

**A LEVEL**

**Moderators' report**

# **FILM STUDIES**

**H410**

For first teaching in 2017

**H410/03/04 Summer 2023 series**

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## Introduction

Our moderators' 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.

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Following this you can also complete a subject-specific Focus on Internal Assessment course for your individual Cambridge Nationals qualification, covering marking and delivery.

### GCSE, A Level and Cambridge Technicals (2016)

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## General overview

This was the third session of H410/03/04 and the first without adaptations for dealing with the impact of the pandemic. Teachers and candidates are to be congratulated on the way in which they have come out of the pandemic and delivered a very high standard of work for this NEA component. Most centres engaged enthusiastically and creatively with the demands of the specification. It is clear that candidates have enjoyed their experience and have, as a result, produced some excellent products. Moderating their work has been a joy and at times it was difficult to remember that we were viewing student work.

Most candidates demonstrated skill in the application of the micro-elements of film form and centres are encouraged to continue to create opportunities for candidates to learn and practice effective use of these. In the best work, candidates engaged in thoughtful critical analysis of the set short films, carefully planned their productions based on the knowledge and understanding gained from their research, used their creativity and technical skills to produce artefacts demonstrating knowledge and understanding of the micro-elements of short film and its distinctive narrative form, and then critically evaluated their productions in relation to their analysis of the set short films.

For this series centres continued to take advantage of being able to upload work to the OCR Repository (the 03 option) with fewer submitting hard copies of work (04 postal) such as scrapbooks, ring binders, DVDs and memory sticks. When sending postal materials centres are asked to make sure that everything is clearly labelled and that memory sticks are carefully virus checked before posting. Whichever option is chosen, centres are requested to make sure that all files (virtual and physical) are clearly labelled with the candidate's number and name. Some centres continue to develop good practice by using blogs to present work for moderation, which enables both teachers and moderators to see the development of the candidate's work. This method is particularly suitable for presenting research and planning materials. Since the pandemic this practice seems to have slowed.

Centres continue to work effectively with the published marking criteria for this component, with many centres applying it accurately. In previous sessions, some centres were unclear about the assessment of the screenplay with storyboard option. All but a few now seem to have taken onboard that when assessing this option both the screenplay and storyboard should be marked for both knowledge and understanding of short film and its narrative form and micro-elements. A holistic approach should be taken in much the same way as if marking the short film option. The centres marking the screenplay for knowledge and understanding of short film and its narrative form and marking the storyboard separately for knowledge and understanding of micro-elements are now minimal.

Teacher commentary on the candidates' cover sheets continues to be really helpful with personalised comments reflecting the marking criteria. It is important that these comments are as clear as possible and refer to the candidate's work in relation to the appropriate level descriptors.

### **Preliminary activities**

While preliminary activities are not assessed it is a requirement that they be submitted for moderation; this allows both the teacher and moderator to authenticate the candidate's work. While most centres are encouraging candidates to engage with this essential process, many are not submitting a full range of research and planning. It is important that the candidate clearly demonstrates the full process of production. Over the years the amount and quality of these materials seems to have decreased, in many cases to the detriment of the final product. Candidates are not marked down for non-submission of research and planning but where this is not completed, they effectively self-penalise through products that do not demonstrate sufficient knowledge and understanding.

The most effective presentations of research and planning continue to be online, showing a clear sense of process. Some centres submitted a few printed pages describing either the planning completed or the

final production process. Centres could consider doing more research and planning to inform better end products. Preliminary activities could also include opportunities to acquire and develop the skills required to accomplish the technical aspects of production. Research, especially analysis of the set short films, is a requirement of the specification and essential to informing candidates' knowledge and understanding of what they are producing. For this component centres should discourage research into feature films and their narrative forms as this often distracts from the distinctive short film form.

## Production work

This series has seen a swing in favour of the short film option after the predominance of screenplays during the pandemic. Many centres have offered both options with most of their candidates taking up the short film option. Centres continue to deal well with assessing both options in parallel. The production work submitted demonstrated varying levels of understanding of the short film and its distinctive narrative form, but generally candidates seem to have a greater understanding of form than in previous years.

## Short film

There continues to be some excellent examples of short films produced for this option. Some of the top-level products would hold their own at film festivals. The level of creativity, combined with genuine understanding of the narrative form, is a real joy to see. The most successful short films continued to be demonstrably influenced by aspects of the set short films and had a clear three act structure with a narrative resolution. There were fewer "experimental" films this series, with candidates clearly enjoying working within identified conventions. A dominant feature of the set short films is that the story arc is complete, and many candidates are now identifying this. Following the three act structure is to be encouraged unless candidates can challenge the form in a sophisticated way and are able to articulate their understanding through their evaluation.

## Screenplays with digital stills

This option requires that candidates produce a "screenplay for a new short film (10 pages, equivalent to 10 minutes of screen time) including a **digitally photographed** storyboard of a key section of the screenplay, illustrating, through careful construction of mise-en-scène and shot selection, how the screenplay would be realised (20 digitally photographed key frames)".

Candidates produced some creative and technically well-constructed work for this option. The most effective screenplays were easy to read as complete narratives and included direction as well as clearly indicated dialogue. Candidates who used screenwriting software for this purpose were best able to present their ideas.

Some storyboards were excellent representations of the screenplays and included a range of appropriate directions, including sound and dialogue, as well as the required digital images. The photography for this element should be equivalent to the cinematography of the filmed option, showing an understanding of framing, positioning, mise-en-scène (including lighting), colour, and direction of actors. A significant minority of candidates did not produce the required number of photographic images. Some continued with the previously allowed adaptation of mixing hand-drawn, found, and photographic images. Centres should note that this is no longer permitted; it was a temporary measure to facilitate production during pandemic restrictions. Centres must also discourage candidates from using AI to produce images for their storyboards as these are not considered to have been produced by the candidate.

Storyboards should be formatted appropriately with a maximum of two images per A4 page and images should be presented in landscape format, preferably 4:3 or 16:9, to represent a film still. Some candidates still did not seem to understand the importance of aspect ratio and presented their key frames in a variety of ratios.

## Evaluation

Overall, evaluations were detailed and allowed candidates to reflect on the set short films and how they had influenced the development of their own work. Many evaluations referred to the influence of at least one film from the set list, but often more. In some cases, the way the set films had influenced the candidate's production seemed superficial or only relating to vague general points. Some candidates referred to the short films in detail, but then did not successfully relate them to their own productions. Others drew too heavily on the analysis of feature films and so applied conventions that were not appropriate to the short film format. Candidates can draw on analysis of short films outside of the collection but should be encouraged to use the collection as their primary reference. Stronger evaluations often used stills from the set short films and their own productions to support their written analysis. This is good practice and should be encouraged.

The evaluation element continued to be the most accurately marked, with teachers appropriately rewarding candidates when they wrote with precision and sophistication and giving lower marks to work that was descriptive, repetitive and lacking in detail.

Candidates who did well generally:	Candidates who did less well generally:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• applied learnt skills, knowledge and understanding to their products</li> <li>• completed a range of appropriate research and planning, including analysis of the set short films</li> <li>• employed the distinctive codes and conventions of short film effectively</li> <li>• for their storyboards, constructed a range of well-considered photographic images</li> <li>• effectively evaluated their own work in relation to the set short films.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• did not develop their technical skills</li> <li>• did not apply their prior learning to their productions</li> <li>• did not complete appropriate research and planning</li> <li>• did not apply appropriate codes and conventions</li> <li>• used mixed-medium, including hand-drawn, images for their storyboards</li> <li>• described the process of production rather than evaluating their own work in relation to the set short films.</li> </ul>

## Avoiding potential malpractice

Centres should make sure that all photographic imagery is made by the candidate. This is especially important to the storyboard for those following the screenplay option. The specification requires 20 photographic images to demonstrate the candidates' understanding of the micro-elements of film making. These must not be hand-drawn images, found images, or AI generated images. The JCQ's guidance on the use of AI in assessments can be found [here](#).

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