Reading film

IB DP Film textual-analysis task full package

1. The task at a glance

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IB Film textual analysis: a prescribed film text, a chosen extract of at most 5 minutes, and a 1750-word written analysis plus sources - 30 percent at SL. The craft is reading film: film language used systematically to explain how the extract's elements create meaning in context.

Must-know: the four systems (mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing, sound) with their vocabularies; the denotation-connotation-significance chain in every paragraph; the four contexts; extract justification; the document's four-part structure with sources separated; the catalogue, summary and review failures.

2. The four systems

The four systems

Mise-en-scene: everything in the frame - setting, costume, lighting, staging. Cinematography: the frame itself - shot size, angle, lens, movement, composition. Editing: the join - duration, transitions, continuity, montage. Sound: the unseen layer, from diegetic to non-diegetic, with dialogue, silence, bridges.

The analytical move is always the chain: describe precisely (a low-angle medium shot), read the connotation (the subject towers), connect to significance in THIS film (power the narrative will strip away). Technique names without the chain are a catalogue, not an argument.

3. Context and the extract

Context and the extract

The extract must be justified and FOCAL: minutes where film language visibly carries the film's central concern. Time codes identified, what precedes and follows stated, the choice argued.

The four contexts: production (technology, industry, movement), historical (what the film answers), cultural (whose stories, what world), generic (conventions used, delayed, subverted). The prescribed list spans world cinema: meaning may rest on the audience a film assumes.

4. Writing the analysis

Writing the analysis

The document: extract identified and justified; context compact (a paragraph, not a history essay); the analysis proper organised by system or by sequence, each paragraph one element with the full chain, always returning to the extract's place in the whole film; the conclusion of significance.

Sources: the film itself, the prescribed-list context, any scholarship; primary separated from secondary. The failures: the catalogue, the plot summary, the review - analysis, not evaluation.

Check yourself

Check yourself

The four systems with one element each; diegetic vs non-diegetic.

The chain completed for any named technique; the long take against montage.

The four contexts; the two extract tests (focal, justified).

The document's four parts; sources separated; the three failures; the worked neo-realist chain.