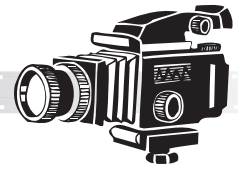


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# Introduction

*Film. n. 7. A drama, episode, event etc. recorded on cinematographic film, magnetic tape etc. for subsequent viewing.*

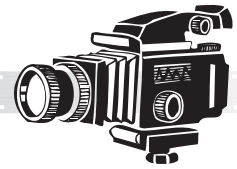
*The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*

Turning the words of a script into a series of coherent screen images involves the skills and imaginations of many – directors, producers, editors, special effects creators, sound designers, costume designers, make-up artists, cinematographers, actors and a multitude of others. Interpreting and responding to film is also a creative act and involves learning how to ‘read’ the meaning these artists construct on celluloid. *FilmStarts: Approaches to Film Study* is designed to assist in this process. Through it, we aim to extend students’ enjoyment and appreciation of the art of film, to stimulate their imaginations, and to develop their skills and understandings in analysing film.

The importance of being able to ‘read’ visual text, including film, has become increasingly significant in curriculum areas in recent times. In most English syllabuses within Australia and overseas, ‘texts’ refer to any form of written, spoken or visual communication. Films are texts that combine all of these elements. Viewing is a component of all Australian syllabuses, usually in combination with reading. This book draws together elements of film study emphasised in secondary English syllabuses across Australia and elsewhere. It is particularly suitable to assist with classroom study at the upper secondary level.

*FilmStarts* provides teachers with an introduction to the elements of film and describes strategies for building students’ understanding of film in the classroom. It aims to offer a range of flexible teaching options that may be used with short or full-length feature films, documentaries or miniseries. The elements considered include codes and conventions of film, characters, camera work, sound, colour and lighting, and text. The way these elements are combined is explored through directing, reviewing and researching activities.

The book also provides opportunities for a close study of film openings. We have chosen a mix of films for study ranging from a black and white classic, *The Maltese Falcon*, to a contemporary high-tech special effects action drama, *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*. The films include adaptations from a Shakespearean play, a comic strip and a video game; they are made by Australian, American and British film-makers; they cover a variety of film genres including those which challenge the boundaries of conventional classifications; they explore diverse social and cultural settings and values; and they are likely to appeal to a wide audience.



## Activities

The following activities will develop students' thinking skills and give them opportunities to work within a variety of communication modes. A more detailed description of the nature of the skills and modes developed through these activities is provided on page 7. A cross in the box indicates there is an emphasis on that area.

### Thinking Skills

Activity	Remembering	Understanding	Applying	Analysing	Evaluating	Creating
1	X	X	X	X	X	X
2		X	X	X	X	
3	X	X	X	X		X

### Communication Modes

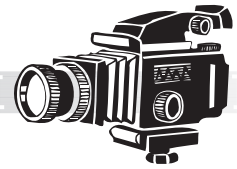
Activity	Using ICTs	Listening	Talking	Reading	Writing	Viewing
1			X		X	X
2	X		X	X		X
3	X		X			X

#### Activity 1

*Individually or in groups*

Identify a selection of key shots from a feature film or documentary. Ask students to view these and to examine how each shot is created by the camera. Consider what is seen in each frame, what types of shots are used and from what angle the frames are filmed. Suggest what these techniques reveal about the setting, events or characters.

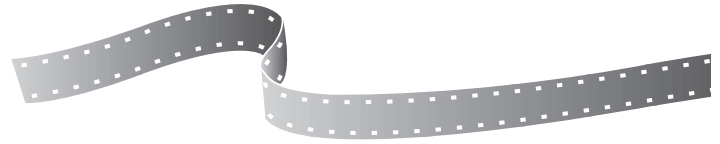
Make a chart to describe the findings, using the headings **Camera Shot** (what is in the frame or frames, for example action, people, objects and setting), **Type and Angle of Shot** (for example close-up; long; medium, low or high angle; wide), and **Purpose or Effect** (what does it reveal about the characters, story, ideas; what effect or meaning does it have?).



# Assessment Profile

In completing the activities on the elements of film, \_\_\_\_\_ (name of student) has achieved the following outcomes:

N = Needs further work C = Competent H = Highly competent	N	C	H
<b>Thinking Skills</b>			
<b>Remembering</b> Identifies generic conventions and structures Identifies techniques used to create meaning in film Recognises stereotypes and symbols			
<b>Understanding</b> Shows understanding of themes and ideas presented in film Shows understanding of the roles of film-makers and their crews in creating film Interprets ways meaning is shaped in film Understands the ways visual texts are shaped by social and cultural contexts			
<b>Applying</b> Makes comparisons between different film genres Makes comparisons about ways elements of film are used Applies knowledge of film techniques to compare and contrast a range of films			
<b>Analysing</b> Analyses the characteristics of film genres Analyses structures of film and film sequences Examines relationships between visual and verbal components of film Explores the ways in which film techniques contribute to meaning			
<b>Evaluating</b> Critically interprets a range of visual texts Evaluates effectiveness of individual elements of film Evaluates impact of film techniques on audience			
<b>Creating</b> Makes inferences about ideas, characters and plot-lines of films Composes visual texts in different media for different audiences Uses imagination to creatively participate in film study			
<b>Responding Skills</b>			
Engages with a range of written and visual texts for different purposes Empathises with characters and situations Communicates using a variety of modes to describe responses to film Identifies how point of view affects viewers' responses Presents personal responses in a variety of different forms Uses technologies to explore and express responses to film Makes judgements about acting and the art of film.			



# Film Openings

**I**n the opening four or five minutes of a film a viewer is drawn into the film by a variety of artistic means, including the way sound, text, colour, lighting, camera work and character development are employed in the creation of the film's meaning. Furthermore, film openings:

- can be easily studied in a short period of time
- allow study by individuals, small groups or large groups
- can be repeated easily in a short time frame – a necessity for close reading
- introduce the viewer to many of the features which unfold in the body of the film
- often indicate generic conventions
- usually cover a wide range of techniques central to film-making.

The order in which the films are studied in this section can be varied; other films may be introduced for comparison or other reasons; and viewers themselves might produce their own guidelines for critiquing film as their experience and confidence increases. This section is intended to provide a stimulus for imaginative exploration of the ways in which films create their meaning and experience. It is meant to encourage creative thought and enquiry and not to set limits on the ways in which this can be done.

It would be helpful for students to read the background notes or explore the material on the Web before they begin their close study of film openings. The viewing templates (pages 91 to 96) suggest focus questions for discussions of the different elements used to construct these openings. The filmnotes could be retained by the group leader and used to guide the discussion, or given to viewers as points of comparison for the ideas they develop as they work with the templates. Alternatively, the notes could be used as a springboard for discussion. The assessment profile (page 97) lists outcomes students can achieve through their close study of film openings.

## Ways to View the Opening Sequences

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### For Those who Have Not Seen the Film

Students should watch the opening scenes and make notes or discuss in groups their predictions about the film. Ask questions such as: What kind of film will it be? What will it be about? Who will be the main character or characters? What evidence in the opening scenes, or from your prior knowledge (the title, the actors taking part, the director, publicity and so on) gives you these impressions?