INTRODUCTION TO FILM AND MEDIA STUDIES:

EDITING
WHAT IS FILM EDITING?

FILM EDITING is part of the creative post-production process of filmmaking. The FILM EDITOR works with the raw footage, selecting shots and combing them into sequences to create a finished motion picture. An EDITOR must work to create effective FILM TRANSITIONS, which are techniques used to move from one shot to the next to convey a tone or mood, suggest the passage of time, or separate parts of the story.

FILM EDITING is often referred to as the “invisible art” because if an EDITOR is particularly talented, the viewer can become so engaged that he or she is not even aware of the editor’s work. The FILM EDITOR must know how to tell a story. EDITORS select sounds and images from all the film that has been shot and arrange them to create the final version of the film. They also plan how one shot will be transitioned to the next. He or she works creatively with the layers of images, dialogue, music, pacing, and actors’ performances to “reimagine” and even rewrite the film to craft a cohesive whole.
EDITOR’S CUT

There are several editing stages and the EDITOR’S CUT is the first. An EDITOR’S CUT (sometimes called the ROUGH CUT or ASSEMBLY CUT) is normally the first pass of what the final film will be when it reaches theaters. Prior to cutting, the EDITOR and DIRECTOR will have seen and discussed DAILIES (raw footage that is shot each day) as the film shooting progresses. Screening DAILIES with the DIRECTOR gives the EDITOR an idea of the DIRECTOR’S intentions. The EDITOR’S CUT is typically longer than the final version of the film. The EDITOR works with the DIRECTOR to refine the cut as shooting continues, and often the editing process can go on for months to a year beyond the shooting of the film.
DIRECTOR’S CUT

When shooting is finished, the DIRECTOR can then turn his or her full attention to the collaborative process and work with the EDITOR to refine the cut of the film. This is the time that is set aside for the EDITOR and DIRECTOR to mold the EDITOR’S CUT to fit the DIRECTOR’s vision. DIRECTORS receive a minimum of ten weeks after the completion of shooting to prepare their first cut. During this process, scenes and shots are re-ordered, removed, shortened and otherwise altered. If the DIRECTOR and EDITOR discover problems (like plot holes, missing shots, or acting concerns), there is then time to re-shoot necessary scenes.
FINAL CUT

After the DIRECTOR has had his or her chance to oversee a cut, the subsequent cuts are supervised by one or more PRODUCERS who represent the production company and/or MOVIE STUDIO. After that collaboration is complete, the EDITOR returns to the studio to create the FINAL CUT, which is ultimately what is released in theaters.

There are sometimes conflicts between the DIRECTOR and the PRODUCER / STUDIO (when the DIRECTOR’S VISION would be compromised by the STUDIO’S goals). In fact, in some (rare) cases, this conflict cannot be resolved and the use of the “ALAN SMITHEE” credit comes to play. This director credit signifies when the DIRECTOR no longer wants to be associated with the final release.
FILM EDITING TERMINOLOGY: THE CUT

A **CUT** is the most basic and common type of FILM TRANSITION is the CUT. A cut happens when one shot instantly replaces another. It is an abrupt visual transition created in editing. Cuts are so widely used that feature movies normally count thousands of them.

Cuts are essential for the effects of juxtaposition – for viewers to establish meaning. Although most CUTS exist simply for a technical need, the abrupt replacement of one shot by the other demands a certain interpretation from the viewer.
FILM CUTTING: EXPLAINED BY ALFRED HITCHCOCK
Film Editing is:
• creation
• manipulation
• juxtaposition
EFFECTIVE EDITING

A good edit should

1. elicit / convey appropriate emotion to add to the storytelling.
2. maintain continuity in terms of storytelling
3. use eye trace (where the viewer’s eye goes) appropriately to ensure the viewer is not confused, strained, or disoriented.
4. maintain 2-dimensional plane of screen and 3 dimensional space of action.
CONTINUITY EDITING is editing that creates action that flows smoothly across shots and scenes without jarring visual inconsistencies. This type of editing establishes a sense of story for the viewer.
The 180 DEGREE RULE is a basic guideline regarding the on-screen spatial relationship between a character and another character or object within a scene. An imaginary line called the AXIS connects the characters, and by keeping the camera on one side of this AXIS for every shot in the scene, the first character is always FRAME RIGHT of the second character, who is then always FRAME LEFT of the first. The camera passing over the AXIS is called JUMPING THE LINE or CROSSING THE LINE.

With the 180 DEGREE RULE, the viewer rarely experiences any sense of spatial disorientation. CONTINUITY EDITING ensures the viewer never feels confused.
180 DEGREE RULE

LINE OF ACTION (180 degree Rule)

Cam A
Cam B
Cam C
Cam D

Crossing the line
Line of action

Kane

Cam B
Cam C
Cam D
“CROSSING THE AXIS”

The most common exception for violating the 180 DEGREE RULE, a technique known as “CROSSING THE AXIS,” is for “EFFECT.” For example, in a chase scene, the 180 DEGREE RULE is violated to leave the audience puzzled.
A CUTAWAY SHOT (sometimes called an INSERT SHOT) is when the EDITOR cuts away from the primary subject to something the filmmaker has decided is equally or more relevant at that time. The EDITOR uses this shot to add interest, pick up pacing, establish context, and develop meaning.
CUTAWAY: REACTION SHOT

NOTE: The specific CUTAWAY SHOT that showcases a character’s reaction to something is termed a REACTION SHOT.
EYE-LINE MATCH TECHNIQUE

EYE-LINE MATCH is a FILM EDITING TECHNIQUE associated with the CONTINUITY EDITING system. It is based on the premise that the audience will want to see what the character on-screen is seeing. The eye-line match begins with a character looking at something off-screen, followed by a cut to the object or person at which he is looking. This shot is also called a LOOK-OFF SHOT.
EYE-LINE MATCH TECHNIQUE
SHOT REVERSE SHOT
SHOT REVERSE SHOT

A SHOT REVERSE SHOT is a continuity editing technique used in conversations or simply characters looking at each other or at objects. It is a shot showing what the character is supposedly looking at (either a point of view or over the shoulder shot), which is followed by a reverse angle shot of the character themselves looking at it, or of the other character looking back at them.
CROSS-CUTTING

CROSS-CUTTING shots are those in which the EDITOR cuts back and forth between two or more events or actions that are taking place at the same time, but in different places. CROSS-CUTTING is used to build suspense or to show how different pieces of the action are related.

Another term for CROSS-CUTTING is PARALLEL EDITING. Again, this type of editing is a technique of continuously alternating between two or more scenes that are happening simultaneously, but in different locations.

CROSS-CUTTING is a cornerstone of editing that works to mask abrupt changes in temporal (time) and spatial continuity, and enhance narrative.
CROSS-CUTTING
(PARALLEL EDITING)
CROSS-CUTTING (PARALLEL EDITING)
MATCH ON ACTION OR MATCHED ACTION CUT

A MATCH ON ACTION CUT is an editing technique for continuity editing in which one shot cuts to another shot portraying the same action as the subject in the first shot.

This technique creates an impression of a sense of continuity – the action carrying through creates a “visual bridge.”
MATCH CUT
DIALOGUE REFERENT

A DIALOGUE REFERENT CUT is a cut from a character to what he or she is referencing in his/her dialogue.
THOUGHT REFERENT

A THOUGHT REFERENT CUT is a cut showing what a character is thinking.
DISCONTINUITY EDITING

DISCONTINUITY EDITING is a unique editing style in film that is antithetical to that of normal cinema, or CONTINUITY EDITING. In a discontinuous sequence, the filmmaker will deliberately use an arrangement of shots that seem out of place or confusing relative to a traditional narrative.

Russian director Kuleshov was a famous innovator in the DISCONTINUITY EDITING technique. He discovered the cinema’s ability to link entirely unrelated material into coherent sequences. The meaning the audience derived from it was completely invented. He termed the technique “creative geography.”
THE KULESHOV EXPERIMENT

Russian director Lev Kuleshov edited together a short film in which a shot of the expression of a man was alternated with various other shots (a plate of soup, a girl, a coffin, a woman on a divan). The film was shown to an audience who believed the man’s expression was different each time he appeared, depending on what object he was looking at; however, the footage of the man was actually exactly the same each time. Kuleshov used the experiment to illustrate the usefulness of film editing. The implication is that viewers bring their own emotional reactions to sequences of images. Director Alfred Hitchcock explained this editing technique and the KULESHOV EFFECT in the interview shown earlier. He terms this technique “PURE CINEMA.”
THE KULESHOV EXPERIMENT

The audience believed the man first looked sad, then looked hungry (after the image of the soup), then mournful (after the image of the baby in a coffin), and then lustful (after the image of the woman).
MONTAGE EDITING

MONTAGE is a technique in film editing in which a series of short shots are edited into a sequence to condense space, time, and information.

Famous Russian director Eisenstein, a director known highly influenced by Kuleshov and known for establishing the Soviet Montage Theory, stated that “montage is an idea that arises from the collision of independent shots wherein each sequential element is perceived not next to the other, but on top of the other.” It is his belief that the quick juxtaposition of certain shots helps to elicit certain emotional and intellectual responses. The SOVIET METHOD OF MONTAGE includes different types of montages. Three of the most common are the RHYTHMIC, INTELLECTUAL and TONAL.

The American and British term for this technique is MONTAGE SEQUENCE; it is usually used to suggest the passage of time.
INTELLECTUAL MONTAGE

INTELLECTUAL MONTAGE is an editing technique that uses the quick juxtaposition of shots combined to elicit an intellectual/symbolic meaning. In the following example from Eisenstein’s 1925 film Strike, a shot of workers attacked is cut with a shot of a bull being slaughtered creating a metaphor suggesting that the workers are being treated like cattle. This meaning does not exist in the individual shots; it only arises when they are juxtaposed.
TONAL MONTAGE

TONAL MONTAGE uses the emotional meaning of the shots to elicit meaning – to elicit a reaction from the audience. The images often carry conventional symbolism. The film used in the KULESHOV EXPERIMENT is an example of TONAL MONTAGE. Here is one from Eisenstein’s 1925 film: Mourn.
RHYTHMIC MONTAGE

Although MONTAGE is typically DISCONTINUOUS, RHYTHMIC MONTAGE includes cutting based on CONTINUITY EDITING, creating visual continuity from cut-to cut (edit-to-edit).
AMERICAN / BRITISH MONTAGE SEQUENCE
AMERICAN / BRITISH MONTAGE SEQUENCE PARODY
AMERICAN / BRITISH MONTAGE SEQUENCE
A JUMP CUT is a CUT in FILM EDITING in which two sequential shots of the same subject are taken from camera positions that vary only slightly. This type of edit gives the effect of jumping forwards in time. It is a manipulation of temporal space in the duration of a single shot, and fracturing the duration to move the audience ahead. This kind of cut abruptly communicates the passing of time as opposed to the more seamless dissolve, which aims to give the appearance of continuous time and space in the story world by de-emphasizing editing. JUMP CUTS, in contrast, draw attention to the constructed nature of film. The JUMP CUT was first made famous by French New Wave director Jean Luc Godard in his film titled A Bout de Souffle (Breathless).
This cut from shot one to shot two makes the subject appear to "jump" in an abrupt way.
JUMP CUT
SCENE TRANSITIONS

Directors and editors need to carry viewers from scene-to-scene, from sequence-to-sequence. This technique of movement and narrative progression is called a SCENE TRANSITION. These transitions are essential because they represent change, and without change there would be no perception. Film hides its pauses to ensure a steady stream of momentum. It is an act of trickery, and it’s very tricky to do effectively. The director and editor do not want to fatigue the viewer, but they also do not want to place distracting breaks in the story.

There are many different types of SCENE TRANSITIONS.
SCENE TRANSITIONS: THE DISSOLVE

The DISSOLVE is an editing technique where one clip seems to dissolve, or fade into the next. As the first clip is fading out, getting lighter and lighter, the second clip starts fading in, becoming more and more prominent. The process usually happens so quickly and so subtly that the viewer isn’t even aware of the transition.
A FADE occurs when the picture gradually turns to a single color, usually black, or when a picture gradually appears on screen. FADE INS generally occur at the beginning of a film or scene, while FADE OUTS typically occur at the end of a film or scene.
SCENE TRANSITIONS:
THE WIPE

The WIPE TRANSITION is the opposite of the DISSOLVE in that it draws attention to itself.
SCENE TRANSITIONS: IRIS WIPE

An IRIS WIPE is a wipe that takes the shape of a growing or shrinking circle. It has been used frequently in animated films, like in Looney Tunes or Mickey Mouse cartoons, to signify the end of the story.
SCENE TRANSITIONS:
IRIS WIPE

Here’s another famous use of the IRIS WIPE, this time used to open a scene.
FAMOUS EDITING
SEQUENCES:
NORTH BY NORTHWEST
FAMOUS EDITING SEQUENCES:
THE BIRDS (1963)
FAMOUS EDITING SEQUENCES: THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS