

MEVIT1110 Grading Rubric (Autumn 2019)

Instructor: Annie Fee

Part A: Scene Analysis

The students do not need to make a clear thesis statement in their introduction and the text does not have to be structured in the same way as the essay in part B, with a clear topic sentence in each paragraph. What is important is the content/idea of what they are saying. If it is precise and clear and interesting and if their references to the film supports their argument, then they will receive an A. Students are being tested on their interpretation of the scene. More weight should be given to the analysis of significant formal and stylistic elements (circa 70%) than to the relationship of the scene to the film or episode as a whole (circa 30%).

The key to a successful scene analysis essay is focus. An A-level essay may concentrate on how one or two formal elements perform one or two functions. It may also pose a clear, defensible argument regarding the function of the scene's formal elements and develop that argument over the course of the essay. An A-level essay will show a mastery of the technical terms for film analysis learnt during the semester (see glossary handout and textbook). A B-level essay may include a mix of interesting analysis and generalities and may include some errors in technical terms. A C-level essay may offer a catalogue of observations on the scene's formal elements and not make the necessary step from description to analysis. It may not consistently use the technical terms in the correct way. A D-level essay will not attempt to use the technical terms learnt in class and will be descriptive rather than analytical.

We can understand the film analysis exam essay as involving the three steps listed below.

- 1) Description of the scene. What formal elements are used?
- 2) What meaning does these formal elements of cinematography and mise en scene produce?
- 3) How does the meaning produced in this shot fit in with the issues/themes/characters/settings/narrative of the film as a whole?

A D-level essay will not reach beyond step 1. A C-level essay may attempt steps 2 and 3 but may not be completely successful. The ideas may not be fully developed or well-supported with formal elements. A B-level essay will engage with steps 2 and 3 and will be mostly successful, but the analysis may be a little unclear or uninteresting at times. An A-level essay will engage with all three steps and do so convincingly with interesting analysis and ideas.

Part B: Students will answer one of the following three essay questions. All questions require them to reference at least two readings and to discuss at least one specific scene.

Part B. Question 1.

- 1. What film genre best describes *The Fits*? In your answer you should explain how the film follows and/or breaks with at least three specific genre conventions.**

An excellent essay will include most of the following points and use examples from the film and readings to support their answer.

Main Point:

The Fits does not fit into a clearly defined genre category but rather engages with at least three film genres: the teen pic, the horror genre and the sports film. It is therefore an example of genre mixing. The relevant readings for this question are Rick Altman, Steve Neale and the textbook. The students only have to reference two of these, but Altman should be one of them.

The Fits and Genre:

An excellent essay will point to how the film fits the horror genre syntax, while incorporating semantic elements of the teen pic and the sports film. They will use the Rick Altman reading discussed in class and give an explanation of the meaning of the terms *semantic* and *syntactic* traits. An excellent essay will show how *The Fits* transfers the horror syntax of monster-victim onto a new set of semantic elements, i.e. a young girl joining a dance team.

They will outline the importance of the film's mise-en-scene for engaging with multiple layers of genre. One example would be Toni's golden nail varnish representing both her membership of a peer-group (teen pic) and sports team (sports film), but also her gender performance and her transformation into a gender-conforming "monster" or "zombie" (horror film). Excellent essays will also point to the film's self-reflexivity about genre, for example when Beezy plays at being a zombie and when Toni scares Beezy in the darkened sports hall.

Students will note the generic *vocabulary* of the sports film and teen pic, using details from the film. They may test the generic *syntax* of each of these genres to find that they do not fit the film. For example, they may explore how the film engages to a certain extent but not completely with the Cinderella plot pattern and with the Sports film competition plot pattern. In relation to this, students may discuss viewer expectations and how the film creates surprise and suspense through its playful relationship with genre.

Note: In Question 1, an A-level essay will show a clear understanding of the *semantic* and *syntactic* elements of film genre by engaging with the Altman text. It will discuss all three genres (horror, sports film and teen pic) using examples from the film. A B-level essay will cite Altman but will not illustrate a clear understanding of the terms *semantic* and *syntactic*. It will also discuss all three genres (horror, sports film and teen pic) using examples from the film. A C-level essay will either not mention Altman's terms or will cite his text in a superficial way. It may only engage with two genres and not support their argument with examples from the film. A D-level essay will not cite Altman or the terms *syntactic* and *semantic*. The D-level essay may give vague and general statements instead of making an argument and may rely on plot summary rather than examples from the film.

Part B. Question 2.

2. Is *Waltz with Bashir* a documentary? In your answer you should explain how the film follows and/or breaks with the documentary form.

An excellent essay will include most of the following points and use examples from the film and readings to support their answer.

Main Point: *Waltz with Bashir* is a documentary film, based on real events, real characters and using real interviews. It is an example of several modes of documentary, as outlined in the Nichols reading. These are the *participatory mode*, the *performative mode* and the *reflexive mode*. However, the use of animation makes it different from most documentary films and students will engage with how animation functions to make meaning and develop themes in the film. Excellent essays will explore how Folman uses animation in a poetic way to explore themes of memory and trauma. They will discuss Folman's assertion about how only animation is capable of recreating the memories, hallucinations and dreams of war as a "bad acid trip." The relevant readings for this question are Bill Nichols, Garrett Stewart and the textbook. The students only have to reference two of these, but Nichols should be one of them.

Indexicality and Self-reflexivity:

Unlike film, animation has no clear indexical value. Folman's use of animation challenges the value of historically authentic footage as evidence (Nichols). Folman's film is self-reflexive about its status as animation. The integration of real video footage of the Sabra and Shatila massacre's aftermath at the end of the film contrasts sharply with the rest of the film in terms of imposing a highly-charged indexicality. In addition, he playfully explores the boundaries of his medium by positioning a fictional camera within his film. For example, in one scene a sweet wrapper hits and obscures the camera lens, and in other scenes optical point-of-view shots from sniper rifles and binoculars are integrated.

Note:

In Question 2, an A-level essay will develop the main point above in a well-argued essay with rigorous use of examples from the film and readings. An A-level essay does not have to show a clear understanding of indexicality and self-reflexivity as outlined above, but such an understanding will mark the essay out as an A. A B-level essay will develop the main point above but may not use examples from the film in a convincing manner. It may not show a full understanding of the readings. A C-level essay may discuss the modes of documentary in a superficial way without giving examples from the film and without showing a clear engagement with the readings. A D-level essay may state that the film is based on real events and real people and thus functions as a documentary. It may support this argument with plot summary and descriptions of scenes, but will not engage with the main point above.

Part B. Question 3

- 1. How is the home represented in *The Searchers*? What function does the setting of the home play in the film's narrative and how is it used to develop themes central to the Western genre?**

An excellent essay will include most of the following themes and use examples from the film and readings to support its answer.

Main Point:

Student essays should situate the home within the conflict between civilisation and nature or “savagery” central to the Western genre. Civilisation is represented by the homes of white European settlers and the “savage” and unpredictable nature of the frontier is represented by the Native American tribes. The relevant readings for this question are those by Rick Altman, Robert Warshow and the textbook. The students only have to reference two of these.

Themes:

Home, Family and Race

The relationship between home and the idea of family. Students will address how family is represented in the film by discussing the relationship between Ethan and Martin Pauley and between Ethan and Debbie. They may note that Ethan’s idea of family is racial and based on blood-ties, whereas Ford’s vision of the family is based on broader community ties.

Ethan’s Relationship to the Home

Ethan’s discomfort in the home is part of his characterisation as the wandering cowboy hero typical of the western genre. Ford uses the setting of the frontier between civilisation and nature or “savagery” to highlight the moral ambiguity of Ethan’s character. Students will note how Ethan is continually associated with the Native Americans he so despises.

Gender roles and the home

Students may note how Ford playfully subverts traditional roles with the characters of Mrs. Jorgensen, Mr. Jorgensen and their daughter Laurie. This sub-theme overlaps with the theme of race and particularly the question of a woman’s “whiteness” as addressed by Ethan’s attitude toward Debbie and the other women kidnapped by Comanche tribe members. The wedding scene would be an obvious example to discuss the question of gender representations in the film.

Note: In Question 3, an A-level essay will show a clear understanding of the semantic and syntactic elements of film genre by engaging with the Altman text, but doesn’t have to. In this question students can get an A without using Altman’s terms of syntactic and semantic generic elements. The A essay will touch upon all most of the themes listed above and will be well-organised with clear examples from the film and readings. The B-level essay will engage with only one or two of the sub-themes listed above, and may be less organised and give fewer examples from the film. The C-level essay may only discuss one of the sub-themes and may not support all points with examples from the film. A D-level essay may only mention the main conflict of civilisation and nature and not the themes listed above. It may give vague and general statements, instead of clear arguments and may rely on plot summary rather than examples from the film.