# Film Studies Pre-Enrolment Task: Initial Assessment

### Instructions

Select the opening of a LIVE ACTION film of your choice. The extract should be **no longer than three minutes. It must NOT be any of the texts studied on the course. Ask your teacher if you are unsure if you can use a particular film.**

Write a 450 – 550 word analysis of the sequence, commenting on the use of:

* Camera and lighting – types of shots, camera movement, amount of light
* Settings, props and costume – locations, backgrounds, what the actors use and wear
* Editing – the pace of the sequence (fast/slow), types of transitions used
* Sound – dialogue, music, sound effects, etc.
* Performance – what the actors are doing with their bodies and their voices.

**To be successful at this task, you MUST meet the criteria:**

Make sure that your work is the right length AND you've talked about the five micro-elements bullet-pointed above.

Academic writing is not about opinion – it's not a review or a blog. Look at the examples as a style guide.

**Save your work digitally AND bring a printed copy to your first Film Studies lesson. You will be given instructions for digital submission in your first week.**

## Example 1 - Word Count: 467

*The Graduate* (1967, Mike Nichols) opens with a close-up of Benjamin’s face, surrounded by a backdrop of whiteness, introducing the audience too their protagonist. The camera proceeds to pull out revealing too the audience that Benjamin is in a crowded plane surrounded by others, suggesting to the audience that Benjamin feels emotionally and mentally isolated, despite psychically being around others, Nichols continues to emphasize this motif throughout the film as one of its core reoccurring themes.

As the plane prepares to land the pilot speaks the first sentence of dialogue within the film “Ladies and gentleman we’re about to begin our descent into Los Angles” perhaps foreshadowing the beginnings of Benjamin’s emotional descent once he returns to Los Angles.

Nichols cuts to the second shot of the film, depicting Benjamin being carried along by an automatic walkway, reflecting how up too this point Benjamin’s life has been controlled by external factors. During this shot the song “The Sound of Silence” plays, its lyrics directly making references too loneliness and lack of communication, both recurring motifs within the film.

As the automatic walkway carries Benjamin along, he passes by a repeating and identically even pattern on the wall behind him, this communicates too the audience of Benjamin’s desire to escape his institutionalized, routine based mundane lifestyle. The seeming never-ending bland walkway may also reflect Benjamin’s uncertainty about his future, viewing his current life path to be going nowhere of note. Faceless strangers breeze past our protagonist, showing how comparatively in control of their lives his peers are. Benjamin faces forward throughout this sequence, only breaking away once to make eye contact with a woman walking past, introducing Benjamin’s desire for female companionship which is a main focus of the film’s narrative.

The films cut to a scene of Benjamin’s baggage travelling across an automatic carrier, visually comparing Benjamin himself too psychical property, which is later revealed too be an accurate analogy for Benjamin, as he spends the majority of the film’s runtime being forced into situations.

On Benjamin’s exit out of the airport, a young couple walks past Benjamin in the opposite direction, the young man’s costume stands out within the frame, visually more casual than anyone introduced within the film yet creating a strong contrast between Benjamin’s bureaucratic two-piece suit. The young man confidently guides the young girl along with him, representing Benjamin’s ideal life, being able to walk confidently into his future as his own person. The contrasting directions each character walks directly implies the different directions their lives are currently on.

Now outside the airport, Benjamin is seen psychically greeting someone through a wave, the implications being that it’s his parents, the fact that the frame only shows Benjamin and not his parents is significant as it introduces Benjamin’s consistent isolation from his parents.

## Example 2 – Word Count: 520

 *The Truman Show* (1998, Peter Weir) opens with a close-up of Christof, from what seems to be an interview on a TV screen. This is done to immediately inform the viewer that the film is taking place in a television show. Christof’s first few lines illustrate his point of view, and how he feels about Truman and his life, that Truman will be better off ignorant to his observers. Yet this is already being questioned by the TV screen, suggesting the interview itself may be fake, and also by himself, with the line “the world he inhabits is in some respects counterfeit”.

We then see Truman for the first time, once again through a TV screen. The camera zooms out from his eyes, telling the audience that this is the main character. As he stares into the camera (or a mirror from his perspective), he talks to himself, pretending he is in some kind of TV show or movie, unknowing that he really is. Not only is this extremely ironic, it also provides great character development, showing he is quite creative and playful, making the life the show traps him in even more tragic.

This footage then continues to inter-cut between credits revealing the other characters names, and that Christof created the show, making what he said prior to this even more biased. Sometimes Truman almost responds as he inter-cuts, saying things like “you’re crazy”, foreshadowing events later in the film.

The next interview that we see is with Hannah Gill, who plays Meryl on the show. She is introduced without the TV screen element, almost as if you are the interviewer, or that you are entering this fake world yourself. As she speaks, she states that The Truman Show is her “life”, but then calls it a “lifestyle”, this helps emphasise her divide with Truman, as what he sees is not the real her, and the only one who can really call it a life is Truman himself.

Over this sequence we hear a very angelic piano and choir, symbolising the god-like presence, that Christof and the actors have over Truman and his entire existence. The inter-cutting of Truman continues through here as well.

The final Character we meet is Louis Coltrane, who plays Marlon. The first and only thing he states is that nothing is “fake”, just “controlled”, this then sparks the question, under certain circumstances, what’s the difference?

After we see the title, the final shot of the opening, is of Truman’s face. But this time it’s different, there is no longer a TV screen. We are now looking specifically through the lens of the camera. We know this due to the darkness we can see on the edges of the frame. It feels as if you are watching through some sort of spy camera, which is in fact, exactly what is happening. The sides of the cupboard we see around the camera, look as though they are closing in on Truman, as he is sitting in centre frame, this emphasises both that he is the focus of the show and that he is closed off from the real world.

## Example 3 – Word Count: 550

*A Clockwork Orange* (1971, Stanley Kubrick) begins with loud, dramatic music and a blank red screen- hinting at the exciting violence that is to come. Just as the tension becomes unbearable, the brief opening credits roll, and it cuts to a close-up shot of Alex’s face. He stares directly into the camera with a menacing, unsettling smirk, and the viewer feels that he is staring straight at them, creating a lot of unease and discomfort. Centre framing draws even more attention to Alex and his friends; they are also more brightly lit than the other patrons of the bar, showing them clearly as the dominant contrast. The camera slowly zooms out, causing the viewer some relief as they are distanced from Alex- but his stare is unwavering, suggesting that maybe he- and the terror he brings- is unescapable, no matter how far you flee. Meanwhile, Alex’s companions appear zoned out, all of them looking away from the camera- as is everyone else in the room. This brings even more focus to the protagonist, gives him power, and suggests that he is in charge- or at least thinks he is.

While the performance hints at a rather unsettling experience for the viewer, the set dressing does the same. The furniture is made up largely of sculptures of naked women, hinting at the prevalent sexual themes in the film- and at the way its characters view women. In their eyes, women are there only for the convenience and pleasure of men; this becomes clear right away when we see the patrons of the bar- all of them male- using depictions of them as tables and footrests. Sculptures of nude women are also used as decoration, hinting at another negative view of their sex- that one of their main purposes is to be visually pleasing for men.

This opening one-shot scene also makes use of symmetricity, with only a few differences to break things up and prevent it from being visually boring. This neatness, combined with the lack of clutter aside from the furniture and drinks, creates an air of clearly false security- the bar is almost clinically neat, and yet the crudely positioned nude sculptures and the unsettling aura of the protagonist prove that this place is full of depravity. The viewer is even further unsettled; this hints to them that this is not a film where they can afford to let their guard down.

The setting, furthermore, is quite alien and unfamiliar- the unique furniture, the unfamiliar, curling words on the walls, the slightly odd clothing and makeup, and what looks like a guard dressed in what looks like a white cotton jumpsuit, all create a dreamlike sense of detachment from reality. This is aided in part by the contrast of light and dark, combined with the tacky pops of colour from the sculptures’ shining wigs and the fact that there is no environmental sound, only the loud, dramatic music. And yet the sense of detachment this all brings is overwhelmed by the curiosity it creates. Furthermore, the captivating stare of Alex feels as if it traps the viewer- this unsettling, strange scene is not one the viewer can escape, and they are trapped by an overwhelming curiosity- and fear- of what the rest of the film will bring.