

# Film: Subject-specific guidance

See also: EE generic guide and EE Teacher support material

## Overview

An extended essay (EE) in film gives students an opportunity to undertake an in-depth investigation into a topic in film of particular interest to them.

Students should undertake the study of at least two films in consideration of their chosen topic.

Complex skills are involved in the interpretation of film. The EE requires students to develop and demonstrate a critical understanding of how and why film texts:

- tell stories
- create emotional responses
- give information.

In the spirit of intercultural understanding promoted by the IB, students should study film in a broad international context (ie beyond Hollywood).

## Choice of topic

Students will need guidance in their choice of topic.

The topic must clearly focus on film or television, rather than a literary, sociological, political or historical issue.

For example, a study of film adaptations of Shakespeare's plays or of classic novels must not become a literature essay about the plays or the novels. It must be a discussion about the films from a filmic point of view.

The topic needs to offer enough scope for a substantial essay without being too general. Crucially, it needs to capture the interest and enthusiasm of the student.

The research question must give the essay a sharp focus within the topic and the student has to be perfectly clear about the following.

- What arguments or points of view will they develop or prove in the course of the essay?
- What needs to be said about the topic?
- How will they use evidence to support the ideas under discussion?
- What evidence will be appropriate?

If addressing a topic already addressed in academic studies, students must examine existing views and argue against them to some degree. Earlier studies must be used as a basis for discussion and not be merely replicated.

Students must also avoid:

- being mainly dependent upon summarizing secondary sources
- approaches that are essentially narrative or descriptive
- approaches that are anecdotal
- being unfocused and too general
- material that is more appropriate to other subject areas.

Students should ensure that they have sufficient sources to support their EE and can access them when needed. Early planning is essential.

## Treatment of the topic

Clarity, coherence of ideas and attention to detail are all necessary to achieve an effective EE. Students need a well-formulated research question that allows them to develop an EE that is cogent, rational and economical in expression. Their ideas should be supported by relevant sources and specific reference to film and/or television texts.

## Primary sources

For primary sources, there must be detailed references to at least one film (or major television work).

Primary sources include:

- the film(s)
- the script
- the screenplay
- the score
- personal contact or personal correspondence with individuals involved in making the film.

Surveys and questionnaires undertaken by the students themselves should be avoided as they are unlikely to offer statistically valid information.

## Secondary sources

For secondary sources, students must make close reference to relevant sources (print and other media) related to the question, such as:

- journal and magazine articles
- reviews
- DVD “extras”
- promotional material
- internet material.

## Use of sources

Students should:

- evaluate the arguments in the sources rather than simply repeating what they say

- explore a broad range of ideas from different sources, rather than relying heavily on one, or on a number of items from a single author.

## Use of visual materials

An EE may be enhanced by visual materials, such as:

- drawings
- diagrams
- storyboard frames
- screenshots
- camera layouts.

However, such material must not be used merely for decorative purposes.

Visual and other source materials must be properly referenced and acknowledged at the end of the essay.

In addition, students' EEs must:

- focus on developing, supporting and illustrating their argument, rather than on plot summary or character description
- use filmic terminology accurately and appropriately.

The most successful essays are often those with a clear voice that transmits the student's enthusiasm and scholarship with clarity and conviction. The EE should reflect the student's coherent and informed engagement with their chosen topic.

## Examples of topics, research questions and suggested approaches

Once students have identified their topic and written their research question, they can decide how to research their answer. They may find it helpful to write a statement outlining their broad approach. These examples are for guidance only.

Topic	<b>Clint Eastwood and the Western</b>
Research question	To what extent can Clint Eastwood be said to have resurrected the dying genre of the Western?
Approach	An investigation and discussion of whether Clint Eastwood re-established the Western as a credible genre with specific reference to <i>The Outlaw Josey Wales</i> (1976), <i>Pale Rider</i> (1985) and <i>Unforgiven</i> (1992).

Topic	<b>Neo-noir in colour</b>
Research question	To what extent can the films <i>Chinatown</i> (1974), <i>Blade Runner</i> (1982) and <i>Blood Simple</i> (1984) be classified as film noir even though they were filmed in colour?
Approach	An investigation into the origins and characteristics of films classified as film noir and an assessment of how far these films can be defined as belonging to the same genre or style.

Topic	<b>African film and cultural independence</b>
Research question	To what extent have the films of Ousmane Sembène retained indigenous content and style in the face of pressures to make films more acceptable to the international market?
Approach	An investigation into how Ousmane Sembène’s films achieved and have maintained international status in world cinema, with particular reference to the narrative and visual style of <i>Xala</i> (1974), <i>Guelwaar</i> (1992) and <i>Moolaade</i> (2004).

Topic	<b>Ang Lee as an international film-maker</b>
Research question	To what extent do the films of Ang Lee enable him to be considered a truly international film-maker?
Approach	An investigation into what has enabled Ang Lee to become a significant international director with films from very different cultural contexts, with particular reference to <i>Yin shi nan nu</i> ( <i>Eat Drink Man Woman</i> ) (1994), <i>Sense and Sensibility</i> (1995), <i>Wo hu cang long</i> – ( <i>Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon</i> ) (2000), <i>Brokeback Mountain</i> (2005) and <i>Life of Pi</i> (2012).

Topic	<b>Wes Anderson as auteur</b>
Research question	To what extent can Wes Anderson be considered an auteur?
Approach	An investigation into the origins of auteur theory and a discussion of whether Wes Anderson’s films qualify him to be considered an auteur, with specific references to <i>Rushmore</i> (1998), <i>The Royal Tenenbaums</i> ( 2001), <i>Moonrise Kingdom</i> (2012) and <i>The Grand Budapest Hotel</i> (2014).

Topic	<b>Film and feminism</b>
Research question	To what extent can theories of the male gaze and feminism be explored filmically?
Approach	An investigation and discussion of the theories of the male gaze and feminism with particular reference to <i>The Piano</i> (Jane Campion 1993), <i>Amelie</i> (Jean-Pierre Jeunet 2001), <i>The Hours</i> (Stephen Daldry 2002) and <i>Brave</i> (Mark Andrews 2012).

## An important note on “double-dipping”

Students must ensure that their EE does not duplicate other work they are submitting for the Diploma Programme. For example, the EE must not be based on the same films the student has studied for any assessment tasks as part of the course.

## The film EE and internal assessment

An EE in film is not an extension of the internal assessment (IA) task. Students must ensure that they understand the differences between the two.

**Supervisors play an important role in guiding students on these distinctions. Students risk their diploma if academic misconduct is detected.**

## Interpreting the EE assessment criteria

### Criterion A: Focus and method

(Strands: Topic, Research question, Methodology)

Students must choose a topic that:

- focuses specifically on film (or television)
- is of sufficient substance to merit a 4,000-word academic essay
- can be considered adequately within that word limit.

Students must establish the filmic context and significance of the topic.

Students' research question must be:

- specific and sharply focused
- presented as a statement or a suitable proposition for discussion.

Topics should not be too broad. For example, students can consider three or four films in relation to a genre, but not attempt to make the genre itself their topic. The topic should also not be too narrow (eg just one film).

Students should draw on a wide range of relevant, substantial sources.

**Primary sources:** students should choose film (or television) texts that are appropriate for addressing the research question and topic. They should be capable of sustaining discussion.

**Secondary sources:** these should support the ideas discussed or enable the student to present opposing views.

Students should produce a diligent, serious and personal piece of research that is appropriate specifically to the study of film or television and not any other discipline. For example, a study of the film or television adaptations of classic literary texts must not become an essay about the texts from a literary point of view but must focus on the films as films.

## Criterion B: Knowledge and understanding

(Strands: Context, Subject-specific terminology and concepts)

There should be clarity and coherence in the knowledge and understanding that students display. They should beware of topics that lead to a narrative approach or a simple listing of facts.

The student must have a substantial body of knowledge at their disposal with which to write a discursive essay and reflect a range of arguments. The student must be able to select and employ accurate information to establish the points of view expressed.

Students must use appropriate subject-specific language to present their ideas and analyse, discuss and argue.

Discussion should be open and various opinions presented. The student should, however, reflect their own personal engagement with the topic.

## Criterion C: Critical thinking

(Strands: Research, Analysis and Discussion and evaluation)

The student should be logical, rational and economical in expressing points of discussion. Their ideas must be supported by clear and detailed references to relevant film and/or television texts.

Sources should be considered analytically and discussed, not necessarily agreed with. Students should refrain from using the essay simply to reaffirm their preconceived ideas.

Within the primary sources there should be reference to more than one film (or major television work).

The student's research needs to reflect aspects of film history and/or theory.

Students must be able to construct, present and support a specific area of discussion. They must offer their own personal arguments rather than simply relying upon summarizing the views of others. However, their arguments must be rationally justified and based upon careful research.

Students are also encouraged to view secondary sources with a critical eye and not take the views of critics and scholars as beyond careful scrutiny. Students should be aware that some sources may be unreliable. Students must carefully evaluate their research source material in order to develop a rounded argument. Their evaluation of sources should not be presented in a separate section but be fully integrated into the body of the argument itself.

Students should not present EEs that are too narrative or descriptive in approach. A careful choice of topic and research question will help to avoid this.

Similarly, EEs should not merely explore characters and themes without careful analysis of how these are shown in filmic terms. The essence should be a discussion of how and why particular meanings are constructed filmically.

## Criterion D: Presentation

(Strands: Structure, Layout)

This criterion relates to the extent to which the essay conforms to accepted academic standards in relation to how research papers should be presented. It also relates to how well these elements support the reading, understanding and evaluation of the essay.

Illustrative material such as screenshots, sketches, film posters and storyboard frames can enhance the essay. However, they should only be used if they:

- are directly relevant to the research question
- contribute towards the understanding of the argument
- are of a good graphic quality.

They should appear as close to their first mention as possible. If they are used merely for decorative purposes then no credit can be given and this may detract from the flow of discussion.

Any material that is not original must be carefully acknowledged, with specific attention paid to the acknowledgment and referencing of quotes and ideas. This acknowledgment and referencing is applicable to audiovisual material, text, graphs and data published in print and electronic sources. It also applies to any film or screenshot or film sequence referred to in the essay. If the referencing does not meet the minimum standard as indicated in the guide (name of author, date of publication, title of source and page numbers as applicable), and is not consistently applied, work will be considered as a case of possible academic misconduct.

A bibliography is essential and has to be presented in a standard format. Title page, table of contents, page numbers, etc must contribute to the quality of presentation.

The essay must not exceed 4,000 words of narrative. Students should be aware that examiners will not read beyond the 4,000-word limit, nor assess any material presented thereafter. Titles for photographs, images, figures and notation scores are not included in the word count.

## Criterion E: Engagement

(Strands: Reflections on planning and progress)

This criterion assesses the student's engagement with their research focus and the research process. It will be applied by the examiner at the end of the assessment of the essay, and is based solely on the candidate's reflections as detailed on the [RPPF](#), with the supervisory comments and extended essay itself as context.

Students are expected to provide reflections on the decision-making and planning process undertaken in completing the essay. Students must demonstrate how they arrived at a topic as well as the methods and approach used. This criterion assesses the extent to which a student has evidenced the rationale for decisions made throughout the planning process and the skills and understandings developed.

For example, students may reflect on:

- the approach and strategies they chose, and their relative success
- the [Approaches to learning](#) skills they have developed and their effect on the student as a learner
- how their conceptual understandings have developed or changed as a result of their research
- challenges they faced in their research and how they overcame these
- questions that emerged as a result of their research
- what they would do differently if they were to undertake the research again.

Effective reflection highlights the journey the student has engaged in through the EE process. Students must show evidence of critical and reflective thinking that goes beyond simply describing the procedures that have been followed.

The reflections must provide the examiner with an insight into **student** thinking, creativity and originality within the research process. The **student** voice must be clearly present and demonstrate the learning that has taken place.