L3 VISUAL TEXT
CHEAT SHEET

STUDY
TIME

ABOUT THE STANDARD

- Regardless of whether it's a book or a film, a lot of the structural and stylistic skills are shared by written and visual text. In order to save paper, we'll cover some of the non-visual specifics in less detail, so make sure you check that one out, too.
- This standard is all about writing an essay that proves your opinion on the importance of film, using **aspects** of visual or oral text.
- **Aspects** include:
    - Director's purpose
    - Intended audiences
    - Themes
    - Characters
    - Settings
    - Narrative structure
    - **Language features of visual tex**t
- **Language features of visual text** cover the same broader writing and story techniques as written text, such as metaphors and symbolism. However, what makes visual text kind of unique is the extra camera-specific features. Why are these called language features? No idea. It's something to with how film is a language. I don't get it either.
- **Language features** include:
    - Cinematography
    - Mise-en-scene
    - Editing
    - Design
    - Sound
    - Performances
- We'll get into those in more detail soon, so don't worry if this is the first time you've heard mise-en-scene (things sound scarier in French).
- Like written text, the most important thing about Level 3 is that the focus of the essay shifts from being about a text (e.g characters in a film) to an **idea** (e.g. "To be successful, a text must bring us moments of joy", like in the 2017 exam).
- To write a killer Level 3 visual text essay, you've got to have a few things down: the essay's purpose, the critical evaluation, the perception, knowledge of language features and how to use them, and the writing structure. Here's how you do it.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

- The very first thing that's so often overlooked at Level 3 is that you're not being given a question; you're being given a statement and asked "*Discuss the extent to which you agree*". This means that the **purpose of**

your essay is to critically evaluate how true the statement you've chosen about visual or oral text as a whole is.

◆ **Critical evaluation** means that you can't take the statement as having already been proven just because it's there, and then go on to write an essay about it. That's not to say you can't totally agree with it, though. It means that you've got to **weigh everything up (including counter-arguments) and justify why your opinion is right.**

◆ The essay is **persuasive**, in that it's focused on proving an argument: the extent to which you agree with your chosen statement. This is how you're marked.

◆ As such, the essay is **thesis-based, with aspects of specific text only being used as evidence to support it.**

◆ **A thesis is the idea that your essay is going to prove.**

◆ Along with "respond critically", the next thing to bear in mind is that you've also got to "respond **perceptively**". This means that your essay needs to revolve around a **perceptive idea**.

◆ **A perceptive idea is one that discusses the statement by weaving in 'the Big Three': society, the human condition, and/or wider literature.**

  ◈ See the written text version for detail on these.

◆ **To demonstrate perception, you have to present an argument centered around this perceptive idea and prove it using "how" and "why".**

  ◈ For example, your argument can't just be, "*For a text to be successful, it must bring us moments of joy because this makes the audience happy.*" You need to explain *how* a text brings moments of joy, *how* a text can be considered successful in the first place, how moments of joy change a text, *why* directors want to do this, and *why* successful texts are ones with joy.

  ◈ If your argument is that for a text to be successful, it must bring us moments of joy, then you need to argue this - *why* can't a text that has no moments of joy still be successful?

◆ These are broader, more abstract ideas that are focused on film as an art form, **not** the film *Schindler's List*. This means that *Schindler's List* is just evidence of film as a whole, not the be-all and end-all.

◆ If you're using it as evidence to back up your argument, you need to demonstrate **appreciation** of how *Schindler's List* is worthy of representing film in this way - does it challenge the idea that a text needs to bring moments of joy (it's pretty grim), or does it actually prove that it does because even the darkest successful films have moments of joy and that is what makes them successful?

◆ This is where you bring in **aspects** of visual text - to prove that *Schindler's List* is a great representation of visual text because of the aspects that you're focusing on.

◆ We can split aspects of visual text into two sections:
  1. Ideas and purposes
  2. Visual text language features

◆ **a.** These are universal regardless of medium, and they all pretty much come down to what the director or author is trying to mean under the surface. For example, Puss n' Boots is a character representing the director's challenge of the classic "hero", with the purpose of showing children that you don't have to be selfless and perfect to be the protagonist of your story, conveying the theme of societal expectations, succeeding because the character is relatable, and the boots represent treading your own path (probably not but you can't prove me wrong).

◆ Visual text language features include the stuff listed earlier, so let's take a look at what they are actually are.
  ◈ Basically, we study film because it's a new way of "reading" literature. If you think about it, storytelling as

a way of conveying human messages began with oral myths and fables in ancient civilisations, before became popular when printing and paper allowed for them to be written down as poems and books. Now, we've got film, and no one reads the book any more.

◆ Technology is a powerful driver in how society represents ideas in literature. And whilst you probably shouldn't use *Bad Neighbours* 2 as your visual text, there are some deep films that can make you cry and view society differently. **This is what you need to be showing the marker**. And you show them how your visual text is the perfect piece of evidence to use to critically evaluate the essay statement by discussing visual text language features.

◆ **Cinematography** includes things like camera angles, zooms, colour, and a whole lot more - pretty much everything that the camera does. Sometimes, cinematography works more with the subconscious than the conscious. The more films you watch with this in mind, the more you'll see differences in directing styles.

  ◈ Wes Anderson uses a pastel colour palette, which gives the Grand Budapest Hotel a real 1900s luxury vibe. Quentin Tarantino, on the other hand, uses a whole lot of red, and so his movies feel violent.

  ◈ It's hard to pinpoint exactly what the camera is doing that's so important, but if it wasn't there, it'd be a completely different scene. For example, horror movies often use shaky cameras or quick cuts, and that actually gives us adrenaline. If shaky-camera was used in a rom com, however, it would just make it more difficult to enjoy Ryan Gosling.

◆ **Mise-en-scene** is pretty much everything in a shot. It's a fancy French name for how and why everything is the way it is and visible to the audience - does the vase in *American Beauty* give audiences the forced impression of homeliness? (Who knows, but write about it.) This means it's closely linked with **design**: the world inside the text.

◆ **Sound** is a huge one, and includes ambience (footsteps in a big empty space is a favourite for creepy scenes, as is phones ringing in a boring and stressful office environment the character doesn't want to be a part of), sound effects, and music (horror movies without music are about 82% less scary).

◆ All of these aspects come together to make your visual text that visual text. You need to analyse how and why the director has chosen to make this specific visual text, **before using the text as evidence for your thesis about visual text as a whole**.

◆ **It's crucial that we don't just chuck a camera angle in and hope the marker froths it**. You're not going to get E if you just say that x represents y and here's a mid-shot that shows it. **Your analysis of language features needs to be specific and sophisticated.**

◆ What we mean by this is that if you're bringing in a mid-shot, it needs to be a technical choice made by the director for the purpose of improving the director-audience relationship. You don't need to spend heaps of time analysing all the nuances of a camera angle, but you do need to prove to the marker that you know exactly why the director used that specific angle and how it has an effect on the text itself.

◆ As for structure, there are two main structural tools to use: **the upside-down triangle introduction** and **TEXAS** paragraphing. See the written text guide for more on those!

OVERALL

◆ It all comes back to your thesis. Make sure you're referring to it often, and explain how your evidence about the book is proving it using **how** and **why**.

◆ Your essay is an argument about visual or oral text, not a description of how deep *Schindler's List* is. As such,

start with the more philosophical discussion of how and why texts do or don't need moments of joy to be successful, making sure that you break down how and why a text is "successful" in the first place in order to show **critical evaluation** and **perception.**

◆ To be perceptive, bring it back to the Big Three - society, the human condition, or wider literature. You can always do this at a stretch, even if it's *Bad Neighbours 2* (but don't do *Bad Neighbours 2*).

◆ As always, read those exemplars and write those practice essays (even put them in your teacher's mailbox).