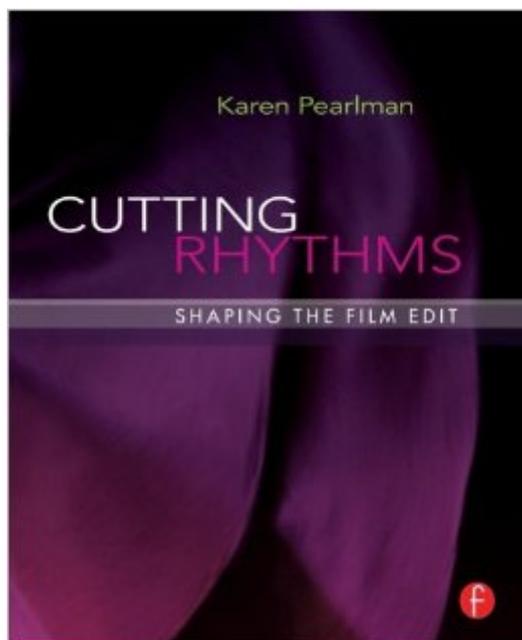


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# Cutting Rhythms: Shaping The Film Edit



## Synopsis

There are many books on the technical aspects of film and video editing: e.g., how to use software packages like Final Cut Pro and Avid. Much rarer are books on how an editor thinks and makes decisions. Faced with hundreds of hours of raw footage, a film editor must craft the pieces into a coherent whole. Rhythm is a fundamental tool of the film editor; when a filmmaker adjust the length of shots in relation to one another, he or she affects the entire pace, structure, and mood of the film. Until this book, rhythm was considered a matter of intuition; good editors should just 'know' when to make a cut. *Cutting Rhythms* breaks down the issue of rhythm in an accessible way that allows filmmakers to apply the principles to their own work and increase their creativity. This book offers possibilities rather than prescriptions. It presents questions editors or filmmakers can ask themselves about their work, and a clear and useful vocabulary for working with those questions. Filled with timeless principles and thought-provoking examples from a variety of international films, this book is destined to become a staple in the filmmaker's library.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The least you need to know is that *Cutting Rhythms* is an interesting book. I say this in the same way I would say watching bacteria replicate is interesting i.e. genuinely so. This book reads like the thesis work it started out as. Author Karen Pearlman apparently got interested in the science and art of dancing and bodies in motion then, like a true academic, decided to see if she could analyze her chosen profession of film editing in light of her chosen hobby, as it were. The result is, and I beg your

apologies again, interesting. It's always so when one attempts to fuse two things that on the surface couldn't be more different; in my humble and untutored opinion, Pearlman succeeds. I have heard it said that all capital "A" Art aspires to music and film editing is no different, I expect. Pearlman proposes to dissect something which on the surface appears to defy analysis and in this well-laid-out book, she grabs the reader's interest and doesn't let go. Beginning with the Introduction, in which she describes what she's about to tell you (including this little tidbit: "Cutting Rhythms hypothesizes that the editor's intuition is an acquired body of knowledge with two sources--the rhythms of the world that the editor experiences and the rhythms of the editor's \*body\* [emphasis mine] that experiences them." This caused me to snicker a bit) through all the 12 chapters in which she skillfully does, this is an excellent bit of work. I am particularly enamored of Chapter 6, Physical Rhythm, which she describes as "the rhythm created by the editor when she prioritizes the flow of the visible and audible physical movement in the film over other types of movement (such as emotional interactions of characters or larger patterns of events in stories).

I'm a (prose) writer and have read about screenwriting (McKee's *Story* and Truby's *The Anatomy of Story*) to gain a different perspective on storytelling. But it wasn't until I read Robert Olen Butler's *From Where You Dream* (Chapter 4, "Cinema of the Mind"; a comparison of film vs fiction techniques), that I realized how helpful it might be to explore other aspects of filmmaking. And then, on cue, came Karen Pearlman's primer on film editing -- an element so crucial to storytelling that she says, "Editors write the last draft of the script." To be clear, this is primarily a book for film students or editors early in their careers. Focusing on rhythm to shape a story, she first discards the off-putting adjectives that editing is "intuitive" and "magical." Instead, she opens the process to show a tangible set of tools and skills that can be learned, practiced and internalized -- until they do operate in the subconscious background of seeming intuition. It's textbook-ish -- academic in tone (yet very readable) and content (including exercises and case studies), with end notes, a bibliography, and an index. My only quibble is that some of the case-study photographs are printed so dark they're indecipherable.

"Cutting Rhythms" is not a manual of techniques, but is a very helpful introduction to a host of considerations that get hardly any attention in other manuals. For example, Pearlman gives a very thoughtful analysis of the difference between pacing generated by different planes of action within a shot and pacing generated at the level of cutting. Her focus, as suggested by the title, is on how film editors employ intuition to create rhythm and how that rhythm both contributes to storytelling and

operates independently to give texture and feeling to a sequence. An excellent complement to this book, that focuses more directly on the abstract dimension of rhythm, would be *The Visual Story* (another very valuable Focal Press title). Rather than provide a list of usual solutions to editing difficulties, Pearlman asks what experienced editors do and how they think when faced with such problems, and considers what questions can be asked to motivate similar intuitions about what works. She draws upon cognitive science and phenomenology and film theory, as well as upon the insights of practicing editors from the beginnings (such as Eisenstein and D.W. Griffiths) to today (such as Walter Murch), in addition to her own experience as an educator and editor, mostly of dance films. She is interested more in the process of invention, rather than with identifying what has worked in the past and is likely to have become something of a cliché. I'm not sure I understand the reviews suggesting this is an excellent starter book for beginning editors. It's not, and doesn't really pretend to be (caveat below). It's nothing like a "how-to" guide.

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