



GCE A LEVEL EXAMINERS' REPORTS

**SUBJECT: FILM STUDIES
A LEVEL**

AUTUMN 2020

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FILM STUDIES

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COMPONENT 1: VARIETIES OF FILM AND FILMMAKING

General Comments

The paper was an accessible and well-balanced set of questions that allowed students to show their knowledge and understanding of film whilst applying that knowledge and understanding in varied, interesting ways. There was a good variety of questions that assessed all relevant aspects of the specifications and allowed all studied texts to be used productively. Candidates showed that they could respond to the demands of the paper and its questions effectively, writing generally well-focused and consistent responses.

There was an even spread of responses to the questions set which suggested that each of the questions were equally challenging and accessible to all candidates who sat the paper, except in Section B where twice as many students responded to the first question. The number of candidates sitting the paper was very low though so conclusions from this are difficult to draw.

There was much engaged, passionate and precise writing in all responses that showed that candidates had been well prepared for the examination, most responses showed evidence of good teaching and learning that had equipped candidates well for the demands of the component. Performance across the paper was generally consistent although some responses for the third section were quite brief which is, perhaps, indicative of not managing time effectively or losing focus toward the end of the examination. Some reviewing of how candidates manage their time in the exam and spread their efforts more consistently might be useful with a minority of students so that their overall performance in the component does not suffer unnecessarily.

Although the numbers taking this paper were small because of current national contexts there was some encouraging evidence that candidates' ability to evaluate critical approaches is improving. Last year's report highlighted the need to develop candidate's evaluative skills in regard to critical approaches and much development work was done on this in the exam board's CPD events and published guidance. It was good to see this paying off and candidates much more confident in handling questions that asked them to evaluate critical approaches in questions. It is hoped that this will be taken forward and will be seen on a wider scale next year.

Comments on individual questions/sections

In Section A, the questions were testing candidates' knowledge and understanding of the auteur debate as applied to the films they had studied and the candidates' abilities to compare the films. Question 1.1 was more focused on asking candidates to compare the ways in which the films reflected an auteur influence in relation to 'look and style' and demanded detailed reference to a sequence from each film. Most successful responses had a clear focus on auteur 'signatures' and included analytical detail on mise-en-scene and cinematography in comparing the films. Some candidates looked closely at editing and performance as part of the visual style and that was acceptable too. There were some excellent responses that evaluated the influence of auteurs compared to wider contextual styles and were able to be very precise in identifying an auteurs influences on specific aspects of the films they had studied. talked more generally about visual style, such responses assumed auteur influence rather than evidenced it.

Question 1.2 was more focused on contexts and auteur freedom, asking candidates to address these issues in comparing the films. Most candidates focused on how the films' aesthetic styles and thematic concerns evidenced varying degrees of freedom or studio control but some candidates focused more on auteurs' approach to the production process and manner of working. Both approaches were acceptable, indeed with some films and auteurs the latter approach could be argued to be more fruitful for a question like this. For both questions, better responses showed a clear knowledge and understanding of the selected films and auteur debates without reducing this to a simple checklist of features. Better comparison work tended to consider similarities and differences between the films studied, evaluate the most important features of auteur influence and link these to contextual influences. Weaker responses tended to have only a few, unsubstantiated and assumed points to make about auteurism and comparison tended to be minimal.

In Section B, the questions were testing knowledge and understanding of spectatorship in relation to contemporary American cinema with 2.1 inviting more focus on 'filmmaker's control' whilst 2.2 is more concerned with mise-en-scene and spectator response. Both questions tested candidates' understanding of the interaction of film and spectator and ability to analyse the chosen films. Better responses to both questions tended to have very precise and well chosen examples of formal aspects of the films discussed. In 2.1, better responses took a wide-ranging approach to discussing how formal aspects demonstrate attempts to control response - some candidates focused on mise-en-scene and sound whilst others focused almost entirely on cinematography or editing. The question allowed for a varied approach and candidates tended to respond in engaged and fluent writing about whatever formal aspects they chose to focus on. It was an important feature of the better responses that they didn't lose sight of the spectator's ability to resist manipulation and so showed a more rounded and complex understanding of the debates about film-spectator interaction.

In 2.2 there were good responses that showed a detailed and confident understanding of mise-en-scene with very close attention to specific sequences, as well as an awareness about the spectatorship debate. Weaker responses tended to assume affect and not engage in debate about the interaction of film and spectator or they tended to discuss the films in generalities. Some candidates referenced encoding-decoding models from Media Studies and whilst this can be useful in discussing 'preferred reading' and 'oppositional readings' it does not often lead to more nuanced and complex debates about the films studied. If teachers do frame film spectatorship around such models they may better focusing on the concept of 'negotiated readings' as this is not often referenced by candidates but can be a useful way into the more filmic concept of spectatorship.

Section C featured questions asking candidates to evaluate ideological critical analysis and demonstrate knowledge and understanding of their chosen films. As indicated in the component overview, candidates responded generally well to these questions and this was an improvement upon the previous year's examination. Last year's report and the ensuing CPD and specification guidance sought to improve candidate preparedness for these types of questions, and it was pleasing to see teachers and candidates' efforts paying off. There was generally, clear and explicit evaluation of the ideological critical approach in most responses and in better responses this was linked to some detailed and well-developed analysis of the films studied. Most candidates thought that an ideological approach to studying film is useful and helps us to understand a film. Better responses explained why this was the case with more precise exemplification and a clearer rationale by, for example, explaining how ideological analysis might reveal new layers of meaning about characterisation and alternate aesthetic pleasures for spectators. No responses suggested that ideological analysis might not be useful, but this could be a valid way of answering such questions. Weaker responses tended to just state that ideological analysis was useful but provided no justification or developed any specific analysis of the films studied. Some responses to 3.1 did not tend to examine the closing sequences of their chosen films in enough detail and some responses ignored them completely.

Summary of key points

In general, there was sound evidence that candidates were well prepared for Component 1 and some improvements were discernible from the last exam sitting. The following points are worth bearing in mind in preparation for next year's examination:

- Candidates are advised to spread the time they spend on each section more evenly. Each section is worth the same amount of marks and so the total mark will suffer if some responses are very brief or not completed. Candidate training on time-management is advised if not already standard practice.
- Knowledge and understanding should not be reduced to simplistic 'checklists' to be recited in the exam. How candidates use and apply their knowledge and understanding is just as important in demonstrating it in the mark scheme.
- If questions ask for a specific sequence to be used, detailed analysis is expected. This does not mean a description of formal features employed, even if that description is lengthy. Better analysis focusses on very specific features and aspects of the sequence and explores their implications for meanings and responses.
- Questions that ask for an evaluation of a critical approach would be better answered if candidates can explain clearly why the approach is useful or not and link these points to specific feature of the films studied.

FILM STUDIES

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COMPONENT 2: GLOBAL FILM-MAKING PERSPECTIVES

General Comments

General Comments

This was the second sitting of the paper by a very small number of candidates and so it is difficult to accurately reflect on the scope of answers. Overall, the questions were accessible, they enabled candidates to demonstrate their understanding and knowledge of films studied and wider appreciation of the context of the subject content.

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. Knowledge of the chosen films was very good – though further subject specific terminology and application is needed.

The most successful candidates were those that clearly answered the set questions rather than a pre-prepared generalised response to the section.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A: Global Film

Q.1 (a) The films used in Section A were generally well understood and appreciated by candidates.

Candidates were asked to select 'key' characters from each film- these need not necessarily be 'main' characters, the best answers were those that selected characters that encouraged through narrative, performance of character construction, some challenge to audience expectation.

The best candidates focussed on their chosen films themes and ideas with reference to selected characters rather than addressing the characters role in the narrative.

(b) This question was the most popular option in this section. Most candidates selected aspects of mise-en-scene as a basis for their answer. The best answers selected sequences that appreciated the aesthetic dimension of the film rather than a descriptive commentary of the visual style of the film. Candidates should be encouraged to use subject specific terminology when analysing sequences and centres should ensure that precise terms are taught.

Summary of key points

Section B: Documentary

This section seems to offer the most challenge for the candidates as they need to demonstrate their textual knowledge and apply an appreciation of a selected filmmakers' theories. *Amy* is by far the most popular film in this section and there is still a tendency to focus too heavily on describing the footage presented and over asserting its meaning in response to the candidates feeling towards the singer.

Again, the most successful answers were from candidates who addressed the set question specifically.

- Q.2 (a)** Candidates were required to consider the creative choices of their selected filmmaker from both a macro and micro perspective. There was a requirement to focus on 'thought provoking' and the best answered demonstrated through well chosen sequences what was unexpected or fresh in the choices made by the filmmaker.
- (b)** This question was answered more successfully than in the summer paper with candidates able to explore an aspect of selected filmmaker's theory and apply it to their chosen documentary. Candidates were able to compare sequences from their case study film and illustrate their knowledge of the theory without over asserting its similarity or difference.

Section C: Film Movements-Silent Cinema

Overall, this section was effectively answered with candidates able to address both set questions from a textual and contextual perspective. Candidates may need to be reminded that due to the relatively short allotted time that they can focus on one selected sequence to produce an answer, rather than producing an essay that covers an unnecessary historical overview at the expense of productive focused analysis.

- Q.3 (a)** Candidates were able to engage with realist/expressionist debate with reference to aspects of film form. They directly addressed which techniques produce realist or non-realist effects with reference to well chosen sequences. The question allowed candidates to select a suitable element of film form from their case study and engage with their interpretation of 'realism'.
- (b)** Candidates did demonstrate knowledge and understanding of their silent cinema film movement in addressing this question. Candidates are not expected to cover all possible contextual areas and may indeed focus on just one. The best candidates engaged with confidence and insight their appreciation of the films through their contextual awareness.

Section D Film Movements-Experimental film (1960-2000)

Clearly *Pulp Fiction* and *Fallen Angels* are the most popular films in this section and candidates clearly enjoy their style, but centres may want to debate how 'experimental' the films are when teaching this section.

Q.4 (a) Editing was the most selected element in answering this question often addressing how it was utilised in *Pulp Fiction*, although too often there was little critical insight into Postmodernism. There was evidence of good knowledge and understanding of the textual features of all the films studied.

Candidates could develop an answer to this question that argues that either of these film form elements contributes less to the experimental quality of the film than other elements.

(b) Candidates demonstrated their knowledge and understanding of their specific film movement with reference to sequences. Some candidates explored ideas centring on narrative fragmentation that questioned the notion of audience rejection which were well argued.

Candidates often developed a largely personal perspective of how the films narrative challenged them and this is acceptable.

Summary of key points

Candidates should be taught to respond to the given question and ensure that they are addressing what is set rather than what they have prepared.

It would be better for candidates to select fewer sequences and focus on analysing them precisely in more detail. This would allow them to present an extended analysis rather than a few superficial points.



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