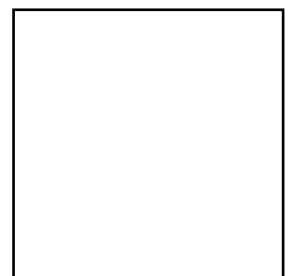
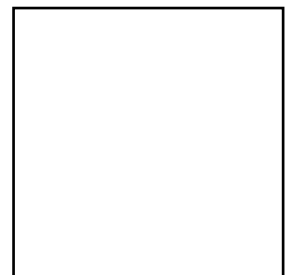
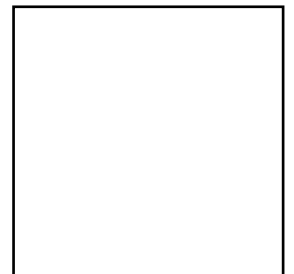


**Nelson Thornes  
Distance Learning**

# **AS Film Studies**

**Yolanda Railton**



Nelson Thornes

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First edition published in 2010. This edition published in 2011 by:  
Nelson Thornes Distance Learning  
Delta Place  
27 Bath Road  
CHELTENHAM  
GL53 7TH  
United Kingdom

11 12 13 14 15/10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Berforts Group

### Acknowledgements

The authors and publishers wish to thank the following for permission to use copyright material:

[www.blu-ray.com](http://www.blu-ray.com) for an extract from its website;  
Cengage Learning Ltd for extracts from Gill Branston and Roy Stafford, *The Media Student's Book*, Routledge (1999);  
Channel Four Television Corporation for extracts from Jon Fortgang, 'Blue Juice Review'; and Jamie Russell, 'Miss Potter Review' on its website;  
Dodona Research for 'Cinemas in the UK, October 1996', *Screen International*, 24.01.97;  
Seth Gilbert for an extract from his article, 'Gaming and Movie Convergence: A Retrospective Timeline', [www.metue.com](http://www.metue.com), 01.02.08;  
Guardian News and Media Ltd for an extract from John Ezard, 'Filmgoing is back in the frame', *The Guardian*, 06.01.01. Copyright © Guardian News & Media Ltd 2001;  
Long Road Sixth Form College for an extract from [www.longroadmedia.com](http://www.longroadmedia.com);  
The New York Times and PARS International for Peter B Flint, 'Alfred Hitchcock Dies: A Master of Suspense', *The New York Times*, 30.04.08. Copyright © The New York Times 1980;  
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Christopher Null for an extract from his article, 'Platoon', [www.filmcritic.com](http://www.filmcritic.com), 2001;  
Robert Payne for an extract from his article, 'The Crying Game', *Jump Cut*, no. 39, June 1994, pp.7–14;  
Dov S-S Simens for an extract from his article, 'Distribution: The Key to Success', [www.moviemaker.com](http://www.moviemaker.com), 30.06.97;  
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Archie Thomas for his article, 'Anatomy of a Blockbuster', *The Guardian*, 11.06.04.

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# Contents



<b>Introduction</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>Module 1 Exploring Film Form: Making Meaning</b>	<b>1</b>
Unit 1.1 Introduction	3
Unit 1.2 Cinematography and Lighting	9
Unit 1.3 Editing and Sound	17
Unit 1.4 Narrative	29
Unit 1.5 Narrative Theory	33
Unit 1.6 Narrative Theory Continued	39
Unit 1.7 Genre and Iconography	43
Unit 1.8 Representation and Ideology	49
Unit 1.9 Stereotypes	55
<b>Module 2 British and American Film</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Module 2A Producers and Audiences</b>	<b>63</b>
Unit 2A.1 The Film Industry	65
Unit 2A.2 Modern Hollywood and the Film Simulation Game	73
Unit 2A.3 Recent History of the Film Industry	75
Unit 2A.4 The Film Audience	81
Unit 2A.5 How to Exhibit a Film and How to Define a Star	87
Unit 2A.6 Producers and Audiences	93
Unit 2A.7 Distribution	103
Unit 2A.8 How British Film Companies Try to Survive	107
Unit 2A.9 Audience Development	115
<b>Module 2B British Film and Stars</b>	<b>121</b>
Unit 2B.1 What Is a Star?	123
Unit 2B.2 Ewan McGregor	127
<b>Module 2C Comparative Study of Two US Films</b>	<b>139</b>
<b>AS Revision Pack</b>	<b>169</b>
<b>Coursework Getting Started</b>	<b>177</b>
<b>Coursework Areas of Study</b>	<b>183</b>
<b>Coursework Presentation Script</b>	<b>209</b>
<b>Coursework Annotated Catalogue</b>	<b>213</b>
<b>Coursework B: Creative Product</b>	<b>215</b>

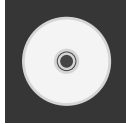
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Writing



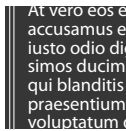
Hand-in activity (either by post or e-mail)



Listening



Discussion



Reading



Internet research or online activity

# Introduction



Film Studies AS is divided into two Modules. Module 1, Exploring Film Form, is the coursework element and Module 2, British and American Film, is a 2 1/2 hour exam. Module 1 is worth 40% (80 marks) and Module 2 is worth 60% (120 marks).

## The coursework in Module 1 is divided into Parts A and B:

- **Part A**—one analysis of how the micro aspects of a chosen extract from a film of the candidate's choice produce meanings and responses (1500 words)
- **Part B**—one creative product based on a film sequence or short film

## The exam in Module 2 is divided into three submodules:

- **Module 2A**—Producers and Audiences
- **Module 2B**—British Film and Stars
- **Module 2C**—Comparative Study of Two US Films

Your Nelson Thornes Distance Learning tutor might provide you with a more detailed schedule for working through the student course materials.

Coursework units are designed to be studied in your own time but with the tutor's guidance. Your tutor might ask you to start on these units at a different stage during the AS course.

## Contact numbers for Nelson Thornes Distance Learning

- **Tel**—01242 267913
- **Fax**—01242 267294

Your tutor may not be immediately available on these numbers, but messages can be left or sent via the fax and will be passed on immediately to your tutor. You will also be given your tutor's e-mail address and can use this for any queries and for sending work through.

## Textbook

The textbook is *AS Film Studies* by Jo Harland and Nick Timmons (Nelson Thornes, 2006).



# Study Calendar

## AS Film Studies | 2011–12

Study Week	Unit start date	Unit	Externally Assessed Assignment	Work due date
		Introduction		
1		<b>Unit 1.1</b> Introduction		
2 3		<b>Unit 1.2</b> Cinematic Codes—Cinematography and Lighting		
4 5		<b>Unit 1.3</b> Cinematic Codes—Editing and Sound		
6		<b>Unit 1.4</b> Macro Elements—Narrative		
7		<b>Unit 1.5</b> Narrative Models		
8		<b>Unit 1.6</b> Narrative Models ( <i>Continued</i> )		
9		<b>Unit 1.7</b> Genre and Iconography		
10		<b>Unit 1.8</b> Representation Stereotypes and Ideology		
11 12		<b>Unit 1.9</b> Creative Coursework—Storyboarding <b>Unit 1.10</b> Creative Coursework—Step Outline <b>Unit 1.11</b> Revision/Coursework		
13		<b>Unit 2.1</b> An Introduction to Film as Industry		
14		<b>Unit 2.2</b> Film as Industry—Modern Hollywood <b>Unit 2.3</b> Recent History of the Film Industry		
15		<b>Unit 2.4</b> The Film Audience <b>Unit 2.5</b> Stars and Exhibition		

Study Week	Unit start date	Unit	Externally Assessed Assignment	Work due date
16		<b>Unit 2.6</b> Producers and Audiences <b>Unit 2.7</b> Distribution		
17		<b>Unit 2.8</b> British Film <b>Unit 2.9</b> Audience Development		
18–22		<b>Unit 2B</b> What is a Star—Ewan McGregor		
23–28		<b>Unit 2C</b> Comparative Study of Two US Films		
29 onwards		Revision		

### Note:

Your Nelson Thornes Distance Learning tutor might provide you with a more detailed schedule for working through the AS Film Studies Student Course Materials. Your tutor might also ask you to insert the title and deadline of all your assignments.

Unit 1 is a coursework unit worth 40% of your mark. It is designed to be studied in your own time, but under guidance of your tutor. Your tutor might ask you to start on these units at a different stage during the AS course, but deadlines must be kept to whatever the work time frame is.

# Module 1 Exploring Film Form: Making Meaning



This module is subtitled 'Making Meaning'. It involves interaction with the medium of film and requires the watching of several film texts. This is a crucial part of the study and the film text should be given equal weighting with other texts of other subjects. Just as you wouldn't expect to pass English without reading any books, you cannot expect to pass film studies without watching any films.

The text should therefore be considered absolutely necessary to the learning process. There are times throughout the guide when a particular film should be watched together as a group; but there are also occasions when, if time is short, these films should be watched in your own time. It may occasionally be necessary to watch the film together but to attempt the activities as homework. This model is the basis for all the coursework.

Assignments are set where appropriate. Your tutor must assess your progress on any practical or creative coursework and allow time to complete your creative product throughout Module 2. Drafts of coursework will be marked and returned as many times as possible so the candidate may gain as high a mark as possible but the emphasis to complete all work on time is on the student.

Film watching is a process that is common to all of us. It is part of our everyday lives and probably has been since we were very young. Even very small children understand what films are about without any formal instruction. This is because it is part of a cultural process that we learn almost by osmosis.

Films make sense to us through an intricate set of codes and conventions that we can translate into meaning. Having grasped this meaning, we respond in some way. For example, we believe or disbelieve, laugh or cry, react or remain indifferent.

Whatever our response, it would be impossible to have one unless we first understood what was being presented. This film language that we are so fluent in is the fundamental basis of film studies. From this we can deconstruct the film process and find out how meaning is created by looking at all a film's elements.

**Read pages 1–3 of your textbook**



---

# Module 1 Exploring Film Form: Making Meaning

## Unit 1 Introduction

---

### Activity 1

Watch the beach scene from the film *Jaws* and write down anything that stands out (for example, music, colour, genre, etc.).



---

You will probably mention whether or not you thought it was good. You may have decided this based on how its elements appeal to you. You will probably have determined what type of film it is—perhaps you like this type of film or perhaps not. The fact that you can establish the type of film is based on your previous knowledge of films. The way you decipher some codes will also be based on your own cultural experience. Use of a specific colour may have relevance; for example, red in a horror picture may symbolise blood or danger.

Besides cultural codes there are also cinematic codes. You may have referred to some cinematic codes without even knowing it. For instance, you may have referred to character types and assessed their place within the story. You may have worked out the setting, time and place. The music may have indicated something to you.

## Activity 2

Watch the rest of the film in Activity 1 and see if your initial responses were borne out by the rest of the film. Did you enjoy it? Was it what you expected? Did you read the film correctly?



Reading cinematic codes is a fundamental skill in film studies and works in conjunction with cultural knowledge, particularly for mise-en-scène. The rest of this topic strips the medium down to these component parts and analyses how each one contributes meaning to the end product.

### **Film form**

We have established that films are made up of codes and conventions, so the next step is to divide these codes and conventions into the two areas that make film form. Take another look at the notes you made in Activity 1. Perhaps some notes refer to the physical aspects of the film and other notes refer to the content, such as the story or the type of film. The physical aspects of the film are micro elements and the content-related aspects are macro elements.

## Activity 3

In groups or pairs, think of what elements are needed to physically construct a film. If you need some help, choose any film and look at the credit list at the end.



Your list may have gone into much more detail, but it will be a list of the micro elements:

- Editing
- Performance
- Cinematography
- Sound
- Mise-en-scène

Most other factors, e.g. special effects, are subdivisions of these main groups. Consequently, film form can be understood as a formal system—what the film is about—and a stylistic system—what the film looks like.

**Table 1**  
*Film form can be understood using a formal system and a stylistic system*

Formal system (macro)	Stylistic system (micro)
Narrative	Cinematography
Ideology	Editing
Themes	Lighting
Concepts	Sound
Genre	Mise-en-scène (Performance)

Let's take a closer look at the elements in Table 1, starting with mise-en-scène.

## Mise-en-scène

### Activity 4



Find a silent movie or watch part of a film with the sound off. Make notes that describe how figures, props, background and costume are used to inform the spectator about the scene you are watching.

**Read pages 26–32 of your textbook**

Now that you understand the meaning and use of mise-en-scène, test yourself on what you have learned. Mise-en-scène is made up of which four elements?

1

2

3

4

## Activity 5

Look at the opening sequence from the film *Pretty Woman* then use the four elements you identified in Activity 4 to explain how mise-en-scène sets up the story and characters. A good way to approach an analysis of mise-en-scène is to remember that nothing in the scene is accidental; everything serves a filmic purpose and is deliberately put there to fill out the picture.



## Activity 6

Figure 1 shows stills from well-known movies. What do the costumes, figure expression and general mise-en-scène communicate to the audience?



**Figure 1**  
*Stills from well-known movies*  
(see handout)

## Activity 7

In groups, imagine you are going to produce a film set about a poor student in his second year of university. He has one younger sister and his father left home when he was ten years old.

- 1 Where would you set it? How would you portray the family situation through the use of mise-en-scène?



## 2 How would you portray poorness?

---

### Activity 8



---

Choose a film sequence that is no longer than seven minutes. Analyse how its use of mise-en-scène creates meaning for the audience.

---

### Summary

In this unit you have covered:

- ◀ Film 'language' and how it creates meaning
- ◀ What cinematic codes are
- ◀ Analysis of mise-en-scène analysis in specific texts
- ◀ Components of film form



---

# Module 1 Exploring Film Form: Making Meaning

## Unit 2 Cinematography and Lighting

---

Cinematography and lighting also contribute to a film's style and communicate a lot of meaning. They work in conjunction with each other, so it makes sense to examine them together. You will sometimes see a credit for a lighting cameraman on low-budget or TV movies.

Remember that cinematography is not just camerawork; it is a unique and highly specialised form of camerawork.

A crossover is starting to occur as some films experiment with different formats, but most films that have been produced for cinema over the last hundred years have been shot on film, usually 35 mm film.

A feature film has multiple images on one strip of exposed 35 mm negative. When the 35 mm negative is printed and projected at speed—24 frames per second for cinema—the human brain interprets the sequence of still images as one moving object, hence the name 'motion picture'.

That is why film-making is very much about photography, hence the importance of lighting. A film can record events and it can shape our views of those events; the way it shapes our views depends on the artistic talent of the director of photography (DoP).

Prints of the previous day's filming are called rushes in the UK or dailies in the US. The film shot in the camera has to be processed or developed in a laboratory before it can be viewed. It is quickly developed overnight so the director can view their work the next day.

With the move to shooting in digital format, overnight developing will become a thing of the past, but film-makers will still need to view rushes the next day so they can spot any problems with the set and the camera process.

### **Read pages 5–15 of your textbook**

The director and cinematographer have to work closely together to get the film in the can. They can only see their work live through the camera, or on a portable screen and under the pressure of the shoot. The editor and the director need to view the rushes with a fresh pair of eyes to look for potential problems. Consequently, much preparation and rehearsal of actors and camera movement, including focus pulling, is done before they go for a take—a take is the real thing.

Lighting is an essential part of this. Shadows in the wrong places can ruin the shot. While watching a film, have you ever noticed the shadow of the microphone, or the boom, in a shot? Or have you seen the reflection of the crew in a pair of glasses worn by a character? Hopefully you haven't, as film-makers are very skilled at avoiding these mistakes. But sometimes they get through and then you may wonder why nobody spotted the mistake, and if they did, why the director didn't reshoot it. On the other hand, you can admire the genius when a great scene comes off perfectly.

Try to think of cinematography as moving photography. You should be able to stop a good film on any frame and find a perfectly composed photograph. Cinematography and lighting create meaning by using conventions, just like mise-en-scène use the conventions explored in Unit 1.1.

Some key features are camera framing and movement, type of lighting and intensity of lighting. Let's take a look at them, one at a time.

## Framing

### Activity 1

Read this quotation from *Film Art* by Bordwell and Thompson: 'In film the frame is not simply a neutral border; it produces a certain vantage point onto the material within the image. In cinema the frame is important because it actively defines the image for us.'

What do you think it means? Discuss it with the rest of your class.



At vero eos e  
accusamus e  
iusto odio d  
simos ducim  
qui blanditi  
praesentium  
voluptatum d

### Activity 2

Take some pieces of paper or card having different sizes and cut out the middle section as if you were making picture frames. Then find some pictures of anything at hand and try placing the frames in different places and in different positions on the pictures. What are the effects of the different frame sizes and how can the meaning of the picture be altered by changing the frame?



In cinema, the edge of the screen marks our frame, but the world of the film does not end there. We can often hear noises off screen and we always assume that characters have entered that screen from somewhere else. Choosing what

to include on a screen or in a frame is an important choice. The choice of cinema frame changes shape depending on the nature of the material to be shown.

The shape of the frame is rectangular and rectangles come in various aspect ratios. The aspect ratio is the ratio of the dimension down the side of the screen to the dimension along the top of the screen. Epic adventures are shown in Cinemascope, a narrow rectangle known as letterbox with an aspect ratio of 1:2.35; social realism and documentaries tend to be shot using an ratio of 1:1.85 or the standard analogue television screen ratio of 1:1.33. One reason is cost and another is that the frame reflects the production values. An epic needs to look glamorous and social realism needs to avoid looking Hollywood.

Actors are often the primary focus of the camera, so the language of framing and camera movement makes reference to the amount of person in the frame:

- **Long shot**—the whole person from head to toe.
- **Medium long shot**—from the knees up.
- **Medium shot**—from the waist up.
- **Medium close-up**—from the chest up.
- **Close-up (C/U)**—from the chin up.
- **Extreme close-up (ECU)**—a detail or closer than above.

Sometimes there are no people in a shot; for example, it may be a medium shot of a car and a close-up of the wheel. If there are two people in the shot, a medium shot is called a medium 2-shot; the other terms are modified in a similar way.

This is not a science and these terms are interpreted quite flexibly, but they are a good set of guidelines for describing the action.

**Activity**  
**3**



Fill in the following space with representations of each shot. Include a medium 2-shot and an over-the-shoulder (O/S) shot.




## Activity 4

Choose a film. Using the remote control, skim through it and try to pick out an example of each of the shots you have drawn.

### **Camera movement**

Early films were created using stationary cameras, but today we take it for granted that the camera moves. This enhances our viewing pleasure by working with framing to involve us at various levels of intimacy.

The important thing to remember about camera movements is that audiences read them. They contribute meaning to a scene or add dimension to the action, just like the conventions of *mise-en-scène*.

#### **Tracking shot**

A tracking shot is where the camera moves forwards, backwards or alongside the action. It is a very common technique. The camera is put on a dolly that holds the camera and the cameraman, then the dolly is put on a track and wheeled along with the action. This shot takes a lot of preparation as track has to be laid and grips, usually men, have to push and pull the dolly with the weight of the camera and cameraman. The focus puller has to practise to keep everything in focus as it is recorded.

The noise of the wheels on the track and the people pushing can sometimes be heard, so most of the sound has to be replaced, which is expensive and time-consuming. Films with a large budget tend to make frequent use of tracking shots. Feature films and other films use it sparingly or for crucial sequences only.

#### **Panning shot**

A panning shot is where the camera tripod remains static but where the camera head swivels from left to right or from right to left. It takes its name from the word 'panorama' as this is the view it produces.

#### **Tilt shot**

A tilt shot is similar to a panning shot, but the camera moves up and down rather than from side to side.

#### **Crane shot**

A crane shot is where the camera is mounted on a crane, so it can sweep across the action at a high angle. In making-of documentaries that show how a film was made, perhaps you have seen the director sitting with the camera on the crane. When the filming begins, a cameraman will take the place of the director.

#### **Hand-held shot**

In a hand-held shot, the camera is held in the cameraman's hands; it gives a 'real', documentary quality to the film.

## Steadicam shot

In a Steadicam shot, the camera is mounted on a framework that is strapped to the cinematographer. This gives a smooth hand-held quality to the action. It is a popular choice and has partly replaced the tracking shot.

## Other elements to consider

### Angle

We typically distinguish three basic angles: straight on, high and low. A high angle positions us looking down at the material in the frame, and a low angle positions us looking up at it. Sometimes these positions indicate power or subordination, but not always, so look at a film carefully before you decide how it uses angles.

### Depth of field

Depth of field signifies what is in focus on the screen, whether something is foregrounded or backgrounded, whether the whole picture is in focus or just part of it. In some ways, depth of field is linked to the zoom mechanism.

## Activity 5

Choose another sequence from your film in Activity 4. Try to identify the camera movements and why each shot has been chosen.

Now read pages 16–18 of your textbook.

## Activity 6

Go back to your sequence in Activity 5. Look at the film-maker's choices of framing and movement and say why you think they were chosen. What meaning is communicated by the type of shot?



# Lighting

Lighting is important because it enhances or even creates the mood of a piece. Appropriate lighting forms part of our cultural knowledge and we read into it specific meanings. For example, we would not expect to see low, subdued lighting in the supermarket or office during working hours. If we do, our suspicions are aroused. At home in the evening, if we want to create a cosy atmosphere, we will often turn on lamps that cast shadows to add warmth instead of the cold glare of the overhead light bulb.

Films use lighting to create mood. We all know that a dark alley implies danger. Shadows indicate not only the time of day but also something sinister. When we can't see things clearly because there is not enough light, our sense of fear is heightened. How many times in a thriller or horror film has a woman come back to her flat, heard a suspicious noise and *not* flicked on the light, as any real person would? The film-makers do not want to break the atmosphere of suspense created by the shadows. But when the danger has gone, the scene acquires a reassuring brightness.

- **High key lighting** is when the scene is brightly lit and there are not many shadows.
- **Low key lighting** is when the scene is dimly lit, hence lots of shadows are created.

These terms act as a general guide, but cinema lighting is much more complex than this. Often a variety of lighting is used to create a variety of effects. In their book *Film Art*, Bordwell and Thompson put it like this: 'Lighting is much more important than just illuminating the image. It creates atmosphere and can be manipulated to have a great impact on the scene. Lighting is often used to illuminate a key gesture or prop just as shadows conceal them to add tension.'

They point to four major features of film lighting:

- **Quality**—this describes the intensity of the light. Hard lighting is intense and unflattering whereas soft lighting diffuses the image to create gentle tones and no hard shadows.
- **Direction**—this describes where the light is coming from: front, back, side, overhead, underneath. Underlighting gives hard shadows and textures when used on its own. Single top lighting (overhead lighting) also gives a hard light; think of the swinging light bulb in Hitchcock's *Psycho*. A combination of back, top and side lighting gives a well-lit flattering effect (see the next section).
- **Source**—this describes which lights are doing the lighting. They could be lights that appear in the scene or lights that don't appear in the scene. Ever seen a character strike a match and light up the whole room?
- **Colour**—light doesn't have to mean the bright white of daylight or realistic light. Colour filters can be used over lights to create shades that indicate a mood or give an artistic effect.

## Classic Hollywood lighting

Early Hollywood developed three-point lighting, a famous technique to illuminate stars from all sides and show them in the best possible way. It used these three lights:

- **Key light**—the main light from the front.
- **Back light**—placed behind.
- **Fill light**—to fill any shadows created.

.....  
**Figure 1** *Lighting:*  
(a) *back light,*  
(b) *fill light,*  
(c) *key light,*  
(d) *lighting the*  
*star*  
(see handout)

## Activity 7

At vero eos e  
accusamus e  
iusto odio d  
simos ducim  
qui blanditi  
praesentium  
voluptatum

Watch the scene in *Casablanca* where Ingrid Bergman is in Rick's Bar for the first time. Notice how lighting the star was used to create a perfect and romantic Hollywood image. Watch the rest of the scene and notice the use of shadows to create mood in this classic film noir.

**Read pages 18–25 of your textbook**

## Activity 8



What kind of lighting would you expect to see in the following types of film?

**a** Romantic comedy

**b** Horror

**c** Science fiction

**d** Thriller

## Activity 9



### Homework

Write 500 words that analyse how cinematography and lighting create meaning in a film sequence of your choice. Using your written work and a film clip of up to five minutes, present your analysis to the group. Identify the types of shots and lighting used in the sequence, then say why you think they were used.



## Summary

---

In this unit, you have covered:

---

- ◀ How to identify different types of shot
- ◀ How the camera moves
- ◀ How a shot is lit
- ◀ How lighting and camera movement combine to create meaning