

Unit 25: Film Studies

NQF Level 3: BTEC National

Guided learning hours: 60

Unit abstract

All approaches to studying film are theoretical to a greater or lesser extent. Even casual discussion about movies often reveals a recognition of and a cultural investment in the auteur as the source of the film's meaning. A theoretical approach to film simply recognises that we need to consciously apply specific ways of responding to film texts in order to make our interpretation clear, not only to others but to ourselves as well. Done properly this is not merely an exercise in regurgitating theory: the effective application of theory and the use of specific analytical tools to produce different understandings of the same texts improves our understanding, enlivens our appreciation, and, for film practitioners, informs and enhances their production activity.

Through following this unit learners will develop an understanding of a number of theoretical approaches to film and apply them to specific films. Learners will come to understand that films do not exist in a vacuum, nor do they simply appear like flowers in the spring. Rather, they are created by a range of determinants and influences which include, amongst others, the culture and politics of the country where they are produced, the finance that enables their production, the technology of film production, distribution and exhibition, and the nature and structure of the industry which produces them.

In addition learners will explore the often complex relationship between audiences and films and will be able to understand why and how audiences watch and make sense of films in particular ways.

There are opportunities in the unit to develop and apply research techniques through the completion of a piece of practical audience research. The unit will also help to put production work done in other units into context.

Learning outcomes

On completion of this unit a learner should:

- 1 Be able to apply different analytical approaches to films
- 2 Understand the relationship between production contexts and films
- 3 Understand the relationship between producers and audiences
- 4 Understand the relationship between audiences and films.

Unit content

1 Be able to apply different analytical approaches to films

Analytical approaches: theories, eg structuralism, semiotics, auteurism, feminism, queer theory, Marxism, psychoanalysis; genre analysis; content analysis

Application: to extracts; to whole films; to genres

2 Understand the relationship between production contexts and films

Production contexts: eg Hollywood, Bollywood, British, developing countries, international co-productions, independent

Factors influencing the relationship: financial determinants; funding bodies; quotas; tax incentives; technologies of production, distribution and exhibition; trends; genres and cycles; stars; social and political issues; regulatory issues; synergies between different films

3 Understand the relationship between producers and audiences

Relationship between producers and audiences: audience research; audience targeting; publicity and marketing, eg advertising, reviewing, chat shows, product tie-ins, premieres, awards

4 Understand the relationship between audiences and films

Relationship between audiences and films: active spectatorship; pleasure; frameworks of interpretation; media literacy; intertextuality; preferred readings; effects; fandom; pre- and post-viewing experiences; conditions of reception

Grading grid

In order to pass this unit, the evidence that the learner presents for assessment needs to demonstrate that they can meet all of the learning outcomes for the unit. The criteria for a pass grade describes the level of achievement required to pass this unit.

Grading criteria		
To achieve a pass grade the evidence must show that the learner is able to:	To achieve a merit grade the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass criteria, the learner is able to:	To achieve a distinction grade the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass and merit criteria, the learner is able to:
P1 apply approaches to analysing films expressing ideas with sufficient clarity to communicate them and with some appropriate use of subject terminology	M1 apply approaches to analysing films coherently with reference to well-chosen examples, expressing ideas with clarity and with generally appropriate use of subject terminology	D1 apply approaches to analysing films critically, supporting points with arguments and elucidated examples, expressing ideas fluently and using subject terminology correctly
P2 describe the relationship between films and their production contexts expressing ideas with sufficient clarity to communicate them and with some appropriate use of subject terminology	M2 explain the relationship between films and their production contexts with reference to well-chosen examples, expressing them with clarity and with generally appropriate use of subject terminology	D2 fully explain the relationship between films and their production contexts justifying ideas and points made with supporting arguments and elucidated examples, expressing ideas fluently and using subject terminology correctly
P3 describe the relationship between producers and audiences expressing ideas with sufficient clarity to communicate them and with some appropriate use of subject terminology	M3 explain the relationship between producers and audiences with reference to well-chosen examples, expressing them with clarity and with generally appropriate use of subject terminology	D3 fully explain the relationship between producers and audiences justifying ideas and points made with supporting arguments and elucidated examples, expressing ideas fluently and using subject terminology correctly

continued

Grading criteria		
To achieve a pass grade the evidence must show that the learner is able to:	To achieve a merit grade the evidence must show that the learner is able to:	To achieve a distinction grade the evidence must show that the learner is able to:
P4 describe the relationship between films and audiences expressing ideas with sufficient clarity to communicate them and with some appropriate use of subject terminology.	M4 explain the relationship between films and audiences with reference to well-chosen examples, expressing them with clarity and with generally appropriate use of subject terminology.	D4 fully explain the relationship between films and audiences justifying ideas and points made with supporting arguments and elucidated examples, expressing ideas fluently and using subject terminology correctly.

Essential guidance for tutors

Delivery

It is likely that this unit will initially be covered through class teaching and discussion, but it should quickly be possible for learners to undertake research, provide feedback and give mini-presentations. There are opportunities for group work at this later stage, though work that is handed in for assessment must be produced individually by learners.

As genre forms part of the content of *Unit 5: Critical Approaches to Media Products*, there are opportunities to cover this aspect of the two units in assignments that focus on the combining of other theoretical methods with a genre analysis.

Developing an understanding of different analytical models may appear daunting at first, but an accessible starting point could be to contrast a generic approach with an auteurist approach. The former finds meaning in identifying recurrent structurally significant elements (for example, in narrative and character) whereas the latter finds meaning through identifying the recognisable elements which signify the presence of a particular film 'artist'. Plenty of practice should be provided through, for example, exercises in which statements are matched with particular theoretical models and comprehension and cloze activities to facilitate understanding of a range of writing about film. Abundant viewing of films and extracts, both in and out of class, is essential, as are opportunities to discuss 'ways of reading' if learners are to be able to demonstrate an awareness that any act of interpretation is dependent on some kind of theoretical foundation.

Group work, mini-presentations and producing visual material for display in the learning environment can all illustrate the various ways in which films are determined by, and respond to, their contexts of production. Examples might include the relationship between films and computer games, the agendas of film funding bodies, the rise and fall of particular film cycles and genres, the influence of digital technology on production practices and costs, distributors voluntarily cutting films to fit a particular BBFC certificate, and the evolution of the studio system.

NB: centres which opt for this unit within a Television and Film pathway might wish to cover this unit in combination with *Unit 5: Critical Approaches to Media Products* in such a way as to ensure that attention is given separately to the film industry and to the television and video industry. Assessment of Unit 5 can then be based on work done on the television and video industry, and of this unit on work done on the film industry.

Assessment

Evidence for assessment

An obvious assessment instrument for this unit is the academic essay, for which titles and objects of study could be negotiated. An alternative is the formal presentation, which would include clips for analysis and similar expository content. The *viva voce* is another possibility. If *vivas* are used for more than one learner it is important that each learner is asked the same lead questions and that all are given equal

opportunities to expand or clarify their answers. Presentations and *vivas* should be recorded for the purposes of internal and external verification. Learners may be able to produce a short video or audio piece to demonstrate their understanding of film studies.

As evidence for achievement of learning outcome 1 learners should apply at least two different analytical approaches, relating them to extracts, whole films, and genres.

Evidence for achievement of learning outcome 2 could be a case study of a single film or of several films, either written or presented orally.

Evidence for achievement of learning outcomes 3 and 4 could also be essays or presentations. A practical alternative for learning outcome 4 would be a piece of actual audience research in which a hypothesis is devised, research conducted and conclusions reached. Care should be taken to ensure that the proposed research is not too ambitious in scope. It should be quite possible for a modest piece of well-designed, theoretically informed piece of research to meet the distinction criterion.

For some elements of this unit, and for some learners, a formal *viva voce* assessment might be appropriate. When more than one learner in a cohort is assessed in this way care must be taken to ensure that all learners are asked equivalent questions, and that all are given equal opportunities to expand or clarify their answers. Interviewers must also ensure that questions are not phrased in such a way as to provide or suggest an answer. Formal *vivas* should be recorded for the purposes of internal and external verification and at least 50 per cent of such assessments must be internally verified.

Application of grading criteria

When applying the grading criteria, tutors should follow the advice given below. Please note that any examples of evidence given here are indicative only. This advice is not exhaustive and the examples need not specifically be included in a learner's work in order for that learner to achieve the exemplified grade.

Pass

To achieve a pass grade, learners must achieve all the criteria at pass level.

P1: learners must demonstrate that they know about more than one approach to film analysis though the application will be implicit rather than explicit. Their application of theory will lead to the identification of possible meanings, although there will be little detail, and ideas or points made will be generalised and undeveloped. They will refer to whole films rather than specific elements of those films. In discussing codes and conventions in a genre analysis a learner might note, 'The knife is part of the iconography of the horror movie. In 12 of the 15 movies I studied for my content analysis a knife was used for at least one of the murders and in five it was used for all of them. Knives have connotations of the ordinary and the everyday, and are used for doing things like cutting up meat in the home. They also have connotations of danger because most people have cut themselves at some time in their lives so they know what it feels like.'

P2: learners will describe aspects of the relationship between films and their production contexts. They will be able to give, for example, an accurate outline of the Hollywood studio production system but they will not elaborate on how that system affects the films produced in such a system.

P3: learners will offer a basic description of the types of market research that film producers might carry out, and some of the ways in which audiences are made aware of a new production. Points made will be accurate and relevant but will not be elaborated.

P4: learners will offer a basic description of the relationship between audiences and films but will be limited to a personal, subjective assessment of how this relationship affects responses. If audience research is carried out it is likely to be based on simple assumptions and to reach simplistic conclusions.

P1, P2, P3 and P4: when expressing themselves orally, learners' language skills will be sound and they will be able to express themselves with sufficient clarity to be understood, though vocabulary – and in particular technical vocabulary – will be limited, and register will not always be appropriate to the situation or audience. When expressing themselves formally in writing, learners' skills will be basic, typically with frequent errors of spelling and punctuation and occasional lapses in grammar and syntax. Generally, language skills will be adequate for learners to communicate simple ideas or deal with straightforward material.

Merit

To achieve a merit grade, in addition to achieving all the criteria at pass level, learners must achieve all the criteria at merit level.

M1: the application of theory will yield a detailed, coherent discussion of key examples. Learners will be able to talk about texts in such a way as to show how they are constructed and how meanings can be derived through the application of theoretical methods. Relevant examples that draw upon elements or details of the films studied will be given to support what is said, but learners will not elucidate these examples to show how they illustrate the point they support. In discussing codes and conventions in a genre analysis a learner might note, 'The knife is part of the iconography of the horror movie and is often the means by which the victim is killed. In 12 of the 15 movies I studied for my content analysis a knife was used for at least one of the murders and in five it was used for all of them. The other two common means of killing were strangulation with a rope and with the bare hands. Knives have connotations of slashing movements and gushing blood. The most famous example of this must be the shower scene in Hitchcock's *Psycho*. Being knifed to death is particularly frightening because you can see the person killing you. It's not like shooting, which is done at a distance and is a much more cold-blooded way of killing. This is why the gun is the conventional weapon in gangster movies like *Scarface*.'

M2, M3 and M4: learners will talk about the relationships between production contexts and films, between producers and audiences, and between audiences and films in such a way as to show why they are the way they are, or the effects they have on the films that are produced. Relevant examples that draw upon elements or details of the films studied will be given to support what is said, but learners will not elucidate these examples to show how they illustrate the point they support. If audience research is carried out it will have a clear hypothesis and conclusions will be coherent with some acknowledgement of the limitations of the work.

M1, M2, M3 and M4: when expressing themselves orally, learners' language skills will be good and they will be able to express intentions and ideas clearly using, for the most part, the right word in the right context, including technical vocabulary and the kind of language used in the industry. Register will be generally appropriate, with perhaps occasional lapses. When expressing themselves formally in writing, learners' skills will be sound with typically few lapses in grammar and syntax, though there might be some errors of spelling and punctuation. Generally, language skills will be good enough for learners to be able to express fairly complex ideas and to handle material of moderate difficulty.

Distinction

To achieve a distinction grade, in addition to achieving all the criteria at pass and merit level, learners must achieve all the criteria at distinction level.

D1: the application of theory will be critical – that is, films studied will be subjected to an evaluative process that compares, assesses and discriminates. Ideas will be developed and points supported with arguments and well-focused examples which are elucidated in such a way as to draw out of the example precisely what it is about it that exemplifies the point it illustrates. Examples will refer to precisely defined elements or details of the films studied. In discussing codes and conventions in a genre analysis a learner might note, 'The knife is part of the iconography of the horror movie and is often the means by which the victim is killed. In 12 of the 15 movies I studied for my content analysis a knife was used for at least one of the murders and in five it was used for all of them. The other two common means of killing were strangulation with a rope and with the bare hands. What these methods all have in common is that they involve close bodily contact between the victim and the killer, which makes the murder more frightening, unlike shooting which is done at a distance and is a much more cold-blooded way of killing. This is why the gun is the conventional weapon in gangster movies like *Scarface* or war movies like *Platoon*, where the killing of Elias by Barnes shows how far apart they are morally as well as physically and Barnes's act seems even more calculating because so careful and deliberate. Knives have developed connotations through intertextuality that are specific to horror movies, such as slashing movements and gushing blood. In the most famous example of this – the shower scene in Hitchcock's *Psycho* – we never actually see the murderer, but we do see the movement of the knife repeated over and over again, and the blood swirling down the shower outlet as though it is just water.'

D2, D3 and D4: fuller and more extensive explanation, better application of examples, and provision of argument to support points made, plus the higher quality expression, will discriminate between this level and the merit. So, in discussing relationships between production contexts and films, between producers and audiences, and between audiences and films learners will justify points made with supporting arguments or evidence, and will draw out of an example precisely what it is about it that exemplifies the point it illustrates. Examples will refer to precisely focused elements or details of the films studied. If audience research is carried out, there will be a coherent hypothesis, methods will be appropriate and executed systematically and conclusions will be persuasive.

D1, D2, D3 and D4: when expressing themselves orally, learners will speak with fluency, using a wide vocabulary and deploying both general and technical language with accuracy and confidence. Register will always be appropriate. When expressing themselves formally in writing, learners' skills will be good with typically quite complex sentence structures, very few grammatical errors and infrequent errors in spelling and punctuation. Generally, language skills will enable learners to express complex ideas and to handle difficult material.

Links to National Occupational Standards, other BTEC units, other BTEC qualifications and other relevant units/qualifications

There are opportunities to link this unit with *Unit 5: Critical Approaches to Media Products*, as it offers progression from skills of textual analysis to more explicit articulations of theoretical models and contextual relationships. In addition, there are some opportunities to link with *Unit 1: Research Techniques for the Media Industries* and *Unit 24: Television and Video Studies*.

Essential resources

Learners will need individual access to DVD or video players and monitors in an appropriate viewing area. They will need access to a DVD or video library containing copies of a wide range of film productions, including historical and contemporary films, mainstream and independent productions and film productions from a range of cultural and social contexts. Ideally these will be in the original cinematic format.

They will also need access to a library containing texts on media and film studies, magazines, newspapers, trade journals and specialist publications. Access to the internet is essential for research.

Indicative reading for learners

Books

Barker M, Arthurs J, and Harindranath R – *The Crash Controversy: Censorship, Campaigns and Film Reception* (Wallflower Press, 2001)

Bordwell D and Thompson K – *Film Art: An Introduction, 4th Edition* (McGraw-Hill Inc, 1993)

Hill A – *Shocking Entertainment: Viewer Response to Violent Movies* (John Libbey Media, 1997)

Lacey N – *Introduction to Film* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004)

Nelmes J (editor) – *An Introduction to Film Studies, 3rd Edition* (Routledge, 2003)

Journals

Empire

Sight and Sound

Key skills

Achievement of key skills is not a requirement of this qualification but it is encouraged. Suggestions of opportunities for the generation of Level 3 key skill evidence are given here. Tutors should check that learners have produced all the evidence required by part B of the key skills specifications when assessing this evidence. Learners may need to develop additional evidence elsewhere to fully meet the requirements of the key skills specifications.

Communication Level 3	
When learners are:	They should be able to develop the following key skills evidence:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • discussing film theories and applying them to examples • presenting critical readings of films • comparing cultural and institutional contexts in film production • a writing a film review • b writing an essay explaining the relationships between audiences and films. 	<p>C3.1a Take part in a group discussion.</p> <p>C3.1b Make a formal presentation of at least eight minutes using an image or other support material.</p> <p>C3.2 Read and synthesise information from at least two documents about the same subject. Each document must be a minimum of 1000 words long.</p> <p>C3.3 Write two different types of documents, each one giving different information about complex subjects. One document must be at least 1000 words long.</p>
Information and communication technology Level 3	
When learners are:	They should be able to develop the following key skills evidence:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • using the internet, digital sources and databases for research • presenting audience research findings in a PowerPoint presentation. 	<p>ICT3.1 Search for information, using different sources, and multiple search criteria in at least one case.</p> <p>ICT3.3 Present combined information such as text with image, text with number, image with number.</p>

Problem solving Level 3	
When learners are:	They should be able to develop the following key skills evidence:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> designing audience research determining research methods and reviewing their effectiveness. 	<p>PS3.1 Explore a problem and identify different ways of tackling it.</p> <p>PS3.2 Plan and implement at least one way of solving the problem.</p>