

## Academic Writing Guide: How to Write a Film Analysis

### Getting Started

- **First read your assignment instructions very carefully.** What components of the film are you meant to focus on and later write about? Are you meant to write about a specific scene, theme, genre, or the style of the film?
- The first time you watch the film, try to focus on simply understanding it. What is its narrative? Who are the main characters and what are their relationships? When and where is it set? Make sure you have a solid foundation so that you can talk about the film in detail.
- After your viewing, make some notes about key moments, scenes, images, and sounds that stood out to you.
- Then, watch it again. You should try to watch a film several times before writing on it. Films are a complicated, layered form of media that can only be understood through careful and repeated viewings.
- Consider taking notes during one of these subsequent screenings. Try to focus your notes on the topic of your assignment (i.e., a specific formal or stylistic element, a specific scene, or a certain theme or idea).
- As the authors of *Film Art: An Introduction* suggest, when studying film texts, “[l]ook and listen carefully” and “[t]hink like a filmmaker” (Bordwell et al 307).

### Preparing to Write

There are several things you can prepare before writing your paper to make things easier.

- Draft a thesis statement.
  - Without a thesis statement, an essay has no argument (and arguably, is not even an essay)!
  - Usually, thesis statements answer the questions posed by your assignment’s instructions.
  - A strong thesis statement contains a direct argument *and* an explanation.
  - A strong thesis is **not** an observation you made about the film.
  - A strong thesis statement will guide you as you write, giving you a key idea that you can frame your entire analysis around.
  - If you finish the paper and realize your main argument or idea has changed, you can always update or modify your thesis statement.
- Outline your main ideas.

- What ideas do you have that will help you demonstrate your thesis?
- What will be the key evidence you use to support your argument?
  - Remember: evidence should help support your argument, but it should not speak for you.
- Think of a strong outline as a roadmap for your essay.
- An outline will give you a sense of your paper's structure before you begin writing. It should also give you an idea of how sound your argument is and how convincing your evidence will be.

## Writing the Paper

- Avoid spending too much time summarizing the plot — your instructor is familiar with the film and knows its plot. Spend your efforts describing its form and style.
- Remember, this is an analysis – you must carefully *analyze* key features from the film. How do formal and narrative features or patterns contribute to the film's main themes?
- Filmmakers make choices for a reason, which is to help convey their film's major ideas. Detailing how these choices contribute to these ideas will prove your ability to think critically about cinema.
- Interpretations vary – a strong film analysis is not about finding the *right* interpretation of a film, but instead convincingly supporting your interpretation through specific evidence and analysis.

## Writing About Movies: Best Practices

- The first time you mention a film, you should also mention its director and year of release:
  - There are several ways you can do this, so long as the information is included.
    - E.g., "*Raging Bull* (dir. Martin Scorsese, 1980) explores..." or "Martin Scorsese's *Raging Bull* (1980) considers..."
  - Film titles should be *italicized*.
  - Refer to directors by their last names, not their first names.
  - The first time you reference a film character, it can be useful to connect them to the actor who portrays them:
    - E.g., "Jake LaMotta (Robert de Niro) struggles with..." or "Jake LaMotta, played by Robert De Niro, struggles..."
  - Use the present tense to describe the film.
    - "The film depicts..."
    - "The camera pans..."
    - "Scorsese shows..."

## Film Studies Citations

- When you discuss specific scenes or shots in a film, you need to provide an in-text citation.
- In-text citations for films are structured like this, using the film title and a time stamp. (*Film Title* HH:MM:SS-HH:MM:SS).
  - E.g., “Wozniak (Seth Rogen) again asks that Jobs (Michael Fassbender) credit the Apple II team during the presentation, and again he refuses (*Steve Jobs* 00:22:29-00:23:37).”
- You must cite all sources referenced in your paper, including all films, on a *separate* page located at the end of your paper.
  - Consult the WLC’s style guides for how to cite a film. Make sure to use the correct style for your class.
- **Failure to provide proper citations will result in you receiving a 0 and an academic alert being filed!**

## Recommended Resource

Corrigan, Timothy. *A Short Guide to Writing About Film*. Pearson, 2014.

**For additional help, please make an appointment with a Writing & Learning Centre Humanities specialist at: <https://alexander.mywconline.com/>**