Comparing films

International Baccalaureate · IB Diploma · Film · HL

IB Diploma Programme Film HL (first assessment 2019; 2017 guide). This topic equips the COMPARATIVE STUDY – the externally assessed task (30% SL, 20% HL): a recorded MULTIMEDIA presentation of at most 10 minutes comparing two films on ONE chosen focus, with a list of all sources. Film is studied comparatively across the guide's world-cinema scope, so the study's spine is intercultural: two films from different cultural contexts, compared with film language and read through context. This handout teaches the comparative craft. All worked examples are original.

Must-know for the comparative study:

Family	Content
focus	ONE comparison axis, chosen before the films are locked
pairing	two films, different contexts, both serving the focus
method	compare element by element: film language in parallel
context	the films' worlds explain the differences found
presentation	recorded multimedia, at most 10 minutes, with sources

The focus and the pairing

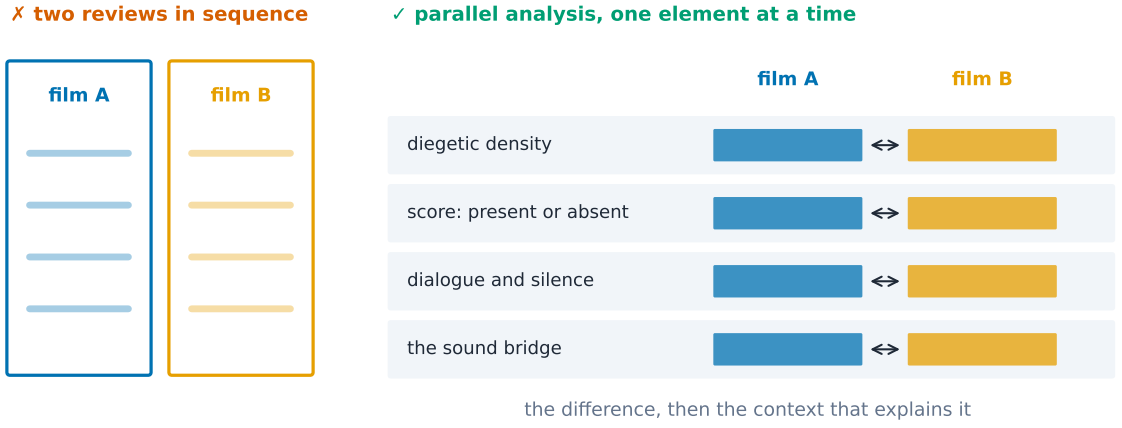
The **focus** is one comparison axis, stated as a question or proposition: not "these two films" but "how two national new waves stage the city" or "how two films use sound to build isolation". The focus comes FIRST because it disciplines the pairing: two films that both illuminate it, from DIFFERENT cultural contexts (the guide's comparative scope), each with film language rich enough on the axis to analyse. The pairing tests: does each film say something the other does not (contrast is the value), and can both be read with the same instruments (film language plus context).

> **Worked example.** Focus: how two films build URBAN ISOLATION with sound. Pairing: a European art-film city drama (sparse dialogue, traffic drone, no score) against an East Asian metropolitan drama (dense room tone, mediated voices through phones and screens). The focus disciplines what is analysed (sound systems) and what is not (stars, genre history beyond need).

The comparative method

Comparison is **parallel analysis**, not two reviews in sequence: choose the focus's elements (for sound: diegetic density, the score's presence or absence, dialogue and silence, the sound bridge), then for each element analyse BOTH films in the same movement – how the European film thins its soundscape to isolate (denotation to connotation, topic 01's chain), how the Asian film crowds its soundscape yet isolates differently. The comparison's finding lives in the CONTRAST and its explanation:

the same concern, two film cultures, two solutions – explained by each film's context (movement, industry, audience, moment). The classic failures: the double review (each film summarised, nothing held together), the catalogue (elements listed, focus forgotten) and the theme essay (context talk with no film language).



Compare element by element, both films at once, then let context explain the differences.

Worked example, continued. Element: the score's absence. In the European film silence isolates the protagonist (connotation: the city offers no emotional commentary); in the Asian film the score is replaced by delivered message tones (connotation: connection exists but only as machine sound). The contrast's explanation: two film cultures answering the same modern isolation with different sound worlds – the comparison's finding.

The multimedia presentation

The task is recorded **multimedia** : at most 10 minutes, images and clips as evidence, a spoken comparative argument. Structure: the focus stated in one sentence (with a clip moment from each film as hook); the two films identified (title, director, year, country, and why THIS pairing); the element-by-element comparison (each element: brief clip or still, the chain for each film, the contrast); the contextual explanation (what each film's world accounts for); the conclusion (the finding, owned as one reading). Craft: clips are EVIDENCE (short, cued to the analysed moment), the voice carries the argument (not titles read aloud), and the clock is hard at 10 minutes. The sources list cites both films properly plus any scholarship, primary separated from secondary.

Worked timing (original). Ten minutes spent: 0:00–0:40 the focus sentence, each film's hook clip behind it; 0:40–1:20 the pairing justified (title, director, year, country, why THESE two); 1:20–8:20 the elements, roughly 2:20 each – clip, chain per film,

contrast; 8:20–9:20 the contextual explanation; 9:20–10:00 the finding, owned as one reading. Rehearsed to land at 9:30: against a hard cap, the unrehearsed recording is the one whose final element gets cut by the clock instead of by choice.

Checklist

- The focus first: one axis as question or proposition, before the films are locked (focus).
- The pairing tests: contrast value, same instruments, different cultural contexts (pairing).
- Parallel analysis: element by element, both films in each movement, the chain completed (method).
- The contrast explained by context: each film's world accounts for its solution (context).
- The presentation: focus sentence, pairing, element comparison, context, conclusion; clips as evidence; at most 10 minutes; sources separated (presentation).
- The worked isolation-through-sound comparison understood (worked).
- The worked timing plan mastered: 0:00–10:00 budgeted element by element, rehearsed to land at 9:30 (presentation). Boundary notes: the comparative study is marked on the focus's discipline, the film-language evidence and the intercultural explanation: the examiner must hear ONE argument, not two reviews. All worked examples are original; the films referenced are the standard canon. The timing plan is the unseen criterion in miniature: a recording that lands at 9:30 with every element intact demonstrates the management the task quietly assesses. And the finding is owned as one reading: a comparison argues a RELATIONSHIP between two film worlds, never a verdict of better or worse – the recording that ranks its films has stopped comparing them and started reviewing.