KEY CONCEPTS IN FILM ANALYSIS

Film has a **form** – system of relations involving  
--- **style**  
--- **narrative**

Film has **meaning**  
--- **referential**  
--- **explicit**  
--- **implicit**

A viewer distinguishes **five general principles** in a film  
--- **function**  
--- **similarity & repetition**  
--- **difference & variation**  
--- **development**  
--- **unity/disunity**
Film form is a system – a unified set of interdependent elements

Both narrative and stylistic elements have functions. Function does not always depend on the filmmaker’s intention.

The viewer finds motivations for narrative & stylistic elements:
• motif --- a significant repeated element
• parallelism --- two or more elements share some similarity
• repetition & variation
• development

When all the relationships within a film are clear and economically interwoven, the film has unity

Source: Bordwell & Thompson, Film Art (2009) – Chapter 2
What are the **basic techniques & structures** to understand a film?

1 – **Common to film and literature**

**Theme or motif** --- identifies the main idea or ideas
   helps to see what the film is about

**Characters** --- individuals that propel the story

**Point of View** --- depicts the position from which a character views another person, object or event
   --- often suggests how that p.o.v. determines the meaning of what is seen

**Story/Plot/Narrative**
   **Story** --- provides the basic materials – from fact or fiction – about events, characters & their motivation
   **Plot** --- the way the story is constructed (order of events)
   **Narration** --- shapes and colors the plot with a certain point of view
Dramatic Conflict --- between characters or between a character & society or other larger forces.

Settings/Sets/Mise-en-scene

Settings --- descriptive backgrounds
Sets --- props, backdrops & constructions used in films
Mise-en-scene --- staging of the scene for the camera

Rhetorical Figures

Metaphor – the meaning of a term is transferred from one object it usually represents to another object
Simile --- explicitly points to the construction of this resemblance by using ‘like’ or ‘as’
Symbol --- connects a word or image with an abstract meaning or larger idea
2. Specific to film

Film has developed its own formal and stylistic elements

A. Composition of film images
B. Editing

   A. Film Images

Shot --- a single, uncut segment of film

Elements to consider --- the shape of the frame
the perspective of the image
the film speed
the distance between the camera and the figure being filmed
the angle
camera movement
use of color
B. Editing

Editing --- the linking together of two or more shots

**Continuity editing**, or invisible editing --- editing is unnoticeable

Discontinuous editing – the editing calls attention to itself and to actions and perspectives that do not fit smoothly together.

Editing creates --- space
time
rhythm

Different types of editing --- purely narrative purposes
to create emotions
for ideological purposes
When I watch a film .... What do I pay attention to?

1. How the story has been put together
   - narrative structure
   - conflict
   - characters
   - point of view
   - use of space & time

2. How the camera moves

3. How the editing functions

4. What it all means (an informed judgment)
John Updike
1932 - 2009

“The affair between Boston and Ted Williams has been no mere summer romance; it has been a marriage, composed of spats, mutual disappointments, and, toward the end, a mellowing hoard of shared memories. It falls into three stages, which may be termed Youth, Maturity, and Age; or Thesis, Antithesis, and Synthesis; or Jason, Achilles, and Nestor”

John Updike, “Hub Fans Bid Kid Adieu”, New Yorker, 1960