

Language of media

SYNTAX

Topic 2



Syntax

Syntax is the way how the text is constructed: words, phrases, and sentences or their parts. It is also the study of the relationships of component parts of the text.

Rules of syntax are also behind the **inverted pyramid structure** and relations between parts of the journalistic text: headline, main text, sub-headlines, pictures, graphics, multimedia components.

In audiovisual media, syntax is the arrangement of various components of the picture (title, graphics) or motion picture (order of pictures or scenes, relation between sound and picture).



Syntax

Syntax is not dealing with the meaning. However, the techniques used to create audio-visual media, which are described in this lesson, can be used to encode various messages. Hence syntax and semantics are closely related.



Syntax

Each film - and video to some extent - is created three times, during:

- Pre-production
- Production
- Editing (post-production)



Static techniques (that can help convey meaning)

Scene setting – mise-en-scène: Arrangement of everything that appears in front of the camera.

180-degree rule: the camera should stay on one side of an imaginary line between two characters so that each character always appears to be facing the same direction, regardless of where the camera is positioned. Breaking the 180-degree rule may cause a spatial disorientation.

30-degree rule: the camera should move at least 30 degrees relative to the subject between two consecutive shots that are focusing on the same subject. This rule helps avoid distraction of the audience.



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Static techniques (that can help convey meaning)

Double exposition (or Double - Multiple - Exposure): superimposition of two images, one over the other, which results from exposing the same film twice.

Superimposition - images are placed over each other in one frame.

Length of a shot: how much time is dedicated to a certain topic or person.

Colour: use of special filters to represent the situation and mood.

Lighting: the intensity and quality of lighting influences perception of the situation.



Static techniques (that can help convey meaning)

Sizes of shot: how much of the environment or the subject is visible, figure is also used to describe the scale. For example:

- **Establishing shot:** it introduces the audience to the scene or whole movie. It clearly shows the location and sets the tone of other shots.
- **Extreme close up:** e.g. an eye or chin.

Angle of a shot: the camera placement (angle of the camera).

- **Low-angle shot:** camera is placed low on the vertical axis and is looking up.
- **High-angle shot:** camera is placed high on the vertical axis and is looking down. It should not be confused with aerial shot, which is shot from above (for example from birds' perspective).



Dynamic techniques (that can help convey meaning)

Editing

Cuts and transitions: order of scenes can change perception of the whole story. Editing is a powerful tool for manipulation and deception. Information can be easily taken out of context. Transitions are used to achieve artistic impression, or convey jumps in time or space.

Examples of cuts:

- **Time cut:** it refers to simple passage of time.
- **Smash cut:** it is used at a crucial moment in a scene where it is not expected.
- **Match cut:** in this technique, two shots on either side of the cut are connected by a subject, action, or subject matter



Dynamic techniques (that can help convey meaning)

Editing

The main transitions used are:

- **Dissolve to** indicates that a longer period of time has passed between two scenes.
- **Fade to** means that one shot is fading into the black (fades out) and the following shot starts with black frames and gradually becomes brighter (fades in).
- **Wipe to** is a film transition, where one shot replaces another by moving from one point of the shot to another, often with a special shape. Examples of the wipe are: star wipe, clock wipe (indicates that a time has passed), or wipe from left to right.



Dynamic techniques (that can help convey meaning)

Editing

- **Combination of sound and picture:** whether the person speaks loudly or quietly and presence of background noises can influence perception of the person or story.
- **Music:** usually used to provoke emotions.
- **Special effects:** they are used to make the media piece more attractive, but can be counterproductive if they have a bad quality or are inappropriate.



Dynamic techniques (that can help convey meaning)

Editing

Montage is an editing technique, in which a series of shots, often accompanied by music, represents a long period of time, at least one day, condensed into one to a few minutes to provide relevant and important information about space, time, and/or events.



Dynamic techniques (that can help convey meaning)

Editing

Fast cutting is a combination of several consecutive shots of a very short duration (just a few seconds). It can be used to share a lot of information very quickly, but also to imply radical changes, energy, or chaos.

Continuity editing is a technique in which more-or-less related shots are combined into a sequence to convey temporal or spatial continuity.

Part of continuity editing is use of **continuous diegetic sound** which helps to smooth cuts by overlapping the shots. It's close to the rule that says picture and sound cannot be cut at the same time.



Dynamic techniques (that can help convey meaning)

Editing

Cross-cutting conveys spatial discontinuity by cutting back and forth between two locations at which two actions are happening parallel to each other.