

HOW YOUR SECOND FILM ANALYSIS ESSAY WILL BE EVALUATED

The second film analysis essay is in many ways an assessment of how well we have grasped, digested, and learned to apply the material covered in the first and second halves of the semester, including the key concepts of academic writing as well as the major protocols of semiotic, cinematic, and narrative analysis. Accordingly, we are looking for highly affirmative responses to the following queries:

1. Have you produced a thesis statement that goes beyond a mere articulation of what your film is about but more significantly addresses what the film is trying to say, or have you attempted instead to follow the approach developed in WAM Chapter 4 where you ascertain whether the film reinforces a dominant ideology, subverts it or both? Have you done so while being precise and specific or are you stuck with vague and overly abstract language to express this overall point of the essay? Is it contestable? Can someone potentially disagree with it? If so, how? (Please note that if your thesis is about “love” or something like “love conquering all,” you are not only being vague, you are also being banal and uninteresting. If “love” is your point, you have no point. Since the term “love” can be used for virtually anything, as a result, it says virtually nothing. “Love” or some related expression is what we see as the point in elementary school essays, not university work. Therefore, if you are tempted to go that direction, try to upgrade your level and say something significantly more sophisticated. Blow away your audience; do not induce them into a state of somnolence.)
2. Are you able to introduce your thesis logically with an engaging lede and sufficient background regarding the story or is your lede insipid and boring as well as vague? (If you start with an epigraph, be sure to connect it to the writing that follows. Do not let it sit there and speak for itself.)
3. Have you articulated the key question emerging from the film that your thesis is attempting to answer? Did you actually write it down?
4. If you have carried out a full-scale plot analysis, did you identify the major plot points and major moments of tension? Did you summarize the plot appropriately and not excessively while doing so? (Remember that summarizing is a tool, not an end. Review WAM Chapter 1 if needed on the use of summarizing.) The plot analysis is optional for the second essay, but if you decide to exclude it, keep in mind the reader’s perspective. Do you need to identify any particular narrative elements to help the reader’s understanding of the film?
5. Have you applied semiotic terms appropriately and effectively to the film? In applying the terms, do you go beyond simply asserting the application of the term but also proving your application to be appropriate and convincing? Are you reading the film as an aggregate of various specific signs?
6. Are you applying cinematic terms effectively to the film? Are you trying to read individual frames in order to determine their composition? Are you employing some of the language Monaco describes as coming from the visual arts? Are you

- avoiding the vague use of the term “mise-en-scene,” which basically says nothing, and instead putting into play the 15 more specific terms as explained by Monaco in Chapter 3? If you decide to deal with sound, are you being specific enough and descriptive enough in your explanation? We do not recommend analyzing sound, especially if you do not have a sufficient technical grasp of the field. Telling your audience that a sound is diegetic or not is not really interesting either. Do you deal with the editing of the film as well? Is your discussion of it appropriate? Are there any particular kinds of edits that stand out (refer to Monaco’s discussion of Metz in Chapter 5 where specific categories of montage are identified.) Would it be appropriate to explain any particular transitions being used in the film?
7. Have you effectively applied at least one of the more interpretive narrative terms, including symbol, irony, tone, imagery, theme, etc. in your analysis and have you proved the appropriateness of your application? Has the discussion been adequately developed or was it merely a brief mention without further explanation?
 8. Do your body paragraphs begin with clear topic sentences that establish interpretive points? Do the topic sentences delineate topics, controlling ideas and reflect your attitude toward them clearly and appropriately?
 9. Are your body paragraphs well developed with about 8-15 sentences?
 10. Are your body paragraphs focused and unified or do you occasionally go off-topic or change the topic? Ask yourself if each sentence in the body paragraph supports your topic sentence in some way. Is there a mismatch at any point between your topic sentence and the body sentences of your body paragraph?
 11. Have you employed effective transitions, including novel repetitions of previously written elements? Have you used transitions to start your body paragraphs as well as your conclusion? Does the essay have a distinctive flow as a result, or do you have a lot of disjointed, choppy sentences that do not appear to be linked?
 12. Has every body paragraph accomplished your specific goal for the paragraph? What are your goals in the body paragraphs? What is your focus?
 13. Is your tone appropriate for academic writing? Is it formal or is it overly familiar and informal?
 14. Do you have a concluding paragraph that restates your thesis in a different way and sums up your key interpretive points? Do you take the further step of showing your reader the implications of your discussion, what it all means and what the key takeaways are? Have you shown to your reader why reading your essay was worthwhile? Do you have about six to eight sentences for your conclusion? Is it sufficiently developed?
 15. Have you formatted your essay correctly? Is it uniformly double-spaced from top to bottom or do you have extra space between some lines? Have you indented your paragraphs five spaces (using the ruler instead of the space bar or tab key) and kept the indentation uniform throughout the rest of the essay? Do you have a header with your surname and perhaps your initial on each page along with page numbers that ascend on each subsequent page?
 16. Is the film title in italics only throughout the essay? Do you carry out a Works Cited entry for the film on the last page and is the formatting for the entry in the current MLA format? Is the first line of the entry flush left and each subsequent

- line indented five spaces? (use the carrots on the ruler to set these.) Is the entry double-spaced, and double-spaced without additional space between the entry and the Works Cited title?
17. Have you made sure NOT to use sources other than the film itself? Have you been looking at material online to help you sort out the meaning of the film (BAD), or are you relying on our narrative terms and your own resources to determine the meaning (GOOD)?
 18. Have you plagiarized your essay in any way? Have you borrowed so much as a phrase from a source? (This is not allowed and will get you a failing grade.)
 19. Have you carefully gone through your essay and proofread it prior to submission?
 20. Have you gone through it step by step, numbered item by numbered item, to check to make sure it adheres to the submission guidelines from the website? Feel free to take a couple hours of extra time to do so if needed.

If your answer to the great majority of these questions is affirmative, then a B grade or higher is readily attainable. Only if your sentences and expressions are basically unreadable is such a result not possible.

If you are having trouble or do not fully understand all of these questions and criteria, you should consider doing the following:

1. Review my lectures on academic writing from early in the semester as well as the later lectures if appropriate. These lectures serve as the basis for my evaluation of your work, so it is worthwhile to review them throughout the term. A one-time viewing may not be enough.
2. Contact me and ask specific questions or set up a Zoom conference. I cannot give a preliminary reading and review of your work or correct any outlines, but I can answer specific questions and look at a thesis perhaps once or twice and give some brief feedback.
3. Consider contacting the UIC Writing Center for additional assistance.