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# **GCE EXAMINERS' REPORTS**

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**GCE (NEW)  
FILM STUDIES  
AS/Advanced**

**SUMMER 2018**

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## FILM STUDIES

### General Certificate of Education (New)

Summer 2018

#### Advanced Subsidiary/Advanced

#### COMPONENT 1: AMERICAN FILM

##### Key points:

- Most candidates attempted all questions with very few incomplete scripts.
- Candidates used the correct films for the question attempted and in most cases, where applicable, referred to two films.
- There was generally a good sense that candidates recognised that each question carries different marks and adjusted their time accordingly.
- Clear evidence that Spectatorship Issues had been taught.

##### Section A: Hollywood 1930-1990

**1.1)** This question asks candidates to do several things compare, creates meaning, using a key sequence and to reference both films. Candidates answered well using Casablanca, often in comparison to Bonnie and Clyde. This was the most popular pairing of films. Generally, subject terminology was applied well and put into the context of classical Hollywood. Where Bonnie & Clyde was used as a comparison, the analyses were less strong with more general points raised and reference such as 'hilly billy' comedic music but without any real interpretation. The stronger answers used the closing scene and discussed enhanced diegetic sound and the use of silence. Vertigo and One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest was another successful pairing with the dominant comparison of film score versus non-diegetic sound. Candidates could discuss the complex psychological atmosphere created through soundtrack and compared it to the unsettling eerie use of non-diegetic sound and how they matched the themes of insanity and incarceration. These films offered a good response to the question. Do the Right Thing was an accessible film for this question and often paired with Some Like it Hot which was however, less well analysed. Candidates could recognise the way that Spike Lee manipulated sound, both to 'tell the story' and communicate social and political meaning. Overall, a good understanding and application of film terminology was noted. Most other set films were used, but with less regularity. Johnny Guitar was used occasionally and when attempted showed a good understanding of how sound creates meaning in the opening scene. Limited responses from other films and virtually nothing from Lady from Shanghai.

**1.2)** There were fewer responses to this question than 1.3. The term 'production context' was interpreted quite broadly and this was allowed for. The question did not ask for specific scenes or key moments so the responses did not always have key scenes, although this was not directly asked for, it did mean that textual analysis was sometimes lacking and candidates could have more responsive to the term 'shaped' which suggests that some discussion of the film texts is required. The better responses did this but often candidates gained marks in bands 3,4 & 5 for AO1 but failed to match this in AO2.

Centres should be reminded that marks are awarded across both AO1 and AO2. Directors and stars such as Spike Lee, Humphrey Bogart and Marilyn Munroe were identified, and some meaningful discussion was noted around the concept of auteur and the Hollywood star system bringing in good contextual points regarding Classical/New Hollywood. Some downloading of information regarding Blade runner/Directors Cut and the workings of the studio system was noted but whilst accurately done this is detail did not always contribute to the question effectively. Again Casablanca and Bonnie and Clyde, as well as Vertigo and OFOEN were popular choices and here there was good understanding of how messages and values can be identified as coming from specific time periods and production contexts. Some candidates showed a depth and at times a sophisticated understanding of how differing production contexts shaped the style, tone and messages in a film.

**1.3)** A very popular question and one that produced generally good responses. In the main the concept of gender had been well taught. It was pleasing to note there was no real sense of an overly name check or theoretical approach and this is to be encouraged. Answers at the higher bands demonstrated an excellent use of 'light touch' theory embedded into textual analysis. Candidates were able to recognise a film's context and understood issues of representation using film form such as framing and cinematography as well as just citing actions and tropes. Blade runner was paired with a range of films – Do the Right Thing or Some Like it Hot particularly.

Responses to Blade Runner focussed on femininity to good effect but when analysing masculinity in this film candidates found it more difficult to debate the hegemonic position of masculine power and entitlement. Some Like it Hot allowed candidates to discuss the 'playful' attitudes to gender in a discursive way. Vertigo and OFOEN offered candidates a good way in to discuss both masculinity and femininity and compare effectively. **DTRT** enabled candidates to engage in an argument over the stereotypical representations of gender presented in the film. Weaker candidates had a tendency to write in a superficial and sweeping way about the representation of women with much assertive commentary regarding the position of women in society e.g. always housewives or not having the vote and failed to select taught learning in a meaningful way.

## **Section B: American Independent Film**

**2.1)** Here there was a good spread of films. The question has its own demands as it carries few marks and requires candidates to produce a succinct and focussed response in approximately 10 minutes. Those that were able to do this did best. Others who downloaded too much description found themselves lacking the time to get to the point. The three most popular films were undoubtedly Captain Fantastic, Winter's Bone and Boyhood, followed by France Ha! Beasts of the Southern Wild was hardly represented at all. The question asked for a key setting and this was most closely dealt with in reference to Captain Fantastic where most candidates used the opening sequence but with a reasonable coverage of other key scenes such as the mother's funeral. Often these responses to this film were simplistic in terms of referring to setting/location. Again, and particularly in these short answers, teachers should guide their students to meet the criteria for both AO1 and AO2 as often the latter was underdeveloped. Candidates understanding of the specialist area of Spectatorship was good. Most candidates felt confident in using terms such as alignment, point of view and empathy. More challenging was the idea of passive/active spectatorships with most candidates able to define the term but not specifically apply the concept to sequences or shots. Responses on Frances Ha! could be quite descriptive with other background (e.g. influences by FNW) detail that didn't always address the question. Winter's Bone elicited the best responses with a real sense of engagement with its filming style and how this can impact on spectator response. However, overall centres could spend more time preparing candidates to write effective short answer questions as many were very brief (four or five lines) and simplistic.

**2.2)** This question was attempted by the majority of candidates. It is fairly straightforward, if potentially challenging, due to the number of things it asks the candidate to do. Most were able to identify a key character. For films such as *Winter's Bone* and *Frances Ha!* the choice of character was straightforward. In other films a range of characters were selected. Here again, candidates demonstrated a good understanding of spectatorship issues and the application of specific vocabulary was at times very good. However, a significant number of candidates did make simplistic assertive comments about identification and whilst they could use film form analysis to support their comments, this was often basic. This was best demonstrated in *Captain Fantastic* and was the most popular choice, but did not always elicit the best responses which tended to be descriptive and assertive. *Winter's Bone* allowed candidates to offer more nuanced and sophisticated answers, as did *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, although hardly any candidates used this film. *Boyhood* gave mixed responses – some good reference to *mise-en-scene* and cinematography and the use of editing to prompt an active spectatorship but at other times simplistic discussions of alignment with Mason because he is a young person/teenager. Advice to teacher would be to move candidates away from using simple assertions that 'relatable' age/gender/experience automatically creates alignment. A better approach would be to teach how techniques and devices using film form can elicit spectator identification regardless of a relatable quality.

**2.3)** Far fewer candidates attempted this question. Those who did were divided into ones who understood the thrust of the question and were able to discuss style, aesthetics and tone in relationship to narrative/story.

Others struggled to interpret the question and tended to tell the story and focus on how characters and storylines are more important. This tended to be descriptive. *Winter's Bone* and *Boyhood* gave candidates the best opportunity to explore this question and it was in these films that ideas of spectatorship were well discussed. Overall the question was challenging, with many candidates finding it hard to apply issues of spectatorship if the only viewpoint they had been taught was that of identification/alignment by a character being the 'main' character in a film and following their journey. Teachers are encouraged to explore how the aesthetic choices of sound, editing and cinematography function to create meaningful identification for spectators. This question also asks candidates to come up with an opinion/argument/viewpoint.

## FILM STUDIES

### General Certificate of Education (New)

Summer 2018

#### Advanced Subsidiary/Advanced

### COMPONENT 2: EUROPEAN FILM

This was the first cohort of students to take AS Film Studies Component 2, comprising of questions relating to their study of two British films and one non-English Language European film. In comparison with previous examination series candidates were expected to complete four questions in 90 minutes, a short response in Section A and B and one essay (from a choice of two) again from each section.

The new specification brings a different emphasis in comparison with FM2 from the legacy specification, offering two sections which assess all three core areas of study: key elements of film form, representation, context and narrative as a specialist area of study.

It was extremely encouraging to see that the majority of candidates tackled all the questions in the time available. There were very few rubric infringements where candidates tackled a section or question with reference to the wrong film.

#### Section A: British Two-Film Study

There were no issues in this section with centres preparing films which were not prescribed in the specification, or problems relating to candidates who answered questions with reference to one film only. Centres are to be congratulated on preparing their candidates to focus their responses on two films with equal attention. Candidates clearly understood that this section was a two-film study and not a comparative study. Candidates reaching band 4 or band 5 often drew comparisons between their films when exploring elements of film form and in relation to the films' narrative, genre and conventions. This level of sophistication is pleasing to see, but of course, it is not expected or stated in the specification for Component 2 that candidates do so in order to reach the higher bands.

Popular film choices by far were *Trainspotting*, *Shaun of the Dead*, *This is England* and *We Need to Talk about Kevin*. *Moon* and *Under the Skin* were next, with relatively few centres opting for *Secrets and Lies*. Centres made considered and interesting choices when pairing their films. Popular pairings were: *Trainspotting* and *This is England*, *Shaun of the Dead* and *Sightseers*, *Sweet Sixteen* and *Trainspotting/ Fish Tank*, *Fish Tank* and *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, *Moon* and *Under the Skin*. These pairings were driven by the themes, narrative structure, genre and conventions and also the aspects of British and Social Realism in the films.

With an additional band in the mark scheme of this new specification, centres are advised to spend commensurate time on the application of knowledge and understanding in ways which develops candidates' ability to offer a confident and sustained analysis.

**1.1)** This type of question is new to the specification, offering candidates opportunities to draw on their knowledge and understanding, and its application of an aspect of film form. In many ways, the knowledge, skills and demands of this question echo what some centres may recognise from FM1 in the legacy, with the emphasis on micro-elements and how they create meanings and generate responses.

Candidates were asked to explore how lighting creates meanings in ONE sequence from EACH of their chosen films. It is recommended that they spend 20 minutes attempting this question, and it is not an essay question. Candidates were awarded for responses which included aspects of cinematography and colour.

Centres are commended for the excellent preparation of their candidates who focused very well on citing a specific sequence from each film in their exploration of lighting. The very best responses were those which used their knowledge and understanding of lighting to explore how it contributed to the characters and their relationships, the mood in the sequence and/ or the effectiveness of lighting in relation to the film's narrative, genre and use of conventions. Those candidates who attained Band 4 or 5 applied their knowledge of the lighting in the selected sequence to confidently sustain their exploration, without offering a 'prepared' or 'model' response. At these levels, the strongest responses showed detailed and sophisticated responses where multiple meanings were explored analytically.

Candidates who achieved a Band 3 showed sound knowledge of both their films and selected sequences, but they fell short of marks through a tendency to be descriptive, or in some cases to lack focus on the question. Band 2 candidates offered few points and simplistic references to lighting with a basic understanding of its role in creating meanings.

Films with strong aspects of social realism generated responses focusing on natural lighting and its contribution to the sequence, whilst candidates often referred to generic codes to explore the use of lighting, as for example in *Shaun of the Dead*, *Moon* and *Under the Skin*.

**1.1 and 1.2)** Emphasis in the essay question lies in developing a critical approach to the study film narratives. There is strong evidence that centres and candidates have worked extremely diligently in their study of narrative in two films. With increased attention to the application of this knowledge, it is anticipated that candidates' confidence to tackle unseen questions, to explore and analyse them will certainly increase.

**1:2)** This essay question was the more popular option with candidates. In this question, candidates are assessed for knowledge and understanding and its application of narrative as a specialist area of study. Effective use was made of the prompts in the question either to engage with the full implications of the question and/ or to structure their essay response. These prompts are suggestions.

It is possible with this question to attain a high band mark by offering a critical approach to narrative, without explicitly citing Claude Levi-Strauss. When exploring how binary oppositions create dramatic conflict and lead to powerful stories, strong responses used their

detailed knowledge of their chosen films to support and sustain their exploration. The focus with these was the contribution of oppositions in propelling the narrative forward, with explicit engagement with all aspects of the question. With this essay question, candidates can attain bands 4 or 5, without offering detailed sequence analyses. Engaging with the complex aspects of this critical approach around binary oppositions will enable them to effectively explore the implications of the question in sophisticated ways. Within Band 5 some candidates offered responses which were highly detailed and confident.

Less analytical responses which achieved a Band 3 tended to drift into plot description which detracted their attention from fully answering the question. Many candidates offered 'taught' responses which focused on aspects of the director or genre (particularly with *Shaun of the Dead* and *This is England*) and this approach tended to limit their attention to what the question was asking. Within Band 2 superficial and basic answers were reductive with little or no understanding of how binary oppositions create tensions and impact on the narrative structure.

**1.3)** This was the least popular of the essay option, but candidates attempting this, made use of the prompts to develop engaging explorations. Within the higher bands, candidates demonstrated an excellent and sophisticated appreciation of how films manipulate the time-frame within their narratives. Responses drawing on *We Need to Talk about Kevin* were able to sustain their focus on the non-linear narrative structure to create a powerful story, as did essays drawing on the realism and the break with realism in *Trainspotting*. The strongest responses to this question considered the impact of different time manipulations, for example editing techniques and flashback on creating 'powerful stories'. Candidates focusing on films with strong elements of social realism linked the use of devices and structures to the aesthetic of realism in sophisticated ways which explored the implications of the question.

Within Band 3 candidates tended to revert to description of the plot, with limited attention to the question. Band 2 responses often gave a list of narrative devices, with little understanding of how these impacted on the narrative or telling of the story.

### **Section B: European film**

In section B, candidates are expected to explore one film in relation to the Core Areas of Study. *Pan's Labyrinth* was by far the most popular of film choices with centres, followed by *Life is Beautiful* and *Victoria*. Fewer centres tackled *The Diving Bell and Butterfly* and *Mustang*, with *Ida* being the least popular.

**2:1)** The majority of candidates discussed the representation of age in this question. For 10 marks and a response written in about 10 minutes, it is extremely pleasing to see that many candidates accessed marks for application (AO2) as well as knowledge and understanding (AO1).

The best responses which attained Band 4 or 5 were those which discussed age in relation to youth and older age, where relevant; as for example in *Pan's Labyrinth*, *Life is Beautiful* and *The Diving Bell and Butterfly*. In addition, the stronger responses were those which focused on aspects of representation, thus enabling the response to be analytical rather than a list of features. Sophisticated responses aptly discussed aspects of representation in their chosen film, rather the film's themes. It is commendable to see good coherent responses which can develop a short response answer, whilst demonstrating a clear focus on a sequence and application of their understanding. Weaker answers often made points without citing a specific sequence whilst these responses tended to be superficial.

**2:2)** This question, focusing on mise-en-scene in relation the films' themes was certainly the favourite with candidates. In the best responses, there is solid evidence of how the core areas of study have been synthesised. This approach has led to strong, confident and sophisticated explorations which enhance candidates' ability to form links between mise-en-scene and themes, and thus to access marks from AO2 in the higher bands.



Weaker candidates often reached Band 3 because they offered detailed accounts of mise-en-scene, whilst ignoring the full implications of the question. These responses indicate a strong knowledge and understanding of the selected film, but they were less secure with what constituted themes and often confused this with aspects of representation.

**2:3)** This question was the least popular, whilst those candidates who opted for this demonstrated a strong enthusiasm for the contextual aspects of their film. Candidates studying *Mustang*, *Victoria* and *Life is Beautiful* tended to answer this question.

In the stronger responses, candidates offered solid knowledge and understanding of cultural or political context by drawing on a wide range of references from their film. Such responses formed meaningful connections between the contextual frameworks of their film and the film narrative itself. Often, and in some of the very best responses, key elements of film form were also explored in addition to themes to enhance the relationship between the film text and its context.

Weaker answers were developed in instances where candidates worked very hard to discuss cultural or political context, but without bringing this in to the world of the film to explore how this knowledge can contribute to an understanding of the film itself. Band 2 and 3 candidates tended to ignore the full implications of the question.

Whilst the study of context is often challenging in Film Studies, there is a strong sense in this year's responses that candidates can appreciate how far a study of non-English Language European film relies on accessing the rich cultural diversity and contexts of the films studied.

Overall, in this year's first examination series for Component 2 there is strong evidence of excellent preparation for the demands of external assessment. There is an appreciation for film as a distinct form- demonstrated in highly detailed responses which draw on elements of film form and a genuine passion for film's storytelling potential across the range of films studied.

**FILM STUDIES**  
**General Certificate of Education (New)**  
**Summer 2018**  
**Advanced Subsidiary/Advanced**  
**COMPONENT 3: PRODUCTION**

In the first year of the new specification of AS Film Studies there has been some really creative and enthusiastic work produced by centres. Candidates have embraced the opportunity to produce individual work and many successfully took on the challenge of producing a film extract, which was longer than that required at AS by the previous specification, taking real care to make meaningful and often moving, thought provoking pieces. The option to write a screenplay with an accompanying storyboard was also popular and as many centres had already tackled these options for many years for FM3, they adapted well, but inevitably there were some issues with formatting and interpretation of the specification in this first year. The new method of submitting work online has operated very smoothly and it was great to have such easy access to the work, many thanks for making this so successful this year.

The assessment was largely accurate and there were some really helpful comments on the coversheets and on the work which is excellent practice. It was really useful to have the comments and marks for the production on the coversheets separated into the two elements from the marking grid: application and structural elements (mark awarded out of 25) and application of key elements (mark awarded out of 15), using the descriptors from the marking grid on both the coversheet and the work itself; this should still be annotated before it is uploaded. Many centres completed the coversheets in this way or indicated the separate marks on the production work itself and this certainly contributed to the accuracy of their assessment. It would be good to see all centres adopting this approach for both AS and A level Film Studies.

Also all candidates must identify the chosen brief from the list of four in the specification, many just identified which type of work it was (screenplay or filmmaking) rather than referring to the specific brief chosen.

### **Film Extract**

There was some really ambitious and creative work here and many candidates benefitted from the opportunity make a piece which lasted three and a half minutes, although some centres had not noticed the change from the previous specification and submitted extracts of two minutes, please refer in detail to the appropriate section of the specification. The most successful film sequences focussed on the experience of a small number of characters, paid careful attention to key elements: employing frequent close-ups of protagonists and had carefully constructed mise-en-scene. They also carefully constructed a multi-layered soundscape avoiding the use of a single music track and songs where the lyrics can overwhelm the images. Candidates should avoid taking this narrative music video approach and particularly the use of a non-linear structure with repeat shots, often literally illustrating the lyrics of a single track. Such pieces struggled to fulfil one of the prescribed four briefs which are narrative based rather than conceptual.

There was some lovely evidence that much had been learned about film during the AS course and the best work often showed inspiration from the films studied. There was an issue with some candidates who had chosen the opening sequence brief, having opening credits, often on a black screen which lasted for up to a minute of the allocated time; this is not suitable as material for assessment and should be avoided. There is no need for credits to be included, but where candidates wish to include them, they should be at the end and not used to fill up the time to reach the minimum of two and a half minutes. The specification is very clear about the ways in which work which exceeds or is less than the prescribed time should be assessed. This also applies to word counts for the written elements.

### **Screenplay**

Most candidates were able to handle the master scene script layout with confidence and were able to adhere to the guidance given in the specification and in the notes for guidance and digital resources. Please be aware that there should be no instructions for cinematography and editing, these ideas should be expressed in the illustrative storyboard. In a similar way to the filmmaking, the best pieces had few characters and had created carefully written and convincing dialogue for these, which created a clear sense of character. They also wrote highly visual descriptions of scenes including mise-en-scene and actions which advanced the narrative or created subtle character points. There was a little bit of confusion about the visual nature of screenplay writing and some candidates included thoughts or feelings of characters not conveyed as visual instructions, as if they were writing a piece of prose fiction, this must be discouraged. Candidates should avoid over-reliance on dialogue for storytelling and bear in mind that film is a visual medium and that there are more interesting ways of telling a story.

### **Illustrative Storyboard**

The best of these pieces really brought the screenplay to life and there was an excellent continuity between the screenplay and storyboard with facial expressions or clothing which had been described, shown visually in a digital photograph. The close up is a vital shot here too and was perhaps a little under-used. It is important to follow the specification and choose a section of the screenplay to storyboard and most chose the opening and used a frame for each element of the scene, which is excellent. Candidates encountered problems when they tried to storyboard the whole screenplay in the limited number of shots or chose randomly from it. While the setting may be indicative, if not possible to re-create, a different approach should be taken to characters: candidates should choose to photograph people to illustrate the facial expression or reaction which has been described in the screenplay.

Also where props can be realistically used, they should always be used over representative objects. There was a realistic use of timings on most storyboards seen this year which is pleasing and some careful consideration of transitions between shots. This is also the place to consider non-diegetic sound which many did to great effect, in terms of mood and atmosphere. It is not acceptable to submit images which have been hand drawn or are entirely digitally produced.

### **Evaluative Analysis**

Again, there was an opportunity here to write more than in previous years and there was some excellent and detailed consideration of cinematic influences with some centres encouraging their candidates to use examples and screengrabs from their influences alongside those from their own work; this is excellent practice and encourages some detailed and perceptive analysis. As with previous specifications, the emphasis here should be on how meaning and response has been created for spectators. Candidates should not describe the process or discuss what they could have done differently. Some of the cinematic influences were really interesting and it is essential that these are films intended for a cinema release, whether from the course or their own enthusiastic engagement with film as a medium. There was some real evidence of learning about film in the best of these pieces. It is helpful for written components, if candidates could include a word count on their work.



WJEC  
245 Western Avenue  
Cardiff CF5 2YX  
Tel No 029 2026 5000  
Fax 029 2057 5994  
E-mail: [exams@wjec.co.uk](mailto:exams@wjec.co.uk)  
website: [www.wjec.co.uk](http://www.wjec.co.uk)