

## **FILM 2332.003 – Understanding Film**

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### **I. Instructor Information**

**Instructor:** Dalton Cooper, MA

**Class Meeting:** Thursday 4:00pm – 6:45pm; MC 2.410

**Email:** Dalton.Cooper@utdallas.edu

**Office:** JO 5.410B

**Office Hours:** Thursday 2:00-3:00pm and by appointment

### **II. Course Description**

This course explores the history and stylistic elements of cinema as a mass medium and an art form. The course analyzes visual language and film style, cinematic codes, and the ways that films can embody or criticize popular ideas and attitudes. Emphasis is on film analysis, film in relation to the other arts and mass media, films as artifacts, and understanding the ways that films are put together and how they function expressively. This course thus introduces students to the various formal elements of cinematic language and to the practice of film analysis, allowing students to critically think about film in terms of ideology, culture, and politics.

### **III. Student Learning Objectives**

In addition to being a prerequisite for upper-level film studies courses, this course serves as a creative arts core credit. This category of courses focuses on the appreciation and analysis of creative artifacts and works of the human imagination. Creative arts courses seek to expand students' abilities to critically think, communicate, collaborate, and develop social responsibility. In this course, students will achieve their creative arts requirement as they:

- Reevaluate what it means to “watch movies” (there is more to film than Marvel)
- Identify the various formal elements of film
- Develop a vocabulary for discussing and writing about cinema
- Understand how film operates within historical and cultural contexts
- Learn to analyze film and develop arguments about cinematic texts

This class also counts toward the fulfillment of UTD's minor in Film Studies (18 credit hours) or major in Visual and Performing Arts with a film studies concentration. For more information:

<https://catalog.utdallas.edu/now/undergraduate/programs/ah/minors#ah-minor-film-studies>.

### **IV. Required Texts**

**Reading:**

- **Pramaggiore, Maria and Tom Wallis. *Film: A Critical Introduction*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., Laurence King Publishing, 2020. ISBN-13: 978-1786275776**
  - Available as an eBook through the library
- Additional required readings will be uploaded to e-Learning

## **Screening:**

- **HBO Max subscription/access**

- The films assigned in this course are just as vital for your learning as the required readings are. You are responsible for watching all assigned films before the class meeting in which they are discussed. Most of the screenings will come from HBO Max (the required streaming service for this course); additional screenings will require using Kanopy (free to UTD students), or online rentals.

Please Note: The content and/or form of some screenings for this course may be considered difficult or challenging for certain viewers (subject matter may be mature and/or controversial [sexuality, nudity, violence, gore, etc.]). Enrollment in this course requires watching all assigned films.

## **V. Course Basics**

**Structure:** Each week of this course is organized around a guiding question that the lecture and assigned materials will help us to answer. By the end of the semester, once we can answer each guiding question, we can confidently say we are on our way to “understanding” film. After the course introduction, each class meeting will feature two components: a discussion of the assigned screenings and a lecture. As evidenced by the course calendar, this is a screening and writing-intensive course.

**eLearning:** Lecture slides, additional readings, and assignment templates will be uploaded to eLearning. Students will complete exams and submit papers through eLearning (which runs them through Turnitin). This means that you are required always to have access to all online materials throughout the semester.

**Instructor Communication:** It is my mission to ensure that each one of you gets out of this class what you put into it. Communication is the key to successfully managing a classroom. There are three primary ways to communicate with me in this course:

1. **Lecture:** ask questions during our discussion and raise your hand if you're confused during the lecture—don't let me confuse you more if you don't understand. In addition, I'll answer questions directly after each lecture.
2. **Office Hours:** Come visit me in office hours! I promise I don't bite (unless you are a cheeseburger). Just send me an email to schedule a time for a talk or drop by during the scheduled times. We can also meet through a scheduled meeting on Teams if that makes you more comfortable.
3. **Email:** email me any questions you might have, or if you just want to talk about the course. I will be checking my email every day, but that does not mean I am available all day, every day. Please allow me 24 hours to respond.

I do not want any of you to fail. However, if you earn a failing grade, I will post it without hesitation. Please please please ask me for help AS SOON AS you realize you need help. Not two weeks after, not at the end of the semester, as soon as you know.

## **VI. University Policies**

It is expected that students are aware of and understand these policies. All relevant course-wide university policies can be found here: <https://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies>

## **VII. Assessment**

**Philosophy of Grading:** This class serves as your primary introduction to the various elements of understanding film, which means we have a lot to cover in a short amount of time. Again, you will never get more out of a course than what you're willing to put into it. I want to see the effort and energy that you're putting into this course so you can gain real value from it and use that for your future career and academic goals. Some of you will naturally take to certain topics more than others, but no matter the topic, I want to see you apply what we learn through the lectures and readings in our discussions and assignments. If you are ever unsure of what is being asked of you for an assignment or discussion, please let me know before the due date. I know sometimes students feel embarrassed to ask questions but believe me when I say that I am here to help you!

**Deadlines:** All assignments are **due by 11:59pm on the due date** listed on the course calendar at the end of this syllabus. All assignment instructions can be found within eLearning and will also be discussed in detail in class. Each assignment is designed to help you expand your understanding of film.

**Submitting Assignments:** All written assignments must be submitted as **.doc, .docx, or .pdf** file formats. No other file types are acceptable because I won't be able to open them! Please keep a copy of your Turnitin receipt for each submitted paper (sent via email). If there is ever an issue with eLearning/Turnitin, you **MUST LET ME KNOW IMMEDIATELY** so I can help you fix this issue.

**Academic Integrity:** Any of the various forms of academic dishonesty, as outlined in UTD policy (<https://conduct.utdallas.edu/integrity/>), including but not limited to plagiarism, will not be tolerated, and will result being referred to the conduct office.

If an assignment is considered "open materials" that does not mean that you collaborate with your peers unless directed to do so—all work submitted must be uniquely yours. AI usage is also against the rules. I will not have Skynet come from my class. If Turnitin determines that 50% of your paper is generative AI, I am required by UTD to report the assignment to the Office of Student Conduct. Do not allow this to happen to you; make good choices.

**Late Work:** Late work is not accepted without discussing with me in advance. Reach out to me if you need to discuss an extension.

**Feedback:** On each course assignment, I will provide feedback to help you understand both the grade you received and how to improve for the future. For the sake of time, this feedback will be relatively brief. If you would ever like more in-depth feedback on your assignments, I am happy to discuss in detail in office hours!

**Grading Breakdown:** Grades will be figured out of a total of **100%**. All grades will be posted to eLearning, and I recommend keeping a personal running total of your grades throughout the semester. I do not round grades. Grades will be visible on eLearning as percentage points. The numerical breakdown of grade equivalents is as follows:

Letter Grade	Numerical Grade
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A+	100-97
A	96-94
A-	93-90
B+	89-87
B	86-84
B-	83-80
C+	79-77
C	76-74
C-	73-70
D+	69-67
D	66-64
D-	63-60
F	59-0

**Grading Distribution:** Details about each assignment can be found in the assignment guide of this syllabus. Percentages are allocated across the assignments as follows:

Assignment	Percentage of Grade
Attendance	15%
Film Journal	20% (2% x 10 entries)
Short Paper	10%
Film Analysis Assignment	25%
First Exam	15%
Second Exam	15%

### **VIII. Assignment Guide**

**Basics:** All assignments will be discussed in detail in class. For each written assignment, I will post a style guide students should use to format their work. I am a big fan of consistency and my eyeballs, so standardizing formatting helps me help you. All written assignments should be completed in Times New Roman font, 12-pt, with standard margins. All written assignments should feature the author's last name and page number in the upper-right corner (the page number need not appear on the first page). All sources must be properly cited in MLA format. Assignments will be collaboratively workshopped during class meetings.

**Attendance & Participation:** Students are required to attend each class meeting to receive full credit for this assessment category. There are sixteen class meetings this semester, but all students get one "free" unexcused absence. It is expected that students participate during discussion.

**Film Journal:** Throughout the semester, we will be watching **two films per week**. The film journal serves as a collection of your responses to the weekly screenings. Each week, students will select **one** of the two assigned screenings which they would like to write about. Students must complete journals for 10 weeks of the semester (out of 15 offered journals). I will provide a prompt for each screening. Students will then answer the assigned prompt that corresponds with their chosen screening. Each response should

feature a thesis statement that answers the prompt and evidence from the film to support their claim. **Each response must be 200-250 words.**

**Short Paper - Film Review:** The film review is a short paper that draws from the skills you build writing your film journal. The film review must be **500-750 words**. You will select one film of your choice that is **not on our syllabus or discussed at length in assigned reading** (ask me if you are not sure about your choice) to write about. Like your journal, it is expected that this paper will have a thesis statement and supporting evidence. Research is not required for this paper—I just want to know what you've absorbed from our class.

**Film Analysis Assignment:** The term paper requires students to apply the skills and knowledge they've gained from this course in a way that resonates with their own passions and interests. For this paper, students will analyze **one** of the films from the syllabus. This paper must be **1,000-1,500 words**. Like your journals and review, this paper should have a thesis statement and evidence to support your claim. Research is required to support any claims that necessitate it. Well before your film analysis is due, we will discuss this paper and how to write it in class. You must have two academic sources in your paper.

**First & Second Exam:** Students will complete an open materials first exam and second exam outside of class on eLearning. These exams are multiple choice and serve to assess your knowledge of the concepts, vocabulary, readings, and films from the course. Each exam will be 75 questions, with each question valued at two points. Bonus questions for extra credit will be offered. Students may use any materials from the course to complete their exams but may not work with their peers.

## **IX. Course Calendar**

**Instructor's Note:** The due dates, topics, readings, and any other elements of the course calendar are subject to change at the discretion of the instructor. I will, of course, try to keep all course changes to a minimum, but sometimes changes are necessary either to ensure the effectiveness of the course and the success of the students, or due to streaming licensing changes. All changes will be announced in class and an updated course calendar will be uploaded to eLearning.

**Calendar Key:** Each week's number, class meeting date, and associated material is listed below. Screenings and readings must be completed before their assigned lecture, so that you may participate in the discussion of the films each week. Included with each screening is a suggested way to watch the film. Films are listed by release date.

## **Week 1: August 28**

Introduction to Course

## **Week 2: September 4**

What Does It Mean to "Watch" Movies?

Reading: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 2: "An Approach to Film Analysis," pp. 20-51

Screenings: *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939); HBO Max  
*Arrival* (Denis Villeneuve, 2016); Pluto TV

Assignment: Week 2 Film Journal

**Deadline: Week 2 Film Journal due Sunday, September 7, by 11:59pm**

## **Week 3: September 11**

What Does a Film Have To Say?

Reading: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 10: "Film and Ideology," pp. 318-349

Screenings: *Gojira* (Ishiro Honda, 1954); Kanopy (be sure to watch the original Japanese version with subtitles, **not** the Americanized version starring Raymond Burr)  
*The Wind Rises* (Hayao Miyazaki, 2013); HBO Max

Assignment: Week 3 Film Journal

**Deadline: Week 3 Film Journal due Sunday, September 14, by 11:59pm**

## **Week 4: September 18**

How Are Films Organized?

Reading: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 4: "Narrative Form," pp. 76-101

Screenings: *Rashômon* (Akira Kurosawa, 1950); Kanopy  
*12 Angry Men* (Sidney Lumet, 1957); Amazon Prime, Pluto TV, Tubi, Roku Channel, Library

Assignment: Week 4 Film Journal

**Deadline: Week 4 Film Journal due Sunday, September 21, by 11:59pm**

## **Week 5: September 25**

What Makes a Film Visually Interesting?

Reading: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 5: "Mise en Scène," pp. 102-143

Screenings: *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958); available to rent on Prime or at the UTD Library, Internet Archive  
*The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (Peter Jackson, 2001); HBO Max

Assignment: Week 5 Film Journal  
Introduce Short Paper - Film Review

**Deadline: Week 5 Film Journal due Sunday, September 28, by 11:59pm**

## **Week 6: October 2**

What Is the Role of the Camera?

Reading: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 6: "Cinematography," pp. 144-181

Screenings: *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941); Library, Internet Archive  
*Blade Runner 2049* (Denis Villeneuve, 2017); Library

Assignment: Week 6 Film Journal

**Deadline: Week 6 Film Journal due Sunday, October 5, by 11:59pm  
Film Review due Thursday, October 9, by 11:59pm**

## **Week 7: October 9**

What Gives a Film Its Rhythm?

Reading: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 7: "Editing," pp. 204-239

Screenings: *Singin' in the Rain* (Gene Kelly & Stanley Donen, 1952); HBO Max  
*Mad Max: Fury Road* (George Miller, 2015); Netflix

Assignment: Week 7 Film Journal

**Deadline: Week 7 Film Journal due Sunday, October 12, by 11:59pm**

## **Week 8: October 16**

How Do Non-Fiction and Avant-garde Films Represent Reality?

Reading: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 9: "Alternatives to Narrative Fiction Film: Documentary and Avant-garde Films," pp. 284-315

Screenings: *Pink Floyd: The Wall* (Alan Parker, 1982); YouTube, Internet Archive  
*Grizzly Man* (Werner Herzog, 2005); Prime, Tubi, Pluto TV

Assignment: Week 8 Film Journal

**Deadline: First Exam Opens Friday, October 17, at 9:00am. Due Sunday, October 19, by 11:59pm**  
**Week 9 Film Journal due Sunday, October 19, by 11:59pm**

## **Week 9: October 23**

What Do We Expect from Film?

Reading: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 13: "Genre," pp. 386-411

Screenings: *Double Indemnity* (Billy Wilder, 1944); Library, Internet Archive  
*The Dark Knight* (Christopher Nolan, 2008); HBO Max

Assignment: Week 10 Film Journal  
Introduce Film Analysis Proposal

**Deadline: Week 10 Film Journal due Sunday, October 26, by 11:59pm**

## **Week 11: October 30**

How Do We Interact with Cinema?

Reading: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 12: "Film Stardom as a Cultural Phenomenon," pp. 370-385

Screenings: *Star Wars* (now known as *Episode IV: A New Hope*) (George Lucas, 1977); Disney+  
*Spider-Man* (Sam Raimi, 2002); Disney+

Assignment: Week 11 Film Journal

**Deadline: Film Analysis Proposal due Sunday, November 2, by 11:59pm**  
**Week 11 Film Journal due Sunday, November 2, by 11:59pm**

## **Week 12: November 6**

## What Is Genre?

Reading: eLearning - Buscombe, Edward. "2. The Idea of Genre in the American Cinema". *Film Genre Reader IV*, edited by Barry Keith Grant, New York, USA: University of Texas Press, 2012, pp. 12-26.

Screenings: *The Searchers* (John Ford, 1956); Rental/UTD Library  
*The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1974); Pluto  
TV/Amazon/Library/Tubi

Assignment: Week 12 Film Journal

**Deadline: Week 12 Film Journal due Sunday, November 9, by 11:59pm**

## **Week 13: November 13**

### How Do Cinema and Gender Intersect?

Reading: eLearning – Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." 1975. *Visual and Other Pleasures*, 2nd ed., Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, pp. 14-30.

Screenings: *Mulholland Drive* (David Lynch, 2001); online rental/library course  
reserve  
*Lady Bird* (Greta Gerwig, 2017); Kanopy

Assignment: Week 13 Film Journal

**Deadline: Week 13 Film Journal due Sunday, November 16, by 11:59pm**

## **Week 14: November 21**

### The Business of Filmmaking

Reading: eLearning – Vitkauskaitė, Ieva. "Types of Film Production Business Models and Their Interrelationship." *Informacijos Mokslai*, vol. 89, no. 89, 2020, pp. 43-54.

Screenings: *Ed Wood* (Tim Burton, 1994); Library, YouTube  
*La La Land* (Damien Chazelle, 2016); Philo/Library

Assignment: Week 14 Film Journal

**Deadline:  
Week 14 Film Journal due Sunday, November 30, by 11:59pm**

## **November 26 THANKSGIVING/FALL BREAK (NO CLASS)**

## **Week 15: December 4 (LAST DAY OF CLASS)**

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What Is Beyond Hollywood?

Reading: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 11: "Social Context and Film Style: National, International, and Transnational Cinema," pp. 350-369

Screenings: *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1920); Kanopy  
*Breathless* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1960); Kanopy

**Deadline: Week 15 Film Journal due Sunday, December 7, by 11:59pm**  
**Film Analysis Paper Due Sunday, December 7, by 11:59pm**

## **Second Exam**

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**Opens: December 11, 9:00am**

**Deadline: December 15, 10:45am**