

Grammar of the Edit



Fifth Edition

Christopher J. Bowen

A Focal Press Book



Grammar of the Edit

This newly revised and updated fifth edition of *Grammar of the Edit* will teach anyone who needs to use video as a communication tool how to show more effective visual stories. This accessible resource presents both traditional and cutting-edge methodologies that address the all-important questions of when to cut and why, and teaches readers the principles behind selecting the best shots, cutting for continuity, pacing, editing sound, color correction, and more.

Designed as an easy-to-use guide, this book covers each topic succinctly with clear photographs and diagrams illustrating key concepts, complete with fun and practical exercises and quiz questions, as well as “from-the-field” examples, resulting in a staple text for any filmmaker’s library.

New to the fifth edition:

- Instructional and student resources offer downloadable and editable raw footage so that students can practice the techniques described in the book, and instructional videos showcasing examples of different editing choices and types of shot transitions.
- Thorough chapter content reviews and refreshed exercises and quizzes help test readers on their knowledge using real-world scenarios.
- New section, Principles in Practice, concludes each chapter by presenting unique scenarios that a video maker may encounter in their own video-editing work and offers creative solutions and advice on how one might handle them.

Together with its companion volume, *Grammar of the Shot*, the core concepts discussed in these books offer concise and practical resources for both experienced and aspiring filmmakers who wish to master their craft.

Christopher J. Bowen has 25 years of experience within the motion media industry as a cinematographer, editor, director, producer, and educator. Currently, he enjoys visual content creation, fine arts painting, and writing fiction. He is the author of the companion text, *Grammar of the Shot*.



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Introduction

Today's world is filled with screens, both large and small, that stream moving images. From the IMAX theater to digital billboards to your 4K TV, laptop, or tablet to the smartphone in your pocket: All are capable of displaying motion media. It is safe to say that every moving image that you see on these screens has been edited. Movies, television shows, commercials, music videos, and web videos of all kinds have been cut down, re-ordered, padded out, massaged, sweetened, and tweaked to some degree or another – by an editor.

A writer creates the story, a director coaches the talent, a cinematographer creates the visual style of each shot, and an editor puts all of these pieces together. Being one of the last creative people to touch a motion media project, the editor truly is the final storyteller. That final version may be exactly what creators set out to make, or it may be very different in mood, tempo, information content, or emotional effect. It is the skill, craft, and gut instinct of the editor that help to form the over-arching visual style, pacing, and coherence of story that are ultimately experienced by the audience. Editing is where you get to figure out how to make it all work together.

This book, *Grammar of the Edit*, fifth edition, continues the series' long tradition of introducing video beginners to the world of time-based, motion media editing. The suggested guidelines and general practices presented herein will provide a new student of this craft with a solid understanding of the established techniques and methodologies associated with the *what*, *how*, and *why* of the video-editing process.

The updated fifth edition has been thoughtfully redesigned, enhanced, and expanded. Comprehensive chapter outlines and detailed review sections highlight the main concepts contained within. Exercises and Quiz Yourself materials present ways in which you can immediately apply concepts and offer a gauge to see how well you absorbed the information. The content from the fourth edition's [Chapter Eight: Working Practices](#) has been integrated into the conclusion of each existing chapter where the related concepts are most-directly put forward. These new Principles-in-Practice sections (PIPs) present real-world scenarios (some more advanced) that a video content creator is likely to encounter while working on projects. New topics have been added throughout the fifth edition, and most recurring topics have been rewritten and restructured for clarity and flow. Many of the visual figures that illustrate the concepts have been refreshed.

Regardless of the career direction in which the fledgling editor wishes to go, everyone needs to learn how to walk before they can run – this book will define the basic terms and clarify the common practices of editing motion media projects. It does not mention specific video-editing software, but it does discuss some issues inherent to the digital video medium. Terms such as “motion picture” or “motion media” content may be used interchangeably to encompass a wide variety of live-action and animated project types, whether produced for social media, the web, television, or movie theaters. A particular genre of film or a specific type of television or streaming programming may be called out in an example to illustrate a unique point. The goal of this book is to inform a person, who is new to editing video, about the accepted practices of the craft, the reasoning behind those practices, and how the audience interprets meaning, on several levels, as they experience the edited piece. Good technique and not-so-good technique will be discussed and illustrated. In the end, you will find that there is no 100% right or wrong way; there is only what works and what does not work for that particular edit – and why.

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As a media professional, I wish to thank my many collaborators and clients, who have encouraged and enabled me to explore new techniques in telling their unique motion media stories.

As an educator in film production for over two decades, I wish to acknowledge the support of my numerous colleagues and the helpful contributions from all of my students over the years. A collective thanks to everyone who has added to my growth as an educator, author, and motion media producer.

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This book is for all people who wish to learn the basics about communicating visually through motion pictures – especially the editing process. I hope you have fun and enjoy the ride. If you would like to learn more about the topic, find additional resources, or contact the author, please visit the author's website: www.grammaroftheedit.com.

For Emily & Jinx & Sparky

Chapter One

Video Editing: An Introduction to the Process

- A Very Brief History of Film Editing
- Key Factors Affecting Editorial Choices
- Stages of the Editing Process
- Traditional Motion Picture Transitions

When you write something substantial, like a paper for school, an important work email, or a blog post, you typically have a certain message in mind before you start writing. Then, to do the actual writing, you select words from your vocabulary and put them together in particular ways to construct sentences. If assembled correctly, these accumulated sentences will inform, entertain, or evoke emotional responses within the reader. A very similar process occurs when you edit a motion picture. You must have a message (or story) in mind as you begin. Then, to do the actual editing, you select shots of visual and aural content (your video's "words") and assemble them in a particular **sequence** (your video's "sentences"). If done correctly, this motion media message will inform, entertain, or evoke emotional responses within the viewer. For your readers to comprehend your written sentences, you must follow the known and accepted rules of grammar for your written language: word order, verb tense, phrase construction, punctuation, etc. There is also a similar grammar for the visual "language" of motion pictures. It governs how the images are recorded and how they are edited together – and, over time and with repeated exposure, audiences have learned how to "read" them.

In our companion book, *Grammar of the Shot*, the basic practices of structure, movement, and purpose in frame composition are discussed in detail. This text, *Grammar of the Edit*, presents the traditional guidelines of motion media construction that will allow you to take those same shots and assemble them together into a meaningful narrative. As a creative motion media producer, you can choose to edit your visual and aural elements however you wish, but it should be understood that traditional editing guidelines do exist and that they are commonly accepted (and, often, expected) in the entertainment and visual communication fields. The chapters of this book are designed to help you to understand the visual and aural materials that you will be working with during post-production. Our content also describes numerous principles and practices behind

the basic grammar of the motion media editing process. Familiarizing yourself with this content will set you on a clearer path to good video editing practices.

A Very Brief History of Film Editing

Understanding why things are the way they are today requires an examination of how we got here. The present is built upon the past, and taking a quick walk down film editing's historical timeline will provide useful context for the technologies, terms, and techniques that you'll be reading about in this book.

Long before the existence of digital video and computer editing software, people used emulsion film to create the illusion of movement on a screen. More than 100 years ago, emulsion film strips and hand-cranked moving film cameras were leading-edge technologies, but the actual length of plastic film limited the duration of image recording time. Many of the original movies were merely very brief **real-time** recordings of life's daily events.

The technologies advanced very quickly and motion pictures moved from being straight documentary recordings to more elaborately constructed fictional narrative stories. Longer strips of film allowed for longer recording times. As film's visual language began to develop, more shot variety was introduced and motion pictures grew in scope and sophistication. The "cutters" who once just assembled a few short strips of picture film took on a new role in the expanding post-production phase of filmmaking. Story structuring – or sometimes reconstructing – became the full-time job of the film editor.

Within just a few decades, a more complex visual language of motion picture photography and editing had evolved. Films were quickly becoming the largest entertainment and information medium on the planet. They were held in high esteem by many and denounced by others as a novelty at best and a corrupting distraction at worst. Motion pictures and how audiences perceived them became a source of study. Many theories about the social and artistic values of filmmaking, and the visual power of film editing especially, emerged from different cultures around the world.

At what point the editor cut the film and how the various shots were joined together were seen to have an effect on the viewing audience above and beyond the actual story. Editing was no longer just a means to physically trim the excess footage from a series of shots; it had become recognized as a powerful tool in the filmmaker's toolbox.

Over time, the machines that took the pictures and performed the cuts evolved, but most of the basic parameters of visual grammar remained the same. Differing editorial styles have come and gone, but the core methods and intent behind the practice of assembling picture and sound elements are unchanged even today.

What Is Editing?

As a transitive verb, “to edit” can mean to review, refine, modify, eliminate, or assemble components into a new, acceptable form. It was first used broadly with the written word and is now also applied to moving picture and sound creations. For our purposes, the term “editing” (a noun) is the act of assembling individual clips of picture and sound into a coherent story of some kind. So, an “editor” is a person who takes a collection of picture and sound material source clips, and reviews, refines, modifies, eliminates, and assembles those picture and sound components into a new, acceptable form or motion media story.

An **edit** (also a noun) is the place where you join those clips, of picture and/or sound, and transition from one shot to the next within that assembly. Put simply, an edit is a cut point: a place where one shot ends and another separate shot begins. The term “cut” stems from the days when motion pictures were shot and edited on very long strips of celluloid plastic emulsion film. Looking at the individual still frames on that strip of film, the editor would determine where to physically cut the film between pictures. A pair of scissors or a razor blade was used to actually cut the film at that point (Figure 1.1). Glue or a tape “splicer” was then used to join the different cut strips of plastic film together again (Figure 1.2). The cut or join becomes the point of transition from one shot to the next. The **straight cut** described here is just one way to move between shots. How, when, and why you choose to transition from one shot to another depends on many variables.

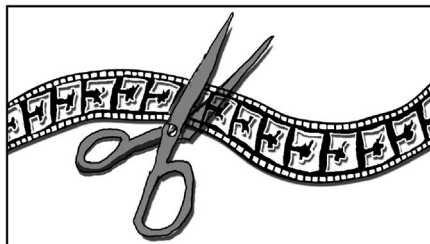


FIGURE 1.1 Initially, editing motion picture film required very basic technologies.

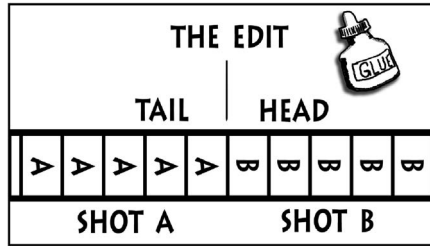


FIGURE 1.2 The head of the film clip for Shot B is edited onto the tail end of Shot A.

Key Factors Affecting Editorial Choices

Tools

The first factor you may wish to consider is what medium you are using to perform the actual edits: film, tape-to-tape video, or digital video-editing software. Each medium, and the devices that are used in the editing processes, can often dictate physical, time-related, or, certainly, financial limitations. At the time of writing, you would be hard pressed to find anyone who, on a large and consistent scale, still splices emulsion film prints or runs linear tape edit suites. The majority of editing, for all kinds of motion media projects, is now done almost exclusively using software Apps on computers (desktops, laptops, tablets, and mobile smartphones).

If you only have access to very basic editing software, do not worry; you are still able to effectively edit picture and sound elements to create a good story. More advanced tools can allow new editors to play with more bells and whistles, but at the core, you need to maintain good storytelling (or story-showing) methods, regardless of the type of project you are making. Don't believe the hype: the "latest and greatest" technologies do not automatically enhance the quality and value of your project or make you a better editor. You may find, however, that it is necessary to have a recent operating system and a recent version of editing software to actually decode and play the video files generated by the many different digital video cameras in use today.

However, having some access to a robust computer and the video-editing software of your choice is actually very important to anyone's progression as a practicing video editor. If you do not have the tools, you cannot practice, and you cannot do the work; therefore, your skills will not improve. Luckily, several of the major Apps do allow for free trials or "limited-use" free versions of their fully functioning software. Certain Apps with rudimentary features are free or relatively inexpensive for download and do a fine job at providing you the tools you will need to complete basic and intermediate video

projects. Audio-only editing applications are similarly available. The self-education marketplace offers many high-quality learning materials (books, virtual courses, training videos, etc.) to assist you in acquiring detailed instruction on precise software titles. Please see [Appendix A](#) to get started on your own search for useful resources.

In this book, we will purposefully keep the discussions of editing grammar as generic as possible. We will do very little in the way of mentioning specific hardware or software, tool names, buttons, menu items, or keyboard shortcuts. There are, quite frankly, too many, and they are modified, added, or removed with each new version of each operating system, software title, App, or device. The general working practices presented here should apply to any medium or genre and to most editing devices or applications. Where it matters, we will call it out specifically. Just be aware that certain terminology and techniques used in one medium may have their origins rooted in the history of another and may vary from one software application to another and even from one country to another.

Project Type and Genre

A second factor that may affect your editing choices can be the kind of project you are editing. Are you assembling picture and sound media for a documentary, a fictional narrative short film, a news package, a YouTube “how-to” video, a music video, a television commercial, a cousin’s wedding video, or even an animated cartoon? Each type of motion media project may have duration limits, a call for certain editing styles, or require particular visual elements, transitions, etc. For instance, you may wish to use long, slowly progressing dissolves from one shot to the next in a moody music video, but you may not find it beneficial to use them in a hard-hitting, factual news package. We will discuss dissolves in more detail later, but the example illustrates the importance of understanding the traditionally accepted guidelines of style for differing program types and for genres within those distinct kinds of programs.

The project’s budget, scope, purpose, quality of resources, and turnaround time also play into the approach an editor can take. Personal or “no-budget” productions may require that you have your own computer and video editing software and have access to a number of high-capacity media file storage hard drives. Larger shows may be edited in more professional editing facilities with very complex signal flow and shared network storage. Often, a project’s budget also affects the scope (the length of the desired final edit), the quality of resources, and the time frame for completion. Short news pieces with only a few images and soundbites need to be cut together quickly to

get to air – sometimes in a matter of minutes. A feature film, especially a grand epic saga, may have tens or hundreds of hours of footage to comb through and assemble into a rather complex, multi-character storyline. This kind of project may take months to finish.

The type of project you are editing can also demand and/or influence many of the nitty-gritty editing choices you make. If you are cutting for an established TV show, it probably already has a template or formula to be followed. Watch enough “reality” and non-fiction TV and you’ll quickly see the sections, patterns, and timings of “story” events in each episode. Videos you make for your own YouTube channel may also be structured around a “branded” template – for efficiency and for meeting subscriber audience expectations. A slow-moving, hour-long drama may call for uninterrupted long takes of strong performances by the actors. A promotional video for a motocross racing team may benefit from very fast cutting of short, action-filled clips accompanied by hard-driving music and many visual effects (sometimes called **VFX** or **DVE**). Your own experimental film or a music video project could allow you total freedom when it comes to how you treat the visual and aural elements. For the purposes of clarity and simplicity, we will often focus on the grammar and practices associated with fictional narrative motion picture storytelling, but the general guidelines may apply to all forms of motion media.

Degree of Audience Manipulation

It is safe to say that almost all edited motion media projects are destined to be viewed by some kind of audience, whether on a social media stream, in a large movie theater, or along the aisles of a “big-box” store. The editor is the person who crafts that particular viewing experience for the intended audience. Often tied directly to the purpose of the project, the level of manipulation (and we mean this in a good way – like directing or guiding) invoked by the editor is variable. It’s like taking the audience on a ride at an amusement park. Are you going to create an adrenaline rush like the corkscrew coaster? Is your project slow and calm like the “kiddie karz?” Do you want to construct a mysterious and complex story full of false leads like the hall of mirrors or frightening jump scares like the spooky haunted house ride?

The **pacing** and **rhythm** you provide to the edited shots, scenes, and sequences help control the audience’s experience and their mental, physical, and emotional reactions to the story. If you present certain information in a certain order for particular durations on screen, you will get certain responses from the viewer. The need for and degree of audience manipulation comes from the **purpose** and **content** of the motion media project.

Are you editing an informational process or how-to video? Not much direct manipulation of emotions are needed there. Are you editing a short, funny video for TikTok? You might construct a set-up/pay-off scenario with comedic timing. A dramatic, action-adventure story has all of the ups and downs of a roller-coaster ride. Sustained tension needs a release. Suspense must end to feel completed. The script, the direction, and the performances (whatever the project might be) all add to the degree of audience manipulation that the editor constructs while assembling the picture and sound elements. Whether the goal of the project is to inform or to entertain, or a combination of both, the quality of the edited content allows the audience to engage with the material during the viewing experience – to think and to feel – in ways that you, the editor, want them to think and feel, when you want them to think and feel in those ways.

Other Factors

Another factor involved with over-arching editorial choices is your own level of creativity. Experience can help to give you speed of execution and some well-developed problem-solving skills, but any editor, regardless of age or time in the editor's chair, can come up with bold, fresh, and innovative approaches to stitching together a very effective final product. The right editor can breathe new life into almost any old, tired, or boring content, but an editor, no matter how skilled, may still have to deal with those potential limiting factors discussed previously (and others yet to be discovered).

Additionally, if the project is not your own, you may have to consider the viewpoints and input of other parties. The vision of the director and the not-so-subtle suggestions of a producer can (and will) influence the direction in which a project, or certainly portions of projects, may go. Yes, an editor performs the task of editing, but she or he does not always have total control over the many variables that are at play during the post-production process. The goal, however, should always be to create the best and most genre-appropriate viewing experience for the audience, regardless of any limiting factors or challenges that may present themselves. Getting your next job may depend on it.

Stages of the Editing Process

As an editor, you will be tasked with creating motion media presentations that show coherent, meaningful, emotional, and/or informational narratives to certain audiences. To achieve repeated successes with these finished sequences, you will, most likely, need to work through several stages of story development.

The editing process, more generally referred to as **post-production** (or sometimes just **post**), can range from being rather simple to extremely complex. The post-production period really encompasses any and all work on the project that comes after the video recording period (also known as **production**) is completed. Picture and sound tracks are edited together to show and tell the story, special visual effects are generated, titles/graphics/credits are added, sound effects are created, and music is scored and mixed – all during post-production. On smaller projects, one person may have to do all of this work, but on larger productions, several teams of creators and technicians work in various departments to contribute unique elements across the phases of the post-production **workflow**.

In recent decades, within the world of broadcast television editing, there have been two main phases of post-production: the **offline edit** and the **online edit**. The offline phase builds out draft versions of the overall show structure and is traditionally done with lower resolution image files so that the editing system can work faster. The online phase turns the agreed-upon completed sequence into a high-resolution/best-audio-mix program ready for television broadcasting. It looks and sounds as best as it can for the viewing audience and conforms to the technical specifications of delivery. Today, even though most videos produced do not get shown on broadcast TV, many post-production workflows still follow this offline/online editing process for scheduling, organizational, and sometimes technical reasons. With our faster and more powerful computers, graphics cards, RAM, and storage drives, combined with more capable video-editing software, we are no longer required to conform to this rigid offline-to-online process. Most professional and many amateur editors can work on high-definition/4K media all the way through the editing process, although large amounts of hard-drive space are eaten up very quickly for data storage. If your editing system is not robust enough, you will encounter some playback issues – offline/online can certainly assist you in this instance ([Figure 1.3](#)).

The following is a list of the major steps involved in most post-production workflows. Consider the acquisition to picture lock stages as the offline phase, and the finishing and mastering and delivery stages as the online phase:

- Acquisition
- Organization
- Review and selection
- Assembly
- Rough cut

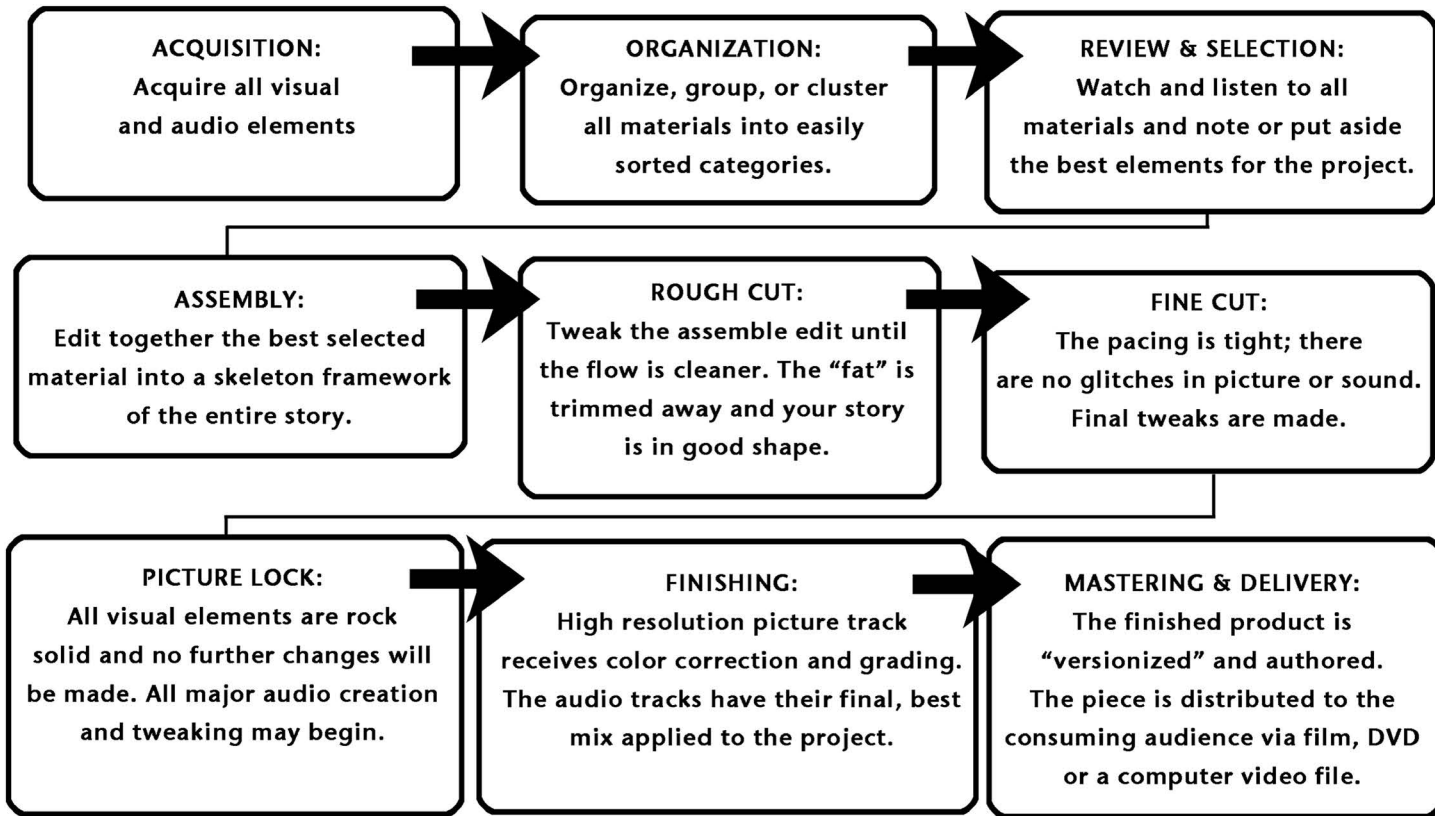


FIGURE 1.3 The common stages of the editing process.

Stages of the Editing Process

- Fine cut
- Picture lock
- Finishing
- Mastering and delivery

Acquisition

Simply put, you must acquire the visual and audio media recorded by the production team and any other sources required for completing the edited project (i.e., still photos, music, graphics, etc.). Motion picture and sound elements, whether on emulsion film, analogue tape, digital tape, or as digital media files, must be gathered for the duration of the post-production editing process. As almost all editing is done on computers, any source material not already in a digital format must be converted. If you are using a digital non-linear editing system to perform the edit, then you will have to import, capture, or “digitize” all materials as media on your storage drives. These media files must be protected and remain accessible by your editing software for the lifespan of the project.

Organization

All of the minutes, hours, feet, reels, or gigabytes of picture, graphics, and sound elements should be organized in some way. If you do not have a clear system of labeling, grouping, or sorting all of the material needed for your project, you will eventually have a difficult time finding that particular videoclip or that special sound effect, etc., when you really need it. Having unique bins or folders for material arranged by date, subject, scene, etc., is wise on both short-term and long-term projects. Organization of source materials is not the most glamorous part of the editing process, but it can certainly make the difference between a smooth post-production workflow and a slower and more frustrating one. Many of the better editors and **assistant editors** are also highly praised for their organizational skills. Create your own organizational methods that make sense to you across all types of projects, but be prepared to adapt when working at certain post-production facilities, who will, no doubt, have their own in-house ways of doing things.

Review and Selection

Once you have acquired and organized your picture and sound elements, it will be necessary to review all of this material and pick out the best pieces that will work for your project. You will “pull the selects” and set aside the good stuff while weeding

out the junk that you hope you will not have to use. Some editors place the “selects” (or copies of the good stuff) in their “working” bins or folders, while others might color code their clips according to usability. Labeling the shots you would like to use in some way will be important as you proceed with the edit. You would also be wise to not actually throw anything away (trash or delete) because you never know what might come in handy a day or a few weeks into the editing process. That one shot of the flag waving in the breeze may just save the entire edit, so keep it readily available even though you know it is not one of your best original selections. Some editors create “master footage” sequences out of all the good material so that they have a single source through which they can more easily scrub – quickly scanning and locating needed visual content. This can be faster than loading each individual clip in the source monitor window.

Assembly

This process calls for assembling the major pieces of the project into a logical sequence of picture and sound elements. If you are editing a scripted story, you may initially try to follow that script as a blueprint for assembling the best selections of the various shots of the scenes that make up the motion picture. Some editors start off by following scripts with production notes or storyboards, while other editors use this first pass to assemble the narrative that *they* see in the raw footage given to them. If you are creating a documentary or even a music video, there is always some story that needs to be shown to an audience; assemble those raw parts into this skeleton version. Some editors even string together all the good takes of a performance at the appropriate point of the assembly sequence to get a better feel for which take may work best, eventually keeping just that one. No matter what genre the project, the story, in its longest and most rough-hewn form, takes shape now in the assembly phase.

Rough Cut

This is the stage of the project’s development where the majority of the “visual fat” has been trimmed and you are left with a presentation that is a long but functional version of the narrative, with many rough edges. Not every cut is perfectly timed; there are no finalized titles or graphics; effects, if any, are more or less placeholders; and the **audio mix** certainly has not been completed. You do have the timing of the main elements down to a good pace, however, and you, and others to whom you show the developing work, like how the story unfolds, although major restructuring of scenes may still occur if the flow does not feel right.

Fine Cut

You have worked, re-worked, and massaged the material of your project into a tight and finely tuned presentation. You like the order and timing of shots in each scene, the overall pacing fits the story, and the various elements work together as best as they can. There will be no major renovations from this point forward. You and the majority of the people to whom you show the piece all agree that only minor tweaks are required. This cut is fine.

Picture Lock

You have reached picture lock when you are absolutely certain that you will not make any more changes to the picture track(s) of your edited sequence. The timing of all picture elements (shots, titles, black pauses, etc.) is set. Once you have locked the picture tracks (sometimes literally but mostly figuratively), you are then free to address your audio-mixing needs: Final sound effects (SFX), level/panning tweaks, music scoring, etc. In the olden days of actual emulsion film “work print” editing, the picture track had to be locked at a precise duration so that each separately constructed audio track would **sync** up from the start frame. All computer editing software is so much more flexible that there is no longer an absolute need for picture lock, but keep in mind that any alteration to overall duration of picture tracks must still be altered on *all* corresponding audio tracks as well – or sync issues will result.

Finishing

This stage is sometimes called the online edit. If the offline edit has been done with low-resolution or proxy files, then these are swapped out for the highest-resolution video clips possible. Finishing is the stage where the final color grading of the image is accomplished. This is also known as color timing, and may include additional color correction. Every clip of video is made to look as good as necessary according to the needs of the project (i.e., appropriate colors, saturation, and brightness and **contrast** levels, etc.). Best-resolution graphics, titles, animations, etc. are placed into the sequence. The audio tracks also receive their final mix and are placed in your timeline (in proper sync) along with all of these “finished” video tracks.

Mastering and Delivery

All of your efforts in creating a well-edited piece will mean very little if you cannot deliver the show to the audience that needs to see it. These days, this process may

mean **rendering** everything and recording your finished sequence onto an archival HD videotape, creating a cut list for an optical film print for projection in a legacy movie theater, exporting and converting your story into a computer video file for streaming, or authoring onto a Blu-ray DVD. Each medium would require a unique process and supporting hardware, software, and media. The end result is a fully mastered original version of your show that you can then convert into other media formats and upload and/or **distribute** to various viewing outlets for audiences to enjoy. It also makes good sense to keep an archive copy (or two – stored in different locations) of this fully completed work.

You should now have a solid idea of what the basic editing or post-production workflow is for any project, whether large or small. You certainly may encounter projects that do not call for all of these stages of editing to be executed in a clearly delineated manner, but, for the most part, you will touch upon some combination of each of these stages as you work toward your finished sequence. Finding your own logical and efficient order of editing phases will be part of your own unique approach. Just understand that they have been developed by the industry across the years for good reasons – rushing through, omitting, or jumping around the order too much may compromise the speed and efficacy of your post-production process.

Traditional Motion Picture Transitions

The last topic for us to touch on in this introductory chapter on editing will be the edit point itself: The place where the two clips are joined together. Getting a handle on these terms now will help us to understand them better as they appear throughout this book. [Chapter Six](#) is dedicated to a more expansive exploration of these traditional editing practices.

In an edited sequence, there are four basic ways to transition from one shot or visual element into another:

1. **Cut** – An instantaneous change from one shot to the next. The last full frame of picture for a clip is immediately followed by the first full frame of picture for the next clip.
2. **Dissolve** – A gradual change from the ending pictures of one shot into the beginning pictures of the next shot. This is traditionally achieved via a momentary **superimposition** of the two shots over one another, where the opacity of the outgoing shot fades down and that of the incoming shot fades up

simultaneously. As the end of the first shot “dissolves” away, the beginning of the next shot “resolves” onto the screen at the same time. Both images appear to be blended on the screen for a very brief period.

3. **Wipe** – A line, progressing at some angle, or a geometric shape, moves across the screen removing the image of the shot just ending while simultaneously revealing the next shot behind the moving line or shape. The wiping shot replaces the previous shot on the screen over a brief duration where segments of both shots are partially visible.
4. **Fade** – (1) A gradual change from a solid color-filled screen (typically black) into a fully visible image, also known as a **fade-from-black** or **fade-in**; (2) a gradual change from a fully visible image into a solid color-filled screen (typically black), also known as a **fade-to-black** or **fade-out**.

The grammar of the edit has evolved in some ways since the early days of cinema, but these four basic transitions have remained the same. No matter what type of motion media project you are editing or what tool you are using to make it, a cut is still a cut. A dissolve is still a dissolve no matter what pictures you dissolve from and to. A wipe will literally wipe a new shot over the old shot. A fade-in still comes out of black and a fade-out still goes into black. The traditional transitions have remained the same over time because their individual purposes have remained the same, and almost everyone around the world understands their grammar – or what it means when they see one being used at a transition point between two video clips.

Later in this book, you will be able to explore a more in-depth analysis of these basic picture transitions and learn about audio transitions as well. For now, let us further explore some of these editing principles in practice, review the topics presented in this chapter, develop our skills via a few exercises, and quiz ourselves on some of the pertinent information. These concluding sections exist at the end of each chapter, so if you want to jump ahead and scan over these pages, you will have a solid understanding of the types of editing topics that we discuss, illustrate, and encourage you to think about and play with.

Chapter One – Final Thoughts: Editing Purpose and Process

Editing is required of almost every motion media project. Regardless of whether the “job” of the video is to inform, influence, or entertain, the greater or lesser effect of the overall messaging received by the viewing audience hinges upon the solidity and