

A LEVEL

Examiners' report

FILM STUDIES

H410

For first teaching in 2017

H410/01 Summer 2019 series

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 question paper can be downloaded from OCR.

Paper 1 series overview

This is the Film History paper for this specification, requiring:

- knowledge and understanding of the micro-elements of film
- the ability to analyse and compare use of these micro-elements to create meanings and responses or aesthetic effects in set films from three periods of US film
- the ability to analyse European experimental films and a film from a European film movement using critical approaches.

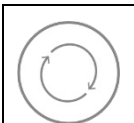
Candidates appeared to be well prepared for this paper, showing the ability to respond to the specific questions set and analyse films.

Candidates who did well on this paper were clear on the meaning of continuity editing, understood the difference between 'aesthetics' and 'meanings and responses', were focused, where required, on comparing films, and analysed surrealist films using critical approaches.

Candidates who did less well on this paper wrote more descriptive responses or did not respond to the specific demands of the question set. For example, in Q2 to Q5, some candidates analysed films using the full range of micro-elements, only touching occasionally on the micro-element specified in the question. Better answers were clear about the micro-elements required or, in Q6 and Q7, the critical debate embedded in the question.

Candidates generally completed the whole paper referring to the appropriate films, as required. Most candidates appeared to allocate their time well, though some candidates spent too much time on Q1 and Q2 and appeared to rush the later questions.


A few answers, often but not always in Q2, cited a film from the wrong time period.

	AfL	<p>Candidates might be coached to start the examination by writing the names of the films they are to use for each question on the question paper and double-checking that they have selected the correct film(s).</p>
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Section A overview

Q1 tests Assessment Objective 1: demonstrate knowledge and understanding of elements of film. Candidates that demonstrated knowledge and understanding, in this case of continuity editing, performed better than those who analysed a sequence in terms of its meaning with little demonstration of knowledge and understanding of the specifics of editing. Q2, on the other hand, tests a different Assessment Objective – AO2 (1a): apply knowledge and understanding of elements of film to analyse films – and thus does ask for analysis.

A key skill required for Q3 or Q4 is that of comparison, as 10 of the 35 marks available are specifically for AO2 (1b): apply knowledge and understanding of elements of film to compare films. Successful candidates in these questions were often those who could state the different aesthetics (Q3) or meanings and responses (Q4) of their two chosen films as a whole, using key sequences as specific examples. Many otherwise competent answers failed to explicitly compare the two films – often laying out two unrelated analyses one after the other – and thus lost marks.

	<p>AfL</p>	<p>Candidates should develop the skill of comparison. Having an overview of all three US films studied would aid this comparison, including their overall aesthetics and meanings and responses.</p>
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Question 1

You should have studied **one** US film from each of the lists below. Questions 1–4 require you to write about the US films you have studied.

Silent Era	1930–1960	1961–1990
<i>Birth of a Nation</i> (1915). Directed by D.W. Griffith. USA	<i>Citizen Kane</i> (1941). Directed by Orson Welles. USA	<i>2001: A Space Odyssey</i> (1968). Directed by Stanley Kubrick. USA
<i>The Gold Rush</i> (1925). Directed by Charles Chaplin. 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>The Mark of Zorro</i> (1920). Directed by Fred Niblo/Theodore Reed. USA	<i>Stagecoach</i> (1939). Directed by John Ford. USA	<i>E.T.</i> (1982). Directed by Steven Spielberg. USA
<i>The General</i> (1926). Directed by Clyde Bruckman/Buster Keaton. USA	<i>Vertigo</i> (1958). Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. USA	<i>Do the Right Thing</i> (1989). Directed by Spike Lee. USA
<i>Sunrise</i> (1927). Directed by F.W. Murnau. USA	<i>Double Indemnity</i> (1944). Directed by Billy Wilder. USA	<i>The Conversation</i> (1974). Directed by Francis Ford Coppola. USA
<i>The Wind</i> (1928). Directed by Victor Sjöström. 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 made in the **silent era** that you have studied, explain how continuity editing creates shot to shot relationships. **[10]**

There were some very good answers that explained the principles of continuity editing – usually through the explanation of examples from a specific film sequence whose edits the candidate could describe in detail. Less successful answers tended to describe edits without reference to continuity editing, often including lengthy analysis of the sequence with little reference to specific edits. Some candidates showed little understanding of the term. A number of candidates referred to principles of continuity editing, such as the 180 degree rule, in other questions (such as Q5) but not in this question.

Exemplar 1

At the beginning of the sequence, there are long shot durations as the camera tracks the man through the trees, but when it does cut to a different angle, for example, the 180° rule isn't broken, ensuring the man always looks like he's heading in the same direction. After a while the camera cuts always to show the woman from the city waiting for the man - the relationship established here is that he is walking towards her. The camera cuts back to the man, walking in the same direction as he was before.

Here the candidate has explained the editing in the sequence by using the 180 degree rule of continuity editing.




AFL

Candidates should ensure that they can explain all the subject content for the micro-elements of film form listed on pages 13-15 of the specification and give examples of these concepts from the set films (where present).

Question 2

- 2 With reference to a sequence from **one** film from **1961–1990** that you have studied, analyse how mise-en-scène creates aesthetic effects. [10]

Successful candidates analysed mise-en-scène giving several examples and were clear on aesthetic effects. Less successful answers might analyse the mise-en-scène but purely in relation to meaning and responses, though with occasional reference to aesthetic effects. Many answers liberally used the term aesthetics without analysing aesthetic effects. There were some candidates who were not clear on the meaning of the term mise-en-scène.


	Misconception	Lighting is listed under cinematography, not mise-en-scène, in the specification, though it is permissible to discuss the interaction of lighting and mise-en-scène so long as the reference is clearly to mise-en-scène. Similarly, candidates should understand that performance is a separate micro-element to mise-en-scène and that casting is listed under performance in the specification.
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Question 3

- 3* With reference to examples from **one** film from **1930–1960** and **one** film from **1961–1990**, compare how cinematography (including lighting) creates aesthetic effects. [35]

The most successful answers had a clear idea of the overall aesthetics of each film and could compare both the aesthetics of the two films and the cinematography used to create them. For example, some answers discussed the aesthetic of childhood wonder in *E.T.*, of utopian pleasure in *Singin' in the Rain*, the brutalist aesthetic of *Raging Bull*, or the social realist aesthetic of *Do the Right Thing*. Better answers would consistently compare the two films rather than separating them into two halves of the essay.

Less successful answers often discussed other micro-elements such as editing and mise-en-scène at the expense of cinematography, lacked analysis of detailed examples or links to aesthetics.

	AfL	To aid comparison, candidates should learn a concise way of expressing the overall aesthetics of their chosen films as well as analysing the effects in specific sequences. Any plausible formulation in terms of concepts such as style or look or tone or mood or artistry or beauty is acceptable. Less skilled candidates might require a simpler formulation than more skilled candidates and the difference between aesthetics and meanings and responses should be emphasised.
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Question 4

- 4* With reference to examples from **one** film from the **silent era** and **one** film from **1930–1960**, compare how performance generates meanings and responses. [35]

Candidates who chose this question could often compare the performances in the two films and the meanings and responses they created, but fewer discussed detailed examples of performance. Less successful answers often simply explained the narrative of the film or veered away from performance into other micro-elements. Better answers tended to concentrate on non-verbal behaviour and acting styles. Few discussed casting.

Section B overview

Section B was generally answered more successfully than Section A. This was due in the main to the candidates' familiarity with *Un Chien Andalou* and *L'Age D'Or* and, perhaps to a lesser extent, with their choice of French new wave or German expressionist film. Candidates had to cover both surrealist films in Q6 or Q7, which the vast majority did with ease.

	<p>AfL</p>	<p>Candidates should be warned about over-interpreting surrealist films. Many stated that these films resist meaning then persisted in trying to establish meaning. For example, the scorpions in <i>L'Age D'Or</i> were variously interpreted as representing the bourgeoisie, the proletariat, homosexuality, and the number of narrative articulations in the film. While none of these interpretations can be considered 'wrong', some candidates wasted time reproducing them at length rather than answering the specifics of the question.</p>
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Question 5

You should have studied **both** of the **experimental surrealist films** below:

Un Chien Andalou (1929). Directed by Luis Buñuel. France.

L'Age d'Or (1930). Directed by Luis Buñuel. France.

You should also have studied **one** film from the table below:

German expressionist	French new wave
<i>The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari</i> (1920). Directed by Robert Wiene. Germany	<i>The 400 Blows</i> (1959). Directed by François Truffaut. France
<i>Nosferatu</i> (1922). Directed by F.W. Murnau. Germany	<i>À Bout de Souffle</i> (1960). Directed by Jean-Luc Godard. France
<i>Metropolis</i> (1927). Directed by Fritz Lang. Germany	<i>Cleo from 5 to 7</i> (1962). Directed by Agnes Varda. France

- 5 Analyse how **either** the German expressionist **or** the French new wave film you have studied uses mise-en-scène to create a style that was distinctive for its time. [15]

Most candidates could cite aspects of their chosen film as evidence of a distinctive style, but many less successful answers included elements such as casting and lighting, that are not listed in the specification under mise-en-scène. Some otherwise competent answers spent too long detailing facts about German history (e.g. Weimar hyperinflation) which distracted from analysis of mise-en-scène in their expressionist film. Similarly, there were responses on the French new wave that listed many facts about the movement; while these could be made relevant to the issue of 'distinctive style', they should not replace analysis.

Answers on German expressionist films typically offered several examples of mise-en-scène but those on French new wave films often discussed style with less specific reference to mise-en-scène, relying on generalisations about location and props with few specific examples.

Question 6

- 6* Analyse how **both** experimental surrealist films you have studied use narrative ambiguity to disrupt the relationship that spectators expect to have with conventional films. [35]

This was a popular question. The best responses gave many examples and linked their discussion to narrative theory – either implicitly or explicitly (often in relation to Todorov). Implicit use of critical approaches included discussion of the lack of linear causal chains, disruptions in diegetic time and space, lack of narrative resolution, inconsistent or fleeting characters offering few points of identification, and so on. Less successful answers might simply discuss the strangeness of the films, but often did so with a fair degree of detail.

Question 7

- 7* Analyse how **both** experimental surrealist films you have studied use naturalistic techniques to express human desires and passions. [35]

This was a less popular question than Q6. Stronger answers recognised the incorporation of the critical debate about 'claims of naturalism and realism as against the expressive' and produced nuanced and sophisticated responses that weighed up both sides of the question. Less successful answers tended to concentrate on the 'desires and passions' part of the question, which allowed exemplification of the many passions and desires represented in the two films (encouraging much Freudian speculative interpretation) but lacked analysis of the balance between naturalism, realism and the expressive.

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