

AS LEVEL

Examiners' report

FILM STUDIES

H010

For first teaching in 2017

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Version 1

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Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates. The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report. A full copy of the exam paper can be downloaded from OCR.

Paper 1 series overview

This was the second examination of the new AS Level and there were marked improvements in the overall quality of the responses candidates were able to offer. The benefit of the previous live paper and the feedback to centres provided via last year's examiners' report was clearly evident. There were less examples of candidates unable to complete their responses fully, indicating an improvement in addressing time management demands. A substantial number of candidates chose their own route through the completion of the paper, with some doing the lower mark Section A questions last.

Overall, across all three sections of the examination, there was firm evidence of centres and candidates adapting to the requirements of the new specification and its assessment strategy.

In terms of further driving up standards, all centres are strongly advised to make sure that all relevant aspects of film language are comprehensively worked through in relation to all films studied to ensure candidates are ready for whatever the examination demands. Candidates need a set of examples from their chosen films which they can deploy to suit the specific question focus. The ability of candidates to be able to support points and arguments with textual evidence is imperative across all of the sections of the examination.

Section A overview

Overall, the quality of responses in Section A was improved from last year's examination, with much greater evidence of analysis of chosen sequences and less reliance on descriptive writing in candidate responses.

To access the highest level in Q1 and Q2 candidates must balance technical explanation of chosen sequences using accurate terminology with the time available. Accordingly, responses must be concise and very precisely targeted. This is a skill which needs to be developed and should feature as a recurring feature of successful teaching and learning plans.

In general, Q3 was answered effectively by the majority of candidates, who showed the ability to express their knowledge and understanding of the selected films.

Question 1

You should have studied **one** US film from the 1930–1960 list and **one** US film from the 1961–1990 list below. Questions 1–4 require you to write about the US films you have studied.

1930–1960	1961–1990
<i>Citizen Kane</i> (1941). Directed by Orson Welles. USA	<i>2001: A Space Odyssey</i> (1968). Directed by Stanley Kubrick. USA
<i>Singin' in the Rain</i> (1952). Directed by Gene Kelly/Stanley Donen. USA	<i>Raging Bull</i> (1980). Directed by Martin Scorsese. USA
<i>Stagecoach</i> (1939). Directed by John Ford. USA	<i>E.T.</i> (1982). Directed by Steven Spielberg. USA
<i>Vertigo</i> (1958). Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. USA	<i>Do the Right Thing</i> (1989). Directed by Spike Lee. USA
<i>Double Indemnity</i> (1944). Directed by Billy Wilder. USA	<i>The Conversation</i> (1974). Directed by Francis Ford Coppola. USA
<i>All that Heaven Allows</i> (1955). Directed by Douglas Sirk. USA	<i>West Side Story</i> (1961). Directed by Jerome Robbins/Robert Wise. USA

1 With reference to a **sequence** from **one** film from **1961–90** which you have studied, explain how cinematography has been used to create meaning for the spectator. **[5]**

This question requires candidates to undertake semiotic analysis of a chosen sequence by identifying elements from the sequence and being able to apply subject specific terminology and then explain the potential connotations for spectators. To score marks in the highest level, this is precisely what is required. Candidates who achieved marks in level 2 did so because one of the above elements wasn't as fully present as it might have been.

Question 2

2 With reference to a **sequence** from **one** film from **1930–60** which you have studied, explain how mise-en-scène has been used to create meaning for the spectator. **[5]**

All of the comments regarding Q1 above also apply here. Additionally, it should be noted that candidates were expected to be able to discuss precise elements of mise-en-scene (e.g. costume, location) and analyse the potential meanings of these. There were a sizeable number of candidates who struggled to be able to discuss specific elements of mise-en-scene explicitly.

Exemplar 1

Throughout ET, it was very rare to see ET's face making his come across as mysterious and the audience constantly wanting more and feeling intrigued. The only times the camera shows ET's face is when he is doing something magical / out of the ordinary. Spielberg uses cinematography here to create suspense and mystery to ET whilst also making him appear like a powerful and mysterious creature. Also known as God.

In ET, directed by Steven Spielberg in 1982, Spielberg used cinematography to make the audience relate ET to God. There are a few events such as ET rising from the dead ~~but it is not shown~~ in this scene, ET walks out the back of the doors to the van. Spielberg places the camera lower to the ground so we, the spectators, are looking up at ET making him appear powerful and when this is paired with the light shining behind him it makes ET look magical. This is done so the audience unconsciously relate ET to God.

In Vertigo, directed by Alfred Hitchcock in 1958, mise-en-scene has been used to reveal more about the characters and future plot points.

Madeline is often surrounded by the colour red which in this film represents romance and passion along with danger. Hitchcock has done this for the audience to assume that Scotty will fall in love with Madeline but it's a warning too that she is dangerous.

Another thing to notice is how the colour green is also used. This too is often surrounding her or directly on her like her clothes for example. In Vertigo green resembles death once again indicating that Madeline is dangerous and she will die or cause the death of another.

Hitchcock tries to make Madeline appear as ghost like as possible. To do this Madeline is often very pale or far away from the camera. It often appears that Madeline is gliding rather than walking due to her feet frequently being covered.

Q1 and Q2 – the candidate has fully demonstrated their understanding of the questions and the films studied. The responses are concise but well-developed and demonstrate technical knowledge with an understanding of how meaning can be made. Making effective points concisely is a key element of good practice for both of these questions.

Question 3

3* Compare how sound has been used to convey messages and values in the **two** films you have studied. You must refer to examples from **one** film in the **1930–60** list and examples from **one** film in the **1961–90** list in your answer. **[25]**

The majority of candidates were able to use relevant examples from their chosen films to analyse elements of sound proficiently. Candidates who scored marks in the upper levels did so through being able to clearly discuss examples from the films and use terminology accurately and frequently. Where candidates achieved marks in the lower levels this was because they were not able to offer clear examples from the films and / or there was a lack of accurate use of specific terminology.

Exemplar 2

Both Vertigo and E.T. effectively use sound to establish characters, dramatic events and establish the core themes and values of the films.

In the openings scenes of both Vertigo and E.T., sound is used to establish the genre of the film. E.T. starts with non-diegetic eerie, high pitched typically sci-fi related music as the opening credits play, and we are introduced to the spaceship. Spielberg's decision to do this is significant as it allows the spectator to understand what type of movie this is and what the codes and conventions they would expect to see would be. In a similar way, Hitchcock allows the spectator to establish the crime/ thriller genre of Vertigo, with the

Q3 - The candidate offers a very well-structured response which constantly draws on examples from the films studied and regularly deploys a high level of knowledge and understanding of relevant aspects of film language. As well as this knowledge and understanding, the response offers a convincing comparison of the use of film language in the two films, demonstrating high level academic writing skills at this assessment level.

Question 4

4* Compare how editing contributes to the aesthetics of the **two** films you have studied. You must refer to examples from **one** film in the **1930–60** list and examples from **one** film in the **1961–90** list in your answer. **[25]**

This question required a focused consideration of editing and its impact on aesthetics – both of which can be challenging areas for candidates. Fundamental qualities of higher level responses were the explicit discussion of editing techniques / styles (such as montage editing, discussions of the applications of the Kuleshov effect) together with an understanding of film aesthetics (the way a film's stylistic elements are constructed and how that may trigger some kind of response in the spectator). The choices made in the editing of any film will go a very long way to guiding the response of any spectator to the characters and the narrative. So, discussions of any aspect of editing, e.g. transitions, sequencing of shots, the amount of on-screen time for some characters over others all lend themselves to discussions of aesthetics.

Exemplar 3

Editing is used in both ET and Vertigo's title sequences. In ET there is a black background coupled with purple credits. The purple lends itself to sci-fi theme and immediately sets up the genre of the film. For the first five minutes there is no speaking which is odd for a children's film. Also an eerie theme is played whilst the opening credits role. In Vertigo, the opening credits start with by showing a woman's lips. This could link to the romantic aspect of the film. Then the audience are shown eyes. They look from side to side as though being watched, a key theme of the film (voyeurism). Then, throughout the credits are spirals. They have no solid shape, perhaps linking to the duplicity of all the characters.

Q4 - The candidate offers a detailed response to a question area which students have often found challenging. The candidate demonstrates very good understanding (at AS level) of the contribution editing makes to aesthetics and is able to offer a response which constantly stays 'on-task' and gives well-chosen examples, effectively supported by good knowledge and understanding of film language.

Section B overview

The majority of candidates answered Q5 rather than Q6. Candidates showed good knowledge and understanding of their chosen films. Not all candidates were able to fully address the specific requirements of the question in their responses.

Question 5

You should have studied **one** of the themes in the table below. For your chosen theme, you should have studied **one** film from the US Independent list and **one** film from the Non-US English Language list. Questions **5–6** require you to write about the two films you have studied.

Theme	US Independent	Non-US English Language
Family and Home	<i>Moonrise Kingdom</i> (2012). Directed by Wes Anderson. USA	<i>Room</i> (2015). Directed by Lenny Abrahamson. Canada/Ireland
	<i>The Tree of Life</i> (2011). Directed by Terrence Malick. USA	<i>Animal Kingdom</i> (2010). Directed by David Michôd. Australia
Outsiders	<i>A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night</i> (2014). Directed by Ana Lily Amirpour. USA	<i>The Babadook</i> (2014). Directed by Jennifer Kent. Australia/Canada
	<i>Elephant</i> (2003). Directed by Gus Van Sant. USA	<i>The Piano</i> (1993). Directed by Jane Campion. New Zealand/Australia/France
Conflict	<i>The Hurt Locker</i> (2008). Directed by Kathryn Bigelow. USA	<i>District 9</i> (2009). Directed by Neill Blomkamp. South Africa/USA/New Zealand/Canada
	<i>Whiplash</i> (2014). Directed by Damien Chazelle. USA	<i>Mad Max</i> (1979). Directed by George Miller. Australia

EITHER

5* With reference to examples from the **two** films you have studied from your chosen theme, compare how the films create gender representations that reflect the contexts in which they are made. **[35]**

As with other questions in this examination, there are two key demands within the question here: candidates needed to be able to discuss gender representation and production contexts. The majority of candidates were able to discuss gender representations with reference to characters in the films studied. Some candidates were hesitant in being able to locate these gender representations in context. The question left open what contexts could be applied, allowing candidates to discuss the contexts that were most suited to the films they had studied. Therefore, for example, social context could have been discussed with regard to *Whiplash*, political context could have been discussed with regard to *District 9*, social and cultural contexts could have been discussed with regards to *Room*, *The Babadook* or *The Piano*. When selecting set films for study, as part of their planning for curriculum delivery, centres are strongly advised to plan for and deliver learning opportunities on the different contexts.

Exemplar 4

The introductions to the protagonists in both films convey the stereotypical gender expectations expected surrounding the context. When the audience are first introduced to Judy, she is reading a book, whereas Sam is riding a canoe. Reading a book is a very passive activity that would be deemed a stereotypically 'acceptable' thing for women to, whereas a boy scout being in the great outdoors is a much more active pastime, that would be expected of boys. Wes Anderson set the film in 1965, a time when society was less liberated, therefore explaining the stereotypical gender roles. Similarly, in the montage that introduces the spectator to Room we see a shot ~~to~~ with a shallow focus, focusing on Jack watching TV whilst we see 'Ma' in the background scrubbing the floor. This too is very traditional gender roles, as it displays the man/bey enjoying himself whilst the woman suffers. As this could suggest men are at the focus of society. Lenny Abrahamson grew up in Ireland, a deeply Catholic country that still has traditional views on gender roles; this could have been a contributing factor to his decision. However, Abrahamson himself has said that the movie was not meant to be political.

Q5 - The candidate offers a very confident analysis of gender representation in the films studied. The candidate is able to offer a strong discussion of stereotypical representations of gender which is subsequently complemented by a discussion of counter-stereotypical representation. In doing so, the candidate demonstrates a full understanding of the issue as applied to the films studied.

Question 6

6* With reference to examples from the **two** films you have studied from your chosen theme, compare how their use of genre conventions may create meaning and response from spectators. [35]

The majority of candidates who attempted this question clearly knew and understood the films studied and how, in general terms, those films can trigger spectator response. In order to address the requirements of the question candidates needed to effectively situate their studied films within a generic context. Where candidates were unable to do this they could not offer full answers to this question which impacted on the marks attained. Candidates must be prepared for all eventualities that the examination can demand with regard to the knowledge and understanding of the films studied in order to be able to provide full responses to the demands of the question.

Section C overview

The overall quality of responses in Section C showed improvement from last year. There is still evidence that candidates seem less prepared for the type of questions they face here. This could be a time management issue – most students attempt this section last – and/or it could be that candidates need to further practice their skills in analysing their selected text.

Question 7

You should have studied **one** European film from the list below. Questions 7–8 require you to write about the European film you have studied.

European Film
<i>The Lives of Others</i> (2006). Directed by Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck. Germany
<i>Son of Saul</i> (2015). Directed by László Nemes. Hungary
<i>A Prophet</i> (2009). Directed by Jacques Audiard. France/Italy
<i>The Great Beauty</i> (2013). Directed by Paolo Sorrentino. Italy/France
<i>Ida</i> (2013). Directed by Paweł Pawlikowski. Poland/Denmark/France/UK
<i>Let the Right One In</i> (2008). Directed by Thomas Alfredson. Sweden

EITHER

7* Discuss how the poetics – the choice of micro elements to create aesthetic effects – of your chosen European film contribute to the film's representation of a distinctive fictional world. Refer to specific sequences in your answer. **[35]**

A minority of candidates attempted this question. Those who did could demonstrate accurate evidence of knowledge and understanding of their chosen film. Given that most candidates attempt this question last, there was a tendency in many responses to skate through elements of the film rather than taking time to analyse specific sequences, as called for in the question. In some cases, this led to an overly descriptive writing style which repressed candidates' potential to score higher marks.

Question 8

8* Discuss how the narrative and representations in the European film you have studied reflect events and issues in the wider world. **[35]**

The majority of candidates attempted this question, but as with Q7, a number of candidates struggled to link their discussion of the narrative and representation in their chosen film to events and issues in the wider world. Notable exceptions could be found with some discussions of the ethnic structuration of the prison population in *A Prophet* and how this can be seen to be reflective of modern France and some ability to forge links between the representation of characters and the East German state in *The Lives Of Others* to the nature of the totalitarian regime in power in East Germany/ German Democratic Republic at the time that the film was set. Part of the learning experience of studying European Film at AS Level is not just to learn about other, less familiar film styles and production contexts but also to learn about the underpinning social, cultural and political contexts which inform the films on the set list.

Exemplar 5

Finally, the exhumation scene in *Ida* ~~conveys~~ discusses a taboo in Polish society and explores the repugnance of the Polish in the war. The story of Ida's parents and the Skibos' mirrors that of a town ~~where~~ ^{where many Jews in a church} in Poland. As Symon digs up the grave, we see a high angle of him sitting in the grave, hat removed. This expresses his vulnerability ~~and~~ and humanity, suggesting his genuine feelings of guilt. As in *Jerzywo bne*, many Polish people had felt enormous guilt for what they had done. The Polish government even passed a law absolving ~~all~~ Polish people from blame for what happened in the war. However, Pawlikowski challenges this idea and forces people to accept and realise their involvement in such atrocious crimes. As a result of this *Ida* was banned in Poland, and only recently has a heavily edited ~~flat~~ this scene is not included) version of *Ida* been allowed to be shown.

In summary, Pawlikowski uses *Ida* to address many controversies and time periods in Polish history, and invites discussion on them. As he said, the purpose of *Ida* was to 'muddy the waters' and show that things are not always as clear and

Q8 - The candidate offers a fluent and cogent response which demonstrates very good knowledge and understanding of the film. The candidate is also very able to make connections to the real world issues demanded by the question by invoking a sense of how the film contributes to a national discussion of Poland's history in World War 2.

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