

## Cross Cutting

**Cross-cutting or inter-cutting is a primary narrative device of the continuity style. This technique pieces together sequences that occur at the same time but in different places in order to increase narrative tension. The literary equivalent of this device is simple narrative transition such as “meanwhile” or “in another part of town”. Some films borrow these verbal clues by using inter-titles or voice-over narration.**

**Clips mentioned in this section are not available to view on the website but are readily available to buy or rent from the usual outlets.**

**Watch the opening scene of Strangers On A Train (1951):** (00:01:00 to 00:02:20)

The opening scene of Alfred Hitchcock’s thriller, *Strangers on a Train*, illustrates the technique of cross or inter-cutting where we are shown different events happening at the same time and we seamlessly connect these events in our mind. In this case, we are seeing the first view of the two main characters as they separately move towards the point where their paths will cross (the train tracks are a visual illustration of this).

This is an example of the technique of cross-cutting being used to set up the story and introduce the two lead characters in a novel and intriguing way. This scene can be returned to at a later stage to look at camera angle, positioning and framing as the use of low angle shots to introduce characters is an innovative use of the continuity style.

**Silence of the Lambs (1990):** (01:33:56 to 01:36:22)

Jonathan Demme’s film is one of the most important films of the 1990s winning Oscars for best film, director, actor, actress and adapted screenplay. This was groundbreaking because a film with such lurid subject matter (it is the tale of two serial killers) had never achieved this status before. The film could be described as a hybrid genre film mixing the police procedural/detective thriller genre with the horror movie.

In terms of technique, the director based a lot of it on his study of Alfred Hitchcock’s films and in particular how Hitchcock strikes a balance between identification and suspense. *“I have embraced it (the Hitchcock style) more and more in my own quiet way, not necessarily in terms of visual flamboyance but more in the use of subjective camera and how to photograph actors to communicate story and character points.”*

In this scene building towards the climax of the film, the director is using the technique of cross-cutting to build up suspense, create narrative tension and to wrong foot the audience.. Will the FBI

get to the house of the serial killer in time to save the woman whom he has imprisoned in the basement? At this point in the movie, the FBI believe that they have tracked down the address of the serial killer while the lead character, Clarice Starling (played by Jodie Foster) is searching elsewhere.

Because we are so used to this type of dramatic scene where two scenes cut together tell us that they are linked together in time and place, we are easily fooled into believing that the FBI are indeed closing in on the home of the serial killer. It is only at the end of the scene that we discover that they have, in fact, been misled (like the audience). They are at the wrong house, while it is the lead character who has tracked down the serial killer (although she doesn't yet know this). Now the narrative tension and suspense moves to a different level as we worry about what will happen to her as she finds herself alone with the serial killer.