



GCE A LEVEL EXAMINERS' REPORTS

FILM STUDIES A LEVEL

SUMMER 2023

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FILM STUDIES

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COMPONENT 1

General Comments

This year there was, again, much evidence of excellent teaching and learning that had prepared candidates well for the examination and resulted in so much exciting and interesting critical writing about film whilst retaining a highly engaging passion for the subject. The majority of responses showed a wide range and, surprisingly, deep knowledge of films in relation to their associated core and specialist learning areas. Candidates often wrote with a level of confidence and engagement that was a credit to their hard work and the great efforts of their teachers in preparing for this examination.

The questions were clearly accessible, if challenging at times, and this enabled candidates to show their knowledge and understanding of the subject content whilst applying it in meaningful ways to the films studied. Those responses that really engaged with the questions and constructed a clear discussion around the question set were far more successful than responses which tended to 'download' pre-prepared information in the hope of scoring marks. There were instances, in all the sections, of responses that featured lengthy recitals of theoretical definitions, plot descriptions, historical overviews and filmmaker biographies that, whilst showing some knowledge of the subject, did not answer the question or engage with the mark scheme very well. Responses that kept a focus on the question and applied conceptual, contextual and textual knowledge to discuss the films tended to show better understanding and more sophisticated critical awareness. There were many candidates who did this very well but some practice on answering questions rather than just downloading knowledge would benefit some. It is also important to remember that this is Film Studies and so the focus of responses should always be on the films themselves rather than wandering off into vague discussions about theoretical or contextual issues.

Most candidates were able to complete all three of their responses in the time allowed and produce substantial answers to the questions which showed good practice. Some responses were very brief and this meant that there was limited evidence of knowledge and understanding shown or that the quality of what was produced was basic. Most candidates wrote about both of their films, in each response, equally and this generally led to a more successful answer compared to those that were uneven and had very little on one of the films or where the quality of analysis of one film was far inferior. The section that proved most difficult appeared to be Section B because many responses did not evaluate the specified critical approach, the better responses here seemed to be from candidates who had obviously practised this type of question before and were very confident in reflecting upon the value of critical approaches used to study films. Centres are advised to read all the previous Examiners' Reports and CPD Guidance Materials to build evaluation of critical approaches into their schemes of learning to ensure all candidates are prepared for such questions in the future, wherever they might appear in the examination paper.

Handwriting as usual was a challenge for a great deal of responses. This ranged from the wrong kind of pen which did not scan well, to writing that was incredibly difficult to decipher. It goes without saying that challenging writing makes the process of marking much more difficult, if centres could encourage more legible handwriting and the use of suitable pens that would be much appreciated and would help candidates communicate their knowledge and the application of it more effectively.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A: Hollywood 1930-1990 (Comparative study)

Both questions in the Hollywood section of the exam proved to be accessible to and engaging for candidates, with 1.1 being more popular possibly because it more directly addressed the specialist learning topic for this part of Component One. Students seemed very well-prepared to discuss auteurism and cultural/political contexts in relation to the films they had studied and were able to write quite lengthy answers on the whole to demonstrate knowledge they had gained but sometimes did not apply that knowledge as well as they could have. As a result, this was the strongest section for most candidates as they were very able to provide lots of evidence of knowledge for AO1, it was a shame though that some were not able to apply this knowledge through better comparative analysis to score as highly on AO2 at times.

Most candidates seemed to clearly understand that the main purpose of the section is to assess how Hollywood films had been impacted by institutional changes from the Classical period to New Hollywood and that answers to any questions in this section must be comparative. Answers to 1.1 were often more successful at integrating contextual knowledge to textual analysis whereas in responses to 1.2 many responses focused on downloading contextual information rather than engaging with the texts and analysing them. There was an improvement in concise and fluent writing in this section as, often, answers were shorter but richer than in previous years where sometimes candidates have felt the need to write lengthy but less incisive responses, which is to be encouraged. The best responses in this section were able to apply theory, terminology and auteur/contextual knowledge with detailed and well-chosen examples to develop sophisticated comparative analysis of the films studied.

Despite the detectable improvement in preparedness for this section there are some points worth mentioning to improve candidates' responses, which have been highlighted in previous reports but still persist and can limit the quality of responses to these questions. These are linked to AO2, the application of textual/contextual knowledge through comparison and analysis. Firstly, comparison between the films studied is better if it is detailed, developed and productive in drawing out precise similarities between the films referenced rather than simplistic and, often, only implicit comparisons. Too many candidates still fail to access the higher bands on AO2 because of this by making only superficial references to the films being different because they are from different time periods. More sophisticated responses identify precise similarities and differences between the films and link these comparisons to precise examples, often adopting a structure for their response that organises the answer by comparative points rather than adopting the rather simplistic approach of discussing one film and then discussing the other which often means that comparison is forgotten about or is too superficial. A second area for improvement in this section is in encouraging students to develop specific and detailed examples of textual analysis linked to the points they are making. This year, as in previous years, too many candidates failed to develop the examples they were using to support points by not including specific and detailed links between formal and narrative features with meanings and responses. The best candidates were able to show that they had a very secure and extensive understanding of the films they had studied by linking the auteur/contextual points they were making to very well chosen and detailed examples.

Q.1.1 This was, by far, the most popular question and candidates were clearly prepared to discuss auteurism in relation to the films they had studied. There was much evidence of clear knowledge about auteur signatures and a very pleasing improvement in the use of auteur theory to frame and underpin discussions.

This was particularly true of those responses that used Sarris' definition of an auteur and used this to structure their comparative analysis of the films studied or of those responses that considered Bazin's distinction between the auteur and the metteur-en-scene and used this to underpin their responses. Weaker responses tended to have scant understanding of their auteur and/or the auteur signature and only include perfunctory and, often, inaccurate references to the films themselves. There was much excellent work on Hitchcock, Lee, Scott, Welles and Forman that applied detailed knowledge of possible auteur influence with precise and well-developed analysis of the films. Equally, there was some excellent work on *Casablanca* and *Bonnie and Clyde* that showed how, despite some evidence of auteur-director influence, there was better evidence of Studio and contextual or collaborative influence upon the films.

There were few that used the word auteur without exploring its meaning, and the vast majority brought a wealth of information about the directors, films, time periods and regulation to their answers. Candidates demonstrated a good knowledge of the films studied, in weaker responses this became plot descriptive but on the whole examples were well chosen and productive. In some excellent responses, there was detailed exploration of how the films could be seen as a vehicle for personal expression and these candidates made some very useful references to the biography and wider filmography of the auteurs they were discussing. Overall, there was a much better understanding of auteurship and auteur theorists such as Sarris, Truffaut and Kael, the best responses used this understanding to structure analysis of the films and explore their impact. There were many interesting responses that considered film collaborations to question the notion of the auteur - so producers, studio heads, editors, cinematographers and actors as Auteurs were considered rather than just directors. The very best responses like this considered the interrelationships of influences and how these shaped the films in very sophisticated ways.

Q.1.2 This was a less popular question but when done well provided some excellent discussions and exciting, interesting and varied responses. Most candidates who responded to this question were able to show how the films reflected cultural and/or political influences with better responses linking precise contextual knowledge to detailed and well-developed textual analysis that constructed clear and sophisticated comparative writing. Some candidates may have been put off this question because of its invitation to discuss cultural and political contexts and this may have seemed to these candidates that extensive knowledge of the political and cultural history surrounding their films was needed but the best responses to this question showed that one or two very specific events or trends could be used to show how these had influenced their chosen films. There were some excellent responses that focussed on how first and second-wave Feminism had influenced and shaped *Casablanca*, *Johnny Guitar*, *Some Like It Hot* and *Bonnie and Clyde* in similar or very different ways. Other excellent responses to this question looked at how the USA's experience of World War Two and the Vietnam War had shaped their chosen films in interesting and very productive ways. By looking at just a few contextual issues, candidates were able to spend more time considering in detail and in very sophisticated ways how these issues had affected and influenced different aspects of their chosen films in different ways. The mark scheme always makes room for alternative responses, of course, and there were plenty of responses that discussed how films like *Vertigo*, *Do the Right Thing*, *Johnny Guitar* and *Bladerunner* whilst being influenced by the political and cultural times in which they were made could also be seen more as Auteur films, more shaped by their creators' personal interests than external factors.

Weaker responses tended to only provide vague and superficial points about contextual factors and state that these shaped the films rather than provide detailed evidence of this or much convincing, accurate referencing of the films studied. It is disappointing to see this because, often, responses like this show that they can make the right points and have the framework of a good response but fail to analyse their films and provide convincing evidence that they know their films well. Unlike 1.1, not enough candidates took the invitation to focus on one sequence from the film in response to this question which also made their response appear to lack detailed knowledge of the films. This might have helped those candidates struggling to add detail by focussing on specific filmic features rather than trying to offer broad generalisations about the films which often appeared superficial and unsupported by analysis.

Section B: American film since 2005

As in previous years, despite all Examiners' Reports and CPD materials advising on this and providing clear guidance to centres, the main weakness of candidates in Component One is the Evaluation of Critical Approaches questions. This year, these questions appeared in Section B and asked candidates to evaluate the ideological critical approach they had used to study their chosen films with so it is no surprise that this was the weakest section for most candidates and the section that produced the most disparity between candidate performance. Those centres that have obviously used the previous Examiners' Reports and CPD Guidance had prepared their candidates well to evaluate the critical approaches they have used to study their chosen films but too many candidates did not seem prepared for these questions, which must appear in Component One, and were only able to offer vague and often quite confused responses.

The specification requires candidates to be assessed on the evaluation of critical approaches in every examination and so they must be prepared for such questions through consistent reflection in class and in revision work: for too many candidates it seemed that the examination was the first time they had been asked to evaluate a critical approach they had used to study film with. Those candidates could often apply the critical approach to their chosen films, in this case an ideological analysis of the films, but could only implicitly suggest that they were evaluating the critical approach. The best responses were able to compare ideological study of film with other ways of studying film, for example spectatorship study or aesthetic analysis, or evaluated different ideological critical approaches, for example 'Feminism' and 'Marxism' to consider the 'value' of ideological study of film and how this might impact upon appreciation and understanding of the chosen films. The very best candidates produced sophisticated evaluations of the benefits and drawbacks of ideological analysis and considered the specifics of the films they had studied.

Q.2.1 This was the most popular question in this section, perhaps because candidates saw it as a question about spectatorship rather than a question asking them to evaluate the ideological critical approach as a means of explaining the impact of the films on spectators. The best responses had clear views on whether ideological analysis offered useful insights into why spectators responded in particular ways to their chosen films. For example, there were some excellent discussions about how the impact of films like *La La Land*, *Frances Ha!* and *Inception* could, perhaps, be better explained by analysis of formal elements and aesthetic style or how genre might be a better way of studying *No Country for Old Men* or *Carol* than ideological analysis. Equally, there were some passionate endorsements of ideological study in relation to films like *Beasts of the Southern Wild* and *Winter's Bone* that argued that these films were inherently ideological and that this was the best way of explaining the films' impacts.

Some very interesting responses argued that films such as *Carol* or *La La Land* revealed very varied, and sometimes oppositional, spectator responses when an ideological approach was applied - for example, how a post-colonial critical approach to the study of *La La Land* might change a very positive response to the film's aesthetic and narrative pleasures into a very negative response - even from the same spectators.

Unfortunately, too many responses were not prepared to engage with evaluative reflection on the ideological approach and too often got sidetracked into just discussing spectatorship, often in very superficial and inaccurate ways. The most common issue here was in the very vague and insecure understanding about how to discuss 'active' and 'passive' spectatorship with many candidates mistaking these terms for fixed spectatorship positions or not really understanding their definition or how to apply them to film analysis. Too many candidates could only produce reductive discussions that suggested that spectators were either actively 'thinking' or not when experiencing film or confused an 'ideological critical approach' with something that filmmakers do. As pointed out above, many centres need to revisit past Examiner Reports and CPD materials to better prepare their candidates for these types of questions.

Q.2.2 This question was far less popular in this section and was responded to less well on the whole. Aside from the issues mentioned above about the lack of preparedness for evaluation of critical approaches questions, the other issue here was the lack of detailed analysis of mise-en-scene and therefore textual analysis. Examples given to support points made were too often superficial and, in some cases, inaccurate. The best responses recognised that the question was asking them to consider whether the use of mise-en-scene could be explained by ideological analysis, some candidates saw this as an invitation to look in precise detail at specific moments in their chosen films and compare different critical approaches to the analysis of mise-en-scene. There were some really good responses looking at sequences from *Carol*, *No Country For Old Men*, *Selma* and *Captain Fantastic* that argued that ideological analysis was crucial for understanding the use of mise-en-scene and other responses that argued that other critical approaches, such as narrative, genre or contextual issues, could better explain the use of settings, props, costume, etc. Some very sophisticated responses showed how mise-en-scene in films such as *La La Land* and *No Country For Old Men* could be studied ideologically or in terms of aesthetic style and yield very different readings whereby the beauty of the films belied darker ideological meanings which could be seen as offensive or existentially bleak. Weaker responses, again, failed to engage with an evaluation of the ideological critical approach and could only offer an application of ideological analysis to the study of the chosen films' use of mise-en-scene. These responses were able to access mid-range bands of the mark scheme but were not able to gain higher marks because they were not explicitly engaging with the question set.

Section C: British Cinema

Overall, the responses in this section were very competent and tended to show satisfactory or good levels of knowledge and understanding about the films. The problem for some, as in Section A, was where they didn't directly answer the question or failed to provide detailed analysis of the films to show application of their knowledge. Candidates often managed to write in detail about their chosen films, some with considerable flair and depth and could reference key information about both of their chosen film texts.

There are still some issues in this section connected to a lack of precision in discussing narrative and in applying narrative theory, and in discussing ideology far too superficially especially in relation to the most popular films. Most candidates were well prepared to discuss their films and their chosen examples but there were problems in candidates not answering the questions as carefully as they should, in lacking textual analytical detail or in not developing their points to fully engage with the question.

Weaker responses tended to suffer from the same problem as in other sections in that, too often, theories and theorists tended to be namechecked and explained for little reason other than to describe features of the films and were not used to productively analyse the film in relation to the question set. Propp may be a useful way of understanding character functions in narrative, but candidates should spend more time discussing and exemplifying the characters in the films studied and how they function, than in detailing the theories of Propp, Todorov, et al. All the films in this section, and in the rest of the specification, are great films to discuss and analyse and that is what candidates should be spending their time on in the exam.

Q.3.1 This question was answered relatively well regarding making connections to messages and values. Many candidates did understand the ideological steer of the question and were able to discuss ideologies and representational issues in their chosen films reasonably well. Where candidates were weaker was on a lack of formal textual detail regarding cinematography and especially editing. For several years the advice at CPD and directly from Eduqas has been to focus on close textual analysis of the films, with an emphasis on how film form creates meaning. Links between ideological frameworks and how the film was made should be clear if taught in an analytical fashion. This wasn't always the case. Equally, it isn't acceptable for candidates to ignore the question and just write about whatever they have prepared in revision. There were too many candidates who didn't write about cinematography or editing at all and just wrote about mise-en-scene and sound. It was acceptable for candidates to argue that other aspects of form are more important in reinforcing messages and values in their films, but they should still address the question.

Better candidates were able to discuss cinematography in slightly more depth beyond just shot size. They were able to develop a useful commentary on framing, lighting, composition, use of focus and crucially movement, although this level of engagement was only evident in a few responses. In terms of editing this was even less successful with most candidates just mentioning montage, often in a generalised manner and unrelated to aspects of messages and values. There was a distinct lack of discussion of continuity editing, parallel editing, pace, ellipsis and other discontinuity devices. However, some good work did discuss editing in the more realist films with useful links to political ideologies. There was some very good work on the use of continuity editing in films like *This Is England* and *Fish Tank* that showed how this style of editing helped to underpin suspension of disbelief and make the political ideas of the films more persuasive, this was developed further by the very best responses that focussed on specific examples of how shot-reverse-shot, matches-on-action and the 180-degree rule contributed to this in very precise ways. Equally, there was some recognition in the more expressionist films, such as *Under the Skin* and *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, of how a more fragmented approach and the use of discontinuity can create ambiguous readings of what is presented. Final thoughts on this question are that there needed to be less downloading of lists of points on ideology and a more expansive sense of how film form makes meaning. Deep sequence analysis does provide a high degree of rigour exploring the filmmaker's decisions to position a camera or cut in a particular place.

The reasoning behind this is rarely explicitly ideological which was a key point that only very few of the strongest candidates realised.

Q.3.2 This question allowed candidates to take a wide range of approaches and the mark scheme was able to accommodate very varied responses, particularly in the types of narrative devices that candidates wanted to discuss when they sought to compare characters with other narrational features.

There was some very good discussion of plot structures, narrative positioning, ellipsis, setting, etc in comparison to the use of characters, while other candidates focused on characters in detail and that approach was able to yield excellent responses too. Many responses fell rather predictably into discussions of binary oppositions but there was some good evidence (better than last year) of seeing this as a structuralist device in creating conflict rather than just ideological meaning and so was sometimes used very well to contrast with characterisation as a storytelling device.

It was apparent in quite a few responses that they had been only prepared to discuss ideology rather than narrative which is disappointing as narrative is a specialist learning topic, along with ideology, for this section and so candidates do have to be prepared to discuss how the films that they have studied tell their stories, create drama and trigger meanings and responses. There were some very good responses that made references to character arcs, and this was welcome – but often candidates didn't really develop their points about this and show how characters developed in detail or why this was important in the telling of the story. The importance of openings (exposition) and endings (resolution) were considered in some answers. That said, what would have been great is to see issues like cause/effect, causal agents, reveals, catharsis, narrative catalysts, repetition, use of settings/locations, differences between story/plot in more answers. Narrative should be a core element for all films studied in this section because it is a specialist learning topic here, but narrative study should also be applied to all films on the specification in order to examine how films work.

Summary of key points

- Teach students how to evaluate critical approaches by comparing approaches and asking them to identify the strengths and weaknesses of different ways of studying their films. Focus on how different approaches might enhance their appreciation and/or understanding of the films.
- Theories and theoretical terms should be used as tools of film analysis, not ends in themselves. Identifying aspects of film, media, narrative, psychological theory or naming theorists will not necessarily be rewarded, these must be used to productively explore the films studied in light of the question asked.
- Comparison in Section A needs to be more detailed, rigorous and explicit. It is not adequate that candidates simply state that films are similar or different, comparative analysis is required for the higher bands in the mark scheme and as a result comparison needs to be further embedded in more responses.

- Encourage rigour and passion for film analysis. Motivated Film students who focus, in detail, on the films they have studied and use the language of film study productively will be able to apply their learning much more effectively and confidently when it comes to the exams.
- Candidates must answer the question that is set rather than repeat a pre-prepared essay or series of case study examples so that knowledge shown is relevant (AO1) and it can be applied (AO2) appropriately. Centres are advised to focus on this in preparations for examinations.

Thank you to all of the candidates and teachers whose dedication to the subject have ensured that so many have been able to write such well informed and captivating responses in this exam. Your hard work and engagement is very much appreciated and we do, very much, enjoy reading all responses. All the comments above are intended to show what best practice looks like and where candidates might be limiting themselves in the exams. We want to ensure the quality of the critical writing about film continues to develop and that all candidates do as well as they possibly can and so we thank all those teachers and centre teams that have obviously taken onboard advice given in previous Examiners' Reports, CPD and WJEC/Eduqas guidance materials.

I would also like to thank all the tireless examiners and diligent administrators who have worked with such professionalism to ensure that all examination processes were completed so thoroughly and efficiently this year, and in all previous years.

FILM STUDIES

GCE A LEVEL

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COMPONENT 2

General Comments

In general, candidates approached the paper with confidence. It is still encouraging to find many answers that demonstrate not just learning but a genuine engagement with the films studied. Most responses showed very good knowledge of the chosen films and application of concepts and debates. Candidates are balancing the demands of the paper effectively and there were very few rubric infringements.

Centres are clearly engaging students with film form and context throughout their studies and there is exceptional teaching and learning delivered from this specification. Prescribed films have clearly aided candidates from across a range of abilities to understand the foundations, context and style of vastly different films.

However, as the paper is now very established there is a tendency for uniformity in all areas, with candidates preparing a contextual or film form answer, regardless of the question set. Centres need to prepare candidates to debate, challenge and explore their selected films, and maybe challenge themselves to teach a new area or at least to refresh sequences.

I would also recommend that centres revisit with their candidates the specialist film form sections of the syllabus, as integral topics including *mise-en-scène* and sound, sometimes lacked specific knowledge and specialist language.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A: Global Film

This section of the paper clearly demonstrates the candidate's knowledge and enthusiasm for the films studied and there is still a sense of them discovering and acknowledging the impact of 'world cinema'. There is clear evidence of excellent teaching of themes, context and meaning.

Candidates were well prepared for both answers and were generally successful in their approach, although there can be an uneven response in using both films, with the second film given a much lighter touch.

Both questions asked to refer to key sequences from each film. Centres may want to remind candidates to focus on one or two sequences in detail. Candidates must be efficient, balancing specific film form with relevant contextual detail. Many candidates provide unnecessary narrative or historical detail at the expense of answering the set question.

The most popular film combination, by a considerable margin, is *City of God* and *Pan's Labyrinth*, there were good answers on each combination and some excellent answers on the less popular films including *House of Flying Daggers*, *Victoria* and *Taxi Tehran* that sophisticatedly addressed the set questions.

There is a certain uniformity of approach with the same sequences from the same films, and this does not always help the candidates with the actual set question. Centres need to ensure that they equip candidates with the confidence to see the whole of their films in terms of film form that will provide with the tools to answer any set question.

Q.1.1 Explore how cinematography and sound help to convey important themes in the films you have studied. Refer to key sequences from each film.

Candidates responded well to question 1.1 in most cases, indicative of some effective delivery from centres. At the top end, there were some sophisticated and detailed textual responses, which were effectively linked to a range of themes. These candidates demonstrated an excellent knowledge and understanding, as well as a sophisticated application of knowledge and understanding, therefore engaging with both assessment objectives to a high standard.

Better answers looked closely at one/two sequences per film and demonstrated a detailed and wide understanding of the use of cinematography (including depth of field, composition, angles, lighting etc), and sound (diegetic and non-diegetic, environmental, silence and sound design) linking examples of techniques directly to individual spectator response. There were some very well thought out responses on *Taxi Tehran*, *Victoria* and *House of Flying Daggers* that developed nuanced answers that fully addressed the question.

For example, the relationship between cinematography and sound in *Taxi Tehran*, where the confined space of the taxi and the limited number of camera positions was identified linking to the restrictions on free speech within the haven of the taxi.

The films offer a variety of themes to discuss and there is clearly evidence of centres providing students with detailed historical, political and economic background which can be an excellent framework for study. Answers can become over assertive; candidates should be encouraged to explore what these films mean to them as spectators. However, it is important given the time available, to think in terms of an 'answer' rather than an 'essay' and not to cover too many themes.

Some candidates had not read the question closely and only analysed one element of form, usually cinematography. In a very small number of cases, some candidates deviated from the expected focus on cinematography and sound and opted to discuss other micro elements. This should not be encouraged.

Q.1.2 Discuss how one or two contextual factors have influenced the aesthetic of each of the films you have studied. Refer to key sequences from each film.

This question required candidates to show knowledge and understanding of the films' contexts and how these have influenced the aesthetics of their chosen film.

The best answers to this question provided excellent and sustained contextual discussion, which was effectively linked to aesthetics. Again, candidates offered a good balance between excellent knowledge and understanding (AO1) and a sophisticated application of knowledge and understanding.

Mustang, *Taxi Tehran* and *Victoria* proved fruitful ground for the context responses, which enabled candidates to identify and explore aesthetics and meaning with some very insightful responses that used context as a springboard for sophisticated analysis.

However, some candidates struggled with effective discussion of aesthetics, as they seemed to struggle with what the concept meant. This led to some uneven answers, where candidates made plenty of reference to context, but they struggled with an effective discussion of aesthetics. Successful answers were able to 'label' their aesthetic such as 'gothic' or 'neo-realist' and then consider some of its key film form elements, such as editing and the impact of a contextual factor. Centres may want to name the relevant aesthetic when they are reviewing short sequences in their centres and then discuss how the context may have impacted the film form.

Again, the importance of answering the set question, rather than prepared contextual 'essay' will certainly aid candidates.

Section B: Documentary film

This is a demanding section with much expected of the candidates in the time available: to demonstrate textual knowledge of their chosen film, its context, an understanding of issues in documentary and a specific application of filmmakers' theories or digital debates. Candidates have clearly been taught effectively with a range of sequences and ideas explored and a genuine interest demonstrated in the topics of the films.

As always, however, it is important, given the time available, to think in terms of an 'answer' rather than an 'essay'. Challenges remain, of course, but become more concerned with the organisation of material and finding the best balance between the different elements of the answer, for example, between conceptual discussion and textual detail.

The use of filmmakers' theories always requires fine judgement. This year there was no direct question relating to this specialist study. Neither question therefore required any reference to filmmakers' theories. This is not to say that such material cannot be included but it needs to be relevant and add to the candidate's response. Unfortunately, some candidates included sometimes substantial information and examples from a filmmaker's theory that was of limited relevance. This is discussed further in relation to question 2.1 but the general message is that filmmakers' theories should only be used if they can be applied relevantly to the actual question.

As a final introductory point, it is worth repeating the importance of reading the wording of the question very carefully. Several of the issues within each question relate to this.

Q.2.1 Discuss how two documentary techniques are used to explore a key issue in the film you have studied.

This question required candidates to discuss how two documentary techniques have been used to explore a key issue from the chosen film. The best answers identified the key issue clearly and early in their answer and used it as the structure of their answer.

On the question paper, the number **two** is highlighted for a reason. Some candidates stated and then discussed "multiple techniques" or "a range of techniques". Whilst there is no penalty as such for using more than two techniques, the risk is that this might result in less depth or briefer exemplification than a clear discussion of just two.

However, when one technique is identified such as editing, several specific editing techniques might be considered, as this would allow for greater detail and knowledge about editing rather than different techniques.

There was also an issue with using documentary mode as one, or both documentary techniques. This is not a problem, if in the answer, a specific technique that characterises the mode is explicitly discussed, not just named or generally characterised.

As mentioned in the introduction, perhaps the most significant issue was the use of filmmakers' theories and, as already stated, the crucial point is relevance. For question 2.1 some candidates outlined techniques of one or more of the filmmakers, sometimes including detailed examples, before stating that this was the opposite of what was done in their chosen film. In a few cases, the question was answered in a comparison-style with about half of the answer discussing one of the other filmmakers and their films. The focus, as the question specifies, is 'the film you have studied', so any material from filmmakers' theories needs to be relevant to this. There were, of course, examples where students had done this very well, with succinct comments relating to other filmmakers linked back to the chosen film. In general, this point about relevance should be made to students, particularly with time so limited in the exam.

Q.2.2 How far are digital technologies important for capturing and manipulating reality in the films you have studied?

This question required an analysis of how far digital technologies were important in capturing and manipulating reality in the chosen film.

Questions linked to the specialist study critical debate on the significance of digital technology in film can be challenging and this was no exception.

The main issue was around explicit knowledge, understanding and discussion of digital technologies and the critical debate surrounding them. A lack of this characterised quite a few answers. Instead, techniques were discussed in relation to capturing and manipulating reality, but without and clear detail about the digital nature of the technique. For example, editing used to manipulate reality but with no detail about its digital nature or digital debates around it. Several such responses seemed as if they would have made better answers to question 2.1. Among weaker answers, some candidates seemed confused about which aspects of their chosen film were or were not digital, leaving considerable doubt around their choice of question.

There were, of course, many higher-level responses covering not just the digital aspect of the technologies but also the wider contextual background of developments in digital technology and debates around them. Strong answers about *Amy* discussed these developments in relation to the changing material utilised throughout the film. 'Capturing and manipulating reality' – most candidates did well in discussing aspects of both ideas. Manipulation, unsurprisingly, tended to focus on editing (with, in *Amy* particularly, a lot of 'frankenbiting'). A few assertive responses discussed at length, and not very productively, not knowing what the director left out. Higher-level answers not only covered both aspects but debated issues questioning 'reality', including particularly sophisticated responses based on *Stories We Tell* and *The Arbor*.

The films used all appeared to work for both questions. *Sisters in Law* provided some pleasingly good answers to Q.2.2 showing very good understanding of the importance of digital to aspects of the film.

In Kapida's *Amy*, the most popular film, the emotive aspects of the narrative can sometimes lead to strongly held opinions which manifest in strongly expressed subjective views rather than a more objective, critical approach of a student of film. This can also lead to descriptive narrative detail or narrative theory, which often detracts for the set question and can waste valuable time when writing an answer.

With *Stories We Tell* a few responses that used the 'three levels' analysis of the film, read like prepared answers, which weren't going to let the actual question get in their way.

Finally, for both questions, in terms of breadth and depth, it should perhaps be repeated that stronger answers tend to focus in greater detail on a smaller number of issues. Answers which sometimes feel almost like a checklist with a fairly high number of points made, will rarely achieve the depth needed to reach beyond a satisfactory response.

Section C: Film movements-Silent Cinema

This section was effectively handled by many candidates, as other reports have mentioned answers on silent cinema do provide a clear sense of engagement and discovery of a 'new' area of cinema.

Both questions were answered with contextual knowledge and appropriate textual detail. Centres clearly teach the critical debates about realism and the expressive effectively this allows candidates to discover silent cinema. However, a note of caution although contextual knowledge does provide the necessary foundation to discover the film form aspects of the selected cinema it needs to be used only where relevant. Some candidates used too much of the answer and time providing a political and historical essay that did little to contribute to answering the set question.

The popular choices of texts to study remain *Sunrise* and Buster Keaton shorts. There were even numbers of *Strike* and *Man with a Movie Camera*.

Q.3.1 Explore how representations of gender reflect the times in which the film option you have studied was made.

Generally good responses with some strong use of contextual study at times, candidates were prepared effectively for this question by centres. Unsurprisingly *Sunrise* provided many opportunities to explore the social and political context of the film. The central role of industrialisation and the subsequent emancipation of restricted gender roles was central to *Sunrise* and provided fruitful ground for candidates to explore how gender was constructed in the film and to what extent it reflected the times it was made. The contrast between the 'traditional' representation of 'The Wife' and the 'modern' representation of 'The Woman from The City' was usefully explored by many candidates. Answers had selected relevant aspects of film form to underline their contextual knowledge with engaged comment. The best candidates questioned this binary opposition, exploring wider tensions between institutional pressures, national and personal ideological perspectives.

The study of Buster Keaton shorts also enabled a good debate over the representation of gender. Again, many candidates commented on 'traditional' gender roles constructed in the films with a binary opposition between the active male and the passive female. Other candidates delved into changing gender roles and the social and political changes occurring in the USA in the 1920's.

Some candidates valuably explored the construction of masculinity in the performance of Buster Keaton. Some developed this analysis into a critique of gender roles and a potential attack on the capitalist construction of patriarchy.

The wider study of the social and political background to the formation of the Soviet Union in the 1920's gave candidates who studied *Strike* and *Man With A Movie Camera* a good grounding for this question and these candidates seem to grasp the ideas of visual storytelling.

Some candidates had over rehearsed previous years' questions and moved beyond gender to wider social change. Some candidates failed to explore the ways that either representations found in the films they studied were a reflection of the times, or evidence of the time period they had studied reflected in the films. The requirement to answer the set question remains the same.

Q.3.2 Discuss how far mise-en-scéné is used in realist and expressive ways in the film option you have studied.

This popular question gave all candidates an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of a key aspect of film form. Candidates were also able to explore the key debate within this film movement of the tendency to expressive/realist techniques. The better candidates explored 'how far' ways were used and the possible reasons for these aesthetic choices.

These areas were central to a study of *Sunrise* and candidates embraced this question with a clear delineation of examples of realist and expressive mise-en-scéné. As might be expected, the marsh scene from *Sunrise* was the main example selected, although other sequences worked very effectively for this question.

The study of Buster Keaton shorts also enabled candidates to explore the choices made in the construction of these films. The use of 'realistic' settings and 'expressive' gags was a common response with detailed examples from the selected films. Debate over the construction of Keaton's persona allowed an interesting exploration by some candidates.

Responses on *Strike* and *Man with a Movie Camera* were less fruitful. Candidates were able to use their knowledge and understanding by placing mise-en-scéné within the context of aesthetic choices made by these filmmakers. The context of *Spies* and the filmography of Fritz Lang provided solid material for responses in this area.

Although most candidates had some understanding of the realist-expressive distinction, many were unable to locate evidence of this in the uses of mise-en-scéné. A large proportion of candidates discussed lighting and performance as aspects of mise-en-scéné, with a few also locating editing and sound within this element of film form.

Centre should prepare candidates to deal with each aspect of film form on the specification discretely and in detail, this would obviously assist them on whatever question is set in whichever section.

Section D: Film movements- Experimental film (1960-2000)

The questions this year allowed significant, informed debate and demonstrated detailed study of auteur theories and experimental style. A significant number of centres have selected *Fallen Angels*, *Vivre Sa Vie* and *Daisies* with a clear engagement by candidates in the challenge of studying more problematic texts. Candidates who were less assertive and more enquiring provided sophisticated answers at the end of a demanding paper, well done.

The ongoing debate about how 'experimental' *Pulp Fiction* is has certainly improved. The film remains by far the most popular choice in terms of number of candidates and enthusiasm of response. Some candidates struggled in both questions to really identify what makes *Pulp Fiction* experimental beyond its narrative.

Q.4.1 Explore how one or more key characters are constructed in experimental ways in the film option you have studied.

This question gave considerable autonomy to candidates to explore how the character(s) of their choice were constructed and how this could be considered experimental. Those writing about *Vivre Sa Vie* and *Fallen Angels* developed engaging answers, giving precise and detailed examples of how and why the characters had been constructed in experimental ways by their auteur filmmakers. The choice of Nana in the study of *Vivre Sa vie* was an obvious one and was largely very successfully used.

Candidates answering on *Pulp Fiction* at times found this difficult, exploring characters as unconventional or surprising rather than experimental. Some identified relatively strong female characters as experimental. Many reverted to a discussion of narrative characteristics or debates surrounding postmodernism that did not fully address the question. The best answers using *Pulp Fiction* challenged that the characters were 'experimental' and that they 'played' with Hollywood genre and gender conventions.

Q.4.2 'Experimental film auteurs create stylistically innovative films.' Discuss this statement in relation to at least one key sequence from the film option studied.

This question enabled candidates to set their own agenda in selecting aspects of film form. This could be wide ranging with a listing of claimed experimental elements or a more complex debate over auteur status and stylistics. The best candidates were able to identify and discuss aspects of style, exploring Wong's use of step printing, Chytilova's use of editing or Godard's framing. Centres selecting these films have clearly challenged their candidates interrogate the style of their chosen films.

The improved focus on the debatable status of *Pulp Fiction* was demonstrated here with a range of informed responses on the style and form of the film and this provided candidates with a more nuanced approach to tracking shots or dialogue in their selected sequences. There are still some Tarantino devotees who claim many of his stylistic traits as being new and never-before-seen with little justification.

The inclusion of the word auteur in the question leads many candidates to apply their pre-prepared arguments about meeting Sarris' criteria to be considered auteurs, often taking up too much time in these short answers.

Summary of key points

- Greater emphasis needs to be given to answering the set question, rather than preparing answers and sequences regardless of what is asked. Please remind candidates that we remember what the previous questions were and can easily 'spot' those revised essays, which can prevent capable students of achieving less precise but more engaging answers.
- As stated previously in this report, 'get in early and clearly' - candidates do not need to approach answers with long introductions or extensive background information. Focus on the set question with well-chosen examples.
- Centres may want to revisit the specification in relation to aspects of film form to ensure candidates are clear of what to include when addressing cinematography or mise-en-scéné. Film language should be precise and relevant in every answer.
- Candidates need to be reminded to be less assertive and always consider enquiry.
- It should perhaps be repeated that stronger answers tend to focus in greater detail on a smaller number of issues. Presentation should make the response legible and as fluent as possible.

Finally, I would like to thank and congratulate all the candidates and teachers whose hard work, commitment and passion is evident throughout this paper. This subject is demanding covering a variety of disciplines and you should take credit for continuing professionalism and dedication to learning.

FILM STUDIES

GCE A LEVEL

Summer 2023

COMPONENT 3

General Comments

This year candidates had the challenge of responding to new and quite challenging briefs for their production work, of these, the most popular has been distinct genre, with some successful examples produced. Thriller and horror have dominated as they have done for many years and there have been some really excellent pieces of work and innovative approaches to the genre and its subgenres, for example a very sophisticated and stylish vampire comedy. The woods remain a popular location and sometimes candidates need to be reminded to develop their narratives beyond simply being lost. There was an interesting trend of protagonists trying to bury bodies that turned out to be actually alive. Other popular and successful choices included sci-fi, surrealism, coming of age and social realism. For the purposes of Film Studies as an academic discipline, drama is not an appropriate genre, candidates must identify a genre in a much more precise way.

Second to this, the non-linear narrative was popular with some interesting use of flashbacks and circular narratives; the most effective were those that used it for a key narrative moment. However, some of these narratives were a little confusing, therefore candidates should be encouraged to test their ideas and gain feedback as it is often difficult to gain a sense of objectivity when engrossed in production. Using a narrator either in the form of a voice over or within the narrative, strongly influenced by *About A Girl*, also proved popular and there were some lovely examples of either heartfelt 'dear diary' type of narratives or unreliable narrators. At the top end, the use of narrator was often highly creative and allowed for lots of scope and originality, as candidates thought carefully about the type and role of the narrator. Candidates must use an appropriate human voice for these; some candidates used computer generated voices which were not appropriate or teenage voices for older adults, and these lessened the success of these short films. Parallel stories was a less popular brief, but there were many successful responses to it, helping to emphasise conflict and binary opposites with interesting results. Whilst candidates must identify a primary brief and discuss their response to it in their evaluative analysis, it is possible for their work to also fulfil one of the other briefs. Sometimes it was not clear which brief had been followed, this must be at forefront of candidates' planning and production, and clearly identified both on the cover sheet and in the evaluative analysis.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Option 1: Short Film

The film-making option is often more successfully realised than screenplays and storyboards and assessment is more accurate. Many candidates carefully constructed their narratives and mise-en-scene. Candidates should pay attention to costume, ensuring there is a clear sense of deliberate construction. At the very top there was some real excellence achieved with high levels of competency across both structural and key elements and we recommend these be entered for the Moving Image Awards. A few candidates struggled to fill the minimum of four minutes, many just being seconds away - centres are reminded to follow the assessment procedures for short or over-long work (page 45 of the digital specification). Work over five minutes disadvantaged the candidates for the assessment of narrative, as the resolution could not be assessed.

Candidates should avoid the use of a single song for the entire film as this overwhelms the visuals, creating a narrative music video effect, or doesn't allow a complex soundscape to be constructed, required for the key elements in the higher bands. Some work needed sharper editing, sometimes a slow pace was used as the narrative was not fully developed.

Candidates should be advised to avoid extended sequences which contribute very little to the narrative, e.g., teeth brushing (a particular favourite of many candidates) and walking.

Option 2: Screenplay and Storyboard for A Short Film

Many candidates have grasped the master scene script format for screenwriting, programmes such as Celtx helped with this, although the programme does not number scenes and this needs to be done separately by the candidate. Despite this, there were the following formatting issues which impacted negatively on assessment: the incorrect font; uncentred dialogue; sluglines not used or not containing the relevant information. Over-reliance on dialogue continues to be an issue which then impacts negatively on the storyboards, leading to a lack of variety of shot types beyond shot/reverse shot for conversation or overlong shots of extended conversation. Construction of narrative through dialogue also leads to a lack of detail in the description of mise-en-scene which affects the mark for structural elements, as does the lack of characterisation through gesture, movement and action. There were some examples of excellent and purposeful use of convincing dialogue to create character and advance the narrative, often with an indication of tone and volume where appropriate. Some candidates lapsed into prose style writing, describing thoughts and feelings or giving information which wasn't apparent visually, for example 'it's his pride and joy' and 'he was already upset as his mum had been shouting'; this needs to be changed in the drafting process as this kind of writing cannot be awarded a mark in the higher bands. It would be useful to include a wordcount on these pieces and centres must follow the assessment procedures for short or over-long work.

There were some lovely examples of thoughtfully constructed and detailed storyboards which were clearly not an afterthought for the candidate. It may be useful for candidates to plan and construct their storyboard as they are writing their screenplay. However, storyboards still present the most issues for moderators. Centres are reminded that the storyboard should be a digitally photographed continuous sequence of twenty shots which clearly references a particular section of the screenplay, as there are still some candidates trying to cover the whole story. Hand-drawn or computer-generated work is not acceptable for assessment for this qualification. Close ups are incredibly useful shots for storyboards, both for creating character and alignment with the spectator, and for subtly suggesting appropriate and indicative mise-en-scene. As well as composing and framing a variety of interesting and purposeful shots, the written information required also needs to be full and detailed, including a consideration of camera movement and non-diegetic sound, especially music identified in detail; please see the suggested template for required headings. Candidates should pay attention to timings, there are still too many over-long shot durations and too many filler sequences: teeth cleaning, putting the kettle on, extended walking, to give a few examples. Centres should remind candidates of the amount of found images permitted, there were some storyboards submitted this year entirely comprised of found images, these pieces receive few marks, as can storyboards without images and unfinished work. Unfortunately, too many candidates submitted very short storyboards or did not submit one at all, this significantly affects the marks which can be awarded for key elements.

Evaluative Analysis

The evaluative analyses at the high end were excellent, with impressive levels of knowledge and understanding, and some perceptive and sophisticated analysis of their own work clearly linked to cinematic influences including the short films - the use of screengrabs to illustrate this is incredibly useful for adhering to the word count. The analysis should start with a short introduction which discusses how the creative work meets the chosen brief.

Many candidates wasted words on lengthy introductions about the process of making the production and decisions made, which is not required. The more successful evaluative analyses kept the candidate's film as the main focus, rather than describing or analysing the short films in isolation, often leaving very few words for the analysis of the candidates' own work. Some centres seemed to restrict candidates to the study of the same selection of the short films, whereas freedom for candidates to explore a wider selection of short films always allows more creativity and relevant discussion. It is important for candidates to make meaningful links between the short films and their own works in terms of structural or key elements, it is not advisable to include references to short films and then dismiss them as not useful.

There seemed to be some confusion in some centres about the requirements - it is not sufficient to just watch the eighty minutes of short films and log those on the cover sheet, the logged eighty minutes must be discussed in the work in a meaningful way which makes a connection between the influence and the candidate's own work. Please remind candidates that cinematic influences must be films, as there are still references to television shows and games which are not acceptable. Not all candidates mentioned their own cinematic influences, and this does limit the mark that they can be awarded. Screenwriters must also refer to screenplays for professionally produced short films as is detailed in the third bullet point of the marking grid, this is still being omitted by many of the candidates and again restricts the marks that can be awarded. Please be aware that the screenplay for *Curfew* is available online. It would be useful here to include a word count and ensure that assessment procedures are followed for short or over long work.

Summary of key points

- The brief must be clear from the work, on the cover sheet and from the evaluative analysis.
- Cinematic influences must be films.
- Analysis of eighty minutes of the short films must be integrated in analysis of the candidate's own work, watching alone is not sufficient.
- Screenwriters must link their work to professionally produced screenplays including those for short films.
- Assessment procedures (page 45 of the digital specification) need to be followed for assessing short or long work.
- Include word counts on written work.
- Annotations are not required on storyboards.
- Use comments from the marking grid to complete coversheet sections and on the screenplays and evaluative analyses.
- Unless awarding full marks, it is important to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the work, so that moderators can see exactly how marks have been awarded.
- Please ensure that the wording used matches the mark awarded.
- When uploading work, please do check that it has been successful and all pieces of work are there; compressing films does seem to cause problems and the work has to be re-uploaded, please avoid doing this.
- Label files with the candidate number, surname and type of work.

Thank you for some very engaged, creative and enjoyable pieces of work this year.



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