

Movie Review Assignment | Mrs. Weisgerber CRITICAL VIEWING GUIDE¹

Name: _____ Make a copy and rename your file: LASTNAME_3CRIT_Per#

To receive full credit, your film critique must meet the following requirements:

- ★ Standard Heading
- ★ Double-Spaced, TNR 12-pt, and 1-2 pages tops.
- ★ Three of 12 criteria must be addressed.
- ★ Your review must be lucid, complete, and original.

1. **Subject:** What is the film about? What is its plot or line of action? What is the storyline? What is its genre? What is the value of the subject, or, how important is it to you? (An example of a film's subject might be "Secret science experiment goes wrong, wreaks havoc on country, and is finally controlled by a shy but brilliant World Lit student.")
2. **Theme:** What is the main idea or underlying message of the film? Is this message important to society, or important to you? (An example theme for that science example might be "Don't be seduced by technology," or "An individual with faith in himself can make a difference.")
3. **Acting:** How believable are the actors and actresses? Do they express a wide range of experience and emotion? A depth of realism? Does their timing seem natural? Are the characters they portray relative to the situation they are in?
4. **Dialogue:** Are the lines spoken by the characters appropriate and natural for the time, place, and situations they are in? ("Gee whiz" might seem corny, but is appropriate for a film from the 1950's.) Are the lines spoken convincingly? Are they spoken to give the viewer clues about what is happening... would someone say those things in real life?
5. **Settings:** How are the locations, props, and costumes used to create atmosphere? Are they appropriate to the era in which the film is set? To what level of detail are the settings realistic? How are settings used as devices of character development (sometimes you might say that settings are an extension of the character... is this true for the film?)
6. **Lighting:** How is lighting used to set the tone and atmosphere of a scene? Are shadows and intense contrasts of light and dark used to communicate plot and character development? (For instance, a dramatically side-lit face causes one-half of the face to be brightly lit while the other half is hidden in shadow. This often communicates that the character is lying or is deeply confused.) Are such devices overused?
7. **Sound:** Does the film's soundtrack rely on sound effects to create drama and emotion, or does it use sound to enhance the drama and emotion created by other means, such as acting and editing? Are the different parts of the soundtrack (dialogue, ambient sound, special effects, and music) mixed at effective volumes so you can hear what you're supposed to hear? How creatively are ambient sound and sound effects used to foreshadow a turn of events or establish the mood of a scene?
8. **Music:** How much of a film's score is original, and how much is taken from other sources? Is the music used as a crutch to generate excitement or tension, such as the classic four-note refrain from Jaws, or is it used to complete the feel of a scene? How well-matched is the music to the action or mood on-screen?
9. **Cinematography:** Are camera techniques used only in conventional ways or does the film include any unique visual style? Do shot lengths and angles vary? Is camera movement relied on to create excitement? Is composition used creatively to convey meaning?
10. **Special effects:** What purpose do special effects serve in the scene(s) where they're used? If the effects are supposed to be spectacular, are they? If the effects are supposed to be subtle, are they natural and convincing? Are they consistently believable or of uneven quality?
11. **Editing:** How does the pace of editing establish the rhythm and momentum of the film? Is it appropriate to the action taking place? (For example, chase scenes typically use fast-paced edits, while calm conversations use longer shots between edits.) Are creative transitions between shots, such as dissolves, used or overused?
12. **Overall direction:** Has the film's director skillfully blended all the visual and acoustic elements together? Is she clearly more comfortable with one element, such as dialogue, at the expense of another, such as creative camera work? Does the technical form of each shot—the distance, angle, and movement—bring out the inner nature of the subject matter she is filming (for instance, many directors will slowly zoom in on the face of a character that has just been delivered horrible news; this movement would serve as a metaphor for the character's inner shock. The director might also fade away all ambient sound to further indicate the character's momentary mental isolation.) How well did the film achieve its objectives—to be funny, exciting, frightening, or sad? Did any of the talent rise above their usual abilities?

¹ Javitz, William. Understanding Mass Media. Lincolnwood: National Textbook Company, 1996.