

1. Description of the Discipline

According to the Denison University Handbook, Cinema at Denison encompasses “both the history and development of film and video as art forms and the creative process of producing cinematic works.”

2. Citation Style Used

MLA, APA, and Chicago are all acceptable as long as they are applied consistently.

3. Organization/Required Components

Most cinema papers require a film-specific thesis, supportive arguments based on detailed analysis of specific scenes, and a conclusion which comments upon the significance of the argument or speculates about the function of a particular cinematic technique.

Students should remember:

- a. Most papers should be written as argumentative essays which move from the general to the specific. The Cinema department often encourages students to start with a narrow, one-sentence thesis and then use detailed analysis of specific scenes to support the thesis’s claims.
- b. The thesis statement must be specific to the film, not broadly applicable to other films. Also, thesis statements should tell why a cinematic technique is used, rather than simply stating that a certain pattern or form exists.
- c. Think of scenes as evidence. Therefore, descriptions of the scenes should be as accurate and detailed as possible, and students should explain how these scenes are relevant to the paper’s argument.
- d. A good conclusion summarizes the argument and provides final comments about why the analyzed element is significant to the film.

4. Voice

Writers of argumentative essays use a less formal voice that employs the first person “I.” Research papers will require a more formal voice and tone.

5. Types of Writing Assignments

Many cinema assignments are argumentative essays analyzing the form or style of particular films, but assignments can range from film segmentations to shot breakdowns to research papers.

- a. Film Segmentation: Describe scene-by-scene the narrative action of a film.
- b. Cinematic Form Analysis: Present an argument about a film’s narrative patterns using detailed analysis of specific scenes.
- c. Stylistic Analysis: Argue for the function and significance of stylistic patterns within a film.
- d. Shot Breakdown: Provide a shot-by-shot description of a scene, including prominent narrative information and elements of film style.
- e. Research Paper: Examine a cinematic genre, historical position, or other topic.

6. Research Process

To write most papers will require multiple viewings of the film. For argumentative essays analyzing a particular film, no other research is allowed. Students may not consult any outside sources and may not discuss ideas with other students in the class. Professors consider any such collaboration to be plagiarism.

Conversely, research papers tracing aesthetic patterns or genre developments over a period of time may require extensive research. In these cases, students should consult both primary and secondary sources.

7. Common Mistakes

- a. **Avoid too much plot summary.** If a professor has assigned a particular film, students should assume that the paper's readers have seen the film. Therefore, summaries of scenes or action should only be included when relevant to the paper's argument.
- b. **Avoid generalizations, evaluative claims, informal language, and film clichés.** Students should avoid statements such as "keeps viewers on the edge of their seats" or descriptions such as "eerie music plays" because these are generic and unspecific phrases.
- c. **Argue, don't interpret or evaluate.** Students generally are expected to make an argument about the film, rather than interpreting its social meaning or evaluating the film's quality.
- d. **Use present tense when describing action in the film.**
- e. **Italicize film titles** (*The Birds*, *Pretty Woman*).

8. Preferred Language (jargon, pronouns)

Professor Jonathan Walley says that students sometimes fail to use terms and concepts discussed in the textbook or in lectures. He claims, "If you're not using vocabulary from class, you're probably not writing about what you should be." Below is a partial list of common terms used in cinema classes.

Angle	Close-Up	Composition	Crane shot
Cut	Depth	Frame	Genre
Long shot	Mise-en-scène	Motif	Narrative
Perspective	Plot	Point of view	Scene
Sequences	Sound effects	Story	Theme
Transition	Voice-over	Zoom shot	Tracking shot

References

Bordwell, David. The McGraw-Hill Film Viewer's Guide. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2004.

Corrigan, Timothy. A Short Guide to Writing about Film. 3rd ed. New York: Longman, 1998.

Walley, Jonathan. Personal Interview. 23 Oct. 2007.