

## WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

### FST 368 FILM STYLES AND GENRES: STYLE IN HOLLYWOOD CINEMA

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#### READING SUMMARIES

At the very beginning of every class with an assigned reading, students will submit, by hard-copy, a summary of the reading. Each summary should be no longer than 1½ double-spaced pages. Summaries 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. They moreover help you practice the skill of explaining someone else's argument concisely and fairly.

You should summarize the main points from all portions of the 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, condense and distill the author's main points, as though *you* were the author ("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 paragraph should explain one (just one) of the author's chief points, and sentences should move logically from one to the next. In your first paragraph, explain the author's *main* point (the thesis of the reading), which is not necessarily the author's first point. After that, one paragraph = one point.

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 four lowest scores. If you know that you must miss a class, you may turn in your reading summary early—at least 1 hour before the start of class on the day it is due—by email as an MS Word attachment.

At the end of each summary, write one or two *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 about a confusing passage or point in the reading;
2. A connection between the readings and whatever film we are studying that week;
3. A passage in the reading that you want to look at closely in class and why (e.g. you disagreed with it);
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:
- your first paragraph summarizes the thesis (main point) of the reading
  - your paper summarizes key points from all parts of the reading
  - 1½ pages or fewer
  - typed / double-spaced / printed hard copy
  - includes 1 or 2 discussion topics at the end
  - complete, clear, logically organized, grammatically correct sentences and paragraphs.

#### Extra Credit

Within a week of receiving back a graded reading summary, you may submit a revision of your summary for re-grading, 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 mischaracterizations of the author's argument. I will average the original grade and the new one. You must submit the first version (*including* my comments) with the revision.

## PAPER ASSIGNMENTS

Students will complete a series of three assignments:

- A) Prospectus, Bibliography, and Filmography
- B) Style Paper: Abstract, Paper, and List of Works Cited
- C) Style Paper (revised): Abstract, 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, multi-track sound, 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 have used it.

Prepare your papers and bibliographies using MLA format. The Purdue Online Writing Lab explains MLA format and provides examples: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>.

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.

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, however small, of a movie, you 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, Bibliography, and Filmography

A *prospectus* is a written proposal (make it under 600 words) for your research project. In it, you identify:

1. A *question* pertinent to Hollywood style;
2. *Why the question is of interest and worth researching*. Justify your question. Don't tell readers why you want to write about the topic; nobody cares. Instead, 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 detailed 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 *bibliography* is a comprehensive list of articles, books, book chapters, movie reviews, etc. pertaining to the topic you are writing about. Use reliable sources: Avoid websites that do not have a proven history of reliable scholarship. Put film titles in a "filmography," separate from written resources. Use 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:      under 600 words    contains: 1) question, 2) justification, and 3) methodology.  
 bibliography in MLA format    separate filmography    bring 16 typed/double spaced copies of everything

## B) Style Paper: Abstract, Paper, and List of Works Cited

Although you will rewrite this paper later, version 1 is not a "rough draft." A rough draft is garbage, and you don't show other people your garbage. Submit a polished paper, your best work.

Your paper presents your research findings and analysis. It includes the following separate parts:

- 1) *Title Page, Byline, and Abstract*. An abstract briefly articulates your paper's conclusions (i.e. your thesis).
- 2) *Essay*. 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) *Works Cited*. A list of all of the print and online resources cited in the paper, organized alphabetically in MLA format; do not include film titles in this list.
- 4) *Filmography* (optional). Separate your filmography from your Works Cited.

The length of your paper depends on how much you have to say and how efficient you are in saying it.

You may turn in this assignment 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 the extension lasts just one week past the due date. After a week, I deduct 1% every half-hour the paper is late.

Submit the paper as an email attachment (MS Word documents only). The title of your document should start with your last name ("yourlastname\_paper.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:    Abstract on a separate Title Page  
               Essay in MLA format  
               Works Cited page in MLA format  
               Filmography (if you have one) on a separate page  
               Email as MS Word attachment (attachment title starts with your last name).

### C) Style Paper (revised): Abstract, Paper, and List of Works Cited

Your revised paper may be very different from the version you turned in earlier. I assume that you will change your points after you receive my comments and continue to conduct research and revise. I'm looking to see how much you have rethought and revised your paper; I'm looking for improvement.

Submit the paper as an email attachment (MS Word documents only). The title of your document should start with your last name ("yourlastname\_finalpaper.doc"). Final papers will not receive comments, just grades, and there are no extensions; I will deduct 1% every half-hour it is late.

- Checklist:  Abstract on a separate Title Page  
 Essay in MLA format  
 Works Cited page in MLA format  
 Filmography (if you have one) on a separate page  
 Email as MS Word attachment (attachment title starts with your last name).

### TEN 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 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.
4. Write about your movie *as* a movie; don't write about what the movie is about. In other words, don't use the movie 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.")
5. 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.
6. 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 movie could be said only about that one movie (not many movies).*
7. 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.
8. 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?
9. Your thesis should be true. If you don't believe what you're saying, certainly your reader won't.
10. Before you hand in your 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.