

IB FILM PRESENTATION - A GUIDE TO NOT SUCKING

Firstly the official IBO Assessment criteria

SL

21–25 There is a coherent, incisive, insightful and detailed evaluative interpretation of the extract, displaying an excellent understanding of how meaning is constructed through the use of film language, with an excellent awareness of the extract's relationship to the film as a whole. There is a persuasive explanation for the selection of the extract. The critique shows an excellent awareness of the film's genre and/or its place in a broader sociocultural context. There is an insightful analysis of the director's intention. Simple description will be negligible and analysis will be clear and thorough.

NOW, WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

It means there are certain things you HAVE to discuss and do. The guiding principle is this: everything you say should be **analytical**. It is perhaps best to think of this analytical task as having two levels, both of which you must address: MACRO and MICRO analysis. It seems to make sense to start with the macro analysis, though there is no 'correct' way to structure a presentation.

MACRO ANALYSIS

Macro means 'the big picture'; basically, you are dealing with contexts of various types. This is NOT the real focus of your presentation, though, so it should not take up a disproportionate part of the time available; 4 minutes (S.L.) maximum.

Films are produced and viewed within many contexts; part of your challenge, especially if you are aiming for Levels 6 or 7, is to select and discuss appropriate contexts. However, there are some obvious ones!

•**Context within the film.** At the very least, you need to take a few seconds to contextualise the extract in the plot. But this is the bare minimum. More ambitious students might put the extract into context in the narrative structure. Is it part of the exposition, rising action, the climax, the falling action, the denouement? (Freytag's structure.) Or, is it part of the equilibrium, the disequilibrium, the new equilibrium? (Todorov's.) Does it mark a transition from one of these stages to the next? You also need to refer to other parts of the film as you are discussing the extract ('... an excellent awareness of the extract's relationship to the film as a whole...'); you need to know the film very well, and you need to show that you know it very well.

•**Social, historical, economic, political (SHEP) contexts.** Films, like any art form, are affected by the things going on in the world at the time of their production. Firstly, make sure you distinguish between the time the film was made and the time it is set if these are different. Do not spend much time in discussing what was happening in the world (for example, we don't need to know much about Vietnam if we're talking about New Hollywood, but it might be relevant if discussing rebellion in those films to point out that Vietnam was the first popularly-protested war.) The important thing is this; ONLY discuss history or politics or whatever if you can link it directly to your film and, preferably, to your extract. If you are discussing history (or anything else, for that matter), make sure you know what you are talking about; correct dates, names and sequences of events most definitely do matter.

•**Generic context.** You MUST discuss this, even if your film is not an obviously generic piece. Talk about whatever generic icons are being used (Buscombe's theory might be useful) or whatever codes and conventions are being used. Discuss generic expectations and whether they are fulfilled

IB FILM PRESENTATION - A GUIDE TO NOT SUCKING

or not. Is it using genre conventions or subverting them? If your film IS a generic piece - a horror, or film noir (arguably), you could use genre as a guiding principle. Given that a genre is a collection of icons, codes, ideologies, characters, settings, plotlines, aesthetics etc etc, you could conceivably discuss everything in the extract using genre as a unifying theme. But be sensitive to different genre generic codes in play in a single film; a film noir might also be a romance and a war film. A period drama might also be a love story. It's up to you to decide how useful a concept genre is in the discussion of your particular extract.

•**National context / Film movement context World cinema contexts** are often the most useful. The concept of First, Second and Third (American, European and Third World) cinema can be a useful if vague starting point. A knowledge of the country's relevant history is obviously important. Different movements or genres are often associated with particular countries, so it's not unusual to be discussing these things together. New Hollywood, as an example, is a movement with its own ideals and aims (anti-war, anti-authoritarian), but it's also uniquely American so it often uses particularly American genres (the western, for example) and it is in part a response to contemporary American history (Vietnam.)

•**Institutional context.** The film industry itself often creates a very relevant context. For example, film noir largely worked within and around the auspices of the Hays Code - so you need to know what the Code was and understand how Noir was shaped, in part, by it. (An example - if you can't show violent things, then you need to find other ways to create a sense of violence and threat. Lighting is one way.) The collapse of the Code and the studio system is an important determinant in the establishment of New Hollywood. It's worth mentioning one important point here, though - you need to actually KNOW about the Hays Code and the studio system or whatever. What were they, when were they in operation, what effect did they have? It's not enough to vaguely mention these things and assume you'll get credit for it; unless you can specifically relate it to your film and, preferably, your extract, you won't. The presentation isn't a test of how much stuff you can memorise - as mentioned earlier, everything must grow out of your discussion of the extract.

•**Auteur context.** (context within the oeuvre of the film maker)
Your film will probably be by a well-known director, so chances are you'll be able to use auteur theory to discuss it. Basically, this means that you will discuss the extract as a product of that individual's particular world view; you're looking for aesthetic, technical, philosophical or whatever aspects of the film which are typical of or unique to that director. However, be open to the possibility that the DP, the sound designer or the editor might be 'auteurs' too. Certain actors can also bring a certain star persona to play - someone like Humphrey Bogart, for example, would certainly give a certain tone or quality to a film and could conceivably be regarded as an 'auteur.' It's probably not a great idea to discuss the auteur in question, though, if you haven't actually seen any of their other films. There is a reason why they give you four weeks to prepare - part of that is to get a feel for films from the same director (or Director of photography or whatever) or studio or genre or movement. Nobody's too impressed by someone who needs four weeks to understand one film. However, remember that the focus of your presentation is on your extract. A distinct point to note is that the assessment criteria ask you to consider the director's intention; this means that, regardless of whether you consider auteur to be a useful way to address the clip, you must explain what the director was trying to achieve throughout the clip. Or, to put it simply - the director's name should crop up a lot in your analysis!

So, you have a few minutes to cover as much of that as you think relevant. I'm sure you've realised that you need to **BE SELECTIVE**; a sign of understanding is the ability to pick the most appropriate contexts and the most revealing points. But it takes time and work - about four weeks' worth - to get up to that level of understanding.

IB FILM PRESENTATION - A GUIDE TO NOT SUCKING

MICRO ANALYSIS - This is about the detail of your extract, and it should form the bulk of what you say. Remember that attention to detail is key to success in this task

•The criteria ask for ‘a persuasive explanation for the selection of the extract.’ Saying vaguely that something is a ‘turning point’ or that you think it is a good example of some entirely random thing (‘editing’, usually) is not ‘persuasive.’ Why ARE you choosing this extract? The only sensible reason is because it gives you opportunity to talk about everything you need to talk about. A ‘persuasive’ reason for choosing an extract, then, might be something about it containing particularly generic iconography or that it is entirely typical of a director’s auteurship.

•You are basically doing *structuralist* and *formalist* analysis here - trying to pull the whole extract apart and show how the director (director’s intention, remember?) has used these elements to make his (or her; implied from now on) point, achieve his ends, communicate his preferred meaning. Obviously, what you will actually focus on will depend on your extract, but there are some basic things to look at.

•Remember that your job is to ANALYSE. Look at the last sentence of the criteria: ‘Simple description will be negligible and analysis will be clear and thorough.’ Many students don’t ‘get’ this. The following example might help:

Easy Rider	
‘The opening of Easy Rider shows two guys on motorbikes conducting a drug deal.’	Pure description. Utterly useless.
‘The expository scenes at the start of Hopper’s Early New Hollywood classic ‘Easy Rider’ use an inspired mix of drug-influenced bright palettes and extremely fetishistic close ups of both the hippies and their bikes. The non-diegetic soundtrack twists through the visuals while the diegetic soundtrack is ripped apart violently by the surprising appearance of an aeroplane overhead.’	STILL pure description, but dressed up in Film Terminology. It’s good description, but it’s still useless unless it is followed by some analysis.
The opening of Easy Rider combines close-ups of the motorbikes, a non-diegetic rock soundtrack and a drug induced palette, often shot through distorting filters and lenses, in order to show how these things - money, drugs, freedom (symbolised by the bikes, the equivalent generic icon to the horse in a Western) are connected in contemporary America.	Description, accurately expressed in film terms, followed by analysis. This sounds like a presentation.

•**Mise en scene analysis:** What’s in the frame?

•**Location** - How is it used? Is it important?

•**Palette.** Are certain colours used powerfully or suggestively, either through objects or a certain cast / filter to colour the whole scene? Is the colour symbolic or does it establish a tone? What colour temperatures are in evidence? Which colours are coming forward? Hot reds or cool blues?

IB FILM PRESENTATION - A GUIDE TO NOT SUCKING

- **Iconography**; are certain objects either symbolic (use the vocabulary of semiotics to discuss this - we talk about signs rather than symbols) or associated with a particular genre? (Use Buscombe's theory but don't over-use it, or any theory. IB aren't big fans of theorising in presentations!).
- **Proxemics** - How are characters and objects arranged on screen? How is distance between them manipulated?

•Cinematography

- **How is the frame composed?** What shot is being used? Why is it used - what's the director's intention. (Avoid mediocre, banal commentary here - saying 'Ivory cuts to a close up so we can see the character's face' is so obvious it doesn't need saying.) IS there any camera movement. Is the cinematography very composed and still and graceful or very kinetic, fluid, full of motion?
- **More on composition** - are leading lines established / broken? Is focus being used (or thrown) to direct the viewers' attention around the frame? Are planes (background, midground, foreground) divided by focus or boundaries and if so, why?
- **Lighting - Colour temperature?** Regular three point or single-source low-key or chiaroscuro? Is the location lit or the characters? Are men lit differently from women? Hard or soft shadows?

• **Sound - Diegetic, non-diegetic**, ambient, synchronous and non-synchronous, Foley, music, ducking. All or none might be relevant. Look for changes in the sound; when the music starts or finishes, for example, or changes tonality.

• **Script/narrative - Linear, non-linear?** What area of storytelling are we in? Realist, fantasy, classic Hollywood? Are binary oppositions (Levi-Strauss) established? Is the Hermeneutic (Enigma) code apparent (Barthes)? IS the script typical of a certain genre? Is the dialogue believable (naturalistic) or stylised? How are characters constructed?

• **Editing - Continuity, montage, rhythmic?** Fast or slow (or variable) pace? Any ramping? Slo-mo? Has the footage been altered - graded or filtered in some way? Are certain shots being juxtaposed for effect (you might be able to mention the Kuleshov Effect to discuss juxtaposition.) What shots are being emphasised?

• **Representational / ideological issues**. Often a good place to end up! Representations and ideologies are built from the details on the screen so if you can show, for example, how the iconography and mise and style of a Merchant Ivory film might convey a very particular view of Britain at a certain time in its history, you're doing well!