

SP25-COM230002 Introduction to Film

M & W, 11:30-12:50 Instructor: Calista McRae

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1. Course Description

COM 230 is a writing-intensive introduction to the study of film. Its focus on close analysis and critical writing is meant to give students practice in careful observation and effective communication. Students will: investigate culturally and aesthetically significant films across a range of periods and genres; assess and discuss these films, alongside secondary criticism from film studies; make claims about how a given film's content and form connect; find and present evidence for those claims. Each section will also be an opportunity for students to consider their own writing at a careful, slow pace: students will write frequent short responses in a viewing log, as well as three formal essays. They will also each select one aspect of a film to "teach" their classmates, in a five-to-ten-minute multimedia presentation centered on close analysis.

2. Course Goals

- Closely analyze films in multiple genres
- Analyze basic cinematographic techniques
- Communicate insights through the mode of rhetorical argumentation, drawing on various invention and revision strategies
- Refine your own communication, by describing films as precisely and expressively as possible
- Identify a range of genres and sub-genres, and discuss how individual films handle generic expectations
- Recognize film's contributions to human emotional and intellectual life.

3. Prerequisites

ENGL 101 and ENGL 102 with a C or higher; ENGL 102 may be taken concurrently as a co-requisite.

4. What you have to buy or rent

No books, but quite a few movies. Wait to buy/rent each until we're nearing the week we watch it, since the syllabus might change. [JustWatch](#) can help you find each movie, but also get a [Newark Public Library card](#): it's free, you can sign up online, and it gives you access to Kanopy and Hoopla.

5. Warnings!

Some of the movies we will discuss contain material that may offend or upset you. There will be blood, sex, and much foul language (for instance, *The Big Lebowski* is currently 43rd on Wikipedia's list of "Films that most frequently use the word *fuck*"; the main character of *In Bruges* uses racist and homophobic slurs, also slurs about physical appearance and about mental disability). Quite a few of these movies are troubling, depressing, or controversial. In discussions, think about your classmates; respect for one another should be a consideration at all times. You are always welcome to talk with me further about any movie outside of class.

Also: most of these movies are close to two hours long, which means preparing for discussion will take more than two hours. Several are old or experimental.

6. Assignments

in-class writing, drafting, brainstorming, quizzes if any	-	10%
participation	-	15%
five-minute in-class presentation	sign up for a day here	10%
short essay on <i>Get Out</i>	February 26, 1 PM	10%
short essay on <i>Winter's Bone</i> , <i>Moonlight</i> , or <i>Wadjda</i>	April 9, 1 PM	10%
midterm exam	in class, March 3	10%
final exam	in class, May 5	15%
final essay, on a film of your choice	May 9, end of night	20%

The links above have guidelines for each assignment.

7. Grading and Revising

Work will be evaluated according to the university's grading scale. If you are concerned about a grade, contact me as soon as possible. Waiting until the end of the semester means there will be no way to improve the grade.

A = 100-90 (superior) B = 86-80 (very good) C = 76-70 (acceptable) F = 59-0 (inadequate)
 B+ = 89-87 (excellent) C+ = 79-77 (good) D = 69-60 (minimum)

To improve a grade you got on a formal assignment, you can revise and resubmit it any time before the last meeting of this class, on May 5. Before resubmitting, you need to meet at least once with someone at the Writing Center: bring them the assignment, your work, and my feedback, and ask them to tell me you went. After that meeting and after you've done all the revising you think the essay needs, email me the new essay, along with a short note describing what you changed and why, and I'll average out your original grade and revised grade.

If you want me to read an early draft of any assignment, we need to meet to discuss the work (in person, by Zoom, or by phone), at least two days before it's due. But if at the last minute you have specific questions (for instance about a particular sentence or paragraph), please do email me and I'll answer as quickly as possible.

8. Attendance Policy

I use class to assess your performance, and class should give you the tools and practice you need to do well in the formal/graded work. If you have a lot of unexcused absences, do your best to make up for it by being as engaged as possible when you do come. Contact me early in the semester if you have any concerns about attendance/participation.

If you have an absence that NJIT can "excuse" (illness, family emergency, jury duty, a university event, etc.), please ask the Dean of Students to review the request; they keep your personal information confidential and can email all your professors at once.

Otherwise, with the exceptions of the midterm and final days, you can miss two classes for any reason, without it affecting your grade; there is no need to tell me why you're skipping. (For everyone, at the end of the semester, I will also remove the two lowest grades for in-class writing and participation.) After that, additional unexcused absences will start to bring your participation grade down, little by little. If you have an emergency on the midterm or final day, you need a DOS note.

According to university policy, students who expect to miss classes or exams because of religious observance must send their instructors, by the end of the second week of classes, a written list of dates that will be missed.

9. Submitting Work

For any out-of-class work, please make a .doc file; include your name and an interesting title. Use 1-inch margins and double-space. No need for hard copies; Canvas has submission links. For in-class writing, I'll usually give you paper and just collect it at the end of class, but you might be asked to send me something in a Google Form from time to time.

10. Late Work

Extensions are handled on a case-by-case basis: often it's possible, but it depends on the assignment. If we're discussing a given work in class that day, you're asked to submit your own rough notes/draft beforehand, to show that you did start thinking about your essay early. Without an extension or a note from the DOS, the grade of late work will go down by three points per day (e.g., from an 85 to an 82), until it hits a grade of 60. I do accept late work until the last day of classes, and as long as the work is clear about what helped you, it is literally always better to turn in work late than not at all. I will not give late work the same amount of feedback given work sent on time.

With presentations, sign up for a slot that works for you, as soon as you can. Changing days without a note from the DOS will result in a reduced grade for that assignment. No-shows without a note

from the DOS will get a zero, though depending on our schedule you can make it up and I will average out the two grades.

11. Academic Integrity

Here is NJIT's policy on academic integrity: for this class, pay attention to the section on plagiarism.

When I encounter work that for any reason seems (a) as if it may be using other people's work (including AI work) and (b) is not clear about that use, NJIT requires me to send it to the DOS, so that their office can look into what happened. To avoid this, make sure you understand the following:

- This class is meant to help you become a stronger reader and writer; to do that you need to practice. The class will give you all the tools you need; you don't need other sources.
- What counts as plagiarism varies between fields; the standards for biology are different from those for a literature or film class. For this class—where your work is graded partly on how you're communicating your ideas—you need to be explicit and detailed about places where another writer helped you in any way. To evaluate your work, I need to understand where it is coming from.
- If anything you're writing uses an idea or language (even a few words!) of any other person, make that use clear to your reader (or audience, in the case of the presentation). *In the essay itself, right at the moment you use any idea or wording, you need to signal the particular use. And if you borrow somebody's wording, put it in quotation marks.* Here is a very short overview of the main problem I see, [accidental plagiarism](#).
- When in doubt, be clearer than you think you need to be.
- Don't use generative AI (like ChatGPT). It almost always makes your writing less clear, more boring, and more pretentious. And while doing so, it also [does a number on the environment](#).
- I strongly discourage people from using writing assistants like Grammarly, but if you decide to use one, 1) submit both the pre-Grammarly version and your final version, and 2) use only the features related to grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Don't use the features related to tone or vocabulary.
- To sum up: please write these essays on your own, but as per above, if you make the decision to get outside help in any way, spell out that use. If you're worried about some aspect of your writing, get in touch with me.

12. Accessibility/Accommodations

If you think you may have any difficulties related to the format or materials of this course, or if you would like to discuss any accommodations that might be helpful, please contact me at the start of the semester. If you have a documented disability, or if you think you might have a disability, you

should also be in touch with [OARS](#) (Office of Accessibility Resources and Services) either to request an official accommodation or to discuss requesting one.

13. The Writing Center

The Writing Center (G17 Central King) is available for 45-minute remote or in-person appointments with writing tutors, who can help with planning, structuring, or refining essays. You can make an appointment [here](#). When you go, please bring any rubrics/handouts, so the consultant can see how you'll be graded. And please ask the writing tutor to fill out a Writing Center report and send it to me, so that I know you are going and give you credit for making that effort.

14. If You Have Problems

If you find that you are dealing with a serious, life- and coursework-affecting problem, please do not just go off the radar. Let both me and the DOS know, right away (you may have to provide paperwork to them, but their office really does want to help). Because of NJIT policies, having the DOS involved may give me more flexibility in helping you with deadlines, etc.

15. Draft Schedule

This schedule is tentative and will change. Any Canvas announcements or emails take precedence over what's here. As of 12/31, all film links work--but please let me know right away if one isn't working for you.

Start

Wed., Jan. 22. Course policies and introduction; short diagnostic assignment. Keaton, Chaplin, Vertov. Make an [NPL account](#), then connect it to [Kanopy](#). {Optional reading: from Cook, *A History of Narrative Film*}

Intro to Film Analysis

Mon., Jan. 27: Truffaut.

Wed., Jan. 29: Corrigan.

Mise-en-scene

Mon., Feb. 3: Hitchcock.

Wed., Feb. 5: Ray.

Camerawork

Mon., Feb. 10: Kubrick.

Wed., Feb. 12: Bordwell.

Editing

Mon., Feb. 17: Bordwell, Marker.

Wed., Feb. 19: Bong.

Sound

Mon., Feb. 24. Coppola, Bordwell.

Wed., Feb. 26. Peele.

Due at start of class: short essay on [*Get Out*](#).

Scripts

Mon., Mar. 3. Midterm exam.

Wed., Mar. 5. McDonagh.

Characters

Mon., Mar. 10. Joel and Ethan Coen.

Wed., Mar. 12. Keaton.

(break)

Mon., Mar. 17 and Wed., Mar. 19: spring break – no class

Genre: coming-of-age films, broadly construed

Mon., Mar. 24. Granik.

Wed., Mar. 26. Continued.

Genre, continued

Mon., Mar. 31. al-Mansour.

Wed., Apr. 2. Continued.

Genre, continued

Mon., Apr. 7: Jenkins.

April 7 is the last day to withdraw

Wed., Apr. 9. Continued.

Due at start of class: second short essay, on *Winter's Bone*, *Wadjda*, or *Moonlight*.

Animation

Mon., Apr. 14. Miyazaki.

Wed., Apr. 16. Kon.

Documentary

Mon., Apr. 21. Farrokhzad.

Wed., Apr. 23. To be chosen, by the class, from list of available works that have won an Academy Award for Best Documentary Short Film.

Experiments

Mon., Apr. 28. Vertov.

Wed., Apr. 30. TBD.

End

Mon., May. 5: our last class; final exam in class.

Wed., May. 7: No COM 232; your Friday classes meet.

Fri., May 9: final essay due at end of night.