INSTRUCTIONS FOR WRITING A REACTION PAPER

A reaction paper is just what its name suggests—a paper explaining your reaction to a film. It may be like a review, because your reaction may involve judgment or evaluation; it may be like an analysis, because your reaction may focus on a particular character, relationship, scene, or film technique. It is also like a journal entry, in that it presents a personal reaction rather than an attempt to provide either definitive judgments or detailed analysis. It differs from a journal entry, though, in that it is a more formal essay, prepared for an audience.

Like any good essay, your reaction paper should develop a primary idea or perception, support it with specific evidence (usually references to individual shots or scenes), and present both ideas and evidence in clear language and a logical order.

To summarize the steps:

1. View the selected movie in class
2. Think about your response to the video and your initial impressions and thoughts. You may want to have conversations with sympathetic listeners, to help yourself discover what really matters to you about the movie.
   - Write down three or four (or more) key impressions or associations that stick in your mind.
   - Write a brainstorming page or rough draft listing each of the key impressions you think you’ll want to discuss, each followed with the scenes, images or associations that make those impressions strong for you. [The evidence is important—you’re trying to explain not only your main reactions to the movie, but also what caused those reactions.
   - You can also include any facts/scenes that were new to you or that you learned from.
   - Revise your rough draft to select the most important points and to arrange them in a sensible order.
   - Avoid the frequent problem of too much plot summary! Any viewer can get the plot from viewing the movie, so if your paper devotes too many words to plot summary, there’s not much “value added” in the paper.

Further thoughts about retelling the story . . .
- Retelling the story is a problem even for skilled and practiced writers. It's quite natural to want to follow the order of a film's plot, describing events or scenes as they occur, trying to weave your analysis into the film's structure. What happens too easily, though, is that you just tell the story. In your head, you're replaying the scenes, and perhaps seeing them very vividly and analytically—on paper, though, there's little more than the original story. For the most part, any viewer of a film will get the story without help. Your goal in writing an analytical paper is to help the viewer see or understand or appreciate elements or ideas that are less obvious.

A few different techniques can help you avoid retelling the story.
- One way is to choose a narrow thesis, focusing on a single scene, for example, or perhaps on a secondary character. If you focus on a central theme or major characters, you're more likely to follow them through the whole film, and tell the whole story again.
- Another technique is to stress topic sentences in your paragraphs—make sure that each paragraph has a point to make, that it's not just advancing the plot.
- A more mechanical approach is to arbitrarily limit your plot summary to a single short paragraph.
- A more psychological approach—though not always appropriate—is to assume that your reader has already seen the film, and that you don't want to waste the reader's time with what he or she already knows.
3. **Write a paper that is at least ONE PAGE in length** and expresses your key ideas and what you learned. It may be longer than one page but please don’t make it too lengthy.

   - Typed = Size 12 and double spaced
   - Handwritten = 1 page, no skipped lines, neatly written

4. Revise, edit, and proofread your paper, making sure that you observe all of the technical requirements of the paper. **Use good grammar, spelling and organization.**

   - Throughout the paper, the film’s title should be underlined.
   - Since a reaction paper describes your own reaction to a film, it is appropriate to use first person (I, me, my, mine.)