

A LEVEL

Examiners' report

FILM STUDIES

H410


For first teaching in 2017


H410/02 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 2 series overview


This was the first live paper for the reformed specification, and it is a considerably different type of examination compared to its forebears in the legacy specification. Owing to this, the features of the most effective answers are somewhat different to what was required for the legacy papers. The question commentaries below are all designed to highlight the features of the most effective responses in combination with a reflection on the component parts of each of the questions and what examiners were looking for in candidates' responses.

Overall, the paper has performed well with most candidates being able to adapt ably to the demands placed on them by the questions. It was clear that the overwhelming majority of candidates had secure knowledge of their chosen films and there were very few rubric errors (where candidates would have written about incompatible films from the same set list or not from the set list at all or candidates did not write about the required number of films in each section). This is clear testament to the focus of centres in preparing their candidates well for the demands of the new paper and the new specification.

All of the sections require detailed knowledge of the films studied and this needs to be frequent and explicit in candidate responses. Candidates need to be able to discuss sequences and / or key characters from the films and be able to focus on either of these, depending on what questions they are answering. Centres need to guide candidates away from writing descriptive accounts of film studied in examinations as this will not be a way to secure marks in the higher bands.

Section A overview

Overall, where candidates had a secure understanding of the issue posed by the question chosen and had a range of examples from the selected films to discuss, then this was the pathway to developing effective responses. Where candidates had a lack of understanding of how to address the issues posed by the questions then this acted as a significant barrier to responding effectively.

	AfL	<p>For Q1, it is recommended that centres and candidates fully investigate the impact of the cinematic experience on spectator / audience response and for Q2, it is recommended that centres and candidates have a full understanding of the range and type of use of digital post-production techniques applied (or not) to the films selected from the set lists. These issues arise as 'takeaways' from this paper, but the wider point is that centres must make sure that the full range of content has been delivered to allow candidates to be ready for whatever the exam paper poses to them.</p>
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Question 1

You should have studied **one** British film and **one** US film from the lists below.

British	US
<i>Pride</i> (2014). Directed by Matthew Warchus. UK.	<i>Guardians of the Galaxy</i> (2014). Directed by James Gunn. USA.
<i>Gone Too Far</i> (2013). Directed by Destiny Ekaragha. UK.	<i>The Hunger Games</i> (2012). Directed by Gary Ross. USA.
<i>Ex-Machina</i> (2014). Directed by Alex Garland. UK.	<i>Star Wars: The Force Awakens</i> (2015). Directed by J.J. Abrams. USA.
<i>The Angel's Share</i> (2012). Directed by Ken Loach. UK.	<i>The Dark Knight Rises</i> (2012). Directed by Christopher Nolan. USA.
<i>We Need to Talk About Kevin</i> (2011). Directed by Lynne Ramsay. UK.	<i>Zootopia</i> (2016). Directed by Rich Moore, Jared Bush, Byron Howard. USA.
<i>Skyfall</i> (2012). Directed by Sam Mendes. UK.	<i>Jurassic World</i> (2015). Directed by Colin Trevorrow. USA.

- 1* 'Watching a film at the cinema is always a better experience than watching a film on television.'
Discuss this view in relation to examples from **one** British film and **one** US film you have studied.

[35]

The most effective answers to this question were ones where the candidates could meaningfully tie together an argument about the cinematic experience versus the home viewing experience with sustained reference to the films they have studied – and give equal focus to each of the two films studied. While the question on its own was perhaps reminiscent of some of the issues that were a hallmark of legacy papers F631 and F633, the new specification requires a tight focus on the films studied from the set lists. Whatever the questions will be in future papers, this requirement will remain valid and is something that centres need to be mindful of in the planning and delivery of the unit. Features of less effective responses were a focus on this issue – the film viewing experience – and a lack of direct and sustained discussion of films from the set lists. Alternatively, another feature of less effective responses was an over focus on the films at the expense of a discussion of the issue provided in the question. Such responses often mostly featured description of narrative events of the chosen films.

Exemplar 1

Regarding Nolan's filmmaking techniques, 72 minutes of 'DKR' is shot on an IMAX camera, one of the most advanced technological ways to shoot a film. As the 'DKR' is a sequel to Nolan's previous Batman films, it is important to continue the excitement in order for audiences to consume the film from a positive perspective. The film is full of exciting scenes to engross the spectator,

for instance, similar to ~~the~~ 'The Dark Knight'. Nolan uses a key as the central setting, 'Gotham', to establish a police chase to show the chaos and confusion portrayed within due to the villain, 'Bane'. 'Bane' is a significant villain due to his physical appearance, conveying strength and power from his muscular features. Nolan creates a fight scene between 'Bane' and 'Batman', this scene is set in a dark, underground sewer location so for an audience to watch this in cinema's it is ~~more~~ more effective as they can feel as though they are

The excerpt from the candidate's response reproduced here is an example of the kind of good practice which was a necessary feature of the better responses to Q1. The candidate here shows the ability to explicitly discuss the pleasures and perceived advantages of cinematic viewing of a film and also takes time to focus on technical and character elements pertaining to the film. The discussion of the use of IMAX technology and its impact on the character of Bane helps to bring the response to life.

Question 2


- 2* Discuss how far the use of digital post-production techniques have impacted upon audience response. You must include examples from **one** British film and **one** US film you have studied.

[35]

While this was a less popular question than Q1, there were still a significant number of responses to this question. Where candidates had a command of terminology relevant to digital post-production techniques and the ability to apply this to elements of their chosen films, some highly effective responses were generated. For example, there were some excellent discussions of the techniques of rotoscoping as applied to *Ex-Machina* and how the application of digital post-production techniques then had a significant role in spectator / audience response. There was also some very good discussion of the uses of digital post-production techniques in *The Hunger Games*, *Jurassic World* and *Skyfall*. Less effective responses were characterised by a lack of understanding of what is meant by digital post-production techniques (elements of digital marketing crept in) and thus this prevented candidates from being able to fully engage with the question.

Section B overview

Whilst both Section A and Section C require the study and discussion of different films from the appropriate set lists, this section only requires the study of one film (although it was evident that some centres had studied more than one of the set documentaries). For candidates, this means they need to be able to discuss forensically (at this level) examples from the chosen film and relate this to wider issues about the nature and purpose of documentary.

	AfL	<p>This need to work between the macro (at genre conventions and genre history level) and the micro (the impact of genre conventions and genre history and the foreknowledge and prior experiences that audiences will bring to their viewing experiences) is fundamental to developing successful answers to either of the questions for this section. The ability of candidates to demonstrate understanding of the macro and micro will be essential for candidates with this section.</p>
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The large majority of answers in this section were for Q3, with only a small minority of candidates opting for Q4.

Question 3

You should have studied **one** documentary from the list below.

Documentary
<i>The Stories We Tell</i> (2013). Directed by Sarah Polley.
<i>Searching For Sugarman</i> (2012). Directed by Malik Bendjelloul.
<i>5 Broken Cameras</i> (2011). Directed by Emad Burnat, Guy Davidi.
<i>The Act Of Killing</i> (2012). Directed by Joshua Oppenheimer.
<i>Man On Wire</i> (2008). Directed by James Marsh.
<i>Citizenfour</i> (2014). Directed by Laura Poitras.

- 3* 'The purpose of documentary is to portray reality in an unbiased way.' Discuss this view in relation to examples from the documentary film you have studied. **[35]**

The statement in the question was designed to elicit debate about the purpose and nature of the documentary form. The most effective answers to this question recognised that this was a statement that was there to be debated and critiqued. Candidates were then looking to make connections between the statement and examples of the commentary that they had studied. In order to construct an effective response, candidates needed to be able to isolate examples from their chosen documentary and critically analyse the documentary through the prism of the question. All of the documentaries on the set list had a substantial number of candidate responses and it was clear that each of the documentaries could be analysed successfully within the parameters of the question chosen. Several candidates weaved aspects of documentary theory (Nichols, Grierson, Pennebaker) in and very often this was a device for constructing well thought-out responses. However, for this question, that type of theoretical engagement wasn't essential and the key driver of success was critical analysis of the film studied as opposed to a description of the events of the film with limited or sporadic attempts to connect back to the terms of the question.

Exemplar 2

her own mother. Sarah's documentary takes an approach more similar to Grierson's view on documentary. He Grierson described documentary as "the creative treatment of actuality". Grierson focused on real life stories of the working class, but the key word here is creative. Usually, something creative isn't unbiased or objective and this is seen in "The Stories We Tell". We can also see how Paley drew "The Stories We Tell" uses conventions of documentary to portray a biased portrayal of past events. The theme of the documentary seems to be about the inaccuracy of memory and how everyone has a different "Truth". Sarah Paley's aim in her documentary is to bring together the "Cacophony of voices" and use them to demonstrate that the ~~truth~~ Truth can never really be completely and accurately portrayed. She does this by her use of interviews and talking heads.

This excerpt from the candidate's response demonstrates elements of good practice which were a feature of the better responses to Q3. The candidate here shows the ability to situate the documentary studied within a wider theoretical context (Grierson). Later in their response, there is clear evidence of the candidate directly relating aspects of the documentary to the terms of the question.

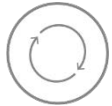
Question 4

- 4* 'Out of every film genre, documentaries have changed the least.' Referring to the theories of Grierson and Pennebaker, discuss this view in relation to examples from the documentary film you have studied. **[35]**

As stated in the overall commentary for this section, Q4 had a limited number of candidate responses. However, the general pattern of responses was good. The candidates who chose this question could recognise, in the main, that the question required an explicit discussion of documentary theory and an evaluation of the degree (or not) to which the genre has changed over the years. Recognition of these issues applied to discussion of examples from the chosen film led to effective responses where candidates could clearly demonstrate their learning about the genre and of the documentary they had studied. This was supported with consideration of the different stylistic elements employed in their chosen documentary with a discussion of why such elements had been used with reference to spectator response.

Section C overview

Each of the five questions in this section contained three elements for candidates to respond to. The overarching element is that of comparative analysis, and the other two elements were all question specific. With three elements per question, candidates faced a demanding level of challenge. The question commentaries below identify the specific question issues, and while the following point is made in some commentaries below, as a section wide issue, it should be noted that these films cannot be taught and learnt in isolation from real world contextual factors.

	<p>AfL</p>	<p>While a thorough knowledge of the films studied is essential for success, so too is a thorough knowledge of the contextual factors – the interplay between macro and micro is critical to driving candidates' understanding of the films and the issues they present.</p>
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Question 5

Theme: Family and Home

You should have studied **three** films from your chosen theme. One film should be from the **US Independent** list, one film should be from the **Non-US English Language** list and one film should be from the **Non-European Non-English Language** list below.

US Independent	Non-US English Language	Non-European Non-English Language
<p><i>Moonrise Kingdom</i> (2012). Directed by Wes Anderson. USA.</p>	<p><i>Room</i> (2015). Directed by Lenny Abrahamson. Canada / Ireland.</p>	<p><i>A Separation</i> (2011). Directed by Asghar Farhadi. Iran.</p>
<p><i>The Tree of Life</i> (2011). Directed by Terrence Malick. USA.</p>	<p><i>Animal Kingdom</i> (2010). Directed by David Michod. Australia.</p>	<p><i>Our Little Sister</i> (2015). Directed by Hirokazu Koreeda. Japan.</p>

- 5* Discuss how the films you have studied use narrative techniques to shape the spectator's understanding of 'family and home'. You must draw comparisons between the **three** films you have studied in your answer. **[35]**

The ability to develop effective responses to this question was contingent on two things: an explicit understanding of narrative techniques and the ability to compare across the three chosen films. In the main, candidates were able to offer meaningful comparisons across their three films. The most effective responses were ones where the candidates were able to focus on elements / characters / sequences from the chosen films and cross compare across the three films. This ability to focus on specifics lends itself to close textual analysis and the ability to demonstrate an understanding of the various micro-elements of film form which are a feature of all of the questions of this section. The other key element of effective responses to this question was the ability to discuss aspects of narrative techniques. Many, but not all, candidates saw an opportunity to apply the theories of Todorov and Propp here while others identified the opportunity to refer to narrative techniques learnt from screenwriting (which are a fundamental part of the specification) – in terms of looking at the different acts of the narrative or referring to elements such as 'inciting incidents' or 'main culmination' for example.

The less effective responses to this question were generally characterised by a lack of understanding of narrative techniques, and in the absence of this, such responses assumed a more descriptive and less analytical format. To make sure that candidates are fully exam ready, centres need to ensure candidates know all of the terminology as set out in the specification and can apply it to chosen examples from the films studied.

Question 6

- 6* Discuss the extent to which genre conventions are used to shape spectators' understanding of 'family and home' in the films you have studied. You must draw comparisons between the **three** films you have studied in your answer. **[35]**

This was the least popular question in the Family and Home sub-section. Effective answers to this question required an understanding of genre conventions and how this impacts on the spectator's reading of the film together with the ability to cross compare over the three films studied. The points about the quality of comparison and what is required for effective comparison are exactly as noted in the commentary to Q5 above. Examiners expected that candidates would be able to position the films studied into a genre and be able to elucidate what the conventions of that genre were and how much the chosen film used those conventions, and how this interplay with generic conventions and audience expectations impacted on spectator response. However, this was rarely the case with the responses which were seen to this. Candidates need to be fully prepared on the required range of content in order to be able to adapt to the specific demands of the question.

Question 7

Theme: Outsiders

You should have studied **three** films from your chosen theme. One film should be from the **US Independent** list, one film should be from the **Non-US English Language** list and one film should be from the **Non-European Non-English Language** list below.

US Independent	Non-US English Language	Non-European Non-English Language
<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.	<i>Yojimbo (The Bodyguard)</i> (1961). Directed by Akira Kurosawa. Japan.
<i>Elephant</i> (2003). Directed by Gus Van Sant. USA.	<i>The Piano</i> (1993). Directed by Jane Campion. New Zealand.	<i>Y Tu Mama Tambien</i> (2001). Directed by Alfonso Cuarón. Mexico.

- 7* 'How an outsider character is represented is determined by the wider context of the film.' Discuss this in relation to the films you have studied. You must draw comparisons between the **three** films you have studied in your answer. **[35]**

This was least popular of the two questions for this sub-section and few responses to the question were seen. So, it is difficult to offer generalisable points about candidates' performance here. The key points which can be made are that this question (like the others in this section) required comparison allied to a discussion of the films through the filter offered by the question. Discussion of wider contexts was more explicit in discussions of *A Girl Walks Home At Night* and *Elephant* but was much patchier with the other four films. Candidates' ability to analyse films and offer comparisons was as effective in answers to this question as the other questions, however, the absence of contextual understanding was a significant barrier to performance.

Question 8

- 8* Discuss how filmmakers encourage the spectator to adopt a particular point of view in relation to the outsider character(s) in the films you have studied. You must draw comparisons between the **three** films you have studied in your answer. [35]

Out of the two questions for the Outsiders sub-topic, this was one was markedly more popular. The large majority of candidates saw the opportunity to offer analysis of the films and the key outsider characters and how the use of film language codes characters as outsiders. The depth of analysis of outsider characters related to the knowledge and understanding of the range of micro-elements of film form and the candidate's ability to apply this to the chosen films. Most candidates could effectively discuss mise-en-scene and some aspects of cinematography, whereas the most effective responses could demonstrate this and in addition analyse some or all of the use of sound, editing and performance.

Question 9

Theme: Conflict

You should have studied **three** films from your chosen theme. One film should be from the **US Independent** list, one film should be from the **Non-US English Language** list and one film should be from the **Non-European Non-English Language** list below.

US Independent	Non-US English Language	Non-European Non-English Language
<i>The Hurt Locker</i> (2008). Directed by Kathryn Bigelow. USA.	<i>District 9</i> (2009). Directed by Neill Blomkamp. South Africa 2009.	<i>The Battle of Algiers</i> (1965). Directed by Gillo Pontecorvo. Algeria.
<i>Whiplash</i> (2015). Directed by Damien Chazelle. USA.	<i>Mad Max</i> (1979). Directed by George Miller. Australia.	<i>The Grandmaster</i> (2013). Directed by Wong Kar-Wai. China.

- 9* How far are the conflicts in the films you have studied a representation of social, cultural and political problems? You must draw comparisons between the **three** films you have studied in your answer. [35]

In addition to the comparative elements of the question, this question required candidates to be able to convey a sense of what the key conflict(s) are in each of the films studied and make connections to wider contextual issues. As with the general pattern of responses across this section, candidates were able to make comparative points across the three films. The points of differentiation, in terms of crediting responses, then mostly lay with determining how well candidates could identify what the key conflict(s) are in each of the films. For example, this took the form of the US / Iraqi conflict in *The Hurt Locker*, conflict between human and aliens in *District 9* and the more personalised conflict between Andrew and Fletcher in *Whiplash*. The second key point in differentiating candidate responses was determining how clearly and to what extent candidates could connect these conflicts to wider social, cultural or political problems. The best responses to this question could make clear connections to colonial conflict (political) in *The Battle of Algiers*, cultural / political conflict in *The Grandmaster* and social conflict in *The Hurt Locker* and *Whiplash*. The least effective responses were characterised by limited analysis of the chosen films and / or limited ability to situate conflicts within wider contextual backgrounds. Similar to a point made in a previous question commentary, this is another example of macro and micro – at the micro level, candidates need to be able to identify and explain the sites of conflict between individuals in each film and at the macro level they need to be able to link this to the big picture about what is driving conflict in each of the societies represented in the chosen films. To be able to do this requires a detailed contextual understanding of the societies and historical moments from which each of these films spring.

Question 10

- 10* Discuss how the films you have studied use micro-elements of film form to help shape the audience's understanding of each conflict. You must draw comparisons between the **three** films you have studied in your answer. [35]

This was the more popular of the two questions in this sub-section. It required comparison between the three films, analysis of the micro-elements and explanation of how the use of these contributes to audience understanding. As with all of the other questions in this section, there were three elements to the question, all of which had to be explicitly responded to in order to construct an effective response. As has been noted previously, candidates are generally comfortable with the comparative element of the question; and as with the other questions, the ability to generate comparisons between the three films was the foundation for an effective response. The key points for differentiating candidates' responses in terms of awarding marks were the demonstration of knowledge and understanding of the micro-elements of film form – and the breadth of that knowledge and the frequency of application across the response. Put simply, candidates who could demonstrate knowledge and understanding of a range of micro-elements (cinematography, mise-en-scene, sound, editing, performance) performed better than candidates who could not offer the same range of knowledge and understanding. The other key driver was determining how clearly candidates could connect their analysis of the use of micro-elements to audience response. The clearer and more frequent their commentary was in this regard, the more likely they were to be given the higher mark bands. The least effective responses were usually characterised by limiting discussion of the use of micro-elements to mise-en-scene and some aspects of cinematography and / or overlooking the necessity to forge explicit connections to audience response.

Exemplar 3

All 3 films use different microelements differently to align the audience with the "good" side or the protagonist, and portray the enemy a certain way. In "The Hurt Locker", cinematography is used very effectively to portray the enemy as suspicious or alien throughout the film. Even from the very start, the Iraqi people are viewed at from long shots where their faces are hard to make out, or through the point of view down the scope of one of the US soldier's rifles. This technique is repeated many times throughout the film. The effect this has is not only to portray the Iraqi people as the enemy,

But "The Battle of Algiers" also uses Mise-en-scène to portray the enemy a certain way, but the micro-element focused on is performance.

A more even portrayal of the French (enemy) and the Algerians are shown, as the audience engage a more with the enemy side than the Algerians. Therefore, this means the audience's alignment with the Algerian side is less forced, but it's still obvious we are meant to align with the Algerian's. This contrasts the "The Hurt Locker" as here we are aligning with the Algerian minority fighting the oppressive colonisation to the Western French

Across both segments of the response reproduced here there is clear evidence of a strong ability to compare and contrast two of the three films written about in the answer. The candidate demonstrates the ability to write about a range of micro-elements of film form, starting off with a discussion of cinematography in *The Hurt Locker* - which extends beyond what is reproduced here. The candidate supplements this later with the beginning of a discussion of performance in *The Battle of Algiers*. The entire response is a very strong, very detailed and sustained analysis of the three chosen films.

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