



FILM 2332.001 – Understanding Film

Fall 2025, 4:00 – 6:45 Monday, ATC 2.101

Instructor Gregory Shows

Email gregory.shows@utdallas.edu

Office Hours: Mondays, 2:00-4:00. All individual student meetings will be through Teams, by appointment, or in person after class. I am on campus but have no official office on Mondays between 2:00 and 4:00.

Required Texts: Pramaggiore, Maria, and Tom Wallis. *Film: A Critical Introduction, 4th ed.*, Laurence King Publishing, 2020. ISBN-13: 978-1786275776. There is one digital copy of the textbook on reserve through the UTD library (free to access) – a link to it is on eLearning on the Course Homepage. The textbook is widely available to purchase (if you want your own copy), as an electronic copy or hard copy, from the UT Dallas Bookstore, Amazon.com, and other textbook resellers. You are not required to purchase any books for this class.

Out of Class Screenings: Full-length films are assigned weekly for viewing before the regular class session. *These films are required texts as well. They are available as DVDs on reserve at the Media Services desk at McDermott Library, or available through streaming in the library. Some can be found via [Kanopy - Stream Classic Cinema, Indie Film and Top Documentaries](#) but are also available from other suppliers, from subscription services to YouTube to Tubi TV to the Internet Archive. Depending on the resources to which you already have access, you might need to spend \$30-40—it could be less—to watch assigned films.*

Recommended: Subscription to a streaming service. The films assigned for 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.

NOTE: The content and/or form of some films 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.

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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 introduces students to the various formal elements of cinematic language and to the practice of film analysis, allowing students to think critically about film in terms of ideology, culture, and politics.

Learning Outcomes: 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 look 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”
- 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

Grading and Requirements: Course grades will be figured from the requirements listed below. All relevant course-wide university policies can be found here: <https://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies>. It is expected that students will be aware of and understand these policies.

Attendance & Participation

15%

Film Journal	20% (2% x 10 entries)
Short Paper	10%
Film Analysis-Team Project	25%
First Exam	15%
Second Exam	15%
Extra Credit	Up to 4% of course total

There are detailed guidelines for each required assignment later in this syllabus, and due dates are listed on the class calendar. A practical set of writing guidelines is also attached and applies to all written assignments.

Late Work: Late work is not accepted without discussing it with me in advance and will need preapproval.

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. This feedback will be relatively brief. If you would like more in-depth feedback on your assignments, I am happy to discuss them in detail by appointment.

eLearning: Assignment guidelines/templates will be uploaded to eLearning. Students will complete exams and submit papers through eLearning, which runs them through Turnitin; no other form of submission will be accepted.

Statement on the Use of Generative AI: The use of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) software, including but not limited to ChatGPT, in this course is prohibited and will be considered a violation of the Code of Conduct as a form of academic dishonesty. You cannot use AI to write a first or final draft of your papers/journals, brainstorm ideas, or for any other purpose. Turnitin has a reliable AI-detection scanner that will flag any AI-generated assignments. The only AI software approved for use in this course is Grammarly, exclusively to be used for the revision of grammar and spelling. (Grammarly Go is not acceptable.) Assignments will be processed through Turnitin, which has reliable AI detection software. 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.

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 and/or the use of AI (see above), will not be tolerated, and will result in a report being sent to the Dean of Students. 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.

Classroom 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 closer to “understanding” film. After the course introduction, each class meeting will feature two components: a discussion of the assigned screenings and a lecture.

Grading Distribution: Per the assignment table above, Grading and Requirements, percentages are allocated across the assignments as follows:

Attendance & Participation (15%): Students are required to attend each class meeting to receive full credit for this assessment category. There are fifteen class meetings this semester, but all students get one “free” unexcused absence. In addition to attending class, students are required to participate in the discussion. A sign-in sheet will be provided at the beginning of each class. Each additional absence will result in a ten percent deduction from your participation grade. If you miss more than four class sessions (e.g., four weeks of class), you will have failed the attendance requirement and will also generate an automatic failing grade for the course. Your first unexcused absence will not cost you points, and it will not count towards the four days you can miss before generating an automatic failing grade.

Film Journal (20%): Throughout the semester, we will be watching up to two films per week. The film journal is a collection of your responses to the weekly screenings and reading. Each week, students will watch both films and then select one of the two assigned screenings that they would like to write about. Students are expected to complete journals for 10 weeks of the semester (out of 13 offered journals). One extra film journal may be turned in for an additional five points of credit. Each journal response must be between 200 and 250 words and must be submitted through Turnitin and by the due date for credit. **NO LATE SUBMISSIONS WILL BE ACCEPTED.** For full film journal credit, the following four assigned questions must be addressed:

1. What are two important takeaways from the assigned readings?
2. What concepts/topics from this week do you find confusing or difficult to understand?
3. How does the assigned film help you understand the reading better (or vice versa)?
4. Add the screenshot or image from the film that struck you most and explain why in a caption. This should be a caption, not a paragraph.

Short Paper - Film Feature (10%): This is a short paper that draws from the skills you build writing your film journals. The Film Feature paper must be between 650 and 750 words. You will select one film from the syllabus that you did not write about for a film journal. This essay does not require extra research or a bibliography, but if you are using external information (from a book, magazine, YouTube video, etc.) cite it accordingly. Although this is a personal essay, your essay must be focused on an idea or subject, organized coherently and logically, and flow smoothly from one paragraph to another. A good essay will argue for a central idea or thesis and use evidence to support claims. The paper should be formatted according to the style sheet included in this syllabus.

Film Analysis – Team Project Assignment (25%): At the beginning of the semester, students will organize into groups for a film analysis PowerPoint presentation that will begin in Week 5. The dates of presentations and films of that week are in the Course Calendar listed in this syllabus. For those weeks with two films only one will be available for presentation (I will indicate which ones). I will provide a signup sheet during the first two weeks of the course. Once complete, a list of presentations will be posted on the eLearning course homepage. If you do not sign up by the end of the second class, I will assign you to a group. On the day of your presentation and during the first twenty to thirty minutes of class, you will briefly present three or four interesting points you learned from watching the film for the week. You will also include the assigned reading(s) and your own independent research as part of your presentation. You might think of this as an opportunity to “teach” your fellow students and myself something in your presentation. Please make sure your presentation does not exceed 30 minutes in length. I would prefer that the entire group take part in delivering various sections of the presentation, but that is a group decision (all students must stand up to present, however). **This assignment should not be focused on a synopsis of the film, nor on the presentation of trivia, but should be an exploration of themes, analyses, and/or critical readings that deepen and broaden our knowledge of the film in question.**

A project guide outlining the requirements of the assignment and grading rubric will be posted in eLearning. In addition to considering things like delivery, clarity, and group cohesion, the presentation will be scored based on how thoroughly (and correctly) the material was organized and presented, how the points and clips were related to the topic, whether the slides were legible and accurate or full of typos, and whether the sources were properly indicated (even course texts). I will email feedback to members of each team and the grade earned by the entire team.

NOTE: Please assume that everyone in the class has seen the film you are discussing and therefore structure your presentation accordingly. Do not present a synopsis of the film as it will result in a loss of points. You may use film clips in your

presentation to illustrate a point, but please **do not use more than 3 minutes of clips** in total. Each group should have one member submit the presentation to me in an email with attachment no later than the evening before it is due.

First & Second Exams (15% each): Students will complete an open materials first exam and second exam outside of class on eLearning. Both exams are multiple choice and will assess your knowledge of the concepts, vocabulary, readings, and films from the course. Each exam will be 75 questions and 5 bonus questions. Students may use any materials from the course to complete their exams but may not collaborate with their peers. Please use library space to complete exams if your personal space is unsecure or presents distractions that could negatively impact your ability to complete the test. **You must complete the exams as indicated, no late submissions and no exceptions.**

Optional Extra Credit (up to 4% of course total): For extra credit points, students may choose to turn in two additional film journals that are not included in the ten journals needed for full credit. Extra Credit can be turned in anytime until Week 14.

Deadlines: All assignments are **due by 11:59pm on the due date** listed on the course calendar within this syllabus. Usually, this refers to a Thursday night. All assignment instructions are contained within eLearning and will be discussed in detail in class. Each assignment is designed to help you expand your understanding of film.

Practical classroom policies. Mostly, these consist of basic courtesy. If you have questions let me know:

- Laptops and tablets can only be used to take notes.
- Mobile phones need to be turned off and put away during class sessions, although you can photograph PowerPoint slides—only—if you like.
- No headphones or earbuds during class.
- If you are not prepared each week, your course grade will suffer. Perfect attendance helps (and will be rewarded), but participation in the life of the class itself through discussion of films and readings will help more.
- Although participation is expected, respect must always be shown to other members of the class, including the professor. Please raise your hand if you wish to say something while someone else is speaking.
- If you must miss a class, you are responsible for all course material covered in class. There are no make-up sessions, and each class will only be taught once. I strongly suggest securing a “class buddy” so that you can exchange lecture notes should one of you miss a class.
- Remember, the week’s reading and screening assignments are all to be completed by the beginning of each Friday session.

- Finally, if you are not performing well despite following the syllabus and its guidelines, contact me about it before midterm so that we can mitigate whatever problems you are having.

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 because extra credit is offered. Grades will be visible on eLearning as percentage points. The numerical breakdown of grade equivalents is as follows:

Letter Grade	Numerical Grade
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

Students expecting to do well in this class should read the assigned materials, attend, and take notes on all components of the class, including discussions and screenings. You are not likely to pass this course of study if you skip the assigned readings and/or continually miss class and screenings.

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Note to all students: UTD offers a **Film Studies Minor** (18 credit hours) to students whose major is outside of Visual and Performing Arts, and a **Film Studies Concentration** to VPA majors. For more information contact me or visit our website:

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

FINAL NOTE: The due dates, topics, readings, and any other elements of the course calendar are subject to change at the instructor's discretion. I will 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 as an announcement on eLearning.

CLASS CALENDAR

Screening Key: We will always discuss the current week's film(s) at the start of the next class.

For example: the Week 2 screenings will be discussed at the start of the Week 2 class meeting.

Calendar Key: Each week's number, class meeting date, and associated material is listed below.

DATE	TOPIC/READING/SCREENING(S)/DUE DATES
<i>Week 1</i> Aug. 25	<i>Introduction and Course Mechanics</i> READING: Syllabus ASSIGNMENT: Introductory Survey [In-Class]
Week 2	NO CLASS - Labor Day Holiday
<i>Week 3</i> Sept. 8	<i>What does it mean to "watch" movies?</i> READING: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 1: "Introduction"; Ch. 2 "An Approach to Film Analysis." OUT-OF-CLASS SCREENING: <i>Daisies</i> (Věra Chytilová, 1966) [114 min], <i>Barbie</i> (Greta Gerwig, 2023) [115 min] ASSIGNMENT: Film Journal #1 due Monday Sept 8 @ 11:00am
<i>Week 4</i> Sept. 15	<i>What are the differences between popular and scholarly film reviews?</i> READING: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 3 "Writing About Film." OUT-OF-CLASS SCREENING: <i>Pan's Labyrinth</i> (Guillermo del Toro, 2006) [119 min], <i>WALL-E</i> (Andrew Stanton, 2008) [98 min] ASSIGNMENT: Film Journal #2 entry DUE: Sept. 15@ 11:00 am

- Week 5**
Sept. 22 ***What does film have to say?***
READING: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 10 "Film and Ideology."
OUT-OF-CLASS SCREENING: *Do the Right Thing* (Spike Lee, 1989) [120 min],
Parasite (Bong Joon-ho, 2019) [132 min]
ASSIGNMENT: Film Journal #3 entry DUE: Sept. 22 @ 11:00 am
- Week 6**
Sept. 29 ***How are films organized?***
READING: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 4 "Narrative Form."
OUT-OF-CLASS SCREENING: *The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972) [175 min],
Moonlight (Barry Jenkins, 2016) [111 min]
Group 1 Presentation
ASSIGNMENT: Film Journal #4 entry DUE: Sept. 29 @ 11:00am
- Week 7**
Oct. 6 ***What makes a film visually interesting?***
READING: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 5 "Mise en Scène."
OUT-OF-CLASS SCREENING: *The Red Shoes* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, 1948) [133 min],
Portrait of a Lady on Fire (Céline Sciamma, 2019) [121 min]
Group 2 Presentation
ASSIGNMENT: Film Journal entry #5 DUE: Oct 6@ 11:00am
Short Paper Drafting and Pre-writing
- Week 8**
Oct. 13 ***What is the role of the camera?***
READING: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 6 "Cinematography."
OUT-OF-CLASS SCREENING: *A Clockwork Orange*, (Stanley Kubrick, 1972) [136 min],
Bladerunner 2049 (Denis Villeneuve, 2017) [163 min]
Group 3 Presentation
ASSIGNMENT: Film Journal #6 entry DUE: Oct. 13 @ 11:00am
FIRST EXAM available 12:00 am Oct. 14. **DUE:** Oct 19 @ 11:59am
- Week 9**
Oct. 20 ***What gives film its rhythm?***
READING: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 7 "Editing."
OUT-OF-CLASS SCREENING: *Singin' in the Rain* (Stanley Donen & Gene Kelly, 1952) [103 min],
In the Heights (Jon M. Chu, 2021) [143 min]
Group 4 Presentation
ASSIGNMENT: Film Journal #7 entry DUE: Oct. 20 @ 11:00am
***Short Paper** DUE for Peer Editing at 4:00 pm, class time
- Week 10**
Oct. 27 ***What do we expect from film?***
READING: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 13: "Genre," pp. 386-411.
OUT-OF-CLASS SCREENING: *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1974)

[123 min], *Dawn of the Dead* (Romero, 1978) [154 min]
Group 5 Presentation
ASSIGNMENT: Film Journal #8 entry DUE: Oct 27 @ 11:00am
SCREEN IN CLASS: excerpt from [The American Nightmare](#) (Adam Simon 2000).
Short Paper Due Oct 25 by 11:59 pm

Week 11 ***How do we interact with cinema?***

Nov. 3 READING: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 12: "Film Stardom as a Cultural Phenomenon," pp. 370-385.
OUT-OF-CLASS SCREENING: *Pulp Fiction* (Tarantino, 1994) [149 min], *Furious 7* (James Wan, 2011) [137 min]
Group 6 Presentation
ASSIGNMENT: Film Journal #9 entry DUE: Nov 3 @ 11:00am

Week 12 ***How does psychoanalysis engage and explain cinema?***

Nov. 10 READING: eLearning – Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." 1975. *Visual and Other Pleasures*, 2nd ed., Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, pp. 14-30.
OUT-OF-CLASS SCREENING: *Fight Club* (David Fincher, 1999) [129 min], *Mulholland Drive* (David Lynch, 2001) [147 min]
Group 7 Presentation
ASSIGNMENT: Film Journal entry #10 DUE: Nov 10 @ 11:00am

Week 13 ***How does cinema construct representations of race and gender?***

Nov. 17 READING: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 10: "Film and Ideology," pp. 318-333, 343-349.
OUT-OF-CLASS SCREENING: *Black Girl* (Ousmane Sembène, 1966) [60 min], *Black Panther* (Ryan Coogler, 2018) [134 min]
Group 8 Presentation
ASSIGNMENT: Film Journal #11 entry DUE: Nov. 17 @ 11:00am

Week 14 ***How do non-fiction films represent reality?***

Dec. 1 READING: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 9: "Alternatives to Narrative Fiction Film: Documentary and Avant-Garde Films," pp. 301-315.
OUT-OF-CLASS SCREENING: *Chronicle of a Summer* (Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin, 1960) [85 min], *Exit Through the Gift Shop* (Banksy, 2010) [87 min],
Group 9 Presentation
ASSIGNMENT: Film Journal #12 entry DUE: Nov. 24 @ 11:00am
SCREEN in class: excerpt from [Night and Fog](#) (Alain Resnais, 1955)

Week 15
Dec. 8 ***How does a director as the primary creative source express their vision of the world?***
READING : Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 14 "Film Authorship."
OUT-OF-CLASS SCREENING: *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (Wes Anderson, 2014) [99 min], *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* (Ana Lily Amirpour, 2014) [105 min]
Group 10 Presentation
ASSIGNMENT: Film Journal entry #13 DUE: Dec 1@ 11:00 am, Extra Credit Film Journal allowed, DUE: Dec. 1 @ 11:00am
SCREEN IN CLASS: excerpt from *Born in Flames* (Lizzy Borden, 1983)

Week 16
Dec 15 ***What is beyond Hollywood?***
READING: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 11: "Social Context and Film Style: National, International, and Transnational Cinema," pp. 350-369.
OUT-OF-CLASS SCREENING: *Let the Right One In* (Tomas Alfredson, 2010) [116 min]
ASSIGNMENT: **IN-CLASS QUIZ**
SECOND EXAM Released (Take Home): available 8:00pm 12/08 **DUE: 12/08 @ 11:59pm**
EXAM REVIEW
ONLINE FINAL EXAM DUE DEC 15 @ 11:59 pm.

GUIDELINES FOR REQUIRED WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

Practical requirements (“style sheet”) for all essays:

- Please type essays double-spaced, in a legible font (10-12 points), with ordinary (1- or 1.25-inch) margins on all sides. Keep within the assigned word-count constraints.
- Give your essay a title **other than the name of the assignment**.
- Extra research is again *not required* for the essays, but when you cite or employ or simply mention the work of—or merely information acquired from—any public or private source (including websites or blogs, or course texts), you must indicate that source properly. You may use any citation format—MLA, Turabian/University of Chicago, or APA—if you employ it consistently. (*If you do not know what any of this means, ask!!*) Sources are not part of an essay page count. Make sure that you are quoting correctly, with any ellipses or alterations properly indicated according to your chosen style manual. Extensive paraphrasing of such material also requires proper citation.
- Number every page after page 1, and *italicize* or underline film titles (choose one, not both; they “mean” the same thing).
- Give the director and date of a film upon its first mention; once you do this, you do not need to keep repeating it, and you can then quote film dialogue or describe the film without further documentation. If, however, you quote from DVD commentary and the like, you must indicate this as a citation.
- When you discuss film characters, name the actors who play them. Films are not the same as novels or stories, they are *performed*.
- Again, all formal essays should be legible to total strangers; they should not be letters to me.
- Do not use gender-specific language—i.e., do not use “he” and “him” as generic or impersonal pronouns that stand for everybody.
- Generally, employ the present tense to write about what is going on in a media text—for example, what happens (not what happened), what the camera does (not what it did), how the performer acts (not how he or she acted).
- Proofread and edit your work before you turn in the final version, and do not rely totally on computer spellcheckers for accuracy. Academically correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling will be expected—again, you are upper-level students at a research university.
- If you feel you need help with your writing, complete rough drafts of papers may be handed in at least ten days before the due date. For help from the Writing Center, go to <https://studentsuccess.utdallas.edu/programs/writing-center/>.
- Finally, two major things: first, always *think of your reader* as being someone with whom you would like to communicate. What helps you as a reader? It probably is not lots of typos, misspelled words or names, citations without attribution, sentences that do not make sense, random organization, extremely long paragraphs, and the like.

Second, *enjoy your work*. Critical thinking is a valuable as well as intrinsically rewarding skill, and writing is a craft that is as important and intricate as any element of film itself.

A GENERAL AND VERY PRACTICAL GUIDE TO EDITING ANY ESSAY

1. What is the title of your essay? If it is more than simply the name of a film or person under consideration, does your title relate to your essay's main point? Is your main point (*thesis*) clearly stated at the beginning of the paper? Is your point analytical, specific, *manageable* enough? Does the paper successfully argue this point?
2. Evaluate your introductory paragraph. Does it accurately forecast the rest of the paper? Does it contain your thesis sentence (if not, why not)? Are your terms well defined?
3. Does each subsequent paragraph contain a subpoint elaborated in a topic sentence? Are the subpoints analytic? Are they relevant to the main point?
4. Are the paragraphs unified (do they stick to proving their subpoints or do they wander off on tangents)? Do they develop their points? Where could you push your analysis further? (NOTE: If your paragraphs are more than a page long, they contain too much information and should be divided into several shorter units.)
5. Do you provide enough evidence to support your subpoints? Note places where additional or stronger evidence is needed. (If you employ any quotations, are they gracefully introduced and correctly documented?)
6. Are the *subjects* or *agents* of each of your sentences clearly identifiable? Is your language gender-specific when it should not be—do you use “he” and “him” and “his” to represent the entire human race?
7. Is the *action* of each sentence located in the verb (e.g., it is usually more compelling to employ “X influenced Y” rather than “Y had an influence on X”)? If not, why not?
8. Find all your transition sentences (those that end one paragraph and lead into the following paragraph). Are they clear?
9. Evaluate your conclusion. Does it reiterate the main point and subpoints *as well as* add to or amplify them? If it does not, what could you do to improve your concluding paragraph(s)?
10. Where are the analytic parts of your paper—individual words, phrases, sentences? If you can't find them, why not? Are you using too much description or summary, wasting time *listing* rather than *discussing*?
11. Finally, check spelling (again, do not rely on computer spellcheckers), usage, and punctuation (e.g., It's and its? Their, there, they're? To, two, too? Diegetic rather than diagetive? Etc.).
12. **Then do all of this again. Proofreading and editing are the secrets to great academic writing.**