

Editing Guidelines

The editor's primary purpose is to tell a story

Why does an editor cut? Answer: to move the story forward.

The right reasons to cut

to sustain the viewer's interest, involvement and investment in the show

setting a pace other than the real-time pace set by a single shot

keeping continuity – where the cut appears seamless

Before you edit

It's vital that you know the purpose of the show and its target audience. You're the one who decides what the audience sees, when they see it, and what they learn from it. Know your raw footage. Take notes on the shots or memorise them.

Before you make the cut

Know where the scene is coming from and where it's going. Each cut should be motivated. Be clear about the purpose of the scene, and the purpose of the cut. Each cut should advance the story, the action, the flow and the thought process.

Do you make a cut because it looks nice?

Answer: No. Instead, the cut links or knits the story together. Editing is a delicate, precise process. Editors always review and refine a scene after putting it together. Refining can take place after a scene is put together, sometimes several hours or a few days later.

Rough Cut vs. Fine Cut

Roughing out a scene means you edit without pausing. Then smooth it out, tightening or loosening edits, making overlaps, adding cutaways, etc.

Fine-cut – you make the edits exactly where you want them to go. Then review before going on to the next.

Cut from the Gut - Use your instinct to cut

When cutting into a shot:

Find the right point to enter. Ask yourself if it is...

Where the drama starts?

Where something begins to happen?

Where information is given out?

When cutting out of the shot:

Where does the shot stop being interesting?

When do you want to see more, learn more?

When not to cut to shot:

When you think you should. You never cut arbitrarily - it's motivation that guides the cut.

Because you think you shouldn't. Don't stick to a shot because it's sooo good! Once the information is conveyed, move on.

Because the shot took such effort to get that it must go in. Absolutely don't use shots just because you feel obligated to do so. Why drag the audience down with something that says nothing to the story?

Cutting Patterns:

These patterns are not to be taken as formulas. Cuts should be approached with the story in mind. But don't be too cutty – make sure that your edits serve the story.

Conventional: starts with a wide master shot, then cuts to a medium and then to a close shot. This pattern cuts you closer to the subject. This tried and true pattern works very well.

However, you can also go with the unconventional pattern –

Unconventional (also known as a Reveal): Start with a CU (or even an ECU), then cut to a MCU, MS, WS to reveal the context.

Matching Action - cutting on movement makes for slick, dynamic and seamless edits

Use of Overlaps - audio leads video or video leads audio, using dissolves or wipes as transitions often frees the editor from thinking in straight cuts only

If it serves the story, the edit can cut to shots that create unbalance, e.g., from a ECU to an OTS that makes the cut more jarring or unsettling. Perhaps this coincides with the psychology of the character and makes the story more dramatic.