

screening response papers instructions

This is a history class, and my sense is that in order to really get a grasp on the big historical questions we'll be asking, you'll need to have a broad base of references to draw upon. Each week of the semester, I expect you to watch at least two films from the list of recommendations on the syllabus (in addition to the film we're watching for class). To go along with your outside viewing, you'll need to write a short essay reflecting on these films (relating these to our discussions in the class, to other films from the same period, to films from previous moments in the semester, etc.). There will be no precise assignment for these essays, but I do expect them to be more than a simple plot summary. In fact, I want NO plot summary—you can assume that I've seen all these films and know them well enough to follow your writing without summary. What I'm looking for is a thoughtful engagement with these films and with the ideas we're exploring in class. You might choose to focus on the issue of film form—i.e., how the films are put together, how they are shot, edited, etc.—or you might focus on questions of representation—more or less the “content” of the films—or on bigger historical questions—how these films fit into their period or complicate your understanding of their moment—or even more grand theoretical questions—following up on some of the theory readings, for example. These response papers need be no longer than a few solid paragraphs long, and I certainly don't want you getting bogged down writing more than a page or two each week. Think of these assignments as a running notebook where you record and develop your thoughts as we progress through the class—but the papers should be more formal than a simple notebook or journal. I do not want “evaluations” of these films—this is not an excuse to voice your opinions, but is instead designed to you allow to start developing the thoughts that will form the basis for your longer papers. As such, these papers need to be relatively formal and well thought out. I'll be using a simple three-grade scale for these—essentially a check/check-plus/check-minus system:

1.5 points—grammatically well composed and thoughtful with a significant engagement with the issues of the class

1.0 points—either less well written or less insightful—a well-written plot summary will at best yield you 1 point, as will a brilliant but sloppily written assignment

0.5 points—both badly written and lacking insight (or offering only the most cursory insights)

You will be required to do 10 of these over the course of the semester, for a total of 15 possible points (hence the 15% of your grade). While you will all be able to take several weeks off—the semester is 15 weeks long and you need only do 10 of these—in the interest of keeping you from getting far behind, I'm going to require that you print these out and keep them in a folder that you MUST bring to class with you each class meeting. Several times during the semester without advance warning I'll ask you to hand over your folders so that I can confirm that you're keeping up (and not just waiting until the end to crank out all of them in a marathon session), grade the assignments, and give you feedback on how you're doing.

If you elect to do more than 10, I'll throw out your lowest grades, so if you complete 13, for example, I'll throw out your lowest three grades. I'd really recommend that you start writing these immediately, saving your weeks off for times later in the semester when you're likely to be overburdened with other work.