



Center for Writing and Speaking

F NO. 17 IN THE CENTER FOR WRITING AND SPEAKING HANDOUT SERIES

Writing About Film

The process of writing about film is very similar to writing about literature, but it also requires analyzing the elements of film, such as lighting, editing, and camera angles. Here are some pointers.

The importance of scenes

Films are made of scenes, which include not only dialogue, but also a myriad of technical elements. You should consider the entire experience. How does the lighting set the mood? How does a casting choice affect the way a character was portrayed? How does the music foreshadow the plot? How does the camera tell the story? When you begin writing your paper, think of how an entire scene contributes to your thesis, with reference to the technical and the more literary elements alike.

Before you watch the movie

- Why are you watching the movie? The purpose behind the assignment will affect how you watch the movie and how you structure your paper. Does the instructor want you to consider the social context of the movie? Are you asked to compare with another movie or a book?
- Do a little research on the film. Movie reviews written by professional critics are a good start because they give you an idea of what to look for. Once you know the reason why critics hated or loved it, you can look for that aspect of the movie when you watch it. The Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com) is one reliable source with information about the director, actors, crew, and a short synopsis. However, don't let a movie review overpower your interpretation of the film—what you write needs to be original.
- Get ready to take notes — the more you take, the more material you will have for later.

While watching the movie

- Remember that film is a unique form of expression, integrating visual and auditory media. Do not get so caught up in the plot that you forget to notice the technical elements. Pay close attention to music, lighting, camera movement, editing, and casting of characters. For example, how does music contribute to the shower scene in *Psycho*? How does the camera help portray relationships in *Sunset Boulevard*?
- Try to watch the movie more than once to notice certain scenes or quotations that you may have missed the first time around.

Writing the paper

- Just as in a literature analysis, you should introduce a concrete, arguable thesis in the beginning and prove it throughout your paper. Define major issues and analyze how, or whether, they are resolved. Sometimes the instructor will ask for a short synopsis of the film in your introduction, but in general, avoid plot summary. Only talk about the scenes that prove your thesis.
- Put the film in context. When was it made? In what time period does the action of the film take place?

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