# Introduction to A Level Media Studies

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# M.I.G.R.A.I.N

## THE KEY CONCEPTS

### Media Language
- What are the denotative and connotative levels of meaning?
- What are the non-verbal structures of meaning in the text (e.g. gesture, facial expression, positional communication, clothing, props etc)?
- What is the significance of mise-en-scene/sets/settings?
- What work is being done by the sound track/commentary/language of the text?
- What sound and visual techniques are used to convey meaning (e.g. camera positioning, editing; the ways that images and sounds are combined to convey meaning)?

### Institutions
- What is the institutional source of the text?
- Is the source a public service or commercial institution? What difference does this make to the text?
- Who owns and controls the institution concerned and does this matter?

### Genre
- To which genre does the text belong?
- What are the major generic conventions within the text?
- What are the major generic themes?
- To what extent are the characters generically determined?

### Representation
- Who is being represented?
- In what way?
- By whom?
- Why is the subject being represented in this way?
- Is the representation fair and accurate?

### Audiences
- What is the target audience?
- What assumptions about the audience's characteristics are implicit within the text?
- What do you know or can you assume about the likely size and constituency of the audience?

### Narrative
- How is the narrative organised and structured?
- How are heroes and villains created?
- How have specific narrative techniques been used?
- What are the major themes of the narrative? What values/ideologies does it embody?

### Ideology and Values
- What are the major values, ideologies and assumptions underpinning the text or naturalised within it?
- What criteria have been used for selecting the content presented?

# PART ONE – DEVELOPING YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH THE MEDIA

As a Media Studies student you will be expected to have engaged with a wide variety of media texts. This will provide you with a 'context' when looking at case studies in lessons.

In the context of Media Studies, representation refers to the way in which aspects of society (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity), events and issues are presented to an audience. It is important to consider representations in terms of their context. For example, it is conventional, in the action adventure / FPS computer games genre, for a protagonist to be represented as a physically strong and fearless leader. It is perhaps less conventional in that genre for the protagonist to be a female, though this is slowly changing now there are more female gamers in the marketplace.

For your summer task you will consider how different newspapers represent events (using print and / or their websites), and what effect those representations might have on the response of the audience.

Although newspapers are dealing in facts, they are not, as some audiences may assume, 'windows on the world' (a term that suggests news programmes and documentaries offer a realistic representation of what is going on in the world). In fact, **all news is constructed**. How the producers of the newspaper decide to present a news story will depend on the style of the newspaper, its ideology (its values and messages) and the audience that will read the text.

## Task 1: To be handed in to Ms Bohitige in your first lesson.

Pick one of these two events as represented in newspapers or official news websites:
- News coverage of Covid 19 – you can choose what you want to focus on within this e.g. the way that Government have presented changes and how that has been reported in the news or coverage of other countries in comparison to us.
- The news coverage of events following the death of George Floyd e.g. the protests or programmes being taken off air.

Then do your research and save copies of newspaper covers and website pages that you can analyse on the same event. Present your findings using the site **Emaze** (which you should have already created in lessons). Aim to have at least 8 slides which include images and analysis of the images and language used in each. You should also consider how the public may respond to these and you may even find examples that show this from somewhere else.

Think about how these stories have been constructed and how they may differ e.g. one may be supporting the work the Government are doing and use language that supports their efforts whilst the other may criticize the Government's plans and focus on images or statistics that suggest they are doing things in the wrong way.

Notice how the Daily Mail has focused the audience on the idea of death, creating fear amongst the public that, 'Many loved ones will die'. The Irish Daily Mail has represented a more positive outlook, encouraging the public to work together to save lives.



Think about how the public have responded to these news stories e.g. the death of George Floyd has led to protests which have challenged the rules set out about social distancing. Is the public represented as right to do this or it suggested that they should obey the Government rules?

**Consider how the mediation of events can change the way audiences feel.**

- Look at how the actions of Patrick Hutchninson have changed the way that the protests have been reported.
- The impact has been global. Reverend Al Sharpton, for example, has spoken and tweeted about Patrick. See link here and Facebook here.





This is a chance to immerse yourself in current debate and this is likely to be something you could use later in the course so please dig deep. You will be presenting these to the class on the first lesson back so remember to send me the link to your Emaze presentation before our first lesson – jbohitige@berhamsted.com

## PART TWO – DEVELOPING YOUR TECHNICAL SKILLS
## (To be handed in to Ms Bohitige in your first lesson)

It is really important to gain a clear understanding of the correct language used when analysing a text. A long shot remains a long shot whether it is shown through film, television or in a magazine and its purpose will always be to show the action and the environment in which the action is happening.

**Task 1** - Learn the range of camera framings, angles and movements as outlined in this booklet (*Task 1 Reading Material*). This will make the start of the course much easier for you.

**Task 2** – Complete either A or B. Use your still camera and / or video camera to explore the technical skills outlined in this booklet.

a) You can take photos using different framings and angles when you are out enjoying the sunshine. Either email or hand in a hard copy of your document which needs to contain the following:
- Images with examples of each of the framings (from ELS to ECU)
- A mix of framings with angles to create different effects e.g. power or vulnerability (these can be in the ones above but try to experiment with different techniques)
- Labels with the framing and angles noted for each (identifying)
- Notes about the purpose and effect for a number of the images (explaining)
- What you learnt from the experience

b) You can make a short video using a range of camera framings, angles and movements. It can be anything from a simple scene in your house to a fully produced music video. Watch the **"Call Me Maybe"** music video by **Carly Ray Jepson featuring Justin Bieber, Selena, Ashley Tisdale and More** for inspiration – click here. Share or bring the video in along with either a directors commentary or a summary of key techniques you have used (bullet points are fine) e.g.
- Examples of framings, angles and movement (identifying) – tip, you could take a few screen shots and label them as you would do with task A
- The genre and target audience
- The main narrative of the video and/or what you are trying to represent
- How you edited the video to create the right pace
- What you learnt from the experience

Before you begin, consider this. A producer of any media text will consider the **'purpose'** and **'effect'** in anything they produce. For example:
**Q.** What is the **purpose** of showing an extreme close up in shot 3?
**A.** *To show the emotions of the character – in this case determination and focus. Do we feel an emotional connection to him? No.*

**Q.** What is the **effect** of putting Joey in a white costume whilst putting his colleague in a black outfit?
**A**. *To signify the character types. We associate white with purity and so the audience will 'read' this and so assume that Joey is the protagonist whilst his rival, who is wearing black, is the antagonist.*
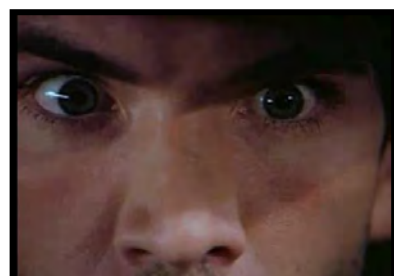
**Shot 1** – M.S          **Shot 2** – Low angle, L.S, Deep focus          **Shot 3** - E.C.U

The media is a complex industry. A great deal of time and planning goes into the construction of any media text so during the summer enjoy exploring the media rather than just consuming it!

**If you are presenting images please put them on a presentation using the site [Canva](#). If you are making a video email me the link as noted above.**
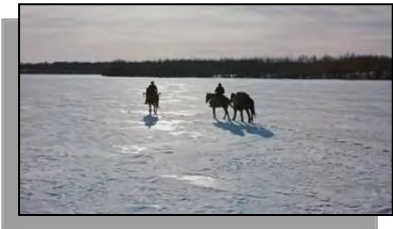
I look forward to you sharing your work with the class at the start of the year. Have fun being creative!
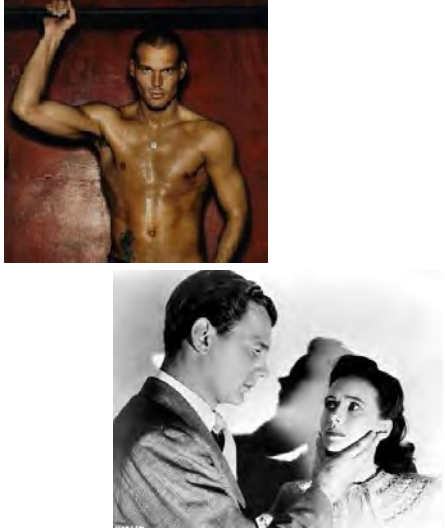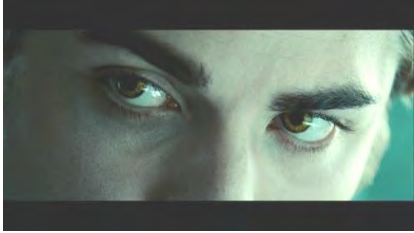
## TASK 1 – READING MATERIAL

# CAMERA SHOTS, ANGLE, MOVEMENT AND COMPOSITION

When describing camera angles, or creating them yourself, you have to think about three important and separate factors:

- The FRAMING or the LENGTH of shot
- The ANGLE of the shot
- If there is any MOVEMENT involved

| CAMERA FRAMING | DESCRIPTION | EXAMPLE |
|---|---|---|
| *Extreme long shot (E.L.S) or wide shot (W.S)* | Can be taken from as much as a quarter of a mile away, and is generally used as a scene-setting, establishing shot. It normally shows an EXTERIOR, e.g. the outside of a building, or a landscape, and is often used to show scenes of thrilling action e.g. in a war film or disaster movie. |  |
| *Long Shot (L.S)* | The most difficult to precisely categorise, but generally one which shows the image as approximately "life" size i.e. corresponding to the real distance between the audience and the screen in a cinema (the figure of a man would appear as six feet tall). This category includes the FULL SHOT showing the entire human body, with the head near the top of the frame and the feet near the bottom. |  |
| *Medium Long Shot (M.L.S)* | The medium long shot is from the knees up or if it were an object it would show approximately three quarters of it.  This is used so that audiences can get a closer look at the object or person and still read the body language. |  |
| | | |

| CAMERA FRAMING | DESCRIPTION | EXAMPLE |
|---|---|---|
| *Medium Shot or Mid Shot (M·S)*  *Two Shot / Three Shot*  *Over the shoulder shot* | Contains a figure from the waist up and again is normally used for dialogue scenes, or to show some detail of action. Variations on this include the **TWO SHOT** (containing two figures from the waist up) and the **THREE SHOT** (contains 3 figures...). NB. Any more than three figures and the shot tends to become a long shot. Another variation in this category is the **OVER-THE-SHOULDER-SHOT**, which positions the camera behind one figure, revealing the other figure, and part of the first figure's back, head and shoulder. |  |
| *Medium Close-up (M·C·U)*  *Close-up (C·U)* | This shows very little background, and concentrates on either a face, or a detail of mise-en-scene. This shot magnifies the object (think of how big it looks on a cinema screen) and shows the importance of things, be it words written on paper, or the expression on someone's face. The close-up takes us into the mind of a character. In reality, we only let people that we really trust get THAT close to our face - mothers, children and lovers, usually - so a close up of a face is a very intimate shot. A film-maker may use this to make us feel extra comfortable or extremely uncomfortable about a character. |  |
| *Extreme Close-up (E·C·U)* | As its name suggests, an extreme version of the close up, generally magnifying beyond what the human eye would experience in reality. An extreme close-up of a face, for instance, would show only the mouth or eyes. |  |

## TEST YOURSELF - WHAT IS THE FRAMING FOR EACH OF THE IMAGES BELOW?



# *CAMERA ANGLES*

The relationship between the camera and the object being photographed (i.e. the ANGLE) gives emotional information to an audience, and guides their judgment about the character or object in shot.

| CAMERA ANGLE | DESCRIPTION | EXAMPLE |
|---|---|---|
| *The Bird's-Eye view* | This shows a scene from directly overhead, a very unnatural and strange angle. Familiar objects viewed from this angle might seem totally unrecognisable at first (umbrellas in a crowd, dancers' legs). This shot does, however, put the audience in a godlike position, looking down on the action. People can be made to look insignificant, ant-like, part of a wider scheme of things. | |
| *High Angle* | Not so extreme as a bird's eye view. The camera is elevated above the action using a crane to give a general overview. High angles make the object photographed seem smaller, and less significant (or scary). The object or character often gets swallowed up by their setting - they become part of a wider picture. | |
| *Eye Level* | A fairly neutral shot; the camera is positioned as though it is a human actually observing a scene, so that e.g. actors' heads are on a level with the focus. The camera will be placed approximately five to six feet from the ground. We see the use of eye level more frequently than any other. | |
| *Low Angle* | These increase height (useful for short actors like Tom Cruise) and give a sense of speeded motion. Low angles help give a sense of confusion to a viewer, of powerlessness within the action of a scene. The background of a low angle shot will tend to be just sky or ceiling, the lack of detail about the setting adding to the disorientation of the viewer. The added height of the object may make it inspire fear and insecurity in the viewer, who is psychologically dominated by the figure on the screen. | |
| *Canted* | Canted faming is a view in which the frame is not level; either the right or left side is lower than the other, causing objects in the scene to appear slanted out of an upright position. Canted framings are used to create an impression of chaos and instability. | |

# CAMERA MOVEMENT

A director may choose to move action along by telling the story as a series of cuts, going from one shot to another, or they may decide to move the camera with the action. Moving the camera often takes a great deal of time, and makes the action seem slower, as it takes several second for a moving camera shot to be effective, when the same information may be placed on screen in a series of fast cuts. Not only must the style of movement be chosen, but the method of actually moving the camera must be selected too. There are seven basic methods:

| CAMERA MOVEMENT | DESCRIPTION |
|---|---|
| *Zoom in//zoom out* | Zoom is a feature you will find on the camera itself and it involves the lens being turned to either zoom in closer to the action or zoom out to show what is surrounding the action. Movement happens through the camera. |
| *Pan* | A movement which scans a scene horizontally, usually left to right. The camera is placed on a tripod, which operates as a stationary axis point as the camera is turned, often to follow a moving object which is kept in the middle of the frame. |
| *Tilt* | A movement which scans a scene vertically either up or down, otherwise similar to a pan. |
| *Tracking Shot* | Sometimes called TRUCKING or DOLLY shots. The camera is placed on a moving vehicle and moves alongside the action, generally following a moving figure or object. Complicated dolly shots will involve a track being laid on set for the camera to follow, hence the name. The camera might be mounted on a car, a plane, or even a shopping trolley (good method for independent film-makers looking to save a few dollars). A dolly shot may be a good way of portraying movement, the journey of a character for instance, or for moving from a long shot to a close-up, gradually focusing the audience on a particular object or character. |
| *Crane Shot* | Basically, tracking-shots-in-the-air. A crane is a useful way of moving a camera - it can move up, down, left, right, swooping in on action or moving diagonally out of it. |
| *The Aerial Shot* | An exciting variation of a crane shot, usually taken from a helicopter. This is often used at the beginning of a film, in order to establish setting and movement. A helicopter is like a particularly flexible sort of crane - it can go anywhere, keep up with anything, move in and out of a scene, and convey real drama and exhilaration. |
| *Hand-held shots* | The hand-held camera (despite its name, a heavy, awkward piece of machinery which is attached to its operator by a harness) was invented in the 1950s to allow the camera operator to move in and out of scenes with greater speed. It gives a jerky, ragged effect, totally at odds with the organised smoothness of a dolly shot, and is favoured by filmmakers looking for a gritty realism (eg Scorsese), which involves the viewer very closely with a scene. Much favoured by the makers of *NYPD Blue*. |

# COMPOSITION
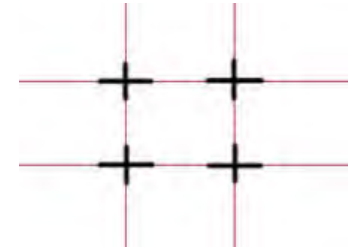
## The Rule of Thirds

For the rule of thirds, imaginary lines are drawn dividing the image into thirds. The most important elements are placed where these lines intersect (see *diagram a*.) In addition to using the intersections, it also helps to use a 2 to 1 ratio (thus dividing the image both horizontally and vertically into thirds) so that nothing is dead center, which makes for a static image. Instead, when placing the horizon line of a landscape, or the eye line of a person, use the lower or upper third as an approximate guide.

In the subway shot, the most important person is the woman in the third on the left of the image.

**Image A**



She could be the main character of a video, or she could be about to do something important that will influence the story.

**Image B**



The image on the right is an extreme close-up of the eyes of a girl. They are placed on the line along the lower third of the image.

This image draws us in, we share the introspective moment that this girl has. In a video there could be a voiceover narration telling us her thoughts, for example.

http://www.hippasus.com/resources/viscomp/RuleThirds.html
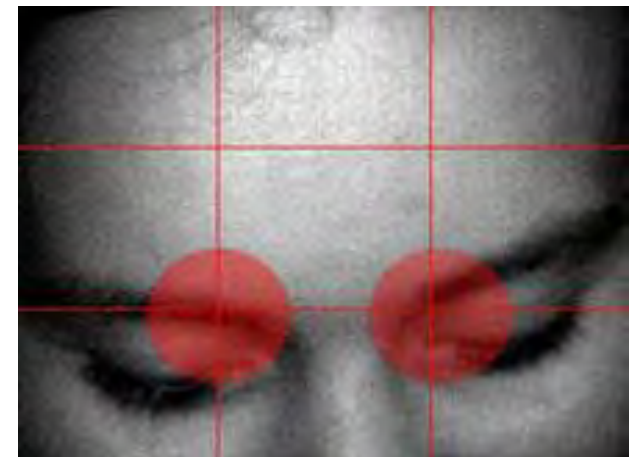
## Depth of Field

"Depth of field (DOF)" refers to the distance through which elements in an image are in sharp focus. Bright light and a narrow lens aperture tend to produce a larger depth of field, as does using a wide-angle rather than a long lens. A shallow depth of field is often used as a technique to focus audience attention on the most significant aspect of a scene without having to use an analytic cut-in.



Depth of field is directly connected, but not to be confused, with focus. Focus is the quality (the "sharpness" of an object as it is registered in the image) and depth of field refers to the extent to which the space represented is in focus. For a given lens aperture and level of lighting, the longer the focal distance (the distance between the lens and the object that is in focus) the greater the focal depth. For a given focal distance, the greater the level of lighting or the narrower the aperture, the greater the focal depth. For that reason, close-up shooting and shooting in low light conditions often results in images with very shallow depth of field. An image with shallow depth of field, as this frame from *Peking Opera Blues* (*Do Ma Daan*, Tsui Hark , 1986), has some elements in focus, but others are not.

## Shallow Focus

A restricted *depth of field*, which keeps only one plane in sharp focus; the opposite of *deep focus*. Used to direct the viewer's attention to one element of a scene. Shallow focus is very common in close-up, as in these two shots from *Central Station* (*Central do Brasil*, Walter Selles, Brazil, 1998).

Shallow focus suggests psychological introspection, since a character appears as oblivious to the world around her/him. It is therefore commonly employed in genres such as the melodrama, where the actions and thoughts of an individual prevail over everything else.

## DEEP FOCUS

Deep focus involves staging an event on film such that significant elements occupy widely separated planes in the image. Deep focus requires that elements at very different depths of the image both be in focus. In these two shots from *Touch of Evil* (Orson Welles, 1958) *Besieged* (*L'Assedio*, Bernardo Bertolucci,1998) all of the different planes of the image are given equal importance through deep focus, not only to the characters (like the man peeking at the window in the first image), but also to the spaces (Shanduray's basement room in the second).

# EDITING

When individual shots are edited together, Filmmakers have a number of editing techniques at their disposal. The importance of these techniques is that they often happen so quickly that we don't notice them at all. Becoming aware of where these techniques are used in movies is important in order to understand the constructed nature of all moving images.

Some of the most common editing techniques include:

• *Simple cuts* — which are breaks from one shot to the next. Cuts carry the continuity of action forward in a straightforward manner, from action to action or place to place.

• *Jump cuts* — which are confusing cuts from one shot to the next that do not follow the obvious rules of cause and effect. These cuts are usually used to disrupt the audience's attention in order to create shock. In Steven Soderbergh's film The Limey (1999), jump cuts are used intentionally to suggest the main character's unbalanced state of mind.

• *Fade-downs/ fade out* — which show the screen fade from an image to a black screen.

• *Fade-ups/ fade in* — which show the screen fade from black to an image. Both fade-ups and fade-downs are used to suggest the passage of time and generally work to give the audience a chance to take a breath in preparation for the next scene.

• *Dissolves* — which show one image slowly disappear as a new image is introduced. Dissolves are used to indicate the end of one event and the beginning of a new event or scene.

• *Wipes* — which show one part of the screen literally wipe over the rest of the screen. One image disappears as it is replaced by a new image. This kind of edit is not often seen in movies, largely because it looks comic-bookish. For this very reason, wipes were used throughout Star Wars to suggest the comic-book origins of the movie.

In the division of responsibilities on a film set, directors supervise and steer the artistic and technical direction of a production and are responsible for a film's final tone and distinctive visual style. Editors make sure that a film's pace, story, and ideas work in the final production.

**Source: The Techniques of Editing**
Excerpted from *Visual Storytelling and the Grammar of Filmmaking, Part I* Study Guide



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**MEDIA STUDIES TASKS CHECKLIST**

- ☐ CURRENT EVENT ANALYSIS HAS BEEN COMPLETED AND PRESENTED ON EMAZE
- ☐ STILL IMAGES IN A RANGE OF FRAMINGS AND ANGLES PRESENTED ON CANVA **OR**
- ☐ A VIDEO THAT I HAVE CREATED
- ☐ LINKS TO THE WORK HAS BEEN SENT TO MS BOHITIGE – JBOHITIGE@BERKHAMSTED.COM
- ☐ I AM PREPARED TO PRESENT MY WORK ON THE FIRST LESSON IN SEPTEMBER

**EXPLORE**
If you are looking for some ideas of things you can do over the summer here are a few to get you started.

**TAKE A COURSE**
*"The value of summer courses is something many people take for granted, as it is an opportunity to enrich and develop your skills outside of the classroom giving you a head start for the new year."* Tom – Year 13 Media Studies Student.

Future Learn offer a range of online courses throughout the year so are a great option for exploring new subjects. I highly recommend these.
Young Film Academy is an official London delivery partner for the BFI Film Academy and they run a range of courses throughout the year, so it is worth looking at their website to see what courses are coming up.
Creative Media Skills run a number of non-residential courses at Pinewood Studios so if you want to be a film producer / director or writer, a costume designer, a special effects make-up artist, a hair stylist, a screen actor or stuntman, then check this site to see what is on offer.

**TAKE TIME TO EXPLORE** (these may open up over the summer)

Warner Bros Studio Tour is almost on our doorstep (Leavesden, Hertfordshire) so why not book a visit to the making of Harry Potter. Visit the site to book your tickets - Warner Bros Studio Tour
BBC Shows and Tours offer a 90 minute behind the scenes tour and costs under £10 per person. The London studios are currently closed but the studio tours in Birmingham are open.
ITV Tours offer a range of tours.
BFI Southbank has a library and cinema with various events running through the year – Check out the website for a range of information and lists of upcoming events.
Watch a film on the big screen. The BFI IMAX at Waterloo has the biggest cinema screen in England and is great cinematic experience so make it an even more amazing experience the next time you see the latest blockbuster.
Science and Media Museum in Bradford is free and has seven floors of galleries, research facilities and three cinemas.
ONLINE - BBFC is a good site to visit to help you understand how films are classified. For a more interactive experience, visit CBBFC you can have a go at rating films based on the content.
ONLINE - BBC Writers Room offers you a chance to find out more about script writing. This is a great place to start if you want to build on your creative writing skills.