

COM 230-001 | Intro to Film | syllabus

T & F, 8:30-9:50

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FMH 307

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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 you practice in careful observation and effective communication. You will watch about twenty culturally and aesthetically significant films from across a range of periods and genres, practice thinking about how each film's content and form interact, and read a variety of writing about movies. In just about every meeting of the class, you will be writing at least briefly, and sometimes you'll build on this writing outside of class.

## 2. Course Goals

- Closely analyze films in multiple genres
- Analyze basic cinematic 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 near 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. Don't use your NJIT email address when making an NPL account, because you'll need to access both NJIT's and NPL's Kanopy selections, and Kanopy can get confused if you use the same email address.

Each day, bring your laptop to class, so that you can have the day's movie or reading up on your screen and/or can type, if needed.

## 5. Warnings!

This course includes a number of "feel-bad movies," to borrow David Fincher's phrase--both depressing movies and movies with intense, disturbing, or controversial subject matter. Some of the

films currently on the list deal with graphic violence, genocide, addiction, domestic violence, terminal illness. Some use offensive language. In general for this class, focus on how and why the filmmakers handle such subjects, rather than on the subjects themselves. Thoughtfulness towards your classmates 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

short in-class writing responses	throughout semester	15%
participation	throughout semester	15%
midterm exam	Oct. 7	15%
longer in-class response	Oct. 28	10%
gradual essay	second half of semester, due Dec. 9	10%
semi-optional presentation	if you choose to do one, sign up <a href="#">here</a> by Oct. 10	10%
final exam	TBD	25%

## 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 near the end of the semester means there will be no way to improve the grade. Also read over the assignments links just above, and the section on attendance below.)

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)

## 8. Attendance Policy

I use class meetings in part to assess your performance, and the meetings should give you the tools and practice you need to do well in the exam and writing. 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. In general, you can pass the class even if you have a lot of absences or significant lateness, but not with a high grade.

If you have an absence that NJIT can "excuse" (illness, family emergency, jury duty, 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, you can miss two classes--except the days of the midterm and long in-class response--for any reason, without it affecting your grade; there is no need to tell me why you're not in class. After those two absences, additional unexcused absences do start to bring your participation grade down. 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 list of dates that will be missed. If you are on an NJIT athletic team with fall competitions, please do the same.

## **9. Submitting Work**

For most writing, you will just be working on paper in class. But if you are asked to do any out-of-class writing, I'll send you a Canvas link or a Google Form.

## **10. Late Work**

Extensions are handed on a case-by-case basis and depend on the assignment. In-class writing can't be made up.

With the semi-optional presentations, changing days without a note from the DOS will result in a reduced grade. No-shows without a note from the DOS will just mean that your final grade for the class won't be above a B.

## **11. Academic Integrity**

[Here is NJIT's policy on academic integrity](#): for this class, pay attention to the section on plagiarism. And for this class, do not use AI chatbots/LLMs to make or refine any work, including forum posts and presentations. 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 that, please read [this handout](#).

## **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 consultant to send me a note so that I know you made 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's policies and HSS policies, having the DOS involved may give me more flexibility in helping you with deadlines, etc.

## **15. Tentative Schedule**

This schedule is tentative and will change. Any Canvas announcements or emails take precedence over what's here. As of August 15, all film links work--but please let me know right away if one isn't working for you.

## 1. Intro

Tue., Sep. 2. What is form, what is close reading?

Before class: Read the syllabus and [this handout](#). Come with questions.

In class: introductory writing and some tasks: download the free version of the FireShot extension (for screenshots from most movies here are links to the [Firefox](#), [Chrome](#), and [Safari](#) versions), download and test [VLC](#), request a [NPL card](#).

Fri., Sep. 5. Truffaut, [The 400 Blows](#) (France, 1959; 99 min.) You need that Kanopy-via-NPL account to watch Truffaut (or you'll need to rent it). Watch in advance; come with the timestamp for one moment you liked.

## 2. Mise-en-scène

Tue., Sep. 9. Read the "[Mise-en-scene](#)" chapter of *Introduction to Film & TV*.

Fri., Sep. 12. Cuarón, *Children of Men* (2006; 109 min.)

## 3. Cinematography

Tue., Sep. 16. Read Bordwell, [chapter on cinematography](#) (159-215 with a few bits crossed out).

Fri., Sep. 19. Ray, *Mahanagar* (1963; 131 min.).

## 4. Editing

Tue., Sep. 23. Sharman, "[Editing](#)"; Murch, *In the Blink of an Eye*, [1-4](#), [15-20](#).

Fri., Sep. 26. Kurosawa, *Stray Dog* (1949; 122 min.)

## 5. Sound

Tue., Sep. 30. Sharman, "[Sound](#)" and one episode of your choice from [the "Settling the Score podcast](#) -- pick an episode about a movie you know.

Fri., Oct. 3. Wong, *Chungking Express* (1994; 98 min.)

## 6. Midterm exam

Tue., Oct. 7. Midterm exam, in class.

Fri., Oct. 10. Keaton, [Sherlock Jr.](#) (1924, 45 min.). If you choose to do so, sign up for a semi-optional presentation by this day. Guidelines [here](#).

## 7. Genre: Dystopias

Tue., Oct. 14. Kahlil, *Pumzi* (2009; 21 min.)

Fri., Oct. 17. Miller, *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015; 120 min.)

## 8. Scripts and screenplays

Tue., Oct. 21. McDonagh, *In Bruges* (2008; 107 min.). Also this handout on [writing about film](#).

Fri., Oct. 24. Coens, *No Country for Old Men* (2007; 122 min.). [Skim](#) the opening of the novel they are adapting.

## 9. Building feeling

Tue., Oct. 28. Longer in-class response; film TBD.

Fri., Oct. 31. Kubrick, *The Shining* (1980; European cut, 119 min.)

## 10. Targets

Tue., Nov. 4. Peele, [Get Out](#) (2017; 104 min.)

Fri., Nov. 7. Bong, *Parasite* (2019; 132 min.)

**11. Genre: Realist drama**

Tue., Nov. 11. Farhadi, *A Separation* (2011; 123 min.)

Fri., Nov. 14. Žbanić, *Quo Vadis, Aida?* (2020; 102 min.)

**12. Genre: Coming of age**

Tue., Nov. 18. Jenkins, *Moonlight* (2016; 111 min.)

Fri., Nov. 21. Granik, *Winter's Bone* (2010; 100 min.)

**13. Compressed week**

Tue., Nov. 25. TBD.

Weds. Nov. 26: Friday classes meet; TBD.

Fri., Nov. 28. No class

**14. TBD** (partly on class interests).

Tue., Dec. 2. Potentially Lamorisse, *The Red Balloon* (1956; 34 min)

Fri., Dec. 5. Potentially Panahi, *The White Balloon* (1995; 85 min)

**15. End**

Tue., Dec. 9. Itami, *Tampopo* (1984; 115 min.) The finished 'gradual essay' is due at the end of the night.

Final exam, date and time TBD by registrar.