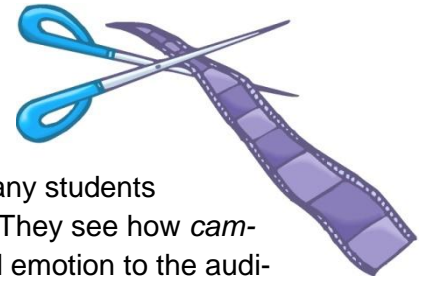


# Editing and representation



As a technical code, editing is primarily related to narrative, and many students struggle to make connections between editing and representation. They see how *camera-work* – such as close-ups and low angles – conveys status and emotion to the audience. The use of costume, props and settings – functions of *mise en scène* – are also pretty transparent. But what does match-on-action have to do with character or representation?

This list is designed to help you to start thinking about how editing can, if sometimes subtly, influence the audience's reading of a character, and lead on to wider questions of representation. It is not an exhaustive list, and you should be wary of assuming these suggestions are either a) complete or b) foolproof – for the same reason that black and white don't *always* represent good and evil (just ask a penguin). The role of editing in representation is open to interpretation, and is greatly dependent on context. So use your own intelligence!

## Action match

When following a single character (e.g. Billy Elliot) this is a purely technical device. However, when an action match is used for intercutting, it can heighten the parallels/contrasts between two different characters in two different situations – an opportunity for juxtaposition.

**eg:** in *Skins*, the young Russian woman's swinging of the axe – all sex and power – is juxtaposed with the fat Russian dinnerlady's heavy serving of congealed mashed potato. It draws attention to the contrasting ways in which Russian women are being represented.

## Eyeline match

Eyeline match usually provides insight to a character's private thoughts.

**eg:** In *Doctor Who: Last of the Time Lords*, Martha exchanges glances with all the people she loves, as though this may be the last chance she has to communicate with them before she dies. Similarly, as she confronts the Master, we keep cutting from her to the family and friends watching her, signifying that she, the woman, is the centre of the action.

## Final shot

In any scene, which character or characters are shown in the final shot of the sequence?

This is often the character with whom the audience is expected to *identify*.

**eg:** In *Primeval*, although Abby saves the day, the last shot is on Cutter, signifying that the audience is intended to adopt the male, not female, point of view. See also every *EastEnders* cliffhanger ever.

## Intercutting: juxtaposition

Although typically a narrative device, intercutting can set up juxtaposition between parallel storylines, exaggerating the impact or meaning of each by highlighting a point of difference.

**eg:** in *EastEnders: Wedding Night*, the warmth, light and music of the happy pre-wedding feast is in stark contrast with the two unhappy families represented in the cold and dark whenever we cut away. This provides a more favourable representation of Asian family life over white Londoners.

## Intercutting: tension

When intercutting is used to draw two storylines together, this can be structured to create tension, and therefore heighten the audience's identification with a particular character.

**eg:** in *Primeval*, intercutting between the tiger's pursuit of Cutter and Abby's running in with the rifle is action code and prompts the question: will she get there in time? In *Hotel Babylon*, intercutting offers both tension and juxtaposition: just as Adam is saving his colleague's life with a jar of jam, another African immigrant, Ibrahim, is being lost. These lead the audience to identify with both characters.

## Jump cuts

These are rarely used in TV or film; when they are, they tend to suggest either a) chaos and disorder, b) self-conscious ellipsis (drawing attention to the rapid pace of the action) or c) a director who likes to break the rules!

**eg:** In *Primeval*, two jump cuts accelerate Cutter's preparation to slide down the zip-wire; this could be read as speedy and decisive.

## Motivation

A motivated edit is any transition 'forced' on the editor by the development of the action, narrative or character. Whenever shot (a) refers to the existence of an event outside the frame, and we then cut to (b) which shows that event, that's a motivated edit. We can sometimes judge a character's worth or importance by the number of cuts they motivate.

**eg:** In *Primeval*, Cutter runs away from the tiger, drawing it away from Abby. His constant motion motivates many cuts in this sequence, reinforcing his status as the protagonist, if not the Proppian hero.

## Pace of editing

This can imply character qualities, especially if only one or two characters are in the sequence. A fast pace might suggest energy or panic (depending on context) while infrequent cuts (long takes) might suggest calm, a casual attitude, or provide documentary-style realism (as in *Cast Offs*). Similar effects can be achieved with speed ramping and slow-motion.

## Prevalence

How much screen time does a character get? The more time we see them on screen, the more important their role. This can develop during a scene to change characters' status.

**eg:** in *Hotel Babylon*, Adam is invisible – just one of many refugees – until he steps forward to treat the diabetic maid. Suddenly, the editing favours him, and we realise his importance and skill, despite his menial status in the hotel.

## Selection: to show or not to show

As experienced film-makers yourselves, it can sometimes be interesting to ask what information has been included or omitted in an edit.

**eg:** in *Primeval*, as Jenny comes under increased threat from West, at no point do we cut away to her colleagues approaching the barn. To do so might have reduced the tension in the scene; not doing so arguably increases Jenny's apparent vulnerability. Narratively, it's also a nice surprise when the team arrive in a single cut, which contrasts with the early tiger chase (see intercutting).

## Shot/reverse shot and reaction shots

S/R/S indicates the relationship between two characters: it signifies and sometime exaggerates their closeness – or their opposition (depending on the context). The amount of time given to a character's reaction shots can convey their status in the scene. For example, if two characters are in S/R/S conversation, do they get equal screen time, or do we spend more time looking at one character, speaking and reacting? Equally (though this is also a function of *camera*, are the two characters framed equally?

**eg:** in *Doctor Who*, the S/R/S between Martha and the Master gives Martha CUs and the Master MCUs, conveying Martha's greater status as a character, even if narratively she appears defeated.

## Keep thinking

This is just the start. What ways can YOU see in which editing influences representation in TV Drama? And are you sure all of these are right? They won't always mean the same thing!

