Film studies

GCSE subject content

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The content for GCSE film studies

Introduction

1.   GCSE subject content sets out the knowledge, understanding and skills common to all specifications in a given subject. Together with the assessment objectives, it provides the framework within which the awarding organisations create the detail of their specification, so ensuring the possibilities for progression to AS and A level or employment.

Aims and objectives

2.   GCSE specifications in film studies must offer a coherent and rigorous course of study. All specifications will enable students to develop knowledge and understanding of:

- the ways in which meanings and responses are generated through film
- a contrasting, culturally diverse range of films from different national contexts
- film as an aesthetic[1] medium
- the relationship between film and film technology over time
- how films reflect the social, cultural and political contexts in which they are made

3.   Specifications will also enable students to apply their knowledge and understanding of film to filmmaking and screenwriting.

Subject content

4.   GCSE specifications in film studies must enable students to demonstrate knowledge, understanding and skills in the exploration and analysis of film and to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of film by creating a genre-based extract either from a film or from a screenplay.

Knowledge and understanding

5.   GCSE specifications must require students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of at least six critically recognised, culturally and historically significant[2]

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[1] "aesthetic": the way a film's visual and aural features are used to create essentially non-narrative dimensions of film, including the film's 'look'.

[2] "critically recognised, culturally and historically significant": critically acclaimed through awards or nominations at major film awards (Oscars, BAFTAs) and major film festivals (Cannes, Berlin, Venice and Sundance); critically celebrated by the academy of film scholars and serious critics in the British Film Institute's and American Film Institute's ten yearly polls of the best films and the annual surveys carried out

feature-length[3] films and the contexts in which they were made. The six films will be selected from the following:

- at least two films produced within the US, at least one of which will be a Hollywood studio film produced between 1930 and 1960 and one will be an independent[4] film
- at least two English language films produced outside the US, at least one of which will be a British film
- at least one non-English language film

6.   At least one film will be a genre film, conforming to the quality threshold noted in paragraph 5, note 2, at least one film will be contemporary[5] and at least one film will have been produced between 1961 and 1990.

7.   GCSE specifications must require students to compare two of the set films in terms which include the films' contexts, narrative construction and the ways meanings and responses are generated (as stipulated in paragraphs 8 to 17).

8.   GCSE specifications must require students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of:

- the concept of genre including the conventions of genre based on iconography, characters, narratives and themes and the significance of genre to film producers and film audiences
- representation including the way films offer representations of gender, ethnicity, age and different cultures

9.   GCSE specifications must require students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of how the films studied reflect key developments in the history of film as well as the institutional (including how films are funded, how the level of production budget affects the kind of film made and the main stages of film production), technological, social, cultural, historical and, where relevant, political contexts in which they are made. Students must in addition gain a knowledge of the most significant developments in film including silent film, the rise of Hollywood, the development of sound, the introduction of colour film, widescreen technology, 3D film, portable cameras and steadicam technology and the role of computer generated imagery in film.

10.   GCSE specifications must require students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the following aspects of cinematography, including lighting, in the films studied:

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by British Film Institute since 2007; and culturally and historically significant as featured in standard academic accounts of the medium. Awarding organisation film choices will be accompanied by a rationale to justify their inclusion against these criteria.
[3] "feature-length": considered, for the purposes of specification design, to be a film of at least 80 minutes.
[4] "independent film": at GCSE, a film produced outside the major commercial structures of, for example, Hollywood or Bollywood, but which is intended for cinematic release targeting a niche market.
[5] "contemporary": released in UK from 2010 to present.

- camera shots including extreme close-ups, close-ups, medium shots, long shots, extreme long shots, high, low and 60° angle shots, tilt and aerial shots
- camera movement including pan, tracking, dolly and the use of steadicam technology
- lighting including position and intensity
- framing created through distance, angle, level and mobility and how it directs spectator attention
- the typical meanings associated with all of the above aspects of cinematography including lighting
- how each of the above contributes to the portrayal of characters and settings
- how cinematography can combine with mise-en-scène or sound to underline meaning
- how each of the above generates spectator responses

11.   GCSE specifications must require students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the following aspects of mise-en-scène in the films studied:

- settings, props, costume and make-up
- the typical meanings associated with each of the above aspects of mise-en-scène
- how mise-en-scène conventionally conveys realism
- how settings contribute to the themes and issues a film raises
- how props contribute to character and/or narrative development in the films studied
- how costume and make-up convey character
- how each of the above aspects of mise-en-scène generates spectator responses

12.   GCSE specifications must require students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the following aspects of editing in the films studied:

- types of edit (cut, dissolve, fade)
- the principles of continuity editing (shot-reverse shot)
- cross-cutting
- pace of editing
- visual effects (created in post-production)
- the typical meanings associated with all of the above aspects of editing
- how continuity editing establishes relationships between characters
- how cross-cutting contributes to the portrayal of character
- how editing contributes to narrative development in the films studied
- how editing, including visual effects, generates spectator responses

13.   GCSE specifications must require students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the following aspects of sound in the films studied:

- diegetic and non-diegetic sound, including ambient sound, sound effects and sound bridges
- the typical meanings associated with diegetic sound including how it contributes to character and narrative development
- the typical meanings associated with non-diegetic sound including how music motifs convey character and different types of music contribute to the narrative
- how non-diegetic sound in particular contributes to the themes and issues a film raises
- how sound, particularly music, whether diegetic or non-diegetic, generates spectator responses in the films studied

14.   GCSE specifications must require students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the following aspects of narrative:

- the distinction between plot and story
- the role of the screenplay in conveying plot and its realisation in visual terms
- cause and effect as a structural principle of narrative
- narrative techniques including ellipsis and withholding/releasing
- narrative conventions in screenwriting including three act structure, plot points, inciting incident and climax
- an interpretation of the narrative
- the role of character and character function in narrative
- how all of the above bullet points contribute to narrative development
- the themes and issues raised by narrative
- how narrative generates spectator responses

15.   GCSE specifications must require students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the aesthetic qualities of film, their significance and how filmmakers create aesthetic effects through specific film sequences.

16.   GCSE specifications must require students to study specialist writing on film, including film criticism[6], to develop their knowledge and understanding of the films they study and the key elements of film.

17.   GCSE specifications must also require students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of subject-specific terminology associated with the subject content set out in this document (paragraphs 4 – 16).

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[6] "specialist writing on film, including film criticism": writing by film specialists, academics, practitioners and/or critics on film, including articles and reviews on film published in specialist film magazines, specialist books on film and text books. A list of required reading and/or a selection of writing in support of films selected will be provided by the awarding organisation.

Skills

18.   GCSE specifications must require students to develop the skills to:

- analyse how films are constructed and how they reflect the institutional, technological, social, cultural, historical and (where relevant) political contexts in which they are made, drawing on the film criticism studied see paragraph 16 and note 8).
- compare two films (as stipulated in paragraph 7)

19.   GCSE specifications must require students to apply knowledge and understanding of genre, as set out in paragraph 8, and of the relevant aspects of cinematography, mise-en-scène, sound and editing, as set out in paragraphs 10 to 13, to the construction of a genre-based extract from a film or screenplay to a brief set by the awarding organisation. Film and screenplay extracts must be individually produced.[7] Work will include:

- production: a genre-based extract from a film or screenplay

  - an extract from a genre-based film or screenplay to a brief to be set by the awarding organisation
  - the screenplay must be accompanied by a shooting script of a key section from the screenplay

- analysis and evaluation

  - an evaluative analysis of the production in relation to other films and screenplays that have been professionally produced

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[7] Unassessed students and others may act in, or appear in, the film extract. In addition, unassessed students and others may operate lighting and sound equipment under the direction of the assessed candidate if required.