

ITL 365: Taking Notes on Film

Before Class

There are several things that you can do before class that will make your understanding of the film more complete. This will also help you complete your writing assignments more effectively. So, before each day of film observation, you should do the following:

- Collect the basic info for the film: date, director, writer, actors, etc. (This can be obtained through IMDB.)
- Generate a list of the primary characters with a 2-3 sentence annotation of for each. (This can also be obtained online.)
- You may also want to view some trailers of the movie before class.

During the Film

Be sure to write down your thoughts concerning story, plot, cinematography, acting/directing, themes, and key moments. Make sure also to take note of effects that are digitally mastered as opposed to captured through more traditional means. Actually – write down anything that stands out in the film: good, bad, or ugly. If it grabs your attention, it's likely of some import.

Following the Film

After viewing, you should make sure to review and expand your notes as soon as possible, while the movie is still fresh in your mind. In addition, make sure to do the following:

- Write up a paragraph concerning the narrative of the film. Remember: narrative is a fancy word for the combination of the story and the plot. An effective description of the narrative will contain a synopsis of the story line, as well as a recounting of the organization of the story. You may also elect to discuss the storytelling aspects of the director's work in this section as well.

- Write up a paragraph concerning the composition of the film. Specifically, what did you notice about shooting and directing of the film, as well as technical issues that may have caught your eye. Pay specific attention to lighting, sound, camera angle, point-of-view, etc.
- Identify the most important items you remember about the viewing and address the question of “What’s special about this film?”
- Write up a paragraph attempting to superficially analyze the film. This is not an official film analysis, but rather, a quick-and-dirty compilation of your initial thoughts and impressions.

Final Notes

If you do these things, you will benefit from a deeper understanding of the film, and you'll also be setting yourselves up to have a much easier time with your paper assignments. Waiting until the last minute to address these issues and the readings will not serve you well in this 300-level course.

Finally, what is not acceptable? You will not be successful if you submit the following:

- Generic lists of rambling thoughts regarding the film.
- IMDB content for anything other than character lists or basic info. If you send me plot information directly from IMDB, you are plagiarizing.
- Information that is clearly not reflective.