

MISE-EN-SCENE IN VCE ENGLISH

If you are [analysing a film as one of your texts for VCE English](#), you have likely encountered the term 'mise-en-scene' before. It's one of those terms film critics love to throw around. But what exactly is mise-en-scene? Why should VCE students become familiar with mise-en-scene? And how do you incorporate analysis of mise-en-scene into your VCE English essays?

Below, I explain what mise-en-scene is and outline the aspects of mise-en-scene you can look for and comment on in your film analysis essays.

What is mise-en-scene? A definition

'Mise-en-scene' is a French term that roughly means "placing on stage". describes Mise-en-scene is concerned with the composition elements within each movie frame. It includes the arrangement of everything that appears in the frame: the actors, decor, lighting, costume, and props, as well as the frame and camerawork. In short, if it appears on the screen and is a physical object recorded by the camera (rather than, say, a cutting technique), it is part of mise-en-scene.

Why should I care about mise-en-scene?

If you're writing about a film for VCE English, you must comment on mise-en-scene. This is because mise-en-scene is a key component of how the story is portrayed to the audience. Directors make careful decisions about what to include and what to not include in each shot and how to frame these elements. How a director chooses to place and portray the subjects in a frame, and what else is included in the shot, contributes to how we 'read' the scene.

How do I comment on and analyse mise-en-scene in VCE English film analysis?

The easiest way to remember what to look for is to split all of the elements of mise-en-scene into four main groups: setting, lighting, costumes, and acting style. Commenting on at least some of these elements will strengthen your English essay and help it 'stand out from the crowd'.

Below is a table that outlines some questions you can ask yourself when watching a film as well as the effect different mise-en-scene choices have on storytelling.

VISUAL ELEMENT	WHAT TO LOOK FOR	EFFECT
Setting	<p>Is the setting indoors or outdoors?</p> <p>If the setting is outdoors, is the setting large or small? Intimate or impersonal?</p> <p>If the setting is indoors, what is the building like?</p> <p>Is the building big or small, simple or opulent? Modern or dated? Roomy or cramped?</p>	<p>Setting introduces a location for the film and puts characters in context. For example, a large, opulent setting suggests that the characters are 'well-off'.</p> <p>Settings can also create suspense or set a mood. For example, a single character in a wide open space may suggest loneliness or isolation.</p> <p>Setting can also establish specific genre.</p>

<p>Lighting</p>	<p>What colours are prominent in this shot?</p> <p>What is the lighting like? Is it dim or bright? Clear or hazy? What direction is the lighting coming from? How does the lighting illuminate the characters?</p> <p>Lighting can be used to suggest a character's state of mind.</p>	<p>Lighting can tell us a lot about a character. For example, dark lighting used in a wide-angled shot may suggest desolation and loneliness. Harsh lighting from below may suggest a menacing, threatening character.</p> <p>A spotlight can draw our attention to the most significant character in the scene.</p>
<p>Costumes</p>	<p>What are the characters wearing? Do their clothes tell the audience things the dialogue does not? Are their clothes modern or dated, designer or second hand, well-fitted or baggy/tight?</p>	<p>Costumes tell the audience about a character's social status, personality, state of mind, etc.</p> <p>The use of colour in costumes help to define a character.</p>
<p>Acting style</p>	<p>Is the style natural; exaggerated; understated, measured or poised?</p>	<p>Key character traits can be quickly established through exaggeration, or emphasised through</p>

	<p>Is any element of acting style emphasised or exaggerated?</p> <p>How does the acting contribute to the impact of the scene?</p>	<p>voice and body language.</p> <p>Acting style can reveal much of a character's state of mind – fear, panic, distress, depression, joy, excitement, etc.</p>
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