

Introduction to Film Editing

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Key concepts, terminology, and workflow fundamentals for beginners

1. What Is Film Editing?

Aspect	Description
Definition	The process of selecting, arranging, and assembling visual and audio material to create a coherent, engaging story.
Goal	Shape narrative, control pacing, convey meaning, and evoke emotion.
Mediums	Film, television, web video, documentaries, commercials, VR/AR experiences.

2. Core Principles of Editing

Principle	How It Works	Typical Use
Continuity	Maintains logical flow of time and space (match cuts, eyeline matches).	Narrative dramas, documentaries.
Rhythm & Pace	Timing of cuts influences tension, excitement, or calm.	Action sequences (fast), romantic scenes (slow).
Motivation	Every cut must have a narrative or emotional reason.	Avoid “jump cuts” that confuse the viewer.
Spatial Relationships	Establishes where characters are relative to each other.	Establishing shots, shot?reverse ?shot.
Temporal Relationships	Shows the passage of time (montage, jump cuts).	Training sequences, flashbacks.
Emotion & Subtext	Choice of shot, duration, and juxtaposition creates feelings.	Close?ups for intimacy, reaction shots for tension.

3. Basic Editing Terminology

Term	Meaning
Cut	Immediate transition from one shot to another.

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Match Cut	Links two shots by visual or thematic similarity.
Jump Cut	Abrupt cut that skips forward in time within the same scene.
L?cut / J?cut	Audio from one clip continues into the next (L) or precedes it (J).
Montage	Series of shots edited together to condense time or convey a theme.
Cross?cutting	Alternating between two or more parallel actions.
Fade In / Fade Out	Gradual increase/decrease of image from/to black (or another color).
Dissolve	Overlap of two images, signaling a softer transition.
Cutaway	Inserted shot that “cuts away” from the main action, often for context.
Insert	Close?up of an object or detail that clarifies the story.
B?roll	Supplementary footage that supports the primary (A?roll) material.

4. The Editing Workflow

1. Ingest & Organization

- Transfer footage to a secure storage drive.
- Rename clips (e.g., SC01_Take03.wav).
- Create bins/folders: *Raw, Audio, B?roll, Graphics*.

2. Rough Cut

- Assemble scenes in chronological order.
- Focus on story structure, not timing.
- Use placeholders for missing footage or effects.

3. Fine Cut

- Refine pacing, tighten cuts, adjust shot length.
- Add L?cuts/J?cuts, smooth transitions, and ensure continuity.

4. Picture Lock

- Finalized visual edit; no further changes to the sequence.
- Export an **Edit Decision List (EDL)** or XML for downstream work.

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5. Sound Editing & Mixing

- Sync dialogue, add Foley, ADR, ambience, and music.