

Preparing Critical Thought Papers

Content Considerations

1. Reread Reviewing Films & Readings, as these are points you should also consider when putting your paper together
2. Discuss and analyze the concepts from the assignment and connect them to the films and readings.
3. Review the discussion board recaps that highlight and reiterate the concepts and connections to the films and readings.

Paper Structure

Writing an Introduction: An introduction paragraph should include the following:

- Mention of the main theme- The Enemy and The State
- Mention all films by name (with properly formatted titles)
- A brief overview of the three or four main themes/concepts you intend to discuss in your paper
- Mention of which three concepts what you intend to discuss

Supporting body paragraphs: Be sure to break up your ideas- you should not have one long paragraph for each concept.

- Use headers
- Connect each prevailing theme with supporting points from the films/articles. You need specific examples, including the names of the characters, the setting and context of the situation, etc., from the films to support your points. Just describing the plot or the article summary is not sufficient.
- The more you can connect points together from the films/articles to relate to the concepts, the better. Similarly, rather than going film by film, article by article, the more you can identify connecting points that relate to the concepts and collectively discuss the films'/articles' points, the better.
- Do not do outside research- discuss the films and assigned readings/video. Everything should be in your own words, with the exception of using short quotes from the films as support (see Reviewing Films & Readings for referencing). Therefore, you should not be citing additional sources of information or need to reference what I provided.

Conclusion

- Recap the three or four the key themes/concepts you discussed as a way to reiterate the relationship between the cinematic world and the real world.

Grammar and Such

In addition to the guidelines laid out in the paper assignment, your papers should have/be/etc.:

- Double-spaced
- Times New Roman 12 pt. font (or Mac comparable)
- Use black color font
- Write in paragraphs
 - A reminder that a paragraph has one main idea with supporting points.
- Write in the third person—especially when discussing the United States (it's not 'we' or 'our', it's 'the U.S.' or 'American')
- Do not write in rhetorical questions- state your points
- Do not list article/video titles. When you discuss these articles/video as examples in the paper, rather than formally introducing the title, just refer to them informally, such as "in the climate video", or "the situation with the Mexican drug war". The article/video you're discussing should be self-evident from what you're saying.
- Edit and proof-read so paper is well-written
 - You will lose points for spelling, grammar, or punctuation errors, as well as using the actor's name instead of the character's name
 - Common errors include
 - Misspelled words/ typos
 - The country is Colombia, not Columbia
 - Using in the incorrect homonym- for instance, using 'too' instead of 'to'
 - Not including punctuation where punctuation should be included
 - For lists of more than two things, there should always be a comma between all items before the final and- for example, 'the film's main topics are drugs, violence, and civil war.'
 - Misplaced or missing apostrophes for possessive v. non-possessive words
 - It's United States' interests, not United State's
 - Clarity in writing
 - Well-organized
 - Appropriate length paragraphs
 - Avoid posing rhetorical questions- instead, write statements

- Don't type the last word on the page and submit the document (you should reread your paper at least once, aloud, so you can determine the placement of breaks—where commas go—as well as catch any typos, incomplete or run-on thoughts, etc.
- You will be penalized for failing to follow any technical guidelines laid out in the paper assignment.
- Note that if your paper is plagued by excessive grammatical errors, you will receive a grade of zero. I highly encourage you to take advantage of the [University Writing Center](#) that offers online assistance to students enrolled in online classes.

Common Errors (i.e., sure ways to easily lose points)

Common grammatical errors and other issues that detract from succinct writing and will result in point deductions include:

- Not writing in the 3rd person, esp. when discussing the U.S. (it's not 'we' or 'our', it's 'the U.S.' or 'American')
- Not properly formatting film titles
- Not using the characters' names (but instead using the actors' names)
- Posing rhetorical questions instead of discussing ideas in statements
- There is no need to write out the article titles. Instead, just refer to the situation in them as the South China Sea (SCS). If you write it as I just did the first time, thereafter you can just refer to it as SCS.
- For both the films and articles, you should absolutely refrain from saying anything along the lines of 'in the article', 'in the film', 'in the first part of the film', 'for the first article', etc. Instead, just describe the points. Avoiding this unnecessary text will save you words and help you to be more succinct in your points.
- Do you mean Soviet Union or Russia? Do you mean Soviets or Russians? They differ. Ask the Ukrainians, Georgians, Armenians, etc.
- Nation and state are not the same thing (see Enemy & State intro)
- Common errors: Cold War is capitalized, the possessive is United States', not United State's, do you really mean it's (as opposed to its)?

- Write in the 3rd person, most of the time. It's okay to say I from time to time, but for the most part you should use he, she, it, they, their, his, her, its, etc. Never use 'you'. That is 2nd person and doesn't belong in a paper unless you're including information about survey questions to which you are referring. Along these lines, the grammatically correct way to refer to people is humans (not man), humankind (v. mankind), and one, he, or she.
- If you're going to define a term, avoid citing a dictionary and/or directly quoting it. It's better to define the term in your own words, as you've come to understand it. And when writing a research paper, you would define a term by referencing past literature on the topic, rather than introducing a dictionary's definition.