Writing Center Quick Reference:

Analysis For Film & Television

**How to Write an Effective Film or TV Analysis**

Writing an academic **Film or TV Analysis** requires intimate knowledge of film and television forms and structures and how they convey meaning. An ideal scene analysiswill *identify* the formalist components of the medium (mise-en-scene, editing, sound, etc.) and then *synthesize* how these elements function within the giventext. Identification of the various formalist components alone will not suffice — a scene analysis mustalso *state an argument* on how a singular scene/sequence functions as a microcosm of the text’s themes, narrative, or cultural meaning.

**First Steps for a Film/TV Analysis**

**First Watch:**

* It’s important to watch each text critically and take down shorthand notes.
* Your focus should be on divulging the central theme(s) and questions sparked by the text.
* You may also want to note any scenes/sequences that speak to the text’s themes and how formal techniques are utilized.

**Brainstorming:**

* Watch the text again after choosinga central theme or topic to write about.

* Identify your evidence, such as dialogue, shot composition, cinematography, costuming, etc. How you utilize these components will depend on the type of scene analysis you are writing.

**Types of Film/Television Analysis**

Consider what type of analysis you are being asked to write, and synthesize your ideas, notes, and thesis statement accordingly. It’s important to remember that analyzing audiovisual media frequently requires a combination of formal and cultural analysis.

**Formal Analysis:**

This type of analysis directly examines the formal components of a text and how they are arranged to produce meaning. Often, these analyses attend to one or two scenes, dissecting how the meaning of a text is conveyed by a complex synthesis of stylistic elements (from cinematography to sound design to dialogue).

**Cultural Analysis:**

This type of analysis examines a text’s relationship to its broader social, cultural, and political context. A cultural analysis moves beyond compositional concerns to address a text’s engagement with its specific socio-historical context. Often, scholars will interweave theoretical approaches to media analysis, such as Marxism, feminism, and queertheory, to help elucidate a text’s complex relationship to its social and cultural background.

**Crafting Your Thesis Statement**

A good thesis statement for a Film or Television Analysis generally has the following characteristics:

**Makes a Claim:** A thesis statement must go beyond merely making an observation and posit a perspective. The difference between an observation and a claim is that the latter inspires other points of view. For example, *Avengers: Endgame* (2019) was a box-office success is an observation that no one can argue with (since it’s verifiable by quantitative records). However, a claim might be that *Avengers: Endgame* struggles with its depiction of female characters — this position engages with competing claims.

**Determines the Scope of the Argument:** A thesis statement should prepare the reader for your paper’s evidence, ideas, and thematic scope. Accordingly, every paragraph should connect back to the thesis**.**

**Provides a Structure for the Argument:** Your thesis should signal to the reader how your argument will be presented.

* For example, *Avengers: Endgame* (2019) fails to leverage the narrative potential of its female characters, often through (Point A), (Point B), and (Point C). In this case*,* the reader understands you will address three crucial points.

**Components of a Scene Analysis**

Below are some potential stylistic elements to consider when writing a **formal analysis:**

* **Shot Selection**: Angles (high, low, dutch) + shot scale (close-up, medium, wide, etc.)
* **Framing**: How is the frame composed? Where is the character relative to the frame? How is space used?
* **Camera Movement**: pans, tilts, tracking shot, Steadicam, etc.
* **Sound Design**: Consider variations between film and television sound and its effect on the viewer; if you are analyzing a television sitcom, is the sound derived from a live audience, or is it canned laughter?
* **Lighting:** Naturalistic or Expressionistic lighting?
* **Editing:** Continuity (preserves the illusion of spatial and/or temporal continuity, 180° system, eyeline match, etc.) vs. disjunctive editing (calls visible attention to the cut, jump cuts, etc.)? How long or short are the shots? The effects on pacing? Does the editing preserve or break away from spatial/temporal verisimilitude?y

* **Costuming:** What do the wardrobe choices say about the character and/or environment?
* **Make-up:** If a character’s make-up stands out, does it tell you anything about that character?

Below are some potential questions to consider when writing a **cultural analysis:**

* How does the text commenton, reinforce, negotiate, or critique social and political issues that were prevalent at its release?
* Does the textcontain any allegorical meaning?
  + For example, in the episode “Let That Be Your Last Battlefield” of *Star Trek* (1966), the conflict between two members of the same alien species is an allegory for racism and the civil rights movement.
* Ask yourself about some of the text’s thematic concerns: race, gender, socioeconomic status, sexuality. How does the text deal with these categories? For example, is the text didactic, subtle, or somewhere in between?
* How might a theoretical approach help to articulate the text’s complex themes and ideas? If you’re writing about racial representation, explore how different writers have written about “race and representation.”
* Does the text address a specific historical period? How might that period reflect the text’s thematic concerns? Remember, period pieces provide a pretext for reflecting contemporary concerns.
* How do the text’s formal components reflect its thematic approach?

**Basic Rules**

Here are a few formatting guidelines to keep in mind when writing about Film & Television:

* Remember to write in the present tense.
* Always italicize the titles of Films and Television series (e.g., *Oppenheimer, Barbie, White Lotus*, etc.)
  + Individual television episodes should be enclosed in quotation marks.
* When introducing a film or television series, indicate the year of release.