

Editing Techniques

Learn the key principles use in editing.

Introduction

The **Key Editing Techniques** editors need to know for creating interesting stories in Post Production:

- Enhancing the **mood**
- Convey the **passing of time**
- Speed up or slow down the **tempo**
- convey the **interaction** between two characters
- Promote a particular **style**
- emphasis a **genre**

Topics

Editing Techniques:

1. Transitions
2. Editing Styles
3. Montage Editing

1. Transitions

The main purpose of editing is to create **pace**, **coherence**, **continuity** and **tempo** in your story:

- switching between **long shots** and **slow shots**
- conveying the **interaction** between two characters
- Enhancing the **mood** of the scene

1. Transitions

In **video** editing a **transition** is the joining between two shots or clips with each other:

- **Transitions** can be instant or gradual
- Depends on the context of the exchanged clips
- Some indicate begin or end a scene
- Some indicate the passing of time
- Some give meaning to an action, dialogue or any other event

1. Transitions

There are **5 basic Transitions** used in video editing:

- Cuts
- Fades
- Dissolves
- Wipes
- Flashes

1. Transitions

The **Cut** is the most common type of **Transition**:

- one shot instantly replaces another
- is an abrupt visual **Transition**
- Used to build continuity in a scene to create a “**visual bridge**”
- Deemphasises the edit process

But there are many types of **Cuts** that mean different things.
Do you know any of them?

1. Transitions

Some **Cuts** exist simply for a technical need to establish meaning through narration:

- The **Dialouge Referent Cut** - is used to show what a character is referencing to in their dialogue

Dialouge Referent Cut

- The **Thought Referent Cut** - is used to show what a character is thinking about

Thought Referent Cut

1. Transitions

The **Eye Line Match Cut** uses the characters line of sight, followed by a cut to the object or person at which he is looking:

- It draws the viewers into the scene
- the audience wants to see what the character is seeing
- begins with a character looking at something off-screen then to the object
- This shot is also called a **Look Off Shot**

Eye Line Match Cut

1. Transitions

The **Jump Cut** is used to indicate a **passing of time**

- when two shots of the same image are cut together
- Results in a **noticeable “jump”** in the image on the screen
- may occur either **with** or **without** a change in camera setup
- May manipulation of temporal space in the duration of a shot
- May **emphasise** or **de-emphasise** the editing process

Jump Cut

1. Transitions

The **Action Match Cut** is a transition that occurs during an action:

- A motivated edit with visual and auditory cues
- Holds the viewer eyes in the same place
- Enhances continuity of a scene
- Deemphasises the edit

Action Match Cut

1. Transitions

The **Graphic Match Cut** are shots linked by their graphic qualities:

- does not depend on the character, place or time
- are constituted by similarities in shape, colour
- and/or composition between the two shots
- Used to seamlessly transition between two shots
- mask abrupt changes in **temporal** (time) and (spatial space) continuity

Graphic Match Cut

1. Transitions

Also **Cut on Action** are transitions used to an action to enhances the continuity of a shot:

- parts of a character's action is removed
- The audience assumes the before and after
- We assume the series of events have taken place all at once
- Deemphasises the edit

1. Transitions

The **Cut Away Shots** direct audience from the primary subject to something equally or more relevant:

- May also be used on actors as a **Reaction Shot**
- Used to pick up pacing or establish context, develop meaning of an action
- Action begins in the first clip then there is a cut “**away**” to something else
- followed by a cut back to the action

Cut Away Shot

1. Transitions

The **Reverse Shot** is also a type of **cut** that alternates between two shots framed from reverse angles.

- Often used to depict conversations between two people
- actors will never speak directly to the viewer
- show who the character is looking at
- either over the shoulder shot
- Slightly beside a **POV**

Reverse Shot

1. Transitions

A **Fade In/Out Fade** is when a dark screen gradually reveals an image or an image disappears as the screen darkens:

- Is a very common scene transition
- **Fade Ins** generally occur at the beginning of a scene
- while **Fade Outs** typically occur at the end of a scene
- If used during a scene may also signify the passing of time

1. Transitions

The **Dissolve** technique is when one clip seems to dissolve, or fade into the next.

- Like the **Fade In/Out**, **Cut A** fades out, **Cut B** fades in
- usually happens so quickly the viewer isn't aware
- for a moment the two images blend in superimposition
- Can also be used in a montage sequence
- Can both emphasise or deemphasise the editing process

The Dissolve

1. Transitions

The **Wipe** transition is not as commonly used unless you are George Lucas:

- the opposite of the **Dissolve**
- As **Cut B** wipes or advances into the frame, it replaces **Cut A**
- it draws attention to itself as a line passes across the screen
- generally occurs at the beginning or end of a scene
- It emphasises the editing process

The Wipe

1. Transitions

Light Flash transition quickly dissolves the screen to white (or another colour) for a fraction of a second so it resembles a camera flash often used:

- as a novelty effect
- Mostly used in wedding video montages and reality TV interviews
- to transition from moving images to a still pictures
- in sports videos usually timed with a sound

1. Transitions

Other **Transition** effects used in video editing include:

- colour replacement
- animated effects
- Pixelisation
- focus drops
- lighting effect

All of which are really unprofessional and should never be used for anything!

Guided Practice

In your groups find a movie trailer and identify the transitions used:

- Could be one or more of the transitions discussed
- Look for cuts that use graphical matches
- Or cleverly used wipes and dissolves

2. Editing styles

There are many ways to edit a video, deciding on which style to use is the hard part.

Here a few techniques you could use to tell your story:

- **Continuity editing**
- **Discontinuity editing**
- **Ellipses editing**
- **Parallel editing**

2. Editing styles

Continuity Editing uses relationships between shot **transitions** that maintain coherency:

- Traditionally preferred by commercial cinema
- the predominant style of film **editing** and video **editing**
- Thought of as invisible editing
- the creation of a logical continuous narrative
- allows for effortless suspension of disbelief

2. Editing styles

Here is an example from *Back to the Future* (1985):

- 2 characters Marty and Doc are racing against time
- each have their own task
- actions are taking place simultaneously
- The cutting between shots remains coherent

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0U4TWkIGijk>



2. Editing styles

Discontinuity editing is a technique that deliberately arranges clips in a way that seem out of place or confusing.

- is a unique editing style opposite to traditional narrative
- is antithetical to that of normal cinema
- uses a discontinuous sequence
- Made famous by Russian director Kuleshov

2. Editing styles

Discontinuous editing is a unique style that is antithetical to that of normal cinema:

- Shots are deliberately arrangement out of place
- The story becomes confusing or disorienting
- The audience must make their own interpretation of the story based on three factors
 - The images
 - The timing of the image
 - The positioning of the images in relation to each other
- It was made famous by Russian director **Lev Kuleshov (Cool-shov)**

2. Editing styles

Lev Kuleshov (Cool-shov) was a Russian director in 1910s and 1920s who wanted to illustrate the usefulness of film editing:

- performed an experiment on an audience
- a short film was shown to an audience
- It alternated between various unrelated shots
- The audience made their own relationships
- It's known as the **Kuleshov Effect**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_gGI3LJ7vH

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2. Editing styles

The intention of the experiment was to see how audiences perceived the **spatial** and **temporal** relationships between shots:

- Although the actor (Ivan Mosjoukine) has the same expression in each shot
- Audiences believed that his expressions changed in relation to the other images
- The implication was that viewers will interpret a sequences of images based on their own emotional reactions

2. Editing styles

Ellipses Editing is a set of techniques wherein parts of the story are purposely removed:

- **Cuts on Action** – is removing parts of an action are eliminated allowing the audience to fill in the blanks
- **Empty Frames** - is when the frame is “**empty**” of action used as a **narrative device** to create suspense or mystery
- **Temporal Ellipses** - passing of time when a clip fades to black for a period

2. Editing styles

Alfred Hitchcock famously said: “What is drama but life with the dull bits cut out.”

- Filmmaking is the representation of life but with the boring parts eliminated
- Stories must be stripped from all the “dull bits”
- There is no need to show the obvious and the tedious
- There may be instances in which writers and directors overlook this
- The editor will then decide if a potentially boring scene works or doesn't

2. Editing styles

A combination of **Ellipsis** editing techniques can tell a whole story using only fraction of screen time:

- In this scene from **Batman Begins** (2005)
- Bruce Wayne's takes a long journey
- A part of the narrative that should have taken hours or even days
- Is revealed in a minute and a half

Example - Batman Begins



2. Editing styles

Parallel Editing aka **Cross Cutting** is a technique of continuously alternating between two or more scenes:

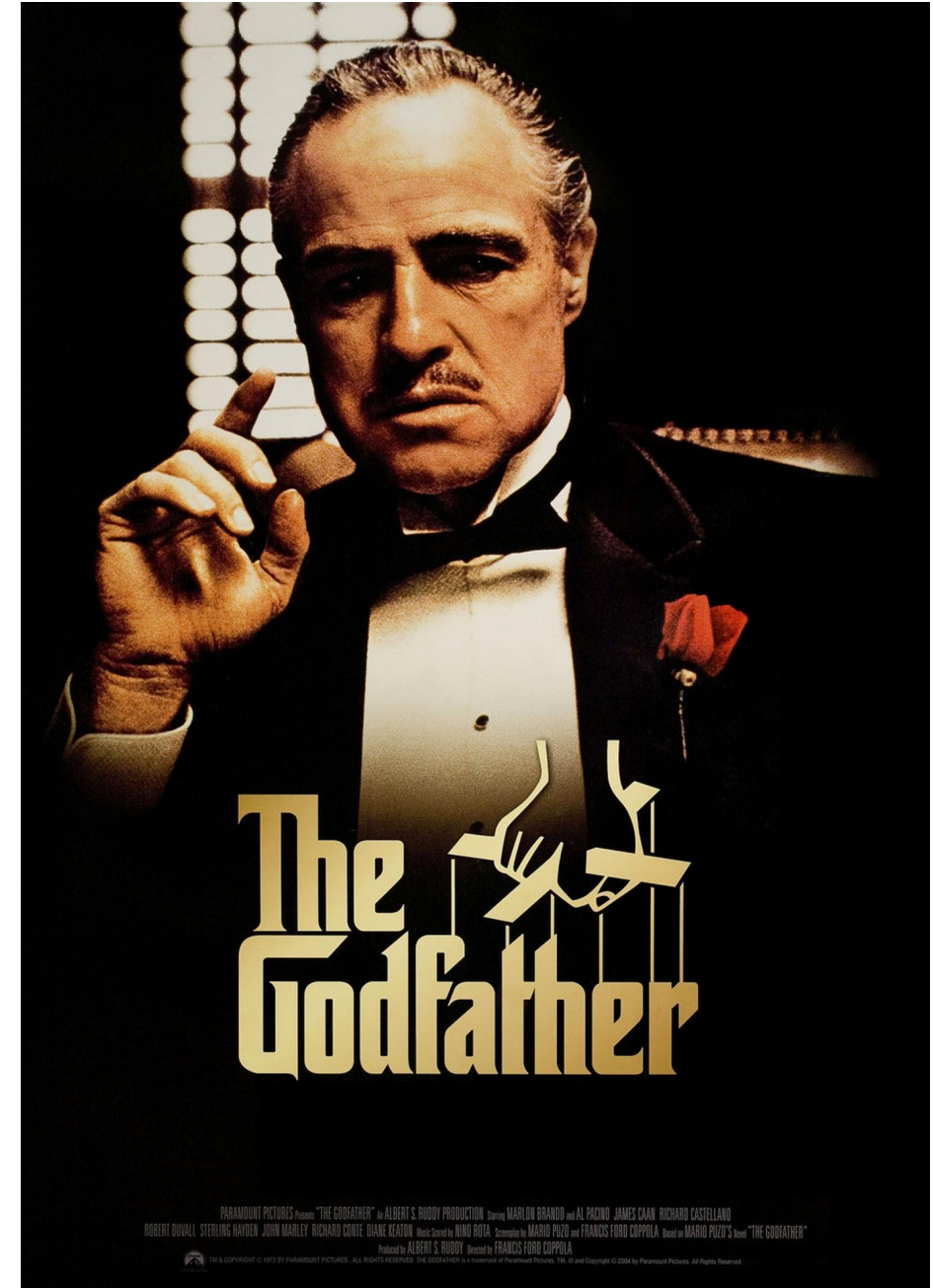
- Add excitement to an otherwise boring sequence
- is often applied to create suspense
- be used to tell two stories at the same time
- actions happening simultaneously in different locations
- actions happening/that happened at different times
- show how different pieces of the action are related

2. Editing styles

In Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* (1972), parallel editing is used to develop the theme:

- the sequence shows the contradictory lives of mafia boss Michael Corleone (Al Pacino)
- Scene A – We see Michael fulfilling his religious obligations by accepting God and renouncing Satan
- Scene B – We see Michael's hitmen murdering his enemies
- The paradox is evident

Example - The Godfather



2. Editing styles

In this scene from *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) parallel editing is used to build tension:

Example - The Silence of the Lambs



Guided Practice

In your groups find a movie trailer and identify the editing style used:

- Could be one or more
- Look for temporal and spatial storytelling

3. Montage Editing

Soviet montage theory is an approach that relies heavily upon editing as its the principal: (**Montage** is French for "assembly" or "editing")

- in the 1920s Soviet filmmakers disagreed about how exactly to view montage
- Various filmmakers put forth explanations of what constitutes the montage effect
- their influences reached commercially, academically, and politically
- So much that that much of montage theory is demonstrated in the majority of narrative today

3. Montage Editing

The production of films and how and under what conditions they were made was of crucial importance to Soviet leadership:

- During the Stalin era a cinematic language was forged
- Films focused on the everyday life of Soviet citizens
- Rather than the individual
- central to the realization of the Communist state
- sought to dismantle notions of artistry above the needs of the people
- provided the groundwork for contemporary editing and documentary techniques

3. Montage Editing

Montage is an idea that arises from the collision of independent shots:

- It was a literal grammar of film language
- A semiotic understanding of images
- each sequential element is perceived not *next* to the other, but on *top* of the other“
- combining shots that are depictive
- single in meaning, neutral in content
- into intellectual contexts and series

3. Montage Editing

Sergei Eisenstein, the Russian film theorist and director famous as a pioneer in the theory and practice of montage, believed that:

- The collision of shots could be used to manipulate audiences emotions
- Like Kuleshov montages could create metaphors
- For example, a shot of a man, spliced with a shot of a piece of bread, could lead the audience to believe that the man is hungry

3. Montage Editing

According to Eisenstein, montage is defined as five methods:

- **Rythmic Montage**
- **Metric Montage**
- **Intellectual Montage**
- **Tonal Montage**
- **Overtonal Montage**

3. Montage Editing

Rythmic Montage The practice of cutting according to the content of the shots, or continuity editing:

- the most commonly used form of montage
- Each shot's length derives from the specific action within the frame
- may also suggest a rhythm or a pattern or even the tempo
- is the content is determined according to the structure of the sequence

3. Montage Editing

In this car chase scene from the *The French Connection* (1971) the rhythm of the movement within the frame is equal to the length of the shots thus generating tension

Example - The French Connection



3. Montage Editing

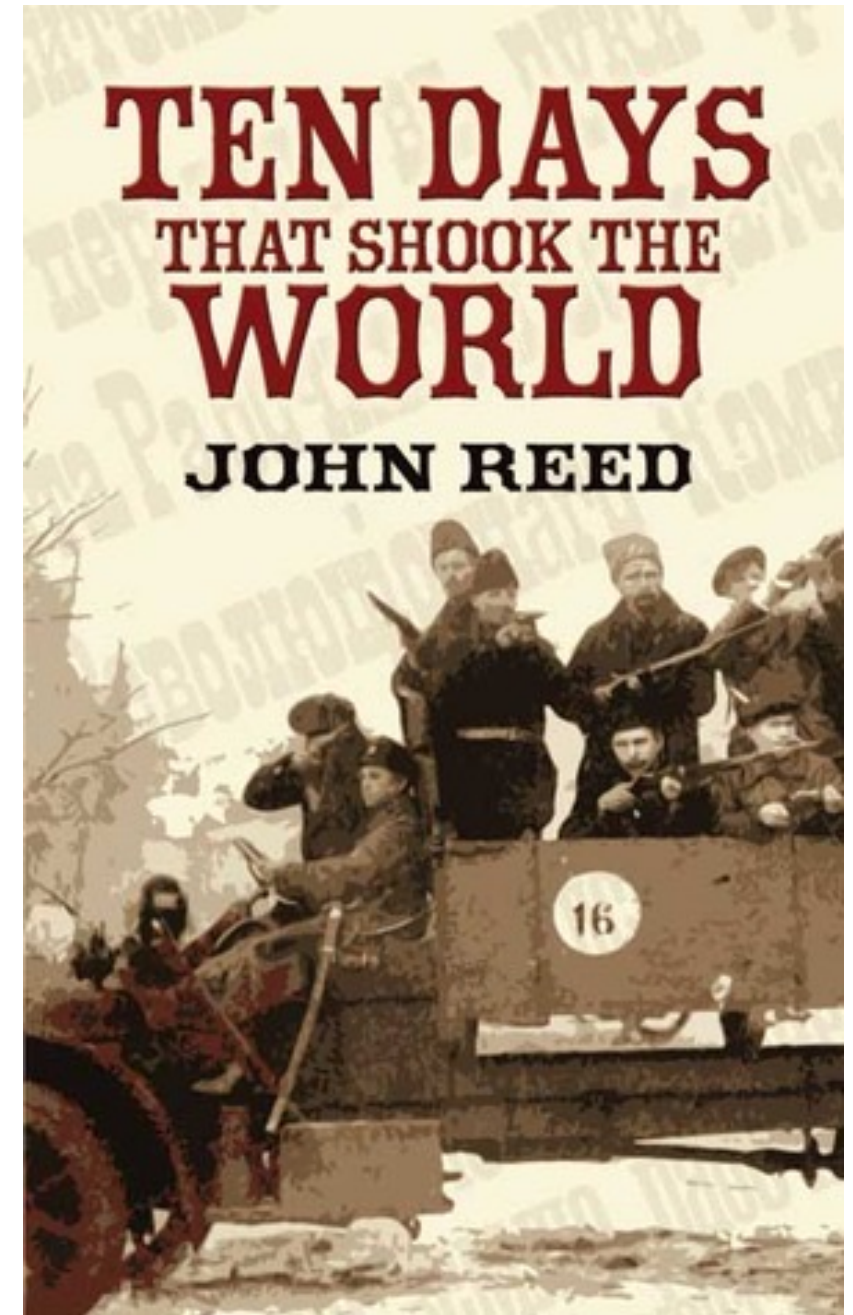
Metric Montage The practice of cutting according to exact measurement, regardless of the content of the shot:

- each shot is of less importance or not as significant than the pacing of the entire sequence as a whole
- The purpose was to elicit audiences most rudimentary and emotional experience

3. Montage Editing

In this scene from “*Ten Days that Shook the World*” (1927) we see shortened close-ups and lengthier wide shots positioned specifically to create tension

Example - Ten Days that Shook the World



3. Montage Editing

Intellectual Montage is a strategy for producing meaning through cultural and literary understanding not present in composite images:

- Eisenstein explored how symbolism could produce an abstract concept
- The following examples of the hieroglyphs are used by Eisenstein to illustrate a process of meaning generation
- eye + water = crying - door + ear = eavesdropping - child + mouth = screaming
- mouth + dog = barking - mouth + bird = singing - knife + heart = anxiety

Example - Intellectual Montage

3. Montage Editing

In this scene from *The Naked Gun 2 ½* (2000) we see many symbols that only have meaning through cultural references.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pDDYLU8SEm0>



3. Montage Editing

Tonal Montage The practice of cutting according to the emotional tone of the piece:

- This type of montage is more subjective
- it's a combination of both metric and rhythmic montage to highlight an emotional theme
- The shots can be matched by both video and aural characteristics

3. Montage Editing

In this scene from *The Lord of the Rings* (2001) we see a Hobbit singing at the moment war breaks out:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N6Sonj3Jyno>



3. Montage Editing

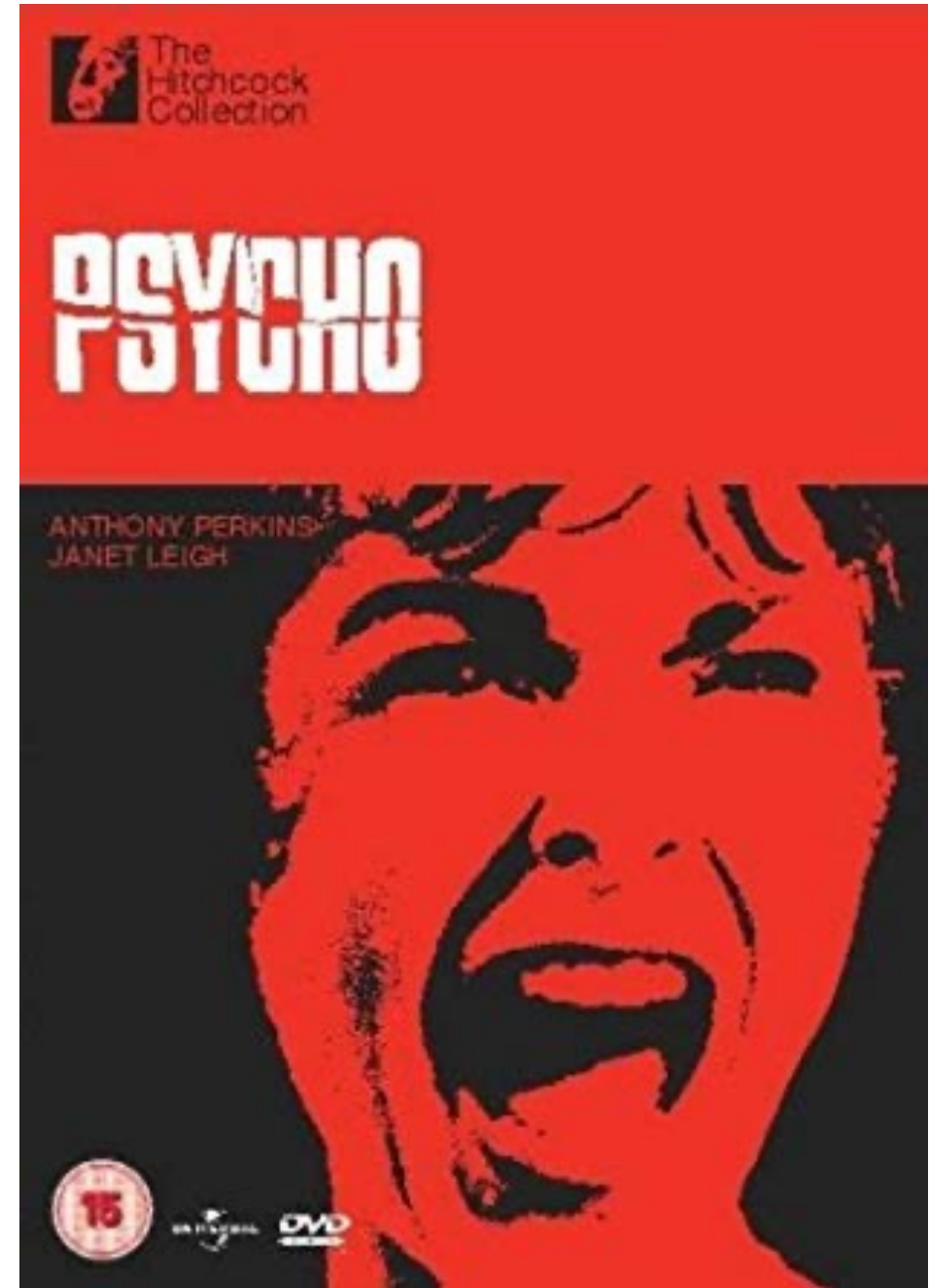
Over-tonal Montage The practice of cutting according to the various “tones” and “overtones” of the shot:

- more abstract than tonal montage
- It is the intermixing of larger themes (whether political or religious or philosophical)
- with the emotional tones of the piece through the use of metric and rhythmic montage

3. Montage Editing

In the iconic scene from *Psycho* (1960) it's what we don't see that creates tension:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2smtCMp2NM4>



Topics

Editing Techniques:

1. **Transitions** – Cuts, fades, dissolves, wipes and flashes
2. **Editing Styles** – Continuity, Discontinuity, Ellipses and Parallel editing
3. **Montage Editing** - Rythmic, Metric, Intellectual, Tonal and Overtonal Montage

Independant Practice

On your own, take 5 minutes to reflect on what you learned today:

- What did you find interesting and why?
- How can you start using this new knowledge?
- From this new knowledge, what new questions do you have?

Resources List

Literature:

- [The Technique of Film and Video Editing. Chapter 3. p386-459.pdf](#)

Video:

- [Eisenstein's Methods of Montage Explained](#)
- [Film: History, Production, and Criticism Crash Course](#)
- [Editing In Storytelling](#)