Audience Reception Context

Sample Questions
Questions 1 and 2 are from previous SAC Packs and Question 3 is from the 2015 end of year exam.

1. Compare how editing techniques contribute to how audiences may read and understand the narratives in both of the texts you studied this year. In your response, you must refer to one or more of the following.

   • the opening, development and resolution of the narrative
   • cause and effect
   • establishment and development of and relationships between characters
   • point/s of view from which the narrative is presented (7 marks)

2. Discuss how the use of acting effects audience engagement. Use examples to elaborate on your response from one of the texts you studied this year. (4 marks)

3. Discuss how one production element **or** one story element assists the audience's consumption and reception in **two** of the narrative texts that you studied this year. You must use the **same** element for both narrative texts. (10 marks)

The Concepts

The main concepts behind audience reception and context are the physical space or platforms that they engage with the film on or in and what prior knowledge/experience/prejudices, etc. the audience brings with them when watching a film.

For example, the physical space could be a cinema, phone, etc. but these examples don't allow for a great deal of elaboration or sophisticated responses. Weak students would write things like, "If audiences watched this film in a dark cinema instead of a bright lounge room they will be engaged with it more."

How To Write About It

The better examples are ones that reference prior knowledge or experiences. This example referencing the 1971 film *Harold and Maude* from this year's assessment report for example states, "Many people, particularly university students, found themselves able to sympathise with Harold's detachment, typical of the angst many teenagers/young adults experience. Thus, while the film was not widely well received, there is a select audience who consume it readily." This is in response to Question 3 above, which was on the end of year exam last year.

You can also talk about the genre/style of the film and how audience's familiar with, or who are fans of that, genre/style will be satisfied or able to recognise the content, or will have certain expectations, and thus be engaged with it more when those expectations are met.

Scott Pilgrim vs the World

For Scott Pilgrim, for example, because of all of the pop culture and game references, students could talk about that. For example:

"Scott's dream sequence that introduces Ramona is a nod to the final sequence from the hugely popular video game Final Fantasy VIII. This sequence, however, subverts the audience's expectations of what an action movie and video game should be. Usually, the tough, strong male lead is saving the world, or at the very least, the damsel in distress, just like many video game narratives that existed in the 80s and 90s and is indeed the narrative for Final Fantasy VIII. In this action film, however, the male lead is the antithesis of an action hero, awkward and weak and the tough confident Ramona Flowers is the female lead arriving to save Scott. Feminist audience members, in particular, identified positively with the film's role subversion, as many women have grown tired of the inherent sexism that exists within gaming culture. The outdated gaming concept of a woman being a prize that needs rescuing by a strong male character is subverted in this sequence and numerous others in the film, as Scott is collapsed helplessly on his knees. Despite its poor box office showing upon release, due to its more progressive gender representation, Scott Pilgrim still garnered a successful following amongst female and feminist audiences."

This answer would need adapting to more adequately suit a Narrative question. The above sample discusses just audience reception, with a bit of reference to genre, but more often, audience reception context isn't asked as a stand alone question but in conjunction with production and story elements. For the above response, you could talk about the use of camera and how it frames Scott and Ramona, or the use of acting and how Scott is slumped on his knees grimacing whilst Ramona skates confidently by, or cause and effect where they discuss the introduction of Ramona as a causal agent, etc.   If they insert this into it and adapt it a little they'd have decent audience reception context response.

If you're going to go the feminist route, they could also make mention of the Bechdel Test too (the test named after Alison Bechdel that tests gender equality and feminism in films and fiction in general. The basic premise is to at least pass the test a film has to feature at least two women who talk to each other about something other than a man.) Scott Pilgrim's a bit light on because for the most part everybody's talking about Scott, but it does actually pass the test, e.g Knives asks Julie where to find Clash at Demonhead records and Knives also tells Envy that she loves her band and reads her blog. It's a weak pass, but on average, over 40% of movies don't pass this test. It doesn't necessarily mean that a film is a feminist film if it passes, but it's at least heading in the right direction.

Genre & Audience Expectations

The other path to take is when you're talking about genre. Audiences who are fans of, or at the very least familiar with, particular genres will have expectations based on this knowledge/previous experience with films of that genre, on what will be included in the film. As I've mentioned in the Scott Pilgrim example above, audiences familiar with action films, for example, will have an expectation that there will be a big, strong, tough hero who is going to save the day and Scott Pilgrim subverts that expectation.

The issue with expectations of course, is that it can make films predictable, because audiences are familiar with the conventions of the genre. Horror movies, for example, have the oft-used trope of a character bending over in front of a mirror and then when they stand back up again there's a killer/monster behind them for a classic jump scare. Consequently, film makers try and toy with these expectations, where they will have the mirror shot and the music will build as the character bends over. The music gets louder, the audience gets more tense because they know what's coming, but then the character stands up and the music abruptly stops and there's nobody there. Because these tropes get used regularly, the film makers try to make their films more unique by having nods to the convention but then changing it so that the audience is familiar with what's going on but is still surprised.

Predestination

The Spierig Brothers did this with *Predestination*. The genre of Predestation is science fiction, or more specifically a sci-fi time travel film. Audiences familiar with time travel films will be aware of the trickiest element of making a time travel film, known as the "time travel paradox", also known as a "temporal paradox".

One of the main temporal paradoxes is known as a causal loop. A causal loop is the paradox that occurs when an event in the future is the cause for something in the past, which in turn is the cause of the future event. A causal loop is also often referred to as a "predestination paradox".

This paradox often takes the form of the simple question, "What happens if I meet myself?"

Previous time travel films, such as *Back to the Future* claim that this possibility would be disastrous. As Doc Brown states when he and Marty are discussing the possibility of 1985 Jennifer running into 2015 Jennifer: "Seeing herself thirty years into the future…would create a time paradox. The results of which could cause a chain reaction that would unravel the very fabric of the space-time continuum and destroy the entire universe!"

Another version of this is, "What happens if I go back in time and kill my own grandfather? Do I no longer exist because I don't get a chance to be born and if not, how do I go back in time to kill my grandfather?"

So this is a common, yet confusing, paradox that exists in all time-travel films and audiences are familiar with it, despite its confusion. The general consensus in most time-travel films is that it's a bad idea to meet yourself in another time and space.

With this in mind, *Predestination* completely turns this paradox on its head. Not only does the central character of John meet a version of himself in another time period (at this point John is Jane before she's had gender reassignment surgery) but he meets a version of himself in another time period, dates himself, gets himself pregnant and then gives birth to a baby which, once taken back in time, is also himself being born as Jane.

This subversion of the causal loop temporal paradox will greatly satisfy audiences familiar with the time-travel paradox who will see that where previously it has been claimed that meeting versions of yourself in other time periods would be disastrous, in *Predestination*'s case, is actually necessary and vital for the circular narrative to continue. Toying with this convention in such a unique way makes an already confusing paradox even more so. Audiences who enjoy this genre, are familiar with the paradox and enjoy trying to break it down and understand and create alternate possibilities, will be considerably engaged by the complexity of *Predestination*'s unique and complex twist on a common convention.