

External assessment: Independent study

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. (*Film guide* 2008 24)

Clarifying the assessment task

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

- Rationale, which clearly specifies the theoretical or historical topic
- A documentary script (that is two column-script in vertical format)
- Annotated list of sources

The documentary should be targeted at an audience of film students in the 14 to 18 years age range. Examples of the topics students may choose to investigate are outlined below.

Please note: All examples given here are for clarification only, and teachers are encouraged to work from their areas of strength in both history and theory.

The musical genre

A genre theory examination of the codes and conventions of the musical film and the way they are expressed through cinematic techniques in different cultures.

- At standard level (SL), the study could be Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly's *Singin' in the Rain* (1952) and Ashutosh Gowariker's *Lagaan: Once Upon A Time In India* (2001).
- At higher level (HL), these films could be studied in addition to Takashi Miike's *The Happiness of the Katakuris* (2002) and Baz Luhrmann's *Moulin Rouge!* (2001).

The influence of expressionism

A historical examination of the influence of the Expressionist movement in Germany on later film genres, films and their directors.

- At SL, the study could be of Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1920) and Tim Burton's *Edward Scissorhands* (1990).
- At HL, these films could be studied in addition to Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) and *Scarlet Street* (1945).

Images of women in action

A gender theory investigation of the way women are portrayed in sports films, particularly in terms of their treatment by the camera and in the light of "the male gaze".

- At SL, the study could be Gurinder Chadha's *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002) and Robert Towne's *Personal Best* (1982).
- At HL, these films could be studied in addition to Penny Marshall's *A League Of Their Own* (1992) and Omung Kumar's *Mary Kom* (2014).

The outsider

An auteur study of how representations of "the outsider" are constructed with particular reference to the *jidaigeki/Chanbara* films of Akira Kurosawa, and their Western remakes by John Sturges (and, at HL, Sergio Leone).

- At SL, the study could be of *The Seven Samurai* (1954) and *The Magnificent Seven* (1960).
- At HL, these two films could be studied in addition to *Yojimbo* (1961) and *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964).

The male gaze

Laura Mulvey's feminist film theory applied across different film cultures.

- At SL, the study could be of Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill: Vol 1* (2003) and Takashi Miike's *Audition* (1999).
- At HL, these two films could be studied in addition to Luc Besson's *La Femme Nikita* (1990) and Dennis Dimster's *Double Identity* (2009).

Development of noir

Use formalist theory to analyse the historical development and changes in film language from noir to neo-noir.

- At SL, the study could be of Andrew Lau's and Alan Mak's *Infernal Affairs* (2002) and Carol Reed's *The Third Man* (1949).
- At HL, these two films could be studied in addition to Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) and Jules Dassin's *Rififi* (1955).

Focus on editing

How editing techniques are used to blur the line between fantasy and reality for an audience.

- At SL, the study could be of Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* (2001) and Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *Amélie* (2001).
- At HL, these two films could be studied in addition to Wes Anderson's *Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014) and Sam Mendes' *American Beauty* (1999).

What are examiners looking for?

Examiners are looking for evidence that the audience has in some way been enlightened. To what extent have the rationale and argument been explored and developed coherently with some depth and complexity? The rationale should be clear-cut and interesting, firmly rooted in cinema history or theory. The script should read like a visual documentary, not an essay. The student will need incisive and well supported analysis skills, complete command of film language and the required audio-visual format. Effective integration (and comparison at HL) of a variety of films, supported by substantial depth of research should be present. The student voice should be clear, accessible and informed.

The audio-visual format

The visual column should describe what we see, preferably in film language. The audio should be the student's voice as narrator and make insightful analysis and observations. Good independent studies will "cut" meaningfully from one scene to the other in unfolding the thesis or argument. Average independent studies will string scenes together. Students should pay attention to the minimum requirements in terms of number of pages and page layout. Time codes of scenes from selected films or for the student's script are not necessary.

Research

An annotated bibliography is part of the requirements and the best students will evaluate the relevance of these resources in regard to their rationale. A deep knowledge of genre, theory, practice or technique is expected. The independent study is not four text analyses (or two in the case of SL) linked together by a common thread. Appendices should not be submitted.

The student voice

An informed and engaged commentary is ideal. Attributed quotes are permissible, but guest or expert narrators should not be used. The narration should not be a mini essay. It should connect with an educated film audience of the student's peers in tone and content, but still be film literate. This obliges the student to use film language and have substantial evidence of text analysis, which shows how the thesis being argued is presented cinematically.

Guidance for completing the assessment

In this assessment task the students are required to move beyond their own observations of film language (primary research) into secondary research in order to support their ideas with evidence from film academics, scholars, cineastes and practitioners. The following key questions may help students in examining each film.

Who made this film?

In general, most students will approach this question from the perspective of the auteur theory. Students should understand that they have accepted a theoretical position when they do this.

What can we tell about the film-makers?

Frequently, this question will lead students to deeper questions of film history. However, it might also lead them back to a consideration of the style of the film, since they will begin by making judgments about the film-makers by looking at the structure of what they have created. When students do this, they are employing formalist film theory (analysing the film by looking at the effects the film-makers wanted to achieve with their practical work from initial design through shooting to the final edit). This is called deconstruction, taking the individual elements apart in order to look at how the film-makers communicate.

So, answering this question will involve a student's own viewing of the film (primary research) and usually secondary research too (looking through print, internet, and other media sources for information from academics, scholars, cineastes and practitioners).

For whom was this film made? How does it address its audience? What is the nature of our engagement with the film?

Frequently, these questions will focus students on issues of film history and film movements.

What outside influences can we perceive in terms of finance, ownership, institution, and sociocultural context?

This question touches on both film history (the reason why films are made) and representation (the way history, institutions, and especially people, are represented by film, which is what gives film its sociological context). Ownership and institution will have profound effects on how issues and people are represented. A deconstruction of film technique will be employed when considering parts of this question. However, when sociological contexts are examined, there should be an examination of how social institutions are represented, how people are represented, and what their power relationships are.

To what other works might it be connected?

This question leads students to consider large questions of both history and theory. For example, if the focus is the auteur theory, a student might consider how a collection of films by the same director are connected, or equally as important, how the work of different directors might influence the work of one specific director. If a student's focus is genre history, he or she might consider how the evolution of conventions and audience expectations have influenced acting portrayals or set design in modern film.

How do you know?

This is certainly the most important question. In all cases, in this section of the course, students will be drawing on their own primary research (the viewing of films and textual analysis) and on secondary research (the work of academics, scholars, cineastes and practitioners).

Frequently asked questions

Do the different films required for analysis for the independent study have to be from different countries of origin?

The films selected should be from at least two different countries. At HL, the four films could be from four different countries, or three from one country and the fourth from a different one, for example. It is important that the films selected are treated equally in the independent study.

What is the correct format for the independent study?

The correct script format for the independent study has two columns, which allow the visual and auditory components to be put side by side. The descriptions of video and audio elements must be both detailed and specific, as well as adequately linked. Scripts must be 8–10 pages long at SL and 12–15 pages at HL, using an accepted size of paper (for example, A4 or US letter) and students are required to use the 12-point Courier font (not in block capitals) and single spacing.

How do you define the country of origin of a film?

Generally, dedicated websites like IMDB display the film's country of origin. This is nearly always the country where the main production company of the film is based. However, in the case of an international co-production that involves several production companies located in different countries, students are advised to select a different film with a less ambiguous origin.

Can the student create a fictional narrator for the independent study?

No. 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. Existing experts or celebrities may appear in the documentary, but only when students ensure that any comments or ideas that they attribute to these guest speakers are fully supported by detailed references in the annotated list of sources, allowing the examiner to verify them in case of doubt.