

Research Proposal + Research Essay Assignment

English 414B

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Spring 2019

Research proposal due date:

- 10:00 AM on Thurs., Feb. 28 (electronic submission only; use the submission link at www.shlensky.com/materials)

Research paper due dates:

- Near-complete draft (6 pp+) on Thurs., March 21 (hardcopy paper submission only);
- Final version by 10:00 AM on Thurs., March 28 (electronic submission only; use the submission link at www.shlensky.com/materials)

>> **All submissions due in Microsoft Word format (no PDFs, please)**

General Assignment Instructions

Your assignment has two parts: a proposal and a research essay. The aim of the culminating research essay is to offer an argumentative/persuasive analysis, with a significant research component of at least four academic sources, comparing two films we will have watched during the term (or other films for which you have received my approval in advance). I have provided some topics below; you may, alternatively, choose your own specific topic with my approval in advance.

Your goal will be to persuade your reader of the usefulness of your original analytical approach as a means of better understanding the two films within the context of changing Hollywood film forms and history, primarily, and American culture, secondarily.

Your audience is an academic reader with basic, but not specialized, knowledge of film conventions who may or may not have seen the films you are discussing.

You must submit the research proposal (worth 10% of the course grade), the essay draft, and the final essay (worth 35%) to fulfill the requirements of this assignment. These components of the assignment are described below, after which I provide some suggested general topics for the essay.

Research Proposal Instructions

Submit a proposal that explains how your final research essay will usefully compare the stylistic and thematic elements of two films we will have watched this term (or other approved films that fall within the course's scope). Your proposal must include:

- A provisional introductory paragraph (~200-500 words) with a clearly formulated, **highlighted** thesis statement that compares two films from different decades. Your thesis should explain *why* your comparison of these two films helps your reader to

understand something important about these specific films within the context of American film style, history, and themes (and, secondarily, US history or culture).

- A simple outline that explains what you will show in each paragraph of the final research essay (recognizing, of course, that this may change during the writing phase).
- A carefully annotated “Works Cited” section in [MLA format](#) with at least *three* academic articles and/or book chapters (you will need to have at least *four* academic sources for the final paper itself). You may also include additional non-academic sources, as long as these are properly cited. Your secondary academic sources must be from peer-reviewed articles or book chapters longer than 10 pages each (shorter reviews of a few pages *do not* fulfill this requirement). Annotations should take the form of a short paragraph that summarizes what your source *specifically* argues, and why this source’s argument will be helpful to your own argument.
- The required secondary sources you use must be film-related scholarly analyses from cinema studies book chapters you may find on the library’s shelves, or from essays or book chapters in the library’s online research databases (such as Academic Search Complete, JSTOR, Project Muse, or the MLA international index).

You may wish to use the helpful instructions offered by the Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL) for developing the writing process: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/index.html.

Research Paper Component

Using your proposal as a template (you may choose to change your topic after you have written your proposal; if so, please speak to me first), write an essay of 1800–2100 words (about 7-8 pp.) on one of the suggested topics or a topic of your own choosing. Your paper must be written in academic format throughout and must contain a thesis (or argument) statement and clear lines of argumentation that you support with evidence and analysis. The document you produce should have an original title that is appropriate for an academic paper. Submit it as a Microsoft Word file (no PDFs or other file formats, please) to the upload link at <http://shlensky.com/materials>.

- You must use *at least four* secondary academic sources in this paper, but you are encouraged to develop your own analysis. Secondary academic sources may include scholarly journal articles (but not reviews) and chapters of scholarly monographs or edited books that you find on the library shelves or in online Humanities databases. Each of these sources must be *at least ten pages* in length.
- Each source that appears in your paper should be referenced in your “Works Cited” section, and vice versa, using MLA citation format.
- You must properly cite any additional non-academic sources you use, including websites, films, magazines, or class lectures.
- Your essay should include “close readings” of at least one or two shots, scenes or sections from each of the films you are discussing. Close reading means that you carefully observe and comment on elements of a shot, scene or section and incorporate your observations into your analysis.

- Your essay must use MLA citation format (See: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>), including in-text citations and a “Works Cited” section.
- Please be sure to edit and proofread carefully. I suggest strongly that you plan to write at least two drafts of your essay.
- Please *notate the final word count* (not including the title and works cited section) at the end of your essay. Out of fairness to all students, I will reduce the marks of essays that exceed the assigned word count.
- I will use my essay assessment rubrics (available at Shlensky.com/materials) for assigning a grade to the essay (and the relevant parts of it for grading the proposal).

Suggested Topics

- A. With the birth of the Motion Picture Production (aka “Hays”) Code in the 1930s, Hollywood began a self-censorship regime that would last into the 1960s. Discuss the ways that resisting the Code’s restrictions may be understood as a significant influence on American cinema’s modes of representation of social reality. What is the significance of the aesthetic and political changes the end of the Code era may have produced?
- B. The Hollywood Renaissance (or New Hollywood) films mark a decisive break from earlier films in both aesthetic and thematic terms. Describe and discuss some of these changes and analyze their importance for understanding American film’s development. What do you view as the lasting impact of the changes this era wrought in American cinema culture and the society at large?
- C. How does the idea of narrative closure differ in two films of the era we are studying? What aesthetic and ideological factors account for these narrative changes? What do such changes to the concept of narrative imply about the development of Hollywood filmmaking within the context of changing American social norms more generally?
- D. The Hollywood blacklist of the late-1940s and 1950s exerted a powerful influence on American cinema production and US culture more generally. Discuss one or more films that may reflect (or reflect upon) these political changes of the Blacklist era in the highly charged political environment of the 1950s.
- E. Considering two films we will have seen during the term, how might one argue that film genre seeks to resolve social conflicts in an increasingly diverse American society? Is the resolution always successful, or do such films potentially exacerbate these social conflicts? How does a comparison of these films suggest that genre expectations shift over time, and why is this so?
- F. Compare the differing or similar stylistic qualities (cinematography, editing, acting style, etc.) of two films from different decades or directors that we will have watched this term. How do the films rely on these styles to present differing (or similar) views of American social reality? How do you understand these stylistic differences or similarities to be significant for understanding the impact of American cinema during period?
- G. Consider the characters, including secondary characters, in two films we will have seen during this term. How do these characters reflect the films’ differing narrative representations of the society from which they are drawn? How does an analysis of such

characters and narratives help us to understand changes in the way filmmakers conceptualize the cultural importance of the American cinema in the relevant period?

- H. Create your own topic. You must email me in order to have this topic approved before you start writing your essay.