

November 2014 subject reports

FILM

Overall grade boundaries

Higher level

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 13	14 – 29	30 – 42	43 – 54	55 – 67	68 – 79	80 – 100

Standard level

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 13	14 – 28	29 – 40	41 – 53	54 – 67	68 – 80	81 – 100

Production portfolio

Component grade boundaries

Higher level

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 7	8 – 15	16 – 23	24 – 29	30 – 34	35 – 40	41 – 50

Standard level

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 7	8 – 14	15 – 21	22 – 28	29 – 34	35 – 41	42 – 50

The range and suitability of the work submitted

Overall, there was a wide range of suitable work submitted. At both levels there was clear student engagement with the assessment, and a wide variety of imaginative responses were produced. The best work showed real artistry and creativity, as well as attempts to work both within familiar cinema genres and outside them in films that were more personal and self-expressive. At both levels, it is more likely that the commentary will be weaker than the film,

and sometimes very good films are presented with rushed or incomplete commentaries. One common problem is the submission of commentaries without supporting photographic or pictorial/graphic evidence to support the writing. At higher level, some students neglect to discuss the creation of the trailer in the commentary. At both levels, the strongest work approaches professional work in execution and the accompanying commentary shows real insight into the student's individual chosen role, as well as keen logistical and artistic self-reflection.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A

Planning and research: Most students seem to find this the easiest part of the commentary as it consists primarily of a documentary overview of work on the project. Usually this is an area of strength, though it is weaker if the student has not presented graphic and pictorial evidence woven into the body of the commentary. Despite restrictions in the guide, some schools persist in submitting materials in a form that resembles an appendix. Since these materials are not being used to clarify or reflect upon process - they are simply present - the required performance standard is not being met. As noted, at higher level some students neglect to discuss the trailer.

Criterion B

Reflection and evaluation: The most common problem here is the failure to discuss their work in their chosen role. While Criterion A demands an overview of the production process, it is important that the logistical (and artistic) problems they encountered in their role as director, screen-writer, cinematographer, editor, or sound editor/sound designer are examined here. Some students simply do not focus on their role. The best commentaries explore those tasks and skills that are unique to the role chosen by the student, clarifying it with appropriate evidence. The best commentaries attempt some artistic evaluation of the completed project, which is required in the descriptors. Weaker work frequently ignores the project itself in favour of a self-evaluation focused minutiae of the production process. As noted, at higher level some students neglect to discuss the trailer.

Criterion C

Professional and technical skills: Students demonstrate varying levels of skill in the chosen roles. As noted above, at the highest level the work is close to professional while at the lower levels there seems to be little familiarity with either technical equipment or the use of film language. Since evidence for the fulfilment of this criterion can come from either the film itself or material in the written commentary, students who have spent time on both components tend to do very well here, even if they are a little weaker than might be desired in their use of film language. The weakest students at both levels tend to pick roles that they are unfamiliar with. This puts them at a disadvantage both in terms of technical skills and their ability to express cinematically in their role.

Criterion D

Effective use of film language: As noted, most students are very engaged by the film-making aspect of the assessment, so this criterion (as well as criterion C) tends to be the strongest at both levels, and for students of all competencies. Many students are creative and insightful in their use of film language, the results of which are often very engaging. However, just as with criterion C, the weakest students appear to have developed little familiarity with either technical equipment or the requirements of their chosen role, and in the weakest cases their work may resemble a home video more than a film.

Criterion E

Originality and creativity: The best work is engaging, surprising, and shows real freshness of approach, whether or not the work is focused within the conventions of a genre. Weaker work tends to copy genre styles without consideration of the limitations of a 4-5 or 6-7 minute film. Further, there are problems with this criterion if the student has not paid attention to the copyright statement in the guide. All materials in this assessment should have been created by the student (or the student should have had an active part in their creation). Weaker students tend to fall back on the inclusion of music and video materials made by others as part of their films.

Recommendations for the teaching of future candidates

The most important preparation for this assessment, at both levels, is the creation of a number of short films that allow the student to become both technically proficient and comfortably able to express themselves in film language. At the same time, students should have enough experience in the five roles for assessment that they can choose the role that they feel they are best at when they work on the final film. It is also important that students encounter a wide variety of short films, both professional and the work of other students, so that they have a good idea of the differences between a feature film and a short film. At both levels, it is also important that the students have experience documenting the film production process, so that this is second nature when they make their final film. A film journal with photos and graphics is a good idea, but they should also have some experience choosing photographic and graphic evidence to discuss their logistic and artistic decisions. If they have some previous classroom experience in these skills, they should do much better in the final assessment. In the case of higher level students and the trailer, it is important that students see a variety of trailers from different time periods and in different styles before they create their own. Often, the trailer is simply an assembly of shots from beginning to end, with little evidence of an underlying rationale of trying to appeal to an audience.

Further comments

In the case of weaker work it is often clear that not enough time has been taken with the production itself. It is also clear, from some films, that they are the product of a very short period of work. There is no reason why students should not have lots of time to plan and complete this work, and no reason why the classroom teacher cannot consult on it. The best films are often the results of months of planning and execution.

As has been mentioned, at higher level, a recurring problem for some centres is the fact that the creation of the trailer has not been covered in the commentary. This will automatically reduce marks in criteria A and B, as the discussion of the trailer is required in the level descriptors. It is surprising that this is a problem as teachers have the opportunity to review the students' work and remind them of the need to comment on the trailer. To some degree, this is also true of some of the other common problems seen when the assessment has not been presented in the form described in the guide. Some films are too long or too short or feature music that is subject to copyright.

Independent study

Component grade boundaries

Higher level

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 3	4 – 7	8 – 10	11 – 13	14 – 17	18 – 20	21 – 25

Standard level

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 3	4 – 7	8 – 10	11 – 13	14 – 17	18 – 20	21 – 25

The range and suitability of the work submitted

Overall, this seems to be a challenging component for students, but there is a wide range of work submitted and the best work skilfully uses the documentary script format to examine interesting and engaging questions of film theory or film history by insightfully building an argument using both visuals and insightful analysis of the student's chosen films. Frequently, the biggest problem for the weaker students is the selection of a topic, or the failure to narrow it so that it can reasonably be dealt with in the length of the higher level or standard level script. Even though there is no shortage of good work focused on film theory and film history, the weakest students seem to come to this assessment with little knowledge of film writing beyond that of the review.

The strengths and weaknesses of candidates in the treatment of individual areas

The first key descriptor is that there is understanding of, and engagement with, film history or film theory. As noted in terms of suitability, the weakest students seem unfamiliar with writing actually based in theory or history, and either attempt to do something like a review, or something like a literary investigation of theme. Those students familiar with film history and film theory topics seem to have little problem either writing about their chosen topic or

selecting films which they find fully engaging and which are clearly related to the topic that they have chosen. A poor beginning here will compromise the scope and depth of the argument possible, so this choice does have an effect on the mark awarded. In terms of the use of sources, a paper without an annotated bibliography will be limited to a mark no higher than 15. The best papers have clear and appropriate annotations which detail how sources were used - including the chosen films. The weakest papers cite nothing but the chosen films, and do not indicate that any research was done beyond viewing the films. The best scripts describe the argument in both video and audio terms, so that both columns must be read; the best scripts use each column to build the argument in the other column. This means that both the details of the movie excerpt and the reason why it has been selected are in the visual column, and are not simply explained in the audio column, which can then be used for deeper analysis. Weaker papers simply present visuals and then explain them in the audio column, presenting what is essentially an essay in the audio column. The weakest papers make no attempt at a visual argument but simply present one-line descriptions, time code without details, or - at worst - nothing at all in the visual column. Most students have an idea about how to choose films that relate to the topic, but if the topic has not been well focused, this may be a problem. At higher level, students sometimes forget that insightful comparisons between the films are required.

Recommendations for the teaching of future candidates

It is most important that the students experience a wide variety of academic writing about film. In the case of weaker students, much of the bibliography is made up of internet sources, often of little critical significance. It is very hard to know what is important to say, unless one has experienced reading and hearing the analysis of experts.

Further, one would expect that all students have some experience of common theoretical perspectives in film; for example, auteur theory, gender theory, formalism, to name a few. One would also expect that the students have had several experiences with movements or genres in film history, for example, the way that visual elements from German Expressionism influenced first the horror film, and later, the film noir as well as the neo-noir. If the student does not have experience of understanding and expressing these ideas in class, it will be very difficult for them to be successful in the independent study.

Finally, students need practice with the two column script format, whether it is introduced simply as a script style as distinct from the narrative script style, or as a practical exercise from a class assignment such as making a documentary film.

Further Comments

There are a number of continuing problems with this assignment at both higher level and standard level.

First of all, though the requirement is that films come from two countries, there is no requirement that the assignment is a cultural comparison. In some cases, close examination of film making practices from different parts of the world can be a valid response to this assignment, but that depends on the theoretical or historical approach. There is nothing

compelling a student to compare cultures. For weaker students, particularly at standard level, the problem is that sweeping generalizations about cultures (or even film genres) are being made from a very small sample of films. Often, this makes for a very weak argument.

Format is an obvious problem, since many students are awarded lower marks because they fail to include an annotated bibliography. Since the classroom teacher is allowed feedback on a draft of the script, this should not be a common occurrence.

At both higher level and standard level there are some misunderstandings about what a film topic is in general. It is not unusual, for example, for a student to spend a long time discussing the 'fact' that films have become more violent and that this violence may be linked to increased violence in society. This is beyond the scope of the independent study. Even if it were true that films have recently become more violent (a valid argument from film history could be made that they have not), deciding that violence in films leads to violence in society is a complex question that will require extensive sociological and psychological research, far beyond the scope of an investigation into film theory or film history.

The teacher should help the student focus and narrow the topic on a film history or film theory topic and ensure they are on the right track. For weaker students, film history topics are likely to be easier. It is important for them to understand that they are examining the history of film not history through film.

It is becoming clear that weaker students are doing limited research for the assessment, particularly in terms of their own primary research of their chosen films. Unfortunately, weaker students often have not viewed the films they are using as sources. Inaccurate descriptions, generalizations based on faulty knowledge, and little engagement with the chosen films themselves are common indicators of this. Students cannot engage with the chosen films at the level and depth that is required if they have not done the primary research of watching their chosen films.

Film presentation

Component grade boundaries

Higher level

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 3	4 – 7	8 – 9	10 – 12	13 – 16	17 – 19	20 – 25

Standard level

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 3	4 – 7	8 – 9	10 – 12	13 – 16	17 – 19	20 – 25

The range and suitability of the work submitted

Although there were relatively few candidates this session similar problems are still prevalent from the November 2013 session. The principal element of the presentation, to analyse a specific film extract, still appears difficult for some candidates. Some concentrated on offering an interpretation of the whole film, making only brief references to the extract. Students frequently concentrated on character analysis, discussion of broad themes rather than how meaning is constructed in filmic terms.

There were still too many instances where candidates describe their extract offering little more than narrative summaries rather than close, detailed analysis. Whilst many descriptions are detailed this only constitutes describing what they see or hear rather than how or why specific techniques are used to represent elements such as major themes, ideas and character.

Basic preparation and organisation is, for some candidates, an issue. Too many candidates achieve less than their full potential as they are finishing their presentation significantly well short of the time allowed. At standard level some candidates are finishing in fewer than six minutes whilst at higher level some are finishing in fewer than ten minutes. The timing of the presentation itself commences after the candidate has given centre and candidate numbers. Far too much time is often wasted by candidates providing unnecessary detail such as lists of characters and actors or a summary of the plot. [Please see recommendations at the end of this report.]

Although it is possible to follow the extract through shot-by-shot this is not the most efficient or effective method. It is better to identify key elements in the extract and the relationship to the film as a whole and explore how the meaning is constructed in the chosen extract. Many candidates, even if they do not follow shot-by-shot simply jump from thought to unrelated

thought. Occasionally this is a result of nerves but more commonly because their notes are not coherently organised.

Some candidates find it difficult to meet the challenge of finding complex meanings in their chosen extracts. There is a tendency to rely too heavily on simple analysis such as “black shadows signify something bad”, “high angle camera shows power” or “red means danger”.

Of more concern is that a small but significant number of candidates are not fulfilling the requirements as set out in the criteria. Some candidates present a detailed analysis of the extract but nothing more. At standard level, candidates must address the film’s genre, the place of the extract within the film as a whole, its place in a broader socio-cultural context and perceived directorial intent. In addition, at higher level, candidates must refer to responses from audiences, reviewers, critics and scholars at the time of release and/or subsequently.

It is worrying that some candidates, albeit only a relatively small number, appear not to have watched the film as a whole. There are references to having only watched extracts online.

In spite of some of the problems indicated above, more candidates are trying to integrate a detailed analysis of the extract in relation to the film as a whole as opposed to presenting a shot by shot description. It is also encouraging to see that most candidates are engaging enthusiastically with their chosen film.

At their best, candidates were able to fully integrate a thorough and perceptive insight into the themes, issues and socio-cultural contexts of their films with a close, detailed textual analysis of their chosen extract.

The strengths and weaknesses of candidates in the treatment of individual areas

November 2014’s candidates showed improvement in some areas. Whilst some candidates are still reciting lists of awards to indicate how films were received, many more are, at higher level, incorporating brief quotations from critics or scholars.

More candidates are organising their presentations effectively and are preparing more fully. Although it is clear that candidates are using well-prepared notes as aides memoire it must be emphasised that candidates are not allowed to read their presentation verbatim from a prepared script. Candidates who do read their presentations risk their presentations being put forward as possible examples of academic misconduct. It would be better if teachers prevented candidates from commencing their presentation if a prepared script is about to be used. An opportunity should then be given to return with appropriate notes.

Recommendations for the teaching of future candidates

- The Film guide must be read fully and carefully before setting out to prepare candidates for the presentation.
- Co-ordinator’s notes in the November preceding the May session must be accessed to identify the prescribed films for the examination session.
- Too few candidates create truly coherent presentations. Candidates must therefore

be given ample opportunities to practice textual analysis before embarking upon their examination pieces.

- Candidates should be given ample opportunity to rehearse practice presentations from films other than those set for the examination
- Teachers should help their candidates be selective in what they say so that they can work effectively within the time frame to present all elements of the presentation.
- Candidates must be given practice in timing for their presentations. Too many are either too long or too short.
- Teachers must check the sound levels before commencing recording and also the sound levels of the presentations sent to be examined. Some presentations have been inaudible.
- Once recordings have been started they must not be paused or stopped and restarted. Should a candidate wish to watch the extract through before the presentation this must be done before the recording of the presentation begins.
- Teachers must not allow candidates to read their presentations. Brief notes are acceptable. Teachers should check a candidate's notes before commencing the recording.
- Recordings must be made in a private, quiet place: not, for instance in an open classroom. Make sure, as far as possible, that the candidate will not be interrupted by outside noise.
- Teachers must not intervene during the candidate's presentation apart from stating, "You have X minutes left. Do you have anything more to say?" Teachers may not prompt candidates by referring to specific areas that they think that the candidate has not fully explored. Anything that is said in response to an inappropriate intervention by the teacher cannot be rewarded.
- Each candidate's recording must be clearly identified, not only on the recording itself, but on the screen ident.

Candidates are encouraged to pronounce the common filmic term "mise-en-scene" accurately. Phonetically it should be pronounced "meez on sen".

It is also worthwhile teachers indicating the correct pronunciation of the names of directors.

Further Comments

Guidance for the recording of the Presentation

To avoid any confusion regarding the timing of each presentation, teachers are encouraged to use the following script as an introduction to each candidate's recording.

"This is an [HL or SL] Film Presentation for [Name and number of School/College.] This Candidate is [Name and number of the candidate]. The presentation will be on [Name the film]. The scene chosen is [identify the scene as on the cover sheet]."

Then say to the candidate: "You may begin your presentation."

This makes it clear when the examiner is to begin timing the candidate.