

EDITING PRIORITIES

Some people enjoy pointing out continuity errors in movies, and there are even websites dedicated to this. Many of these films are edited by some of the best editors in Hollywood, and just because there is a break in continuity doesn't mean there wasn't thought or effort put into the edit. Editors have to make tough decisions, maybe the take away with the continuity error was the best take they had. And the simple truth is that most people won't even notice a continuity error if the story and emotion in the scene is engaging enough. Beginning filmmakers tend to focus too much on continuity and sacrifice more important elements to preserve it.

On your next project, consider this list in how you prioritize your edits:

1. Emotion
2. Story
3. Pacing (Rhythm)
4. Eyetrace
5. Continuity

The first three are self-explanatory: Your edits must have the right emotion, they must progress the story, and the pacing needs to be satisfying (the edits are not too long or too short). Often times, these three elements are linked with each other. A shot that lingers too long interrupts the flow of the story, or rapid cutting between characters might be the wrong emotion if the scene is supposed to show a calm and pleasant conversation.

Eyetrace is where the audience's attention is on the screen. For example, you are filming a scene at a night club, and there is a conversation between two people sitting at a table with people dancing in the background. You want the audience to pay attention to your lead actors sitting at the table. Bad eyetrace would be if one of the dancers in the background was doing crazy dance moves, which shifts your audience's focus to the background instead of the conversation at the table. This is where the term "upstaging" comes from. The people in the back are diverting attention away from the main characters. In editing, if you had two takes of this scene and the emotion, story and pacing were the same for both, you would choose the take that had better eyetrace even if it had a small continuity error over the take with the crazy dancer, but perfect continuity.

Good luck with your editing. And don't be discouraged in considering an edit that has a continuity error if the emotion and the story of the scene really work.