

Mise-en-Scène

What is Mise-en-Scène?

- A French term meaning what is put into a scene or frame
- Visual information in front of the camera
- Communicates essential information to the audience
- made up of various elements

Elements of Mise-en-Scène?

1. Settings & Props
2. Costume, Hair & Make Up
3. Facial Expressions & Body Language
4. Lighting and Colour
5. Positioning of characters/objects within the frame

The following research activities will help familiarise you with the concept and develop image interpretational and analytical skills.

Consider the questions below to provide a framework for your blog and a brief summary of what you have learnt.

Research Activity 1

Can you describe how the elements of Mise-en-Scène in the following scene?

Watch the following scene

- *Snow White* (Disney Studios, 1937)
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cB7O_JlxGuY

1. Settings & Props

The scene takes place in the witch's dark little hut. The space is filled with bottles, jars, and a large cauldron in the center, surrounded by a crow and strange smoke. The main prop is the apple. The gloomy environment and the eerie atmosphere make the witch appear mysterious and frightening.

2. Costume, Hair & Make Up

The witch wears a long dark cloak, with a hunchback, hooked nose, and a wrinkled face. Her appearance makes her look wicked and full of evil energy. Later, when Snow White appears, her bright dress and red bow create a strong contrast, showing her purity, youth, and innocence.

3. Facial Expressions & Body Language

The witch moves with exaggerated, theatrical gestures — she leans over the cauldron, stirs slowly and cackles when the poison appears. Her grin is proud and cruel, showing she takes pleasure in harming others. Snow White's later expressions are open and trusting, with gentle movements when she interacts with animals, which highlights the contrast between innocence and malice.

4. Lighting and Colour

The hut is lit in a dark and shadowy way. The light from the bubbling cauldron creates strange reflections on the witch's face. The apple first shows an unsettling dark color with a skull shape, then magically turns bright red. This change from poison to beauty shows how danger can hide behind temptation.

5. Positioning of characters/objects within the frame

The witch and her cauldron are placed close to the camera, while the apple often appears in the foreground. A crow sits behind her, adding to the sense of fear. This arrangement makes the witch and the apple the visual focus and highlights her dark power.

6. What role does the shot choice (Cinematography) play in the scene.

The scene uses many medium and close shots — first showing the witch's hands and face, then giving a close-up of the apple as the poison forms a skull. These shots make the audience feel like they are part of the ritual. The focus on the apple's color change emphasizes the deception of the poison and the contrast between evil and innocence.

At the same time, the film also uses a visual contrast between the good little birds that usually follow Snow White and the dark raven that stays beside the witch. Later, when the witch appears at Snow White's window, the way she leans in makes the evil feel invasive, showing a strong opposition between light and darkness.

Research Activity 2



Anomalisa. Charlie Kaufman 2016

Can you describe the mise-en-scene in this picture? How are the characters placed in the frame?

The scene shows two characters lying side by side on a hotel bed, viewed from a top-down angle. The setting is plain and quiet — soft beige sheets, a brown carpet, and dim lighting create a sense of emptiness and routine. The slippers and suitcase in the corner suggest daily life but also loneliness. Both characters are placed symmetrically in the middle of the frame, lying close but not touching. The small distance between them shows emotional separation even in physical closeness. The top-down composition makes them look small and fragile, emphasizing the feeling of isolation and detachment.

Research Activity 3

Watch this scene from *Rebecca*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h23zAV2Wnps>

(36mins into the film)



Rebecca (Hitchcock, 1940)

Can you describe the relationship between the characters?

How do we know what the relationship is?

Can you describe how the mise-en-scene works together to tell us what the relationship is?

The relationship between Mrs. de Winter and Mrs. Danvers is tense and unequal. Mrs. Danvers acts dominant and cold, while the young Mrs. de Winter appears nervous and insecure. Their interaction feels like one of control versus fear.

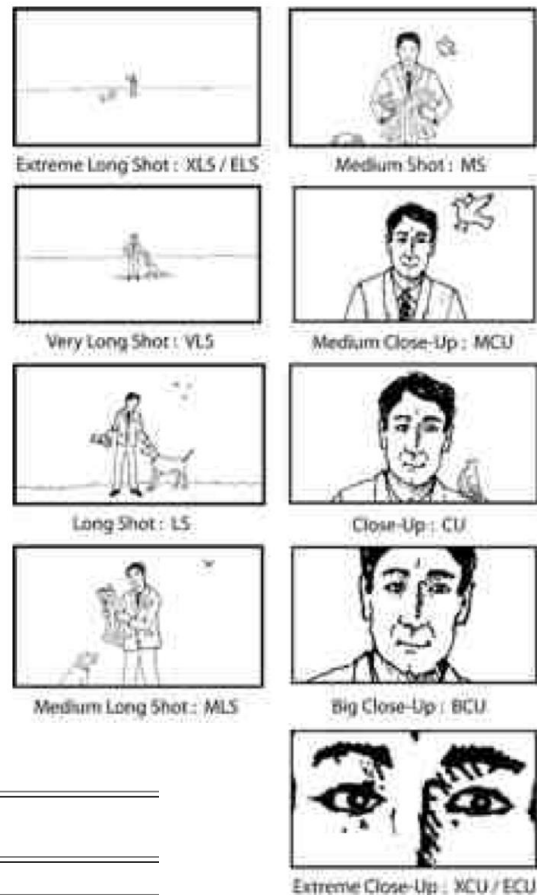
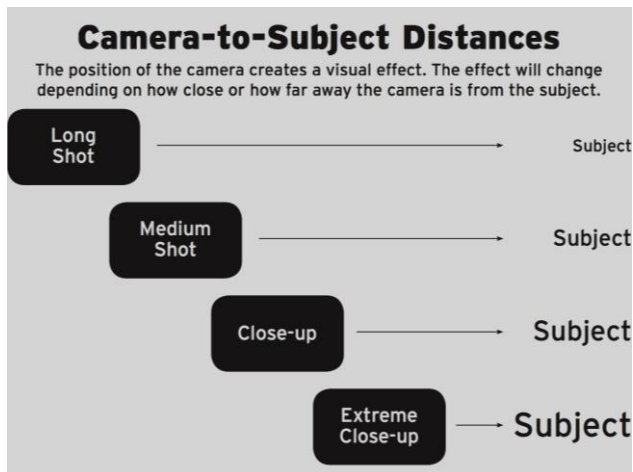
Mrs. Danvers stands tall in dark clothing, looking down at Mrs. de Winter, who is sitting and looking up. The difference in posture and costume clearly shows their power imbalance. Mrs. Danvers's expression is stern and emotionless, while Mrs. de Winter's wide eyes and hesitant body language show her anxiety.

The lighting is low-key, with shadows surrounding Mrs. Danvers, giving her a threatening presence. Mrs. de Winter is placed in the light, but her position—sitting and framed lower—makes her look smaller and weaker. The black-and-white contrast between their clothes highlights their moral and emotional difference: authority versus innocence. The composition uses space to separate them emotionally, even though they stand close together.

High Key Lighting

Low Key Lighting

Natural Lighting



Low Angle Shot

Signifier (shot)	Definition	Signified
close-up	face only	intimacy
medium shot	most of the body	personal relationship
long shot	setting & characters	context, scope, public distance
full shot	full body of person	social relationship
pan down	camera looks down	power, authority
pan up	camera looks up	smallness, weakness
zoom in	camera moves in	observation, focus
fade in	image appears on blank screen	beginning
fade out	image screen goes blank	ending
cut	switch from one image to another	simultaneity, excitement
wipe	image wiped off screen	imposed



Can you describe the mise-en-scene in this picture?

What type of shot is it?

What is the camera angle?

Where is the character located in the frame?

What is she wearing?

What is the depth-of-field?

Describe the colour palette?

Describe the lighting?

It is a medium shot — we can see most of the girl's body, allowing us to focus on her expression while also showing some of the background environment.

The camera is at eye level, creating a neutral and direct perspective. It makes the viewer feel connected to the girl and see the world from her point of view.

The girl is placed slightly off-center, which draws attention to her red hood and creates a sense of movement or unease, as if something is happening outside the frame.

She wears a bright red hood and simple clothes. The red hood stands out strongly, symbolizing innocence and danger at the same time — it makes her both the focus and a vulnerable figure.

The background is softly blurred, keeping the focus on the girl. This shallow depth of field isolates her from her surroundings, emphasizing her loneliness or inner emotion.

The overall colour palette is muted with earthy or grey tones, while the red hood provides a strong visual contrast. This contrast draws the viewer's eye and symbolizes life, emotion, or danger within a cold world.

The lighting is soft but slightly dim, creating a quiet and melancholic atmosphere. The light falls gently on her face, highlighting her expression and making the red hood glow subtly.

