

---

# FILM THEORY & CRITICISM

---



---

Film Theory & Criticism FILM 4390 | CRN: 26691 | Spring, 2020

---

Bell Hall 130A

---

Monday/Wednesday, 12:00-1:20pm

---

Instructor: Greg Beam

---

Email: [gbeam@utep.edu](mailto:gbeam@utep.edu)

---

Office Hours: Monday/Wednesday, 10:30-11:30am & 1:30-3:00pm | Worrell Hall 114

---

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course aims to help the student view, discuss, and write about films with greater acuity, nuance, and depth. We will investigate the nature of film as an art form, explore the role of the critic in the film industry and society at large, and apply a variety of theoretical frameworks and critical methodologies to our discussion of film. The material we consider will include mainstream Hollywood movies, foreign films, and so-called ‘art’ films, and we will address both scholarly and popular modes of criticism.

Students should already possess knowledge of a number of basic terms and concepts related to film composition, production, viewership, and history—e.g. mise-en-scene, diegetic vs. non-diegetic sound, motifs, the Hollywood studio era... If you need a refresher on any of the terms that are being referred to in class, the glossary provided on Blackboard is a good place to start. I would also recommend that you Google any terms you do not know.

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

- To build a deeper and more specific understanding of the formal elements of film, and to be able to identify, articulate, and evaluate the use of those elements in a variety of genres and styles.
- To investigate the philosophical dimensions and implications of film, including the ethics of film (and filmmaking), the ontology of the cinema, and how the creation of film reflects the pursuit of knowledge.
- To learn how to view films from a variety of critical perspectives.
- To develop deep critical thinking and communication skills, both written and spoken, relating to the arts in general and film in particular.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Understanding of the formal elements of cinema, cinematic genres and modes, the philosophical and cultural dimensions of film, and other theoretical outlooks on film, demonstrated through a series of responses to the assigned reading.
- The knowledge and fluency to critique a film upon viewing, delivering clearly phrased responses to questions and prompts about the film.
- The ability to develop a significant thesis relating to the study of film and to support this thesis from a clear critical perspective, demonstrated through a well-researched and precisely argued essay.

## MATERIALS

Readings: *Film Theory: An introduction through the senses*, Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener; ISBN: 978-0415801010

Additional readings will be found in the Readings folder in Blackboard.

Viewings: Most of the films we watch in class are licensed through Kanopy or Swank Digital Media, both of which are available through library services in [my.utep.edu](http://my.utep.edu). I will include links to all available titles in the Viewings folder on Blackboard. We will conduct a number of viewings in class, but you may be asked to finish the films outside of class.

On-line: You must have an active UTEP email address and check it regularly. You should also have regular access to Blackboard. These will be my primary means of communicating with you outside of class. Any announcements that pertain to the whole class will be sent via Blackboard and email. If I need to reach you individually, I will do so via email.

Please note that I will not respond to emails sent from personal email accounts. If you want to contact me, use your UTEP email address.

## SUBJECT MATTER

Some of the films and readings used in this course touch on mature subject matters, including violence, abuse, sexual activity, and verbal obscenity. Consequently, some of the viewings may feature sensitive or difficult topics, as well as discussion of this material. I will do my best to give you a heads up about any troubling material that may come up, and I will endeavor to address difficult subjects with an appropriate degree of sensitivity.

If you have concerns about viewing or discussing specific subjects, please see me to discuss possible accommodations. I expect all discussions, to be conducted in a respectful and professional manner.

## ATTENDANCE

Much of the work of film scholarship, and scholarship in the arts and humanities in general, occurs through the live exchange of ideas. Therefore, attendance is expected at all class sessions. You will absorb fruitful ideas and modes of discourse from your interactions with me and your peers. We will also be conducting regular screenings in class, some of films that may not be available through the services provided by the university. I will be taking attendance at each class session, and multiple absences or consistent tardiness will hurt your final grade.

If you have concerns about your ability to be consistently present, please see me in advance. I realize that things come up, and I am willing to work with you, but it is much easier to make accommodations with advanced notice.

## **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

Any incident of academic dishonesty will result in a grade of zero on the assignment and possible disciplinary action. This includes cheating and plagiarism. Please check the UTEP Student Handbook for more information on academic dishonesty, and if you're in doubt about whether your use of a source is acceptable, don't hesitate to check with me.

## **ELECTRONIC DEVICES**

The use of cell phones/smart phones/iPads/tablets/lap tops is distracting for you, me, and your classmates. If you have a documented need to take notes electronically (see Accommodations Statement below), please talk to me about this outside of class; otherwise, please take handwritten notes.

## **ACCOMMODATIONS STATEMENT**

The Center for Accommodations and Support Services (CASS) at UTEP provides students who require them with accommodations and support services to help them pursue their academic, graduation, and career goals. If you are dealing with any kind mental, physical, emotional, or sensory disability you are encouraged to contact them for a confidential consultation. For more information, visit <https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/cass/> or consult the Student Handbook.

# ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING

## READING RESPONSES

Five times during the semester, you will submit a roughly 300-word response to the current reading assignment. Please give a meaningful response that demonstrates not only that you've done the reading but that you are processing the material and integrating it (or your reaction to it) into your thinking. It may be helpful to connect your thoughts about the reading with observations about current or recent in-class viewings.

## FINAL ESSAY

You will submit one essay of approximately 1800-2500 words at the end of the term. This essay should constitute a significant piece of criticism on a film, filmmaker, or set of films or a deep investigation of a major topic in film theory.

Alternatively, you may construct a video essay (approximately 10-20 minutes). While a video essay may contain considerably less text than a written essay, it should still have an identifiable perspective, a clear and interesting thesis, and a logical structure. The principal difference is that much of the evidence/support will come through the video selections themselves. Where 'style' and 'mechanics' in a written essay pertain to the effectiveness of the language, in a video essay they will apply to the composition, editing, and the quality of any accompanying audio or titles.

A proposal—with the topic you want to investigate, a tentative thesis, and a brief description of the content—must be submitted in advance.

## FINAL EXAM

The final exam will consist of an in-class viewing and response to a film. You will be asked to take notes while viewing a film and then to interpret certain aspects of the film.

**GRADING**

<b>ASSIGNMENTS</b>	<b>POSSIBLE POINTS</b>
Reading Responses:	40
Final Essay:	30
Final Exam:	20
Attendance/Participation:	10
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>100</b>

A = 91-100 points

---

B = 81-90 points

---

C = 71-80 points

---

D = 61-70 points

---

F = 0-60 points

---

## COURSE SCHEDULE FOR FILM THEORY AND CRITICISM (Subject to Change)

<b>Class Meeting</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Viewing (very much subject to change)</b>	<b>Assignments</b>
<b>Week 1: First Impressions - Exploring the material (and immaterial) elements of film</b> <b>Monday, Jan. 20 - NO CLASS (Martin Luther King Day)</b> <b>Wednesday, Jan. 22</b>	“Basic Concepts,” Siegfried Kracauer (1-8) - Course Packet on Blackboard  “On the Impression of Reality in the Cinema,” Christian Metz (9-17) - Course Packet on Blackboard	<i>Various</i>	
<b>Week 2: First Impressions (cont'd)</b> <b>Monday, Jan. 27</b> <b>Wednesday, Jan. 29</b>	“On Editing,” Vsevelod Pudovkin (16-19) - Course Packet on Blackboard  “The Collision of Ideas,” Sergei Eisenstein (20-21) - Course Packet on Blackboard	<i>Various</i>	
<b>Week 3: Creating Cinematic Meaning</b> <b>Monday, Feb. 3</b> <b>Wednesday, Feb. 5</b>	<i>Film Theory: An Introduction Through the Senses</i> - Chapter 1, “Cinema as Window and Frame”	<i>Let the Right One In</i>	<b>Reading Response 1 due Sunday, Feb. 17, by end of day (on Kracauer, Metz, Pudovkin, and Eisenstein articles)</b>
<b>Week 4: Creating Cinematic Meaning</b> <b>Monday, Feb. 10</b> <b>Wednesday, Feb. 12</b>	<i>Film Theory: An Introduction Through the Senses</i> - Chapter 1, “Cinema as Window and Frame”	<i>Let the Right One In</i>	
<b>Week 5: Creating Cinematic Meaning - Signs &amp; Symbols</b> <b>Monday, Feb. 17</b> <b>Wednesday, Feb. 19</b>	<i>Film Theory: An Introduction Through the Senses</i> - Chapter 2, “Cinema as Door—Screen and Threshold”	<i>Blade Runner, Children of Men</i>	
<b>Week 6: Creating Cinematic Meaning - Signs &amp; Symbols</b> <b>Monday, Feb. 24</b> <b>Wednesday, Feb. 26</b>	<i>Film Theory: An Introduction Through the Senses</i> - Chapter 2, “Cinema as Door—Screen and Threshold”	<i>Blade Runner, Children of Men</i>	<b>Reading Response 2 due Sunday, Mar. 1, by end of day (on Chapters 1-2)</b>

<b>Class Meeting</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Viewing (very much subject to change)</b>	<b>Assignments</b>
<b>Week 7: Telling Stories - Delving into Narrative Forms</b> Monday, Mar. 2 Wednesday, Mar. 4	<i>Film Theory: An Introduction Through the Senses</i> - Chapter 3, "Cinema as Mirror—Face and Close-up"	<i>Blade Runner</i> , <i>Children of Men</i>	
<b>Week 8: Telling Stories (cont'd) - Genres &amp; Modes</b> Monday, Mar. 9 Wednesday, Mar. 11	<i>Film Theory: An Introduction Through the Senses</i> - Chapter 3, "Cinema as Mirror—Face and Close-up"	<i>Persona</i>	
<b>Week 9: SPRING BREAK</b>	<i>Film Theory: An Introduction Through the Senses</i> - Chapter 7, "Cinema as Brain—Mind and Body"	<i>Persona</i>	
<b>Week 10: Film and Philosophy, Part I - The Ontology of Film</b> Monday, Mar. 23 Wednesday, Mar. 25	<i>Film Theory: An Introduction Through the Senses</i> - Chapter 7, "Cinema as Brain—Mind and Body"	<i>Synecdoche, New York</i>	<b>Reading Response 3 due Sunday, Mar. 29, by end of day (on Chapters 3 &amp; 7)</b>
<b>Week 11: Film and Philosophy, Part I (cont'd) - Modernism &amp; Postmodernism in Cinema</b> Monday, Mar. 30 Wednesday, Apr. 1	<i>Film Theory: An Introduction Through the Senses</i> - Chapter 4, "Cinema as Eye—Look and Gaze"	<i>Synecdoche, New York</i>	
<b>Week 12: Film and Philosophy, Part II - Knowledge &amp; Appearance</b> Monday, Apr. 6 Wednesday, Apr. 8	<i>Film Theory: An Introduction Through the Senses</i> - Chapter 4, "Cinema as Eye—Look and Gaze"	<i>Rashomon</i>	
<b>Week 13: Film and Philosophy, Part III - Ethics &amp; Ideology</b> Monday, Apr. 13 Wednesday, Apr. 15	<i>Film Theory: An Introduction Through the Senses</i> - Chapter 6, "Cinema as Ear—Acoustics and Space"	<i>The Pervert's Guide to Ideology</i>	<b>Reading Response 4 due Sunday, Apr. 19, by end of day (on Chapters 4 &amp; 6)</b>
<b>Week 14: Film and Philosophy, Part III - Ethics &amp; Ideology</b> Monday, Apr. 20 Wednesday, Apr. 22	<i>Film Theory: An Introduction Through the Senses</i> - Chapter 6, "Cinema as Ear—Acoustics and Space"	<i>The Pervert's Guide to Ideology</i>	<b>Final Paper proposal due Sunday, Apr. 26, by end of day</b>

<b>Class Meeting</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Viewing (very much subject to change)</b>	<b>Assignments</b>
<b>Week 15: Film and Philosophy, Part III - Ethics &amp; Ideology</b> Monday, Apr. 27 Wednesday, Apr. 29	<i>Film Theory: An Introduction Through the Senses</i> - Chapter 5, "Cinema as Skin—Body and Touch"	<i>The National Anthem</i>	
<b>Week 16: TBA</b> Monday, May 4 Wednesday, May 6	<i>Film Theory: An Introduction Through the Senses</i> - Chapter 8, "Digital Cinema and Film Theory—The Body Digital"	TBA	<b>Reading Response 5 due Sunday, May 10, by end of day (on Chapters 5 &amp; 8)</b>
<b>Finals Week:</b> Friday, May 15 Final Exam: 10:00am-12:45pm	TBA	TBA	<b>Final Paper due at 12pm on Wednesday, May 13.</b>