

**WRITING ASSIGNMENTS**  
**FST 496 SENIOR SEMINAR IN FILM STUDIES**  
**AESTHETIC PLEASURE IN HOLLYWOOD CINEMA**

Professor Todd Berliner

Spring 2019

**READING SUMMARIES**

At the very beginning of every class with an assigned reading, students will submit, by hard-copy, a summary of each reading. Each summary should be about 1½ to 2 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. They also help develop the skill of fairly explaining someone else's argument.

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, summarize the author's points, as though *you* were the author. Don't write, "The author says"; just write what the author says ("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. Your first paragraph should explain the author's main point (the thesis of the reading), not necessarily the author's first point. Each of your subsequent paragraphs should explain one of the author's chief points. One paragraph = one point. Sentences should move logically from one to the next.

Weave quotations from the reading into your own prose, but don't cite entire sentences; instead integrate quotations into your sentences. When you quote, put the page number in parentheses at the end of your sentence.

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. If you know that you must miss a class, you may turn in your reading summary early—at least 30 minutes before the start of class on the day it is due—to my campus mailbox or by email as a MS Word attachment.

At the end of each summary, write one or two *questions* that will provoke fruitful class discussions about the reading. Ask a question that the class can answer (not a question for the professor), such as a question about a confusing passage or point in the reading, the relation between the reading and whatever film we are studying that week, a point in the reading that you disagreed with, or the relation between the week's reading and an earlier reading. Ask about something that you yourself want to talk about with the class. Students should be prepared to start the discussions about their own discussion questions.

- Checklist:
- first paragraph summarizes the reading's main points
  - subsequent paragraphs summarize the author's key points from all parts of the reading, one point per paragraph
  - 1 to 2 pages
  - typed / double-spaced / printed hard copy
  - includes 1 or 2 discussion questions at the end (a question for the class, not the professor)
  - complete, clear, logically organized, grammatically correct sentences.

*Extra Credit*

Within a week of receiving back a graded reading summary, you may revise your summary, 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. Submit the first version (*including* my comments) with the revision.

## AESTHETIC ANALYSIS PAPER ASSIGNMENTS

Students will complete a series of assignments that culminates in a polished essay that contributes something original to our understanding of Hollywood aesthetics:

- A) Prospectus, Working Bibliography, and Filmography
- B) Aesthetic Analysis Paper: Abstract, Essay, and Works Cited
- C) Aesthetic Analysis Paper (revised): Abstract, Essay, and Works Cited

You may collaborate, in pairs, on these assignments. If you collaborate, submit one copy with both authors' names on it.

Your paper will take one of the following two forms:

**1) My Movie or Movies are Unusual/Unique**

This type of paper demonstrates that a Hollywood film or group of films has an unusual or unique way of supplying aesthetic pleasure for a commercial film. Your paper is an effort to demonstrate the films' peculiar aesthetic properties.

**2) My Movie or Movies are Representative**

This type of paper uses a Hollywood film or group of films as a case study to explain the pleasures of an aesthetic feature found in a number of Hollywood films. You might examine a narrative device (such as multi-protagonist or alternative-future narratives), stylistic device (such as Technicolor, optical POV shots, the long take), ideological feature (such as anti-heros or likeable protagonists), or genre property (such as the "meet cute," trial scene, or climactic fight). Although you may focus your paper on one film (a case study), examine your aesthetic feature across a range of Hollywood films, exploring the ways in which different filmmakers have used it.

Prepare your papers and bibliographies using MLA formatting and style. The [Purdue Online Writing Lab](#) explains MLA format and provides examples.

To write an original essay, you must know some of what has been written about your topic. You will therefore consult scholarly books, articles, and other materials (such as movie reviews and interviews) outside of those assigned in class. I don't want book reports, however. The background research you conduct is *merely* background: Familiarize yourself with existing scholarship on your topic so that you can add something truthful, insightful and original to 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 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 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, Working Bibliography, and Filmography

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

1. *A question* pertinent to Hollywood aesthetics;
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; we don't care. 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*. Lay out a specific plan for how you will answer your question, identifying areas of existing research that can help answer it. 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. Avoid websites that do not have a proven history of valid scholarship. Use only reliable sources. Put film titles in a "filmography," separate from written resources. Use [MLA format for Works Cited pages](#).

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 15-20 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.

*Optional conference with Professor Berliner*: I suggest making a 20-minute appointment with me a week before your prospectus workshop to review your prospectus or discuss your project. Students have found this conference helps make their workshop more productive.

- Checklist:
- prospectus (under 600 words) with: 1) a question, 2) justification, and 3) methodology.
  - bibliography in [MLA format](#)
  - separate filmography
  - bring 16 typed/double spaced hard copies of everything to your conference

## **B) Aesthetic Analysis Paper: Abstract, Essay, and List of Works Cited**

Your paper presents your research findings and analysis and includes:

- 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. Use [MLA in-text citations](#).
- 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). A list of films cited in the paper with appropriate reference information. Separate your filmography from your Works Cited.

Although you will revise this paper later, the first version 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.

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 only one week past the due date. After a week, I deduct 1% every half-hour it 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. If you are working with a partner, be sure to copy your partner when you email the paper to me.

- Checklist:
- Title, byline, and abstract on a separate Title Page
  - Essay with [MLA in-text citations](#)
  - [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, e.g. yourlastname\_paper.docx). Copy your partner, if you have one.

## **C) Aesthetic Analysis Paper (revised): Abstract, Essay, and List of Works Cited**

Your final paper may be quite different from the version you turned in earlier. I assume that you will change your points after you receive my comments and continue to research, analyze, 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\_paper.doc"). If you are working with someone else, copy your partner when you email the paper to me. Final papers will not receive comments, just grades, and there are no extensions; I will deduct 1% every half-hour it is late.

- Checklist:
- Title, byline, and abstract on a separate Title Page
  - Essay with [MLA in-text citations](#)
  - [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, e.g. yourlastname\_paper.docx). Copy your partner, if you have one.