

**WRITING ASSIGNMENTS**  
**FST 368 FILM STYLES AND GENRES: HOLLYWOOD STYLE**

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**READING SUMMARIES AND DISCUSSION TOPICS**

At the very beginning of every class in which a chapter or article is assigned, students must submit a hard-copy summary of each assigned reading. Each summary should be no longer than 1½ double-spaced pages. Summaries condense and distill the authors' main points. They are designed to ensure that you are prepared to discuss the readings in class, that you are understanding what you read, and that you practice writing clear, cogent, organized, grammatically correct prose. Moreover, they help you practice the skill of explaining someone's argument, which will in turn help you with your papers.

You should summarize the main points from all portions of each reading: Paraphrase the points (put them in your own words) so that I know you understand them. I don't want a blow-by-blow of the article ("And then the author writes about suspense..."); I don't want a summary of the topics of the article ("The author explains how the movie generates suspense"); and I don't want your opinion of the article ("The author correctly characterizes the feeling of suspense."). Instead, summarize the author's points ("The author argues that a film generates suspense by cuing spectators to worry about future events."). *Write your summaries so that the authors themselves would agree with what you have written.*

Organize your summary. Each of your paragraphs should explain one of the author's main points, and your sentences should move logically from one to the next.

Summaries cannot be made up or turned in late. If you miss a summary deadline, you will get a zero on the assignment; however, I will drop your three lowest scores (of the 13 assigned summaries). If you know that you must miss a class, you may turn in your reading summary early—an hour before class on the day they are due—to my campus mailbox or by email as a MS Word attachment.

At the end of each summary, write out one or two *discussion topics* or *questions* that will provoke fruitful class discussions about the reading. Propose something about that reading that you yourself want to talk about, such as:

1. A question you had about a passage or point in the reading;
2. A connection between the readings and whatever film we are studying that week;
3. A passage that you want to look at closely in class and why;
4. A juxtaposition of two or more articles we have read in the class;

Students should be prepared to start the discussions about their own topics.

- Checklist:
- a separate reading summary for each article or chapter
  - summarizes main points from all parts of the reading
  - 1½ pages or fewer per summary
  - typed / double-spaced / printed hard copy
  - includes 1 or 2 discussion topics at the end of each summary
  - complete, clear, logically organized, grammatically correct sentences.

**Extra Credit**

Within a week of receiving back a graded reading summary, you may submit a revision of your summary for regrading, addressing the issues indicated in my comments on the first version. In order to earn a better grade, your revision should be substantial, addressing not just easily fixed issues but also any problems with organization, syntax, clarity, and the logic of the argument. The new grade will replace the old one. You may take advantage of this extra-credit opportunity with up to three reading summaries submitted during the semester. Submit the first version (including my comments) with the revision.

## PAPER ASSIGNMENTS

Students will complete a series of three assignments that culminates in a paper on one of the topics listed below. The assignments are:

- A) Prospectus and Bibliography
- B) Detailed Outline and List of Works Cited
- C) Abstract, Final Paper, and List of Works Cited

Using the methods studied in this course, write a stylistic analysis of a Hollywood film or series of Hollywood films. Your final paper will take one of the following two forms:

1) *My Movie or Movies are Unique*

This type of paper demonstrates that a Hollywood film, group of films, or filmmaker (director, actor, cinematographer, set designer, etc.) has a unique, or at least peculiar, style. What sets the film, films, or filmmaker apart stylistically?

2) *My Movie or Movies are Representative*

This type of paper uses a Hollywood film or group of films as case studies to help us understand the use of a stylistic feature within Hollywood cinema (such as Technicolor, POV shots, the long take, low-key lighting, SurroundSound, wide-angle lenses, etc.). Although you may focus on one film as an illustrative case study, you should examine your stylistic feature across a range of Hollywood films, exploring the ways in which different filmmakers made use of it.

You may collaborate, in pairs, on these assignments; other people are far less likely than you are to buy the ideas you are trying to sell. If you collaborate, submit one copy with both authors' names on it.

Prepare your papers and bibliographies using MLA format. See the MLA Style Guide on the Blackboard page for the course.

The target audience for your paper is someone who has thought about your topic and who wants to learn more about it, someone like me, your professor, who, by a stroke of good fortune, happens to be your real audience. Or, perhaps even better, think of the students in this class as your audience; if your papers are good, they will be.

### Some Hortatory Advice about Writing About Movies

- If you contribute to the understanding of any part of a movie or movies, however small that part is, you will have done your job.
- I care most about the specificity of your ideas, the precision and vividness of your analyses, the originality and ambitiousness of your project, and, in particular, the clarity and validity of your thinking and prose.
- Be sure to ask yourself the most urgent of all academic questions: *So what?* Or, to put the question more delicately, *Who would want to read what I'm writing?*
- Write something about movies that could not also be said about movie plot summaries. Don't write about what movies are about: Write about movies *as* movies.
- Above all, tell the truth. Don't say anything you don't believe. Don't say anything you don't understand. Don't hunt for "the answer." Look at the truth and don't assume it will be either exciting or nugget-like or important or similar to the kinds of things you are used to finding (or putting) in artworks when you study them. The truth is usually good enough and always better than its alternative.

## A) Prospectus and Bibliography

A *prospectus* is a written proposal (about 500 words) for your research project. In it, you identify:

1. *A question* pertinent to Hollywood film style;
2. *Why the question is of interest and worth researching*. Don't tell readers why you want to write about the topic; we don't care about that. Explain why we should want to read your paper. Why should we care about your question? Explain how your particular approach to the topic will reveal something readers will want to know.
3. *Your methodology*. How do you plan to find answers to your question? Lay out a precise plan for addressing your question, and identify areas of existing research that might help answer it. Your plan should be specific: What movies will you watch and what will you look for in those movies? What texts will you read and what will you look for in those texts?

A *working bibliography* is a comprehensive list of articles, books, chapters of books, movie reviews, films, etc. pertaining to the topic you are writing about. Avoid websites that do not have a proven history of reliable scholarship; instead use academic books and the electronic databases that Randall library subscribes to. Separate your list of film titles from your list of other resources (such as books and articles, which should all be grouped together.). Your bibliography should be in MLA format.

On the date indicated in the syllabus, each student will bring to class 16 copies of his or her prospectus and working bibliography, which the class will discuss for about 15 minutes each. The writer will take notes on the discussion without participating, so write your prospectuses in such a way that they require no explanation. You should make your work as specific and complete as possible so that the class may offer criticism and suggestions that will help you complete your project successfully.

Checklist:  1) a question, 2) why the question is worth researching, and 3) methodology.  
 bibliography in MLA format  bring to class 16 typed/double spaced copies

## B) Detailed Outline and List of Works Cited

Students will write detailed outlines that spell out the conclusions of their research and incorporate the existing literature on the topic of study.

1. Your outline should be no longer than two double-spaced typed pages.
2. It must have a clear thesis statement, supporting points, and evidence for the points.
  1. Your thesis statement must in fact be a thesis statement—a statement you are trying to demonstrate or prove—not just a topic.
  2. Your supporting points should also be theses (not topics).
  3. Back up all of your points and sub-points with references to specific primary and/or secondary research, including the findings of previous researchers. Secondary sources should be listed parenthetically, the last name of the author corresponding to the reference in the Works Cited, as indicated in the sample below.

You may turn your outline in late. Any excuse for lateness will be accepted, no matter how improbable; however, late work will receive no written comments (there is no other penalty), and I won't accept work handed in later than one week past the due date (I'll give you verbal comments if you bring your paper to my office hours). Your other assignments may not be turned in late.

Submit your outline and Works Cited as an email attachment (MS Word documents only). The title of your document should start with your last name ("yourlastname\_outline.doc"). I will comment on your work using the "track changes" feature in MS Word and email the document back to you. Do not paste your work in the body of your email.

Checklist:  Includes thesis, supporting points, and evidence  
 Works Cited in MLA format  
 emailed as MS Word attachment (title starts with your last name).

### **C) Abstract, Final Paper, and List of Works Cited**

Your final paper presents your research findings and analysis and includes:

- 1) A clear and explicit “abstract summary” of the paper’s conclusions (i.e. the paper’s thesis statement), placed after the title and before the beginning of the paper;
- 2) A discussion of your findings, organized according to a series of points (supporting theses) with discussions of the evidence in support of the points.
- 3) A Works Cited page that lists all of the print and online resources cited in the paper. If you want to include film titles, create a separate “Filmography” page.

Your final paper may be quite different from your outline and prospectus; I assume that you will change your points after you receive my comments and you continue to conduct research.

The length of your paper should be determined by how much you have to say and how efficient you are in saying it.

Submit as an email attachment (MS Word documents only). The title of your document should start with your last name (“yourlastname\_paper.doc”). Final papers will not receive comments, just grades, but I can meet with you after I read your paper if you want to talk about it. Papers may not be turned in late.

- Checklist:
- Descriptive essay title
  - Thesis statement (Abstract Summary) at the top
  - MLA format
  - emailed as MS Word attachment (title starts with your last name).

## ELEVEN NOTES ABOUT STRONG THESES (AND SUPPORTING POINTS)

Since the supporting points of your outline and final paper should also be theses, these notes pertain both to your main thesis and to each of your supporting points:

1. A thesis is a statement to be demonstrated or proved.
2. A thesis is not just what the paper is about (the thesis is not the “topic” of the paper); a thesis briefly and explicitly states the paper’s *conclusion*. (“The use of low-key lighting in *Touch of Evil*” is a topic, whereas “*Touch of Evil*’s low-key lighting makes some of the characters’ faces appear distorted and grotesque” is a thesis.)
3. Your thesis should make complete sense to readers on its own. Readers should understand the paper’s thesis without reading anything but the thesis. (Unclear thesis: “The first fight scene in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* makes the spectator feel the impact of each blow.” Clear thesis: “During the first fight between Jen and Yu in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, the dynamic changes in distance of framing, angle, and height mimic the often furious and quick movements of the characters and give the audience a sense of constant motion.”) The rest of the paper will set about *convincing* readers of what you are saying, but readers should *understand* your thesis before you try to persuade them of it.
4. Your thesis should be specific and complex enough to sustain the paper. Specific and complex theses tend to be more interesting than general and simple ones, and they are more likely to require explanation and persuasive argument. A rule of thumb regarding specificity: *Make sure that what you say about your clip or movie could be said only about that one clip or movie (not many movies)*.
5. Write about your movie *as* a movie; don’t write about what the movie is about. In other words, don’t use the clip as an occasion to discuss other issues. (Thesis that is *not* about movies: “We can see the importance of intimacy in romantic relationships by studying the depiction of romance in film noir.” Thesis about movies: “Film noir depicts romance as dangerous by surrounding sexually alluring female figures with imagery that evokes feelings of danger and mystery.”)
6. Your thesis must be demonstrable. Your job is not merely to tell your reader what you think: Your job is to *persuade* your reader to think what you think.
7. Your thesis should not be obvious. If we know and agree with your thesis before we read your paper, what’s the point of reading, or writing, the paper?
8. Your thesis should be true. If you don’t believe what you’re saying, certainly your reader won’t.
9. Your thesis is the result of your research, not the starting-point: it is your conclusion. Your paper’s thesis, in its final form, is the last thing you come up with before you write your final draft.
10. Before you hand in your outline and essay, ensure that your thesis statement and that each of your supporting points is a statement to be proved or demonstrated that is clear, specific, complex, about the movie, demonstrable, not obvious, true, and the conclusion of your research. If so, then your points are probably in excellent shape.

## Sample Outline

“The Genre Film as Booby Trap: Seventies Genre Bending and *The French Connection*”  
by Todd Berliner

**I. Thesis:** *The French Connection* exploits viewers’ expectations of police-detective-film formulas, misleading viewers into expecting a conventional genre film. Following trends in seventies genre variation, the film ultimately deviates from its genre in ways that unsettle viewers and catch them off guard.

**II. Point 1 :** Prior to its conclusion, *The French Connection* works mostly as a straightforward police-detective film.

**Example:** Explanation of police-detective film conventions. Detective’s typical character traits: conflict with his superior, energetic pursuit of crime, strategic disregard of the law, determination, obsessive commitment to his case, impulsive actions.

**Example :** Police-detective film conventions in *The Big Combo*, *Madigan*, *Dirty Harry*, *Bullitt*, *The Narrow Margin*, *The Big Heat*, *On Dangerous Ground*.

**Example:** Genre scholarship (Kaminsky, Cawelti, Neale, Schatz, Braudy, Gehring, Grant).

**Example:** Formulaic examples, especially car-crash and bar scenes.

**III. Point 2 :** While much of *The French Connection* does indeed follow police-detective convention, several incidents throughout the movie disrupt the generic simplicity of the story and of viewers’ responses to their protagonist, Detective Popeye Doyle. In this way, the film follows trends in seventies genre variation.

**Example :** Doyle’s single-mindedness in car crash scene.

**Example :** Doyle’s insensitivity in sniper scene

**Example :** detective’s racism, fanaticism and other unappealing qualities.

**Example :** examples of movie commentators and scholars who try (and fail) to limit the movie to the dimensions of its generic mold (Shedlin, Kael, Epps, Schickel).

**Example:** Tendency of seventies cinema to disrupt genre conventions (Cook, Lev, Man)

**IV. Point 3:** The ending of *The French Connection* unpredictably alters the trajectory of the narrative. What spectators took to be the film’s central concern—Doyle’s battle with the drug smugglers—is revealed as a misinterpretation of the narrative. In the end, the movie becomes *about* all the troubling elements that disrupted the simplicity of spectator responses and that distinguish the movie from standard police-detective films.

**Example :** *French Connection*’s deviant conclusion—the final shootout scene

**Example :** Doyle’s indifference to killing Mulderig

**Example :** closing captions show detective’s failure; detractors were right.

**Example :** cinematography emphasizes Doyle’s fanaticism and dubiousness.

**V. Point 4:** The film capitalizes on the fact that the stock virtues of a generic thriller detective have a darker side. In Doyle, these virtues emerge ambiguously as character flaws, the cause of his failure as a cop.

**Example :** Doyle’s energetic pursuit of crime and disregard of the law are linked to his brutality.

**Example :** His determination and obsessive commitment to his case emerge as fanaticism and callous indifference to victims.

**Example:** His impulsive, shoot-from-the-hip temperament results in the death of a fellow officer and leads to his suspect’s escape and a string of acquittals and reduced sentences.

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