

## **ENGL 558: Horror Movies**

### **Horror Movie Short/Trailer and Reflection Presentation**

Your assignment is to make a **one- to five-minute horror short or trailer** and to reflect on the aesthetic decisions you make in a **fifteen- to twenty-minute presentation**. How do the mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing, sound, narrative, and sociocultural/theoretical context work together in the short/trailer to highlight the strengths of the horror film genre?

The aim of the film/trailer and presentation is to encourage close analysis and creative thinking. You must present a clear understanding of how meaning is constructed through the use of film form (cinematic language) and content (narrative/story).

While making references to things that you've learned during the semester, you should also be creative. Don't necessarily make a typical American slasher. Maybe try to make an old Universal or Hammer film, a New French Extremism film, or a film that replicates the style of Dario Argento, for example. Your film/trailer could play on fears in culture or work according to the Final Girl theory (or a spin on it). The sky is the limit!

While you may prepare and use notes for the presentation, you should not read from a prepared document, and you should use any notes for reference and guidance only.

#### **Questions to Ask**

These questions are just to get you started.

#### **Sociocultural/Theoretical Contexts**

How do sociocultural and/or theoretical backgrounds or frameworks provide a way for understanding an interpretation of the excerpt and film?

#### **Mise-en-scène (the overall look and feel of a movie)**

Focus on **production design** (the process by which the look of the settings, props, lighting, and actors is determined) and **composition** (the organization, distribution, balance, and general relationship of actors and objects within the space of each shot). How do props and costumes help convey characters and themes? Are particular colors dominant (or absent)? Is the setting significant? If so, how is it presented? How does the lighting help convey the setting and the action? How is character blocking and placement used?

#### **Cinematography (the process of capturing moving images on film or a digital storage device)**

Where is the camera placed in relation to the action? Distance? Angle? How do particular compositions draw attention to elements of the settings, characters, or themes? How does camera movement function in the sequence? Are different focal lengths or depths of field used? How does cinematography reinforce the mise-en-scène?

#### **Editing (the process by which the editor selects, arranges, and assembles the visual, sound, and special effects to tell a story)**

What kinds of transitions are there between shots? Are these always the same? Do they change? Does the editing have a particular rhythm, and is it consistent? Does it conform to rules of continuity, or does it seem disjunctive or discontinuous? What spatial and temporal relations are articulated through cutting? Graphic relations? Rhythmic relations? Associational connections?

## **Sound**

What sounds are present? When does volume or pitch change? Is silence used? Are specific sounds linked to cuts or camera movement? When and how are onscreen and off-screen sound used? Are sounds diegetic or non-diegetic?

## **Tips**

The **Cinematic Language Quick Reference Card** available on Canvas may help with the creation of your movie/trailer and presentation.

## **Evaluation**

Please consider the following areas of evaluation:

### **A-Level**

There is a coherent, incisive, insightful, and detailed movie/trailer, displaying an excellent understanding of how meaning is constructed through the use of film language, with an excellent awareness of the movie/trailer's relationship to the horror genre. There is a persuasive explanation for the selection of the form and content. The critique shows an excellent awareness of the film's genre and its place in a broader sociocultural and/or theoretical context. Simple description is negligible, and analysis is clear and thorough. The presentation demonstrates elements of excellent preparation and rehearsal.

### **B-Level**

There is coherent and detailed movie/trailer, displaying a good understanding of how meaning is constructed through the use of film language, and a good awareness of the movie/trailer's relationship to the horror genre. There is a clear explanation for the selection of the form and content. The critique shows a good awareness of the film's genre and its place in a broader sociocultural and/or theoretical context. There may be brief elements of description but analysis is thorough. The presentation demonstrates elements of good preparation and rehearsal.

### **C-Level**

There is a limited movie/trailer, displaying some understanding of how meaning is constructed through the use of film language, and a limited awareness of the movie/trailer's relationship to the horror genre. There is a limited explanation for the selection of the form and content. The critique shows some awareness of the film's genre and its place in a broader sociocultural and/or theoretical context. A substantial amount of the presentation may have detailed descriptions but offers only limited analysis. The presentation demonstrates elements of some preparation and rehearsal.

### **D-Level and Below**

The movie/trailer is incoherent, displaying a very limited understanding of how meaning is constructed through the use of film language, and a limited awareness of the movie/trailer's relationship to the horror genre. There is little or no explanation for the selection of the form and content. The critique shows little or no awareness of the film's genre and its place in a broader sociocultural and/or theoretical context. The presentation is likely to be exclusively descriptive. The presentation demonstrates elements of little preparation and rehearsal.

## **Presentation**

- Fifteen- to twenty-minute presentation
- One- to five-minute film or trailer
- Teams of up to five students (possibly more or as an individual with permission)
- Format: Up to you

## **Available Technology**

From my office in Grubbs 402, you may check out the following technology to complete this assignment:

- iPads
- Handheld video cameras
- Digital voice recorder

You may complete this assignment using any software or hardware of your choice, including your phone. For example, you may use iMovie (a cheap iPad application that's easy to use), which I can help you negotiate. However, here is a list of various software that you might decide to use:

<http://www.digitaltrends.com/computing/best-free-video-editing-apps/>

I also suggest using various tutorials available on YouTube in order to figure out how to work the software/application.

## **Teamwork**

Film is a collaborative work; therefore, this assignment is collaborative. I will deal with lack of participation in the following way:

1. You get one written warning from your colleagues.
2. You get one written warning from me.
3. On the third collaboration issue, consider yourself “fired” from the “project” and receive a zero.

If you cannot attend a meeting, offer to do something to compensate your colleagues for their time. Pick up additional outside tasks, for example.

## **Due Dates**

The movie/trailer and presentation are due on **Friday, May 6, at 12:00 p.m.** During that time, we will have the world premiere of your films/trailers along with your presentations. This session will be open to the public.