



GCE A LEVEL EXAMINERS' REPORTS

**FILM STUDIES
A LEVEL**

SUMMER 2022

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FILM STUDIES

GCE A LEVEL

Summer 2022

COMPONENT 1 - Varieties of Film and Filmmaking

General Comments

In the first full examination since the recent pandemic there was plenty of evidence that candidates had prepared well for this paper and had been supported by very good teaching. Deep and wide-ranging knowledge of the chosen films was shown throughout all sections of the exam paper, and there was a detectable increase in confidence with the use of the language of Film Studies and the specification subject content. The exam paper proved to be accessible and provoked responses that allowed candidates to show their knowledge and apply it in interesting ways to all films chosen for study: a fairly even spread of questions were chosen by candidates and, as ever, there were some varied and novel approaches to answering the questions which were accommodated well by the mark scheme. The questions proved to be challenging but accessible and there was good evidence of most candidates being able to respond appropriately.

It was pleasing to see all of the film options being used effectively and stimulating interesting responses from candidates. Some of the options are more popular than others but these did not always ensure good academic writing, it was notable how some candidates had clearly been highly critically engaged by certain choices and it might be worth some centres reviewing their film choices if they want to improve this aspect of their course delivery. There are no easy answers on this as it depends upon knowing the candidates' abilities and interests but tailoring film options to personalise courses might increase closer critical engagement for some centres and their students, this seems to be highly effective for many centres.

Whilst most candidates were able to demonstrate detailed, comprehensive knowledge connected to their chosen films and the topics listed in the Advance Information, too many did not look closely at the question enough and sometimes failed to engage with it. As ever, reading the question carefully and responding to it is of utmost importance if candidates are to use relevant knowledge and apply it successfully in examinations. Similarly, it seemed that most candidates had prepared highly structured pre-planned essays for the exam, indeed some appeared to have used a shared 'template' response, that did allow weaker responses to have more detail and coherency but also limited the fluency and sophistication of better responses to the actual question set. Centres would be advised to ensure that greater emphasis is placed on responding to examination questions than encouraging the revision of 'essay plans', particularly shared 'template' responses and pre-prepared examples.

Examiners reported greater confidence with the language of Film Study this year, particularly in the use of terminology connected to film form, but would still like to encourage more precision and accuracy in the use of subject specific language and film text referencing. There are still too many candidates using vague or inaccurate terminology and not being precise enough, or even accurate, in referencing examples from their chosen films. A more limiting weakness with too many responses is the referencing of theory and specialist learning topics in vague, inaccurate or unproductive ways which are discussed in more detail below.

Theory and terminology should be tools of analysis and used to explore study of the films, not ends in themselves, otherwise responses become Media Studies, Psychology or Political essays and not Film Studies responses.

In terms of time-management, most candidates managed to write detailed and comprehensive answers to all their chosen questions, but some Section C responses were noticeably briefer than others which might suggest this could be an area for development in some Centres. Very brief responses do limit the demonstration of knowledge and application of it in responses and candidates would be very well advised to spread their efforts evenly in this paper. A final point would be that many examiners found the handwriting of too many candidates very difficult to read, more than in previous years, in addition to a deterioration in paragraphing, spelling, punctuation and grammar. Improving presentation of handwritten responses would be worth focussing on in Centres as it can limit the legibility as well as the fluency, coherency and sophistication of responses.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A: Hollywood 1930-1990 (Comparative study)

The distribution of responses between the two questions was quite even and both were accessible to candidates. There was a real strength in acquired knowledge of authorship and historical contexts and some very encouraging developments in candidates being able to reference other films made by their chosen filmmakers, which made their points more sophisticated and better supported. Similarly, there was clear evidence of stronger understanding of concepts and theory in this section this year although some candidates applied these in better ways than others. Unfortunately, some candidates became distracted by lengthy recitals of auteur theory history or explanations of historical contextual events rather than using this knowledge to explore the films studied which weakened their responses considerably.

The main issue with many weaker responses to this section was in not addressing the question set and therefore not linking contextual or auteur knowledge to textual analysis. Better responses were able to use their knowledge to respond with fluency and critical engagement to the main focus of each question. Too many responses seemed remarkably similar in the ways in which they simply 'downloaded' knowledge, most weaker responses appeared to recite pre-planned essays or involved candidates writing everything they knew about certain topics. This has long been an issue but seemed more common this year and meant that whilst many candidates were able to show satisfactory knowledge and understanding they found it difficult to show fluency, detail and sophistication relevant to the question set.

Section A questions always require comparison of the films studied and the changing institutional contexts of Hollywood films in the time period set. Comparisons and contrasts can be made in very different ways by candidates, from very textually detailed to wider stylistic comparisons, but comparison should always be a significant part of the response. The mark scheme shows how comparison is credited as part of the AO2 judgement. The more explicit, developed and salient the comparisons are the better. Some candidates provide very cursory, limited comparisons that are very simple statements rather than developed explanations and detailed examples; such responses struggle to show application of knowledge in this aspect of the mark scheme.

There were some excellent comparisons made between *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Casablanca*, *Vertigo* and *Blade Runner*, and *Some Like It Hot* and *Do The Right Thing* although all combinations worked well were centres had clearly considered how the films could be compared and contrasted in terms of auteurs and/or contextual issues beforehand. Candidates with clear points of similarity and difference between the two films could then, more confidently, explore the films in detail and with a greater sense of fluency. Weaker responses showed candidates not being clear on how the films chosen were similar or different beyond very simplistic points.

There was much excellent work on historical contextualisation, in both questions, where candidates could discuss the changing nature of Hollywood film production and social, political, cultural transformations in America in the specific time period. The best candidates could relate specific events and trends such as the breakdown of the Studio system and the Civil Rights and Countercultural movements to precise examples from the films studied. Knowledge of film auteurs and the auteur debate was mixed, some candidates had very detailed and wide-ranging knowledge of auteurism in relation to their studied films, there was some very detailed and confident work on Hitchcock, Welles, Lee and Scott as well as some excellent discussions of the possible auteur status of Warner Brothers, Dede Allen and Arthur Edeson. What was disappointing was that too many candidates had a very vague and limited understanding of the possible auteur signatures they had studied, some discussions of Hitchcock and Wilder lacked much depth beyond a few learned phrases ('blondes', 'spirals', 'comedy', 'quirkiness', etc) and some were inaccurate, particularly when discussing Curtiz and Penn. These weaker auteur responses tended to not exemplify and detail 'signatures' in film analysis whilst better responses gave lengthy and precise supporting evidence from the films studied and, in many cases, from the auteur's other films.

Q1.1 This question asked candidates to compare how important cinematography and editing are to the identification of an 'auteur signature' in the films studied. Most students were very able to discuss this but better responses were much more precise in their identification of what that signature is and how it might be reflected in the films studied. Better responses showed a good understanding of cinematography and editing in their chosen films and then could clearly explain how important these were to the auteur signature they had studied whether these were important or not. Some excellent responses were able to show how cinematography and editing were crucial to the auteur signature of their studied films even if these were part of a collaborative effort. For example, some candidates discussing *Vertigo* were able to expertly show how Hitchcock's commitment to 'pure cinema' is manifest in the work of Burks and Tomisini on that film. Other excellent responses took issue with the statement in the question and explained how other aspects of form or narrative were more important to the auteur signature of the films they had studied. For example, some outstanding responses on *Blade Runner* discussed, in rigorous detail, Scott's interest in *mise-en-scene* as being more important than cinematography and editing in his auteur signature. Better responses were able to contextualise and frame their answer within the idea of the auteur and its relevant debates. Similarly, better responses were able to identify auteur theorists or theories but use these to investigate the films/filmmakers and debate the idea of the auteur through analysis of the films. Some excellent responses on *Casablanca* called Sarris' definition of the auteur into question by showing how the aesthetic style of the film, especially cinematography and editing, was the collision of the innovative work of Edeson and the continuity system demanded by the 'house-style' of Warner Brothers at that time. Similarly, there were some truly excellent comparisons of how cinematography and editing were crucial to the manipulation of spectatorship in the confrontational political signature of Lee and Hitchcock's Freudian psychodramas. These were a joy to read.

Weaker responses to this question tended to ignore the focus on cinematography and editing or simply state that it was/wasn't important before reciting a pre-prepared list of auteur signature features. Many weaker responses were vague on aspects of the auteur signature that they were discussing or featured glib comments about, "Hitchcock blondes", "Spike Lee's anti-racism" or "Wilder's comedy" without explanation or detailed exemplification of these features. It is expected that A-Level candidates can do more than recite learned phrases and statements in examination and that they can offer detailed analysis of the films they have studied. Similarly, weaker responses tended to list theorists/critics and auteur theories without showing much understanding and application of these to the films studied.

Q1.2 This question asked students to compare how historical contexts have shaped ethnic and gender representations in the films studied. Most candidates were able to identify and discuss these representations in some detail and offer interesting comparisons, and most responses were able to show an understanding of contextual events or issues.

The common problem with weaker responses was that they did not consider how the historical contexts shaped, or did not shape, representations in the films so that these two aspects of the question often became disconnected. Weaker responses tended to involve vague or inaccurate references to representations, such as 'empowered women' or 'passive women', without any explanation of how this was constructed in the films studied. In such responses, references to the films tended to be descriptive and lacked precision.

Better responses were able to discuss representations in their chosen films in detail and show a sophisticated understanding of how these are created through formal elements and narrative construction. Some excellent responses were able to contextualise the representations discussed and consider how representational meanings may have shifted over time and cultural setting so that watching *Do The Right Thing* now might create different meanings than in 1989. Some responses focussed on just gender or ethnicity to answer this question, and this often allowed more detailed analytical focus but for others considering both was more pertinent for certain films and allowed for some very complex debates. There was no best way to interpret this aspect of the question, there were some excellent responses on *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest* that focussed just on gender and others that considered ethnicity too. Some of the very sophisticated responses considered how there were conflictual representations in the films studied, so that in some ways representations of gender and ethnicity were progressive and regressive at the same time. There were some very good discussions of Ilsa in *Casablanca* as both a passive character in terms of narrative functionality but also as a, possibly, positive image of female empowerment, in the context of 1942, because of the power she exerts over Rick and Victor and her 'cold, detached rejection of femininity'.

All better responses linked the representations focussed on to specific historical events and trends, sometimes offering very sophisticated explanations of how the films were influenced and shaped by their contexts. There were some excellent comparisons of how the development of feminism in the 1960's had directly influenced Gender representations in *Bonnie and Clyde*, in positive and negative ways, and how this contrasted with *Casablanca*. Equally, there were some excellent explanations of how historical changes in Hollywood production models and the Civil Rights Movement had changed ethnic representations between *The Lady From Shanghai* and *Do The Right Thing*.

Many excellent discussions of *Casablanca* and *Apocalypse Now* focussed on how the experience of the Vietnam War had changed representations of masculinity and ethnicity in the later film and reflected a shift to more counter cultural political values whilst also featuring a more degrading and regressive representation of women. Complex responses like these showed the power of Film Studies to ignite highly academic, sophisticated writing and were testament to the abilities of the candidates.

Section B: American film since 2005

Both questions in this section asked candidates to evaluate the ideological study of their chosen films. Although there was an improvement in the abilities of candidates to do this, it is still an aspect of the specification that needs better delivery moving forward and remains an area for development for some centres. All candidates have studied their chosen films in terms of ideologies whether this is a particular 'theory' (e.g. Mulvey's 'Male Gaze'), a particular ideological approach (e.g. Race/Ethnicity) or a wider consideration of what the 'messages and values' in the films might be. Candidates can discuss these in their responses but they often fail to then evaluate this way of studying film. Weaker responses fail to consider 'how useful' this approach might be. Better responses were able to do this with confidence and had obviously debated this before; some of the best responses were able to compare an ideological study of film with other critical approaches, such as Spectatorship or Auteurism, in order to tease out the ways in which ideological study might enhance or limit understanding and appreciation of the films they had studied.

Some candidates struggled to discuss ideology in their films and often resorted to listing terms and theorists they had remembered without applying these to the films in any detail. Another common issue is that weaker responses tend to identify a subject or topic as an 'ideology' without any explanation of what the film's 'messages and values' towards it actually are. So, for example, many weak responses identify 'the American Dream', 'gender' or 'family' as ideologies in films such as *Captain Fantastic* or *Boyhood* without any explanation of what the films actually suggest about these ideas, better responses explain what the film suggests about 'families' or what position it takes on 'the American Dream'.

It has been good to see that many candidates have been much clearer and more precise about the benefits and drawbacks of the ideological critical approach this year, often comparing it to other ways of studying their films or showing what is gained or lost by ideological study of film. Some excellent responses tended to be from centres adopting the idea that critical approaches are akin to different 'lenses' for considering films with and this seemed to help candidates develop more critically evaluative skills. Another way of teaching this is to see critical approaches (Ideology, Spectatorship, Narrative, etc) as 'tools of analysis', each offering different ways of studying and thinking about films, and encouraging students to compare these different approaches. Some centres really need to focus on this as an area for development and look again at the CPD and resource materials available to support this aspect of the specification.

The second question in this section was far more popular but there were no discernable differences in the quality of responses and so the reason for this popularity is difficult to pinpoint. Although comparison is not required in this section, it is an approach that many centres take and does seem to assist candidates in being clearer about ideological viewpoints in their films and spectatorship issues. There were some really interesting considerations of how *Captain Fantastic* and *La La Land* offer different interpretations of the American dream and reflect the beginnings of 'Trumpism', of how *Inception* and *Winter's Bone* offer different conceptions of American families and how *Carol* and *Francis Ha!* discuss the idea of gender and sexual relationships.

Q2.1 This question asked how useful ideological analysis is in explaining formal choices made by filmmakers regarding the use of visual elements and sounds in their chosen films. Better candidates were able to give precise and detailed examples of visual and auditory elements and then linked these to their explicitly evaluative points about the ideological critical approach. Other good responses began from the intentions of the filmmakers and used their contextual knowledge to show why the films had been made to communicate certain ideas or ideological viewpoints, they then discussed whether this was a useful way of studying the films compared to other approaches. For example, there were some excellent responses that considered *La La Land* as a homage to Hollywood musicals and showed how Chazelle had used image and sound to construct a tribute to some of his favourite films but then contrasted this, more auteurist, approach to studying the film with an ideological reading of the film that might see the film as 'sexist' or, even 'racist' in its representations of gender and ethnicity. These candidates then discussed the benefits and drawbacks of ideological analysis. Other excellent responses considered how ideological readings of *Winter's Bone*, *Selma* and *Beasts of the Southern Wild* had deepened their own understanding of the films and spectator experience on a second viewing, after researching and considering ideological issues rather than simply viewing the film as a narrative experience. There were some fascinating responses that argued an ideological critical approach to studying *Inception* was not useful as the film is better understood as an example of the Cinema of Attraction where visual and auditory spectacle is more important than ideological meaning, or, how *No Country For Old Men* was better understood as a post-modern reframing of the Western genre rather than a reflection on Nihilism. As ever, there was much very passionate and critically-aware writing about all of these films.

Weaker responses tended to only imply evaluation of the ideological critical approach and offered more generalised examples of formal choices or aesthetic styles. Some candidates did not address visuals and sounds in their responses and this, again, was an example of the question not being closely considered and addressed carefully. There was some confusion in some responses about what visual elements might be which was very surprising, and some candidates failed to consider many aspects of this beyond colour or costume.

Q2.2 This question asked how useful the ideological critical approach is in understanding the ways in which spectators are positioned by the films studied, it was an invitation to consider how filmmakers might seek to manipulate spectatorship for ideological reasons and how ideological analysis might reveal this but also allowed candidates to discuss how spectators might respond in different and unexpected ways.

Better responses brought their understanding of spectatorship to bear on this question and showed how an ideological approach can explain filmic techniques to position spectators, encouraging certain ideological meanings and responses, but might not always explain how spectators are positioned by the chosen films. Some candidates argued that the Spectatorship critical approach is a more useful way of studying certain responses to certain films than ideological analysis and that proved to be a very good way of debating this question as it also brought into question the idea that it is the spectator who creates the ideological reading of the film and 'positions' themselves. There were some very good answers that reflected on the candidates' personal responses to the films studied and discussed how ideological analysis had improved their understanding of the films' construction which increased their enjoyment and appreciation of the films.

There were some very good discussions of *No Country For Old Men* and *Captain Fantastic* that showed how the films seek to position the spectator in ideological debates about Fate and the American Dream, and some excellent responses that deconstructed *Selma*, *Carol*, *Beasts of the Southern Wild* and *Winter's Bone* to show how the films seek to position spectators to adopt a particular political viewpoint, explaining how ideological analysis had deepened their understanding of narrative construction in film.

As with question 2.1, weaker responses struggled to evaluate the ideological critical approach and, in this case, show a clear understanding of spectatorship study. There was too much confusion, in some responses, about the concepts of 'active' and 'passive' spectatorship and generally these ideas were not understood or applied well. Too many candidates assumed that these are fixed states, that one involves 'thinking' and the other does not or that the films themselves are 'active' or 'passive'. Centres need to be confident in using these terms with students and should refer to WJEC/Eduqas resource materials and CPD if they are not, these terms need to be understood correctly and then used to investigate films and spectatorship issues with.

Section C: British Cinema

The questions in this section mainly invited candidates to show their knowledge and understanding of Narrative and Film Form but, as ever, the other aspects of Core Study were important and useful to include in responses too. Question 3.2 was more popular but both questions were engaged with well and were equally accessible to candidates. There was much excellent analysis and fluent use of terminology in this section and, again, some passionate and committed writing about the films chosen. All of the films available were used but *Moon* and *Secrets and Lies* were less popular whilst *Shaun of the Dead*, *Trainspotting* and *This Is England* were most popular, although all films were written about equally well.

All of the films are equally useful to study in terms of Narrative and Film Form but it is worth mentioning that sometimes the cinematic and hybrid generic qualities of *Shaun of the Dead* can be missed and the cinematic qualities of *This Is England* and *Sightseers* can get forgotten about. This might be because of the powerful emotionally dramatic and immersive qualities of these films. Films such as *We Need to talk About Kevin*, *Under The Skin* and *Moon* are, perhaps, more cinematically distinctive and cerebrally challenging films that seem to encourage candidates to engage with the films' formal and narrative qualities more readily. That said, some of the best analysis of form and narrative this year was in responses using *Fish Tank* which seemed to provoke very high personal engagement and excellent academic reflection amongst so many candidates.

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 of 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.

Q3.1 This question asked candidates how one or more specific narrative devices enhance the dramatic qualities of the films studied. Most candidates were able to identify specific narrative elements and link these productively to meanings and responses triggered by the films studied. Better responses were very precise about specific narrative devices rather than narrative events or generalised aspects of plot or story. Good responses focussed on clear narrative devices such as plot structure, the use of binary oppositions, enigma coding, character design, cause-effect relations and settings as ‘tools’ used by the filmmakers, or elements that provoke spectators, to create specific meanings and responses.

Candidates were asked to discuss ‘dramatic qualities’ in order to facilitate a wide range of possible responses depending upon the films studied. Some candidates discussed the drama created by the challenging political and philosophical ideas of films like *We Need To Talk About Kevin* and *Moon* whilst others focussed on the intense emotional drama created by films like *Fish Tank*, *This Is England* and *Sweet Sixteen*. The idea of drama was open to interpretation and good responses used this well to show how narrative construction can enhance dramatic experience. Some excellent responses discussed how the characters of Combo and Woody in *This Is England* are used as binary ideological oppositions but also operate as contrasting ‘father figures’ for Shaun and so enhance the political conflicts of the film by adding emotional drama to our experience. There was some excellent work on how the non-linear narrative features of *Trainspotting* add humour and deepen ideological meaning, how the use of parallelism and repetition in *Moon* and *We Need To Talk About Kevin* create philosophical conflict and how the lack of explicit causality in *Under The Skin* creates a compulsive yet horrifying experience for the spectator.

Weaker responses struggled to clearly identify narrative devices or discuss the dramatic qualities of their chosen films; some seemed to have prepared an essay on narrative and ideology for this section and ignored the question which limited their responses. It also seemed to be the case that weaker responses had not found a personal engagement with the films, either from an emotional or academic connection. Candidates do not have to like the films studied but better responses always seem to come from candidates who are invested in studying the films they write about, even if they want to explain why they find the films difficult or not enjoyable.

Q3.2 This question demanded more specific analysis of mise-en-scene and performance and asked how these formal elements established character information in the films studied. Most candidates were able to give clear and detailed examples from their chosen films and answered the question with confidence, but some candidates struggled to be precise about aspects of performance, despite it being a key aspect of film form. Similarly, some were vague in discussing mise-en-scene or limited their discussion of these formal elements to one or two features which did not help to show wider knowledge or application of it in analysing the chosen sequences. Weaker responses tended to be very descriptive and did not link formal features to character information.

Better candidates showed a wider and more thorough understanding of these formal elements and showed how important character information is established by using very well chosen sequences and very precise, salient examples. Better responses had a clearer sense of the characters they were discussing and were able to identify their place, or function, within the wider narrative so that they could discuss the character’s motivations, relationships and actions.

The best responses showed a wider understanding of mise-en-scene and performance and were not just limited to one aspect of each formal element. Details on props, settings, costume, staging, hairstyles, etc when discussing mise-en-scene or proxemics, expression, gesture, tone of voice and posture, etc when discussing performance were sadly missing from some responses and limited their answer to the question.

Better responses were also able to discuss how the aspects of mise-en-scene and performance worked together to reinforce character information and tended to be more personally engaged in the analysis they were writing. There were some very good examples of personal voice and engagement shown in the films which helped some candidates discuss alignment and allegiance with characters, particularly in films like *Trainspotting*, *Under The Skin*, *We Need To Talk About Kevin*, *Sightseers* and *Fish Tank*. There was some outstanding writing on *Fish Tank* that delineated Katie Jarvis' performance against the backdrop of her surroundings and showed highly sophisticated character analysis as well as extensive contextual knowledge of the film. Equally, some of the analysis of *Sightseers* expertly explained how mise-en-scene and performance work together to create a memorable tragicomic icon of female empowerment in Tina...not least because of the significance of her underwear!

Summary of key points

- **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.
- **Centres should avoid the use of shared writing 'frames' or essay 'templates' for cohorts of candidates.** Whilst these may provide scaffolding for some candidates and enable them to show satisfactory knowledge and understanding, they can also limit the fluency and sophistication in responding to unseen questions for others.
- **Theories and theoretical terms should be used as tools of film analysis, not ends in themselves.** Identifying aspects of film, media, narrative, psychological, etc 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.
- **Encourage accuracy and precision** in all aspects of film writing. Terminology should be used correctly; examples should be accurate and precise. Presentation should make the response legible and as fluent as possible.
- **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.
- **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.

Thank you to all of the candidates and teachers whose dedication to the subject and resilience through the recent lockdowns have ensured that so many have been able to write such well informed and captivating responses in this exam. You have had a tough time throughout the pandemic and deserve all the plaudits you should receive. I would also like to thank all of the tireless examiners and diligent administrators who have worked with such professionalism to ensure that all examination processes were completed so thoroughly and efficiently.

FILM STUDIES

GCE A LEVEL

Summer 2022

COMPONENT 2 - GLOBAL FILM-MAKING PERSPECTIVES

General Comments

In the second examination of the A-level Film Studies Component 2 and the first examination held in two-years and there is much evidence of excellent teaching, engagement and learning that has prepared candidates effectively for the demands of this paper. The majority of responses showed very good knowledge of the chosen films and application of concepts and debates.

The advance information provided by the exam board had encouraged centres to study key sequences in relation to the key elements of film form and meaning and this was evident in all sections, and this had contributed to the candidates' level of preparedness. The questions were accessible, and the best work engaged with the set question rather than providing a pre-learnt overview. Candidates who did less well on this paper wrote more descriptive responses or did not respond to the specific demands of the set questions.

Most candidates were able to complete all four sections in the time allowed and this level of concentration across four distinctive areas was impressive especially regarding the lack of formal examinations these candidates would have previously sat. Centres have obviously worked hard in preparing their students and they wrote with a level of confidence and genuine enthusiasm and discovery that is a credit to the efforts of their teachers.

The imposition of prescribed films in each section is working effectively with very few rubric infringements that have been evident in previous papers. However, there is certainly some sense of uniformity already appearing in an examination that is comparatively new with the same sequences and checklist of points presented regardless of the set question. Centres may want to look at the range of support materials available for all the films examined and re-evaluate their choices. Some of the most successful responses were from candidates answering on films that would be traditionally less popular as they engaged with the set question rather than on pre-prepared information.

Some centres do need to build into their schemes of learning an evaluation of critical approaches and the skills of producing an effective short answer for sections B, C and D. Candidates do not need to provide elaborate opening for their chosen topics and would be better served in quickly addressing the set question.

Candidates may need to be reminded that they do not need to compare films in any part of this component, valuable time is wasted attempting to discuss similarities or differences that is not required in the set question. In preparing for the sitting of the examination centres may also want to 'coach' candidates at the start of the examination to ensure that they write the number of the question they are answering and not to merge the section questions in their answer.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A: Global Film

This section generally produced many engaged and substantial responses that demonstrated relevant detail and relevance to the set questions. Candidates clearly enjoy the films they have studied.

Candidates were well prepared for both answers and were generally successful in their approach across both specific film form elements and the social and political contexts selected. Many candidates demonstrated a strong textual knowledge of their chosen film, and they were well prepared.

Centres should prepare students to focus on a particular sequence from each film rather than several sequences that reiterate points already made. Candidates need to be efficient and answer the set question with relevant subject specific terminology. There is still a tendency which may be drawn from their enthusiasm for the films to provide a lengthy overview of sections of plot or how the films are products of their global heritage that does not address the set questions.

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 *Mustang and Taxi Tehran* that sophisticatedly addressed the set questions. *Wild Tales* is quite a popular choice and again centres need to remind students that it is totally acceptable to focus on short from the film, rather than a number of sequences across the film.

Q1.1

The advanced information had prepared candidates effectively on this question. The best answers were able to address the 'create meaning' aspect of the question to the visual construction of gender representations to the individual films' messages.

The focus on gender was generally good, mostly with reference to mise-en-scene and cinematography, less on performance.

The best answers were able to explore how visual imagery through crafted elements of film form like cinematography and performance contribute towards the representation of gender within the narrative.

There were lots of examples of gender-based iconography and metaphors with reference to selected sequences which were often good but at times a little over assertive.

It was sufficient for candidates to select one example of gender representation. Some weaker candidates seemed to ignore that gender allowed them to talk about men and women. For example, some candidates struggled to discuss male representation in *Victoria* or missed the opportunity to discuss toxic masculinity in *City of God*.

Although some answers probed the toxic theme of gender within the films and the lack of choices to live within a society that feeds on gender toxicity. There was also a tendency to outline characters who candidates identified as 'good' and 'bad' representations of a particular gender and this simplistic approach led to generalisations and assumptions.

Some candidates debated the absence of gender particularly in *City of God*, referring to the film's often uncredited co-director and this discussion of women as passive agents with no direct consequence to the actions of men.

Candidates studying *House of Flying Daggers* outlined how the director Zhang presents the value of women through the visual presentation of Mei and debated if she was depicted as a traditional male hero through film form.

The best answers offered lively and often complex discussions of the visual construction of gender representations and how those constructions created meaning.

Q1.2 This question was less popular, and this may have been a consequence of the advanced material.

The focus on political and social context was generally good with many candidates able to discuss how the politics of places are intertwined with social contexts. Candidates were able to explore how contexts are explored through film form and aesthetics.

Candidates were able to discuss ideological, political and the industrial context of the film and filmmakers. Many were able to recall accurate and relevant facts and link these to specific examples of film form. Weaker candidates overlooked the requirement to link this to setting, which limited some answers.

The best answers interpreted setting by time period, era and place. Candidates' answers explored effective discussions including countries, regions, cities, towns and villages.

There were some engaging answers for the film *Mustang* that provided a sophisticated comparison of the contexts of the 'home rural' and the capital city with effective analysis of the mise en scene and cinematography.

The explore aspect of the question was undervalued by some candidates. While able to describe their chosen films, a proportion were not able to make discuss the social and political contexts apart from establishing when and where the film was made.

Section B: Documentary Film

This is a demanding section with a lot expected of the candidate 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.

It is, however, 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. This is never an exact science, but the aim should be to anchor any discussion or exploration in the film itself and film detail.

The films used all appeared to work for both questions. With Amy, the most frequently used film by some margin, the emotional element of the story made it harder for some candidates to go beyond fairly simplistic ideas for q2.1, although there were many outstanding answers.

It has been noted before that these filmmakers' 'theories' are filmmaking practices or approaches and, if taught as such, enable candidates to draw comparisons or contrasts between their chosen film and the filmmaker theory/practice.

Q2.1 This question required candidates to explore the creation of emotional impact by specific techniques, with reference to a key sequence from the chosen film.

One issue arose from the plural 'filmmakers' in the question. Although the question can be answered fully using only the filmmaker of their chosen film, the wording perhaps led more candidates to include ideas from one or more of the other filmmakers specified as film theorists. This is quite acceptable but led to two related issues. Firstly, the extra material included was sometimes only about their approach and didn't focus on emotional impact. Some of these responses read almost as hybrid answers trying to cover both 2.1 and 2.2. Secondly, points made were sometimes duplicating ideas already stated from the chosen film, adding little to the response. In some cases, this limited the time the candidate had for the detailed analysis of the use of specific techniques that is expected of higher-level answers.

Another issue, mentioned in general already, is the issue of balance in terms of the number of techniques discussed. Some candidates made brief points about quite a few techniques, whereas better answers tended to say more about a smaller number of techniques.

The term 'emotional impact' is obviously central to the question. Here, better answers made the discussion of emotional impact explicit and specific. Weaker answers sometimes listed examples of techniques and stated that they created an emotional impact, but stronger responses attempted to explain how the technique produced the impact. Particularly with Amy, some candidates were unable to get beyond listing examples of events from the story that made the spectator feel sad or sympathetic. There were, on the other hand, excellent examples of how the techniques used and sometimes a particular combination of them, heightened the impact of an already emotional element.

Weaker answers also spoke about emotional impact in quite generalised terms, whilst stronger answers named and discussed specific emotional impacts e.g. happy/sad, shocked, confused, etc.

Q2.2 This question required discussion of how the chosen film supported and/or challenged a filmmaker's theory.

It would perhaps have helped if the word 'one' in the question had been in bold or underlined because quite a lot of candidates used theories from two or even three filmmakers. Whilst doing this is not a technical rubric infringement, it inevitably leads to a reduction in the amount of depth that the answer could go into.

Whilst there were relatively few examples of no filmmaker's theory being referenced, there were examples where the previously mentioned issue of balance arose:

- use of Nichols was sometimes given more space than the filmmaker's theory, often limiting the response.
- other answers were dominated by overly lengthy close analysis of sequences which were then followed by a relatively brief comparison with a filmmaker's theory, again limiting the response

Although the wording of the question mentions the film first and then the filmmaker theory, good answers often reversed this, at least introducing the theory before going into the chosen film. The best answers integrated the two aspects of the question throughout.

The question refers to how the film 'supports and/or challenges' the theory. It may be worth reminding candidates that 'and' or 'or' can produce equally good responses and you are not necessarily limiting yourself by a complete answer that either only supports or only challenges the theory.

Of the filmmakers, Peter Watkins was probably the one that more candidates found difficult to apply well, with less awareness of particular techniques to discuss than with, for example, the elements that make up Kim Longinotto's observational style. In addition, a few candidates wrote as if Watkins' theory is the 'monoform', rather than a critique of it.

Section C - Silent Cinema

This section produced some very engaging answers from the candidates, textual knowledge was good but often combined with contextual understanding especially in responses to 3:2.

The best responses tended to apply this knowledge in well-structured answers directly linked to the questions, the very best managed to do this with sophistication and exemplify their points with excellent analysis of specific sequences that illustrated their knowledge of the films as a whole.

There were many candidates who had clearly been taught to consider the Realist Vs Expressive aspect of the unit as a means of engaging with debates surrounding their chosen area. Candidates were able to reflect on their own preferences in filmmaking.

The majority of candidates provided answers referring to the Keaton shorts or *Sunrise* for this section. Centres who had taught Strike had prepared their candidates well and these students were especially able to address the contexts of their films production well, making clear connections between textual details and ideological intention effectively although there were few centres offering this option.

Some responses showed very limited understanding and descriptive response of their chosen area, only being able to identify general points. Although silent cinema may be new to many candidates they need to go beyond these general descriptive assertions.

In general, the more contextual knowledge the student has, the easier it will be to find their way into the distinctive world and distinctive communication system of their silent film. However contextual knowledge needs to be used only when contributing directly to an answer to the given question.

Candidates who select the combination films are not expected to offer a sequence from *Man with a Movie Camera* and from *A Propos de Nice*, either would have been acceptable when asked to focus on a particular sequence. A reasonable expectation is that in using *A Propos de Nice* as a supplementary film, an example from that film will be used to either reinforce a point being made about *Man with a Movie Camera* or to provide a contrast with that film.

Q3:1 This question was the most popular and produced some very good answers. Candidates were well prepared and were able to actively engage with the debate.

The best answers identified specific detail in developing direct engagement with the question with limited well-chosen sequences.

There were some very predictable responses in relation to *Sunrise*, that often felt like rote learning on German Expressionism with focus only on the Marsh sequences which lacked engagement fully on the question. The best answers were able to focus on the active construction of meaning by a filmmaker in the particular institutional context.

The Buster Keaton answers were often well engaged overall and there seemed to be a genuine enthusiasm for the construction of meaning in well chosen sequences. There was evidence of very good teaching on the exploration over the strategies of realism and expressionism.

As mentioned previously candidates writing about a compilation of films, felt unable to limit their analysis to a key sequence, ranging across all four Keaton shorts, given the 30-minute time frame for answering, a reasonable expectation is that detailed focus will fall on two of the films.

Q3.2 This was the less popular question but candidates interpreted social change in a variety of ways including in relation to modernity, changing roles for women, the growth of the city, the impact of political change and revolution. The best answers were able to discuss the response in relation to the use of film form, aesthetics, representations and messages.

Candidates selecting *Sunrise* had often been well taught, their studies of the USA in the 1920's provided them with a firm foundation to outline the ideological nature and construction of the American Dream, the growth of the urban city and the move from the agrarian hinterland, the consequent social and political changes of female emancipation and the reactionary wave of prohibition and moral panic were all areas that were very fruitfully explored.

The darker vision of German expatriates such as Murnau could be linked to earlier European experience *but* a rote learning of Germany and the expressive arts in the post-war era was not so relevant.

Keaton was again well explored with discussion of the process of industrialisation with the growth of immigrant and transient populations into new conurbations was implicitly linked to answers focussing on Keaton's struggles and often satirisation of urbanisation and automation.

This question lent itself to those students who had studied the Soviet films, as there were able to easily relate the ideologies in the films to the political change that brought them about, offering specific details to exemplify this, although these were a minority of responses.

Section D- Experimental Film

The most popular film (by a large margin) on this section across both questions is *Pulp Fiction* and centres may need to reevaluate how they are teaching this to best serve their candidates for this section. Although *Pulp Fiction* might be seen by centres as an attractive, accessible option for students it offers weaker candidates an opportunity for hyperbole and director worship that distracts from addressing the set question

The key focus for the study of the films in this section is their narrative experimentation, a consideration of how characters are created, their realistic depth and complexity or otherwise and the functions they perform.

It is important to acknowledge that macro study of narrative should be supplemented by examples of how micro features, such as editing, mise-en-scene and sound make vital contributions to narrative. Narrative includes a study of the overall structure of the film but the ways in which narrative works at the level of the shot, the scene and the sequence are equally important areas of study.

Similarly, there are interesting questions to explore about how the aesthetics of the chosen film is an integral part of the film's overall experimentation.

Vives a vie, *Daisies* and *Timecode* may be a more challenging viewing experience- but they may provide more easily identifiable techniques and institutional contexts relating to their experimental status.

Moving on from what might seem a negative response to a film that is on the specification, there were answers that were nuanced and sophisticated and debated the arguments in relation to 'experimental'.

Q4.1 Almost all candidates were able to identify the director of their film option as an auteur, there was a tendency in some answers to define the term and offer context within the filmmaker's output rather than directly addressing the question. Candidates did need to explain how they had interpreted the 'free' and 'playful' approaches rather than assume the definition or mention solely in the final paragraph

A lot of prepared material on Tarantino as a 'postmodern' auteur with very little debate with the terms of question. A checklist of auteur characteristics was the common approach, applying contemporary notions about representing violence and especially the use of racial slurs to make a claim for *Pulp Fiction's* experimental nature.

With such a limited time available for this section there needs to a consideration of the auteur's creative decision making in the particular film being studied. A wider study of the concept of the experimental (via some of the other options) might cast more light on the claims made for this film. However, there were very few poor answers to this question.

Candidates selecting *Vivre sa Vie* often produced detailed references to auteur debates and wider contexts allied to a productive analysis of the construction of the film.

Centres selecting *Daisies* produced engaged respondents from their candidates who seemed inspired by the film which was great to read.

Q4.2 This question was the least popular option, it seems possible that candidates were put off from the specific focus of the question preferring the freedom of 4.1.

Candidates did demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of the specific characteristics of the film's sound and editing which reflected the particular movement they had selected especially in relation to European avant-garde. The focus on specific film form was made use of for many candidates answering on *Daisies*, *Vivre Sa Vie* and to lesser number *Timecode*.

Some candidates answering on *Fallen Angles* seem determined to explore cinematography and the relationship between Wong Kar-Wai and his cinematographer Chris Doyle without fully focussing on editing although some were able to discuss the use of music blurring time and space distinctions.

Work that explored the use of jump cuts or the lengthy shot lengths in *Vivre sa Vie* produced well-constructed answers to this question.

Overall, the best candidates outlined how the films editing and sound was explored to them as a fresh and engaging viewing experience, which again was great to read.

Summary of key points

- In terms of breadth and depth, it should be repeated that stronger answers tend to focus on a smaller number of issues. Answers which sometimes feel almost like a checklist with a high number of points on 'each' side of the discussion will rarely achieve the depth needed to reach beyond a satisfactory response.
- Candidates need to be reminded that they don't need to assert or prepare a stance on any film or filmmaker, the best answers tend to take a 'probing' or open approach to the set questions.
- An important point is to remember is that candidates should ensure they answer the question that has been set and not to conflate both questions on a topic in their answer or recite 'learned' responses.
- In the documentary option use of Nichols was sometimes given more space than the filmmaker's theory, often limiting the response. Candidates need to be reminded that the filmmaker's theory question needs to address the theory rather than a brief comparison to their selected director.
- The most important point is that I would like to thank all the candidates and teachers whose hard work and commitment to the subject has been evident throughout this paper. After no formal exams for two years and for many a very interrupted education these answers were engaging and knowledgeable, and you should take credit for your dedication and professionalism.

FILM STUDIES

GCE A LEVEL

Summer 2022

COMPONENT 3 - PRODUCTION

General Comments

It is commendable how Centres have continued to teach production skills in Film-making and in Screenwriting, despite the considerable disruption across the last two years of the pandemic. Centres and Candidates clearly went to considerable effort to find ways to continue to engage with the Specification and with the crucial experiential learning provided in this Component, and this determination, and the development of creative solutions to teaching and learning is not only creditable, but is a testament to the professionalism of teachers, and the enthusiasm of learners.

There seemed to be a marked change in the relationship with the Compilation of Short Films set by WJEC, and for many they proved a source of inspiration and the study of them also enhance the creative and technical approaches to the creation of creative work. If there were to be just one focus for future years, then it should spring from this, in the form of underpinning creative activity with purposeful and thorough research, and demonstrating (both in the work and in accompanying writing) the application of this research to a Candidate's own endeavours.

Component 3 is designed to encourage the application of synoptic knowledge from elsewhere in the Specification (and beyond), to the practice of production, and as such it is a place where natural enthusiasms and interests can be accommodated on an individual basis. The individual production work does create additional demands, and these may be supported (where possible) with a range of support material for each stage of the production processes. Candidates who generally produced work in the upper end of the range, clearly had such support, with the very best evidencing the benefits from self-directed learning as well. Centres and Candidates should be congratulated on taking such an approach.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Option 1: Short Film

The dual demands of applying learning from the Compilation of Short Films, and of approaching a film within the context of the Production Brief continued to prove a challenge for many Centres, though it remains without question that candidates who engaged directly with the Production Brief and both studied and applied their learning from the Compilation of Short Films achieved the best results. The limitations introduced by Covid restrictions resulted in the "narrative which establishes and develops a single character" becoming the dominant of the Briefs. The Enigma, Conflict between two Characters, and the Narrative Twist following behind. Candidates were generally able to engage well with the Briefs and were able to produce a wide range of interesting and very creative films, many of which are hoped to appear in the Moving Image Awards.

The limitations caused by the pandemic resulted in perhaps a more compact, more intimate style of filmmaking, and for some pushed them to adopt more experimental styles to achieve what they hoped to do. It is commendable that both Candidates and Centres rose to the challenges of societal disruption and continued to produce work of quality and distinction.

There seems to have been quite a drift on adherence to durations in some Centres, with some films under-running or over-running significantly. Meeting the duration requirements is a key part of the process and Candidates should be encouraged to edit their work to ensure the required duration is met.

Option 2: Screenplay for a Short Film

Similarly with the Screenplay for a Short Film, there was a wide range of diverse subjects tackled through the creation of Screenplays and Storyboards, with some evidence and many of clear study of screenplays and of screenwriting in the work at the upper end of the range. It cannot be stressed enough that to successfully create a Screenplay, the techniques of Screenwriting must be studied and applied. There are numerous books on Screenwriting that Candidates could engage with, that will not only shape their work structurally, but may give them a cinematic toolset that will enhance their creations. Such an approach is to be encouraged. The narrative twist, and conflict between two characters dominated here, with the establishing and development of a single character, and the enigma taking a less prominent position.

Candidates were able to offer diverse screenplays from observational comedy to brutal crime dramas and were generally able to engage with the demands of the short film form (this is something else that those choosing this option need to research, as the Short Film has its own structures, rhythms, and distinctive stylings).

It was disappointing that many Candidates did not engage with the Master Scene Script form consistently (or in some cases, at all), and this is a fundamental error that should be addressed at the very beginning of the process. Similarly, many Candidates fell into “telling” rather than “showing”, offering internal thoughts, memories, backstory, and florid descriptions of emotions, none of which could be meaningfully translated onto the screen. The Screenplay’s primary difference to all other forms is that it is a blueprint for another format, its words only exist as instruction for the screen (be it image, sound, dialogue, or character development), and this would be a wise place to begin in teaching the subject: show, don’t tell!

Adjustments due to the Pandemic allowed a return to hand-drawn Storyboards for this year (but not in future years), and a surprising number of Candidates took up this opportunity, not always successfully. The Storyboard element still requires some address, since many were suffering from a poor image to description relationship, incorrectly described framing, poor shot to shot relationships, weakly crafted rhythms (the grammar of the edit – diversity of shot size and timings creating a rhythm that leads the audience, positioning them emotionally). To reiterate a point made in the 2019 Report:

It is essential that candidates select a sequence to storyboard that offers them the best opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge of filmmaking techniques. It is imperative that candidates use this opportunity to display their knowledge of constructional devices, and it is advisable that they do so within the storyboard template available on the Eduqas A Level Film Studies Resources website.

It is worth noting here that, for some, an artificial division in marking across the Screenplay and the Storyboard has developed for AO3: *Apply knowledge and understanding of elements of film to the production of a film or screenplay*. There are two elements to be considered here – the application of Structural elements, and the application of key elements – and it is tempting (though erroneous) to see one mark relating to the Screenplay and the other to the Storyboard. A well-written Screenplay will suggest the application of key elements, in the same way a well-designed Storyboard might suggest the application of structural elements. AO3 must be assessed holistically across both to fairly reward a Candidate's work.

Some Candidates struggled with the word limits for this component (and with the number of frames for the Storyboard), and Candidates should be reminded that they must work to the requirements set out in the Specification.

Evaluative Analysis

Candidates were generally able to engage with analysing their chosen Short Films, and their own production work with ease, with both textual and structural analysis coming to the fore. The very best Candidates were able to offer side by side comparison between their own work and the studied films and other influences, using the Short Films as a contextualising structure for the analysis of their own work. This is to be highly commended as an approach. Candidates were able to produce focused reflections on construction, structural elements, and on stylistic features and influences, and were then able to go on to discuss how these helped them create meaning and intended affect. Many Candidates exemplified their discussion with screengrabs from the Short Films, from Scripts, and from their own work, and this is an extremely valuable and effective approach, firmly anchoring their creative work within a context of their studies.

Candidates could be encouraged to explore the context provided by the chosen Brief in greater detail, and to consider the creative tensions this created (restrictions, possibilities, etc.).

Some Centres approached this task as an analytical essay, spending a significant amount of space deconstructing the Short Films, and not leaving Candidates enough space to explore their own work, nor the way the Short Films influenced it. The most important thing the Evaluative Analysis should do is to enable a Candidate to discuss their production work within a context of the Short Films, and the chosen Brief.

Again, there seemed to be some fluidity about the word limits for the Evaluative Analysis, with many in the lower range being significantly short, and many in the upper range being overly long. It is essential that Candidates are advised to ensure their written work sits within the boundaries outlined in the Specification.

Summary of key points

- Research is key to Film Production and Screenwriting, and so both need to be taught and studied (even if some of that is through reference to online materials on external sites).
- Production work that is produced with explicit focus on the chosen Brief, and an Evaluative Analysis centred around this Brief as a context, tends to better meet the assessment criteria.
- The Compilation of Short Films is designed to inform a production and so careful selection should be made in choosing films to study (was the dark, psychological horror really influenced that much by *The Wrong Trousers*?).
- The Master Scene Script Layout is a key element in producing successful Screenplays and need to be adhered to. Camera instructions should generally not be present. Excise anything from the Screenplay that cannot be translated onto the screen.
- Storyboards are shot-by-shot blueprints for the construction of a film, NOT a scene-by-scene photo board. Attention must be paid to the image structure, and the rhythms created by shot framings and durations.
- Timings for Short Films, number of shots for Storyboards, and word counts for both Screenplays and for Evaluative Analyses should all meet the requirements of the Specification.



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