Compare three theatrical film trailers. Give a detailed analysis of each and explain which is the more effective and why.

You need to concentrate on the following areas of film language:

♦ lighting and colour
♦ sound (including script)
♦ use of camera

♦ editing
♦ mise en scène (optional).

Make sure you understand what each area means and how that area of analysis is itself sub-divided, for example how the area of 'sound' is broken down into diegetic and non-diegetic, on-screen and off-screen sound.

1. Watch each trailer through two or three times.

2. Watch the extract through thinking about *one element of the analysis at a time*. You will not be able to write down every detail, but you should try to get an overview of the area you are looking at. Repeat the activity for each element of analysis. You may find it helpful to create a table for this on A3 paper:

Area to analyse	Trailer A:	Trailer B:	Trailer C:

3. Remember you should always say **why** the element has been used in the way it has. For example, this may be:

   ♦ to establish the genre
   ♦ to create a certain mood or atmosphere
   ♦ to involve the audience
   ♦ to surprise the audience by going against the usual conventions.

   You must also say **how**, for example, the audience is involved, or **how** the mood or atmosphere is created.

4. As well as looking at each section of the analysis separately, consider how each of the elements combine to create an overall impression. Does the speed of sound combine with the speed of editing to create a certain effect? You will need to view the trailers again to decide.

5. As you plan your written analysis, you can work through the table, discussing each element of trailer A in turn and comparing it with those same elements from trailers B & C, rather like writing a poetry comparison essay. By looking at each element in this way, you should avoid retelling the story of the trailer.

Remember to use Point Quotation Explanation for each paragraph.

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6. When you have finished, read your work through carefully and check that you have spelt the names of the titles, production crew and the terms of analysis correctly.

Sample analyses

1. Lighting and colour – *Whale Rider*

Towards the beginning of the trailer for *Whale Rider*, we see an image of bright fair weather skies – a light blue colour. All the way through this trailer we see natural colours like this sky-blue, suggesting this is a film about natural things and that the land is important. In contrast, when a man speaks of a need to lead the people out of darkness, all we can see behind him is darkness, so the image and the words complement each other. Later in the trailer we are shown a shot of a group of people trudging away from a beached whale. The drab colours here: grey and darker blues with shadows, contrast with those we have seen. This is a kind of pathetic fallacy: these people's distress over the whale is mirrored in the darkened landscape around them. Overall, light and colour are used to give the audience the impression of a beautiful natural world which is in trouble.

1A. Lighting and colour – *Donnie Darko*

The trailer for *Donnie Darko* uses contrasts between dark and light very effectively. The opening of the trailer has high-key lighting: a very bright sunlight which outlines the figure of the main character. It is like a heavenly light, and coincides with, during the voice-over, the word 'life' being spoken. There is a suggestion of something supernatural, perhaps even of the after-life by using this lighting. In contrast, later in the trailer during a scene in which Donnie is hallucinating; low-key lighting is used to create deep shadows in the room in which the action takes place and on the face of the character. Once more we are given the impression of an other-worldly scene, and with his face half-dark, half-light, the idea that this main character may be half-good, half-evil.

2. Sound (including script) – *Lord of the Rings*

At the opening of the trailer for *Lord of the Rings*, we hear non-diegetic discordant sounds and rumbles of thunder, whilst we see an apparently idyllic setting. This use of contrapuntal sound suggests that all is not right in middle-earth, and indeed a character tells us that: 'Sauron needs only this ring to cover all the lands in darkness.' Later in the trailer, the music dies away as, in a suspenseful scene, the characters wait to hear if their presence in a cave has gone unnoticed by whatever lives there. The only sounds we hear are diegetic, making the action seem more immediate. These sounds are brief and interspersed with silence. The crashing of a skeleton to the bottom of a well builds suspense, then the drawing of a sword. In between, there is only silence which draws us the audience into the action as if we too are listening, fearful of what might be approaching.

3. Editing – *Heist*

There are many cuts in the trailer for *Heist*. At one point, twelve cuts are used in the space of ten seconds of film. This suggests that this is a film of action, possibly of unpredictability: we don't know what the filmmaker will present us with next. In the ten-second section, we jump-cut from a close-up of a man's face (he is counting threateningly), to three to different parts of action. Because of these jumps, we only get to see parts of things, for instance we just see a truck come into view around a bend before the film cuts back to the man's face. Just after this shot, the film jump-cuts to bring a woman's face into focus, allowing us to see her fear as this truck comes hurtling towards her. As a result, we feel the tension building up to an explosion at the end – one we have been anticipating.

Elements of analysis

Lighting and colour

High-key
Low-key
Colour choices

Mise en scène

Setting and props
Costume hair and make-up
Facial expressions or body language
Lighting and colour
Positioning within a frame

Sound

Diegetic (on/off screen)
Non-diegetic
Sound bridges
Parallel/contrapuntal
script

Editing

Straight cut
Fade
Dissolve
Wipe
Jump-cut

Use of camera

Framing

Close up (CU)
Extreme close up (ECU)
Medium shot (MS)
Long shot (LS)
Point of view (PoV)
High-angle
Low-angle

Movement

Tracking
Crane
Tilt
Pan
Roll

Revision of film language terms

Decide upon the meaning of each term and the possible effect of each technique or choice. Make appropriate notes next to each.

Lighting and colour

♦ High-key lighting _____

_____

♦ Low-key lighting _____

_____

♦ Colour choices _____

_____

Sound

♦ Diegetic sound (sound that naturally belongs to the scene that might be found in the place and/or with the action. The effect could be to draw us into the scene or to create a certain atmosphere.)

_____

_____

♦ Non-diegetic _____

_____

♦ Sound bridges _____

_____

♦ Parallel/contrapuntal _____

_____

♦ Script _____

_____

Use of camera

1) Framing

- CU _____
- ECU _____
- MS _____
- LS _____
- PoV _____
- high-angle _____
- low-angle _____

2) Movement

- tracking _____
- crane _____
- tilt _____
- pan _____
- roll _____

Editing

- straight-cut _____
- fade _____
- dissolve _____
- wipe _____
- jump-cut _____

Writing your media essay …

Introduction

- ✓ Outline what you will be doing in the essay. Explain what you mean by *effective*.
- ✓ Provide overview of trailers: directors, year of release and genre of film.
- ✓ Outline which areas of analysis you will be concentrating on.

Next few paragraphs

- ✓ Deal with **one** area of analysis at a time, e.g. lighting and colour.

  - **Very** briefly: describe what happens to, for instance, the lighting in *Kill Bill*.

  - **Explain** what the effects of these lighting, sound or editing choices are on the audience.

  - As you deal with the analysis of each trailer, **compare and contrast** the lighting (for example) in one trailer with the lighting in the second or third trailer. For example:

    'In *Kill Bill*, the use of colour is very subtle. Near the start of the trailer, we see several scenes shot in black-and-white: a wedding scene and a scene of a group of men and women killing. Just as in *Pirates of the Caribbean*, where certain scenes are linked by the colour gold, telling us that the film is all about the search for gold, here black and white takes us into the past and …'

Conclusion

- ✓ Using your notes, sum up which trailer you found to be most effective and briefly reiterate the reasons why.

Now: make sure you check your work thoroughly and very carefully. Remember that you are being assessed on your **writing** skills: it's important that you use paragraphs appropriately, employ a range of punctuation, check your spellings and use varied and interesting vocabulary.