Writing About Movies

The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.
--Marcel Proust

One way of understanding better what a film is trying to say is to know how it is saying it.
--Andre Bazin

Everything is a text, and this Writing 111 course is built around reading and writing about the film text. This semester, you will learn to read a film text, analyze it, and respond to it in increasingly sophisticated essays. Movies, we will learn, are complex, layered texts. When making a film, for example, the director takes the written screenplay and transfers it to the screen using many layers, or language systems, including photography, mise en scène, movement, editing, sound, acting, drama (sets and costumes), story (narrative structure), ideology, and theory/criticism. A movie is a synthesis of these elements. Talking and writing intelligently about movies requires a little knowledge of all these areas.

Together, the authors of your print text, Writing About Movies, and I will introduce you to the basic elements of film as well as give you several approaches to writing about film. Writing About Movies also covers style and structure in essay writing, research techniques, manuscript form, and documentation.

The MLA and Purdue OWL (both online and free) provide the most current rules of grammar, writing, and documentation.

Texts:
Lectures
Film texts and clips

Work Requirements:
Each of you will write five papers: one response paper, and four argumentative papers, two of which will require secondary sources. In addition, I give frequent quizzes covering your reading material, film texts, lectures, and grammar.

Grading:
10% Response Paper (2 pages) 20% Argumentative Paper # 4 (5 pages)
15% Argumentative paper #1 (4 pages) 10% Quizzes
15% Argumentative paper #2 (4 pages) 10% Class Participation/Activities/Presentations
20% Argumentative paper #3 (5 pages)
Writing 111/Page 2

General Policies:

- Class attendance and participation are necessary in order for you to pass the course. **You will lose one letter grade for each absence after your third one.**
- I hold regular one-on-one conferences. Failure to attend a scheduled conference may result in a lower grade.
- As a rule, I do not accept a paper after that set of papers has been graded and returned. Under extenuating circumstances, I may accept a late paper, but I will deduct one letter grade for each day it is late.
- There are no makeups for quizzes under any circumstances. I usually drop your lowest quiz grade.

A plagiarized paper (in whole or in part) will receive an automatic F and may result in failure of the course. Policy dictates that I report all instances of plagiarism to the Dean of Academic Affairs. Students will conduct themselves in a manner befitting the College policy on Academic Integrity. Consult this section in your Undergraduate Catalogue for official definitions of cheating, misconduct, plagiarism, and providing false information (and their consequences).

- Turn off all cell phones and put them away before you come into class. If you are texting, tweeting, etc., I count you absent—because you’re not really in the class. You are somewhere else. Laptops are also unnecessary, unless I specifically ask that you bring them to class.
- If you fall asleep in class, I count you absent—because you’re not really present. You are in dream land.
- Purge the word “like” from your vocabulary, unless, of course, you are using it correctly. Saying “like” every other word makes you sound illiterate—not something you want to strive for in college.

Course Schedule

**Disclaimer:** This schedule may change depending on your progress as we move through the elements of writing. We will work in grammar exercises throughout the entire semester.

**Week 1**

**Jan 14/16/18**

Introduction to the Course: Writing about Movies

Language System: Narrative Structure

Assignment: Read Chapter 1: The Challenges of Writing About Movies for Wednesday

Assignment: Read Chapter 2: Looking at Movies for Friday

Assignment: Read Chapter 3: Analyzing Film (Formal Analysis and Exploring Meaning) for Wednesday, Jan 23

**Jan 21**

Martin Luther King Day—No Classes
Week 2  Analyzing Film: Formal Analysis and Exploring Meaning  
Jan 23/25  Language System: Photography  
Assignment: Read Chapter 3—Analyzing Film (Cultural Analysis) for Friday  
Assignment: Read Chapter 3—Analyzing Film (Genre Study) for Monday, Jan 28  
Response Paper Due Friday, Jan 25

Week 3  Analyzing Film: Genre Study  
Jan 28/30  Language Systems: Mise en scène  
Feb 1  Assignment: Read Chapter 3—Analyzing Film (Historical Analysis) for Friday  
Assignment: Read Chapter 4—Generating Ideas for Monday, Feb 4

Week 4  Generating Ideas  
Feb 4/6/8  Film in Class  Discussion  
Assignment: Read Chapter 5—Researching Movies for Monday, Feb

Week 5  Researching Movies  
Feb 11/13/15  Language System: Movement  
Argumentative Paper #1 due Friday, Feb 15

Week 6  Language Systems: Editing and Sound  
Feb 18/20/22  Assignment: Read Chapter 6—Developing Your Thesis for Wednesday

Week 7  Film in Class  
Feb 25/27  Discussion  
Mar 1  Assignment: Read Chapter 7—Structure & Organization for Monday, Mar 4

Week 8  Structure & Organization  
Mar 4/6/8  Language Systems: Acting and Sets & Costumes  
Assignment: Read Chapter 8—Attending to Style over break  
Argumentative Paper #2 due Friday, Mar 8

Mar 6  Bleasby Colliquium: Ukrainian Poet Ilya Kaminsky

Week 9  Spring Break

Week 10  Attending to Style  
Mar 18/20/22  Secondary Sources
Quoting and paraphrasing
Integrating sources
Works Cited

Week 11
Mar 25/27/29
Work on Argumentative Paper #3 (with secondary sources)
Assignment: Read Chapter 9—Revising Your Work for Wednesday

Week 11
Apr 1/3/5
Film in Class
Discussion
Argumentative Paper #3 due Friday, Apr 5

Week 12
Apr 8/10/12
Language System: Ideology
Synthesis
Begin Synthesis Presentations

Week 13
Apr 15/17
Synthesis Presentations

Apr 18 – 22
Easter Break

Week 14
Apr 23 (Tuesday)
Monday Classes Meet
Apr 24
Undergraduate Research & Arts Celebration—No Classes
Apr 26
Research Argumentative Paper #4 (with secondary sources)

Week 15
Apr 29
Work with drafts of Paper #4
Student Responses
May 1/3
Conferences
Argumentative Paper #4 due Friday, May 3

May 3
Last Day of Classes