# Film Analysis Essay Assignment

Write an essay of about 600-800 words (about 3 pages) on the following topic. Refer to at 3 or 4 of the 8 movies we've watched thus far in class, using as many specific details as possible concerning the various elements of film that we've discussed – cinematography, mise-en-scene, movement, editing, sound, acting. Naturally, you'll want to observe all the rules of good writing – that is, of grammar, organization, logic, &c.

**Topic:** *How do the specific cinematic techniques or elements of a film support the message or point it is making? As much as possible, choose the films and point out techniques in such a way as to make some general point about the way(s) in which a film exposes its themes.*

## Tips for Writing an Essay on Film

The following tips for writing your Midterm/Final are in *ascending* order of importance, beginning with basic mechanical issues and ending with very broad points concerning content.

## Mechanics

For any formal essay, you should follow the *formatting guidelines* of the profession style in the field – in this case **MLA style**. That means you should have

- a *heading* (your name, the course, &c.),
- a *"header"* (your last name & the page number, which you can add using functions under the Insert tab in your word-processing program), and
- an original, relevant *title*.

(Under Course Documents in Blackboard, I have included a document titled "Essay Format" [yellow lettering] that shows what a document should *look* like in MLA style.)

Use *italics* for the title of any feature-length film.

## Grammar

In discussing any work of art, including a film, you should use the *present* tense, not the past.

As an upper-level English course, this one assumes that you have a general grip on basic organizational concepts (paragraphing, essay structure, &c.), grammatical concepts (sentence

structure, agreement, modifier placement, parallelism, &c.), and punctuation. You can check my document titled "Writing Problems" (cyan-green lettering), which lists the major sentence errors and refers you to the locations in the *Little-Brown Handbook* where you can find information on those errors.

## Style

In all of your writing, you should strive to write *concisely*. (Under Course Documents, I have included a document titled "Conciseness" [azure-blue title] that discusses ways to avoid wordiness in general.) As for *specific* wordiness problems associated with writing about film/literature, here are a few tips:

- Avoid references to yourself or your thoughts/opinions – just state them directly.
- Avoid references to your writing ("I'm going to discuss…") or your essay ("This essay is about…").
- Avoid references to your reader; avoid the 2nd-person pronoun (you, your) altogether.
- Minimize references to the artists involved in the creation of specific techniques. It's fine to name someone *once (e.g.,* the director, the cinematographer, or the scriptwriter) if you happen to know who that person is. But don't constantly say things like, "In this scene the director uses lighting to show…."
- Avoid references to the *intentions* of the film or its makers, like "The movie is trying to make the point that…." Again, just state those points directly, e.g., "The high-contrast lighting supports the theme of the dark side of human nature."
- Avoid references to the film's audience, e.g., "The viewer notices that…."
- In all the above cases, just state your points directly – e.g., "The high-contrast lighting in this scene symbolizes…" or "The expressionist style underscores the liberal message that…"

## Content

Don't just make broad generalizations about how great, how ineffective, how confusing, &c. the techniques are in the films that you're using as examples. Instead, discuss *in detail* (while of course writing concisely) *how* the technique delivers its effect.

Finally and probably most importantly: You should have a central idea, a **thesis**, for the *whole* essay – an *argument* that is *original, complex, relevant, specific*, and *debatable*. Thus, instead of just sort of parroting my question and saying something obvious like, "The films we've watched in this class use a variety of cinematic techniques to create meaning," you should try to narrow the focus to something specific – perhaps some pattern that you noticed from week

to week, or some aspect of film that you found yourself particularly interested in as we went along.

If you find yourself having difficulty in identifying such an aspect, I have included 2 items under Course Documents that might be of some use to you.  One of them is titled "Levels of Literary Interpretation" [purple title] and lists a number of different "subjects" that a work might address, or critical perspectives through which we might view that work – e.g., various social issues or symbolic frameworks or cultural/historical contexts or artistic influences related to the work.  Or your thesis could be some strictly aesthetic point.

For the Final especially, you should be striving to use the various critical approaches we've touched on during the semester, and specifically those discussed in Chapters 10 (Ideology) &11 (Critique).  The other useful item I've included under Course Documents is titled "Issues in Ideology," which is just a brief summary of the "left-center-right" model that Giannetti discusses in Chap. 10.

## Essay Rubric

|  | Excellent (A) | Good (B) | Fair (C) | Poor (D) | Failing (F) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Content:* |  |  |  |  |  |
| *Topic* | Highly relevant & original. | Very relevant w/ personal touches. | Marginally impor-tant or original. | Somewhat insig- nificant; derivative | Not relevant or original. |
| *Thesis* | Exceptionally complex. | Very complex. | Some complexity, but fairly straightfwd. | Not very complex. | Very simplistic. |
| *Body* | Lots of detail;  ex-tensive development | Good detail, examples, coverage. | Some detail and effort on developm. | Speaking mainly in generalizations. | Too short;  no concrete detail. |
| *Logic* | Airtight reasoning. | Sound reasoning;  few lapses. | Okay, but wavering on a few points. | Pattern of faulty logic & emotional appeals. | Illogical;  off track. |
| *Research* | Vast effort on finding sources. | Good sources;  interesting variety. | Some sources;  lacking in variety. | Little effort on sources; sloppy bibliography. | Virtually no citations. |
| *Form:* |  |  |  |  |  |
| *Organization* | Seamless flow of information | Good structure;  major components in place. | Basic structure in place, but bland presentation. | Components out of place or transitions hard to follow. | Seriously lacking in structure. |
| *Style* | Vital, original, energetic prose. | Good, sound English expression. | Somewhat bland. | Awkward, incon-sistent language. | No energy. |
| *Grammar, Punctu- ation, mechanics* | Essentially free of errors. | Free of major sentence errors, but some minor ones. | A smattering of sentence infractions. | Significant major sentence errors. | Variety of errors. |
| *Manuscript form (or spoken delivery)* | Following Server documents;  con-fidently delivered. | Most guidelines, followed;  good presence. | Some lapses in form; good humor. | Disregards fomat rules; lackluster performance. | No knowledge of required formats; poor attitude. |