

ENGL 305: Intro to Film Studies

Sequence Analysis

Your assignment is to create a shot list and to write a **4-page essay**, based on that shot list, analyzing a selected sequence. How do the mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing and sound design work together in the sequence to underscore its themes and those of the film as a whole?

The sequences are available online through our Canvas site. **You should choose one and only one sequence to examine for this essay.**

This assignment has two parts.

Part 1: Shot List

Prior to writing your paper, prepare a detailed shot list that includes all shots in the selected sequence. Please model your shot list on the template provided on Canvas.

Part 2: Analytical Essay

Once you have compiled your shot list, begin thinking about how the techniques you have documented function together in the sequence. Develop an argument about how these techniques reinforce the scene's themes and then select detailed, individual examples from the sequence. You do not need to describe the entire sequence, nor do you need to write about every shot. You don't even need to write about every technique you've catalogued on your shot list. Rather, use *selective examples* to analyze how *particular techniques* create specific effects in the overall design of the sequence.

Questions to Ask

These questions are just to get you started. ***You do not need to answer every question in your essay.*** Use the questions as a way to help select the techniques that will be the focus of your argument. This is only the beginning. There are many other questions you can ask as well. Look back through your lecture notes and your readings.

Mise-en-scène

Focus on production design and composition. 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

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

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

Avoid plot summary and extended visual description. Aim instead to analyze how specific cinematic techniques function to underscore the film's themes and ideas. Organize your essay around key points in your argument, rather than a chronological examination of the sequence.

Avoid evaluative language. ("The costumes are beautiful.") Aim instead to *analyze* the effects of the techniques used. ("Ada's restrictive, layered clothing impedes her movement through the natural surroundings and symbolizes her oppression.")

Use precise film terminology. (Is the camera movement a track, tilt, pan or zoom? Is it a high-angle shot or a low-angle shot?, etc.) When in doubt, consult our textbook.

Avoid vague language. ("The use of lighting in this scene is very effective" or "Parallel editing helps to create suspense," etc.) Aim instead to analyze the specific effect of individual techniques. ("Closed frame compositions emphasize Susan's entrapment.")

Make a strong argument about the sequence. Keep in mind that your essay should have a thesis. A thesis should answer three questions in one or two sentences: WHAT your argument is, HOW you will be making this argument, and WHY this argument is important (or, as I call it, the SO WHAT question).

Ineffective Thesis Statement

In this essay I will analyze the use of sound in *Blackmail*'s "knife" sequence, connecting it to larger thematic and visual patterns in the film as a whole.

Effective Thesis Statement

In *Blackmail*, off-screen sound and high-angle shots illustrate Alice's powerlessness while also encouraging viewers to identify with this position of victimization.

You are not required to do any additional research for this paper. Rely on the analytical skills you have been learning in class.

Evaluation

Argument

1. Paper presents a thesis argument about the sequence.
2. Adequate and clear attention to the following areas:
 - mise-en-scène
 - cinematography
 - editing
 - sound
3. Paper analyzes how the techniques function in the sequence.
4. Uses appropriate examples from the sequence to support the argument.
5. Close analysis of how techniques create meaning.
6. Utilizes terminology and methods of analysis studied in class.
7. Plot description at bare minimum for clarity; focus is on analysis and argument.

8. Avoids evaluative comments or information that is extraneous to the assignment.

Organization

1. Appropriate length.
2. Clear introductory paragraph that introduces an argument about the sequence, and suggests how it will be sustained.
3. Linked paragraphs that develop and sustain the argument introduced above.
4. Each paragraph organized for clarity of argument.

Writing

1. Clear and varied syntax (sentence structure).
2. Few if any grammatical errors.
3. Uses appropriate language and vocabulary.
4. Adequately proofread and spellchecked.

Presentation and Due Dates

MLA format, **4 double-spaced pages plus shot list**, 12-point Times New Roman font

Keep in mind that the plagiarism and late policies apply to this assignment. The first essay is due to me through the drop box on Canvas no later than Monday, March 9, by 11:59 p.m. I am more than happy to review drafts.