

## EXAM STRUCTURE

- ◆ The visual text exam will give you a choice of essay questions on aspects of visual text. Aspects include:
  - ◆ Director's purpose
  - ◆ Intended audiences
  - ◆ Themes
  - ◆ Characters
  - ◆ Settings
  - ◆ Narrative structure
  - ◆ Language features of visual text
- ◆ **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, which you need to include in your essay.
- ◆ The questions will all be split into a **describe** and **explain** component.
- ◆ The **describe** is an 'on the lines' response: discussing how the aspect is used in the text in order.
- ◆ The **explain** is a 'between the lines' response: discussing how and why the aspect is used for a deeper idea to have some effect on the reader.

## THE QUESTION AND YOUR THESIS

- ◆ You are marked on how well you prove your thesis throughout your essay.
- ◆ Your thesis is the idea that you are going to prove: your original and perceptive answer to the essay question.
- ◆ Your thesis needs to answer both parts of the question, and include the key words that you can't answer the question without, which you should underline.
- ◆ To come up with your thesis, say in your head, "In my essay, I am going to prove that. . ." and whatever follows is your thesis.
- ◆ Your thesis should be proven by three main points: your essay's three paragraphs.

## PERCEPTION

- ◆ Perception is the marker's favourite word and the requirement for Excellence.
- ◆ In order to show perception, your analysis needs to look into the text, come up with an interpretation about particular aspects (such as theme or cinematography), and discuss how that points to a perceptive idea.
- ◆ A perceptive idea is one that goes to the deeper meaning of the text and what the director was attempting to show. It may be something to do with:
  - ◆ Society: the world or communities that people live in at certain times
  - ◆ The human condition: the experiences, feelings, and problems of humanity
  - ◆ Wider literature: the effect of literature or links to other texts (if the question is asking about the ending of your text, etc.)

- ◆ To show perception in your writing, make sure that you're including 'how' and 'why'. How does the cinematography represent the struggle for power between characters, and why did the director want to make this representation to convey a message about society or the human condition?
- ◆ Everything in a film is deliberate. From the vase in the shot to the camera angle, the director has worked to make sure his or her message is conveyed to the audience - this is the director-audience relationship.
- ◆ A strong director-audience relationship is one where the aspects of the film have had some effect on the audience, and the director's purpose should be to strengthen this.
- ◆ The effect is what you can use to discuss your perceptive idea. For example, the deeper meaning of a character may be used to represent a human flaw.

## LANGUAGE FEATURES OF VISUAL TEXT

- ◆ **Cinematography** includes things like camera angles, zooms, colour, and a whole lot more. Cinematography is pretty much everything the camera does. For example, horror movies often use shaky cameras, and that actually gives us adrenaline. But if that was used in *Shrek*, it'd be weird.
- ◆ This is also done with **editing**: for example, quick 'smash' cuts have different effects than longer scenes with a single shot.
- ◆ **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).

## ESSAY STRUCTURE

- ◆ Your essay needs to have an introduction, approximately three main paragraphs, and a conclusion.
- ◆ A great introduction structure is the 'upside-down triangle'. Like the food pyramid, you spend the most amount of words on your base, a bit less in the middle, and the tip only makes up a small part.
  - ◆ The base of your triangle is the 'philosophical yarn': this is where you grab the reader's attention by discussing your deeper perceptive idea about society, the human condition, and/or literature and explaining why it's important.
  - ◆ Next, clearly say your thesis in order to show the marker that you're answering the question.
  - ◆ Finally, briefly list your three main points.
- ◆ A not-compulsory but helpful paragraph structure is TEXAS:
  - ◆ Topic sentence: the purpose of your paragraph.
  - ◆ Evidence: where the aspect of the text is within the text itself.
  - ◆ eXplain: how does the aspect prove your thesis?
  - ◆ Author's purpose: why did the author do this for some deeper idea?
  - ◆ Summary: conclude by reinforcing that your topic sentence has been proved, and how this proves your thesis.

- ◆ To conclude, simply link your three main points together to show how your thesis is proved, and that this is important because it demonstrates a perceptive idea.

## COMMON MISTAKES

- ◆ It's crucial that you don't just chuck in a camera angle and then talk about the deeper ideas. All this proves is that you've watched the film.
- ◆ 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 to improve the director-audience relationship and how it has an effect on the text itself.
- ◆ Make sure everything you're writing is relevant to proving your thesis.
- ◆ Your thesis needs to answer the essay question – not be a memorised essay.
- ◆ Your essay is on your idea about the text, not the plot of the text. Avoid explaining to the marker what the storyline is about and pretend like they've already read it.
- ◆ Your evidence is used to back up your argument, not to show the marker that you've read the book.
- ◆ When explaining your interpretation about the deeper ideas in the text or the author's purpose, you need to explain 'how' and 'why' it is true in order to prove your argument.
- ◆ Read what you're writing out loud to pay attention to flow and rhythm. Too many short and simple sentences in a row will make your writing sound robotic and basic.
- ◆ Use conjunctions, like 'which' and 'however' in order to connect sentences and make your ideas flow onto each other.

## HOW TO PREPARE

- ◆ Watch the film and use secondary sources (Spark Notes, Shmoop, articles, etc.) to study various interpretations of the text.
- ◆ Create a list of all your evidence (camera shots, characters, themes) that you would use to explain to someone how and why there are deeper ideas in the text.
- ◆ Read past exams to get an idea of the types of questions that you'll be asked.
- ◆ Read the assessment schedules and reports on the NZQA website to understand what markers want.
- ◆ Write practice essays and compare them to the exemplars on the NZQA website