

How to use the Specialist Writing - A Guide to Component 1, Section C.

In Component 1, Section C, learners are required to engage with a piece of Specialist Writing alongside the study of **one** US independent film. Eduqas will provide a choice of written **extracts**. Learners are required to study **one of these extracts**.

It is important to note that centres **must** use one of the set pieces of writing released by Eduqas. Centres must not use their own sourced film reviews or other pieces of specialist writing outside of the specialist writing extracts provided Eduqas.

The extracts are contained within this pack and are also in handout format on the Eduqas website.

The specialist writing extracts will **not** be provided inside of the examination; therefore learners are encouraged to work closely with their chosen extract alongside the study of their chosen US Independent film. There is no requirement for learners to remember or quote verbatim from the writing as long as they are aware of one or two key ideas from the extract. Learners may wish to use small quotes to illustrate their points but this is not compulsory.

Assessment Tips

- This section is worth 15 marks.
- There is one set question for this section.
- Understanding of the specialist writing will always be assessed in this section.
- The question may ask learners to refer to a **key sequence**. The sequence will not be stipulated (i.e. opening/closing).
- The question may ask learners to refer to **key ideas** gleaned from the specialist writing.
- Centres are therefore encouraged to support the learning of the specialist writing with the study of **key sequences** from the film.

Centres may choose from the following Specialist Writing Extracts:

- Option A: Finding the Frame
This resource focuses on the visual elements of film language.
- Option B: What Makes a Film Independent?
This resource focuses on the genre and narrative conventions of independent cinema.
- Option C: Film Criticism
One piece of writing has been selected for each film. These resources concentrate on a key piece of critical writing about each film.

Each piece of specialist writing has been chosen to enable students to engage with other people's ideas. The key ideas generated by the specialist writing are highlighted in **bold** within each extract. These are not exhaustive. You may wish to pick out further ideas to debate with your students. The ideas outlined below are presented within the Specialist Writing passage and are starter points for you to further develop in class. They are up for debate and can be argued against, for example in Specialist Writing Option C, for the film *Juno*, the critic argues that the film is only feminist on the surface. It would be perfectly acceptable for students to argue against this idea.

Specialist Writing Option A: Finding the Frame – Starter Ideas

The Filmmakers Eye (Mercado, 2010)

- Learners could use this piece of writing to underpin their understanding of how a particular sequence of shots or sequence creates meaning in their film
- How shot composition communicates meaning to the audience
- How a film's themes and ideas are emphasised by what is included in a frame or shot

Specialist Writing Option B: What Makes a Film Independent? – Starter Ideas

Studying American Cinema (Murray, 2011)

- Independent cinema does not adhere to generic patterns and is more fluid in terms of genre codes – is this true of your film? To what extent is your film a 'genre film'?
- Independent cinema looks to create something individual – how is this applicable to your chosen film?
- Independent film is different in terms of aesthetics and/or ideological viewpoint. Does your film challenge dominant ideologies? Does your film 'look' different to mainstream Hollywood products?

Specialist Writing Option C: Film Criticism – Starter Ideas

Ladybird: Greta Gerwig & White Feminism (Kaul, 2021)

- The film presents a “universal female experience” but is a celebration of female whiteness only or as Kaul puts it, a representation of ‘White Picket Fences and White Female faces’
- Kaul argues that *Lady Bird* is a ‘so-called feminist work’ as it only chronicles the hardships of white, bourgeoisie female adolescence without true concern for any other form of diversity
- Kaul mentions a number of positive elements to the film including female empowerment and solidarity but the lack of diversity in the film negates any positive elements

The Hate U Give is not a Black Lives Matter movie (Melina Abdullah, 2018)

- Abdullah argues that the film's narrative entrenches old race tropes making Black people primarily responsible for their own oppression with the film asking viewers to focus on black crime within the story of the film
- The film appears to present 'Black-on-Black crime' as the root of all evil despite the narrative of a police shooting
- Abdullah argues that *The Hate U Give* is propaganda aimed at presenting audiences with a message that they should ultimately trust the police and be wary of the black community.

The Hurt Locker as Propaganda (McKelvey, 2009)

- The film presents itself as an 'anti-war' film but aspects of the film, such as the 'beautiful cinematography' and the 'compelling music', instead, glorify war
- The film uses techniques which put the viewer into the soldiers shoes, therefore the audience has empathy for the US soldiers above anyone else
- The film purposefully contrasts boring suburban life with the excitement of being a soldier at war. This is controversial given the films' supposed anti-war stance.

Whiplash, Men and Masculinity (Beasley, 2015)

- Women are under-represented in film as seen in the Oscars of 2015
- Whiplash is a study of masculinity – Fletcher, represented as the 'alpha male' and sensitive loner Andrew who sees Fletcher is his masculine ideal
- Poor representations of women in the film – Nicole (Melissa Benoist) who is 'underwritten' and serves only to aid Andrew on his path to manhood
- The final scene is a battle of the alpha males and a happy ending for Andrew who surpasses his masculine goals by earning the respect of Fletcher

Juno – Get Real (DeRogatis, 2008)

- Criticisms of the film - irritating dialogue; unrealistic plot points such as idealistic reaction from parents; a world where nobody is judgemental
- Simplistic representation of pregnancy, caricatures of anti-abortion protesters – film glosses over these more complex issues
- DeRogatis says the film has a post-feminist 'surface' – what does he mean? Do you agree that this is only a surface consideration?
- Representation of Jason Loring (Jason Bateman) is the most authentic character in the film

**Specialist Writing Option A:
'Finding the Frame'**

[Adapted from *The Filmmaker's Eye: Learning (and breaking) the rules of cinematic composition* (pp.1-3) by **Gustavo Mercado**, 2010, Focal Press]

A key convention of visual storytelling is that **anything and everything that is included in the composition or frame of a shot is there for a specific purpose**. This is necessary for an audience to understand the story they are watching.

The framing of a shot conveys meaning through the arrangement of visual elements. These include camera distance and angle, what should be included and excluded from the frame and which elements should dominate. These elements then create the meaning to be conveyed by the shot. The process is called 'composition'.



<http://mikecapuzzi.com/wp-content/uploads/mike-capuzzi-godfather.jpg>

Take a look at the shot above taken from *The Godfather* (1972). It is an extreme long shot that shows a car parked on a deserted road with someone in the back seat pointing a gun at someone in the front seat. In the distance, the Statue of Liberty is visible above a bank of wild grass. This seemingly simple composition has a very clear meaning: someone is being murdered inside a car on a deserted road. But, if everything in the frame is meant to be meaningful and necessary to understand the story, then why is the Statue of Liberty part of the composition of this shot? Is it there simply to establish the location of the murder? Why is it so distant and tiny in the frame? You will see that the statue is facing away from the car where the murder is taking place. Could this be a meaningful detail? If it is in the frame, then everything about it, from its placement to the angle from which it was shot has to be meaningful. The inclusion of the Statue of Liberty from that particular angle, at that particular size and placement in the frame conveys much more than the murder of the man inside the

car. Think about what the inclusion of such a recognisable symbol of freedom, hope and the American Dream says about the killing of the man in the car.

A strategy to decoding the meaning of a composition or frame is to identify the themes and ideas that lie at the heart of the film; its essence; its core ideas. Effective stories have strong core ideas that add emotional depth, allowing the audience to connect with the film. For example *Rocky* (1976) tells the story of one man's fight for the boxing heavyweight championship, only this isn't what the story is about. Rocky is about one man's struggle to 'be somebody'; to gain self-respect and the respect of others. The composition behind every shot supports this theme. For example, the placement of the character within the film matches his journey towards self-respect, so that he is placed off centre in unbalanced compositions at the start of the film and central to the frame or larger within the frame as he becomes stronger and more confident.

Every shot counts no matter how inconsequential it may seem.

Specialist Writing Option B:
'What Makes a Film Independent?'

[Adapted from *Studying American Independent Cinema* (pp. 18-19), by **Rona Murray**, 2011, Auteur]

Independent cinema can be, and has been, defined as **something that strays artistically from the norm**. As Geoff King defines it "industrial factors are important, but do not provide the only grounds for definition of the particular varieties of film-making to which the label independent has most prominently been attached in recent decades". Arguably for example, **independent cinema does not need to adhere to generic patterns** since it is not expected to deliver their certain pleasures. In many independent films, genre is a more fluid concept. Genre in mainstream cinema structures our expectation and provides us with cinematic pleasures based on its 'repertoire of elements'. Genres are sold to us (through the advance publicity) as a guaranteed set of pleasures – of narrative, of visual style of set pieces, of stars. Independent cinema, as part of our definition does not need to adhere to those guarantees because it has less of a need to deliver a mass audience (albeit, as we saw above, the pressure to produce breakout successes increased). Therefore, genre tropes and signifiers can be subverted to challenge the ideologies contained implicitly within them. Similarly, narrative expectations do not always need to be met. **The audience for independent cinema specifically takes pleasure in these disruptions of expected enjoyment to find a more subversive and oppositional position outside of the norms**. This can be part of an audience's wish to position themselves by their consumption of products.

Against this is the example (often quoted) of something like *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (2002). Defined purely by its financing this is an independent film, yet it is often quoted as an example of how a purely economic definition draws in a mainstream narrative and genre. It is institutionally an independent production, but it is 'spiritually' and structurally a piece of mainstream cinema. Without wanting to denigrate its achievement and the genuine commercial leap of faith films like this take (especially casting the writer, Nia Vardalos, rather than a Hollywood performer to take the lead). American independent cinema, therefore, is defined for our purposes as a form of cinema that may usually be financed outside of the studio system, but which generally **challenges this cinematic form artistically and looks to create something individual in either its aesthetics or its ideological viewpoint, or both**.

Specialist Writing Option C: Film Criticism
Ladybird: Greta Gerwig's White Feminism

(Excerpt) Adapted from 'Greta Gerwig and White Feminism in Film). Anita Kaul, 2021

I could never understand the appeal of *Lady Bird*. Granted, it was undeniably quirky, somewhat charming and at times humorous, but overall, I couldn't help identifying it as anything but extremely average. Why, then, was it being praised so highly? Critics hailed it as a revolutionary piece of feminist cinema. Audiences lauded its depiction of the "universal female experience". It was even nominated for an Academy Award for Best Picture. All I saw was whiteness. White cast, audience and critic — all united, flocking to rejoice over a glorified work of Western feminism.



Gerwig's American Dream seems to be White Picket Fences and White Female Faces

Whilst it would be unjust to overlook the successful cinematic aspects of *Lady Bird*, the film, like many other so-called feminist works of the 21st century, chronicles the hardships of white, bourgeoisie female adolescence without true concern for any other form of diversity. When minorities are included here (one gay character, two people of colour), they act solely as foils for the protagonist and her development.

From an aesthetic perspective though, the appeal of *Lady Bird* is evident. Gerwig employs softly-lit shots to convey the sense of rose-tinted nostalgia attached to the time period, and the film is suffused with a romantic tone of wistfulness and longing. Additionally, it must be mentioned that Gerwig's directorial debut features several quality performances, most notably those of Laurie Metcalfe and Tracy Letts. Furthermore, the **themes of female empowerment and solidarity are extremely prevalent within the film**, with Gerwig placing *Lady Bird*'s relationships with her mother and best friend at the forefront of this work. However, **all these trailblazing characters are white**, with Gerwig ultimately supplying and prioritising one particular type of female perspective. It is undeniable that the sense of female solidarity is potent within Gerwig's films, **but the core implication is clear: this cinematic world of feminism is for white women & white women only.**

Sisterhood seems to only exist and be relevant when between white women. Year after year we witness coming-of-age feminist films and time after time the protagonist and the majority of their social circle is white. Throughout history, "feminist" films are dominated by white filmmakers, white characters and white narratives. From chick flicks (*Mean Girls*) to dramas (*Suffragette*) to LGBT films (*Carol*), any time a film is deemed progressive in terms of gender or even sexuality, the story is typically a racially exclusive one. This is why when a new film is hailed as a radical feminist work, we can usually expect it to be white-centric, with people of colour either serving as foils, or being excluded from the narrative altogether. A solution to this would be to diversify the industry itself, i.e. more ethnic female filmmakers, as more representation within the industry would directly equate to more representation on-screen, as well as providing an alternative and authentic perspective.

Specialist Writing Option C: Film Criticism
The Hate U Give is not a Black Lives Matter movie

(Adapted from Why 'The Hate U Give' Is Not a Black Lives Matter Movie, Melina Abdullah, LA Sentinel, October 2018)

Some are touting '*The Hate U Give*,' as "the first Black Lives Matter movie". We might, then, wonder about the choice to have Audrey Wells, a White screenwriter adapt an urban Black novel for the screen. **The film's narrative entrenches old race tropes making Black people primarily responsible for their own oppression with the film asking viewers to focus exclusively on "Black-on-Black crime".**

The film builds around Starr witnessing the killing of her childhood friend, Khalil, by a White police officer. Although Khalil's murder at the hands of a White cop is the crescendo of the film, the officer who killed him is quickly overshadowed by the neighborhood drug dealer as the primary villain, a set-up for an ongoing subtext and primary message about **"Black-on-Black" crime as the root of all evil**. Ultimately, Starr spends more time naming the neighborhood drug dealer, King, than she does talking about the police who murdered her friend. At one key point of the film, Starr's voiceover comes in, hitting the audience over the head with the film's main message - that Black communities are saved when Black folks rally together, not against murderous police, but against neighborhood drug dealers. **We must trust police to save us from the Kings of the world and bring them to justice, the film proclaims. Starr's final voiceover warns Black audiences..."Because it's not about the hate YOU give, it's about the hate WE give."**

Starr straddles two worlds, not quite fitting in to the all-Black, inner-city neighborhood in which she resides and not feeling at home at her affluent prep school either, where her White friends exhibit class privilege and everyday racisms. **While Starr's family is a place of refuge, her neighborhood exemplifies a narrative of poor Black folks who are inherently promiscuous and violent. She and her family are portrayed as the exceptions to this because of their ability to redeem themselves from their teenage indiscretions through adherence to a patriarchal nuclear-family structure.**

"The Hate U Give" is propaganda that tells us that the answer to our woes is to trust the policing system to bring an inherently pathological Black community in line. We are eager for cinematic representations of this current iteration of Black freedom struggle. As Black Lives Matters advocates, we state emphatically that this is not a "Black Lives Matter film"; it is the antithesis. We encourage Black audiences, all those who reject narratives that make Black victims of police violence responsible for their own deaths, to invest their dollars in Black film that uplifts and empowers Black communities. *"The Hate U Give"* is not that.

Specialist Writing Option C: Film Criticism
The Hurt Locker as Propaganda

Tara McKelvey. The American Prospect. July 2009

For a supposedly anti-war film, Kathryn Bigelow's *Hurt Locker* serves as a rather **effective military recruiting tool**.

An Iraqi butcher holds a cell phone as he stands near the site of a bomb -- or an improvised explosive devise (IED), as it is known. The Americans shout at the butcher to put the phone down and point their guns; he smiles and waves back, nodding his head reassuringly to show them everything is fine. Then he presses a button on the cell phone and detonates a bomb, killing one of the soldiers.

From that point on, **you, as viewer, sympathise with the soldiers** as they travel along dangerous roads and walk through Baghdad's narrow allies, seeing all of the Iraqi men, women and children around them as potential terrorists. Just as American horror movies shifted at some point in time and invited the moviegoer to take on the point of view of the killer tracking down the victim, rather than the perspective of the victim fleeing from a psychopath, ***The Hurt Locker* places the viewer squarely in the mindset of a soldier on the verge of shooting someone.**

The Hurt Locker shows the paranoia, rage, and brutal recklessness of soldiers trapped in the downward death spiral of the Iraq war: the American soldiers fighting the very people they had once attempted to liberate. **It sets itself up as an anti-war film.** It opens with Chris Hedges' quote, "War is a drug," Yet for more than two hours, the film presents Baghdad's combat zone with excitement and drama. In one scene, a bomb-defuser, Staff Sgt. William James (Jeremy Renner), searches for a detonator in a car loaded with explosives, and later he tries to save an unfortunate Iraqi man who has been forcibly strapped with homemade bombs. The tense moments are set to creepily compelling music and the cinematography **captures the beauty** that is found in the desert landscape and even in the casing of a bullet. **It is easy to understand why the soldier, William James, would take so much pleasure in his work as a daredevil bomb-defuser in Iraq,** and find so little to be happy about in the difficult, messy world of America when he comes home.

Back in the United States, James finds himself in a supermarket aisle, trying to decide between Lucky Charms and Cheerios. He stares at those brands and then at dozens of others on the shelves, feeling overwhelmed by the dizzying array of breakfast cereals, in a scene of American consumerism gone mad. He then spends part of the day cleaning soggy leaves out of the gutter of his house. It is a **dull, dreary world.** A moment later, however, a soldier is shown striding down a wide, dusty Iraqi road in a NASA-like bomb suit, filled with a sense of purpose, courage, and even nobility that does not exist in suburban America.

The film draws a sharp contrast between the tedium of American life, with its grocery-shopping, home repairs, and vapid consumerism, and the heart-pounding drama of the combat zone in Iraq. The fact that the war itself seems to have little point fades into the background. For all the graphic violence, bloody explosions and, literally, human butchery that is shown in the film, ***The Hurt Locker* is one of the most effective recruiting vehicles for the U.S. Army that I have seen.**

Specialist Writing Option C: Film Criticism
Whiplash. Men & Masculinity

Tom Beasley, The Popcorn Muncher.com, January 2015

Much was made in the media about the noticeable maleness of the Academy Awards this year. Not a single woman was nominated for either Best Director or Screenplay. But more than that, the Oscars 2015 was dominated by films *about* men and *about* masculinity itself.

Damien Chazelle's exhilarating drama *Whiplash* tells the story of Andrew (Miles Teller) as he struggles to become the lead drummer in his music school's decorated jazz band, run by tyrannical musician Fletcher (JK Simmons). Andrew practises hard and knows he's pretty good, but he needs to be validated. His mother left when he was young, so Andrew has been brought up without a female figure in his life. He craves approval, but has a somewhat sterile relationship with his father, who doesn't seem to understand what Andrew is doing. **The notion of being approved by Fletcher – a recognised alpha male – excites Andrew to the degree that he is prepared to do just about anything.**

Fletcher represents everything that Andrew idealises. He's a whirlwind of acid-tongued testosterone and is 100% sure of his talent. Fletcher doesn't need validation from anyone because he sits at the top of the food chain – both in terms of music and masculinity. **Even Fletcher's appearance is one of masculine performance. He is stripped down, in terms of his shaven head and his plain black clothing, with no sort of flourish upon his body. For Fletcher, there's no need for the kind of style-conscious appearance so favoured by the modern "metrosexual" man. Notably, Andrew is a baby faced youngster who seems unkempt in appearance. He doesn't have the same focus as Fletcher.**

Andrew's acceptance into Fletcher's band early on in *Whiplash* marks, in his view, his seat at the table of masculinity. **It is significant that merely being a member of the band transforms Andrew from a distant loner to the arrogant man who immediately attempts to enter into a relationship with Nicole (Melissa Benoist).** Andrew believes that being in a relationship is a part of his duty as a man and so he simply asks for a date from the only girl he ever meets – the box office girl at the cinema he regularly visits.

Nicole is nothing but lovely to Andrew. However, he decides to give her the chop when he realises that she impedes his path to success. **For Andrew, his first real female connection is nothing more than a distraction from his work at winning the approval of the uber-macho Fletcher.** When he realises that his relationship with Nicole is an inessential part of his masculine performance, he sees no reason to keep it going. For Andrew, it was never about love – or even lust.

Critics have bemoaned the underwritten nature of Nicole's role in *Whiplash* and it is irksome in such a male-dominated awards year, but her character in the film is a reflection of how the protagonist sees her. For Andrew, just like every other kind of human connection, she's barely a human being and merely a utility on his path to masculine utopia.

Masculinity becomes a performance and a competition between two figures battling to out-alpha the other is the film's finale. In an attempt at revenge for Andrew making a complaint about Fletcher's treatment, the latter sets him up for a fall at an important concert. After initially fleeing the stage, Andrew returns and defiantly leads the band himself, defying

Fletcher's authority and indeed his masculinity. The final sequence focuses on how masculine conflict can turn abruptly into magic - the two men go from full-blooded war to grudging respect in the space of a single scene. Andrew finally succeeds in earning the respect of Fletcher by beating him at his own game. **He proves that he can hold his own in a masculine arena by taking on the alpha. In that scene, Andrew finally succeeds in achieving his own personal masculine utopia.**

Specialist Writing Option C: Film Criticism

Juno – Get Real

(Excerpt) Jim DeRogatis, Chicago Sun Times, January 2008

'Perfection in every aspect of the film', said the San Francisco Chronicle. 'Not a single false note', crowed The New Yorker. 'Just about the best movie of the year,' said Roger Ebert, 'for a while you wonder if this story of a pregnant teenager's coming of age will exhaust you with cleverness but by the end you've fallen in love with the thing.'

Well, no: As an unapologetically old-school feminist, the father of a soon-to-be-teenage daughter, a reporter who regularly talks to actual teens and a plain old moviegoer, I hated, hated, hated this movie. A few of my many problems:

The notion that kids -- even smart and sarcastic ones -- talk like Juno is a lie only thirtysomething filmmakers and fiftysomething movie critics could buy. You want accurate wisecracking high-school dialog? You won't find it here. As Juno says, 'honest to blog!'

Are we really supposed to believe that a girl as intelligent and self-empowered as Juno, when determining the time to lose her virginity via a planned encounter with her best friend, neglects to bring birth control? Or that her endearingly human parents, no matter how non-judgmental, accept the news of her pregnancy so nonchalantly? And why doesn't anybody, including the father, respectfully ask the ever-sneering Juno her reasoning for having the baby and giving it up for adoption?

I lived in Minneapolis, where the film is set, in the early '90s, and every day on my way to work, I passed a women's clinic besieged by angry protesters determined to deny its patients access. It was no laughing matter, and regardless of your personal opinion, the clinicians, the patients and even the protesters **all deserve more complex, nuanced and thoughtful portraits than the simplistic and insulting caricatures drawn by screenwriter Diablo Cody.**

We can debate whether the message of "Juno" is anti-abortion and therefore anti-woman, despite its post-feminist surface. But given its sickly sweet indie soundtrack, there's no arguing that the movie is anti-rock, at least if we still define rock as an honest expression of youthful rebellion.

We're encouraged to see Bateman/Jason Loring as hopelessly immature -- unlike representations such as Seth Rogen in "Knocked Up", who responds to the unplanned pregnancy by turning from loser to SuperDad in the space of 90 minutes -- because he bails on his obviously troubled marriage when he decides he isn't ready for fatherhood. His stunted growth is illustrated by the fact that he's nostalgic for alternative rock, and he regrets quitting his touring underground band to write commercial jingles.

In the end, in a topsy-turvy movie universe where the teen heroine struts like John Travolta in "Saturday Night Fever," clearing a path in her high school hallway with a pregnant belly she treats as the ultimate outsider status symbol, **Bateman's Loring actually can be seen as a more honest** and genuinely rebellious character than Juno.

Acknowledgement

Whiplash review	http://www.thepopcornmuncher.com/2015/03/09/analysis-whiplash-foxcatcher-machismo/	thepopcornmuncher@gmail.com
Adapted extract from Finding the Frame by Gustavo Mercado		info@copyright.com
Adapted extract from Studying American Independent Cinema		office@auteur.co.uk
Juno review excerpt		http://www.suntimesreprints.com/quote-request/
Adapted excerpt of review	Why 'The Hate U Give' Is Not a Black Lives Matter Movie - Los Angeles Sentinel Los Angeles Sentinel Black News (lasentinel.net)	
Review	Greta Gerwig and White Feminism in Film Varsity	licensing@varsity.com
Review	http://prospect.org/article/hurt-locker-propaganda	ateuscher@prospect.org