

## Online Course Syllabus

### Course Information

**Course Number/Section:** FILM 2332.0W1  
**Course Title:** Understanding Film  
**Term:** Fall 2025

### Instructor and TA Information

**Instructor:** Stephanie Oliver, MA (she/her)  
**Email:** Stephanie.Oliver@UTDallas.edu  
**Online Student Hours/Office Hours:** 4-6 pm Sunday, via Microsoft Teams, and by appointment

**TA:** Manjima Tarafdar (she/her)  
**Email:** Manjima.Tarafdar@UTDallas.edu  
**Online Student Hours/Office Hours:** By appointment only

**Special Note:** Please email Manjima with any questions about feedback on your assignments graded by her. For all other questions or concerns, please email Dr. Oliver. Please do not hesitate to reach out any time for anything big or small. We will be checking our email every day, but that does not mean we are available all day, every day. Please allow us 24 hours to respond.

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### Course Description

This course is intended to introduce you to the field of film studies in a way that will allow you to more actively engage with, and appreciate, the films that you watch. 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. During the course of this class, we will examine the stylistic aspects of filmmaking that make up the “language of cinema” as well as the way films embody or criticize popular ideas and attitudes, and the theoretical perspectives by which we can “unpack” film. We will also examine the historical, social and cultural contexts in which films have been made. By the end of this course, you should be able to look at a film as more than a simple piece of entertainment, and begin to take it apart to understand how it has been constructed and what meanings it communicates.

### Course Pre-requisites, Co-requisites, and/or Other Restrictions

There are no pre-, co-requisites, or other restrictions for this introductory course.

### **Course Modality**

This is a fully online asynchronous class. It is not entirely self-paced. Students are required to complete assigned work by deadlines listed in the course calendar below.

### **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. It is my hope that you will use these skills in your daily life. 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, social, and cultural contexts
- Learn to analyze film and develop arguments about cinematic texts

### **Core Competencies**

- Critical Thinking (CT)-to include creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, and analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of information.
- Communication (COM)-to include effective development, interpretation, and expression of ideas through written, oral, and visual communication.
- Teamwork (TW)-to include the ability to consider different points of view and to work effectively with others to support a shared purpose or goal.
- Social Responsibility (SR)-to include intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national, and global communities.

### **Required Textbook**

**Pramaggiore, Maria and Wallis, Tom. *Film: A Critical Introduction* (4th Edition). 2020.**

- There is a digital copy of the textbook on reserve through the UTD library (free to access for all UTD students) – a link to the eBook is on eLearning. Both digital and print versions of the fourth edition are acceptable. The textbook can be ordered online or purchased at the [UT Dallas Bookstore](#), if

you want to get your own copy. Using the free eBook available through the UTD library is also acceptable.

- Additional required and/or supplemental readings, if any, will be made available on eLearning. See the course calendar below for what to read and when.

### **Required Screenings**

**HBO Max subscription/access – sign up at <https://www.hbomax.com/>**

- The films assigned in this course are just as vital for your learning as the required readings. All films are available to stream on HBO Max. You only need to sign up for the ad-supported plan to watch the required screening. But if you wish, you can choose an ad-free plan. Please see the course calendar below for your required screenings and when to watch them.
- You may watch the films on another platform or another source if you so choose/if you can find them.
- Additional clips and/or short films will be posted on eLearning in the weekly learning modules.

**Please Note:** The content and/or form of some screenings for this course may be considered difficult or challenging for certain viewers. Enrollment in this course requires watching all assigned films. If you have any concerns about such matters, please contact the professor immediately.

### **Course Basics**

**eLearning:** All grades, weekly course modules, detailed assignment information (instructions, rubrics, and examples) and links for submission will be uploaded to eLearning. Students will submit all required assignments through eLearning. All writing assignments will be run through Turnitin (except for the discussion board posts and responses). This means that you are required to always have access to all online materials throughout the semester. If you need help accessing course materials on eLearning, please email Dr. Oliver at any time.

### **Technical Requirements**

In addition to a confident level of computer and Internet literacy, certain minimum technical requirements must be met to enable a successful learning experience. Please review the important technical requirements on the [Getting Started with eLearning](#) webpage.

### **Course Access and Navigation**

This course can be accessed using your UT Dallas NetID account on the [eLearning](#) website. Please see the course access and navigation section of the [Getting Started with eLearning](#) webpage for more information.

To become familiar with the eLearning tool, please see the [Student eLearning Tutorials](#) webpage. UT Dallas provides eLearning technical support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The [eLearning Support Center](#) includes a toll-free telephone number for immediate assistance (1-866-588-3192), email request service, and an online chat service.

### **Communication**

This course utilizes online tools for interaction and communication. Some external communication tools such as regular email and a web conferencing tool may also be used during the semester.

### **Distance Learning Student Resources**

Online students have access to resources including the McDermott Library, Academic Advising, The Office of Student AccessAbility, and many others. Please see the [eLearning Current Students](#) webpage for more information.

### **Server Unavailability or Other Technical Difficulties**

The University is committed to providing a reliable learning management system to all users. However, in the event of any unexpected server outage or any unusual technical difficulty which prevents students from completing a time sensitive assessment activity, the instructor will provide an appropriate accommodation based on the situation. Students should immediately report any problems to the instructor and also contact the online [eLearning Help Desk](#). The instructor and the eLearning Help Desk will work with the student to resolve any issues at the earliest possible time.

### **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>

### **Comet Creed**

This creed was voted on by the UT Dallas student body in 2014. It is a standard that Comets choose to live by and encourage others to do the same:

*“As a Comet, I pledge honesty, integrity, and service in all that I do.”*

### **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. 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 you from it and use that for your future career and academic goals. If you are ever unsure of what is being asked of you in a learning module or an assignment, please let Dr. Oliver know as soon as possible. I am happy to discuss drafts of assignments and answer any questions related to the course during student hours or during meetings made by appointment or through email.

**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 to your UTD account).

**Generative AI:** As outlined in the UTD Student Code of Conduct (<https://policy.utdallas.edu/utdsp5003>), cheating includes using unauthorized materials to complete assignments. **Using generative AI is considered unauthorized material, and the use of any generative AI in this course is forbidden (including ChatGPT, Grammarly, or any such site).** AI-generated content including writing (for any graded writing assignments in the course), tables, code, analysis, or images should not be presented as your own work. Turnitin or other methods may be used to detect the use of AI. Under UTD rules about due process, referrals may be made to the OCSC. Inappropriate use of AI may result in penalties, including a 0 on an assignment.

**Late Work: You all get three late tokens at the start of the semester.** When you use a late token, you can turn in an assignment up to 48 hours late without a penalty. **You cannot use late tokens on quizzes or exams, but you can use them on all other assignments.** I suggest using the late tokens on assignments that have a higher impact on your grade. **To use your late tokens:** Email me when you to let me know that you are using one of your three late tokens on an assignment once you have submitted it (you can also email me and let me know that you want to use a late token on an assignment as soon as you decide you are going to use it/before you submit it late).

**Feedback:** On each course assignment, you will be provided 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 after they have been graded, please contact whoever graded your assignment, either Dr. Oliver or Manjima. You will know who graded your assignment as they will put their name in a comment box at the end of the submitted assignment by the rubric.

**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. The numerical breakdown of grade equivalents is as follows:

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

**Grading Distribution:** Percentages are allocated across the assignments as follows:

<b>Assignment</b>	<b>Percentage of Grade</b>
<b>Note to Future Self</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>Weekly Screening Discussion Posts and Responses</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Weekly Reading Quizzes</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>Film Review (Short Paper)</b>	<b>15%</b>
<b>Midterm Exam</b>	<b>15%</b>
<b>Film Analysis Assignment</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Final Exam</b>	<b>15%</b>
<b>Extra Credit (Film Review)</b>	(Up to) <b>3%</b>

**Assignment deadlines:** The following table lists the due dates for all assignments:

<b><u>Assignment</u></b>	<b><u>Deadline</u></b>
<b>Note to Future Self</b>	Part 1 is due August 31; Part 2 is due December 07
<b>Weekly Screening Discussion Posts and Responses</b>	Your discussion post is due on Friday each week; Your response to two classmates' posts are due on Sunday each week
<b>Weekly Reading Quizzes</b>	Friday each week
<b>Film Review (Short Paper)</b>	October 19
<b>Midterm Exam</b>	Will open at midnight on October 20 and must be completed by 11:59 pm on October 26

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Deadline</u>
<b>Film Analysis Assignment</b>	Proposal Worksheet due on November 23; Final Draft due on December 09
<b>Final Exam</b>	Will open on at midnight on December 11 and must be completed by 11:59 pm on December 16
<b>Extra Credit (Film Review)</b>	This is an entirely optional assignment; the last day to submit it for credit is December 16

All assignments are **due by 11:59 pm** on the due dates listed in the table above.

### Assignment Guide

**Note to Self:** To help you reflect on what you have learned over the course of the semester, **you will write a note (of around 250 words) to your future self in the first week of the course** detailing your current thoughts on why people, including yourself, enjoy movies. Speculate on how this course might influence these views. **In the final week, you will revisit your initial note and compose an additional note** on how your perspective has changed, explicitly linking these changes to specific course content. Submissions will be assessed based on the depth and clarity of the initial observations and the connection of the final reflections to course content. Part 1 is worth 2% of your final grade and Part 2 is worth 3% of your final grade.

**Reading Quizzes:** Each week (except during exam weeks and week 1, 8, and 15) there will a short reading quiz designed to help you recall key details from assigned reading and course lectures. Each quiz counts as one percentage point of your letter grade. Selected quiz questions may reappear on the midterm and final exams.

**Weekly Screening Discussion Posts and Responses:** Each week, you will screen a required film on HBO Max. Then, you will write a discussion board post in which you answer discussion questions related to the screening. **Each discussion post must be between 200-250 words.** You will be required to complete a discussion post on a total of **10 out of 12** required screenings. Additionally, for full credit, each week that you submit a discussion post, you must also post **a response to at least TWO posts made by your classmates** and you must write between **75-100** words for each response. The discussion posts need to be submitted to the corresponding discussion board each week on eLearning. More information about the content of your weekly screening discussion posts and responses will be available on eLearning starting week 2.

**Film Review (Short Paper):** This assignment gives you practice with making an evaluative argument about a film of your choosing (and cannot be one of the required screening options). You must make a clear evaluative claim that you defend with your choice of evaluative criteria. **The paper needs to be 650-800**

**words.** You will submit the assignment through a Turnitin link on eLearning. More detailed instructions about this assignment will be available in week 3.

**Exams:** The midterm exam will only cover material from week 2-8. The final exam will only cover material from week 10-15 (it is not cumulative). **You will have a set amount of time to complete the exams online.** The exams will contain a variety of question types, including (but not limited to) true/false statements, multiple-choice questions, and brief written responses. More information about the exams will be made available on eLearning closer to the exam weeks.

**Film Analysis Assignment:** You will **choose between writing a short traditional essay (1000-1200 words) or making a video essay** in which you make an interpretive argument about a film. This assignment gives you practice with making an interpretive argument about a film of your choosing (and cannot be one of the required screenings or the film you wrote about for the short paper). You must make a clear interpretive claim that applies to an entire film that you defend with evidence from across the film and/or outside research. Well before your film analysis is due, you will submit a proposal worksheet. I will provide feedback on your proposal worksheet to help shape your project before you move forward. More information about this assignment will be able after the midterm exam.

**Extra Credit Short Paper (Film Review):** Students may optionally submit an additional film review for extra credit points (up to 3% points towards your final course grade). The same instructions apply for the extra credit film review.

## IX. Course Calendar

**Instructor's Note: The due dates, topics, readings, and any other elements of the below 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 updated on the course calendar and uploaded to eLearning in a revised syllabus. I will also send out an announcement about any changes to the course.

**Calendar Key:** Each week's number and associated material is listed below.

**Big Picture:** Each week you will learn to analyze films in a new way as well as practice making different kinds of arguments about films' meanings by watching the micro-lectures and screenings, completing the readings, and

completing the assignments. Refer to the syllabus weekly to keep up with all you need to do for the course as we move through our learning journey.

## **Unit 1 – The Basics of Film History, Film Analysis, and Writing about Film**

- Week 1**  
August 25-31      **Welcome and Introduction to Course**  
**Reading:** Syllabus and Chapter 1 (“Introduction”)  
**Screening:** None  
**Assignments:** Note to Self Part 1 due on August 31
- Week 2**  
September 1-7      **Introduction to Film Analysis**  
**Reading:** Chapter 2 (“An Approach to Film Analysis”)  
**Screening:** *Spirited Away* (Hayao Miyazaki, 2001; 124 mins.)  
**Assignments:** Reading Quiz 1, Week 2 Screening Discussion Post and Responses
- Week 3**  
September 8-14      **Introduction to Writing About Film**  
**Reading:** Chapter 3 (“Writing About Film”)  
**Screening:** *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939; 101 mins.)  
**Assignments:** Reading Quiz 2, Week 3 Screening Discussion Post and Responses, Read instructions for Film Review (Short Paper)

## **Unit 2 - The Fundamental (Formal/Technical) Elements of Film**

- Week 4**  
September 15-21      **Narrative Form**  
**Reading:** Chapter 4 (“Narrative Form”)  
**Screening:** *Inception* (Christopher Nolan, 2010; 148 mins.)  
**Assignments:** Reading Quiz 3, Week 4 Screening Discussion Post and Responses, Work on Film Review (Short Paper)
- Week 5**  
September 22-28      **Mise en Scène (aka Production Design)**  
**Reading:** Chapter 5 (“Mise en Scène”)  
**Screening:** *The Red Shoes* (Emeric Pressburger, 1948; 135 mins.)  
**Assignments:** Reading Quiz 4, Week 5 Screening Discussion Post and Responses, Work on Film Review (Short Paper)
- Week 6**  
September 29-  
October 5      **Cinematography**  
**Reading:** Chapter 6 (“Cinematography”)  
**Screening:** *In the Mood for Love* (Wong Kar-wai, 2000; 98 mins.)

**Assignments:** Reading Quiz 5, Week 6 Screening Discussion Post and Responses, Work on Film Review (Short Paper)

**Week 7**

October 6-12

**Editing**

**Reading:** Chapter 7 ("Editing")

**Screening:** *The 400 Blows* (Francois Truffaut, 1959; 99 mins.)

**Assignments:** Reading Quiz 6, Week 7 Screening Discussion Post and Responses, Work on Film Review (Short Paper)

**Week 8**

October 13-19

**Sound**

**Reading:** Chapter 8 ("Sound")

**Screening:** *Singin' in the Rain* (Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly, 1952; 102 mins.)

**Assignments:** Week 8 Screening Discussion Post and Responses, **Film Review (Short Paper) due**, Review for Midterm Exam

**Week 9**

**Midterm Exam** – Week of October 20-26 – **Due on October 26**

**Unit 3 - Film and Culture; Film Theory**

**Week 10**

Oct. 27-Nov. 2

**Film and Ideology; Social Context and Film Style**

**Reading:** Chapter 10 ("Film and Ideology") & Chapter 11 ("Social Context and Film Style: National, International, and Transnational Cinema")

**Screening:** *Real Women Have Curves* (Patricia Cardaoso, 2002; 93 mins.)

**Assignments:** Reading Quiz 7, Week 10 Screening Discussion Post and Responses, Read instructions for Film Analysis Assignment

**Week 11**

November 3-9

**Genre**

**Reading:** Chapter 13 ("Genre")

**Screening:** *Parasite* (Bong Joon Ho, 2019; 132 mins.)

**Assignments:** Reading Quiz 8, Week 11 Screening Discussion Post and Responses, Work on Film Analysis Assignment Proposal Worksheet

**Week 12**

November 10-16

**Film Stardom and Film Authorship**

**Reading:** Chapter 12 ("Film Stardom as a Cultural Phenomenon") and Chapter 14 ("Film Authorship")

**Screening:** *Get Out* (Jordan Peele, 2017; 104 mins.)

**Assignments:** Reading Quiz 9, Week 12 Screening Discussion Post and Responses, Work on Film Analysis Assignment Proposal Worksheet

**Week 13**

November 17-23

**Documentary and Avant-Garde**

**Reading:** Chapter 9 (“Alternatives to Narrative Fiction Film: Documentary and Avant-garde Films”)

**Screening:** *All that Breathes* (Shaunak San, 2022; 97 mins.)

**Assignments:**

**Deadline:** Reading Quiz 10, Week 13 Screening Discussion Post and Responses, **Film Analysis Assignment Proposal Worksheet due**

**Week 14**

November 24-30

**Fall Break and Thanksgiving – No class – Enjoy your week!**

**Week 15**

December 01-07

**Studying Screen Media and Convergence Culture**

**Reading:** Chapter 15 (“Studying Screen Media”)

**Screening:** *The Lego Batman Movie* (Chris McKay, 2017; 104 mins.)

**Assignments:** Week 15 Screening Discussion Post and Responses, Work on Film Analysis Assignment, **Note to Self Part 2 due on December 07**

**Week 16**

December 9

**Film Analysis Short Essay – Work Week**

**Assignment:** **Film Analysis Assignment due**, Review for Final Exam

**Week 17**

**Final Exam – Week of December 11-16 – Due on December 16; Optional Extra Credit (Film Review) due on December 16 by 11:59 pm**