

Template for research proposal: Critical Report

This guide allows you to provide an outline of research motivations and objectives identifying key research to support a discussion on a specific research topic.

Note: you should apply the Harvard referencing conventions in all sections.

How Hyperreal VFX Influence Visual Storytelling in Sci-Fi: The Construction of Futurity in Dune

1. Research Objective and Question

A title's primary function is to define precisely and concisely the topic. A legitimate secondary function is to stimulate the reader's interest. Two-part titles are common: a main title to stimulate interest and somehow imaginatively 'encapsulate' the topic, and a subsidiary title to specify or focus the topic.

This research looks at how Dune uses hyperreal visual effects to shape its distinctive sense of futurity. Rather than focusing on technical workflows, the study concentrates on how the film's visual decisions—such as the treatment of scale, light, texture and the blending of practical and digital elements—support its storytelling. Dune is an ideal case because its aesthetic breaks away from typical “high-tech” sci-fi imagery and instead builds a future world that feels ancient, physical and believable.

Research Question :

How does hyperreal VFX contribute to its visual storytelling and to the construction of a convincing sense of futurity?

2. Project Rationale

Consider and explain why you wish to research the subject? A short introduction to the topic, why it is of interest, and why the research is worthwhile. Clarify the central question you are addressing, what will your argument, (your hypothesis) be? (Max 200 words)

Recent sci-fi films have been paying more attention to realism, even when the worlds they present are imaginary. Dune is a clear example of this trend. The film uses natural light, muted colours and real physical locations to make its world feel solid and believable, rather than fully digital. This leads to an important question: why does realism matter in a story set in the future, and how does it influence the audience's experience?

This research is important because it looks at VFX as part of the film's storytelling, not just as visual spectacle. By studying how Dune creates a strong sense of physical reality, we can better understand why viewers find its world convincing and how visual design shapes the film's emotions, themes and overall atmosphere.

3. Keywords and keyword phrases used for research

Experiment with connecting key words and phrases relevant to your topic and research objectives on academic sites. You can optimise key words/phrase searching by reading around your topic.

Hyperreal VFX; Futurity; Visual Storytelling; Realism; Worldbuilding; Dune

4. Situate your proposal in relation to key texts, issues and debates.

Produce a draft review establishing and explaining the views of relevant authors and how they can support the presentation of your argument to answer the research question. Use Harvard referencing (Max 300 words)

Recent discussions on realism in digital cinema highlight how VFX can shape the audience's sense of place and story. Manovich (2013) notes that digital images often aim to look photographic, even when created entirely on a computer. More recent writing—such as Fraser's interviews in *American Cinematographer* (2021)—shows how films like *Dune* use natural light and grounded textures to make large-scale worlds feel believable.

Studies on sci-fi worldbuilding also suggest that visual design plays a major role in how viewers understand themes such as power, environment and culture. Authors like Kinder (2021) and Kennedy (2023) argue that realism in sci-fi visuals helps connect fictional futures to real-world concerns. This links closely to *Dune*, where the mix of practical sets, location shooting and digital extensions supports the film's grounded tone.

Taken together, these texts show that hyperreal VFX are not only technical achievements but also a way of shaping narrative meaning. They provide a useful framework for analysing how *Dune* creates its sense of "futurity" through realistic visual choices.

5. Identify any materials or data that will be examined

Include names of material examples to be examined such as films, artworks, games, events, directors and artists, or any other relevant media. sources that might provide pertinent data or statistics to support research objectives. All material should be referenced using the Harvard Style

Dune (2021, 2024) as the main film for analysis

Behind-the-scenes materials and VFX breakdowns from DNEG and Warner Bros.

Interviews with Denis Villeneuve, Greig Fraser and Paul Lambert

The Art and Soul of *Dune* (official artbook)

Academic texts on realism, sci-fi worldbuilding and digital cinematography

Comparative references: *Blade Runner 2049*, *Arrival*

6. Bibliography

List recognised academic books, journals and articles, that you may use to support the research you wish to undertake. This list should be referenced. Harvard Style – For guidance on how to reference correctly (using your UAL login) See appropriate examples on <https://www.citethemrightonline.com/>

Fraser, G. (2021) 'Capturing the harsh beauty of Dune', *American Cinematographer*, November.
Giardina, C. (2021) 'How the VFX team created the world of Dune', *Variety*, 22 October.
Kinder, M. (2021) 'Immersion and authenticity in sci-fi worlds', *Film Quarterly*, 75(1), pp. 48–61.
Kennedy, R. (2023) 'Texture, scale and the new sci-fi aesthetic', *Journal of Visual Culture*, 22(3), pp. 203–219.
Lambert, P. (2022) 'Building the physicality of Dune', DNEG Official Blog.
Manovich, L. (2013) *Software Takes Command*. Bloomsbury.