

**FST/ENG 317-001: WRITING ABOUT FILM  
SYLLABUS AND POLICIES**

Tuesday 9:00-11:45am  
Kenan 1114

Professor Todd Berliner  
Fall 2009

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

How do you describe the details and essence of an actor's performance? How do you communicate, with words, a picture of what you see on screen? What's the most engaging and effective way to interest someone in a movie, a filmmaker, a genre, or a film event? Writing about film can be challenging, but, like writing about any subject that inspires passion, it can result in some engaging prose.

I have assigned only eight published articles for us to read together, some of them quite brief, but the course has a hell of a lot of writing: six papers, eight reading responses, and a detailed outline. You'll also be reading and critiquing each others' work.

The primary purpose of the course is to make everyone a better writer—to teach students to write clear, engaging, detailed, precise, honest prose about film. Students will read and practice three types of writing: movie reviews, scholarly essays about cinema, and journalistic feature articles. In class, we will have writing exercises, critiques of student essays, discussions of published writing, and writing instruction. Students will be planning, writing, and revising papers about film throughout the semester.

Prerequisite: FST 200, or ENG 204, or permission of instructor.

**ATTENDANCE AND GRADES**

We will spend class time critiquing student writing, and that means that everyone who misses a class has neglected to give his or her fellow students thorough commentary on their prose. Because we are all dependent on each other, all members of the class must attend all of every class. So, if you know you will miss classes because of other commitments, I suggest that you do not take this course. If you find that you must miss a class meeting, I expect you to find out from other students what you missed. You will also be expected to turn in comments on other students' work as soon as you return and to obtain from students any essays that were handed out for critique. If you miss three classes, for whatever reason, you will fail your "citizenship" grade. If you miss four, you fail the course.

Pay close attention to deadlines, which for this course are quite intricate. Missing deadlines for your workshop is the most serious. Failure to bring a hard copy for everyone of your work a week before your workshop or failure to attend your scheduled workshop will result in one letter-grade deduction from your *final* grade.

I have all these irritating penalties because if people don't attend class and meet deadlines the course will flop.

I will calculate your final grades according to the following percentages:

1. Movie Review (10%)
2. Movie Review Rewrite (10%)
3. Scholarly Essay (25%)
4. Feature Article Rewrite (25%)
5. Class Citizenship: attendance, punctuality, participation, critiques of student work, reading responses (top six scores), oral pitch, preparedness for class (30%)

**OFFICE HOURS, EMAIL, AND CONTACTING ME**

If you feel uncertain about your progress, if you don't understand comments I have written on your papers, if you come to a standstill in your writing, or if you just want to talk to me about your work at whatever stage in the process, you should contact me. The requirements of this course may be grueling, but you will always have support.

I will hold office hours on Mondays 1:30-3:00 pm., or by appointment, in King Hall 106D. My campus mailbox is located in the Film Studies Department office in King Hall. My office phone number is 962-3336. Email is the best

way to reach me: [berlinert@uncw.edu](mailto:berlinert@uncw.edu).

If I need to reach you, I'll use your campus email address.

### **PLAGIARISM AND HONOR CODE**

Plagiarism is allowing your reader to believe that another person's words or ideas are yours, and it is a serious offense. If you plagiarize something, I will give you an F in the course and report you to the Dean of Students for disciplinary action. If you are unsure about how to cite sources or about what constitutes plagiarism, consult me or a composition handbook. Always cite your sources, whether it is a book, a website, an article, another student, one of your professors, or the source of any ideas or information that didn't originate in your own brain. All members of UNCW's community are expected to follow the academic Honor Code, as covered in the UNCW Student Handbook.

### **WRITING RESOURCES**

You can receive free individual help on your papers from The Learning Center (WE 1056, 962-7857).

Randall library has a webpage devoted to film studies resources: <http://library.uncwil.edu/subject/Film/>. Liza Palmer (962-4234, [palmerl@uncw.edu](mailto:palmerl@uncw.edu)), the film studies librarian, will help you obtain materials for your papers.

### **TEXTS**

All of the readings for the course (including published articles, instructions for writing assignments, and exemplars of student writing) are on electronic reserve and may be downloaded from the Randall library course reserve website at <http://library.uncwil.edu/>.

Bring print outs of each week's readings with you to class on the days they are listed in the syllabus.

1. **MLAStyleGuide2.pdf**. A reference guide for formatting your papers.
2. **Lane.sexandthecity.doc**. Anthony Lane, "Sex and the City." Rev. *The New Yorker*, June 9, 2008,
3. **Kael.Ragingbull.pdf**. Pauline Kael, "Religious Pulp, or the Incredible Hulk," Rev. of *Raging Bull*. *The New Yorker*, December 8, 1980, 217-225.
4. **Lane.WrestlerReaderDoubt.doc**. Anthony Lane, "The Wrestler," "The Reader," and "Doubt." Rev. *The New Yorker*, December 15, 2008.
5. **Naremore.Cagney.pdf**. James Naremore, "James Cagney in *Angels with Dirty Faces*," in *Acting in the Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 157-173.
6. **Bordwell.action.pdf**. David Bordwell, "Aesthetics in Action: Kung-Fu, gunplay and Cinematic Expression," *Poetics of Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2008) 395-411.
7. **Schatz.gangster.pdf**. Thomas Schatz, "The Gangster Film," *Hollywood Genres* (New York: Random House, 1981) 81-110.
8. **Denby.Fleming.doc**. David Denby, "The Real Rhett Butler," *The New Yorker*, May 25, 2009.
9. **Singer.Scorsese.pdf**. Mark Singer, "The Man Who Forgets Nothing," *The New Yorker*, March 27, 2000, p. 90+.

Print out and bring to every class the writing assignments handouts on e-reserve:

1. **317writing.assignments.doc**. Writing Assignments – General Instructions
2. **317MovieReview.doc**. Movie Review Instructions
3. **317readingresponse.doc**. Reading Response Instructions
4. **317scholarlyessay.doc**. Scholarly Outline and Essay Instructions
5. **317feature.doc**. Feature Article Instructions

I have also placed on reserve examples of scholarly essays, written by students in previous courses, on the topics I have assigned. You needn't print them out; they are solely for your help and reference as you write your papers:

1. **Sample papers - performance**
2. **Sample papers - style**
3. **Sample papers - genre**
4. **Sample outlines**

## FST/ENG 317-001: WRITING ABOUT FILM – SCHEDULE

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### Notes:

- **Everything “due in class” is due at the very beginning.** After that, it’s late and doesn’t count. Early is okay.
- **Bring to class print-outs of the week’s reading** (downloaded from the Randall Library electronic reserve page for this course). You needn’t bring print-outs of sample student papers.
- Study the readings before the class meeting for which they are listed.

### PART I (WEEKS 1-4): WRITING FILM REVIEWS

#### Week 1

Aug 25 Tues Introduction to the course and review of our very complex syllabus and assignments.

**Watch in Class:** *Angels with Dirty Faces* (1938, 97 min., Michael Curtiz)

#### Week 2

Sept 1 Tues **Reading:** 1) Lane.sexandthecity.doc

2) Syllabus (this handout)

3) Writing Assignments – General Instructions (317writing.assignments.doc)

4) Movie Review Instructions (317MovieReview.doc)

5) Reading Response Instructions (317readingresponse.doc)

**Due in class:** reading response to Lane.sexandthecity.doc

Sept 3 Thur **Due by noon:** 1) movie review.

2) Next week’s workshoppers put 16 hard copies of your review in a folder, labeled with your name, in my campus mailbox in the Film Studies Department office (King Hall).

**After noon:** Everyone pick up workshoppers’ movie reviews from my campus mailbox.

#### Week 3

Sept 8 Tues **Reading:** Kael.Ragingbull.pdf

**Due in class:** 1) critiques of workshop movie reviews.

2) reading response to Kael.Ragingbull.pdf

3) next week’s workshoppers hand out hard copies to everyone

**Movie Review Workshop:** 1.

2.

3.

#### Week 4

Sept 15 Tues **Reading:** Lane.WrestlerReaderDoubt.doc

**Due in class:** 1) reading response to Lane.WrestlerReaderdDoubt.doc

2) critiques of workshop movie reviews.

**Movie Review Workshop:** 1.

2.

3.

## PART II (WEEKS 5-10): WRITING FILM SCHOLARSHIP

### Week 5

Sept 21 Mon **Due by noon:** Movie review rewrite; attach original movie review with my comments.

Sept 22 Tues **Reading:** 1) Naremore.Cagney.pdf  
2) Scholarly Outline and Essay Instructions (317scholarlyessay.doc), pp. 1-2.  
3) sample essays (If you know which topic you plan to write on—performance, style, or genre—then you need only read the sample essays on that topic)  
**Due in class:** 1) reading response to Naremore.Cagney.pdf  
2) Come to class having selected your essay topic and potential films.

### Week 6

Sept 29 Tues **Reading:** 1) Bordwell.action.pdf  
2) Scholarly Outline and Essay Instructions (317scholarlyessay.doc), pp. 3-4.  
3) sample outlines (read as many as you like)  
**Due in class:** reading response to Bordwell.action.pdf  
**In class activity:** How to Develop a Strong Thesis and Organize a Scholarly Essay

### Week 7

Oct 6 Tues *Fall Break. No class!*

Oct 7 Wed **Due by noon:** Next week's workshoppers put 16 hard copies in a folder, labeled with your name, in my campus mailbox in the Film Studies Department office (King Hall).  
**After noon:** Everyone pick up workshoppers' outlines from my campus mailbox.

Oct 8 Thur *Last Day to Withdraw.*

### Week 8

Oct 13 Tues **Reading:** Schatz.gangster.pdf  
**Due in class:** 1) reading response to Schatz.gangster.pdf  
2) critiques of workshop outlines.  
**Scholarly Outline Workshop:** 1.  
2.  
3.

### Week 9

Oct 20 Tues **Due in class:** scholarly outline (bring 4 hard copies)  
**In-class activity:** Peer Editing

Oct 21 Wed **Due by noon:** Next week's workshoppers put 16 hard copies of your scholarly essay in a folder, labeled with your name, in my campus mailbox in the Film Studies Department office.  
**After noon:** Everyone pick up workshoppers' scholarly essays from my campus mailbox.

### Week 10

Oct 27 Tues **Due in class:** critiques of workshop scholarly essays.  
**Scholarly Essay Workshop:** 1.  
2.  
3.

## **PART III (WEEKS 11-15): WRITING FEATURE ARTICLES ABOUT FILM**

### **Week 11**

Nov 2 Mon **Due by noon:** scholarly essay.

Nov 3 Tues **Reading:** 1) Denby.Fleming.doc  
2) Feature Article Instructions (317feature.doc)  
**Due in class:** reading response to Denby.Fleming.doc

### **Week 12**

Nov 10 Tues **Due in class:** 1) oral pitch for feature article (see instructions in “317feature.doc”)  
2) next week’s workshopers hand out hard copies to everyone  
**In-class activity:** Pitch Your Feature Article to the Class

### **Week 13**

Nov 17 Tues **Reading:** Singer.Scorsese.pdf  
**Due in class:** 1) reading response to Singer.Scorsese.pdf  
2) critiques of workshop feature articles.  
**Feature Article Workshop:** 1.  
2.  
3.

### **Week 14**

Nov 24 Tues **Due in class:** feature article (bring 4 copies)  
**In-class activity:** Peer Editing

### **Week 15**

Dec 1 Tues Whatever’s left over

Dec 7 Mon **Due by noon:** feature article rewrite