

Non-testers: Read both sides & highlight/underline all information NOT related to the formatting of the assignment. This side is the assignment; back side is the yearly notes to teachers.

Testing in IB Film: Critically/Close Read both sides; I expect that you will have questions, write them down as part of your critical reading. (This side is the assignment; back side is the yearly notes to teachers)

The aim of the independent study is to encourage students to engage in some depth with a cinematic tradition that is unfamiliar to their own culture.

Students must produce a script for a complete short documentary production exploring an aspect of film theory or film history, based on the study of films from more than one country. The documentary should be targeted at an audience of film students in the 14 to 18 years age range. Among the topics students may choose to investigate are:

- genre
- theme
- direction
- use of sound
- mise en scene
- editing
- lighting
- cinematography
- gender

The topic should be discussed primarily in cinematic terms.

The prime voice of the documentary must clearly be that of the student, who will also act as the narrator, on- screen host and/or voice-over. Students must ensure that any comments or ideas they attribute to celebrities or others, such as experts, are fully supported by detailed references in the annotated list of sources.

Students at SL must make reference to a minimum of two films in their independent study. The chosen films must originate from more than one country. At SL the study is not necessarily comparative.

The independent study must be presented in the form of a written dossier composed of the following three items.

1. Rationale
2. Script
3. Annotated list of sources

1. The rationale must offer a brief, reasoned explanation of the concerns of the topic in no more than 100 words.

2. The script must clearly indicate the relationship between the audio and visual elements of the documentary, employing an established documentary format such as “side -by-side” columns for video and audio components. All descriptions of video and audio elements must be both detailed and specific. Scripts must be 8–10 pages long at SL, using an accepted size of paper (for example, A4 or US letter) and must use 12-point Courier font (not in block capitals) and single spacing. It is important that the student treats a topic of film history or film theory in cinematic rather than literary terms.

3. The annotated list of sources should refer to all materials used in researching the topic and all materials used in the documentary itself, including films from which extracts will be shown and quotations from experts or academics. Annotations should give the source and/or location of the reference. A comment on the relevance of the source must be included.

Assessment of this component is based solely on the written script and the rationale. Actual films or film sequences are not acceptable.

As part of the learning process, teachers can give advice to students on a first draft of the independent study. Advice on improving the work can be given, but this first draft must not be heavily annotated or edited by the teacher. Constant drafting and redrafting is not allowed, and the next version handed to the teacher after the first draft must be the final one.

The Independent Study 2017 Subject Report

→ The range and suitability of the work submitted

The key aspect of this task is to engage with a question of cinematic theory or history. Therefore, students should have had a thorough grounding in both areas so they can make informed choices about topics. A significant number of students choose naturally self-limiting topics, such as car chases, fight movies, crime and romance; or sometimes a technical focus like music or colour. It is vital that these choices be linked to larger film movements, theories or genres, such as film noir or gaze theory to name but two. In a similar manner, if a student chooses a more thematic topic, like “coming of age”, it is vital the study is done through the prism of film and not merely plot and character. So, aspects like lighting, colour, mise en scene, framing, editing, proxemics (to name a few) are all part of film language that need to be considered.

This approach of focusing on filmic depictions or linking with theory or history will give students the opportunity to achieve higher marks by enhancing the scope and depth of the argument. The choice of films or film cultures is also critical, particularly the engagement with non-Western film cultures. Comparing British and American film cultures is not an expansive range. Students should also be aware that it is permissible to do “well worn” topics, such as the Western, German Expressionism, Horror and Animation. There is no descriptor for originality of topic or thought or insight. So, try a familiar topic with a fresh and in-depth approach.

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

Poorly expressed rationales are of continuing concern in this task. It is not a summary of the work, but needs to set the framework and areas of reference for the argument. Personal preferences, like “I’ve loved Disney movies since I was a child” are irrelevant and a distraction. This was written last year and worth repeating: A good rationale is one that is anchored in cinema history or theory, avoids personal preferences, is expressed in film language and has a clear and achievable range and purpose.

The best studies opened out the topic into logical and related sub-points. Although not a requirement at standard level, linking between the films is encouraged because such thinking is only going to expand and enrich the scope and depth of the argument being presented. It should be emphasised that the markband mentions “argument” implying that the candidate needs to take a critical standpoint. So those candidates who merely present plot summaries or scene descriptions are self-penalising with this descriptor.

The focus needs to be deepened on audience engagement. Remember that the viewer is a film literate peer so the commentary should not be “dumbed down” by an overly colloquial and generalised approach. It is strongly recommended that students read aloud their commentary which should sound like an informed and passionate conversation. Specific film terms should be used often and with precision. Students need to be mindful of the following oversights or errors, which limit audience engagement:

- A misalignment, or even worse, neglect of providing a balance between the audio and visual columns.
- An unstructured or incoherent structure which makes it difficult to follow the thread and spine of the argument.
- Merely giving a history lesson or technical instruction about cinema without relating knowledge to the development of the proposition unveiled in the rationale. Text analysis of clips or scenes from the chosen films should feature prominently as proof of the developing thesis.

The annotated bibliography needs to be more than an afterthought or a shopping list of sources. The best candidates could interweave critical opinion from others with their own justified opinions. They also went beyond predictable and often superficial sources like Wikipedia and IMDB. There is now a deep critical range of sources candidates can now draw upon to enrich the depth of their argument. The majority neglect this.

→ Recommendations for the teaching of future candidates

The independent study needs to be planned for over the two years duration of studying the film course. It should be viewed as the culmination of a thorough examination of film theory and history, as outlined in the film guide. Teachers need to ensure that students have been prepared by scaffolding tasks which develop a deep understanding of content and skills in using the required format. This task should not come as a surprise to a student any more than the expectation of just giving students a camera will mean they can make a short film. Unfortunately, some students are ill-prepared by poor teaching. Students should not fail to adhere to the formal requirements, but a significant number do. Students should receive informed feedback on their choice of topic, selection of films and a detailed evaluation of their draft; it appears that a significant number do not. It is also strongly recommended that teachers put students in touch with academic sources of a more scholarly nature to enrich the depth of argument. The best students are capable of interrogating the worth and relevance of sources in the annotations of their bibliography in light of the skills developed in Theory of Knowledge. Standard level students in particular should realise that examiners do not expect inferior or weaker argument compared with higher level.

It is worth repeating the advice given to standard level candidates last year as this problem continues: It is recommended that standard level candidates try to go beyond the minimum required two films in developing their Independent Study. The evidence is that if the paper is restricted to just these minimum requirements, candidates struggle to achieve scope and depth required. In both higher level and standard level, candidates who embrace the investigation of a question beyond the limitations of the required films better fulfil the intentions of the task and score accordingly.