Extended response: Reading and defence (Assessment instrument 1)

This sample is intended to inform the design of assessment instruments in the senior phase of learning. It highlights the qualities of student work and the match to the syllabus standards.

Dimensions assessed

- Understanding and interpreting
- Applying and analysing
- Evaluating and synthesising

Assessment instrument

The response presented in this sample is in response to an assessment task

**Part 1: Reading (written)**

Select a film text directed by a recognised auteur and apply either a reader-centred approach or an author-centred approach to produce a reading of the film. The reading must include direct and indirect references to the selected film.

**Part 2: Defence (written)**

Analyse and evaluate the aspects and strategies of the chosen theoretical approach you have used to produce your reading of the film.

**Context**

Your reading will be published in the journal *Reading Australian Film*, which has an audience of adult readers who are conversant with and interested in film, including the one that you have selected as your focal text. Your defence is written for your teacher as primary audience, and must explain how the selected approach has allowed you to make meaning of the text in this particular way.

**Length:** 1000–1500 words
## Instrument-specific standards matrix

Student responses have been matched to instrument-specific criteria and standards; those which best describe the student work in this sample are shown below. For more information about the syllabus dimensions and standards descriptors, see [www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/17601-assessment.html](http://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/17601-assessment.html).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard A</th>
<th>Standard B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Understanding and interpreting</strong></td>
<td><strong>Applying and analysing</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student work has the following characteristics:</td>
<td>The student work has the following characteristics:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• discerning understanding of the complexities of a self-selected film and its social, historical and cultural contexts to produce a discriminating and defensible interpretation</td>
<td>• thorough understanding of a self-selected film text and its social, historical and cultural context to produce an informed and defensible interpretation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• discerning understanding and insightful interpretation of a reader-centred or author-centred theoretical approach</td>
<td>• thorough understanding and interpretation of a reader-centred or author-centred theoretical approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• discerning understanding of the social, historical and cultural contexts of the chosen theoretical approach and of subtle similarities and differences within this approach.</td>
<td>• thorough understanding of the social, historical and cultural contexts of the chosen theoretical approach and of substantial similarities and differences within this approach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Applying and analysing</strong></td>
<td><strong>Evaluating and synthesising</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student work has the following characteristics:</td>
<td>The student work has the following characteristics:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• discerning application of chosen theoretical approach and ways of valuing literary texts to produce an insightful and defensible interpretation of a self-selected film text</td>
<td>• effective application of chosen theoretical approach and ways of valuing literary texts to produce a defensible interpretation of a self-selected film text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• discerning analysis of how different genres, structures and textual features of a self-selected film text support interpretation</td>
<td>• thorough analysis of how different genres, structures and textual features of a self-selected film text support interpretation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• discerning manipulation of the roles, relationships, patterns and conventions associated with academic communication, including terminology</td>
<td>• effective use of the roles, relationships, patterns and conventions associated with academic communication, including terminology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• discerning use of textual features to consistently achieve desired effects for the specific audience.</td>
<td>• effective use of textual features to achieve desired effects for specific audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evaluating and synthesising</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student work has the following characteristics:</td>
<td>The student work has the following characteristics:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• thorough and discriminating evaluation of the chosen theoretical approach used to produce an insightful and defensible interpretation of a self-selected film text</td>
<td>• thorough evaluation of the chosen theoretical approach used to produce a defensible interpretation of a self-selected film text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• thorough and discriminating evaluation of own interpretation, making explicit the theoretical approach that underpins it</td>
<td>• thorough evaluation of own interpretation, making explicit the theoretical approach that underpins it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• thorough and systematic synthesis of relevant ideas, interpretations and viewpoints with discriminating supporting evidence.</td>
<td>• systematic synthesis of relevant ideas, interpretations and viewpoints with convincing supporting evidence.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Colour highlights have been used in the table to emphasise the qualities that discriminate between the standards.
## Student response — Standard A

The annotations show the match to the instrument-specific standards.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comments</th>
<th>Reader-centred Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>discerning analysis of how different genres, structures and textual features of a self-selected film text support interpretation</td>
<td>A Very Long Engagement, directed by Jean-Pierre Jeunet, is a visually stunning film. Throughout, Jeunet explores the brutality of warfare through the narrative of two lovers separated in World War I. At some points in the film, I was confronted by scenes of conflict and I aligned with the pacifist agenda presented. However, during others, I questioned the credibility of the storyline. I felt sympathy for the protagonist, Mathilde, believing she was weak and a gender stereotype.</td>
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<tr>
<td>thorough and systematic synthesis of relevant ideas, interpretations and viewpoints with discriminating supporting evidence</td>
<td>I found Jeunet’s depiction of the self-mutilation of five soldiers horrific. Positioned by subjective shots from the perspective of soldiers, I shared their desperation, viewing them as innocent victims of the machinations of war. I drew parallels between the film and my experiences during travel when I visited prisoner of war and concentration camps. I was horrified by these experiences because I was confronted by past acts of brutality and had to face the reality that humans are capable of such barbaric behaviour.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>I was shocked by Jeunet’s meagre depictions of war and, at some stages, felt sick and shut my eyes. Graphic portrayals of unfettered killing and maltreatment presented a stark contrast to my everyday life. In my limited life experience, I have neither experienced true violence nor the deprivations of war. I was confronted by the overt exhibitions of violence because I found them alien and threatening in terms of my own experiences.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>However, my interpretation of the film was revised when I identified a pacifist agenda. Instead of reactions of horror, I became bored with the film because it seemed didactic. Undercurrents of pacifism in A Very Long Engagement are consistent with Jeunet’s antiterror stance in his films Micmacs and Delicatessen - both of which I have seen. After recognising this overt stance, I emotionally distanced myself from the film and thought that the scenes of conflict were deliberately dramatic and engineered to elicit a negative response towards warfare. During scenes of conflict, Jeunet used a set that is hyperrealistic with a monochrome colour scheme, strategic mise-en-scene which mirrors the soldiers’ bleak existence. Also, there was contrast in cinematic techniques for romantic scenes and scenes of war. In scenes of romance, golden hues are used as part of post production. Despite being bored by these obvious cues, I still aligned with the antiterror message because of my experiences during travel and my parents’ moderate pacifism.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
My boredom was compounded when the film ended ideologically and the lovers are reunited. Since Jeanet showed a uncompromising depiction of war, I thought that this approach of hyperrealism would extend to representations of romance. This was not the case. At the end of the film, Manech is found to be alive. This, despite being sent with four other condemned soldiers into no man’s land, an event I was certain would account to death. Visual cues were used to align my reading with a perspective of shared elation. Jeanet employs close up shots when the lovers are reunited, emphasizing Mathilde’s dramatic reaction of ecstasy. However, I established a divergent reading. Instead of sharing Mathilde’s joy, I felt disgusted. Having been conditioned to reject fairy tale endings, I thought that the ending was tame. I identified negative parallels between the film and trashy American romances which lack intellectual and emotional depth. My disappointment was strengthened because I had found Jeanet’s other films, such as Amélie and MicMac, to be original and insightful.

Throughout, I thought that Mathilde and Manech’s co-dependence was a negative affirmation of gender stereotypes rather than a powerful sign of love. Although I could perceive their relationship was a counterpoint to the brutality of war, I favoured a feminist interpretation. Mathilde and Manech’s relationship was (symbolic) transcending barriers of war and disunity. However, rather than seeing this as strong determination, I saw Mathilde’s dependence as a sign of weakness. I have been exposed to a strong feminist message at school and at home, where female assertions of autonomy are admired. The entire film, Mathilde searches for Manech. She is miserable, noting that without him she is ‘incomplete’. Here, I noticed that Mathilde was defined by her relationship with a man. Given my feminist conditioning and limited experience of love, I interpreted Mathilde’s behaviour as an unhealthy obsession.
Reader-centred Defence

Initially, I perceived the soldiers as innocent victims of the machinations of war. I was emotionally involved in the film, sharing the soldiers’ despair. This reading is best considered using Rick Thomson’s developmental model for literary theory. I had reached Stage 3 in Thomson’s model – Analysing – where I was emotionally involved in the viewing process, drawing “imaginative insight into the experiences of characters and what they are feeling” while drawing upon repertoire of personal experiences to inform my understanding (Thomson, 1987, p.361). In order to understand the motivations of the soldiers, I drew upon the feelings of horror I experienced when I visited prisoner of war and concentration camps.

However, as part of Analysing, Thomson (1987, p.361) avows “readers are emotionally drawn to characters whose experiences they recognize as similar...to their own”. Through this assertion, the efficacy of Thomson’s model in explaining my interpretive strategies is limited. I cannot explain why I was emotionally engaged in the soldiers’ predicament, given that their experiences presented a stark contrast to my life. Abiding to Thomson’s model, I should have been drawn to the protagonist, Malinche, whose experiences bear greater similarity to my own; she is a young female still living in India. This did not occur.

However, more recently, psychological theory from Norman Holland and David Bleich could explain my response to the soldiers. Holland (1992) and Bleich (1992) maintain that we react to literary texts with the same psychological responses we do to events in terms of an individual identity theme (Holland, 1992, Bleich, 1992). According to the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, I am type ESFJ, privileging the cognitive functions Sensing, Feeling, and Judging. Consequently, I am more disposed to “promote harmony” between individuals by attending to the needs of others” (Personality, 2011). In the film, the Army Officers undermine Malinche’s soldier’s dignity and wellbeing. This behaviour was in such odds with my psychological makeup that I felt compelled to see the soldiers as innocent victims.

Holland’s theory is further useful in explaining my horror for depictions of warfare. Holland defines the viewing process through four main psychological responses: defense, expectations, fantasy and transformation (Holland, 1992). Holland’s response of ‘defence’ was evidenced in my reaction to graphic content. Described by Holland as the response that “[shields what the individual lets in from the outside]”, the ‘defence’ mechanism describes
Comments

thorough and systematic synthesis of relevant ideas, interpretations and viewpoints with discriminating supporting evidence

discerning manipulation of the roles, relationships, patterns and conventions associated with academic communication, including terminology

reader's caution when approaching material that has the potential to cause guilt or anxiety (Holland, 1992, p.205). During the film, I utilised defence mechanisms, in some scenes, I shut my eyes and detached myself a reaction reached because I did not want to acknowledge that humans are capable of such barbarity. While Holland and Blythe's theory was useful in explaining my emotional response to characters and events, it was difficult to apply the theory after I distanced myself from the film and sought to view it more objectively. This is because psychoanalytical theory does accommodate a critical faculty that can escape its subjectivity (Thomson, 1987, p.135).

Through experiences during travel, my parents' pacifism and cinematographic techniques I felt an antipathy for war. This is consistent with Wolfgang Iser's theory that literary meaning results from reciprocity between the reader and textual features. Iser maintains the way a reader experiences a text "...will reflect his [or her] own disposition" (Iser, 1974, p.281). In the film, the stark, monochrome set helped to inform my perception of conflict, acting as a response-inducing structure, the "...mannaing strategies to make the 'right' discoveries" (Iser, 1974, p.283). Due to these cues, I felt positioned to adopt a pacifist standpoint. Hans Robert Jauss' literary theory compliments Iser's work. A precursor to Iser, Jauss also draws on phenomenological traditions of thought. He asserts "[a] literary work predisposes its readers to a very definite type of reception by textual strategies, overt and covert signals" (Jauss, 1967, p.72). The contrast in post-production techniques - the warm hues for scenes of romance and the grey hues for warfare were overt and promoted the anti-war message that I adopted.

Nevertheless, when I identified a pacifist agenda, I became bored and disenchanted. Responses in my viewing journal changed from "I can't look at the screen" to "Jauss's using greys and blacks to suggest warfare is horrid". I became less emotionally engaged, believing the film was didactic. Iser explains this response in that:

The more a text individualises or confirms an expectation it has initially aroused, the more we become aware of its didactic purpose, so that at best we can only accept or reject the thesis forced upon us. More often than not, the very clarity of such texts will make us want to free ourselves from their clutches (Iser, 1974, The Implied Reader, p.278).

During the film, I accepted the thesis that war was horrific. However, it became difficult for me to transpose such recognitions into an emotional response once I felt that the film was
Comments

thorough and
discriminating
evaluation of own
interpretation, making
explicit the theoretical
approach that
underpins it

When Manesch and Mathilde’s are reunited, I was disappointed because I expected the film to be original and insightful. This response is explained by employing theories of intertextuality as espoused by Juss. He asserts that past experiences with a genre create preconceived expectations for readers when approaching other literary material (Juss, 1967, p.69). Juss describes these as “horizon of expectations” (Juss, 1967, p.69). (Having seen several of Jeneret’s other work, I established a “horizon of expectations”, anticipating intellectual depth and ideological undercurrent (Juss, 1967, p.69). My expectations were disappointed. I disliked the film because I made textual links to trashy American romances: a genre I have been conditioned to reject. Despite this, Iser was more effective than Juss in articulating my reading tendencies because it was my rejection of, and distancing from, a didactic thesis in the film that underpinned my response to the film.

Throughout, I disliked Mathilde and Manesch’s co-dependence: a resistant response that is explained only by considering Stanley Fish’s interpretive communities. A later phenomenological theorist, Fish extends Iser and Juss’ original approach, acknowledging that readers can reach resistant interpretations. These are contingent on a reader’s membership in interpretive communities. Fish describes interpretive communities as those who share strategies “...for constituting the text’s] properties” (Fish, 1976, p.327). I belong to the interpretive community of Brisbane Girls Grammar School where we have been conditioned to expect and admire female independence in text. Being exposed to a strong feminist message, I saw Mathilde’s dependence as a negative affirmation of gender stereotypes.

Overall, Iser’s theoretical approach was most useful in understanding my own interpretive strategies. While, Holland, Bleier, and Fish helped to explain why I felt antipathy for Mathilde and wariness, my response was contingent on my rejection of the film’s didactic nature. My response was not wholly subjective. After noticing the overt purist agenda, I emotionally distanced myself from the film, took little notice of the response inviting structures and wanted only to escape from its “clutches”.

lecturing to me. By applying Juss’ theory however, I extended my understanding of my 

file and its reminder why I have.
References


Comments

discerning manipulation of the roles, relationships, patterns and conventions associated with academic communication, including terminology

Long
Student response — Standard B

Comments

**Effective use of textual features to achieve desired effects for specific audience**

**Thorough analysis of how different genres, structures and textual features of a self-selected film text support interpretation**

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**READING**

I found David Fincher’s 1999 film Fight Club to be an allegory for serial killing and anti-consumerism. Following a near-fatal automobile accident, nameless protagonist, I was exposed to a surreal struggle through a mundane world of consumerism, striving to find identity and individuality that inspired and related to me on a personal level, far from the socially violent blood-spot film I had expected. This came as a result of my perspectives on the socio-ideological culture and the consumer-driven society in which we live. The film opened my eyes to topics of materialism, consumption, restlessness and anti-establishment ideologies.

I was drawn to the film’s esoteric elements because I have a deep-seated belief that we have become detached from the natural, instinctive way of life, feeling that “We are consumers. We’re the by-products of a lifestyle recession,” and that this has removed us from the survival-instincts required if our species is to continue at a sustainable rate and quality. The protagonist of the film explicitly articulates this feeling after his sudden breakdown, explaining “[we are] not just a bunch of stuff... it was us!” This concept of seeking personas for identity, pondering “what kind of dying set defines me as a person?” has always intrigued me. Not until there is a catastrophic “disaster”, are we freed from our consumerist tendencies and exposed to a world of human qualities and values, “reincarnated.” The film delivered a weighty message, relatable to anyone living in a consumerist society. All through my life as a child in a capitalist society, I have been told that I must study to get a respectable job, to earn money, to afford possessions. This film completely contrasted that point of view, presenting an entirely new perspective. Shopping is the core of so-called civilized existence, which the film outright rejects, implying “you are not your job. You are not how much money you have in the bank.” My attention was immediately drawn to this anti-consumer sentiment, that merely due to the vastly conflicting culture to the way in which I had been raised, then so I began to contemplate and ponder the outcomes that could result from living in a world free from consumerism, “reincarnated” from the mazes of disaster to appreciate true worth, instead of financial wealth.

I found myself relating strongly to the film on the level of masochistic violence, feeling that “we prove our love of pain by how much pain we can inflict, but by how much we can endure.” This vastly revolutionary and interesting point of view, so sharply contrasting to my regular, mundane lifestyle, that I was immediately drawn into the film and related with the protagonist to comprehend such a vastly different ideology and behaviour. If superhero films have taught us anything, it is that despite vast physical abilities and prowess, the true victory and strength comes from enduring great pain or sacrifice to reach a goal. This is addressed often throughout the film, where, for no practical reason, one character introduces another to “chemical-fame,” whereby he retained strength and inner peace through tolerance of pain, rather than inflicting pain. As a pseudo-sufferer with equally considerable pain tolerance, I related to this on a personal level, pondering opportunities to exhibit strength through “how much... [suffering]... we can endure,” rather than “how much... we can inflict.”
effective use of the roles, relationships, patterns and conventions associated with academic communication, including terminology

The film’s microcinematic elements opened my eyes to new points of view and perspectives on the hierarchical and class-based classifications enforced by society. Though decontextualised, often in modern media and language, naturalism is a key desire for the classless social system. I often ponder ideological deviations around the concept that “we are designed to be hunting and war in a society of shopping.” – (David Fincher). The film presents a new ideology of a primitive, egalitarian way of life, returning to the classless hunter-gatherer society where Survival of the Fittest is the only rule and we are freed from the capitalist hierarchy that defines our current way of life. Fight Club opened my eyes to the groundbreaking ideology of primitive communists, primarily because I have always believed that without conforming, one could not move to survive in a class-oriented capitalist society or ‘busted-down’ economy. The film suggested a profound method of attaining freedom, reverting to “ground-zero”, and starting anew, “walking all through the ruins of Rockefeller Centre.” – (Tyler Durden), and living in a perfectly equal world without laws or restrictions of class structure and hierarchy.

Despite expecting an unnecessarily violent, postmodern-decked film marred with blood-splatter and uncontained rage, as I delved more on the complexities of the plot-line the microcinematic visual presentation, I found David Fincher’s Fight Club to be an extremely enjoyable, yet deep and complex allegory for massconsumerism, anarchism and capitalism.
Comments

thorough analysis of how different genres, structures and textual features of a self-selected film text support interpretation

effective application of chosen theoretical approach and ways of valuing literary texts to produce a defensible interpretation of a self-selected film text

thorough evaluation of the chosen theoretical approach used to produce a defensible interpretation of a self-selected film text

DEFENCE

In my reader-centred reading of David Fincher’s 1999 film “Fight Club,” I addressed my expectations of a “film

marked with blood-sport and urbanized rage”, prior to viewing, I discussed my aesthetic agreement and affiliation to

the text, and structured the text to address my own personal definitions of masculinity and identity. In doing so,

I considered Finochietto’s concept of Horizon of Expectations, Althusser’s Theory of Interpellation, and

succeeded to Umberto Eco’s concept of Diffréction of the Reader, among others, whilst unknowingly conforming to read,

appreciate and interpret the text as I had been programmed to do as an invariably interested member of my time, culture

and language.

I found my reading of David Fincher’s “Fight Club” to differ greatly from my initial expectation of a film with

such a title, which defines it as an “interior of expectations,” where I had had a preconceived notion of a film with

a distinct and clear-cut narrative. However, I discovered that the film exceeded my expectations, and that the

film is more complex and multi-layered than what I had anticipated. I found myself constantly re-evaluating my

interpretation of the film, and considering different perspectives from within the world of the film, as well as

within the world of the audience. I was able to relate my own emotions and experiences to the characters and

plotlines of the film, and to understand the complexity of the human condition.

As I viewed “Fight Club,” I found myself increasingly relating to it, at first on the level of intense and expressive

emotions, and then on the level of intellectual and emotional understanding. “Interpellation,” as defined by Louis

Althusser, is where I “recognize myself as belonging to a particular identity.” This process of realizing “what means me” was key in

understanding the film. Throughout the film, I addressed regularly to the complexity of the film. This became apparent

more and more as I watched from different angles, and at different times, as I was able to understand the nuanced

themes and motifs of the film. As I began to understand and appreciate the complexity of the film, I was able to

relate to it on a deeper level, and to understand the themes and motifs of the film.

In conclusion, “Fight Club” is a film that challenges the viewer to think beyond the surface level of the

storyline, and to consider the deeper themes and motifs of the film. I found myself constantly re-evaluating my

interpretation of the film, and to understand the complexity of the human condition.
During my reading of Fight Club, I began to stretch further and further from the text itself and more deeply into my own life and autobiography, succumbing to what Umberto Eco’s defines as the drift of the reader. I went so far as to address the fact that “I must study to get a responsible job, to earn money, to afford possessions…” and thereby keep from the text in my society, being a capital-based democracy, to my upbringing, to my ideologies on working and consuming. But would relate this to fluctuating from “jump to pile” or “drive to planet.” I also succumbed to Wittgenstein and Derrida’s concept of Affective Fallacy, whereby I considered “the final and its results” by deriving my critical evaluation “from the psychological effects of” the text. Because I felt masculine pride and clandestine excitement at the moments of “blood sport — uncensored rage” and destruction, I presumed that the text was worldwide. However, this was a personal response; it may not have been the reaction of those who watched the film upon my recommendation.

Throughout my reading of David Fincher’s Fight Club I followed certain reading approaches, adhered to specific theories and succumbed to various concepts, reading and responding to the text as could be expected by a product of the decades and time of my own and socio-ideological culture, and somebody capable of language, therefore having been exposed to a whole host of factors that influence reading practice and comprehension of texts.

Acknowledgments

The QCAA acknowledges the contribution of Brisbane Girls Grammar School and Benowa State High School in the preparation of this document.