

FILM IN FOCUS (90m)

Since the birth of cinema people have loved films - but why? What makes film so compelling as entertainment and art? In this course lecturer Sam Maxfield will explore techniques such as cinematography, editing and music, to illustrate how film narratives are created. By focusing on one topic per week the group will examine the methods used by filmmakers to tell their stories and discuss their effect on the audience. This is not a practical course for filmmakers but is a way into understanding film, both for beginners wanting to learn to 'read film' or for film-lovers who want to deepen their appreciation.

Tutor: Sam Maxfield

Duration: 10 weeks

Monday evenings commencing MON 4 OCT, 7PM-8.30PM

Week 1: Introduction

A general introduction to key concepts we'll explore in the course and an in-depth consideration of the term 'Mise-en-Scene' as a way into learning how to read films.

Week 2: Settings and People

We'll examine how filmmakers use location and settings to manipulate audience expectations and how the placement of actors within the setting tells us about the character.

Week 3: Shots Part 1

Wide-angle or fish-eye lense? High angle shot or canted low angle? The choices a director (or cinematographer) make profoundly affect the storytelling and how the audience 'reads' the scene.

Week 4: Shots Part 2

Like angles and lenses, the choice of how the camera moves influences audience reaction. From an opening sweeping pan of a Western, or a dizzying crane shot, or a claustrophobic handheld digital 'shaky cam' horror, the effect can be profound.

Week 5: Lighting

Lighting is a vital part of filmmaking, whether classic Hollywood lighting or naturalistic 'realism', light is used to in various ways to signify mood and meaning.

Week 6: Colourscapes

From the clever use of light and shadow in black and white films, to the sharp colour of a Kubrick film or the whimsy of a Wes Anderson, we'll explore how filmmakers use colour schemes purposefully and symbolically.

Week 7: Continuity Editing and Narrative Flow

Most mainstream cinema adopts the 'invisible' editing style that allows the audience to absorb the narrative as a smooth, continuous flow, for the greater part unaware of the cuts, choice of shots, and various decisions that manipulate their experience. This session we will dissect some of those editing choices while also looking at choices that purposely disturb the narrative flow.

Week 8: Soundscapes

While music is profoundly important to our experience of cinema, many of us never really give a thought to the other sounds we hear apart from dialogue. Yet films are rich in soundscapes - footsteps, doors opening, wind whistling to name but a few. We will explore how all are chosen and crafted to subtly enhance our experience.

Week 9: Music and Score

After a film has been edited into a complete narrative it needs a score. Even silent films weren't really silent; they were usually accompanied by an orchestra, organ or modest piano depending on where you saw them. Thus music has always been part of the cinematic experience. In this last session we explore how music influences our reactions to the action on screen and ties together the filmic experience.

Week 10: Conclusion

This session is a chance for us to assess what we have learnt over the last few weeks, consider how different choices of techniques might change a film, and discuss the art of filmmaking in the current climate of calculated franchise blockbusters.