

Media Studies A Level – Preparatory Work 2022

The below are a selection of materials designed to give you an insight and introduction to the technical and visual codes you'll have to apply during the course. Reading them and carrying out the activities will help prepare you for studying Media A level. There are also some articles for you to read to give you a brief overview of different aspects of the course.

Introduction

Read this article for some reasons why Media Studies gives you invaluable skills

<https://www.bournemouth.ac.uk/news/2019-07-30/media-studies-should-be-made-mandatory-schools-tackle-fake-news-research-finds>

Technical and visual codes:

Cinematography

Different types of shots create different types of impact on the viewer and help guide the viewer through the story. We are shown where events happen, what is important in each location. Close-up shots on faces can help show emotion and reaction to what is happening. So the two key elements to cinematography are the **framing** of a shot (what is included in the cinematic space, what we see on screen) and the movement of the camera.

Framing:

Filmmakers define shot types in this way: extreme close-up (ECU) A small object or part of an object shown large (a speaking mouth, a telephone receiver; frame 1). This often shows a plot-relevant object - a piece of jewellery, a telephone number on an envelope, a character's eyes at a moment of high tension. Close-up, (CU) Full view of, typically, a human face, etc. Long shot (LS) Typically this will be of a landscape, a view of a house or street. Normally this will establish where the action is taking place and is sometimes also known as an establishing shot extreme long shot (XLS) A view from a considerable distance (e.g. the skyline of a city). If we can see people then they will merely be small specks in the landscape.

See next page for many of the common shots used.

Camera movement

Fixed the camera remains in a fixed position on its axis.

Track or dolly, when tracking the camera moves (smoothly) towards, away from, or alongside a subject or object, and the focus remains constant.

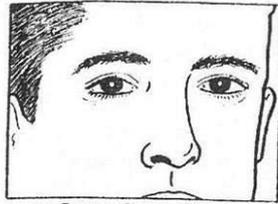
Pan panning, is when the camera moves on a fixed point (e.g. a tripod) horizontally left to right or vice versa. **'Whip pan'** is a pan that's executed very quickly.

Tilt again the camera is on a fixed point but tilts along the vertical, top to bottom or vice versa.

Zoom in a zoom shot the camera itself does not move, it is the camera lens that changes the distance of a shot. When the camera 'zooms in' it magnifies the image and makes subject appear closer in the frame. A 'zoom out' reveals more of the scene and will make the subject we're focussing on appear smaller, the shot widens in a 'zoom out'.

Hand-held this is when a camera image is deliberately shaky and unsteady. Much handheld camera work can be done with a Steadicam where the camera is connected to a harness and weights to ensure the camera movement remains smooth as the camera operator moves. The smoothness of the movement can be adjusted to suit different requirements in this way.

CINEMATOGRAPHY : SHOT DEFINITIONS



Extreme Close-Up (ECU)



Medium Long Shot (MLS)



Interviewee looks into space in the frame
(and towards the interviewer)



Big Close-Up (BCU)



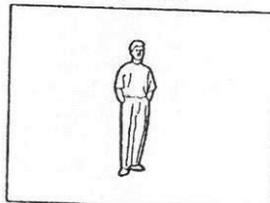
Long Shot (LS)



Moving subject walks into space



Close-Up (CU)



Very Long Shot (VLS)



High Angle Shot (looking down)



Medium Close-Up (MCU)



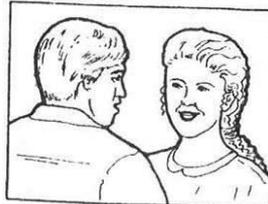
Two Shot (could be CU/MCU/MS)



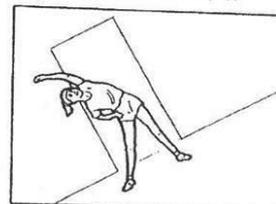
Low Angle Shot (looking up)



Medium Shot (MS)



'Over the shoulder shot'



Tilted Frame

Camera angles

Low angle the camera is positioned low down, pointing up at an object or subject. This can often suggest the height or power of the subject or object. Can make them look intimidating.

High angle the camera is positioned high up, looking down on the subject or object. This can suggest vulnerability or weakness, or just functionally show distance from subject, e.g. view from top of a building.

Eye level this is when the camera is 'straight-on' to the subject. It's often used to give a sense of reality or create a sense of engagement.

Low level camera is placed low down / ground level. Often used to show feet walking, car tyres, etc. As it often obstructs our vision of whole subject or object it's often used to create a sense of mystery.

Aerial the camera is positioned in a helicopter / crane / drone and is taken from a very high position. Dependent on how it's executed, i.e. the type of movement it's combined with, different moods can be created.

Bird's eye view the camera is positioned directly above the subject looking down.

Worm's eye view the camera is positioned directly below the subject looking up.

Editing

You might think that all the art of all audio visual takes place in front of and behind the camera. But a lot of art also goes into the editing process where the final film is put together. Editing a film involves selecting and combining shots into sequences and combining these sequences to create a finished film. This deliberate process helps create the world we watch and make meaning. Good editing is a critical element in getting the audience to understand the story, by creating or enhancing mood, emotion and character.

The director needs to create enough shots for the editor to choose from to tell the story. Not even a great editor can save a badly shot film. However, give the editor a well-shot film and they might work with the director to transform it into a masterpiece. The editor has a number of tasks on a film:

- To select and reject footage filmed by the director
- To organise the various shots filmed by the director into a coherent whole
- To co-ordinate one shot with the following shot in order to produce the desired effect on the audience and to keep a narrative moving

CONTINUITY EDITING

Despite all this art and craft, the audience hardly ever notices good editing. Although we know that we are watching pieces of film joined together, we are so used to continuity editing that we accept what is happening on screen providing that it follows the rules that we have learnt through watching other films or narratives. Most films and other moving images that we watch conform to this method of editing.

The common features of continuity editing, that we so often do not notice include:

Establishing shot

This is typically used at the beginning of a film or sequence to ensure that the audience knows where and when the action takes place. We could see the outside of a building, landscape or a city skyline. This shot may then change to the inside of a building that we can assume for example is the inside of that building that we saw in the establishing shot.

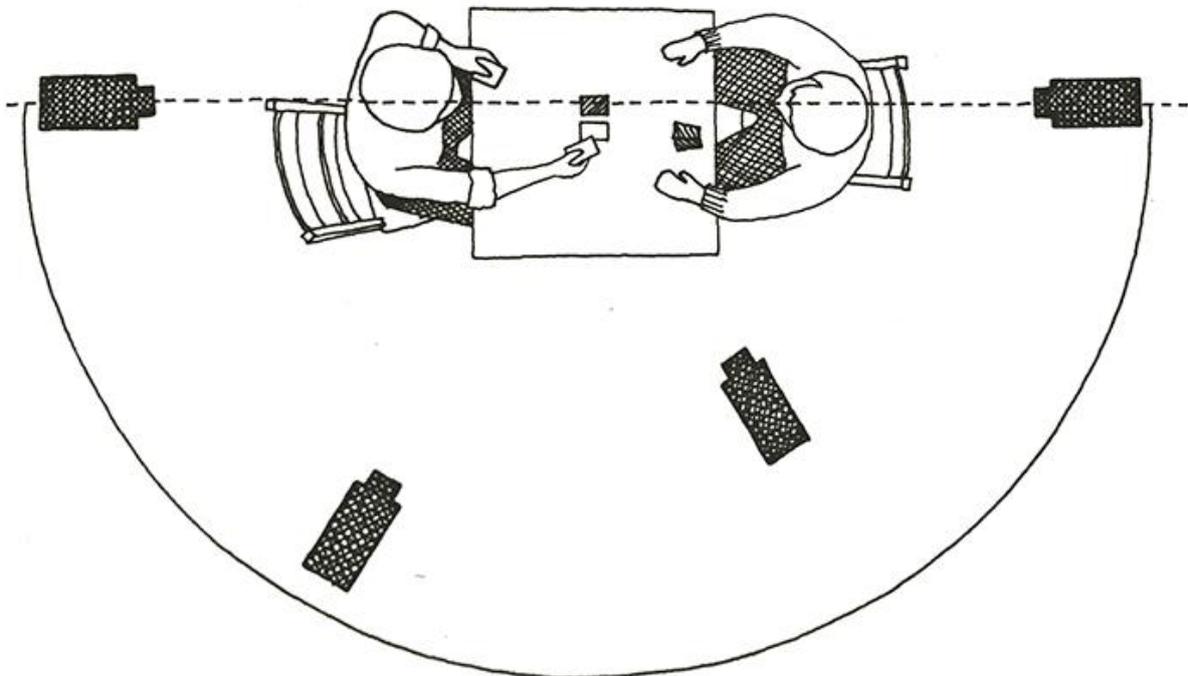
Shot reverse shot

This is commonly used during conversation, it makes sure that we the audience can see how both people in the conversation respond and deliver specific pieces of information.

180 degree rule.

This basic rule ensures that the audience can understand the scene in terms of where things are within the filmic space. For example, two characters (or other elements) in the same scene should always have the same left/right relationship to each other. If the camera passes over the imaginary axis connecting the two subjects, it is called crossing the line. The new shot, from the opposite side, is known as a reverse angle.

Rules can be broken, of course and if a director and editor break the 180° Rule by choice, it is to create confusion and disorientation in either the characters or the audience.



***The above diagram highlights the 180 degree rule, once that line of action has been established the camera can't cross it or the viewer will be disorientated.**

CUT

When the editor is thinking about which shot to choose, they might find that the director filmed one piece of action from a number of different positions or angles. Which is the one that is right for the sequence?

In joining one shot to another, how should the editor cut?

Film editors can connect scenes in a number of ways. The most common transitions you will see include a:

- straight cut
- fade out
- dissolve
- wipe cut
- jump cut

These transitions affect the pace and mood of the scene and how the sense of the film is communicated to the audience.

You can show a scene in a single shot, so why cut from one shot to another in a scene? What is the effect of this?

SPACE, TIME AND RHYTHM

When the editor works on a scene, they are thinking about three things:

The quality of the shot - what does each shot contain? How has the cinematographer filmed each shot? Is it a close-up, a long shot etc.? What is actually happening in the shot? What are the characters doing? How does this relate to the way that the shot has been filmed?

Cinematic space - effectively where the action takes place. It is quite common to begin a sequence with an ESTABLISHING SHOT which establishes the place where the action takes place, spatial relationships between actors and objects within that space and the scale of the cinematic space (i.e. does the action take place in a small room or in a wide landscape). It also asks the audience to think about what people are doing within this space and what we want to focus on.

Cinematic Time - the time a given sequence takes to play on the screen. In film, time can be compressed or extended. Although the action might take only a few seconds, through editing and building up tension, the cinematic time of your final film might be longer. The opposite might be the case. Although the action itself in real time might be for five or six minutes, in cinematic time you might be able to edit the scene in one or two minutes.

How to shrink time

Through a series of fast paced cuts we can see things that would take a long time in just a few minutes or seconds. Instead of watching a character get in a car and drive for 20 minutes we see them get in and then get out, letting us assume that the journey has taken place.

How to expand time

The editor can expand time by adding additional details. For example, someone is sitting in a chair waiting for the phone to ring. In real time this might only last half a minute. But the editor can build up tension by including shots of the person's eyes, tapping fingers (to show impatience) etc, drawing the scene out to a minute or more. We are looking at 'film' time, not real time.

Rhythm - Editing sets the rhythm or pace of a scene. This could be dictated by either the music used behind a scene or the mood that the editor is trying to create and the pace that you edit. To build up tension in a scene you might cut from one shot to another very quickly. However, in a relaxed scene the editing will progress at a much slower pace, dwelling longer on each shot.

Other editing terms:

Cross-cutting cutting between two lines of action within the narrative, e.g. cutting between the police on route to a crime scene and the crime scene itself, normally the pace quickens as the action starts to reach its climax.

Graphic match, two successive shots joined so as to create a strong similarity of compositional elements (e.g., colour, shape).

Cutaway, a cut to something that is not within the master long shot, e.g. in a BBQ scene you might cut-away to a shot of the moon, or during a football game you're presented with a master shot of the action on pitch you might cut-away to a crowd shot. The cutaway should give you more information.

Cut in or insert, cuts to a closer framed shot of something within the scene, done for emotional or story emphasis, usually to an object or item of interest, e.g. medium shot of boss waiting for employee sat at desk, cut in to C.U. of their fingers drumming on the desk.

Match on action, a cut which edits together two different views of the same action so that it appears to take place seamlessly, e.g. with the action of a character entering a house a match on action might cut from an exterior over the shoulder shot to an interior long shot of them entering the house.

Eyeline match, a cut in which the first shot shows a person looking in one direction and the second shows a nearby space containing what he or she sees. It should also obey the 'axis of action' principle in that if a person looks to the left the following shot is off-screen to the right

Master shot usually a wide shot of the whole scene and which frames all the action. It also offers a safe 'way out' if continuity cannot be achieved during the editing.

Montage editing a concentrated sequence using short cuts or techniques such as dissolves to summarize a particular experience or event. Can also be effective in conveying feelings and thoughts. Is often accompanied by music or narration rather than dialogue and can include shots pulled from various sources – e.g. news reports. Some montage sequences are rather cliché – e.g. getting fit/preparing for the big event.

ACTIVITY

Editing is something of an 'invisible art', because we rarely notice the cut between one shot and another.

Look at a 3-minute extract from any film. Watch the extract through once quickly and estimate how many edits there are in the piece. Now watch it again and mark down each time an edit occurs. Did

you underestimate the number the first time you watched the extract? That's the power of the 'invisible art'!...

So we could say that we start with the shot, we then decide what is happening and where it is happening. Then we need to think about the mood of the sequence and how this should be reflected in the way that we cut the shots together. Finally what is the rhythm of the piece? Are we trying to create tension – and if so do we use lots of shots or only a few?

Sound

When we experience, we talk about watching it; our primary engagement with a film text is on a visual level. But a film's sound or audio track has a profound effect on how it communicates meaning to an audience and creates the filmic world. It creates mood and atmosphere, aids our interpretation of characters and action, and links together sequences and moments.

Before we look at how sound works in a film let's consider the following idea. We can only look in front of us, not behind. But we hear in 360 degrees. So although we can't see what's happening behind us, we can hear it.

ACTIVITY

Take a minute to listen where you are now or when you are walking down the street later. What can you hear but cannot see? Can you identify every sound? What sounds particularly draw your attention?

SOUND QUALITY

How might we describe the qualities of these sounds? In a film all we can see is what is on the cinema screen, contained within the frame. However, as in life, films allow us to hear things (noises, people talking etc.) that do not appear on the screen. These sounds are as deliberately placed in the film as any of the images.

Think about a conversation in a film between two people. At times the image will cut from one person to another. We might hear someone speak but not be able to see them. However, in the world of the film we know that they are there. If we hear a dog bark in a film it is the dog that is outside the frame, not the barking!

SOUND EFFECTS

There are so many different audio elements in a film sequence that it is easier to group them into certain 'types'. A very simple way to identify and divide the different sounds is as follows:

- Dialogue – all the words and vocal expressions of the actors
- Music – the music soundtrack that may be in parts or all of the sequence
- Effects – other sounds such as footsteps, gunfire, cars, for example

Music helps to create the mood of a piece. It can also influence the rhythm of the editing for that sequence. For example, if the music is romantic the editor might cut very slowly from one scene to another, leaving individual shots on screen for a longer amount of time compared to editing an action sequence where the editor might cut from one shot to another fairly rapidly. Is the sequence

cut on the beat of the music, or off the beat of the music? What difference does this make? Does any background music create a tone or mood to the sequence?

Sound effects help create a sense of the 'reality' of what is happening – we see a door opening and expect to hear it open as well.

ON AND OFF SCREEN

We also need to consider how these different types of sound relate to what we see on the screen. We can broadly separate sounds in film into two reasonably distinct areas: **diegetic sound** and **non-diegetic sound**.

Diegetic sound refers to sounds which exist 'within the world of the film'; if we were a character in the film, or if we were transported into the action taking place onscreen, diegetic sound is what we would still be able to hear. The most basic expectation would be that we could hear characters talking (dialogue), and all the wider noises made by objects, processes and forces in the world around us (sound effects).

Non-diegetic sound refers to sounds which no character or spectator 'inside' the film can hear. These sounds have been added to create a reaction in the audience or give them information. Most audience expects to hear music overlaying action to prompt our expectations and emotions. We might also be given access to a characters' thoughts in a voiceover that no one in the film can hear, or hear certain sound effects even though there are no objects or processes causing them in the action.

ENHANCING SOUND

Filmmakers and their sound team will often enhance the sounds that we hear on a soundtrack. When filming is taking place then the sound team will mainly concentrate on recording the dialogue. The sounds of what is occurring around the action will probably be added later. Not just added, they will be created. And the levels at which we hear different sounds will be carefully balanced so that the most important events that we see happening at any one moment are given sounds which enhance the telling of the story and the mood of the scene.

Other sound terms/techniques:

Soundtrack the entirety of sound that accompanies a piece of filming, it consists of the effects, dialogue and music.

Voice over off-screen voice (usually non-diegetic) that tells the story, explains the action or comments on it.

Soundbridge sound that begins in one scene and continues over to the next, providing a link between those two scenes.

Contrapuntal sound sound that doesn't complement the images on screen. It's often done to create irony, comedy or shock, e.g. an upbeat piece of music being played during a torture scene.

Sound motif a sound effect that is repeated for a particular character or place, e.g. Darth Vader's heavy rasping breathing is his motif in Star Wars.

Sound theme a piece of music which accompanies a character or place, e.g. the two note cello theme in 'Jaws'.

Sound cut cutting from one sound to another in sync with the visual cut.

Underscore music that accompanies on screen action and compliments it, e.g. a gentle piano piece during a romantic scene.

Hyperreal sound sound that has been artificially exaggerated, e.g. footsteps in a Horror film are often hyperreal in order to increase the tension.

Mise en scene

Filmmakers will tend to follow cultural codes - ideas that we all share, be it about the way we live now or how they think we will identify different periods in history. They will use these assumptions when it comes to creating the filmic world in which the film's story takes place.

We, the audience, understand that the filmic world is a reality created by filmmakers. The French term 'mise en scène' describes this created reality of a film very well – it translates as 'what is placed in the frame'. Everything that we see on screen has been deliberately put there to make the meaning - the furniture we see in a room or the costume that a character is wearing, or something more subtle such as the make-up that an actor wears.

Because the phrase 'mise en scène' describes 'putting' something in the picture, it reinforces the idea that films are constructed – nothing appears by chance in the filmic frame. Everything we see is placed carefully so that the audience enters and understands that filmic world – the characters that we see acting out that story and the time and place where the story is set.

We understand how the device of mise en scène creates this world and makes meaning through these areas of the creative filmmaking process:

- Settings and props
- Costume, hair and make-up
- Facial expression and body language
- Lighting and colour
- Position of characters and objects within a frame.

Settings are where the actions of a film take place. They can help us understand when and where the film is set. A film set in the past will have to convey when it is set through the selection of locations that give the viewer the impression of a particular period in history. The setting also needs to be linked to the correct costumes and props. All of these combined will help create a filmic world to represent a time in the past that the viewer understands.

Seeing the same character in different settings can also change our understanding of both the plot and also the character.

ACTIVITY

Imagine seeing a character first in a very modern, richly furnished room and then the film cuts to the same character in a rather dingy and run down part of town. Discuss what connections and

predictions might you make about this character and what might happen to them. List as many different ideas as you can about the possible story lines that this change of scene could suggest.



Setting can also suggest the genre, or type, of film - romance, comedy, thriller, for example. The film title might not indicate what type or genre the film is, but once we start to see the settings we would generally recognise these as being typical of the genre.

It is not only the place itself that is important. The filmmaker can suggest other ideas or meanings to the audience through things like the weather - a country lane in bright sunlight feels very different to the same lane covered in snow or in heavy rain at night. Change the colour of the walls or the furniture in a room and it can feel very different. Elements like this can affect the way in which we 'read' a particular scene and location where the action is set.

ACTIVITY

Imagine a room. How would you decorate it and what would you put in it to suggest the following inhabitants:

1. A poor and destitute couple in the 17th Century

2. A middle-class couple in the 1940s

3. A spy in the year 2012

4. A businessman in 2012

5. A business woman 2012

6. A group of students

Props are the artifacts used in the film that can be used in a number of ways. They can be used to convey a general sense of the period that the film was set in. Props can also confirm the film's genre for the audience. We, as an audience, may expect to see certain props. This is part of what's referred to as **iconography**.

Iconography is the signifiers that you associate with a particular genre of TV or film, it includes props, settings and sounds. For example, you may expect to the following iconography, in a Western; guns, spurs, chaps, boots, saddles, horses, Native American costume, feather headdresses, Stetsons, set in a Saloon, sounds of gun shots etc. You don't need to see all of these items, but

would expect to see at least some of them to confirm your belief that you really were watching a Western.

Shared cultural codes from advertising, books, TV, the internet, for example, mean that even if you've never seen a Western before, you can recognise at least some of this iconography.

Activity

Detail the iconography for the following TV and film genres, include props, settings and sounds.

Crime drama	Sci Fi	Horror

Costume, hair and make-up can be key ingredients in signalling to the audience what time period the film is set in, the status of the characters, as well as other character information.

What a character wears in a film can rapidly communicate all sorts of information about them to the audience – their position in society, the particular social group they belong to, whether they may be threatening or sympathetic. We can pick up clues from jewellery, hairstyle, shoes, the colour of a particular shirt or dress.

These shared cultural codes create powerful meaning in relation to clothing that we take from our everyday experience, paintings, TV and the internet amongst other things. They give us reference points for understanding a particular character's 'type' and potential significance within the narrative of a film.

Make-up can be used in different ways to create meaning. It may be used to make the characters look 'natural' under the studio lighting. Or it may be used as part of the iconography of the genre; for example, horror films might use make up to create artificial bruising and blood, to make the audience believe a character had just been chased through the woods. Filmmakers can also manipulate details of hair and make-up to make the created filmic world more believable or to meet audience expectations of either genre or narrative.

Facial expression and body language

So much our communication is done without words. This non-verbal communication can be through tiny gestures, posture, rolling the eyes, frowning, etc. and can give an audience very important information.

This aspect of *mise en scène* is based on the relationship between the actor and the director. The director decides what type of emotion they wish the actor to portray and asks the actor to walk or behave in a particular way. The actor's skill helps to convey both the story line and build up the narrative understanding of the character they are playing so that the audience identifies and understands that character 'type'.

A director can help the audience to understand what is happening to a character emotionally by framing them in the shot in a particular way. A close-up on an actor during a key moment or speech makes their face five metres tall on a cinema screen, so that the audience appreciates the full impact of the facial expression and how it communicates a huge amount about a character's emotions, response to the situation, or relationships between characters.

The eyes, eyebrows and mouth are the most expressive parts of the face and they all work together to make meaning for the audience beyond what is actually said.

The eyes are particularly important, as they signal to the audience where a character is directing their attention. Actors carefully control where they fix their gaze, so that they can communicate information and meaning to the audience.

But acting involves the entire body. Shared cultural understanding means that an audience can accurately read a situation from an actor's 'body language' or position and movement.

Watch how different characters in the same scene might contrast with each other physically to show the differences between them, or how a character's body language changes as a film progresses.

Lighting and Colour

Colours can be used to signify certain feelings or emotions. Red is often associated with love and passion but could also suggest danger. Blue is sometimes thought to be a cold colour or suggest conformity or sadness.

Lighting can be used to create a sense of place, give ideas about the weather, the state of mind of the character and also for aesthetic or artistic reasons. For example, in a thriller you might expect to see certain scenes shot in shadow – to create the sense of the unknown (the unseen). But shadows can signify different genres. Imagine shadows being used in a romantic film. Would they carry the same threat as in a thriller or a horror story?

Very bright white lighting can make an environment look very cold and clinical, creating a mood in the filmic world that we the viewer 'read' and apply to our understanding of the story.

Lighting can also be used to draw our attention to a particular character's actions, a significant object, or a particular part of a location or frame.

Whilst lighting is one of the devices that filmmakers use to create meaning in the filmic world, lighting set ups usually serve to enhance the action taking place rather than be significant in itself.

Positions of characters and objects within a frame help us, as spectators, understand when something significant is happening. For example, a minor character might have something important to say, so they will be framed in such a way for us to understand that this is important. This may be the only time that character is ever framed in this way. Or the camera may show a particular object in close up to focus our attention on it.

Look at how characters are placed within the frame. A character placed at the front of the frame with other characters in the background will take on particular importance in our understanding of what is happening.

When we analyse a sequence in terms of *mise en scène*, we need to look at how all the different elements and techniques work together to: - Tell a story - Evoke an atmosphere - Give the audience information - Provoke an audience response - Highlight key themes

Other terms:

Composition where things and people are within the frame is significant and helps guide our response. If something is positioned in the foreground we presume it is important, but also consider that something happening in the background of the frame within a deep focus shot will intrigue us, e.g. a long shot of a hallway and a character comes out of a door in the background of the shot might make us wonder what they were doing or who they are.

Low-key lighting studio lighting which is characterised by high contrast and lots of shadows.

High-key lighting a type of studio lighting where contrast is minimal, it's characterised by brightness and few shadows.

Backlighting a character is illuminated from behind, it has the effect of obscuring their facial features so we just predominantly see their silhouette, creates a sense of mystery, can be quite ominous.

Side-lighting as the name implies this is when a character or object is illuminated from the side, it casts shadows over one half of their face, can be used to suggest duplicity, the idea that they're hiding something.

Top-lighting often used with high key lighting this type of lighting can make a character look more glamorous or attractive as the light on their hair makes it appear more shiny.

Under-lighting when a character is lit from underneath, this has the effect of making shadows appear in the eye sockets and cheeks often look hollowed out, creates an eerie feeling.

Lens flare this occurs when shooting into the light and orbs of light appear across the screen, it can just be aesthetically pleasing, or can evoke certain moods.

Activity

Design a film poster for a genre of your choice, think carefully about all your choices, ensure that you clearly use the iconography of your genre so it's recognisable to your audience. Also, think about how you'll convey key aspects of your narrative through your use of *mise-en-scène*, who are the key characters? What type of character are they? If there's more than one character what relationship do they have? How is that evident? Film posters have to quickly convey the narrative through one still image. Also make sure you include other conventions of film posters:

- Film name
- Tagline
- Reviews
- Release date
- Film and distribution studio logos

- Billing block (names of crew and staff you always see at the bottom of film posters)

At college you'll use Photoshop but if you don't have this or other suitable software, or app on your phone then you can sketch it. The most important thing is that you think carefully about how you'll represent characters, themes and genre.

Magazine industry

Read this article to give you an overview of the development of the industry and how it's been impacted by technology <https://www.theguardian.com/media-network/media-network-blog/2013/mar/07/fall-rise-magazines-print-digital>

TV industry

Read this article for a quick insight into how streaming services have effected British TV industry <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-44862598>

Gaming industry

Read the attached for an overview of the issues around representation in the gaming industry <https://www.theguardian.com/games/2019/aug/07/video-games-do-not-cause-violence-but-makers-do-need-to-think-about-it>