

November 2017 extended essay reports

Film

Overall grade boundaries

Grade:	E	D	C	B	A
Mark range:	0-7	8-15	16-22	23-28	29-36

The range and suitability of the work submitted

Among the wide range of responses, the best work was the result of a focused passion for the film topic that the student chose. As well, narrowing the topic to the point where a clear argument could be phrased was important. In weaker work, the focus was too broad and the argument itself tended to meander. Solid work resulted from exploring the question through primary research (that is, the student had viewed the film(s) multiple times as part of primary research, contextualized the film, and only then went on to continue the research through secondary research). Weaker papers were often the result of working backwards, and building an argument based on the availability of secondary research materials. Often in these cases, the student showed little insight into the film and the argument reproduced what had already been said about the film by others. Weaker candidates tended to pick topics that were more literary in nature, or use the films as a leaping off point to talk about broader sociological issues instead of writing an essay focused on Film itself. This was frequently the case for students who had not taken the IB Film class, and so understood little of film theory or history, film terminology, or reading visual language - all problems when confronting a film as a primary source. There is, for some students, an over-dependence on internet sources which is limiting given the large number of books, DVD commentaries, documentaries and other sources for secondary research. To a degree, this also highlights the lack of passion for their topic, with secondary research limited to what could easily be sourced on Google or other search engines. Students who came to the task without an appreciation of the academic study of film also tended to side-track into a type of writing that was more like a review (the most common source of writing about the Arts that most are exposed to). Therefore, instead of an exploration of the topic, the focus was on value judgements and the student's opinion of 'good' and 'bad,' rather than analysis of Director's intent, the use of visual language, the film's relationship to its historical context, the theoretical approach that produced significant understanding when applied to the film, and other techniques of academic film criticism.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: research question

Frequently the topics were framed so broadly that there was little chance of covering them in the required word count. The best work had a clear and narrow focus that framed the question within a clear cinematic context. As noted: often the topic was focused on narrative in general and was of a more literary nature. The best work was clearly focused on visual language elements, film theory and/or film history.

Criterion B: introduction

The best work made clear how the research question related to existing knowledge, and explained why the topic was significant and worthy of investigation.

Criterion C: investigation

The best work uses appropriate and imaginative sources, while weak work used limited sources. The best work was born out of a synthesis of the student's starting point idea and the ideas found in research.

Criterion D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

Knowledge and understanding: Weaker work tended to focus on simply explaining the narrative of the films, or the student's understanding of the 'theme' of the work, while good work focused on visual language and film-maker's intent, with a significant knowledge of film theory or history.

Criterion E: reasoned argument

The best work supported the student's argument with evidence from (especially) primary research and support from secondary research. Some of the best work took positions contrary to what had been discovered in secondary research. The weakest work tended to simply repeat arguments made by others.

Criterion F: application of analytical and evaluative skills

The best work featured close textual analysis of visual language, frequently with visuals to support ideas.

Criterion G: use of language appropriate to the subject

Weaker work was couched in review language or the language of literary analysis (plot described in non-filmic ways).

Criterion H: conclusion

Most candidates handled the conclusion well, although in the weaker students it was not necessarily consistent with the evidence presented in the essay.

Criterion I: formal presentation

For the most part, this was handled well, though some students forget key elements such as an Abstract or an Introduction. It is reasonable to expect that most filmic analysis will use screen grabs or other visual aids to analysis, and sometimes these were missing.

Criterion J: abstract

This was usually done well, although sometimes the research question, the way the investigation was conducted, or the conclusion of the essay was left out. The most common problem for weaker students was leaving out either the description of how the research was conducted or the conclusion.

Criterion K: holistic judgement

Sometimes choices of topic seemed guided by the simplicity of the question. While determining whether someone is an Auteur could be a significant question, often the answer was obvious from the start and it was hard to believe the question was very significant. As is the case generally, the best results here were achieved by students who showed a real interest in a significant film question.

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

As noted, often topics were too broad or not filmic in nature. It is important the teacher helps frame the topic so that a strong argument and convincing data can be presented in the framework of the essay and its required length. Going over criteria and encouraging the student to focus on a topic which is meaningful to him or her is important. Knowing the requirements for a Film EE is important. Many students came to the task with little knowledge of academic writing about film.

Understanding that writing about film is not simply 'reviewing films' or stating an opinion about a film, is central. It is important for the students to understand that good writing about film uses evidence, analysis, and an understanding of film history. There are ample published sources that can be drawn upon, and it is important that teachers draw their student's attention to this. As well, some practice distinguishing between academic sources online and review/fan sites is important.

Further comments

Students do better when they are engaged and passionate about their topic. Though they need help with focusing and narrowing the topic so it can be dealt with in the boundaries of the assessment, they also need to have time to explore their topic. Viewing the films should be the most significant part of their work. Understanding and analysing their primary sources before they consult secondary sources is important, otherwise the essay will seem simply the repetition of what has already been said by others, resulting in an essay that is cobbled together from other sources. This means there must be time in the overall preparation of the essay for students to watch, analyse, and delve deeply into their primary research materials - the films.