

Unit 26: Film Studies

Unit code: **T/600/6634**

QCF Level 3: **BTEC National**

Credit value: **10**

Guided learning hours: **60**

● Aim and purpose

This unit aims to develop learners' understanding of how films are created for specific audiences and how they make meaning for those audiences through an exploration of industry practices and the application of a range of theoretical approaches. The insights which learners develop will inform their future production work.

● Unit introduction

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 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 films and their production contexts
- 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: methods, eg genre analysis, content analysis, narrative analysis, reception study, fan study; film theory, eg structuralism, semiotics, auteur theory, feminism, queer theory, Marxism, psychoanalytic

Application: to extracts; to whole films; to genres

2 Understand the relationship between films and their production contexts

Production contexts: 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; vertical and horizontal integration

3 Understand the relationship between producers and audiences

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

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; interactivity; social networking; pre- and post-viewing experiences; conditions of reception, eg cinema, home viewing, online access

Assessment and grading criteria

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

Assessment and 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 with some appropriate use of subject terminology [RL]	M1 apply approaches to analysing films coherently with reference to detailed illustrative examples and generally correct use of subject terminology	D1 apply approaches to analysing films critically, supporting points with arguments and elucidated examples and consistently using subject terminology correctly
P2 describe the relationship between films and their production contexts with some appropriate use of subject terminology [IE]	M2 explain the relationship between films and their production contexts with reference to detailed illustrative examples and generally correct use of subject terminology	D2 comprehensively explain the relationship between films and their production contexts with elucidated examples and consistently using subject terminology correctly
P3 describe the relationship between producers and film audiences with some appropriate use of subject terminology	M3 explain the relationship between producers and film audiences with reference to detailed illustrative examples and generally correct use of subject terminology	D3 comprehensively explain the relationship between producers and film audiences with elucidated examples and consistently using subject terminology correctly
P4 describe the relationship between audiences and films with some appropriate use of subject terminology.	M4 explain the relationship between audiences and films with reference to detailed illustrative examples and generally correct use of subject terminology.	D4 comprehensively explain the relationship between audiences and films with elucidated examples and consistently using subject terminology correctly.

PLTS: This summary references where applicable, in the square brackets, the elements of the personal, learning and thinking skills applicable in the pass criteria. It identifies opportunities for learners to demonstrate effective application of the referenced elements of the skills.

Key	IE – independent enquirers CT – creative thinkers	RL – reflective learners TW – team workers	SM – self-managers EP – effective participators
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Essential guidance for tutors

Delivery

Developing an understanding of different analytical models may appear daunting at first, but an accessible starting point could be to contrast a genre-based approach with an auteur approach. The former provides insight through identifying recurrent, significant elements (for example, in narrative, setting, iconography and character). The latter finds meaning through identifying the recognisable elements which signify the presence of a particular film 'artist'. Both require an awareness that audiences and producers use sets of codes and conventions in order to classify films.

Practice should be provided through, for example, exercises in which statements are matched with particular theoretical models to facilitate understanding of a range of writing about film. Abundant viewing of films and extracts, both in and out of class, is essential. Learners will also require opportunities to discuss 'ways of reading' in order to demonstrate an awareness that any act of interpretation is dependent on some kind of theoretical foundation.

Group work, presentations and producing visual material 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. Learners might also explore the influence of digital technology on production and costs, distributors voluntarily cutting films to fit a particular BBFC certificate and the evolution of the studio system. Other relevant activities would include audience research, simulations and production activity to indicate understanding of genre conventions.

Input from professionals working in film production, distribution or exhibition will be valuable for learners. Visits to film screenings and film festivals will also be beneficial as will contact with staff from agencies working to develop audiences for film in the UK. Access to production equipment will provide an opportunity to produce evidence in forms other than the written essay, whilst also making links with other units and areas of learners' competence.

Outline learning plan

The outline learning plan has been included in this unit as guidance and can be used in conjunction with the programme of suggested assignments.

The outline learning plan demonstrates one way of planning the teaching and assessment of this unit.

Topics and suggested assignments and activities
Introduction to unit and unit assessment.
Introduction to the film industry with case study screenings of clips and whole films.
Introduction to film theory with case study screenings of clips and whole films.
Auteur theory – case study of one director with screening of two films.
Lecture sequence – genre, audience and industry:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ascribing films to genres: codes and conventions• how audiences choose films• the industry, genre and distribution• screenings of three films with class discussion.

Topics and suggested assignments and activities

Individual case studies on genre and audience.

Assignment 1 – Theory in Action

Learners produce a 'talking heads' video for a website aimed at young people interested in film. The video will show how one specific theory and one method can be applied to a film and will be illustrated with stills and clips.

Production contexts: visiting speaker and screening of case study.

Lecture – research material for production context case study.

Case study and screening.

Assignment 2 – Old Films for New

Learners will produce an illustrated report, blog or vlog entries titled, 'Old films for new,' comparing a contemporary remake with the original version.

The article must focus on production contexts and factors influencing that context (eg, financial determinants, technologies of production, distribution and exhibition, trends, genres, stars, social, political and regulatory issues, synergies between films, vertical and horizontal integration).

Producers, distributors and exhibitors – visit to a multiplex cinema.

What do producers do? Visiting speaker from a production company.

Assignment 3 – Bums on Seats

Learners will write an article for a print or online film magazine on the production and marketing of a blockbuster movie

The article must cover:

- how the producer considered the target audience during production
- the publicity and marketing strategy for the film.

Lectures:

- audience theories and fandom
- reception theories.

Assignment 4 – Me and My Movies

Learners will produce a report or short video for a fan web site documenting on why they like a particular genre.

The article must cover:

- active spectatorship, fandom and preferred readings
- frameworks of interpretation, intertextuality and media literacy
- social networking, conditions of reception and pre- and post-viewing experiences.

Individual tutorials to review learning and assessment.

Assessment

Evidence for assessment

An obvious assessment instrument for this unit is the written essay, for which titles and objects of study could be negotiated. Alternative formats include a blog, vlog or formal presentation, which would include clips for analysis and similar expository content.

Reviews for a specific target audience, industry-related research pieces and web content provide alternatives to the formal essay. For industry contexts, magazines or websites aimed at specific audiences (such as fans or students) offer opportunities to provide evidence. Learners may also be able to produce a short video or audio piece to demonstrate their understanding of film.

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 several films, either written, in video form or presented orally.

Evidence for achievement of learning outcomes 3 and 4 could also be written pieces or short productions using a specific set of conventions. Another 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 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. Presentations and 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. For each of the criteria learners must present evidence that addresses each italicised sub-heading of the content for the learning outcome.

P1: learners will 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. Learners 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 description 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 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 this 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: evidence will show a basic understanding of technical terminology but learners will generally be unsure about this vocabulary and will make fairly frequent mistakes when they do use it.

Merit

To achieve a merit grade, learners must achieve all the pass and all the merit grade criteria. For each of the criteria learners must present evidence that addresses each italicised sub-heading of the content for the learning outcome.

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: learners will talk about the relationships between production contexts 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. Relevant factual information about production contexts will be offered although it will not be used to support developed argument.

M3: learners will talk about the relationships between producers and audiences, in such a way as to show why they are the way they are, and their relevance to the film industry. 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.

M4: learners will talk about the relationships between films and audiences, whilst demonstrating an awareness of some of the key theoretical models. They will show an understanding of the variety of ways in which audiences interact with film without developing fully sustained arguments.

M1, M2, M3 and M4: learners will use technical vocabulary for the most part correctly, but may make mistakes or be unsure about usages at times.

Distinction

To achieve a distinction grade, learners must achieve all the pass, all the merit and all the distinction grade criteria. For each of the criteria learners must present evidence that addresses each italicised sub-heading of the content for the learning outcome.

D1: the application of theory will be critical. 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 it is 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: learners will talk critically about the relationships between production contexts and films, justifying points made with supporting arguments or evidence. They will draw out of an example precisely what it is about it that exemplifies the point it illustrates. Material about production contexts will be well researched and will refer to precisely focused elements or details of the films studied. Learners will provide full and extensive explanations and consistently provide arguments to support points made. Relevant examples that draw upon elements or details of the films studied will be given to support what is said.

D3: learners will talk critically about the relationships between producers and audiences, justifying points made with supporting arguments or evidence. They will draw out of an example precisely what it illustrates and its relevance to the film industry. If audience research is carried out, there will be a coherent hypothesis, methods will be appropriate and executed systematically and conclusions will be persuasive.

D4: learners will explain the relationships between films and audiences, using fuller and more extensive explanation and better application of examples than shown by merit grade learners. Learners will also demonstrate an effective awareness of the key theoretical models by showing understanding of the variety of ways in which audiences interact with film. They will use evidence to support fully sustained arguments.

D1, D2, D3 and D4: technical vocabulary will be secure and used correctly and confidently at all times.

Programme of suggested assignments

The table below shows a programme of suggested assignments that cover the pass, merit and distinction criteria in the assessment and grading grid. This is for guidance and it is recommended that centres either write their own assignments or adapt any Pearson assignments to meet local needs and resources.

Criteria covered	Assignment title	Scenario	Assessment method
P1,M1, D1	Assignment 1 – Theory in Action	Learners produce a ‘talking heads’ video on a specific film for a website aimed at young people interested in film.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All research notes.• Video.
P2,M2,D2	Assignment 2 – Old Films for New	Learners write an illustrated article, blog entry or vlog for a film magazine website.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All research notes.• Article.
P3,M3,D3	Assignment 3 – Bums on Seats	Learners will write an article for a film magazine on the production and marketing of a blockbuster movie	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All research notes.• Article.
P4,M4,D4	Assignment 4 – Me and My Movies	Learners will produce a short video for an online fan ezine on why they like a particular genre.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All research notes.• Video.

Links to other BTEC units

This unit forms part of the BTEC Creative Media Production suite. This unit has particular links with the following units in the BTEC Creative Media Production suite:

Level 2	Level 3
	Critical Approaches to Creative Media Products
	Radio Studies
	Television and Video Studies.

Essential resources

Learners will need individual access to an online or DVD 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.

Learners will also need access to texts on media and film studies, magazines, newspapers, trade journals and specialist publications.

Employer engagement and vocational contexts

Centres should develop links with local cinemas, production companies and freelancers working in film. Some regional film agencies will be able to identify speakers for sessions on film funding and the development of the industry in the UK

Delivery of personal, learning and thinking skills

The table below identifies the opportunities for personal, learning and thinking skills (PLTS) that have been included within the pass assessment criteria of this unit.

Skill	When learners are ...
Independent enquirers	planning and carrying out research into films and the film industry and judging its relevance to specific texts
Reflective learners	communicating the outcomes of their film industry research and analysis to an audience inviting feedback on their own work and dealing positively with praise, setbacks and criticism evaluating their experiences and learning to inform future progress.

Although PLTS are identified within this unit as an inherent part of the assessment criteria, there are further opportunities to develop a range of PLTS through various approaches to teaching and learning.

Skill	When learners are ...
Creative thinkers	devising productions which explore the conventions of a genre or an auteur's signature
Team workers	if working in a group production, taking responsibility for their own role
Self-managers	seeking out challenges or new responsibilities and showing flexibility when priorities change responding positively to change, seeking advice and support when needed.

● Functional Skills – Level 2

Skill	When learners are ...
ICT – Use ICT systems	
Select, interact with and use ICT systems independently for a complex task to meet a variety of needs	presenting research material to an audience live and in recorded form
ICT – Find and select information	
Select and use a variety of sources of information independently for a complex task	devising a research presentation on the production context of a specific film
ICT – Develop, present and communicate information	
Bring together information to suit content and purpose	devising content for a specific audience for an online review
Present information in ways that are fit for purpose and audience	presenting content for a specific audience for an online review
English	
Speaking and listening – make a range of contributions to discussions and make effective presentations in a wide range of contexts	presenting material relating to a film, genre, director or theory
Reading – compare, select, read and understand texts and use them to gather information, ideas, arguments and opinions	producing content for a short video in a specific genre
Writing – write documents, including extended writing pieces, communicating information, ideas and opinions, effectively and persuasively	writing reviews which explore the work of a specific director.