

# Textual Analysis: Cultural Context

## Cultural Context

**Download - [Condensed TA Analysis assignment details](#)**

The first key area that you will need to explore in your Textual Analysis is cultural context. By now you should have a firm idea of what it means to understand the cultural context of a film.

As the *IB Film Guide* states, cultural context appears in both the taught syllabus and assessment tasks, and involves consideration of some of the following factors, some of which may be blended (such as socio-economic factors).

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Economic	Such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• the economic classes and issues explored within a film's narrative</li><li>• the economic message or point of view of the filmmaker</li><li>• the economic influence or impact caused by a film or a film's production methods.</li></ul>
Geographical	Such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• the geographical location of a film's origin</li><li>• the region that is depicted in the film</li><li>• the colonial or post-colonial legacy addressed by the film.</li></ul>
Historical	Such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• the period in time in which a film was created</li><li>• the era or cultural moment depicted by the film</li><li>• the events or notable historical figures depicted in the film.</li></ul>
Institutional	Such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• the production, distribution and exhibition factors involved for a film</li><li>• the digital or analogue production and distribution factors involved for the film</li><li>• the budget and control factors involved in a film's production (independent vs. studio based).</li></ul>
Political	Such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• a film that attempts to persuade, subvert or create a political effect</li><li>• a film that has caused or incited political events or effects</li><li>• a film that directly addresses a political issue or concern.</li></ul>
Social	Such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• the communities, identities or issues represented in a film</li><li>• the social values, conventions and traditions represented in a film</li><li>• the use of the film by particular communities, identities or groups.</li></ul>
Technological	Such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• the tools, products and methods used to create a film</li><li>• the integration of distribution and exhibition technology into a film</li><li>• concerns and factors related to a film's sustainability and/or longevity based on the technology used to create, distribute or exhibit it.</li></ul>

Something rather magical happens when the formal film elements - such as mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing and sound, the immediate experience of viewers (via screening notes) and the dedicated writing of film students and scholars are linked to a specific cultural context.

Films begin to breathe and expand both their meaning and significance for both filmmakers and film audiences.

It would be impossible to isolate and fully understand every cultural context that might apply to an individual film title. That is because films are not static but living and changing texts that can be used, adapted and activated according to different times, locations, audiences and needs.

Where a film comes from, who made it and why, who paid for the production, and who was affected by its story are also all central questions that relate to cultural context.

Addressing these questions explicitly requires time, effort and research, and is anything but haphazard or random. Writing about a film's context also takes the courage and fortitude needed to justify the particular perspectives and frameworks explored by a student, scholar or writer. Just as an individual film text is alive, so too are the contexts in which it is embedded.

A minute change in perspective - a shift from looking at a specific film from the point of view of the technological innovations and tools used in its production to that of its historical or geographical points of origin - can radically transform both how we view a film and how write about it.

The 2017 horror film *Get Out* reflects the current political and social discourse on racism in 21st century America and satirizes ideas of white privilege, institutional racism, and racial profiling.

**Review - [Why Jordan Peele's 'Get Out' just made history](#)**

## **Cultural Context: Rubric and Example**

Now you are going to work on analyzing the cultural context of the film you've chosen for your textual analysis.

Notice that we said *of the film*, not the extract.

This will allow you to provide a solid introduction to your textual analysis that will focus on locating your chosen film solidly within its time and place.

Then, you are going to pick three or four factors of cultural context to discuss in relation to your film.

This section of your TA is worth 6 out of 24 points.

## Cultural context

Evidence: Textual analysis and sources.

- To what extent does the student demonstrate an understanding of the cultural context of the film text?
- To what extent does the student support their understanding of the cultural context with research from relevant sources?

Mark	Descriptor	Possible characteristics
0	The work does not reach a standard described by the descriptors below.	
1 - 2	This work is limited. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The student demonstrates little or no understanding of the identified cultural context of the chosen film.</li><li>• The student does not reference sources that are relevant or appropriate to the work.</li></ul>	Basic Ineffective Superficial
3 - 4	This work is satisfactory. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The student demonstrates some understanding of the identified cultural context of the chosen film, but this is underdeveloped.</li><li>• The student references sources that are mostly relevant or appropriate to the work.</li></ul>	Acceptable Standard Typical
5 - 6	This work is excellent. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The student demonstrates an effective and appropriate understanding of the identified cultural context of the chosen film.</li><li>• The student references suitable sources that are both relevant and appropriate, adding to the critical perspectives explored in the work.</li></ul>	Compelling Honed Insightful

## Take one! - a model example

Here's an example from a model, provided by IB, of the first page-and-a-half of a textual analysis on a scene excerpt from Jane Campion's 1993 New Zealand film *The Piano*.

You reviewed this example in Year 1, but now we'll look more closely at exactly what this student did to get such a high score.

Because this is the first year of the new curriculum, this is not an actual student-written essay, but one that IB has put together to give students and teachers an idea of what they are looking for in this assessment, and how students might approach it.

So, while you'll notice that the entire assessment has a maximum word limit of 1750 words, this model actually has 1938 words, for which it was not penalized.

### TA Exemplar 1

Download - [TA01: Textual analysis](#)

Download - [Textual Analysis: The Piano \(1993\)](#)

### Commentary

Notice how the author tells us right away not only which factors of cultural context they are going to consider, but also what film elements they will be focusing on.

This is crucial as IB very clearly states that:

*at the start of the textual analysis, students should clearly state which film elements they are going to discuss,*

and this should also be true for the factors of cultural context she is planning to focus on.

While it might have made more sense for them to start the third sentence with a new paragraph, the author does begin to discuss the elements of cultural context in exactly the same order as they introduced them. This is the mark of a well-organized analysis, and helps the reader follow the flow of the author's discussion easily.

Starting with a description of the way women were treated in New Zealand in the mid-nineteenth century, especially in regards to marriage, sex, and property, all of which will be revealed as relevant topics in the film, they then go on to describe the geography of the island where the story takes place, pointing out that this remote setting is not only a 'typical feature' of the filmmaker's work, but a way in which the director can explore character.

While acknowledging that Campion herself does not identify herself as a feminist, the author cites two authors who make arguments that Campion's characters are feminist constructions, and that Campion herself was quoted as saying that she did not want her female characters to be objectified sexually.

Another important aspect of this analysis - and one that IB most definitely requires - are the variety of authoritative sources used to support the analysis.

Here, on the first page, they parenthetically cite two sources, quoting from acknowledged film authorities on Campion's work. We might also suggest that the author also could have used citations for the discussion of the gender history of New Zealand, as it is likely they researched this area as well.

The only drawback to this cultural context analysis is that it is a bit too short and underdeveloped.

**How long should this discussion be?**

If you were to write your TA in Arial 12 point font, you would write about four single spaced pages to meet the 1,750 word requirement of this assessment.

So, to make sure you provide enough initial information about the cultural context of your film, and give yourself enough 'real estate' for the body of your essay which will focus on an analysis of certain film elements and their relationship to cultural context, try to write 1 ¼ single spaced pages using 12-point font for your cultural context introduction.

Your introduction will focus on certain cultural factors of the film as a whole. This will give you approximately 2 ¾ pages for the rest of your essay.

To determine the exact amount of words per page using the font you choose, use this word counter app.

**Review - [Words Per Page](#)**