

Technical Codes – Sound

Though we may think of film as a visual medium, sound is what anchors the meaning of the visual codes.

The soundtrack of film is comprised of three possible layers. These layers are constructed by the film maker: we can classify these as **types** of sound.

Types of Sound in Film:

1. **the human voice – dialogue**
2. **sound effects**
3. **music**

Dialogue serves several functions in the narrative. It can move the plot forward, flashback, reveal character, and establish mood.

Sound effects can be synchronous (matched with movements) or asynchronous (not matched with movements). Asynchronous sound can act as a form of juxtaposition. For example, a couple arguing on screen with the sound of an ambulance in the distance underscores a psychic injury of a character.

Music is usually background, or non-diegetic sound. It adds or signals a change in mood, connects to theme or character, and can operate as a motif.

From the audience's perspective, sound can be classified as **diegetic** or **non-diegetic**: this can be called the **location** of the sound. This is, the sound is either part of what is happening on the screen, located within what you see, or it is supposed to be located off screen.

Diegetic sound is any sound that has an onscreen source or is connected to the visual elements of the narrative.

Non-diegetic sound is any sound that is not part of the onscreen narrative such as voiceovers or music.