

Term Paper

The term paper for this class will provide an opportunity to explore in detail one aspect of Documentary Film and one brief example of it. The paper is to be a combination original essay and research paper, as explained below. It should be 7-9 pages long (at least 2,300 words), typed, and also include a Works Cited page.

Due dates:

- **Tues. (10/12)** – Email paragraph describing topic selected to filmst121@sbcc.edu > Explain why you selected this topic, how you plan to analyze it, what historical period you might be focusing on, what interests you in these films, any research you have done. Provide some background information about the topic and the films you will be focusing on.
- **Tues. (10/26)** – Email paper update – (one paragraph about research, films, scenes, changes) to filmst121@sbcc.edu > take the previous proposal further by explaining more specifically what period you selected and why, as well as how you plan to analyze it. What specifically will you be focusing on in your paper? What books and articles have you found? You should cite at least 3 works.
- **Tues. (11/9)** – Email a working thesis statement and preliminary outline of your paper with a list of works cited to filmst121@sbcc.edu.
- **Tues. (11/23)** – Email you Term Paper to filmst121@sbcc.edu – make sure to reread your paper carefully and to include an original title and a Works Cited page > NO ATTACHMENTS.

Topic:

Select a theme, historical moment, theoretical issue, or documentary movement to analyze using a minimum of **THREE documentary films** – two of the films should be selected from all the films screened throughout the semester, and one should be of your choosing. In conceptualizing this paper, DO NOT restate already formulated arguments by authors you have read in this class. Attempt to rethink their arguments in a creative manner. For this paper, you must reference at least **THREE books and/or articles** that will assist you in formulating your argument. Do not rely on these authors' statements as evidence. Use examples from the films as your supporting evidence.

You are highly encouraged to formulate your own topic and selection of films. Nevertheless, possible topics may include:

- Implication of reenactments using three films as examples.
- The problem of authenticity in Direct Cinema and Cinéma Vérité.
- Implication of the personal and poetic in documentary form.
- Filmmakers as performers / documenting the self
- The use of documentary for social change.
- The influence of Dziga Vertov on Cinema Vertite and Direct Cinema.

As you work on your paper, consider the following:

- You should first do as much research on your subject as possible, developing a real familiarity with

it. The SBCC library has many resources to assist you with this project; look for books and articles in the online databases.

- **While you do your research look at: History of the American Cinema. (call #: 791.430973 H295h: available in the stacks for check out and in reference) > each of the 10 volumes contains a comprehensive chapter by decade on U.S. Documentary Film. This is very useful!**
- You can access the **History of American Cinema** collection online by following this link and clicking on **Arts**:
http://libproxy.sbcc.edu:2048/login?url=http://infotrac.galegroup.com/itweb/cclc_santa?db=GVRL
- For the most recent films and topics, you will need to look at the online databases available on the SBCC Library website. Look at **Newspapers** and **Project Muse**.
- The paper should reveal a general knowledge of your subject, a mastery of the films you're working with, and an ability to apply to the segment of the film your are examining the analytic tools needed to explain the films relationship to the class or group of films you have researched.

You must have a Works Cited page at the end of your paper, and you must at least THREE books and/or articles.

It's important that you begin working on the research paper as soon as possible.

The steps you need to take are:

1. Select a topic;
2. Research that topic in the library;
3. Read the information you have found;
4. Select 3 film to focus on;
5. Watch the films that you will be analyzing;
6. Use your research and notes to write your paper.

Be sure to:

1. Use correct spelling, grammar, and syntax;
2. Describe and analyze scenes in detail when necessary;
3. Build analysis through use of detail and researched information;
4. Use terms and information from the textbook so as to show you understand them;
5. Include an original title for your paper, and number each page;
6. Use the present tense and use characters' (not actors') names in your paper;
7. Proofread.

DO NOT:

- Divide your paper into three parts with each part analyzing one film > the paper should organize the films and your analysis in a more creative manner > for example, through themes, style, types of proofs, etc.

PAPER GUIDELINES FOR FILM ANALYSIS

Writing a paper involves three stages. All three are necessary to writing a paper that is original, clear, and cogently argued.

1. Preparation

Select a topic: If you stray significantly from the paper topics provided for the class, you must get my approval for your topic. In selecting the films and topics for your paper, realize that you will produce a much better paper if you write about films that you are interested in. So pick a topic and films that you want to analyze and learn more about.

Watch the film or films you have selected several times, taking notes: If you find it difficult to unravel the film's meaning, you might pay particular attention to the opening and closing sequences. Often beginnings and endings provide clues to the themes in a film. Think about camera movement and framing, editing, mise-en-scene, sound, etc. How do they contribute to our understanding of the narrative development and to the social actors represented? How is 'reality' conveyed? What 'truth' claims is the film making? Take notes on the style and the narrative progression of the film. Also, mark scenes that are most interesting to you and that seem to relate to the issues we have been discussing in class and to the readings.

Take stock of your ideas: Go over your notes, making a list of the ideas that seem particularly useful for your topic. Do any sequences stand out with regard to the topic you are writing on? Are there two or more sequences that are markedly similar to one another that you might compare? Think about interesting juxtapositions and metaphors or striking stylistic elements (do you notice a pattern of unusual point-of-view shots, montages, or camera angles?) How do these elements relate to the themes you plan to discuss? For example, I've been asked to write a paper about representation in Nanook of the North and The Thin Blue Line, and I've noticed that there are many reenactments in both films. I will make a list of the reenactments I've noticed then think about how these are used, why there are used, what function and purpose they serve the film and the subject matter, and if there are any patterns in their representation.

Formulate an argument: Your argument should allow you to tie together your observations, yet it should be informed by the historical information you have read and the theoretical/critical arguments you have been exposed to in the articles assigned for the class. It should be suited to the length of the paper; don't make statements that you can't support in the amount of space you have to write the paper or with the information you have at hand. Your argument should be based on your analysis of the film, not an evaluation of it. Do not write a film review – don't say that you like it or not.

Write an outline: Even if you don't stick to it, it is helpful to have a plan before you start to write. The outline should include your thesis statement and the points you will make to support your thesis. Each point should be supported by examples from the film or films you are discussing. It probably won't be possible for you to include all of your observations about the film(s) in your paper. Select the examples that best support your argument. These examples will need to be described, analyzed, and related to your argument.

2. Writing

Don't use anything larger than 12-point font. Use one-inch margins and double-space.

Your writing must be your own and it must be original: Plagiarism will result in disciplinary action by the Dean of Students. You must indicate your sources, including readings, lectures, and discussions from this or other classes (see below for the form your citations should take). If your paper relies on extensive knowledge of a subject that you have gained outside of this class, you must discuss it with me. You are encouraged to discuss your ideas with other students, but your work must be your own.

Citations: You are not expected to do extensive research for a film analysis unless specifically told otherwise. You should use the readings assigned for the class. Follow MLA style for your citations. Extensive quotes, of three lines or more, should be indented and single-spaced. You should include your source whether you use direct quotes or summarize an argument. This includes information from lectures and discussions. Citations should include the author's last name in parentheses followed by the page number. If you provide the author's name in the text, you need only include the page number. At the end of the paper, you will need to include a list of works cited.

Examples:

As Erik Barnouw explains, "a decade after Nanook of the North the explorer-as-documentarist was clearly in decline" (51).

or

It is possible to see the influence of Dziga Vertov's concept of shooting life-unaware in The Spanish Earth (Waugh 145).

or

Vivian Sobchack describes the way in which music is central to Las Hurdes:

Music is the clearest cue that Bunuel gives viewers of Las Hurdes to be wary, to question what they will see and hear in what might be otherwise accepted as a conventional travelogue or documentary. The stately, languorous, and romantic quality of Brahms's Fourth Symphony, which punctuates the narration and links the images, is so antithetical to what it accompanies that it functions blatantly to announce contradiction (73).

Works Cited

Hall, Jeanne. "Don't You Ever Just Watch? American Cinema Verite and Don't Look Back." Documenting the Documentary: Close Readings of Documentary Film and Video. Eds. Barry Keith Grant and Jeannette Sloniowski. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1998. 223-237.

Barnouw, Erik. Documentary: A History of the Non-fiction Film 2nd revised edition. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Avoid common errors: Two of the most common errors that students make when writing about film are 1) focusing exclusively on characters/social actors and narrative to the point of neglecting the manner in which meaning is conveyed filmicly (i.e. through editing, camera movement, sound, mise-en-scene, etc.) and 2) describing the film rather than formulating an argument about it. It isn't enough simply to identify the reenactments in a film. You need to think about how they function, that is, what effect they have.

Support your argument with examples from the film: Examples might include close readings of specific sequences or analyses of the manner in which certain elements recur throughout a film. For instance, an essay on reflexivity in Las Hurdes might include a close analysis of the opening sequence as well as describing how the narration is ironically juxtaposed to the images throughout the film and what the function of such juxtaposition might be.

Correctly identify characters and film titles: The first time you refer to a film, include the director and year in which the film was released, e.g. The Man with the Movie Camera (Vertov, 1929). Subsequent references to the film need only give the title, which should always be underlined. It's terribly distracting, not to mention confusing, to read a paper in which characters and films are misidentified. If you can't remember a character's name or aren't sure of the spelling, look it up. The Internet Movie Database (<http://us.imdb.com>) includes this information.

Include a title page: The title of your paper should be in the center of the page. Remember to underline film titles and to have an interesting title, not just the title of the film. At the bottom of the page provide your name, the class, the professor's name, and the date.

3. Editing

Be sure to read your paper carefully! It's a good idea to ask a tutor or someone else to read the paper for you. Double-check the following:

Content: Have you made any assertions that are not supported with examples from the film? Have you made any sweeping generalizations that are beyond the scope of your paper? Eliminate evaluative statements (e.g. "Errol Morris is a great director." "Chronicle of a Summer is an excellent film.")

Organization: Have you presented your evidence in the best possible way? Does your introduction clearly state the argument? Do your paragraphs flow from one to the next, or are they disjointed and unrelated? Does each paragraph contribute to your paper's thesis? The topic of each paragraph should be clearly stated in the first sentence or two and should be supported with specific examples from the film. Any information that does not directly relate to your paper's argument should be confined to footnotes or endnotes, or eliminated altogether.

Style: Have you used inappropriate slang or colloquialisms? Are your verb tenses consistent? (Actions in a film should be described in the present tense, historical events in the past tense. Have you chosen the best possible words to express your points? Are you certain of the meanings of the words you are using? Do you over-use particular words and phrases?

Spelling and Grammar: You will be marked down for errors in spelling and grammar. Most word processing programs will check your spelling and grammar for you. If you are uncertain about English grammar, arrange to meet with a writing tutor.