



GCE AS EXAMINERS' REPORTS

**FILM STUDIES
AS**

SUMMER 2019

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Component	Page
Component 1	1
Component 2	6
Component 3	10

FILM STUDIES

GCE AS

Summer 2019

COMPONENT 1: AMERICAN FILM

General Comments

- In general, candidates approached the paper with confidence, obviously more comfortable and at ease with the requirements of the assessment than was the case last year in the first series of the paper. The majority of candidates were able to assess the direction and expectations of the question and engaged directly with the given key elements. Some candidates are still providing unnecessary filmography and/or plot details during their responses. This is not a requirement of the questions and means that candidates use up allocated time on non-creditable points.

Section A: Hollywood 1930-1990

- In Section A, *Hollywood 1930-1990*, it was pleasing to note that films had been chosen for their suitability for comparison or contrast across a range of criteria, and a great many candidates wrote confidently and in detail. Popular choices for example were *Casablanca* coupled with *Bonnie and Clyde*, and *Vertigo* coupled with *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* or *Blade Runner*.
- Other popular films in Section A included *Some Like It Hot* and *Do the Right Thing*, with the remaining films in each group examined by only a minority of candidates.
- The three questions in Section A require candidates to compare the two films they have studied, and while many were able to draw pertinent lines of comparison or contrast, it was a little disappointing to see so many candidates skim lightly over this part of the question.
- It was noted that appropriate and relevant film language has been taught and candidates were able to use this effectively. In some cases, candidates relied on assumptions, assertions, plot and informed commentary to answer the questions. Centres and candidates are advised to avoid a 'downloaded' response that whilst demonstrating knowledge and understanding of the film(s), does not engage specifically with the question. This was most apparent where candidates used the film *Vertigo*. There was considerable evidence of learnt knowledge about Hitchcock and his distinctive style but candidates tended to be indiscriminate with this knowledge. Candidates will not gain marks from irrelevant learnt knowledge.
- Candidates had clearly been taught to use their time well. Where a paper has a range of marks (in this case 10, 20 & 40) it is important that the overall examination time is used proportionately. This was evident in the length of candidate's responses.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Q.1.1 Compare how camera or editing techniques create meaning in a key sequence from each of the films you have studied

- The question directed candidates to write on either cinematography or editing in their response. When this question was answered with a clear focus on either camera or editing techniques, candidates showed the detailed knowledge and application required to gain marks in bands 4 and 5. Where both elements were used, the more able candidates demonstrate a sophisticated appreciation of the way these two elements can work in tandem, but examiners noted a dilution of focus in the more generalised responses from weaker candidates. Some candidates further diluted their response, tending to widen the question to sound and mise-en-scene as well. They would have been better advised to restrict their answers to one element, as suggested by the question.
- Most candidates benefited from limiting themselves to just one key sequence from each of the chosen films; those who wrote about more than one sequence sometimes risked rendering their answers rather more superficial. It was pleasing to note that the majority of candidates were very well prepared in terms of having particular key sequences ready for discussion, and there was only a limited tendency towards the descriptive.
- This question directs candidates to use a specific sequence and element of film form. Centres who wish to improve candidate outcomes should remind their students to conform to this instruction. As this approach will be one of a recurring possible question format, they should prepare their answers with this structure in mind. However, where a candidate demonstrates a strong and clear argument towards an alternative or more compelling factor or element of film form, they would not be penalized. In fact, for a strong candidate, this provided excellent evidence of being able to construct an argument and present a wide knowledge and understanding of the films, their contexts and features.

Q.1.2. Compare the ways in which the two films you have studied reflect the messages and values of the times in which they were made. Refer to key sequences in your response.

This question was the most popular option choice in this section.

Popular pairings were *Casablanca* and *Bonnie & Clyde*, *Vertigo* coupled with *Blade Runner* or *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. A good range of *Some Like it Hot/Do the Right Thing*. Limited use of *Johnny Guitar* or *Lady from Shanghai*.

A significant number of candidates chose to approach the question from the social context of gender, regardless of film pairings. This was a useful approach and valid but there tended to be an overuse of Mulvey's Male Gaze theory which was not always anchored in the examples used or put into a specific time context. It is disappointing to see candidates still making sweeping statements about women when discussing gender. Claims that women were 'just expected to be housewives' are too simplistic. Muddling of dates for second wave of feminism and thrown in comments about 'the pill' did not help candidates. It would be better to teach candidates about 'agency', 'presence' and 'power to drive narratives' (or not) and where this was seen, candidates were rewarded for their nuanced understanding of gender relationships in a particular historic or cultural context.

Historical, cultural and political contexts were discussed well with the films *Casablanca/Bonnie & Clyde* as well as *Vertigo* and either *Blade Runner* or *One flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*. However, some candidates emphasised the context too much and did not support their points with evidence from the films studied. This meant that they received uneven marks across AO1 and AO2.

Q.1.3. 'New Hollywood films marked a significant stylistic departure from the films of the Classical Hollywood era'. Compare the two films you have studied in relation to this statement.

Fewer candidates chose to do this question. Whilst it might have been perceived as more challenging (or more unfamiliar than a production context question might be), candidates approached it successfully and in general demonstrated a more personal and less formulaic response than many did for Q1.2. This approach is to be encouraged.

Candidates demonstrated good knowledge and understanding of the differences between Classical and New Hollywood and could discuss both production and stylistic differences to good effect. In general, knowledge was well supported with textual examples demonstrating a good ability to address the question. Some candidates showed a sophisticated ability to discuss stylistic differences.

Only a few candidates resorted to 'downloading' information about studios/studio system with most able to focus on key scenes to support their points.

Summary of key points

- Centres should guide candidates to address the question and avoid a generalised film form analysis.
- It is not necessary to offer filmography and plot detail beyond key points. For example box office information is not required.

Section B: American Independent Film

- In Section B, *American Independent Film*, most candidates chose to write about *Captain Fantastic* or *Winter's Bone*; *Boyhood* or *Frances Ha!* were chosen by a significant majority, and *Beasts of the Southern Wild* appeared to be slightly more popular than last year.
- All three questions in Section B require candidates to consider spectatorship in their responses, and it was gratifying to note a more explicit examination of spectatorship issues than from this year's candidature. However, there does persist in a significant minority of answers where the tendency is to download learnt 'theory' regarding 'active' and 'passive' spectatorship. These terms were better applied this year, demonstrating a more confident understanding of their meaning, but some candidates struggle to apply them to their films, making broad statements. It is recommended that if candidates (or centres) find theory challenging that they avoid this approach and respond through the impact of character experience, alignment and empathy. Candidates at AS level are expected to just 'go the brink' of theory and should not let it drive their response unless they are confident in its use.

Q.2.1 Examine how the use of sound creates meaning for the spectator in a key sequence from your chosen film.

In this short answer question, worth 10 marks, candidates are advised to 'get straight to the point'. There is no need to introduce the film (beyond mentioning its title for clarity) nor to deal with plot, themes or directorial intent. The best candidates made reference to film terminology and applied it to one key sequence. Weaker candidates talked generally about sound and its generic impact on spectators, lacking close analysis to the specific film/scene.

There was some muddling up of diegetic and non-diegetic sound.

Q.2.2 ‘Most films encourage spectators to emotionally connect with a lead character’. Discuss this statement in relation to your chosen film.

Most candidates identified a ‘key character’. With the majority of the film texts this is straightforward and obvious. In *Captain Fantastic* a common approach was to discuss both Ben and Jack, sometimes choosing one or more of the children as well. Where candidates moved between more than two characters, the responses were weaker. They tended to be a list of why a spectator might align with them and often lacked analysis. To contrast the spectator response with two characters is acceptable but to offer an analysis of several impacts on the quality of the response and candidates should be guided to address the question which asks for ‘a lead character’.

Winter’s Bone, *Boyhood* and *Beasts of the Southern Wild* elicited some good responses. *Frances Ha!* is less used this year but as a clear lead character this film could have offered plenty of scope. Candidates tend to be less confident about this film, perhaps because of its quite ambiguous storytelling and lack of overly dramatic moments to discuss.

Examiners noted that candidates have become more familiar with spectatorship terminology and able to embed this into their discussions to good effect. As with the general comments regarding Spectatorship, there is still some overuse of terminology and citing of (sometimes dubious) critical theorists that have a tendency to be ‘downloaded’. If a critical approach is used, then centres should prepare candidates with specific scenes/moments from the film to support the theoretical points made.

Another approach to review for future teaching materials is the ‘personal experience’ factor. Weaker candidates gravitated towards comments such as ‘if you had shot a deer yourself’ (*Captain Fantastic*) or ‘if you were a single parent yourself’ (*Boyhood*). Better to focus on the techniques that encourage alignment regardless of the spectator’s own personal perspective. For example, you can feel an emotional experience and empathy for an animated elderly couple without being part an animated elderly person (*Up*). This is down to film form and narrative techniques. In Spectatorship Studies it is rarely the ‘what’ but the ‘how’ that makes meaning and impact.

Q.2.3 ‘Spectator response is shaped by visual elements of film form’. Explore this statement with reference to a key sequence from your chosen film.

The better candidates were able to discuss elements of mise-en-scene and cinematography, as suggested by the bullet points to good effect. Others would be advised to take note of bullet points as they function to guide the candidate into a helpful direction. Weaker candidates (or those who chose to ignore the guidance) often wrote a generalised response to this question. Often focussing on plot, character and description for which they received lower marks that the question could offer. Good responses were noted from *Boyhood*, *Winter’s Bone* and *Beasts of the Southern Wild*.

As with all questions in this section, candidates are expected to write on Spectatorship. Those who chose to focus on cinematography did this well and were able to make meaningful comments about the impact of film form on the spectator.

Summary of key points

- An understanding of spectatorship issues is key to this section. Responses suggest that centres and candidates are navigating this topic successfully.
- Some guidance for the future: avoid spurious 'theorists'. Some knowledgeable understanding of the way that spectators are 'positioned' to read a film is very helpful but should be taught from the perspective of representation, agency, genre, directorial intent, personal understanding and empathy as well as narrative devices and film form techniques.
- Candidates should be taught to respond to the given question (key character, key sequence etc). A pre-prepared generalised response regardless of the question is ill-advised.

FILM STUDIES

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COMPONENT 2: EUROPEAN FILM

General Comments

This was the second examination series for AS Film Studies Component 2. Accordingly, there was a strong indication that centres are more familiar with the specification requirements, films and assessment objectives. This familiarity and confidence extends to the layout of the paper across both sections and the demands posed by the overall timing. The vast majority of candidates answered all four questions in the allocated time and there were very few rubric infringements where candidates answered a question or section of the paper with reference to the wrong film.

Candidates demonstrated their confidence across the range of their responses with the three core areas of study (key elements of film form, representation, context and narrative) and were able to give the appropriate focus when responding to particular questions; as for example the British two-film study with its emphasis on narrative.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A: British Film (two-film study)

Overwhelmingly, the popular film choices were *This is England*, *Trainspotting*, *Shaun of the Dead* and *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, but it was also pleasing to see more centres explore *Moon*. Fewer centres studied *Under the Skin*, *Sightseers* and *Fish Tank*. Popular pairings, as was the case last year, were: *This is England / Trainspotting*, *Shaun of the Dead / Fish Tank*, *Moon* and *We Need to Talk About Kevin*. These choices were made in relation to the two films' themes, narrative structure/s and techniques, generic codes and where relevant aspects of Social Realism.

It was also encouraging to see the vast majority of candidates tackle the British two-film study with reference to both of their films. Across Section A, candidates demonstrated their abilities to engage with both films commensurately, with some responses in Band 4 and 5 drawing comparative comments where appropriate. However, it is not expected that candidates explore their films comparatively in order to access AO2 marks from the higher bands.

With so many candidates increasingly attaining marks in upper Band 4 centres are advised to give attention to the development of skills which will enable candidates to further exemplify their responses in order to produce a confident and sustained analysis required for Band 5.

Q.1.1 Explore how cinematography creates meaning in a key sequence from each of your chosen films.

[20]

It is very pleasing to see that centres and candidates are now familiar with the challenges of this question. The recommendation is that they spend 20 minutes on this question, which is not an essay question.

Centres must be commended for the excellent support offered candidates to tackle this question with clarity and focus. Centres note that cinematography invites candidates to also explore lighting.

Candidates navigated through the question by citing a specific sequence from each film to explore how meanings were created through various aspects of camerawork, movement, angles and lighting. In the very strongest responses at the top of Band 4 and into Band 5 it was evident that candidates' exploration aimed to sustain and extend the range of meanings and responses; and also to link these back to the films' themes, characters, social realism, genre and wider contexts. These responses expressed confidence and sophistication in their application of key elements of film form, whilst sticking to their selected sequence.

Weaker responses within Band 3 did not extend their analysis and exploration to relevant aspects of lighting and often tended towards description of the selected sequence/s. Some candidates made reference to more than one sequence and in so doing they were unable to develop more explorative responses. Candidates whose responses fell into Band 2 did not go beyond identifying aspects of camera work, whilst these struggled to analyse the contribution of lighting. Some candidates in Band 2 switched their focus to a study of *mise-en-scène* instead and thereby drifted away from the question.

Q.1.2 'Film narratives rely on conflict in the lives of characters to develop dramatic and powerful moments.' Explore this statement in relation to your two chosen films. [40]

This question was the more popular option. Candidates are assessed for their knowledge and understanding of narrative as a specialist area of study and its application. Candidates are asked to engage with Structuralism as a critical approach to narrative but they are not explicitly expected to explain the ideas of Claude Lévi-Strauss; and it is possible to attain marks in Bands 4 and 5 without doing so. The question focused on the contribution of characters to conflict and binary oppositions. Candidates engaged very enthusiastically with this question by drawing widely on moments across their selected films in order to explore and analyse a range of ideas.

Responses studying *This is England* explored ideas of conflict which connected to ideologies, notions of nationalism and patriotism and also racism by referring to the key characters (Combo, Milky and Woody). In *Shaun of the Dead* the most sophisticated responses analysed binary conflicts within the framework of the generic conventions, whilst explorations of *We Need to Talk about Kevin* examined conflict within Eva herself in sophisticated ways. The strongest candidates confidently exemplified their ideas by engaging with the implications of the question.

Candidates who achieved a Band 3 understood the direction of the question but their responses lacked development and application with some offering descriptive, rather than analytical answers. Superficial understanding of the question together with a more limited grasp of narrative structure put candidates into Band 2.

Candidates continue to find the prompts helpful and there was little evidence this year that they are offering a 'taught' or 'model' response, which was extremely pleasing.

Q.1.3 'Most film plots lead to a predictable narrative resolution.' How far is this true of the endings of the two films you have studied? [40]

This question proved less popular, whilst there was a spread of responses across the mark bands. Candidates are not expected to explicitly cite the Formalist critical approach to attain marks from the higher bands. Candidates who engaged with the full implications of the question developed sophisticated responses which demonstrated an excellent understanding of the complex aspects of film narrative. For example, when exploring *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, they drew narrative moments from across the film in order to analyse the question. With *Trainspotting*, the very best responses were also those which selected sequences to develop their exploration, without slipping into description. The strongest responses came from candidates who were able to apply aspects of narrative structure (equilibrium and enigma) with confidence to offer highly detailed and supported references to their chosen films.

Within Band 3, candidates often lost sight of the question or they offered descriptive rather analytical responses which limited their ability to access marks from AO2.

Candidates whose responses fell into Band 2 struggled to develop their essay beyond offering a list approach to the Formalist theory, with little if any supporting references.

Section B: Non-English language European Film

In this section, candidates explore one film in relation to the Core Areas of Study. *Pan's Labyrinth* continues to be far the more popular choice, followed by *Mustang*, *Victoria* and *The Diving Bell and Butterfly*. Fewer centres opted for *Ida* and *Life is Beautiful*.

Q.2.1 Explore how lighting and colour create meaning in one key sequence from your chosen film. [10]

Candidates on the whole engaged very well with this question and the best responses were able to sustain their focus on a selected sequence to fully examine the question. A range of responses was offered with a cluster around the top of Bands 3 and 4. The strongest responses within Band 4 and 5 explored multiple meanings through both colour and lighting, with sophisticated analyses of their contribution to wider aspects of the films' contexts, representations and aesthetics where appropriate. Popular sequences for *The Diving Bell and Butterfly* were the beach sequence and the father's apartment.

Within Band 3 candidates were able to identify relevant aspects of colour, but explorations were restricted and lacking in detail. Where *Ida* was studied, candidates in Band 3 missed opportunities to consider the impact of monochrome. Candidates whose responses were 'Satisfactory' tended to ignore lighting in their analysis. Responses which fell into Band 2 understood the direction of the question but they struggled to examine how colour and lighting contributed to meanings; and often made general reference to their film without citing a sequence. It is highly commendable that candidates are able to respond effectively to the challenges of this 10 mark question.

Q.2.2 Examine how the aesthetic of your chosen film contributes to its themes. Make reference to key sequences. [20]

Candidates who attempted this question were on the whole able to manoeuvre across their selected film to support their exploration. Excellent and analytical responses went beyond readings of the reality/duality aspects of *Pan's Labyrinth* by weaving in sophisticated and insightful explorations of the wider contexts. Within Bands 4 and 5, candidates examined a range of themes with a strong ability to fully support and sustain their eye on the question. Some candidates who explored *Mustang* focused on the look, mood and style of the film to analyse themes of claustrophobia, freedom, entrapment and patriarchy.

Within Band 3 candidates demonstrated their knowledge and understanding of their film but whilst relevant, lacked detail and analysis. Within Band 2, candidates struggled to connect aspects of their film's aesthetic to its themes, as for example with *Mustang* where candidates discussed patriarchy or *Victoria* in relation to youth and culture in Berlin.

Q.2.3 Explore the representation of a female character in your chosen film. Use key sequences to illustrate your response. In your answer, you may consider: [20]

Although fewer candidates opted for this question, there was a very good range of responses which engaged with their film's wider representations and contexts. Stronger responses which explored *Pan's Labyrinth* discussed Mercedes rather than Ofelia and were able to embed in key elements of film form such as camera angles, framing and sound to analyse notions of power/ powerlessness; linking to discussions of Vidal.

Band 4 and 5 responses expressed confidence and insight to support their analysis as for example when they examined Lale in *Mustang* with references to Turkey's male-dominated culture. Candidates who developed a 'Satisfactory' response were unable to sustain their focus on the question and tended towards descriptions of gender. In Band 2 superficial observations were made with little ability to extend these with relevant evidence from across the selected film.

Summary of key points

- Centres are advised to give less emphasis to narrative theories unless these are intrinsically linked to films and sequences
- The best responses came from candidates who sustained their focus on the question and had a sound grasp of the key elements of film form
- Excellent work with European films focused on the wider contexts and its underlying contribution to the film's themes, elements of film form and meanings as well as the key representations
- Centres are veering away from taught or 'model' answers and this has enabled candidates to develop their confidence in exploring a range of meanings when responding to specific questions.

FILM STUDIES

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COMPONENT 3: PRODUCTION

General Comments

There was some outstanding creative work and careful assessment of it for Component 3 Production this second Series. The moderation of centre assessment was aided by helpful comments on the coversheets and on the work itself using phrases from the marking grid in the specification, which is excellent practice. The separation on the coversheet of marks and comments into the two elements from the marking grid: application and structural elements (mark awarded out of 25) and application of key elements (mark awarded out of 15) was really useful this year and most centres used the descriptors from the marking grid on both the coversheet and the work itself. A reminder please that written work should still be annotated before it is uploaded. Some centres completed coversheets from the previous year and as the coversheet had changed to include a new GDPR section, as well as the separation of the marks as outlined above, it is vital that centres use the most current version.

Last year many candidates failed to identify the chosen brief from the list of four in the specification on the coversheet, and this has largely been rectified; however some candidates still just identified which type of work it was (screenplay or filmmaking) rather than referring to the specific brief chosen. It would be good practice for candidates to refer to the brief at the start of the Evaluative Analysis too which many did, evaluating the ways that their piece met the brief.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Film Extract

As with last year's cohort, there was some really creative and well-executed work here and the candidates seemed to have really enjoyed the opportunity to make a film-sequence. A few centres had not penalised candidates for work that was too short, please refer in detail to the appropriate section of the specification. As last year, the most successful film sequences focussed on the experience of a small number of characters, paid careful attention to key elements: employing frequent close-ups of protagonists and had carefully constructed mise-en-scene. There were more candidates who had carefully constructed a multi-layered soundscape avoiding the use of a single music track and songs where the lyrics can overwhelm the images. For such a short sequence, it is important to be able to identify a protagonist and see how key elements are used to create a specific response to them. There was some evidence of some beautifully composed and framed shots and this was lovely to see.

Screenplay

There was a noticeably improved and confident mastery of the master scene script layout by most centres this year, most were able to adhere to the guidance given in the specification and in the notes for guidance and digital resources. Please be aware that there should be no instructions for cinematography and editing, these ideas should be expressed in the illustrative storyboard.

In a similar way to the filmmaking, the best pieces had few characters and had created carefully written and convincing dialogue for these, which created a clear sense of character. They also wrote highly visual descriptions of scenes including mise-en-scene and actions which advanced the narrative or created subtle character points. There was still a little bit of confusion about the visual nature of screenplay writing and some candidates included thoughts or feelings of characters not conveyed as visual instructions, or instructions for an actor, this must be discouraged. Candidates should avoid over-reliance on dialogue for storytelling and bear in mind that film is a visual medium and that there are more interesting ways of telling a story. Screenplays with a small number of characters who were different and sounded different from each other by carefully written, minimal lines of dialogue, were much more successful. Scenes should also be numbered.

Illustrative Storyboard

This is the place for more focus on technical audio/visual instructions and the best work had some excellent detail in this section. Centres who used the WJEC template or used the headings from it, had greater success in providing the correct amount of detail to accompany the images. Some images were difficult to see: too dark, or upside down, the best photographs were taken in landscape where composition and lighting had been considered. The advice for film-making about the close up and an identifiable protagonist is also relevant here, too many storyboards have a predominance of one shot type, often the long shot or mid shot. Fewer candidates tried to storyboard the whole screenplay or chose randomly from it this year, which was good to see. There was a realistic use of timings on most storyboards, but some still had the same long timing for each shot and hadn't really considered the effect of pacing. There were some careful considerations of transitions between shots and candidates should pay attention to continuity features such as eyeline matches and ensure that the 180 degree rule is not broken, unless for a particular effect. This is also the place to consider non-diegetic sound which some did, but many neglected to mention it at all; it does not need to be a particular music track, but could just be a subtle drum beat for example.

Evaluative Analysis

There was some interesting consideration of cinematic influences with more centres encouraging their candidates to use specific examples and screengrabs from their influences alongside those from their own work; this is excellent practice. Please ensure that non-film sources such as books, people and very often TV shows are not cited as cinematic influences; 'Pretty Little Liars' seems to have been very popular with this year's cohort and was mentioned inappropriately by quite a few of the candidates. If the screenplay/illustrative storyboard option has been chosen, candidates should refer to professionally produced screenplays as cinematic influences. Many candidates often analysed in detail how meaning and response had been created for spectators in their own work which was excellent and to be encouraged. As noted last year, candidates should not take a production diary approach, describing the process or discussing what they could have done differently or describe the content of their work. Candidates should briefly mention a target audience, but there is no need to discuss this in any detail or gain audience feedback, instead the majority of the piece should be an analysis of meaning. There was some real evidence of engagement with the films from the course and ones from their wider watching in the best of these pieces and a real careful awareness of the impact of the piece that they had constructed on a spectator, which is excellent practice. It is helpful for written components, if candidates could include a word count on their work.

Summary of key points

- Production work this year has been much more straightforward in this second year. There has been some lovely, thoughtful and creative work across all options. Where chosen, the storyboard should be given the same amount of careful attention as the screenplay, it is a shame to see cases where the storyboard is unfinished or has poorly constructed images and little written detail to accompany them; they should look at the two pieces together and ensure that they are of the same standard.



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