

ABOUT THE STANDARD

- ◆ Firstly, if you haven't checked out our strategy guide for written text, we recommend that you do that first for a lot of the structural and stylistic parts of essay-writing that are the same across both standards. Here, we'll go into more detail on analysing those films.
- ◆ Visual text at Level 2 is pretty much about getting a visual text, taking evidence from it in the form of **aspects**, and then - most importantly - analysing it.
- ◆ **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. 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
- ◆ When we **analyse**, we're using evidence to come up with interpretations of those aspects in order to answer the question.
- ◆ To get Excellence, our interpretations have to be **perceptive**. This effectively just means being deep about it. Or in the words of NZQA, being **insightful** and **original**. That's all well and good, but it probably doesn't help too much - so let's figure out how to actually do that in your essay.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

- ◆ A lot of the strategies regarding constructing an essay that will knock your marker's stockings off are the same as written text. However, the analysis is kind of different. Because, you know, it's a film now.
- ◆ One of the most important things to keep in mind is that your essay is **persuasive**, not informative. You're not telling the marker what *Pan's Labyrinth* is about, because your marker knows it's wild. You're trying to

prove an argument: how your answer to the essay question is solid and backed up.

- ◆ 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.**
 - ◆ For example: *"Colour was used in Schindler's List to reinforce a stark contrast between hope and war, by highlighting the beauty of life."*
- ◆ Notice how this thesis is perceptive in that develops ideas beneath the surface: by saying **how** and **why** the ideas are actually conveyed.
- ◆ In the marking schedule, NZQA wrote that students who got Excellence "maintained a strong thesis throughout their essay." **This means that you've got to be consistently referring back to your thesis as the whole purpose, and every point you make should reflect that.**
- ◆ You'll remember that in order to be perceptive, we've got to be **insightful** and **original**.
- ◆ **Insight** means that we're going below the surface of the text and accurately pointing at deeper ideas. Aspects of the book, like setting or characters, are surface-level stuff. It's what the book is *about*, but it's not really what it's about. To do that, we need to discuss what the author is really getting at.
- ◆ We can demonstrate insight by linking our evidence with **perceptive ideas**.
- ◆ **A perceptive idea is one that discusses the statement by weaving in 'the Big Three': society, the human condition, and/or wider literature.**
 - ◆ Society refers to the world we live in, the world your author(s) lived in, or the world the author(s) want us to live in.
 - ◆ The human condition refers to the feelings, flaws, and experiences that are universally human.
 - ◆ Wider literature refers to how the statement and the written text you've chosen fits in or says something about literature at that time or in general.
- ◆ It's really important that we **link our perceptive ideas with the director-audience relationship**. This basically means that we want to frame our philosophical yarns around the director's purpose and **how they've achieved it through film**.
- ◆ By doing this, we can show **appreciation of the director's purpose in shaping the text**: by writing about how and why the ideas underlying the film are so important and how they are conveyed to the audience through **aspects of film**.
 - ◆ For example: *"The juxtaposition of the child's red coat against the otherwise black and white Schindler's List is a powerful use of colour in order to convey an idea: that there is hope for the future if we choose to see and protect it."*
 - ◆ If you really want to spice things up even more, you can even critique the director's purpose and how it's actually conveyed through their use of aspects of visual text. Maybe they tried and it's solid, but you feel like something got in the way (but this is a bit extra, Becky).
- ◆ It's also a great idea that your essay is as **original** as possible.
- ◆ This means having **personal voice**, or making sure that your writing style is interesting - try and vary your sentence lengths, vocabulary, and don't repeat your points.
- ◆ It also means that it's an absolutely great idea to make your interpretation of the text as unique as possible. Remember, there's no wrong way to watch a film - only interpretations that aren't backed up by evidence. If the way that colour was used in *Schindler's List* speaks to you in a different way, there's a good chance that you're onto an interesting take on the director-audience relationship. **If you think the director intended**

something, you're probably right.

- ◆ In last year's assessment report, NZQAs said that candidates were more likely to get Excellence if they "adopted an original viewpoint and explored multiple interpretations of meaning."
- ◆ Now, let's talk about the main difference between written and visual text: **visual language features, otherwise known as film techniques.**
- ◆ We can split aspects of visual text into two sections:
 1. Ideas and purposes
 2. Visual text language features
- ◆ **Ideas and purposes** include things like characters, themes, author's purposes, intended audiences, and symbols. However, it's important that we don't just use these. Because you're studying film, you need to be able to analyse film-specific features and techniques.
- ◆ Visual text language features include the stuff listed earlier, so let's take a look at what they are actually are.
- ◆ **Cinematography** includes things like camera angles, zooms, colour, and a whole lot more. Cinematography is pretty much everything the camera does. 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).
- ◆ **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 film is proving it using **how** and **why**.
- ◆ Aspects of visual text are evidence to use to back up your thesis, and your analysis of those aspects needs to go to the director-audience relationship.
- ◆ Make sure you are bringing in visual text language features, and coming up with interpretations that are

as insightful or original as possible. Chances are, the director intended to make you think about society, because isn't that what film is all about?

- ◆ When you are analysing those film techniques, make sure they do directly help prove your points. They should be intentional and have an effect on the audience, and you can get extra marks for writing about how strong that effect is and why. Show appreciation, or even critique it.