

English 1301 Final Exam Essay

The final exam is a critical analysis of any movie of your choice that you particularly admire--current or classic, viewed in the theatre or at home from your personal collection or on rental or television/cable/PPV showing. In a critical analysis, you are not 'criticizing' in a negative sense, but rather analyzing the characteristics of a work of art, in this case a film. **'Critique' means to interpret and assess; 'analyze' means to separate out.** In the process, you want to determine what is the director's purpose in the movie (what is his theme--the 'universal truth' or point of his movie?), or what the actor's intent is in a particular performance, or how the cinematographer or composer underscores the movie with the photography and music, etc. Staying focused on the purpose of the technique(s) you are analyzing should prevent writing a plot summary. Analyze in **present tense** throughout, showing how the aspect(s) you are looking at contribute to the success of the movie. Works of art and entertainment 'live' in the present. Where appropriate, you may certainly quote a bit of dialogue from the movie, but don't overdo that. Include at least two sentence patterns from Longknife.

For example, I could look at Denzel Washington's scene in *Glory*, when he is whipped for trying to find a pair of shoes that fit -- revealing the previous scars, his tragic determination to go through this insult and pain again without giving in emotionally to his tormenters, except for a single tear that courses down his beautiful face. The expression on his face, stance of his body, scars, and single tear say everything about the fate of the black man during slavery in America and call about a wealth of strong emotions within the viewer for the pain of these people and the loss to us all. Later in the movie, Washington's character finally abandons his bitterness and becomes the hero these black soldiers certainly were, and he represents the poignancy and 'glory' of the black man in America. Washington won the Academy Award for best supporting actor that year, largely for this scene, which also serves as the turning point in the film for his character's development and the focal point of the director's intent -- to show the true courage, dignity, grace, and pride of the black man in America. There are many other aspects you can look at in the movie you choose, with similar goals of showing the impact and importance of what you are analyzing.

In your introduction, be sure you identify the movie (movie titles are underlined or italicized), date, director, major stars, and basic premise of the film; then move to your thesis statement about the movie's importance, suggesting your reasons, which will be developed in the body and reiterated in the conclusion with your final commentary. After you identify the stars and directors by full names, refer to them thereafter by their last names, not first names: we may love these actors, but they're not our 'pals'; they are artists, and we refer to artists in critical analyses by last names. Though not necessary, you might also tell the reader whether the movie or actors won any awards. You can find that information in movie books and web sites and DVD 'extras', but **you must tell your reader where any information comes from, in parentheses afterwards.** For example, (Amazon) or (DVD Extra) or (Internet Movie Database). I want you to stay focused on the film; however, if there is some background information you find particularly important, you may include it (being careful to use your own words or

quotation marks), but you **must tell your reader the source**. For example, many DVD's today give 'extras' that are very interesting and helpful to understanding the film or enjoying it even more. You would need to tell your reader the information came from that source. You are not doing research for this essay, so you don't need to do a full Works Cited page for this essay; simply cite the DVD extra (or IMDB, Amazon, etc.) in parentheses. Take notes during the viewing (see it twice if you can), brainstorm all the possible topics, choose the one that you think best represents what you want to explore, brainstorm again, and develop that one with two or three detailed examples from the film.

Do not write a plot summary or give away the ending; rather, analyze what makes the movie a success. Use several examples and details of aspects and techniques used in the film; for example, performance of the lead actor; cinematography, pacing of the story, symbols/images, theme, humor, music, special effects, etc. I'm sure you can think of more: just keep your eyes, ears, and minds open to the movie. Read the sample student papers for how others successfully executed this assignment.

After brainstorming, focusing, coming up with thesis statement, key words and phrases (be sure to review my notes on brainstorming and thesis), write a minimum 1.5 pages to maximum 2 pages, 5-paragraph essay—fully edited—with correct essay format including clear file name using your own name as part of it, clear thesis including your own key words and phrases, good topic sentences, transition, developed paragraphs of at least 4-5 sentences (but no overly long paragraphs), and closure that recalls the thesis and leaves the reader thinking about your position. Be sure you edit for punctuation, syntax, mature diction, pronoun and subject-verb agreement, tone, and organization. Also proofread rigorously for accidental oversights. Again, this is not a research paper, so if a student uses a source and does not cite it, that is automatic failure of the essay and major reduction in the course grade up to failure depending on the grade going into the Final. Of course, flagrant plagiarism (turning in someone else's paper or a professional review as one's own for example) is a zero on the paper and failure in the course.

Essays must be typed double-spaced, with MLA heading typed (not a header) in the upper left corner, 1" margins, left justification, page numbers in upper right corner using the insert page tab, and only in **MSWord** with .doc extension, and using 12 point **Arial** font. No variations on either of those or any other fonts. Put your name in a clear file name so I can download class sets of essays and save them by students' names.

I do not participate in any way on the final exam essay—because it is an exit exam demonstrating what you have learned about argumentative college writing. However, you may use the college writing lab tutors for assistance with format and mechanics. Remember they assist; they do not edit the student's paper. Use the essay check list before uploading to the drop box before the deadline. Students are responsible for uploading on time and for uploading the correct version of the essay. See the syllabus and news alerts.