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Writing in Film Studies: Poetics and Pedagogy

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ABSTRACT

WRITING IN FILM STUDIES: POETICS AND PEDAGOGY

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The focus of this dissertation is writing instruction inside undergraduate film courses. While the existence of textbooks devoted to teaching students how to write about film highlights the need for such instruction, evidence suggests many courses underuse or neglect such texts. Instead, most instructors focus their efforts on content instruction, expecting students to translate an increased content knowledge into written argumentation. Yet, as is the case across the disciplines, students struggle to write successfully in these disciplinary courses. One of the main reasons for this disparity between instructor expectation and student success is the notion of disciplinarity, and how influential disciplinarity is in the construction, and grading, of assignments at what many consider the entry point into the field.

This study identifies disciplinary conventions of the film studies genre system and connects them to the many genres and genre sets in use by professors and students to show how much the discipline dictates what counts as successful writing, even at the introductory, undergraduate level. The study uses the activity system concept to gather and analyze how course syllabi, assignment prompts, student outcomes statements, course textbooks, and professional writing interconnect to form and perpetuate disciplinary norms of writing and argumentation. Identifying these disciplinary norms of argumentation lead to the conclusion that more explicit acknowledgment of these norms can lead to better teaching of, and with, writing in

the undergraduate film classroom. The goal of this study is to help instructors identify the conventions implicitly privileged in our classrooms so we can make them more explicit, thereby helping students come up with better arguments and write better papers.

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DEDICATION

To all my students past, present, and future. While this research will hopefully make me a better teacher, no amount of research could replace what I've learned from you

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Disciplinary Expectations in Film Studies

An illustration will prove helpful as I begin this study of writing in film studies. Imagine faculty members from several disciplines meeting together inside a college classroom to discuss university-wide assessment. On the desks in front of each faculty member rests a standardized rubric, meant to assess student communication effectiveness. The faculty, in order to calibrate their use of the rubric, watch a recorded student speech, given in an unnamed course, on the projector screen. The faculty member leading the discussion asks, once the speech concludes, how the other faculty members would score such a speech. A professor from the kinesiology department confidently asserts the introduction of the speech clearly falls below standards and should receive the lowest possible score. Confused, a faculty member from the communication department says she would score the introduction of the speech much higher, telling the kinesiology professor that the student did exactly what communication faculty teach students to do by starting with an attention-getter that relates to the topic at hand. In response, the kinesiology professor, who mostly teaches students wanting to become physical therapists, says, "OK, but I expect my student introductions to include a greeting followed by their name, and this student did neither of those things."

The above story, which comes slightly paraphrased from an actual assessment meeting, illustrates a truth commonly overlooked by instructors teaching across academic fields: teachers

have cultivated a set of disciplinary expectations, and they, often unconsciously, use those disciplinary expectations to assess student work. In this example both the communication professor and the kinesiology professor are assessing the same speech through the lens of their individual disciplines. Even though both professors share the same rubric, the disciplinary norms familiar to each shape their assessment, with neither professor fully conscious of the role disciplinarity plays in their assumptions. The task of assessing communication effectiveness across disciplines assumes certain communicative traits to be generalizable. No matter the setting or the content of a communicative act, the assumption goes, certain qualities remain fixed as fulfilling requirements of effective communication. While this assumption contains a certain amount of truth, it is important to acknowledge the role of disciplinary expectations in the delivery and reception of a communicative act, even student-to-professor communication in the classroom.

Writing is the most common way instructors ask students to communicate in film studies, and film instructors also carry into the classroom a set of expectations for student writing inextricably tied to the discipline. Like the kinesiology and communication professors noted earlier, film professors often remain unaware of how much influence the norms of disciplinary rhetoric hold over their assessment of student work and often view writing as a skill learned outside of film classrooms. Additionally, college and university professors must juggle the demands of their own research and writing with the ever-increasing amount of content knowledge in their discipline. The demands of professional research and writing limit the time teachers have to help student writers outside of class, while the importance of content instruction limits the amount of writing instruction taking place during class. Timothy Corrigan (2015)

succinctly summarizes the issue in this way: “Those of us who teach film rarely have time to discuss writing about film. Most of us are busy presenting films and various books about those films, and the usual presumption [we] are forced to make is that students know how to put what they see and think into a comprehensible written form” (p. ix). The “presumption” Corrigan notes, that students should be able to write better than they do, is a widespread complaint in subjects throughout academia. Research continues to suggest a disparity between student writing capabilities and expectations held by faculty members in disciplines across the curriculum. Caffarella and Barnett (2000) describe the “shocking” realization faculty make when they realize many “students not only do not write like scholars, but they also may not think like scholars” (p. 39). The same holds true in research from library and information science (Ondrusek, 2012), student affairs (Sallee, et al., 2011), and geography (DeLyser, 2003), with faculty finding students “under-prepared in the skills and techniques that will enable them to present their findings effectively” because “no one has taught them how to write” (DeLyser, 2003, p. 169). As with film studies, students in these disciplines are too often “left to their own devices, and, without guidance, their writing activities seldom exceed the academic requirements of degree programs” (Mullen, 2001, p. 120). On top of this presumption, film scholar David Bordwell (1989) adds that those teaching film studies have used “imitation and habit” to understand the conventions needed to function within, and contribute to, film studies discourse, while also expecting “coordinated action from others,” including students, “without any particular awareness” of the underlying rules to which they proscribe (p. 7). Instructors, therefore, not only feel time constraints keeping them from direct writing instruction in courses, but also lack experience in what direct instruction of disciplinary norms would look like.

Thus, film instructors who view writing as a key component in their curriculum must combat the tendency to assume students entering their classroom already know how to write film essays. There are certainly film professors who spend considerable time and energy aiding student writers through classroom lecture, individual conferences, and written feedback on student papers. However, there are also many who include books such as Corrigan's *A Short Guide to Writing about Film* (2015) in the "Recommended Texts" section of their syllabus hoping it can be the "guide" helping students "through the mechanics of the essay form" and encouraging a "more enjoyable and articulate communication between" instructors and students (p. xiii). In recent years, scholars have begun to acknowledge the long-term and ongoing insufficiency of writing instruction in film classes and have even taken some provisional steps to define and address the problem. This trend has influenced the content in recent editions of popular textbooks *Film Art* (Bordwell & Thompson, 2020) and *Looking at Movies* (Barsam & Monahan, 2021), which include expanded sample student essays along with professional excerpts to exemplify quality writing about film. *The Film Experience: An Introduction* (Corrigan & White, 2021) and *Film: An Introduction* (Phillips, 2009) also include chapters specifically devoted to writing about cinema. Although these texts guiding students through a film-specific writing process exist, the real or perceived lack of time available for instructor-to-student, discipline-specific writing instruction warrants further exploration. The presence of film-specific writing guidebooks indicates the presence of film studies-specific discourse conventions, yet a lack of time spent on concentrated classroom writing instruction in film studies classrooms hampers student recognition of, and familiarization with, those conventions. As Bordwell's quote above acknowledges, it also provides evidence that many instructors may be unconscious of, or

unable to verbalize, the conventions they require students to follow. As a whole, the current situation often leads to frustration with student writing achievement from both instructors and students and indicates the need for a more pervasive understanding of the current status of film studies classroom writing pedagogy and ways instructors can further help student writers succeed.

Writing Pedagogy in the Film Classroom

Ultimately, the lack of time spent on in-class writing instruction necessitates a reliance on students to tacitly learn the writing conventions of film studies. Students must learn to produce quality written discourse implicitly, with instructors hoping that, eventually, students will acquire an ability to produce the conventions through trial and error. To move beyond the current method of implicit instruction, film studies pedagogy must wrestle with the decades-long debates in Writing in the Disciplines (WID) and Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) scholarship, especially those surrounding the identification of disciplinary conventions and whether or not the current pedagogical situation in film studies warrants more explicit classroom instruction about those conventions. The aim of this study is to show that more explicit instruction of film-specific writing conventions will lead to better student writing in undergraduate film studies. My main focus in this study is to identify those underlying rules of film studies writing and to clearly articulate what constitutes the rhetoric of film studies discourse so film instructors can recognize the underlying assumptions currently influencing student classroom assessment. Ultimately, my aim is to join other WAC and WID researchers in helping instructors identify “what they already know and do (with both writing and with their disciplinary knowledge)” in order to “bring those

things to conscious awareness," resulting in better teaching of, and with, writing (Adler-Kassner, 2019, p. 302). My particular focus will be on the undergraduate film course, taking note of how influential disciplinarity is in the construction, and grading, of assignments at what many consider the entry point into the field. Once identified, instructors can then apply these conventions to the larger pedagogy already in use within film studies classrooms.

Pedagogical questions are certainly not new to cinema studies, and many within the field have added their insights to advance teaching effectiveness in film courses. The most prevalent pedagogical tools in the discipline are those written with the student in mind. Textbooks, anthologies, and histories written for student readers proliferate the disciplinary landscape. Less pervasive, though still available, are texts written with the instructor as the intended audience. The British Film Institute (BFI) often provides instructional materials and support for those using film in the classroom, and has even published a "Teaching Film and Media Studies" book series, which includes such titles as *Teaching Men and Film* (Hall, 2005), *Teaching Black Cinema* (Jones, 2006), *Teaching Stars and Performance* (Poppy, 2006), *Teaching Short Films* (Quy, 2007), and *Teaching Contemporary British Cinema* (Benyahia, 2008). There is also an ever-growing collection of articles detailing new approaches and methods to teaching both graduate and undergraduate film students. These articles run the gamut of pedagogical thought, exploring ways to address specific theoretical questions in the classroom (Dixon, 2004; Easton & Hewson, 2010), how to help students approach topics of disciplinary and interdisciplinary concern (Faulkner, 1999; Jankovic, 2012), and encouraging more conscious engagement with teaching practice (Carson, 1997; Tomasulo, 2011). However, as one of the few book collections on film pedagogy, *Teaching Film* (Fischer & Petro, 2012) points out, these articles, spread across many

journals and many decades, have a more "piecemeal and dispersed" than organized feel and can be "difficult for a teacher to know of or track down" (p. 2). With *Teaching Film*, Fischer and Petro (2012) also knew they were "only [gesturing] toward broad areas, issues, and questions" in the field, trusting these areas would "receive more detailed consideration in the future" (p. 1). One such area to explore further is teaching students how to write within the discipline of film studies.

Disciplinary Expectations

Before any exploration of student writing in film studies, and cinema studies discourse more broadly, can take place, however, it is important to acknowledge the social dimension of academic film study, because the study of rhetoric is, by nature, the study of social interactions. David Blakesley (2003) provides a helpful way to understand the rhetorical nature of cinema interpretation. First, Blakesley acknowledges the rhetorical nature of film itself, with filmmakers using film language to direct "our attention in countless ways" with the "aim of fostering identification and all that that complex phenomenon implies" (2003, p. 3). The rhetorical cues in a film carry narrative, thematic, and symptomatic meanings which "reveal not only the predispositions of filmmakers but they also serve ideological functions in the broader culture . . . that can be analyzed as having a rhetorical function, especially to the extent that rhetoric serves as the means of initiating cultural critique and stabilizing cultural pieties" (Blakesley, 2003, p. 5). In this sense films are the conduit filmmakers use to elicit thoughts, emotions, and actions from an audience, as well as the means through which implicit social norms are codified and strengthened. Films then, as Blakesley points out, foster identification (or what Kenneth Burke

calls consubstantiation) and carry cultural ideology, and they do this through rhetorical means. Additionally, we must account for the rhetorical act of film interpretation. Film theory plays a role in this process, providing "the interpretive lens through which and with which we generate perspectives on film as both art and rhetoric" while also "filtering what does and does not constitute and legitimize interpretation and, thus, meaning" (Blakesley, 2003, p. 3). Legitimate and acceptable interpretation, then, involves the construction of meaning through the selection of certain discipline-accepted elements in a film. Proper film interpretation must account for the way others have interpreted film in the past and must fit into standards others have already conceived.

The social nature of film studies discourse, therefore, includes the messages coming from films as well as those coming from the interpretation of those films. Of course, neither films nor interpretations of films occur in a vacuum. Films consciously and unconsciously interact with other previously released films as well as with historical events and cultural beliefs. Likewise, film interpretation considers previously released films, previous interpretations of films, and the historical and cultural milieu of both when the film was released and when the interpretation takes place. Mikhail Bakhtin, when discussing the nature of communication, writes that any "utterance is a link in a very complexly organized chain of other utterances" (1986, p. 69). Thus, the nature of film interpretation, as with all communication, is inherently social, and must consider the ongoing dialogic nature of the topic at hand. Responses to other utterances, to be comprehensible and accepted, must incorporate this social aspect of communication. Each new addition to film studies discourse takes not only a generic form recognizable to the intended audience, but also includes certain modes of thought, argumentation, and expression familiar to

others within the discipline. Filmmakers and critics are not always consciously aware of these considerations or the conventions they follow. Even the generic forms films or interpretations can take often go unnoticed or unanalyzed by those using them. Professionals may be able to use the forms of the discipline, which would include what Bakhtin calls speech genres, "confidently and skillfully in practice" without ever analyzing or even suspecting "their existence in theory" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 78). In harmony with Bordwell's observation mentioned earlier, Bakhtin recognizes those in the discipline as accepting and utilizing, though not always fully conscious of, socially constructed norms of thought and communication.

Instructor expectations, based on the social nature of filmic discourse, inevitably influence classroom practice. Writing scholars have long wrestled with this reality in disciplines across the academic landscape, trying to figure out the best way to approach the divide between "insider" and "novice" writers, especially when those teaching hold certain "insider" expectations for students writing at a "novice" level. It is now a widely held position that writing takes place within specific contexts, and a more developed understanding of that context results in more successful, insider-type writing. In written communication, familiarity with genre is a key component in properly responding to a given rhetorical context. Over the years, many scholars have used different terms for this context, but all agree genre knowledge is essential to effectively understanding a given social situation. So, whether describing the context as a ceremonial (Freedman, 1994), a discourse community (Swales, 1988), a sphere of communication (Bakhtin, 1994), or a community of practice (Wenger, 1998), genre plays a major role in situating knowledge, distributing ideas, framing social relationships, and coordinating the actions of a given group.

Writing Genres: Implicit vs. Explicit Instruction

Genre owes its elevated place in writing scholarship to the fact that, by nature, genres not only manifest as a result of social constructs, but they also have reoccurring structural elements. To some degree, both the structural and social elements of a genre codify to become conventions, which work as "perceptual signals" within a text to "ensure [its] appropriate reception" in a given context (Jameson, 1975, p. 136). Writers use codified conventions within one text to respond to similar codified conventions used by another writer, in another text, producing a clear form of social interaction between those writers. Additionally, this social interaction works to further socialize the users of the conventions into the discourse community within which they take part. This process can happen within a single genre, such as when scholars interact using the conventions of scholarly research essays published in academic journals, but can also take place across genres, as in the case of a call for papers eliciting a query letter, resulting in an emailed response, ultimately causing the submission of a scholarly article. The communication exchange between members of the discourse community relies on acknowledgement of, and adherence to, certain generic norms. As Bawarshi and Reiff (2010) state, genres are "forms of cultural knowledge that conceptually frame and mediate how we understand and typically act within various situations" (p. 4). Knowledge of conventions, therefore, allows for better understanding of existing texts along with the ability to contribute new texts within an ongoing conversation.

As structural entities, genres are a great pedagogical tool for instructors attempting to explicitly teach writing conventions since genres tend to standardize syntactical and linguistic features scholars can identify and utilize in teaching. John Swales' (1990) work in "identifying

the frequency of occurrence of certain linguistic features in a particular register and then making these features the focus of language instruction" exemplifies this approach (p. 2). David Bartholomae (1985) also argues for the importance of explicit instruction in conventions "so that those conventions can be written out, 'dymystified,' and taught in our classrooms" (p. 12). Teachers using this perspective analyze the conventions and expectations of generic writing within a discipline in order to provide students with examples to study and emulate. Using this method, teachers hope students come to recognize both the formal characteristics and content knowledge necessary for what Bartholomae calls "insider" writing. Wolfe (2003) and Schilb (2002) both also argue student familiarity with prevalent disciplinary conventions should be a major goal of discipline-specific writing instruction, and that such instruction breeds student confidence.

Research also shows student initiation into a discourse community relies heavily on the recognition of social conventions, which many claim students learn more through experience than explicit instruction. Some have gone so far as to challenge the "critical pragmatism" inherent in explicitly teaching genres as codified structures, viewing such an approach as removing genres from their social contexts (Pennycook, 1997; Freedman, 1993; Benesch, 2001; Casanave, 2003; Paltridge, 2014). From this perspective, explicit instruction of genres conceals their social uses, producing a lack of critical awareness and, ultimately, a lack of engagement with the genres in question. Following Carolyn Miller (1984), a socially driven view of genre claims "what we learn when we learn a genre is not just a pattern of forms or even a method of achieving our own ends…for the student, genres serve as keys to understanding how to participate in the actions of a community" (p. 165). Since genres function within a community,

they remain fluid and are consistently facilitating the relationship between subjects and social institutions (Bawarshi, 2003; Bazerman, 2004; Soliday, 2005). This aspect of genre knowledge is something which develops over time and is intimately linked to a discipline-specific way of knowing (Freedman, 1987; Bazerman, 2000). It is much harder to learn these social aspects of discourse through explicit classroom instruction, and therefore many claim these qualities are better appropriated implicitly through experience.

However, there are scholars who recognize the social nature of genres and still advocate for explicit instruction of both structural and social genre conventions. One such approach emerges from the view that genre knowledge functions both in the realm of "genre sets" (Devitt, 1993; Bawarshi, 2003) and "genre systems" (Bazerman, 1994). These concepts explore the ways different genres interact within certain social, or "activity," systems (Russell, 1997). Genre sets are the collection of genres a particular group uses within a social system. For example, students in a film studies class would write notes, reflections, summaries, analyses, and academic essays. All of these genres would make up a genre set utilized by the student. Of course, within the same class, the instructor would also utilize a genre set, including a syllabus, assignment prompts, rubrics, feedback, presentation slides, etc. Understanding genres in this way highlights the interactive, and creative, nature of genres. Each text is created, used, and produces a response, and that response usually comes in the form of a different genre. The combination and interaction of the different genre sets constitutes a genre system. Genres within a genre set are, of course, not unique to that particular genre system. Students in a history or biology class, for example, will utilize many of the same genres as those in a film studies course. Genre systems, then, help to regulate how writers use genre sets. The interactions between the genre sets, and

those using them, creates the social environment within which users utilize the genres. This is why explicit instruction of only generic structural elements falls short of teaching the full nature of writing within a discipline. Bazerman (1994) states that only "a limited range of genres may appropriately follow upon one another in particular settings, because the successful conditions of the actions of each require various states of affairs to exist" (pp. 97-98). Students must not only understand how a particular genre looks, but they must also recognize when certain genres are used, and the types of knowledge those genres are meant to contain within a genre system.

A Student's Place in the Discipline

To be sure, the film studies classroom environment does not require nor ask students to completely master any particular written genre, and it certainly does not require students to attempt all the genres available within the film activity system. Russell (2009) explains "the division of labor within and particularly among activity systems" makes it so "not all of the participants must appropriate (learn to read/write) all of the written genres" within the system (p. 47). In fact, much of the work students do in introductory film courses may only vaguely resemble professional genres and fit more into the category of "mutt genres" which "mediate activities in other activity systems" though "their purposes and audiences are vague or even contradictory" within the classroom setting (Wardle, 2009, p. 774). For example, when film instructors ask students to write short discussion posts analyzing a particular scene from a movie, the exercise, in some ways, mirrors analysis done by professionals writing a journal article or movie review. Of course, professors often use these written assignments as exercises in application, and ultimately as practice for the longer papers awaiting at the end of the semester.

However, students often attempt this assignment without any bearings on what constitutes proper analysis within a larger argumentative essay, or how analysis differs depending on the type of audience being addressed. Analysis in a journalistic film review looks a lot different than analysis in an academic, peer reviewed journal article, which also looks different than analysis in the notes included with a special edition Blu-ray release from the *Criterion Collection*. Many of these assignments are "genres that do not respond to rhetorical situations requiring communication in order to accomplish a purpose that is meaningful to the author" outside of earning a passing grade (Wardle, 2009, p. 777). Yet, as we will see in a later chapter, introductory film courses often structure these assignments as preparation work for longer argumentative papers meant to more fully coincide with professional discourse. Instructors also bring to their grading certain expectations gleaned from professional discourse, including the social function of the academic essay genre, which is inherently situated within a certain socially constructed discourse. Often, students have a hard time making connections between the mutt genres of the course and "specific academic genres" of the discipline and, therefore, fail to make connections necessary for high marks on their final papers. Genres exist "when a situation recurs often enough that rhetors learn similar and agreed upon ways to respond to it," but mutt genres, which may only recur within a particular classroom, "do not recur for the student rhetor" and may never be "required by the varied exigencies that arise from their academic experiences to perform such a task again" (Wardle, 2009, p. 778). Students, then, must navigate an unstable landscape where disciplinary norms outside the realm of their experience play a role in their final grade even though instructors never fully place those students within situations requiring engagement with those norms.

Writing in the Disciplines

Starting with Shaughnessy (1977), scholars in rhetoric and composition have tried to further understand the structural and social contexts of academic writing to identify the importance of generic discourse conventions in writing and writing instruction. Research by Bizzell (1982), Kinneavy (1983), Bartholomae (1985), and Freed and Broadhead (1987) reiterated and expanded on Shaughnessy's work, leading to MacDonald's (1989) claim that identification of discourse conventions helps students "adapt their writing to the shifting demands made upon them in different parts of the academy" (p. 411). Research by Fahnestock & Secor, (1991), MacDonald, (1994), and Pullman (1994) further encouraged making discourse conventions an object of instruction rather than something tacitly learned and absorbed by students. Genre theorists such as Swales (1990) and Johns (2002) also support explicit instruction of genre conventions, arguing such teaching helps students more fully recognize and enter disciplinary discourse communities. As Bartholomae (1985) notes, "all writers, in order to write, must imagine for themselves the privilege of being 'insiders'. . . of being both inside an established and powerful discourse, and of being granted a special right to speak" (p. 10). This confidence to speak comes from first, as Ong (1975) puts it, "fictionalizing" themselves as part of the audience, then recognizing tendencies, learning content, and finally composing material to the community of which they are now a part. Their initiation into the discourse community is, obviously, not perfect and takes time, but teaching through the lens of genre conventions helps students "extend themselves into the commonplaces, set phrases, rituals, gestures, habits of mind, tricks of persuasion, obligatory conclusions, and necessary connections that determine the

'what might be said' and constitute knowledge within the various branches of our academic community" (Bartholomae, 1985, p. 163).

Responding to, and in some ways emerging from, such research, scholars in WID and WAC have attempted to identify the social and structural aspects of genres within specific disciplines. Though composition research and writing studies spawned from the same departments meant to research literature, most WID and WAC research focuses on disciplines housed outside English departments, particularly those in the hard and social sciences. Together, this research shows both the fluidity and stability of generic conventions, as well as their persuasive function (Bazerman, 1988; Fahnestock, 1986, 1999; Fahnestock & Secor, 1988; Halloran, 1984; MacDonald, 1989, 1994; Miller, 1992; Prelli, 1989). In many ways research has worked in reverse, focusing first on those disciplines perceived to be most removed from literary studies, such as the hard sciences, and gradually coming closer and closer to the fields most familiar to those in writing studies, such as literary studies. Laura Wilder (2012) sums up this inevitable move back toward the English department in this way: "If the shifting demands of different disciplines present noteworthy challenges for [students], then presumably the demands of specialized, scholarly literary study would present no lesser challenge to students than those they encounter in other corners of the academy" (p. 4).

Film studies is one particular discipline writing research has mostly ignored, likely because of its close relationship with literary studies, primarily entering higher education through the doors of literature departments. The ties between film and literature have led to a significant overlap in the expectations for student writing in both fields. In fact, several texts combine instruction in writing about film and writing about literature, including *Writing About Literature*

and Film (Bryan & Davis, 1975), *The Elements of Writing about Literature and Film* (McMahan, et al., 1988), and *Ways In: Approaches to Reading and Writing about Literature and Film* (Muller & Williams, 2002), even as they try to argue that "analyzing a film is different from analyzing any work of literature" (Bryan & Davis, 1975, p. 153). Yet, there are differences between the disciplines which have only strengthened over time, and the development of stand-alone film departments, along with the interdisciplinary nature of many cinema studies courses and journals, continue to challenge the notion that writing about film is simply an extension of writing about literature. Therefore, to paraphrase Wilder (2012), if a goal of WID is to help students understand the shifting demands placed upon them in different parts of the academy, then film studies deserves the attention of WID researchers.

While writing research has neglected film studies, some film scholars have still examined the rhetorical features of the discipline in an attempt to categorize, and in some cases alter, the theoretical framework ensconced within its critical practices. Most notably, David Bordwell's seminal text, *Making Meaning*, examines and critiques the way cinema scholars interpret film. Bordwell (1989) acknowledges "institutional protocols and normalized psychological strategies" used by critics to "build up meanings" through interpretive strategies (p. 3). He also notes that only "certain theories count as worth mining" in the film discourse community, and those theories "are assumed to be valid or accurate on grounds other than their applicability to the film at hand" (p. 6). Included within the underlying rules of a discipline are ways to cognitively approach and interpret material – in other words, the social aspects of genre and the specific ideas and arguments acceptable within a genre system. Later chapters in this study will explore specific argument types accepted in film studies, including common argument types such as "the

best directors control meaning through aesthetics" or that "the best films challenge conventions." While certainly not the only arguments available for use in film analysis, these argument types routinely appear in professional writing about the cinema.

Professionalization

Explicitly teaching students in an undergraduate film course about this disciplinary knowledge, however, leads to questions of professionalization beyond what many would normally categorize as the point of an undergraduate course. This is a concern many in literary studies have wrestled with over the years, mostly spurred by Gerald Graff's call to "teach the conflicts" (Graff, 1987; 1992; 1994; 1995; 1996). The "conflicts" Graff references are the issues scholars address in professional discourse, and he sees many pedagogical benefits to teaching students what those conflicts are, and how students can engage with them. For Graff, opening student eyes to the "climate of ideological contention in the university" has positive results beyond disciplinary professionalization (1994, p. 26). For one thing, the "conflicts" provide students a "sign of democratic vitality" and techniques of analysis to utilize in other "real-life situations" even if their career is not in literary studies (1995, p. 331). Many other literature professors have made similar arguments to introduce students to current theories while fostering critical engagement with those theories (Scholes 1985; Norton, 1994; Reiter, 1995; Campbell, 1997; Fjellestad, 1999).

Contrasting Graff's view are those who would rather not see undergraduate classes as an introduction to scholarly disciplinarily. Some see this "professionalization" as perpetuating power structures, competitive practices, and argumentative cultures which should actually be

done away with. Work by Spanos (1993), as well as Downing and Sosnoski (1995), is characteristic of this call for a "postdisciplinary" approach to instruction which relies more heavily on personal narratives and reflection than inculturation within the norms of any discipline. In a slightly different vein are studies encouraging a "pre-disciplinary" approach to instruction (Ohmann 1996; Hedley & Parker, 1991; Trimbur, 1995; Fleming, 2000; Diller & Oats, 2002). Rather than seeing students as apprentices moving toward a particular discipline, "pre-disciplinary" instruction seeks to develop writing, reading, and critical thinking skills in a more general fashion that can bridge gaps across the humanities.

While the debate over professionalization continues, actual classroom practice tends to expressly favor students who utilize discipline-specific norms. Some observational case studies provide evidence that, even when instructors claim to teach for more general writing and thinking skills, or even to avoid disciplinarity altogether, most instruction tacitly models and promotes discipline-specific conventions (Herrington, 1988; Sullivan, 1991; Wilder, 2002). Therefore, even when not providing explicit instruction in disciplinary convention, and many times even purposefully disdaining such methods, many instructors reward writing that most effectively uses disciplinary conventions. Schmersahl and Stay's (1992) study even found writing assignments in the English department as "consistently imitat[ing] professional genres" even as instructors lacked "a high degree of self-consciousness" about preferencing disciplinarily (pp. 142-143).

These findings mirror Bordwell's assertion about film studies that those implicitly teaching the rules of the discipline lack conscious awareness of their own conventions even as they pedagogically preference those conventions. This situation leads to an implicit bias toward

disciplinarity when grading student writing, even though students may never be directly taught the conventions being rewarded in their papers. In fact, WAC research suggests this is a problem across the curriculum, as faculty members can both know how to expertly craft written discourse in their discipline and not know how to teach disciplinary writing to their students (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2019). Recently, WAC scholars have explored the concept of "threshold concepts" in an attempt to more fully understand the cognitive changes taking place within students as they learn how to write. Threshold concepts are ways of thinking that, when mastered, completely change a person's approach to thinking and interacting with a particular topic. Yet, as Basgier and Simpson (2020) point out, "because faculty are immersed in these disciplinary perspectives (threshold concepts) and their concomitant genre expectations, the features of 'good writing' can come to seem natural and transparent when in fact they are highly localized to their community of practice" (p. 9). Still, instructors will classify writing as "good" when that writing demonstrates "immersion in disciplinary perspectives" by reflecting knowledge of threshold concepts "represented in constructions of genres" (Adler-Kassner, 2019, p. 283).

Writing "Inside" and "Outside" the Disciplines

One reason instructors have such a hard time identifying the structural and social conventions of their own writing in a way students can understand is the widespread, and implicit, way they view disciplinarity. David R. Russell (1993) summarizes the majority view across the academy as the distinction between writing "outside" vs. "inside" the disciplines. The widespread thought is that we can generalize writing to such a degree that learning to write can,

and should, be done outside specific disciplines. Scholars, now knee-deep in their own discipline, were never explicitly taught the conventions they use and, therefore, believe knowledge of a discipline and writing within that discipline are completely separate endeavors. Colleges and universities typically house these generalized writing courses in the English department as first year composition classes. Building off of Russell's ideas, Michael Carter (2007) writes that in this "model of education understood as the delivery of specialized disciplinary knowledge, writing is considered outside the disciplines . . . and thus unable to play an important role in the disciplines" (386). The disciplines, therefore, become areas of specific content knowledge, and deal in specialization, while writing ability is a general skill applicable to all disciplines. Writing separates from knowing and instead becomes simply the means used to show knowledge.

WID practitioners counter the writing-outside-the-discipline view by highlighting the deep connection between writing and knowing. As Carter points out, this view has its roots in classical rhetoric, "in which invention has historically played a critical role in both recovering knowledge and generating new knowledge" (2007, p. 386). From this viewpoint writing becomes integral to the learning process since learning is not just about grasping concepts, but also about the process through which, and by which, people gain and share knowledge. Therefore, changing the perception of writing as something learned outside the disciplines means reframing the way those inside the disciplines understand the writing process. As mentioned above, showing how integrated genres are with content and disciplinary knowledge provides one way to change this perception. According to Carter (2007), this distinct view of writing shows "the difference between knowledge and knowing, that is, [viewing] disciplines as repositories and delivery

systems for relatively static content knowledge verses disciplines as active way of knowing" (p. 387). Writing does not just relate content knowledge but works as part of the "doing" of a discipline. Carter (2007) calls the conventions used in a discipline's discourse "ways of doing and knowing," and it is instruction in these ways of doing and knowing that allow students to become active participants in not only a genre system, but also the larger activity system. The challenge, pedagogically, is making disciplinary ways of doing and knowing explicit to both students and instructors. Doing so means connecting generic forms to social contexts and providing students ways to discover how formal generic elements are directly tied to rhetorical and social situations. Ultimately, disciplinary knowledge is not a static entity to be absorbed and then regurgitated through writing. Instead, disciplinary knowledge is a continual process involving knowing, doing, and writing. As Carter point out, "doing is the middle term that links writing and knowing in the disciplines" (p. 389). Helping students and faculty recognize the ways of doing in a discipline will enhance our understanding of genre conventions and lead to better teaching and writing in the classroom. Accomplishing this feat will mean "describing in convincing terms the ways of doing that characterize the disciplines" (p. 389).

Film Studies Writing as a Discipline

An appropriate question, at this point, would be whether film studies is a discipline we can categorize and characterize. As mentioned previously, it is a rarity that film stands alone in its own academic department within a college or university. The history of academic film study also includes such wide-ranging theoretical perspectives to make some see it less as its own discipline and more as "an amalgam of interdisciplinary perspectives" (Blakesley, 2003, p. 3).

Dudley Andrew, speculating about the future of cinema studies at the turn of the twenty-first century, wrote that "any census of course catalogs reveals cinema's uncertain location and function from campus to campus, posing questions of general expectations and standards – indeed, putting in question the definition of cinema studies" (2000, p. 341). Since then, the move toward a more inclusive term "media studies" has even more severely challenged the notion of a singular film studies discipline, and, more profoundly, may signal its death if it ever was a discipline to begin with. The study of television, computer games, commercials, the internet, and various other media overlaps in so many ways with the techniques scholars use in the interpretation of cinema that film studies may just fall into a larger, yet to be defined disciplinary category. Andrew, a decade after his earlier thoughts, ultimately came to say that since there was "agreement neither about the shape and size of its territory nor about pertinent work that should be undertaken there, the promise of a [film] discipline, no matter what we name it, has become rather fanciful, the rhetoric of academicians" (2009, p. 883).

The ultimate purpose of this study is not the categorization of film studies as a discipline, a field of study, or by nature an interdisciplinary field. However, the fact that film studies can exist as its own department or as a course within another department accentuates the need to identify consistencies in writing expectations for such courses across the many disciplines film courses find themselves within. What matters for my purposes is the social construction of norms dictating what constitutes quality writing about film, and these norms exist whether or not anyone can agree over categorical terminology, or whether or not an introductory film course resides in the communication department or the English department. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson (2008) write that cinema studies may still be "being renamed [and] merging with new

and old fields and disciplines," but the "intellectual debates, institutional practices, and cultural activities and objects that have long preoccupied so-called film scholars now form the basis of an increasing not decreasing number of courses, programs, and departments" (p. xxviii). This growth, and subsequent writing taking place in and through the growth, speaks of an activity system with numerous genre systems and genre sets all influenced by socially driven rhetorical norms. To produce quality writing within a genre set, or to communicate successfully within any of these genre systems, participants must recognize and utilize the norms of films studies discourse. My goal with this study is to aid in that process.

No film scholar has done more than David Bordwell (1989) to elucidate the "craft traditions that dictate how proper interpretations are built" in film studies (p. 13). Bordwell's foundational analysis also has the benefit of recognizing the structural and social nature of film studies discourse. He clearly recognizes how connected knowledge and writing are within film criticism. Bordwell even states his intention to "keep the social nature of interpretation at the forefront" of film analysis "because the two aspects are inseparable" (p. 33). Any analysis, or interpretation, of a film is a product of "problem-solving skills applied to a task largely defined by forces lying outside" any one person's control and is done "according to norms of thought and writing established" through the historical process of disciplinarity (p. 33). It is the "critical institution" that "defines the grounds and bounds of interpretive activity, the direction of analogical thinking, the proper goals, the permissible solutions, and the authority that can validate the interpretations produced by ordinary criticism" (p. 33). This reality creates a situation in which "it is not enough to discover" interpretations of a film, but also "justify them by means of public discourse" (p. 34).

The craft traditions Bordwell identifies to justify proper interpretations span three "macroinstitutions," which could also serve as labels for genres within a professional critic's genre set since each of these macroinstitutions follow similar interpretive strategies within the professional film genre system. The macroinstitutions include journalistic criticism, essayistic criticism, and academic criticism. According to Bordwell (1989), the conventions of film criticism across these macroinstitutions utilize a common "goal which the institution of criticism sets the film interpreter," namely to produce "a novel and persuasive interpretation of one or more appropriate films" (p. 29). Included in this definition are the following problems anyone writing in film studies must address (pp. 29-30):

1. The problem of *appropriateness*, which must address what makes "the chosen film a proper specimen for critical interpretation"
2. The problem of *recalcitrant data*, which must address how the "critical concepts and methods" used by a critic will render aspects of the film interpretable in an acceptable way
3. The problem of *novelty*, which must address how the interpretation is either a) initiating a new critical theory or method, b) revising or refining an existing theory or method, c) applying an existing theory or method to a fresh instance, or d) pointing out significant aspects which previous commentators have ignored or minimized
4. The problem of *plausibility*, which must make the interpretation sufficiently persuasive through rhetorical strategies

It is clear to see how some of these problems are tacitly addressed throughout standard film studies courses. The different films instructors choose to show in class, along with those

written about in textbooks and course readings, provide a baseline knowledge to gauge appropriateness which students can then transfer to other, similar films. Cinema courses also provide instruction, sometimes explicitly, in certain critical theories, along with readings which apply those theories to particular films. Many undergraduate film courses, for example, require a foundational reading on feminism (e.g., Mulvey, 1975) during a unit studying gender and film. This, along with explicit instruction in the formalist language of cinema (genre, *mise en scene*, acting, sound design, etc.) in conjunction with students reading chapters on those topics in a text like Bordwell and Thompson's *Film Art* (2020) gives students a baseline familiarity with solving the recalcitrant data problem.

However, it is harder to notice how faculty currently address the problems of novelty and plausibility other than through tacit instruction. Students may, through assigned readings, gain some knowledge about how professional scholars make these rhetorical moves. However, these problems connect so closely to the practice of writing that they exemplify Michael Carter's (2007) claims about writing being integral to process knowledge and the ways of doing within a discipline. Answering these problems also involves more deep learning strategies than those associated with surface learning. Smith and Colby (2007) summarize the difference in this way:

> A surface approach involves minimum engagement with the task, typically a focus on memorization or applying procedures that do not involve reflection, and usually an intention to gain a passing grade. In contrast, a deep approach to learning involves an intention to understand and impose meaning. Here, the student focuses on relationships between various aspects of the content, formulates hypotheses or beliefs about the

> structure of the problem or concept, and relates more to obtaining an intrinsic interest in learning and understanding (p. 206).

Warren Buckland (2008) calls for more deep learning in film studies classrooms, and teaching film students different ways to impose meaning on what they watch while plausibly connecting their meanings to the meanings of others through writing creates a clear deep learning environment in the classroom. In fact, Bordwell (1989) writes that the craft of film criticism "consists centrally of ascribing implicit and symptomatic meanings to films," making the goal "assigned to the interpreter . . . to produce a persuasive and novel interpretation, in a process that is at once psychological, social, and discursive" (p. 40-41). What Bordwell means is the process of film interpretation is not only an individual, psychological response, but also involves a recognition that these interpretations happen within a community of other interpretations, and must be "written up, articulated in language" in order to hold persuasive power (p. 41). Learning how to invent arguments that fit within the social context, and then writing about them, creates and produces the deep learning environment.

Bordwell recognizes the importance of rhetorical invention to film studies and utilizes classical rhetoric to elaborate on the way professional film scholars approach the problems of novelty and plausibility. He highlights *inventio*, *dispositio*, and *elocutio* (inventing, organizing, and stylizing arguments) as integral to the reviewing and analytical process, and shows how professionals use examples, enthymemes, and *topoi* to produce interpretation. For example, the "canonical enthymeme" in journalistic criticism follows this pattern (p. 37):

1. A good film has property *p*
2. This film has (or lacks) property *p*

3. This is a good (or bad) film

Part of the invention process is knowing and identifying the properties that can fill the *p* slot, since "only a few properties" will be accepted as plausible arguments, such as "important subject matter, realistic treatment of the subject, a logical story line, spectacle, intriguing characters, a valid message, and novelty within sameness" (Bordwell, 1989, p. 37). Bordwell (1989) also highlights *topoi*, or what he terms the "stereotyped arguments that the audience will grant without question," as a means of invention (p. 37). Knowing these topics aids in the invention of arguments, and ultimately, in solving the overriding problems of academic film criticism and interpretation.

Bordwell's findings clarify the interrelated nature of the "ways of doing" in film studies with those of other disciplines within the humanities. This reality ties to Michael Carter's (2007) notion of "meta-disciplines" and "meta-genres". Carter surveyed and analyzed faculty-developed outcomes statements across his university to find patterns in the ways of knowing and doing across disciplines. His findings "showed that certain ways of doing were repeated in general terms across a variety of disciplines," and that these ways of doing could be categorized into four meta-disciplines, each of which focus on a particular meta-genres: 1) social science uses the meta-genre of problem solving, 2) hard science uses the meta-genre of empirical inquiry, 3) humanities uses the meta-genre of research from sources, and 4) arts uses the meta-genre of performance (p. 403-406). Film studies and literature both fall under the meta-discipline of the humanities, and as such rely heavily on the meta-genre of research from sources.

One of the interesting findings in Carter's (2007) research was that the humanities meta-discipline, which stresses research from sources, tends "to describe that research not as an end in

itself but as a means to an end defined by the individual discipline, a specialized way of knowing" (p. 400). Literature students, for example, must learn "to write about reading in a way that shapes the act of reading" (p. 400). This definition fits well with how Bordwell (1989) describes the problems set forth by film studies. The successful film student learns to write about films in a way that shapes the act of watching films. Therefore, writing about film stems from, and aids in, the particular ways of knowing and doing film studies. Bordwell's (1989) text, while significant and thorough, ultimately aims to identify and challenge critical practice rather than provide pedagogical advice. In fact, Bordwell hoped to remove interpretation from its "starring role in criticism," believing "the great days of interpretation-centered criticism" were over and that film studies needed to look toward "alternatives to an interpretation-driven criticism" (p. xiii). As we will see in a later chapter, academic film study still relies heavily on interpretation-driven criticism, and most expectations, both stated and unstated, throughout pedagogical documents showcase the field's reliance upon interpretive norms.

Research from Literary Studies

The practice of interpretive criticism as the standard-bearer in film studies makes the connections with literary study strong. This connection allows for the utilization of certain literary scholarship to help bridge the gap between film instructor expectations and classroom teaching practice. Research by Fahnestock and Secor (1988), and later by Wilder (2012), actually uses the rhetorical analysis of professional discourse to aid pedagogical practice of literary studies. Fahnestock and Secor (1988), convinced that classical rhetoric was a means to improve invention in the classroom, focused their attention on the rhetorical ideas of genre and *topoi* in

literary studies. Their research used these ideas as instruments of audience analysis to find out the ways professional literary scholars made arguments, and how teachers could use those argument types pedagogically. Wilder's (2012) work then updated and expanded this line of research to capture the fluidity of disciplinary discourse over time. This study will follow this, and similar, research in connecting the rhetorical strategies and genre conventions prevalent in professional film discourse with the strategies and conventions taught in classrooms (Wilder, 2012; Beaufort, 1997; Herrington, 1992; Walvoord & McCarthy, 1990). While the genres and conventions of any disciplinary discourse change over time, and always maintain a certain fluidity, they are still stable enough to identify, describe, and ultimately use in teaching and practice. Outside of Bordwell's work, there is little research on the rhetorical strategies employed in film studies scholarship, and almost none on teaching writing in film studies classrooms. This study is an attempt to spark further research in both areas by seeking answers to the following questions:

1. What are the stated (explicit) and unstated (implicit) expectations for student writing in introductory, undergraduate film studies classrooms?
2. What can professional film studies discourse reveal about the disciplinary expectations in film studies classrooms?
3. What pedagogical implications result from the similarities/differences between classroom and professional disciplinary writing expectations?

Common and Special Topics

This study will follow the lead of Fahnestock and Secor (1991), as well as Wilder (2012), in using *topoi* as the units of analysis within each textual corpus. Other rhetoricians and WID researchers have also analyzed *topoi* for both theoretical and pedagogical reasons. Eberly (2000) used *topoi* to do a rhetorical analysis of public discourse surrounding controversial literary works, Fahnestock (1986) studied the *topoi* in relation to popularization of scientific concepts, and Eisenhart (2006) examined the *topoi* in social and political movements. Research by Infante (1971) and Kirch (1996) supports the use of *topoi* in writing instruction and concludes that such instruction helps students utilize the *topoi* to explore and produce stronger arguments. Following this research, Schilb (2002) calls for the rhetoric of disciplinary discourse to be an integral part of literary studies instruction, arguing such instruction in conventions helps students make more conscious interpretive and rhetorical choices.

Emphasizing *topoi* when teaching disciplinary conventions broadens the scope of writing instruction beyond matters of arrangement and style. These concepts promote critical thinking leading to the invention of new arguments, an important aspect of any new contribution to a discourse community. *Topoi* also seem particularly appropriate when teaching writing in many humanities disciplines which, as Wilder (2012) writes, "do not follow rigid conventions of style or arrangement" as closely as those in other disciplines, such as the IMRAD format in the sciences. In rhetorical tradition, the *topoi* have helped rhetors produce appropriate arguments by identifying, defining, and evaluating one or multiple issues on which community members agree are appropriate to the disciplinary discourse. The *topoi* are typically separated into "general," or "common," topics which apply to all disciplines, and "special" topics which apply more

specifically to a particular discipline. The common *topoi* connect with another rhetorical idea, *stasis* theory, which utilizes a set of questions to stimulate the invention of new ideas. Carter (1988) presents *stasis* theory as an aid to help rhetors organize their creative energies, advance their intended arguments, and ultimately present solutions to current debates. Though the major *stasis* issues, or common topics, may take different forms, they function to probe differences within a discourse community and to generate arguments about those differences. Examining these common arguments addressed by disciplinary writing samples can lead to an enhanced understanding of what constitutes novel and plausible interpretations.

Richard Weaver (1985) provides a clear explanation of the common *topoi* in his essay "Language is Sermonic," and this study will utilize his categories to identify the ways film studies makes arguments. Weaver, in the broadest sense, sees four major argument categories. These categories include being, cause, relationship, and testimony/authority (p. 209). However, expanding the list, as Weaver (1967) does in his *A Rhetoric and Handbook*, more fully captures the range of arguments available within these categories (pp. 137-145):

1. Genus/Definition – An argument made "from the nature of a thing." In other words, identifying what something is, and placing that thing within a fixed category.
2. Cause and Effect – An argument showing something as the cause of some effect, or the effect of some cause
3. Circumstance – An argument based on what seems like an inescapable situation, and stating there "exists no alternative" to what is recommended or has taken place
4. Similitude – An argument based on the likeness of two or more things

5. Comparison (*a fortiori*) – An argument that sets up two possibilities, the second of which is more probable than the first, so that if we affirm the first, we can affirm the second with greater force
6. Contraries – An argument based on the differences between two or more things
7. Testimony/Authority – An argument which "brings in a great name or some other exalted source whose word on the subject in question is regarded as final"

In addition to these common *topoi* are special *topoi*. Special *topoi*, as defined by Aristotle in *Rhetoric* and further explored by more contemporary rhetoricians such as Perelman (1969), Toulmin (1979), and Miller (1987), are common argument types reserved for a specific audience community. They are a cluster of shared assumptions within a discipline about how to make arguments and what arguments to make. Wilder (2012) explains them as the assumptions allowing "each discipline to do its rhetorical work with an efficiency that would be absent if scholarly writers had to explain and defend all of their first principles and grounding assumptions in every argument" (p. 18). These special argument types work as an extension of the common topics, and typically provide discipline-specific arguments that, when analyzed, fit within the above-mentioned commonplace categories. Bordwell (1989) provides a list of argument types from film studies but limits his list to "a few which have given pleasure over the years" rather than providing any specific list based on rhetorical analysis of specific texts (p. 211). Here are a few of Bordwell's special argument types, with an added common *topoi* categorization to make the connections between common and special topics clear:

1. A critically significant film is ambiguous, or polysemous, or dialogical (genus/definition)

2. A critically significant film takes up an oppositional relation to tradition (genus/definition and contraries)
3. A film should make its audience work (cause and effect)
4. Montage is opposed to *mise-en-scene*, or camera movement (contraries)
5. In the artist's late period, technique is thrown aside and the work becomes simpler, more schematic, and more profound (similitude and contraries)
6. The film's style is so exaggerated that it must be ironic or parodic (circumstance)

Organization of the Study

This study will base its organizational structure around the major presumption inherent in the genre set concept: every piece of writing spawns from, and relates to, writing generated by another party. This structure will allow for a clear examination of how interrelated all writing is within the field. Chapter 2 begins this approach through a rhetorical analysis of expected learning outcomes, course syllabi, and writing assignment prompts, all of which are genres specifically meant to guide the interactions between instructor and student. Thus, the study will begin where it ultimately aims to end – in the classroom. However, since a clear identification of current classroom practice is necessary to appropriately shape classroom writing pedagogy, this study will examine written communication between film departments, film professors, and film students. Each of these generic documents provides insight into the goals and aims those teaching the next generation of film students have for writing about cinema. The collection will only include documents from undergraduate film departments and courses as a means to show how influential disciplinarity is even at the introductory, undergraduate level.

Moving a step away from direct written interaction between instructor and student are the "writing about film" textbooks, along with chapters devoted to the topic in introductory film textbooks, professors utilize as guides helping students learn how to write. While on rare occasions actually used by the scholars who wrote them within their own classrooms, more often these texts are a secondary resource that students are meant to read and apply on their own time. In practice, then, film writing textbooks operate as professional disciplinary guides to help students craft more discipline-specific writing. Students, if using the texts at all, use them to influence their discourse and bolster their grades. Whether used by students or not, these texts still provide insight into the expectations disciplinary professionals have of student writing. Therefore, chapter 3 will present a rhetorical analysis of introductory film textbooks as they relate to writing about film to assess the implicit and explicit expectations for generic writing in film studies classrooms.

The next chapter will examine professional discourse written for audiences beyond the classroom. These texts, crafted by those immersed in the discipline, fall into the macroinstitutions Bordwell identifies as the standard bearers of cinema criticism. Yet, even though students are not the immediate audience of these works, the writing in this category will exhibit several argumentative assumptions and standards of practice within the classroom discourse examined in chapters 2 and 3. These standards of practice, which we can categorize into both common *topoi* and special argument types, further illumine the unstated rhetorical assumptions guiding disciplinary insiders and provide evidence for standard modes of argumentation within film studies. The chapter will also explain how certain *topoi* prove useful across the macroinstitutions, while others only remain prevalent within a particular

macroinstitutions. Chapter 4 will start with an analysis of journalistic criticism, looking specifically at the writings of journalistic film critics who have won, or were a finalist for, the Pulitzer Prize in criticism. These selections from the work of Roger Ebert, Stephen Hunter, Joe Morganstern, Wesley Morris, Stephanie Zacharek, and Manohla Dargis constitute a sample of standard journalistic writing about film spanning almost sixty years and numerous publication outlets. Chapter 4 will then move up the ladder of specialization and will focus on what Bordwell calls "essayistic criticism" by examining such publications as *Film Comment*, *Sight and Sound*, *Cinema Scope*, and essays from the *Criterion Collection*'s online publication *The Current*. As with the journalistic criticism, the breadth of the selection will span many years and publication outlets to offer an historical and diversified perspective on the norms of essayistic discourse. Then, the chapter will focus on the research-driven, academic criticism of peer reviewed film journals to identify how professional scholars write for each other. The articles surveyed throughout the chapter will come from *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies* (formerly *Cinema Journal*), *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, *Journal of Film and Video*, *Black Camera*, and *Film History*. These specific journals provide articles written over the span of many years, as well as a range of theoretical perspectives and focuses, giving insight into the ways the generic conventions of cinematic discourse codify and perpetuate.

The concluding chapter will present some pedagogical suggestions based on the study and will make clear how interconnected the ways of knowing and doing are in film studies. The rhetorical analysis of the genres employed by film studies professionals, as presented in this dissertation, will increase understanding of the complex, social processes at work within this field of study, and will also provide research helpful in guiding students through the writing

process. The final chapter also advocates for pedagogies which more overtly treat film studies courses as places of disciplinary discourse and emphasizes heightened attention to rhetorical concerns of audience and purpose when teaching students to critically write about cinema. This approach to disciplinary writing pedagogy will also foster thinking and writing skills useful to students outside film classrooms.

CHAPTER 2

PEDAGOGICAL DOCUMENTS

Introduction

Rather than separate entities, content knowledge and writing work together to form the basis of learning within the field of film studies. To this end, the types of disciplinary knowledge, or the "ways of doing and knowing," privileged within film pedagogy appear throughout the field's pedagogical documents (Carter, 2007). This disciplinary knowledge forms the basis of the structural and social expectations implicitly and explicitly stated throughout three major textual corpuses meant to guide, and produce, student learning and writing within undergraduate film studies programs. These corpuses include expected student learning outcomes statements, course syllabi, and writing prompts. Of course, each individual film department and classroom develops and utilizes this material differently. Research on the nature of classroom ecology (Tudor, 2001; van Lier, 2002) demonstrates how "the totality of participants, relationships, structures, objects, and processes that together constitute the shared experience" of teaching and learning are unique to each classroom (Guerrettaz & Johnston, 2013, p. 779). However, the overall social structures dictating appropriateness and disciplinary norms within film studies maintain a guiding influence on what these documents contain. Furthermore, as Brown (2014) points out, course design largely involves "materials selection in accordance with a general description of a course objective," and these objectives function, in many ways, as

disciplinary norms statements (p. 658). So, even though a wide range of institutions and instructors created the student learning outcomes, course syllabi, and essay prompts examined in this chapter, these documents still share common ideals about writing and the types of knowledge necessary to effectively communicate within film studies discourse.

The research in this chapter adds to previous scholarship on the interconnected nature of pedagogical documents and highlights the presence of disciplinary ways of doing and knowing within pedagogical genres. Afros and Schryer (2009), for example, found that course syllabi tend to articulate faculty membership within a discourse community while also providing a site of socialization for students to enter that community. Carter (2007) explores the relationship between the stated learning outcomes relating to writing skills that university faculty want their students to develop and the actual assignments that they use to achieve those goals. Others have also used discourse analysis of learning outcomes, assignment prompts, and course syllabi as a way of elucidating connections between disciplinary expectations related to social justice and their articulation within course documentation (Rossi, et al., 2009).

Some hesitate to bring a more explicitly disciplinary writing pedagogy into the introductory classrooms, especially since many students taking undergraduate courses will not work as professional film critics or scholars. Certain studies in other disciplines have also advocated for less disciplinarity in writing instruction, having significant "doubts about whether undergraduate writing . . . does or should imitate professional models" (Schmersahl & Stay, 1992, p. 144). Yet, as this chapter shows, disciplinary writing connects so closely with disciplinary knowledge and the content taught in film classrooms that professors of entry-level film courses still expect a level of disciplinarity when asking students to write papers.

Collectively, the pedagogical documents surveyed in this chapter point to an inherent expectation of discipline-specific knowledge and writing within film studies pedagogy. Therefore, whether consciously or not, film departments and instructors expect and teach students to adhere to disciplinary norms, and these norms show up in writing assignments. With grades and classroom success tied so closely to disciplinary writing, it becomes a major pedagogical goal to more clearly understand and articulate the norms teachers are already expecting students to practice.

This chapter will show how the discipline-specific ways of knowing and doing in film studies provide the guiding principles inherent within student learning outcomes, course syllabi, and essay prompts. The content in these documents emphasize the interrelated nature of these pedagogical genres since each genre is meant to interact with the others, accomplishing similar goals through different means. The documents also reveal a larger "top-down" reality, highlighting how disciplinarity impacts and influences classroom practice more powerfully than any department-specific, or classroom-specific, goals.

Student Learning Outcomes

The first corpus under investigation in this chapter is student learning outcomes posted on film department web sites. The sample comes from twenty-five film studies programs across the United States and contains large universities and small colleges, with a mixture of both public and private institutions. A sample of this size and breadth demonstrates that disciplinarity helps to shape film pedagogy more powerfully than the nature and size of any college or university. If land-grant research universities and small, private teaching colleges can share basic learning outcomes, then clearly the knowledge of how and what to write within the discipline is dictated

by what Bordwell (1989) calls the "critical institution," or the norms fostered and preserved in "journalistic reviewing, essayistic writing, or academic criticism," rather than any particular department or classroom (p. 33). As Carter (2007) notes, outcomes are "what students should be able to do; thus, outcomes describe ways of doing, the procedural knowledge of the discipline" (p. 389). While these outcomes are expectations for students finishing their degrees in film studies rather than specific expectations noted in introductory undergraduate film courses, the defined goals of film departments consistently illuminate how those same outcomes appear in the course documentation of introductory courses.

Analysis of the posted student learning outcomes reveals, first, that writing skills form a major point of emphasis in film studies curricula. Eleven of the twenty-five outcomes statements explicitly mention writing as a skill film studies students will master. Some of the general language about writing in the outcomes statements goes beyond discipline-specific standards. For example, Chapman University wants graduating students prepared to write "well-structured, thesis-driven papers," while Boston College expects "clarity and proper grammar for essay writing" along with an "ability to do scholarly research and documentation." Even the fourteen outcomes statements that do not explicitly use the term "writing" still emphasize outcomes achieved through written discourse. Seattle University, for instance, desires the development of "critical, analytical and argumentation skills and independent research," and Pacific University asks students to demonstrate "media literacies through the development of critical, analytical and argumentation skills and dependent research." Similarly, Pepperdine University mentions "critical thinking, analytical, research, and public presentation skills" as outcomes for its students. In fact, phrases such as "critical thinking," "critical techniques," "critical approaches,"

"analysis," and "analyze" appear frequently throughout the outcome statements, making it clear from this sample that film studies, like other humanities-style writing, stresses research and critical analysis in its essays.[1] Table 1 shows a representative sampling of outcomes related to general writing skills in Film Studies programs.

Table 1

Helpfulness of General Writing Skills Addressed in Film Studies Program Student Outcomes

	School	Writing Outcome
Most Helpful	University of Nevada, Las Vegas	"Evaluate films and screenplays and communicate through critical writing and oral response"
	University of California, Santa Cruz	"Demonstrate their ability to employ research skills, including the use of appropriate print and technology sources in the discipline, to construct effective arguments"
	Seattle University	"Development of critical, analytical and argumentation skills and independent research"
	University of North Carolina at Wilmington	"Compose cogent, persuasive, and valid essays about film"
Least Helpful	Boston College	"Clarity and proper grammar for essay writing"
* Five representative outcomes out of twenty-five outcomes surveyed for this study		

More important to the aims of this study than generalized writing skills are the discipline-specific expectations inherent within the outcome statements. As Bordwell (1989) notes, these discipline-specific outcomes and "procedures are transmitted through education" and, "even without explicit instruction, students could gradually master interpretive skills by . . . adjusting their efforts to the standards of reading laid down by teachers" (pp. 25-26). However, making these standards explicit can aid students in accomplishing the goals of cinema studies education

[1] The concept of "media literacy" also plays a part in the phrasing of these outcomes, making it an underlying and overlapping goal of many introductory film courses. Potter (2013), for example, lists "analysis, evaluation, grouping, induction, deduction, synthesis, and abstraction" as the skills crucial to media literacy, many of which align with the goals of critical film interpretation (p.18).

more quickly and effectively. The learning outcomes statements provide several clues as to what constitutes quality, discipline-specific film studies writing. These outcomes reflect the four categories Bordwell (1989) identifies as the problems film scholars must attend to when contributing to the discipline's critical discourse (pp. 29-30):

1. The problem of *appropriateness*: how the critic introduces a chosen film as a proper specimen for critical interpretation
2. The problem of *recalcitrant data*: how the critic adjusts critical concepts and methods to specific features of a film, allowing aspects of the film to be rendered interpretable in an acceptable way
3. The problem of *novelty*: how the critic avoids replicating an already established reading of a film and adds something new to the discourse surrounding a film
4. The problem of *plausibility*: how the critic makes the interpretation sufficiently persuasive

Additionally, the list of common *topoi* Weaver (1967, p. 137) provides (i.e., definition/genus, cause/effect, circumstance, similitude/comparisons/contraries, testimony/authority) connect to the acceptable argument types to use when responding to each problem.

The disciplinary problem of appropriateness, or being able to identify a film or set of films as worthy of study, shows up in almost every set of student learning outcomes. Appropriateness relies heavily on the definition/genus *topoi* because writers solve this problem through evaluation and analysis of film. Evaluation and analysis are the major critical approaches in the field and choosing an appropriate specimen for study means defining whether that specimen is of evaluable or interpretable quality. Evaluating a film means to have enough

"awareness of artistry and visual manipulation" to help make judgments about "creative craftsmanship" (Potter, 2013, p. 24). To analyze, or interpret, a film means to define the significance of any "implicit" or "symptomatic" meaning in the film (Bordwell, 1989, pp. 8-9). An example of an outcomes statement using evaluation and analysis to determine appropriateness comes from Willamette University, which wants students doing "analysis and assessment of film and filmic images." Likewise, Indiana University's students should be able to "identify, evaluate and critique the aesthetic, ideological, and historical aspects of media texts." Missouri State also wants students to "analyze and critique a variety of media products" throughout the course of their studies. These outcomes statements ask students to know how to define the quality of a film from an aesthetic perspective and how to define one as holding a particularly significant historical or ideological meaning.

After defining a film as worthy of study, students must move to the problem of recalcitrant data in order to defend their definitions of quality or interpretation. Students need to identify how they can render aspects of the film, or data points, interpretable to fit their definitional goals. To do this, students must move to the cause/effect *topoi*, making clear how a cause (a certain scene, event, or aesthetic feature in a film) has a specific effect (produces cinematic quality or significant meaning). The learning outcomes handle this aspect of film discourse a few different ways. Some make the relationship between form and meaning overt, as when the University of North Carolina at Wilmington mentions students should "demonstrate the relationship between film form and aesthetic effect" in their film analysis. Others use certain key phrases to emphasize this point, such as "close textual and contextual analysis" (Connecticut College), "close reading" (Pepperdine University), or "deconstruct" and "breakdown media

objects for analysis" (University at Buffalo). Ohio University's comprehensively defined statement asserts that "students will gain mastery of a broad range of critical, theoretical, and historical approaches to film, and be able to apply these to a range of films across different historical periods, nationalities, and modes of practice." This outcome captures several aspects of disciplinary writing that recur throughout the statements. The most prevalent is that students find data points from three set areas of inquiry: critical/aesthetic, theoretical, and historical. These three areas appear again and again in the outcome statements. One of Seattle University's learning outcomes is to "foster student knowledge of the history, theory, [and] aesthetics" of film, while Washington State University asks students to "demonstrate an understanding of . . . critical and theoretical approaches to film" along with "an understanding of the history of national or international film." The University of San Diego similarly wants students to "identify and define the formal and stylistic elements of film" while also gaining "basic understanding of film theory and global film history." The outcomes at Keene State College also utilize these three categories while additionally making their importance explicitly evident, expecting students to "know the basic terminology of analysis," the "major events in world film history," and to "have a knowledge of the major developments in film theory" so that they are "able to produce critical writings in these subfields of cinema studies." Keene's statement, therefore, makes clear how connected the disciplinary ways of knowing—knowledge of aesthetics, theory, and history—are to writing in the discipline. In order to properly define a film as worthy of praise or interpretation, students must first understand what counts within the discipline as being worthy of praise or interpretation. Put another way, students must recognize how aesthetic, theoretical, or historical data points bring merit to a film.

Once a student defines a film as appropriate for study through a cause-and-effect analysis of recalcitrant data, the next step is making sure the definitional argument made about that film is novel through the use of the testimony/authority *topoi*. As Bordwell (1989) points out, the film studies discourse community "discourages critics from replicating one another's readings," which means new arguments must consider existing discourse by either "(a) initiat[ing] a new critical theory or method; (b) revis[ing] or refin[ing] an existing theory or method; (c) 'apply[ing]' an existing theory or method to a fresh instance; or (d) if the film is familiar, point[ing] out significant aspects which previous commentators have ignored or minimized" (p. 30). Therefore, knowledge of existing discourse also involves acknowledgement of existing, and acceptable, theories or methods used in the interpretive process. Three *topoi* emerge in the learning outcomes statements as the main areas of inquiry to create a novel interpretation of a film text. The first is the testimony/authority *topos* which seeks to utilize previous work in the field as a starting point for new interpretation. Chapman University's outcomes make this *topos* clear, seeking to prepare students to "apply relevant scholarly sources . . . to formulate and support a critical argument." The outcomes from the University of California at Santa Cruz likewise seek an "ability to articulate and defend . . . research and practice in a critical environment" by using "the critical vocabulary and methodologies of the discipline." UNC Wilmington's statement that students "will be able to conduct film research and compose cogent, persuasive, and valid essays about film" also supports this outcome.

The outcomes statements also utilize the *topoi* set of similitude, comparison, and contraries to address the problem of novelty. This set of *topoi*, based on the connections evident between two or more items, plays a significant part in film analysis and critical methodology.

The University of Nevada, Las Vegas, for example, identifies these types of comparisons as one of their major learning outcomes. Their outcomes statement asks students to distinguish "major figures instrumental in the creation of world cinema and [to] distinguish different film genres, film forms, national cinemas, and their production and distribution systems." A similar statement appears in the University at Buffalo's outcomes, which desires students to gain the ability to "compare media objects and theory" as well as an ability to "create comparisons using media theory." Some statements also reference the interdisciplinary nature of film studies and require applications of theories from other areas of study to particular films, making arguments of similitude or comparison across disciplinary boundaries. The interdisciplinary nature of film studies is apparent in Connecticut College's outcomes, which wants students "building on critical skills and tools from other fields that connect dynamically to the construction of motion picture discourses." Oberlin College also takes this approach, wanting students to "pursue the meanings of cinema and other media in the broadest, most interdisciplinary ways, considering movies, for example, as works of art, as cultural forms, and as industrial practices." These interdisciplinary comparisons provide a different way to handle the problem of novelty by utilizing a theoretical method usually reserved for one area of inquiry and showing its usefulness to film evaluation and analysis.

While the use of testimony/authority and comparison appear throughout the outcome statements, the most common argument associated with novelty utilizes the circumstance *topoi*. Based on the learning outcomes, arguments of this type in film studies most often relate to the relationship between cinema and society. One iteration is the argument that society invariably influences film content. The cultural ideals, politics, business practices, and events of a given

historical moment shape films to such an extent that students and scholars must interpret films with these contexts in mind. Indiana University captures this sentiment when they ask students to "situate media artifacts and products as works of cultural representation impacted by the dynamics of media industries and production including the processes of media circulation, distribution, and exhibition." The same is true of Gettysburg College, which not only asks students to "understand larger contexts for cinema and other media, namely the institutional, economic and socio/political dynamics always underpinning these media texts," but also to "understand how media intersect with at least one or more key issues such as race, gender, sexual orientation, class, ethnicity, identity, environment, globalization, etc." Pacific University also wants students to identify "the historical and theoretical relations of media to structures of power, economics, and ideology." These arguments fit into what Bordwell (1996) termed "culturalism," which "holds that pervasive cultural mechanisms govern the social and psychic functions of cinema" (p. 9). Therefore, arguments of this type must follow the circumstance *topoi* since they are "based on what seems like an inescapable situation" (Weaver, 1967, p. 141). As Bowling Green State University puts it, quality evaluation means accounting for "the social, economic, and technological factors that shape films from different historical periods, gender and ethnic perspectives, domestic and international cultural contexts."

The other iteration of the argument from circumstance changes the direction of influence, arguing that film content, while still formed by culture, shapes audiences to such an extent that novel discussions of film will account for filmic reception and audience analysis. Bordwell (1996) categorizes this trend in film studies as "subject-position theory," which sees spectators as subjects being socially and ideologically constructed through "film technology, through narrative

structure, through ‘enunciative’ processes, and through particular sorts of representation” (p. 7). The outcomes statements approach this by asking students to “describe and interrogate questions related to the reception, uses and impact of media artifacts and products” (Indiana University), “explain and respond thoughtfully to the religious, social, ideological, spiritual, moral, and ethical values implied in film texts through their close readings and reflections” (Pepperdine University), and be “competent in developing critical responses to cinematic work based upon aesthetic or cultural values other than the entertainment model that dominates the mainstream Hollywood distribution system” (Willamette University). In all, these circumstantial arguments provide cultural impetus to film research and writing, making most novel those definitional arguments that show a film challenging the “ideological underpinnings of dominant cinema” (Bordwell, 1996, p. 8).

After students address the problems of appropriateness, recalcitrant data, and novelty, the final problem to address is making their arguments plausible. The learning outcomes do not specifically use the word “plausible” when referring to written arguments, but they do use other words and phrases that hint at the necessity for discipline-accepted support in essays. Phrases throughout the documents point to the need for students to be able to develop a salient and critically informed set of criteria by which to gauge a film. Some of these phrases include providing “sophisticated evaluation” (Chapman University), “a sense of professionalism” in writing (Bowling Green State University), being able to “defend your own explanation” (University of South Carolina), and having “a competency in discussing” film (University of San Diego). Each example hints at the overriding principle of presenting plausible arguments within cinematic discourse. In many ways, plausibility relies heavily on credibility (*ethos*) and logic

(*logos*), and therefore ties in with several of the problems and argument types previously analyzed. To establish credibility and logical interpretations, students must provide evidence of familiarity with disciplinary knowledge, terminology, theoretical methods to employ, essay organizational patterns, and ways to incorporate specific examples from films (see Bordwell, 1989, pp. 206-223). Students can display this type of knowledge by utilizing the *topoi* to answer the problems of appropriateness, recalcitrant data, and novelty as described above and present throughout the student learning outcomes statements.

The twenty-five student learning outcomes statements provide evidence that disciplinary writing in film studies utilizes the full range of common *topoi* to solve the major problems of film studies argumentation. The examination of professional discourse in later chapters of the study will reveal which common *topoi*, along with certain special argument types, appear most often and to greatest effect in film studies writing. For now, it is important simply to recognize how the discipline-guiding knowledge found in student learning outcomes statements offer clues as to how film studies writing takes shape, and that departments expect graduating students to adhere to these disciplinary expectations as a requisite for completing film programs.

Table 2 provides a representative sample of how the outcomes statements approach the discipline-specific problems of writing in film studies. The table lists these outcomes in order based on how helpful they are in capturing the breadth of disciplinarity within film studies writing.

Of course, the outcomes statements are not uniform in describing the major problems students must answer when writing about film or the *topoi* associated with each problem. Instead, the statements collectively imply the existence of disciplinary problems, and imply ways

Table 2

Helpfulness of Discipline-Specific Writing Skills Addressed in Film Studies Program Student Outcomes

	School	Writing Outcome
Most Helpful	Chapman University	"Demonstrate sophisticated evaluation of film and media scholarship, using the specific disciplinary terminology of film and media aesthetics, criticism and history"
	Bowling Green State University	"Evaluate the social, economic, and technological factors that shape films from different historical periods, gender and ethnic perspectives, domestic and international cultural contexts"
	Washington State University	"Analyze the nature, history, and function of film in an interdisciplinary manner that broadens and enhances critical thought"
	University of South Carolina	"Defend your own explanation of media's power in everyday life"
Least Helpful	Baldwin-Wallace University	"Utilizing and developing a variety of methods to evaluate film"
* Five representative outcomes out of twenty-five outcomes surveyed for this study		

to solve those problems. A more explicit expression of the disciplinary goals and argument types implied by the statements would look something like this:

1. Define discipline-appropriate artifacts to study by analyzing films for significant meaning and evaluating films for aesthetic quality.
2. Apply historical, theoretical, and aesthetic approaches to films, showing how cinematic detail and evidence convey certain meanings.
3. Craft original and plausible disciplinary arguments by a) researching existing scholarship; b) comparing domestic and international films, filmmakers, and film genres with established categorizations; c) identifying the ways society and cinema influence each other.

This summation of the outcome statements highlights the way writing and content knowledge combine in film studies classrooms. The following sections of this chapter assess how connected

these learning outcomes are with the classroom-guiding syllabus and assignment-guiding essay prompt.

Course Syllabi

Course syllabi make up the second pedagogical corpus considered in this chapter. These syllabi were collected from twenty-two different undergraduate film courses across the United States. As with the student learning outcomes, these syllabi come from a variety of colleges and universities representing both public and private institutions. This variety provides further evidence of how the disciplinary norms of film studies guide classroom practice. These syllabi also function as transitional documents, moving from the theoretical question "What will students learn?" answered in the learning outcomes to the more practical question "What will students do to learn?" answered in the assignment prompts. The syllabus, in many ways, bridges the learning outcomes statements with individual assignments by containing aspects of both.

This study's analysis focuses on two main areas within course syllabi. First, course descriptions offer a direct presentation of what instructors expect students to glean from their time in the classroom, and often allow instructors to "manifest their membership" within a discourse community while also introducing students to the community's discourse (Afros & Schryer, 2009). These descriptions also highlight the major learning outcomes of a particular course which, in theory, should coincide in some ways with the learning outcomes of the department as a whole. In a further attempt to capture the pervasive nature of discipline-specific norms, the syllabi under consideration here are from different colleges and universities than the learning outcomes statements analyzed above, making any connections between them

connections based on the discipline as a whole rather than simply reflections of department-specific outcomes statements.

The second area of analysis is writing assignments mentioned in the syllabi. These assignments fall into two major categories as commonly defined by Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) practitioners. In the Writing to Learn (WTL) category are assignments meant to foster student thinking and processing of key ideas. These assignments typically do not follow disciplinary norms of style, structure, or even content. Instead, WTL is a way for students to discover new ideas, find meaning in what they have read or viewed, and understand new concepts without the formalities of discipline-specific genres. Often WTL activities take the form of discussion posts, journaling, response papers, or short analyses. The second category is Writing in the Disciplines (WID), in which assignments prepare students for the formatting, style, and genres of a professional discipline. Such assignments often involve substantial and time-intensive preparation work long before submission.

The course descriptions in the syllabi collection reiterate several findings from the learning outcomes analysis. The syllabi contain language emphasizing the definition of appropriate, disciplinary artifacts for analysis and evaluation, along with the application of theory, history, and aesthetics to show how each impacts a film's meaning. There are suggestions that students should aspire to original and plausible arguments through research, comparison, and investigation of the ways film and society influence each other. One introductory film course syllabus makes these emphases clear, telling students they will "become fluent in the vocabulary of film form and learn to construct an argument about what a film's sounds and images mean and how it structures and achieves its meaning," while also introducing "historical, cultural and

theoretical topics relevant to the films shown" in class. Additionally, students in this class will get an "introduction to the theories, methods, and concerns of film and media studies as a discipline, preparing [them] for further work in the field." This example shows one of the course's main goals is disciplinarity, and that disciplinarity connects with constructing certain types of arguments. Another syllabus highlights the evidential categories of theory, history, and aesthetics as the means to construct arguments. The instructor wants students to have "a working knowledge of film form and film vocabulary" in order to develop "these analytic tools in the context of film history and film theory." This particular syllabus also makes the connection between this disciplinary knowledge and writing at least partially clear, stating the "course also teaches the basics of academic writing about film with a focus on analytical, argumentative composition."

Other introduction to film syllabi also reveal an expectation that students conform to disciplinary norms by touching on the three major learning outcomes identified above. One course teaches students "how to recognize and describe formal choices and techniques" in films while also asking them to "engage in close readings of films, attending to the greater aesthetic significance and stakes of formal choices and innovations evident within a particular film, directorial oeuvre, period or movement." This excerpt asks students to define meaning through use of aesthetic evidence while also comparing their findings to larger, discipline-specific ideas. Later in the description the syllabus also acknowledges the influence of film on society, asking students to "consider the changing role of the spectator in relation to the moving image" as well as "film's relationship to reality including its reporting and deconstruction of the 'real,' as well as how film aesthetics have been employed to build ideology and to break with it." While never

specifically stating that these ideas help students make novel and plausible arguments about film, the syllabus implicitly showcases the discipline-specific ways of knowing that professors strive to teach even within introductory film classes. Another introductory film class does something similar, intending to introduce students "to film form, history, and theory" as a means to "develop the ability to analyze and critique films . . . as an art form and as a vital expression of culture." With these aims, the professor notes that "writing about film . . . is strongly emphasized." Again, the course asks students to apply theory, history, and aesthetics to define quality and meaning, and to make novel written arguments by connecting their argument to culture.

Even syllabi that claim less lofty aims, such as merely helping students "appreciate films more completely," still often add terms or phrases that point toward disciplinarity, such as wanting students to "make viable interpretive arguments" about films. A "Film Appreciation" syllabus does something similar, stating the overall philosophy of the course "is to give students insight into both the technical aspects of film production and the creative and artistic application of those techniques" while also expecting students to "understand works of film as expressions of individual and human values within an historical and social context" so they can "articulate an informed personal reaction to artistic works of film." These statements point to the hope that students will be able to create original and plausible arguments about film by interpreting what films mean. Of course, as the learning outcomes and the other syllabi suggest, making these arguments without knowledge of theory, history, or aesthetics, and without the use of research, comparison, or acknowledging the influence cinema and society have on each other becomes

very difficult. In short, the syllabi imply that making written film arguments directly ties to disciplinary knowledge.

Not surprisingly, more advanced, specialized undergraduate film course syllabi also showcase the integrated nature of disciplinary knowledge and argumentation. A syllabus for a senior-level "Concepts in Classical Film" course, for example, states students should have an "understanding of how film theory can be utilized to analyze film and mass media in general." Additionally, the syllabus wants students able to "engage critically with theoretical texts, both in terms of thinking and writing," which points to the goal of original and plausible arguments based on research. The course description in this syllabus also implies the importance of research, comparison, and the relationship between society and film by listing the major names and theories the course will cover. The list includes: "film language and film form (Sergei Eisenstein, André Bazin), the relationship between film and reality (Siegfried Kracauer, Bazin), film as a narrative art form (Tom Gunning, David Bordwell), authorship and genre (Andrew Sarris, Peter Wollen, Thomas Schatz, Leo Braudy, Rick Altman, and Robin Wood), and psychology and ideology (Christian Metz, Laura Mulvey)." The presentation of this list also signals the professor's place within the discipline and provides students with the beginnings of a lexis they must acquire throughout the semester in order to demonstrate their "mastery" over the subject matter which, according to the syllabus, "will be assessed by short response papers." One course on "Modern Film and Global Culture" combines all of the above-mentioned learning outcomes by asking students to conduct "formal scene analyses and discussing key historical and critical concepts regarding film" while also paying "particular attention to the cultural, political, and economic factors of various national or transnational cinemas, including their systems of

production, distribution, and exhibition." This quote first advocates the use of aesthetics, history, and theory to define a film's meaning, and then focuses on how society's influence over film aids in that meaning making. The description goes on to suggest what makes certain films appropriate for study by again emphasizing a cultural influence on filmmaking and privileging films that challenge mainstream narratives and stylistics. The description does this by declaring the films used in class "exhibit visual styles and narratives, often incorporated as a critique of Hollywood conventions" and that they "also address issues of national, cultural, or ethnic identity; many represent cross-cultural conflicts; and several reflect the effects of globalization on filmmaking and spectatorship." Within these claims are clear implications about what constitutes plausible argumentation when writing about films for this particular class, including comparisons between "Hollywood" and non-Hollywood filmmaking styles and emphasizing the role culture plays in shaping film narratives and techniques.

Though research, comparison, and the impact of society on film all make appearances throughout the syllabi, the upper-level film course syllabi showcase an overwhelming preference for subject position and cultural studies argumentation as the main lenses through which students can make plausible arguments. Some of the examples above have already pointed in that direction, but it is also clear in many other course syllabi. A class on "Film, Myth, and the Law" wants students to see how the "law provides a template for film spectatorship, positioning viewers as detectives and as jurors." Another class asks students to compare American and Soviet films made during the Cold War in order to "discuss key concerns in contemporary American society, including the perpetuation of an unequal power system." Other courses require students to develop "an advanced understanding of film as a complex cultural medium",

explore “the intersections that exist between film, media, and culture through a specific focus on the intersections between cinema and the broader social, scientific, and political concerns of global environmental change”, and critically analyze the “construction of conventional American Indian representations” while exploring “alternative-imaging strategies.” A course on “Popular Culture and American Politics” shows how important cultural studies is to plausible argumentation in the class by telling students the course will “not just utilize films with overt political messages” but will also “include films with more covert political messages that allow us to analyze American culture, society, and politics.”

Ultimately, it is clear that this sample of film course syllabi carries on the major disciplinary writing goals in the student learning outcomes. Syllabi from these various instructors, in various institutions, teaching a wide range of cinema courses, all seem to agree that students must learn how to define an appropriate artifact to analyze or evaluate, how to apply theory, history, and aesthetics to that artifact’s defined meaning, and how to make those arguments plausible through research, comparison, and examining the ways society and cinema influence each other. Since these disciplinary goals appear so frequently in the learning outcomes and syllabus course descriptions, they seem to provide the guiding principles of film pedagogy.

While some of these syllabi directly mention writing as the way in which these disciplinary arguments will take shape, the fact that writing plays such a major role in film pedagogy becomes clearer by examining the assignments each course requires. The assignments listed in this sample of syllabi add to the disciplinary knowledge presented in the syllabus course descriptions by placing a priority on writing to showcase such knowledge. In fact, every one of

the syllabi examined in this study contained at least one writing assignment, with most containing multiple writing assignments throughout the duration of the course.

The most common writing assignments in the course syllabi are WTL type assignments, with sixteen out of the twenty-two syllabi including some type of recurring journal or reflection response. While these WTL assignments do not require professional disciplinary standards in terms of formatting or content, the assignments are clearly meant to foster disciplinary thinking from the students. One of the main goals of these assignments seems to be aiding the students in making connections between the films they watch in class and the readings assigned for those films. Some courses have students set up a blog for response posts, in which the student must "analyze the film of the week and engage the main topic of the week" or keep "reflections and critical thoughts on course materials." Other courses assign journal entries as a way to foster student critical thought about course materials. These can require "synthesis (not just summary) of the assigned readings and the application of those readings to contemporary film and television artifacts", can ask students to give a "personal opinion about how the film broadened your understanding of American Politics or society", or ensure students "not only completed the reading but are thinking critically about the readings and applying them to the media texts." Similarly, some classes utilize short response papers to achieve this goal of connecting "the film with the readings due for that week." One syllabus includes "Film Term Analysis" assignments which have students "choose one film vocabulary term (i.e. high angle, makeup, flashback, pan, sound bridge, etc.) covered in class and analyze its use in one of the previous few films from the syllabus" in 300-word essays. Others use discussion board posts to accomplish similar aims, creating more of a dialogical dynamic between students and instructor in an online format. Such

assignments ask students to “reveal a close and critical engagement with the text” in question and to “identify and analyze at least one example of the formal choice or technique we are studying that week in one of the films assigned.” These assignments, if not really capturing the nuances and intricacies of generic disciplinary writing, still function as introductions to disciplinary thought, providing ways for students to begin defining cinematic meaning by utilizing research and applying theoretical, historical, and aesthetic evidence to their claims. As one course syllabus puts it, these assignments are “a class requirement, but it’s also essential practice.”

While not used as frequently throughout the semester as the WTL assignments, most film courses also utilized at least one WID essay assignment that more closely aligns with the professional genres of the discipline. Most courses approached these WID assignments progressively, working students toward the discipline-specific research essay at the end of the semester either through WTL assignments, or with a shorter WID assignment earlier in the course. This progression speaks to the disciplinary outcomes that professors expect of their students, not only based on the WID assignments’ placement at the end of the semester when students would presumably have more disciplinary knowledge to accomplish these writing tasks, but also based on how these WID assignments make up a larger portion of the students’ grade than the shorter, less discipline-specific assignments earlier in the semester. All syllabi that included a final paper had that paper total at least twenty-five percent of the grade, with several accounting for anywhere from thirty to forty percent of the student’s total grade for the course. A typical paper sequence used a shorter analysis paper around midterm as the catalyst for the longer research paper at term’s end. One such class had students do “an analysis of a scene from

one of the films in the first half of the course" before moving them on to "a research paper in which you will compare a course film to another, similar film of your choosing." Another class designed the analysis paper as a way to "help you pay closer attention to film's formal elements and how they construct the meanings and effects of audiovisual representation" and then uses the final paper to "cultivate the habits of critical thinking" and to "engage more deeply with the [assigned] readings." The overall tendency in setting the papers up this way is to allow students practice in applying aesthetic or theoretical analysis to construct a film's meaning on a small scale before asking them to create a more novel, large-scale argument through comparison and research. An "Art of Film" syllabus moves students along this path through two shorter papers analyzing "specific formal choices . . . supporting the analysis of a central theme or idea you see advanced by the film" before requiring a "10-12 page essay" that should "advance an original, well-argued, clear thesis on a topic relating to the formal choices . . . discussed over the course of the semester." As with the learning outcomes and course descriptions, these assignments call students to utilize specific disciplinary outcomes evidenced through writing—specifically a novel, researched argument defining a film's interpretive or evaluative quality by applying theory, history, or aesthetics.

So far, the film studies pedagogical documents all indicate a preference for disciplinarity in film studies classrooms. Departments shape the student learning outcomes to align with disciplinary norms, and professors craft courses to help students gain disciplinary knowledge and writing skills. Short writing assignments throughout the course often lead to a longer research paper meant to resemble and reflect the work of disciplinary professionals and adhering to disciplinary norms of argumentation. Therefore, student grades at the undergraduate, and even

introductory, level depend on the ability to write in a way consistent with the discipline. With so much of film studies pedagogy resting on students achieving disciplinary writing skills, a major question remains: how much emphasis do instructors place on helping students achieve this level of disciplinarity in their writing?

The syllabi provide a few clues on how instructors approach writing instruction in film studies classrooms, and their methods emphasize generalized writing skills rather than discipline-specific ways of knowing. First, four of the syllabi included a section on formatting papers. These sections typically ask students to check spelling and grammar, double-space, use specific font styles, and adhere to a specific citation style. In fact, one of the only overt references to disciplinary writing in the sample of syllabi collected for this study comes in a formatting section and relates to citations. The professor notes that most "academic journals of film, media, and culture adhere to *The Chicago Manual of Style* or the *MLA Handbook*," and therefore students will receive "a brief citation and style handout based on the 16th Edition of the *Chicago Manual* before the first paper is due." Outside of this instance, though, the syllabi focus on writing tips generalizable across the humanities, such as "Give your papers interesting titles!", "Number all pages except your title page!", and "You may use any standard citation style, but I recommend Chicago."

A second way the syllabi approached writing instruction was through a topic-approval process. This approval process—whether involving a written proposal, outline, abstract and/or discussion with the instructor—appears in five of the syllabi, seeming to function as a disciplinary checkpoint between student and professor. More than anything else, this additional step to the writing process gives professors a way to gauge the appropriateness of a student's

paper topic, help students develop an alternative topic, and/or guide them to more discipline-specific approaches to their topic. This process only becomes explicit instruction in disciplinary writing if the teacher acknowledges that any suggested changes are due to the norms of film studies writing rather than simply suggestions on, for example, how to create a better thesis or develop stronger arguments. In other words, explicit disciplinary writing instruction can only take place if the professor recognizes how much disciplinarity influences their suggestions. Students would have to either infer disciplinary conventions from any suggestions without reference to disciplinary writing, or simply believe the suggestions to be the preference of the teacher rather than norms more common to writing in film studies.

Two particular aspects of the syllabi indicate that explicit writing instruction is rarely an essential part of introductory film courses. First, none of the courses required a "writing about film" textbook or any required reading having to do with writing. There were three courses that "recommended" students read Timothy Corrigan's (2015) *A Short Guide to Writing about Film*, but nowhere does the syllabus require students to read any of that text. Second, many of the syllabi contained a course schedule outlining the topics under discussion during each period. All of the topics listed across the courses related to gaining understanding of film theory, history, or aesthetics, with none of the class sessions providing any focus on writing about film. The elements of analysis that did appear, in various forms or iterations, on nearly all the syllabi include narrative, mise-en-scène, editing, genre, the production process, sound, historical movements, spectatorship, authorship, adaptation, and film theory. The amount of time spent on these topics places a strong emphasis on the second of the major learning outcomes identified earlier, namely the application of theory, history, or aesthetics to support meaning. This almost

singular emphasis on explicit instruction in the theoretical, aesthetic, and historical nature of film studies leaves the development of original, plausible arguments as well as the defining of appropriate artifacts to study as mainly tacit enterprises. According to the syllabi, the major emphasis in these courses remains on content knowledge rather than showing that knowledge through written discourse. However, as mentioned above, writing assignments account for a large portion of student grades, and quality writing about film requires more than simply inputting content knowledge onto a page. The content in undergraduate film syllabi support two of the aims of Corrigan's (2015) writing text, which is meant to "save time for instructors of film who, in presenting the complexities of the art and industry of film, are hard put to deal with the writing problems of students . . . by clarifying points that many instructors mistakenly presume students already know" (p. xi). Course content, according to this sample of syllabi, remains heavily enmeshed in the "complexities of the art and industry of film" without much room for writing instruction.

In sum, film studies syllabi reiterate the importance of disciplinarity in film studies pedagogy while also indicating a lack of time devoted to explicit writing instruction throughout the courses. The documents analyzed in this section showcase the importance professors place on students being able to write in such a way that they are 1) defining appropriate artifacts for study through analysis and evaluation, 2) applying theory, history, and aesthetics to show how films carry meaning, and 3) creating original and plausible arguments through research, comparison, and showing the connections between society and film. The syllabi also suggest a tendency toward more discipline-specific writing as courses progress, allowing shorter writing assignments to function as preparation for longer, research-driven papers. Finally, the syllabi

suggest a tacit pedagogical approach to disciplinary writing, with professors sometimes giving explicit, generalized writing skills throughout the documents, but more powerfully privileging theoretical, aesthetic, and historical content without clear instruction on how to put that content into written form. However, some professors do include a topic approval stage in the assignment process, providing teachers the opportunity to encourage and direct student writing toward the disciplinary norms implicitly affirmed by the learning outcomes and syllabi. While teachers may not use the conversations surrounding the approval process to explicitly acknowledge disciplinarity, the opportunity exists.

Assignment Prompts

The final corpus analyzed in this chapter is a collection of assignment prompts from undergraduate film courses. As with the learning outcomes and syllabi, these assignment prompts come from a variety of institutions, and represent assignments in both entry-level and upper-level film courses. Assignment prompts provide the most overt written expression of what and how professors expect students to write in film courses. Not surprisingly, the twenty assignment prompts used in this study further reiterate the disciplinary conventions implied in the student learning outcomes and course syllabi. The prompts, however, do add a few details about writing instruction in film classrooms not presented by the other pedagogical documents. These details include specific tips professors highlight to guide student success (often in the form of what to avoid), a tendency to provide disciplinary ideas to help thesis formulation rather than allowing students to research external sources, and a reliance on textbooks to help students prepare disciplinary arguments. Though not explicit, the tendency in these documents is toward

disciplinarity, moving students to the writing goals set by the institution of professional film studies criticism.

The first area of disciplinarity addressed in the prompts is making sure students write about an appropriate film in their essay. Most prompts handle this issue for the student, providing either a selection of films to choose from, or designating a specific film, or films, to write about.[2] A popular method to ensure students are selecting the right kinds of films is to limit selections to those already screened in class. A prompt from one course tells students they will "watch many documentaries" and that each student should choose one of those films to write about. Another course asks students to choose "a film to review from those we have watched so far in the course," even offering specific suggestions "as strong possibilities." Some assignments limit the choice of films for study even further, providing a shorter list of movies to write about. Certain assignments focus on one film, such as a "Sequence Analysis" paper where students must choose "a selected sequence from *Chungking Express*" about which to write their paper. Other assignments provide two or three films for comparison, like an essay where students had to "compare and contrast two of the following films: *Brazil*, *The Conversation*, and *Dr. Strangelove*." There are, though, courses which provide students a bit more leeway, but still encourage them "to write about films that we have seen—or will see—in class," only allowing another film "IF (and only if) your tutorial leader approves the film." Even assignments allowing students freedom to choose any film they would like offer guidance on how to select appropriately. One assignment tells students to "work with a film of your choice" while also

[2] The selection of films here includes not only discipline-appropriate specimens of study but also what instructors feel fit students at a cognitive level—films appropriate for teaching certain critical thinking or media literacy concepts to undergraduate students. It can also include films appropriate for a particular unit of study within an introductory cinema course such as national cinemas or cinematic eras.

cautioning them to choose one "that you feel merits our attention," forcing students to think about definitions of quality or meaning in their film choices. An additional example of this tactic positions appropriate films as more "difficult," telling students to choose a film they may not initially appreciate because while "films considered 'difficult' might, indeed, ask more of you as a viewer, they may also be (though not always) more substantive." Therefore, whether supplying students with a list of films or giving students more freedom about which films to utilize in their papers, assignment prompts imply a discipline-guiding level of appropriateness over the films available for analysis or evaluation.

Since the assignments often provided students with an appropriate specimen to analyze, the second aspect of disciplinarity—the application of theory, history, or aesthetics as evidence to show how films carry meaning—are the prompts' most prominent feature. This is not surprising given the emphasis the course schedule gave to covering these content categories. Based on the assignment prompt sample, the assessment of student writing in film studies classes rests heavily on applying relevant, disciplinary evidence to support an argument. In this way, the assignment prompts showcase the connections between disciplinary knowledge and writing success since knowledge of theories, historical movements, and aesthetic qualities form the evidential basis of written argumentation in film studies. A prompt for a "Film Analysis Essay" sums up many of these assignments by posing this question for the students to answer: "How do the specific cinematic techniques or elements of a film support the message or point it is making?" Other prompts repeat this sentiment, asking students to "address how style and form construct your films' meaning", analyze "how the film is put together to achieve its meanings

and effects", or explain how "the mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing and sound design work together in the sequence to underscore its themes and those of the film as a whole."

The prompts further highlight the importance of proper analysis by directing students to avoid certain non-disciplinary writing behaviors. The most common behavior the prompts ask students to avoid is to "beware of excessive plot summary at the expense of providing analysis", "avoid or minimize bare description so that you focus instead on writing an essay with well-developed and supported cinematic analysis", and "avoid description and plot summary . . . [to] focus on cinematic analysis instead." While the prompts do not say much about what makes for proper analysis in the place of plot summary, they do ask students to also avoid simply listing a film's aesthetic qualities. One prompt overtly states: "Do NOT construct your essay as a simple list of techniques and their uses." However, the more common tactic employed by the prompts is to contrast extended summary or listing aesthetic observations with developing a strong argument. Students are expected to apply theory, history, and aesthetics to a substantial argument related to a film's meaning. As stated in one of the prompts, students must "offer the reader a thesis-based argument about what you see emerging as a major issue in the film, typically with reference to specific scenes."

Though the writing prompts focus heavily on the application of historical, theoretical, and aesthetic content to a selection of films, this application rests on students being able to produce novel arguments holding the examples together. As with the student learning outcomes and course syllabi, the writing prompts connect novel argumentation with research, comparison, and society's influence on films. Research does not play a major role in most of the prompts collected for this sample. In fact, some prompts discourage students from using outside sources

for fear students will plagiarize. The most prominent example of this comes from a "Film Analysis" paper, which directly tells students the following: "DO NOT CONSULT ANY OUTSIDE SOURCES: works of criticism (books, magazines, reviews, etc.), Internet resources, term paper files, paper writing services, or DVD commentaries regarding your film. Even if you correctly cite them, you will be under suspicion of plagiarism." Other prompts are not as restrictive, but limit the use to "controlled" sources, or those used as course readings throughout the semester. These "controlled" sources could include introductory readings on film theory (gender studies, auteur studies, etc.), or professional essays related to the film(s) under analysis. An example of a course using these "controlled" sources comes from an "Analytic Essay," which warns students they "should not resort to library research, nor to research on the web (except that, of course, you are encouraged to use any resources on our course website or linked to from it)." Even though cutting students off from larger disciplinary discourse seems contrary to the clear disciplinary goals of the assignments, some prompts counteract this reality by providing discipline-specific ideas from which students can generate arguments. These ideas sometimes take the form of thematic suggestions for students to concentrate on, and other times stem from the guiding questions posed by the prompt. However, certain prompts do not provide more than an example thesis statement or a list of things to avoid to reconcile this disparity, and instead expect students to accomplish disciplinary goals without the aid of much research or disciplinary questions to explore. Most rare were prompts that encouraged research, and actually asked students to "analyze a film of your choice based on research from a specific school of literary criticism," providing a series of links for students to explore where they may find sources related to such criticism.

Even though research does not play a large role in the assignment prompts analyzed here, the use of comparison as a way to generate novel arguments does appear across several documents. This is apparent in the two courses focused on literature and film, with one seeking essays "Contrasting Porter's 'The Jilting of Granny Weatherall' with Haines' film adaptation of it" and the other asking students to "compare and contrast the way two of the following films interpret, critique, and/or re-envision *Hamlet*." Others utilize comparison to help students develop an argument about a single film, encouraging students to ask questions like "What parallel traits do the characters share?" or "How are they contrasted?" Another common tactic in the prompts is to rely on genre comparisons as a source of inspiration, and questions such as "Does the film engage with genre conventions?" or suggestions to "compare and contrast two genre films and describe its 'community of interrelated character types'" frequently appear.

The least prevalent suggestions related to novel argumentation were those asking students to explore the interrelated nature of film and culture. While this approach to novelty formed a large aspect of novel argumentation in the learning outcomes and syllabi, this sentiment rarely emerges in any overt way across the prompts. To be sure, there are certainly references to this line of argumentation smattered throughout the assignment sheets. For example, one prompt states that "In film, as with any sort of text, meaning doesn't arise 'naturally' it is made—manufactured by culture", while another recommends thinking about "critical perspectives through which we might view that work—e.g., various social issues or symbolic frameworks or cultural/historical contexts." There is also a prompt asserting students "should address the ideologies and social values that the film conveys" in their essays. Also, certain courses are structured around the cultural studies model, even if there are no overt references to cultural lines

of reasoning in the prompts, such as in courses on “Queer Cinema and Visual Culture” or “Cinema and Technology.” Overall, though, the lack of references to the influence of culture on cinema in these essay prompts is surprising given how heavily the other pedagogical documents emphasized this aspect of argumentation.

To summarize, disciplinary argumentation in the assignment prompts still points to the plausibility of arguments in research, comparison, and the interactions between film and society. There are also clear indications that students must analyze appropriate films, and that the analysis must apply theory, history, and aesthetics as the means to support argumentation. Yet, as with the other pedagogical documents, these disciplinary realities rely on students implicitly recognizing them as the overall expectations and goals of the paper. This is exacerbated by the fact that in the prompts these methods of producing disciplinary writing are, in many cases, supplied for the student rather than overtly taught. Indeed, some of the assignment prompts even tended to point students to other texts, particularly textbooks, to help them formulate quality, discipline-specific arguments as opposed to explaining these facets of disciplinary argumentation. The references to the textbooks gave professors a way to move disciplinary writing instruction away from the prompt and class discussion to a separate location for students to seek help on their own time. A certain prompt even made the bold claim “Learn about how to write essays!” before listing certain sections of different textbooks to consult, while more than one prompt encouraged students to review Corrigan’s (2015) text for suggestions on writing analytical essays about film. These textbooks, as evidenced in the next chapter of this study, do offer introductions to critical theories, provide sample student papers as guides for current students, and introduce the elements for analysis used in film studies discourse. Yet, as the next

chapter, along with the course syllabi mentioned above, also shows, these texts function on the periphery of courses—often recommended to students, but rarely required. For the moment, though, the crucial point is that the assignment prompts implicitly encourage the same disciplinary behaviors as the student learning outcomes and course syllabi, but do not necessarily include a lot of information as to how students can accomplish these tasks. Also, based on the information provided by course syllabi, very few courses block off classroom time to explicitly instruct students on how to write about film even if some do recommend readings related to the writing process.

Conclusion

Overall, the content in undergraduate-level film studies pedagogical documents strongly suggests that departments and instructors expect students to learn in a very discipline-specific manner. The documents also provide a clear connection between content knowledge and writing in film studies, with writing taking a major role in both the learning outcomes and, more practically, throughout individual courses in written assignments. These disciplinary norms show up consistently throughout the documentation even across different universities, courses, and professors, slightly contradicting the notion, at least in film studies curriculum, that there may be different disciplinary writing expectations at research universities than there are at small colleges (Schmersahl & Stay, 1992). Such consistency throughout film studies documentation provides clear evidence that the disciplinary institution of film studies shapes classroom pedagogy to a large extent. It also makes clear that, even if an individual professor seeks to foster generalized

critical thinking skills over disciplinary knowledge, student assessment remains based to some degree on an ability to function within the bounds set by the discipline.

The findings of this chapter present clear notions of what constitutes disciplinary thought and writing within film studies. Although these findings do not provide a complete picture of how film studies instructors approach the teaching of writing, they nonetheless provide clues to potential pedagogical techniques. One such clue comes from the *topoi*, and it may be good for instructors of film courses to realize the types of arguments they ask students to make, and to help students think through these types of arguments in a more overt manner. Also, teachers can utilize a more conscious recognition of what makes for novel argumentation in film studies writing, and then explicitly teach these methods throughout the duration of a course. There are also ways to structure rubrics and assignments to include assessment of how well students use the *topoi*, or meet levels of disciplinarity, in writing tasks. This study will offer more specific ideas about how to integrate what we know about film writing with classroom teaching in its concluding chapter. Clearly, though, the present situation in film classrooms necessitates that instructors and students recognize how much the norms of disciplinarity dictate classroom content and success.

CHAPTER 3

"WRITING ABOUT FILM" TEXTBOOKS

Introduction

In the previous chapter I found that course documents and student learning outcomes implicitly respond to the disciplinary problems of film criticism Bordwell (1989) identifies in *Making Meaning*. These problems, which include appropriateness, recalcitrant data, novelty, and plausibility, provide the framework for acceptable thinking and writing about cinema. The fact that course documents respond to these problems supports the idea that the major ways of doing film studies permeate the discipline to such a degree that they influence and shape pedagogy in introductory, undergraduate classrooms. While instructors of entry-level courses may not consciously incorporate disciplinary expectations into undergraduate assignments, the expectations they present to students tacitly privilege disciplinary thought and practice. Yet, though these expectations appear throughout course documents there is minimal evidence in these documents of any direct instruction to teach students how to address these expectations through writing. Writing certainly plays a major role in introductory film courses, and often a large portion of a student's grade hinges on writing performance. Aside from certain generalized writing principles, however, the course documents do not provide any clear explanation of how teachers guide students toward better writing about film.

Though learning outcomes and course documents are unclear about any explicit writing instruction taking place in film courses, certain film instructors use "writing about film" textbooks or introductory film textbooks with a dedicated "writing about film" chapter to spur

students on to greater writing success. This "writing about film" content holds an interesting place within film studies pedagogy. In one sense these texts showcase the need for quality writing instruction for film students. The most popular of these texts, Timothy Corrigan's *A Short Guide to Writing about Film* (2015), indicates this need by encouraging "a more enjoyable and articulate communication between" students and instructors by facilitating film studies-specific writing instruction (p. xi). Authors of similar textbooks have made similar claims. One of the first books designed to help foster better writing about film, *Writing About Literature and Film* (Bryan & Davis, 1975), was designed as an "effort to help the student bridge the gap between the ability to…view a film, and the ability to write about the work with some confidence" (p. vii). Other texts, such as *The Elements of Writing about Literature and Film* (McMahon, et. al., 1988), indicate somewhat loftier aims, hoping to provide everything "beginning students need to know in order to appreciate and write well about…film" (p. v). No matter the stated aims, however, each text points to a discrepancy between what instructors expect of student writing and what students actually produce for film courses. The need for better student writing in film courses has also led several introductory film textbooks to include chapters dedicated to this topic. Such chapters appear, for example, in *Engaging Cinema* (Nichols, 2010), *Film Studies: An Introduction* (Sikov, 2010), *Essential Cinema: An Introduction to Film Analysis* (Lewis, 2014), and *The Film Experience: An Introduction* (Corrigan & White, 2018). Ultimately, both dedicated "writing about film" textbooks and chapters on the subject in introductory texts provide instruction and sample student essays as a means to illustrate proper writing for undergraduate film courses. Yet, in another sense, the presence and utilization of these textbooks indicates a different discrepancy – one between need and practice. As indicated

through an analysis of syllabi in the previous chapter, few undergraduate film instructors even recommend, let alone require, students to read from these texts, and the chapters devoted to writing about the cinema in introductory texts are likewise mentioned as suggested reading material rather than a required prerequisite to classroom discussion. Additionally, there are very few "writing about film" textbooks even available, with only two such texts currently in print beyond a first edition. Corrigan's aforementioned book is in its ninth edition, as of this writing, and the text *Writing About Movies* (Gocsik, et. al, 2019) has made it to its fifth edition. Also, when compared with the number of introductory film studies textbooks available, the list of texts containing chapters on writing instruction seems severely outnumbered, and underused, in undergraduate cinema courses.

One possible explanation for the lack of "writing about film" textbooks, and instructors' minimal use of the few available texts, is that the need does not actually exist to the level indicated by the texts. This explanation, however, does not seem very plausible. Studies across the disciplines have for decades found too many significant tensions between student writing and instructor expectations for film studies to somehow escape this reality. Lillis and Turner (2001) describe student writing as being "increasingly seen as a problem" in higher education, noting "complaints about students' inability to write in the ways the academy requires" (p. 57). Others have described how often students struggle with understanding the ways they are shaped by the disciplines they encounter (Lea & Street, 1998) along with the preferences held by individual instructors (Vardi, 2000; Read, et. al., 2001; Adams & Guillot, 2008). There are also, of course, plenty of complaints surrounding students' grammatical acumen and clarity of expression (Ganobcsik-Williams, 2004; Ahmad & McMahon, 2006; Itua, et. al., 2014). Those who teach

film courses have no doubt had similar conversations with colleagues in their own offices and department meetings, listening to the latest lament on a recently submitted essay assignment. In short, film instructors often feel the same "mismatch" others across the academy feel between their own expectations for student writing and what students can produce (Hardy & Clughen, 2012, p. 25).

A more likely explanation for the small number of "writing about film" textbooks or chapters, and their lack of use in film classrooms, is the view that writing ability and content knowledge are two separate skill sets, with writing functioning merely as a way for students to showcase content knowledge. Content knowledge, in this view, becomes key to writing within a discipline as long as students already arrive in a disciplinary class with the ability to write. Russell (1991) describes the process by which the education system has "clung to the outmoded conception of writing as transcribed speech and to the vanishing ideal of a single academic community" by separating "learning and writing" (p. 5). This separation comes from viewing writing as "an elementary, mechanical skill" with "no direct relation to the goals of instruction," and, therefore, which "could be relegated to the margins of a course, a curriculum, an institution" (Russell, 1991, p. 5). Writing, according to Russell (1991), has historically been "thought of as a way to examine students, not to teach them," or as "a means of demonstrating knowledge rather than of acquiring it" (p. 6). Yet, this viewpoint also coincides with the ever-present complaints over student inability to formulate thoughts through writing. Professors who assume writing is a "generalizable, elementary skill" able to produce an "immutable standard of literacy" are "constantly disappointed when student writing fail[s] to measure up to the local, and largely tacit, standards of a particular social class, institution, discipline, or profession by which they were in

fact judging that work" (Russell, 1991, p. 6). This separation also seems to be a functional reality in many film classrooms, and the presence, though lack of widespread usage, of these textbooks provides another method to help students learn "to write" outside of the disciplinary classroom setting. The thinking goes that if students, on their own, can glean the writing skills necessary for class from a textbook, then instructors can spend class time teaching content rather than writing.

Closely tied to the separation of writing from content knowledge is the assumption of generalizable writing skills transferring from one situation to another. Writing scholars have long wrestled with the idea of transfer since many students seem to struggle transferring any writing skills they learn in, for example, a First Year Composition (FYC) course to other courses across the disciplines. Several studies have looked into the complexities of transferring writing abilities from the FYC course to later, disciplinary course work (Herrington, 1985; McCarthy, 1987; Walvoord & McCarthy, 1990; Dias, et. al., 1999; Beaufort, 2007; Yancey, et. al., 2014; Anson & Moore, 2017). Some of these studies conclude that the transfer of writing skills from one situation to another is nearly impossible, and even more "portable" skills like grammatical and syntactic ability, must be "cultivated" and "engaged" in different environments for students to be successful (Dias, et. al., 1999, p. 232). Russell (1995) uses activity theory, and the corresponding idea of activity systems, to explain the difficulty of transferring writing literacy from one situation to another. Activity theory analyzes human behavior in relation to particular activity systems which are the "basic unit[s] of analysis for both cultures' and individuals' psychological and social processes" (Russell, 1995, p. 53). An activity system is a goal-directed, historically situated, cooperative human interaction. Similar to the idea of genre systems discussed in Chapter One, people utilize particular, accepted tools within an activity system to achieve the

goals of that system. In most academic disciplines, including film studies, writing is a tool one can use to achieve the goal of adding to existing knowledge within the discipline. However, since both writing and content knowledge expectations change between disciplines, one must "acquire the genres…used by some activity field as one interacts with people involved in the activity field and the material objects and signs those people use (including those marks on the surface that we call writing)" (Russell, 1995, p. 56). Wardle (2009) summarizes the critiques against generalizable writing instruction as follows:

> The goal of teaching students to write across the university…assumes [they] can be taught ways of writing (genre and genre knowledge) that they can then transfer to the writing they do in other courses across the university. This goal and its underlying assumption, however, are complicated by the fact that the activity system of FYC is radically different from other academic activity systems in its use of writing as the object of primary attention rather than as a tool for acting on other objects of attention. Because of this difference in primary focus, the rhetorical situations of FYC courses around the country do not mirror the multiple, diverse, and complex rhetorical situations found across the university in even the most basic ways. Transfer to such varied situations is not easily accomplished (p. 766).

Film instructors expecting students to "know how to write" because those students have passed a FYC course sequence will run into a similar "transfer" problem, since film courses rely not only on specialized knowledge – which many instructors spend the majority of class time covering – but also specialized, and socialized, writing. The film studies activity system, made up of genre systems and genre sets, presents a socially constructed situation necessitating a socially appropriate response even from students in introductory film courses. This socially constructed knowledge goes beyond knowledge of theory, history, and aesthetics, but integrates interpretive rhetoric which, as Bordwell (1989) points out, is the "vehicle of the reasoning process characteristic of interpretation" and "forms the permanent basis of public critical activity" (p.

34). To more fully teach film students to write quality film papers, teachers should identify the characteristics of this public critical activity and explain what constitutes acceptable interpretive rhetoric within the field.

The *Topoi* in Film Textbooks

The "writing about film" textbooks I survey in this chapter include Bordwell's (2001) companion booklet to his well-known textbook *Film Art: An Introduction* titled *The McGraw-Hill Film Viewer's Guide*, Corrigan's (2015) oft-recommended *A Short Guide to Writing about Film*, and the most recent addition to the genre, *Writing about Movies* (Gocsik, et. al., 2019). These three texts, along with chapters from the aforementioned introductory textbooks, will provide some additional insight into the type of writing film instructors expect from students. They also give a glimpse into rhetorically acceptable writing as it relates to film studies. Written with an undergraduate film student in mind, these texts offer several clues revealing how film studies professionals view writing in their discipline, and the ways students should write in their classrooms. Much like the course documents I surveyed in the previous chapter, the "writing about film" textbooks and chapters instruct students by implicitly responding to the major problems associated with film criticism. The content of these texts, then, give students a way to start solving the problems of appropriateness, recalcitrant data, novelty, and plausibility. Also like the course documents, the texts accomplish this feat by relying on the common *topoi*, with certain *topoi* particularly suited for use within each of the problem areas. An analysis of these textbooks will reveal which common *topoi* help respond to each problem and will in many ways solidify several findings from the previous chapter. More importantly, analysis of these texts will

start exposing certain special argument types disciplinary professionals take for granted, and which most film instructors inherently reward in student papers. The presence of these special argument types shows up most prevalently in the example student papers the textbooks contain. Therefore, this chapter will analyze not only what the texts explicitly teach students about writing in film studies, but also what the texts tacitly teach about writing in this discipline.

Definition

The student outcomes and course documents provided evidence that students solve the problem of appropriateness by using the genus/definition *topoi*, particularly the tools of evaluation and analysis to define a film as holding evaluative quality or significant interpretive meaning. "Writing about film" texts also focus student attention on learning how to define a film's quality or meaning. The texts do acknowledge that different writing assignments help to shape the writer's definitional goals, and they identify three main assignment types students "typically encounter…in an introductory film course" (Bordwell, 2001, p. 12). These three assignment types include the screening report, the film review, and the analytical/argumentative essay (Bordwell, 2001, p. 12; Nichols, 2010, p. 435; Corrigan, 2015, p. 8). Of the three assignment types, the screening report accounts for the least amount of discussion within the texts. The main reason for the brevity in discussing this assignment type is that it does not fully engage with either of the definitional goals of evaluation or interpretation, and instead acts more as a "descriptive" piece "showing how the assigned film is relevant to issues being examined in the course" (Bordwell, 2001, p. 13). Screening reports also avoid "strong opinions or a particular argument" and aim "to be as objective and concrete as possible" (Corrigan, 2015, p. 8). In many

ways this assignment acts as scaffolding for future assignments and classroom discussions rather than as an introduction to disciplinary writing.[3] In fact, the screening report assignment as described in these textbooks fits the description of several writing to learn (WTL) assignments instructors used in the course documents from the previous chapter. Corrigan (2015) even writes that these assignments will "provide compelling support for discussions in class and for preparation for examinations" rather than as an entryway into discipline-specific writing (p. 9). The view in these textbooks is that writing to summarize "is useful in helping you to clarify what you know about a film," but ultimately helps to lay "the foundation for the more complex processes to come" (Gocsik, et. al., 2019, p. 10). As becomes apparent throughout the rest of the texts, these more complex processes include defining a film's evaluative quality or its significant interpretive meaning.

The next writing assignment these textbooks cover is the movie review, and the texts discuss this writing task in a bit more detail than the screening report. Unlike the screening report, the movie review does present the student with an opportunity to interact with the definition *topos* through the act of evaluation. Corrigan (2015) writes the movie review's function is to introduce "unknown films" in order to "recommend or not recommend them" (p. 9). Bordwell (2001) elaborates a bit more by saying this type of writing "is essentially a judgment about the quality of the movie, backed up with enough information to indicate that your judgment is based on good reasons" (p. 14). The information to support arguments comes from placing "the film in a larger context such as a genre, national cinema, or a director's overall oeuvre" (Nichols, 2010, p. 436). This aspect of the review – backing up a claim with support –

[3] For more discussion on scaffolding, see Applebee, A. & Langer, J. (1983) and Pea, R. (2004).

will ultimately lead to the cause/effect *topos*, but for now it is important to realize that the goal of the writing assignment is definitional. Though evaluation does require the finding and articulation of "the reasons for your personal response," knowledge about film aesthetics, history, or theory is simply the means to provide support for definitional claims (Gocsik, et. al., 2019, p. 10). These definitional claims, though, fit into a fairly consistent format matching reader expectations for film reviews. Bordwell (2001) states there "must be a brief plot synopsis" which suggests "the main conflicts and character developments" of the movie in question, along with a spotlight on the "striking aspects of the film," comparison with "other films which belong to the same genre, which belong to the same filmmaker, or which raise similar thematic issues," and must be brief given the constraints of publishing (pp. 14-15). None of the texts, however, elaborate much on these conventions of film reviewing, nor do they provide in-depth instruction on what constitutes a quality film. Both Bordwell (2001) and Corrigan (2015) do offer a short excerpt from a professional review to show how the professionals offer "vivid descriptions" (Bordwell, 2001, p. 15) or show a "clear sense of…audience" (Corrigan, 2015, p. 10), but no explicit instruction on how students can achieve similar results. In many ways, the texts place the film review as another steppingstone toward the more scholarly analytical essay. This this effect, Nichols (2010) states it is "criticism rather than reviewing" which is "the expected form of writing" in most film study courses (p. 436). This could be because, like the screening report, much of the film review "is devoted to summarizing the plot" rather than interpreting implicit or symptomatic meanings (Corrigan, 2015, p. 9), causing instructors to view such writing as easier for students to accomplish. No matter the reason, discussion of writing movie reviews takes up far less space than instructions on writing analytical essays.

While the "writing about film" textbooks devote some space to summative and evaluative writing, the most prominent instruction revolves around analytical writing. That the analytical essay accounts for the most detailed descriptions in the texts is not surprising since the course documents also showed a similar preference for analytical essay writing. Not only were analytical essays worth the highest percentage of a student's grade in course syllabi, but teachers also seemed to use other writing assignments as preparation for analytical writing. Analytical essays also provide students the opportunity to utilize interpretive skills to define a film's significant meaning. The course documents provided evidence that finding the implicit or symptomatic meanings of films was a major objective in film courses, and these textbooks only solidify such conclusions. Interpretation's place within film studies helps to shape the way students are to view film, and the "writing about film" textbooks present film as being a whole made up of individual parts ready for viewers to analyze. As one text puts it, analytical thought and writing means breaking "the whole into parts so that you might see the whole differently" (Gocsik, et. al., 2019, p. 12). While some "parts may be intriguing in themselves…the film operates as a total system," with each part only gaining "its full meaning in that context" (Bordwell, 2001, p. 1). Ultimately, this search for the "full meaning" of the whole work results in the identification and definition of a film's theme. One of the texts tells students to "consider the parts of your topic that most interest you, and then examine how these parts…contribute to the film's theme" (Gocsik, et. al., 2019, p. 11). Corrigan (2015) also encourages his readers to "identify the major themes of the movie, which often comes down to stepping back and asking what this film is 'about'" (p. 37). Analytical writing, then, becomes a way to "help other viewers understand the movie" under consideration, allowing the writer to define and uncover implicit

meaning to others (Bordwell, 2001, p. 18), moving "past what would be obvious to anyone seeing the film" (Lewis, 2010, p. 290). Part of the disciplinary process for film students is figuring out how to analyze film for these "hidden" meanings. Writers of analytical essays hope "to reveal subtleties or complexities that may have escaped viewers on the first or even the second viewing" (Corrigan, 2015, p. 12), finding "underlying meanings" which "fade into the background" or become "invisible" to the untrained viewer (Gocsik, et. al., 2019, p. 31). The more advanced a viewer becomes, the thinking goes, the more easily they can uncover these hidden meanings.

Viewing a film as a whole made up of individual, analyzable parts which contain implicit or symptomatic meanings connects film study with other interpretive enterprises and, most particularly, with literary studies. In fact, the "writing about film" textbook has its origins as a subset of the "writing about literature" textbook, and the titles of three now out-of-print texts highlight this relationship, with *Writing About Literature and Film* (Bryan & Davis, 1975), *The Elements of Writing about Literature and Film* (McMahon, et. al., 1988), and *Ways In: Approaches to Reading and Writing about Literature and Film* (Muller & Williams, 2003) serving as the progenitors of the genre. Therefore, an important point to make about "writing about film" textbooks is the inherent view these texts contain that film studies is a branch of, or at least akin to, literary studies, and that writing about film resembles writing about literature. Though often mentioning the differences between literature and film (Bryan & Davis, 1975, p. 153), these out-of-print texts all seem to find more similarities than differences, showing how "often literary terms and approaches can be applied to the study of film" (McMahan, et. al., 1988, p. 54). The connection between literature and film is not surprising given film's history

within the academy, typically entering university settings through literature departments. This connection also explains interpretation becoming the main focus of film studies scholarship, with films becoming "texts" scholars could "read," ultimately "transmitting interpretive values and skills" from literary study to film study (Bordwell, 1989, p. 17).

Cause/Effect

Film studies' preference for analytical and interpretive writing also helps explain the "writing about film" textbooks' emphasis on solving the second problem of film criticism, which is the problem of recalcitrant data. As I discussed in chapter 1, the problem of recalcitrant data is solved at the cause/effect *topos* and utilizes evidence from three major areas of inquiry: film aesthetics, history, and theory. As Lewis (2014) states, film assignments "offer the opportunity to think deeply about how a film works," and such "deep and close analysis forms the foundation for a critical interpretation or reading of a film that is built upon its formal content and/or its cultural, industrial, or historical contexts" (p. 283). Writers then use the evidence from these areas to support their previously defined claims about a film's quality and meaning. The textbooks support this idea. Students are supposed to look for "specific examples of cinematic language that will support the principle idea of" their paper (Gocsik, et. al., 2019, p. 33) and are told "sharp analysis" demands fine "distinctions about the historical, stylistic, and structural presentations of" a particular "theme in each movie" (Corrigan, 2015, p. 38). Much of the content in the "writing about film" textbooks relate to this issue of helping students recognize the formal, historical, and theoretical evidence they can use to support their claims. The hope espoused in the texts is that an increased knowledge of film language will allow students "to

view a movie more accurately and formulate" their "perceptions more easily" so they can discuss their "subject with precision and subtlety" (Corrigan, 2015, p. 36). A large section of these texts focuses on the formal and cultural elements of film study, introducing students to terminology and ways of thinking about film. Both *Writing about Movies* (Gocsik, et. al., 2019) and *A Short Guide to Writing about Film* (Corrigan, 2015) include sections devoted to the tools of analysis, presenting an overview of topics such as narrative, cinematography, mise-en-scène, acting, editing, sound, theory, history, and genre. In many ways these sections reiterate, or reproduce, the content found in introductory film studies textbooks, which focus mainly on the tools for analysis. According to the course syllabi surveyed in Chapter Two, these are also the topics instructors most frequently teach during class lectures, guiding students through the process of interpretation and analysis. Clearly the tools for film analysis hold a very high place in film pedagogy and function as the building blocks for disciplinary writing on the cinema.

The textbooks also suggest several brainstorming techniques to get students thinking about the cause/effect relationships between content and theme. One such technique is drawing up a segmentation, or a sequence-by-sequence breakdown, of the film in question. Bordwell (2001) views this tactic as "the best way to grasp the overall shape of the movie" since it often will "suggest things that will support or help you nail down your thesis" (pp. 18-19). Corrigan (2015, 2018) offers similar advice when he heralds note-taking and written reflection during and after viewing a movie. He says methodical "notes allow a viewer to map accurately what happens in a movie, to record details about the subject and its meaning that would otherwise soon fade from memory," and also allows writers to support "ideas with concrete descriptions from the movie" to make arguments "dramatically more convincing" (p. 35). The texts also

provide questions to help students think through how certain formal or cultural elements could impact meaning. A selection of questions taken from the texts reveals the goal of moving from individual film elements to an interpretive meaning of the whole film. For example:

- If the film does not seem organized as a story, what seems to be the model for its organization…How does that model suggest a way to understand the film? (Corrigan, 2015, p. 44)
- Does the movie use restricted narration to limit the viewer's perspective? If so, what is the effect on the viewer's understanding? (Gocsik, et. al., 2019, p. 41)
- Do the objects and props in the setting, whether natural ones or artificial ones, have a special significance that relates to the characters or story? (Corrigan, 2015, p. 51)
- How do rhythmic shifts and patterns affect mood and meaning? (Gocsik, et. al., 2019, pp. 48-49)
- Does the camera frame ever seem unbalanced in relation to the space and action? …Is it meant to recreate the perspective of a drunk, or might it be a more subtle way of commenting, for instance, on a community that lacks harmony and balance? (Corrigan, 2015, p. 62)
- Are sounds that occur off-screen a cue to cut to reveal the source of the sound, or are the sounds allowed to remain out of view? For what reason? (Nichols, 2010, p. 446)
- Are people of a particular class portrayed negatively (or positively) in this movie? If so, what seems to be the point of that portrayal? (Gocsik, et. al., 2019, p. 60)

- What is the relation of the sound to the image in specific scenes or sequences? How might the answer to that question be refined to reveal the aims, achievements, or even failures of sound in the movie? (Corrigan, 2015, p. 74)

These questions, and many others in the textbooks, clearly utilize the cause/effect *topos* to spur interpretive analysis of individual films. The questions also aid the process Bordwell (2001) lays out when he tells his readers to "identify salient techniques, trace out patterns of techniques across the whole film, and propose functions for those techniques" which will "often support or refine your thesis" (p. 20). Therefore, the interpretive theme helps to drive the types of evidence writers notice when watching movies, and the evidence helps form the cause/effect relationship necessary to produce analytical argumentation.

So far, I have outlined how the "writing about film" textbooks tackle the problems of appropriateness and recalcitrant data, showing how the texts focus heavily on the tools of analysis and interpretation to guide student thinking about movies. This emphasis pretty clearly confirms the evidence from course documents and student learning outcomes that defining the evaluative quality and interpretive meaning of films constitutes a major goal not only of cinema studies, but specifically writing within cinema studies. At this point it is important to note, before turning any attention to how "writing about film" chapters and textbooks handle the problems of novelty and plausibility, why discussion about novelty and plausibility is so crucial to writing instruction within the discipline. Notice that, thus far, the texts have instructed students to identify significant interpretive meaning hidden within a film and provided a brief overview of how to connect salient features of a film to support such meaning. Missing from the discussion up until now, though, has been any overt acknowledgment of what constitutes significant

meaning, or the types of movies containing such meaning. The authors of these textbooks have clearly explained *that* students must identify meaning, and *that* meaning needs supporting evidence. However, there has been no explicit instruction about *what* makes any particular meaning significant. In other words, professors will not view every meaning a student finds in a film as significant and will not see every student argument about a film's aesthetic choices as resulting in a quality paper. To convince a reader of these things means doing more than merely defining meaning or quality. It also means doing more than simply supplying those definitions with support through concrete illustrations from the movies in question. Eventually, students must make rhetorical moves adhering in some way to the socially acceptable and acknowledged ways of argumentation in the film studies activity system.

It is clear these textbooks recognize the socially constructed nature of film discourse, and that proper writing about movies takes its audience into account. Of the texts, *Writing about Movies* (Gocsik, et. al., 2019) positions academic writing about film most firmly within its social context. The book tells students they "will need to make and support [their] claims according to the customary expectations of the academic community," not only by familiarizing themselves "with the scholarly conversation before" writing, but also by building "on existing knowledge" so as not to "replicate what is known or what has already been said" (pp. 5-7). The goal of film writing is to "come up with fresh observations" rather than "summarize in a paper what's obvious, or what's already known and discussed," thereby adding "something new, something of your own, to the ongoing scholarly conversation" (Gocsik, et. al., 2019, p. 7). Corrigan (2015) likewise guides students to "situate a film within the larger tradition of film history and analysis" because a "good essay is one that reveals intuitive, careful, and discriminating thinking" that

attends “to what might normally escape a normal viewer and listener” (pp. 36, 73). Rather than settling for “oversimplified and inapplicable moral[s]” when deciding on a film’s theme, the texts encourage novel and original argumentation (Corrigan, 2015, p. 38). Nichols (2010) goes so far as to warn against “repeating commonsensical ‘what everybody knows’ generalities that pass for knowledge” which runs “the risk of turning a deaf ear to particulars, to the specific issues and formal qualities that arise in a concrete context” (p. 443). Novelty, then, is an important component of film studies argumentation, even at an undergraduate level. The texts also tie novelty to disciplinary knowledge students can only showcase through specific, acceptable argument types connected to research since academic “writing is often viewed as a conversation among scholars in which ideas are shared and debated” (Lewis, 2014). According to the textbooks, quality student writing recognizes the cinema studies discourse community and makes novel arguments which add to the established discourse.

Comparison/Contrast and Circumstance

“Writing about film” chapters and textbooks help address the problem of novelty with the same *topos* the course documents used to address this problem – namely, by utilizing the *topos* group of similitude/contraries/comparison, the *topos* of circumstance, and the testimony/authority *topos*. Both Corrigan (2015) and Gocsik, et. al. (2019) identify several approaches students can use when writing about film, and the approaches invariably use these *topoi* to create essay ideas. The approaches to writing about cinema include national cinemas, genre, auteurs, history, and ideology (Corrigan, 2015, pp. 83-96; Gocsik, et. al., 2019, pp. 35-100). These approaches also connect very closely with those I identified throughout course

documents as the areas of inquiry most helpful when solving the problem of novelty. Therefore, both the textbooks and the course documents suggest these particular methods when trying to create original arguments in film studies.

National Cinemas

The most common *topos* the authors use in the textbooks are those related to comparison. This *topos* shows up most prominently when discussing approaches related to national cinemas, genres, and auteurs, but also appears throughout the other approaches as well. Corrigan (2015) makes use of this *topos* when he describes the process a writer goes through in deciding on a topic related to national cinemas. He suggests the writer "might begin by questioning…what exactly distinguishes these [foreign] films from the American ones with which" the writer "is familiar," and that such an approach may even imply "a unity or a fundamental similarity between many different films from a country" (Corrigan, 2015, pp. 87-88). When studying national cinemas, a student can also ask if a film was "made as part of a particular film movement" or if it breaks "from the prevailing tradition of the period" (Gocsik, et. al., 2019, p. 97). Comparing films with others both within the same national cinema or across national cinemas gives writers an entry point whereby they can place individual movies within larger groups.

Genre

Not surprisingly, approaching a film through the lens of genre likewise appeals to the comparison *topos*. Not only are genres known as categories "for classifying film in terms of

common patterns of form and content," but they also provide opportunities to study how particular genres have "changed through history," if certain movies "fit the genre it seems to be placed in," and if a film holds a "strange self-consciousness" in its "use of generic formulas" (Corrigan, 2015, pp. 88-89). Genre films "often fulfill some expectations while surprising and subverting others," making them ripe for comparative analysis (Gocsik, et. al., 2019, p. 81). Comparisons within and across genres, then, create another avenue for students to approach cinema studies discourse.

Auteur Criticism

While the approaches of national cinemas and genre criticism mostly focus on comparisons between films made by different directors across time and location, auteur criticism attempts to find commonalities between films made by the same director, star, producer, or screenwriter. This approach uses comparison as a way to "understand the common themes and aesthetic decisions in films by the same director (or producer, or star)" to identify the creative visionary behind those films (Gocsik, et. al., 2019, p. 93). Like national cinemas and genres, comparative analysis through the lens of the auteur clearly provides the basis for novel argumentation about cinema. The comparison *topos* give writers ways to find evidence to support definitional claims about a film or filmmaker's place within a national cinema, genre, or artistic canon.

History and Ideology

The comparative *topos* also play a role in historical and ideological approaches to film studies, but often these comparisons give way to arguments of circumstance relating films to society. The course documents used the circumstance *topos* to show how cinema influences society as well as how society influences the cinema. The textbooks also include these influences, though they tend to preference the latter, showing how filmmakers are "products of the same society inhabited by their intended audience" and "may be just as oblivious of the cultural attitudes shaping their cinematic stories as the people who watch them" (Gocsik, et. al, 2019, p. 56). When providing example historical topics to explore, for example, Corrigan (2015) suggests examining the "relationship of films to their conditions of production, perhaps allowing a writer to make connections between American films of the 1980s and the trend during those years toward the ownership of studios by large corporations like Gulf+Western or TransAmerica" (p. 84). Such an approach would certainly compare films during that time period but would ultimately make a circumstantial argument about how the cultural situation invariably influenced the themes and topics explored within those films. Historical changes in technology and acting styles have also played a large role in film history, and the texts suggest comparison of these historical developments as the starting place for inquiry. However, these comparisons also move to the *topos* of circumstance since any such comparison would "examine the circumstances surrounding the development of each technological advance" to illumine how social innovation changed cinematic presentation (Gocsik, et. al., 2019, p. 93).

Ideological approaches to film follow the same pattern in the textbooks. The textbook authors propose comparisons between the content of films and dominant ideologies of culture to

stimulate thought, then ultimately lead the student to conclusions based on arguments from circumstance. For instance, Corrigan (2015) suggests a study of "Hollywood hegemony" which would "focus on how classical film formulas dominate and sometimes distort ways of seeing the world" (p. 94). A study of this sort would clearly present filmmaking both as strongly influential over audiences and as inescapably subject to cultural norms. *Writing about Movies* (Gocsik, et. al., 2019) captures this tension between the two major arguments from circumstance by saying "any work of art may work against some aspects of the dominant power structure" even though "the very powerful pull of one's social milieu prevents even the most radical artist from breaking entirely free from accepted ideas and expressions" (p. 59).

Clearly, novel argumentation in the "writing about film" textbooks depends heavily on disciplinary knowledge and disciplinary thought. Encouraging students to use the comparative *topos* when writing about movies implies students must gain a knowledge of film history, genres, and auteurs to use for comparison. Emphasizing the *topos* of circumstance implies students must gain a knowledge of ideological theory in order to compare films with society in some way, while also implying certain types of argumentation students should use to draw conclusions from those comparisons. Instructors will certainly cover some of this knowledge during course lectures and discussions. Faculty typically structure introductory film courses around these content areas and provide students with foundational information whereby students can begin making comparisons. However, evidence from these textbooks suggest students must move beyond simple comparisons and toward academic, disciplinary arguments. These disciplinary arguments use the *topos* of circumstance and comparison as lenses to help find cause/effect evidence from particular moments in a movie which then lead to definitional claims about a

film's symptomatic or implicit meaning. Viewing the process in this way helps to reveal the disciplinary expectations inherent in film courses, and also presents writing as more than a set of grammatical and organizational guidelines. Good writing in cinema classes recognizes and responds to the socially constructed norms of the field.

Testimony/Authority

Students also gain an ability to recognize disciplinary norms and present novel arguments through research, and the textbooks promote this view. As mentioned above, "writing about film" textbooks clearly state a preference for original arguments advancing disciplinary thought. They also advocate for continuing ongoing disciplinary conversations, which "is a normal part of any academic discipline, including film study" (Nichols, 2010, p. 456). These statements, along with sections devoted to the research process, show the importance of the testimony/authority *topos* when writing about movies. Corrigan (2015) does make a distinction between the amount of research needed when doing evaluative as opposed to analytical writing. He writes that "those in the first camp" writing movie reviews "interpret a film through their own analysis and feelings about the value of the movie, and researching material other than what is on the screen is usually considered unnecessary" (p. 128). In contrast, those in the second camp writing analytical essays feel that "understanding a movie involves a significant amount of research into the ideas and historical background that have determined what appears on the screen" (p. 128). Nichols (2010) likewise mentions the "amount of research needed" for a particular essay "will vary" as some "instructors prefer for beginning film students to rely on their powers of observation rather than derive ideas and arguments from others" (p. 456). Of course, the content of the textbooks has

shown an overwhelming preference for analytical writing and, therefore, a preference for writing involving research. While research provides an avenue into disciplinary argumentation, students must be careful when using that research. The texts warn students of the "grave mistake" many make "when they write their first academic papers" by "not writing an informed argument of their own but rehashing what has already been said on a topic" (Gocsik, et. al., 2019, p. 131). Again, novelty is an important, driving factor in the use of research, and writing for film maintains an argumentative, rather than informative, purpose. The texts also warn it is "important to remember that research is not simply the accumulation of information to decorate or fill out a paper," but students must instead discern "what information supports [their] argument or thesis" (Lewis, 2014, p. 292). Therefore, good writing does not "just accumulate 'dry facts' or cover theoretical issues that have little to do with why we like or dislike a film," but are instead "based on a desire to throw more light on what certain movies mean or why we value them" (Corrigan, 2015, p. 129). Research aids a student's ability to respond within the bounds of the socially situated activity system. These quotes reveal the end goal of the research is again definitional, helping a writer provide more evidence when defining a film's significant meaning or evaluative quality.

Generalized Writing Skills

At this point, the complex nature of disciplinary writing should be clear. To achieve this level of disciplinarity, students must advance a discipline-specific argument by considering previous disciplinary research, comparatively viewing a film through a disciplinary lens, identifying salient features of a film by understanding disciplinary terminology, and showing

how those features cause a film to contain an implicit or symptomatic meaning. Every aspect of this process utilizes a different common *topos*, and each *topos* aids in solving a separate problem associated with disciplinary writing. Yet, though the common *topoi* aid in the disciplinary writing process, they still do not provide answers to exactly which films count as appropriate specimens for study, or the types of interpretations those within the discipline view as original and plausible. The "writing about film" textbooks have certainly provided more explicit instruction than the course documents on formulating essay topics and finding evidence to support such topics. However, these texts ultimately arrive at a similar place to the course documents, which is that the amassing of content knowledge should lead to quality writing. The texts suggest the more a student knows about film genres, film history, auteurs, aesthetics, and theory, the better that student will write papers. Interestingly, the textbooks acknowledge this is not always the reality for instructors and students. Corrigan (2015) opens his book by telling of instructors who "must increasingly puzzle over and bemoan those enthusiastic students who seem to know so much and are brimming with things to say about the movies but who write confused and disappointing papers" (p. xiii). Students like the one Corrigan describes here may know the content covered in a film course but still have trouble articulating or identifying disciplinary arguments. Since neither the course documents or the textbooks include explicit instruction on what constitutes disciplinary argumentation, students must still come about this knowledge tacitly and, therefore, may struggle turning their content knowledge into acceptable disciplinary writing.

The textbooks recognize there must be something besides content knowledge keeping students from writing quality papers, and since introductory film textbooks, classroom lectures,

and these "writing about film" textbooks cover disciplinary content, the assumption is that students have just never learned how to write. In other words, the problem keeping students from developing quality papers seems to be the absence of generalized writing skills. To combat this issue the authors of "writing about film" chapters and textbooks reserve some of their texts to cover the writing process. The more formal writing instruction components in the texts approach writing about film as "similar to writing on any subject" in that "you must choose a topic, generate ideas, research your topic, craft a thesis, structure your argument, and find the proper tone" (Gocsik, et. al., 2019, p. 103). In providing an overview of the writing process the authors hope to offer "guidelines" that will "sketch many of the fundamental steps and tools underlying good writing" (Corrigan, 2015, p. 108). The textbooks then provide "general advice" commonly found in a FYC textbooks (Gocsik, et. al., 2019, p. 103) since the "actual writing of the essay involves guidelines that are basic to all writing and are important to rehearse and recall frequently" (Corrigan, 2015, p. 111). Some of these guidelines include defining a thesis as "the central claim your argument advances" (Bordwell, 2001, p. 18), encouraging writers to "keep the diction fresh and varied" rather than using a "lazy or uncontrolled repetition of words" (Corrigan, 2015, p. 113), to "remember the cardinal rule of good writing: be clear" (Sikov, 2010, p. 185), and to "think about what purpose you want the paragraph to serve, and then…come up with an organizational strategy that will help your paragraph to achieve that purpose" (Gocsik, et. al., 2019, p. 160). There are certainly moments when the textbooks revisit some of the common *topoi* during these writing sections to help foster ideas, and *Writing about Movies* (Gocsik, et. al., 2019) even lists them as a way to generate thesis topics (pp. 112-115). There are also moments when the authors remind students about the importance of disciplinary

argumentation, though these mostly come in the form of general reminders about attending to audience expectations (Sikov, 2010, p. 171; Corrigan, 2015, p. 109; Gocsik, et. al., 2019, p. 146). Overall, however, the sections covering the writing process support the notion that the ability to write is a generalizable skillset transferrable to different disciplines. The structure and content of these textbooks seems to argue that if a student knows about film, and knows how to write, a student should be able to write competently about film.

Student Papers and Special Argument Types

Generalized writing instruction and continued knowledge of cinema studies can certainly aide students in writing better papers, and the "writing about film" textbooks utilization of the common *topoi* definitely provide ways to stimulate thought and argumentation. Yet one way to help students gain a better understanding of specific disciplinary arguments is through the introduction of special argument types. The special argument types act as a gallery of commonly agreed upon thoughts and values from which writers can pull to achieve readily acceptable disciplinary arguments. Undoubtedly, knowledge of these argument types comes through experience. Several years studying and researching film genres or film history, for example, would result in easier identification of what makes for legitimate film studies arguments. This experience explains why film professors and instructors, who have spent many years reading and writing about cinema, inherently know how to identify appropriate films to study and how to make and recognize novel argumentation. It also explains why these instructors believe teaching the content as outlined in the course documents and "writing about film" textbooks would result in quality, disciplinary writing. As mentioned above, the course content and writing taught in

introductory film courses depends on the full range of common *topoi*. When those who have amassed disciplinary knowledge and understand disciplinary argumentation wittingly, or unwittingly, use the common *topoi*, what results are arguments found in the form of special argument types. The "writing about film textbooks" provide evidence for this when the authors share examples with readers. For example, when a film studies scholar looks for a cause/effect connection between an aesthetic component (credit sequences) and a film's theme, the result is as follows: "David Fincher wanted to set up anxiety in the spectator from the start, especially since the villain appears rather late in the film, so he commissioned graphic designer Kyle Cooper to create fast-cut, scratch-and-burn credits which suggest mutilation and madness" (Bordwell, 2001, p. 2). The following special argument types, and the corresponding common *topoi*, are implied in this list:

- Skilled directors can control the message in a movie through artistic choices (similitude/contraries and definition)
- Audiences respond to aesthetic choices made by directors (cause/effect)
- Narrative films follow certain patterns, but certain aesthetic choices can make-up for changes to those patterns (similitude/contraries)
- The most important themes are those which relate to the human experience (definition and similitude/contraries)

Similar special argument types appear in the professional examples Corrigan (2015) uses throughout his text. Here is one section from a John Hess article on *The Godfather Part II* Corrigan (2015) includes in his textbook: "Coppola builds up, interweaves, and finally destroys four levels of familial affiliations…Through careful juxtaposition, he shows how each strives

unsuccessfully to create an ideal community. In all cases, the needs of business destroy whatever communal aspects these associations might provide. In fact, it is the very effort to conserve and support these families that becomes corrupted by business and destroys them" (p. 93). Some special argument types appearing in this sample include:

- Skilled directors can control the message in a movie through artistic choices (similitude/contraries and definition)
- Narratives carry implicit meanings which may escape a normal viewer (definition)
- The most important themes are those which relate to the human experience (definition and similitude/contraries)
- Contemporary society shapes film content, and the best filmmakers challenge the norms of contemporary society (circumstance)

While professionals can easily formulate disciplinary arguments, students have a much harder time recognizing and utilizing special argument types. Yet, instructors tend to reward students who use the special argument types in their essays. These argument types are not ready-made arguments students can just plug into papers without critical thought to receive high marks on an essay. As Bordwell (2001) writes, "there is no formula for writing incisive and enlightening film analyses" (p. 25). There are, though, types of arguments connected with the disciplinary thought of film studies, and knowledge of these argument types can aid students in the writing process.

One way to identify some of the special argument types instructors tend to reward in student writing is to analyze the examples from student papers included within the "writing about film" chapters and textbooks. The authors of the texts present these student papers as quality examples other students should follow when writing their own papers. The most common special

topos in the samples is that contemporary society shapes film content, and the best filmmakers challenge the norms of contemporary society. This *topos* appears very clearly in a student essay on the film *M* (1931). The student argues the film "seems to work as a mirror image of the rise of fascism in Germany, but in reflecting that rise, the film may be most important as an attempt to expose it to the German audience that was so involved in fascism and its growth" (Corrigan, 2015, p. 97). This sentence captures both the argument from circumstance surrounding society's influence over film content, but also an argument of comparison showing how films can challenge the widespread beliefs of society in the hands of capable filmmakers. Another example from a student essay on *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) makes a similar argument. The student states that director Arthur "Penn, through the self-conscious style he supposedly learned from the French New Wave, is offering a complicated commentary on modern images of violence in America and a disturbing critique of how Americans have escaped into those images, especially during the sixties" (Corrigan, 2015, p. 152). This argument again shows how important films break free from societal norms and challenge mainstream thought and practice. Rather than being just a product of its time, *Bonnie and Clyde* challenges the norms of its day. A third essay, this one on *King of Comedy* (1982), connects 1980s America's obsession with fame and celebrity to the film's main character and argues that celebrity worship often blends fantasy and reality. In the paper the student argues that "Martin Scorsese definitely manipulated stylistic elements of *The King of Comedy* to successfully craft a film in which the line between fantasy and reality is blurred not only for the character but for the viewer as well" (Bordwell, 2001, p. 31). Such an argument likewise elevates films and filmmakers challenging what they see as societal ills. This argument type also works when attempting to point out films which simply reflect the social

status quo. In an essay on *Ordinary People* (1980), a student claims this "supposedly honest and impartial movie can be viewed as a careful construction of women as agents of disaster or failure…seen and shown from a male perspective in which they function mainly to devastate and disrupt the already shaky state of the film's protagonist" (Corrigan, 2015, p. 102). For this student, the film fails because it fears the influence of women and excludes them in the same way the American male-dominated society does, and it does this without questioning or challenging this reality.

Another special *topos* in the student papers views important films as those which challenge generic and narrative conventions. One student essay sees the content of *The Searchers* (1956) "surpass" its literary forebearer mainly because the main character "grows much more complicated" than the "fairly traditional western hero" of the novel (Corrigan, 2015, pp. 78-79). This anti-traditional movie hero has "a mysterious and possibly criminal past," "struggles with the turbulent dangers of sexual desire," and "is clearly a racist," all of which makes "Ford's version of the story…a much more troubling and disturbing," and therefore interesting, version than the more traditional novel (Corrigan, 2015, pp. 80-81). This challenge to generic conventions coincides with a challenge to narrative conventions. While the film "proceeds as a linear quest" and is "ultimately resolved in a classical manner," a "counter-current within this linear, forward plot…is an interior search that seems to move backward and inward in the film, investigating Ethan's twisted mind and dark past" (Corrigan, 2015, p. 79). The student essay on *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) also uses this *topos*, claiming the film "is more than a gangster film" since these "public enemies never seem to demonstrate any of the real malice or the professional confidence associated with the James Cagney variety of gangster" and "the world they live in

lacks all the glamour of a gangster's world" (Corrigan, 2015, p. 152). Though the student ultimately ties these generic differences back to the social implications of the film, the challenges to genre conventions further solidify the film as significant.

Both the argument types listed above rely on another pair of film-specific arguments apparent throughout the student essays. These argument types stem from the belief that important filmmakers and films purposefully shape a film's meaning while less important filmmakers and films simply reflect society. The difference in these arguments relies upon the difference between implicit and symptomatic meaning. Implicit meanings imply filmmakers "know more or less what" they are doing, purposefully inserting clues throughout a film which viewers can discover to uncover a thematic meaning (Bordwell, 1989, p. 9). Symptomatic meanings, however, are unconsciously included in a film, and are normally "traced to economic, political, or ideological processes" which have more control over the meaning of a film than the filmmakers (Bordwell, 1989, p. 9). Film viewers must uncover both types of meanings, but they frame the source of each meaning differently. The student essays frame filmmakers as the source of implicit meanings, showing how certain "motifs are central to *M*" which draw "from that expressionist tradition in which Lang himself worked during the 1920s" (Corrigan, 2015, p. 99), or that "Scorsese uses aspects of style to create a coherent fantasy that is easily recognizable as such" (Bordwell, 2001, p. 27), or that "Fincher introduces this incendiary character with a subtle but profound tracking movement that reveals much more than it appears to at first" (Sikov, 2010, p. 170). Instances like these show thematic meanings emanating from the creative mind and artistic power of the filmmaker. When films present symptomatic meanings, however, the student papers frame intent differently. The paper on *Ordinary People* (1980) concludes with the

following: “The point is obvious, even if unintentional: If an intimate two-shot with a male is the test of an honest reality, in *Ordinary People* women are clearly excluded from it and the reality it represents” (Corrigan, 2015, p. 107). An essay on *The Big Sleep* (1946) makes a similar argument, claiming the film version of the story eschews “the novel’s cynicism and misogyny” to cater to “the market necessities of popular moviemaking” and provide an ending “1940s audience[s] wanted” even though it “imposes a false class reconciliation to a story that had otherwise insisted upon a world characterized by class differences and struggle” (Lewis, 2014, p. 308). From these examples it becomes clear that while certain films and filmmakers control the underlying messages through artistic prowess, others cannot avoid the overpowering influence of social conventions and unintentionally adhere to culturally manufactured messages.

The student essays contain one additional special *topos*, which is that important films make their audience work. There are examples of this sentiment across the sample, with one film making “it difficult…to say whether Beckert is an evil madman or a victim of some force that runs through the whole society” (Corrigan, 2015, p. 100), another which “doesn’t hand over a clear and concise ending…but instead forces the viewer to earn it” (Bordwell, 2001, p. 29), and another producing a “confused and contradictory response” which is “an indication that it achieved its aim” to “untrap” its “audience through its self-conscious and graphic assault on them” (Corrigan, 2015, p. 154). In each case the student presents the films and filmmakers as purposefully challenging audience expectations, forcing viewers toward intellectual stimulation and personal reflection. Audiences must work to understand and wrestle with the themes presented in such films, making the films worthy of study and appropriate to write about.

These special argument types are not unique to this study, nor are they unique to the student papers included in these "writing about film" chapters and textbooks. In fact, most of them show up, in one form or another, on Bordwell's (1989) list of special argument types in *Making Meaning* (p. 211). The presence of these arguments in the student essays does, though, reveal how socially integrated student work is within an introductory course to the disciplinary expectations of film studies. Successful writing in an undergraduate film course means doing more than having a growing understanding of aesthetic terms and theoretical concepts. It is also more firmly grounded within a particular activity system than instruction in general writing skills can provide. Rather, quality writing in film classrooms depends on the use of certain argument types familiar to those who work in the discipline professionally. By including these student essays, the authors of "writing about film" textbooks implicitly teach novel and plausible writing in undergraduate coursework as writing that includes discipline-specific and discipline-accepted argumentation. These special argument types more fully answer the question of novelty and plausibility than general interaction with the common *topoi* explicitly taught throughout the texts, and commonly taught in undergraduate classrooms. The special argument types actually provide disciplinary ways to answer the questions posed at the common *topoi* and would lead to more acceptable and appropriate disciplinary arguments for students to explore and write about.

An important point to remember is that the special argument types listed above are also representative rather than exhaustive. Film studies professionals use other special argument types in their writing as well and identifying the special argument types of professionals in the discipline will provide a more complete arsenal for students to explore and include in their own writing. The next chapter will analyze professional documents to find these special argument

types and will hopefully establish more connections between scholarly arguments and the unstated expectations instructors have for student writers.

CHAPTER 4

PROFESSIONAL DOCUMENTS

Professional Writing in Film Studies

The previous chapters have shown how disciplinary norms implicitly dictate film studies classroom practice, including the expectations surrounding writing assignments. Pedagogical documents provided plenty of evidence to show the interconnectedness of disciplinary knowledge and writing practice within the film studies curriculum. Though departments and professors may not explicitly realize how much the norms of the discipline influence day to day classroom pedagogy, the content found in student learning outcomes, course syllabi, and assignment prompts all imply disciplinarity as a goal for students, even at the introductory level. This study has also shown that the textbooks available for instructors to use in teaching students how to write in film studies also advocate a certain level of disciplinarity, encouraging students to think and write for a disciplinary audience. The textbooks all address the major problems of film criticism and encourage students to analyze and interpret movies through a very discipline-specific lens, utilizing the full range of common *topoi* in the process. To these ends, the textbooks offer explicit instructions to help students formulate and produce film studies specific writing for introductory film courses. Yet, the textbooks also implicitly include material advocating for types of specialized argumentation in the field, utilizing several important special argument types contained in sample student essays throughout the texts. These special argument

types capture some of the major arguments those in the field accept as appropriate and, in turn, the arguments professors reward most in student work.

With these two points in mind, this chapter examines professional discourse to show the disciplinary moves practitioners use in the various writing genres of film studies. Scholars have, for many years now, investigated the ways professionals utilize disciplinary strategies to communicate through written discourse. In fact, much research in WAC and WID studies relies on analysis of disciplinary discourse, using these findings to help professors across the curriculum in designing and implementing writing assignments within their courses. Some of the earliest studies in the field provided a groundwork to help those in the disciplines more overtly understand what they already implicitly expected from students. Works by Selzer (1983), White (1985), McCloskey (1985), and Bazerman (1988) all provide a rhetorical approach to disciplinary writing to show how integrated rhetorical strategies are with disciplines across the curriculum—specifically disciplines viewed as outside the purview of rhetorical instruction. Others, such Fahnestock and Secor, (1991), MacDonald, (1994), and Pullman (1994), started encouraging instructors to make the discourse conventions they found through such research an object of instruction within college classrooms. Johns (2002) agreed, asking why "some of the finest minds in genre theory eschew discussion of the pedagogical implications of their work" (p. 237).

Identifying the modes of argumentation within a given field of study, with an eye toward teaching discipline-specific rhetorical conventions, has been a main area of focus in researching the rhetoric of disciplinary writing. Several research projects provide support for professors wanting to help students invent discipline-appropriate arguments. Invention, a canon of rhetoric

since the time of Aristotle and Hermagoras, provides a way into discourse through time-tested techniques meant to foster thought and argumentation. One such technique, *stasis* theory, utilizes questions to aid the brainstorming process while also helping to determine the types of arguments necessary in advocating a particular position. Another way to define *stasis* is as "the kind of issue or question that is at stake in an argument" (Fahnestock & Secor, 1991, p. 78). The *topoi* connect closely with the *stases* in helping researchers find common argument types to use when attempting to answer the questions at each *stasis*. Scholars have used *stasis* theory and *topoi* as tools for rhetorical analysis, studying published material to identify types of arguments used within certain disciplines. Michael Carter (1988) provided evidence that *stasis* theory aids in the social construction process when communicating, tying communities together through common argumentation types. Fahnestock and Secor (1988) focused on scientific and literary arguments to find the "exemplary" argument types in those disciplines, showing how different disciplines can be in the types of arguments used by professionals. Wilder (2005) studied literary criticism through the lens of the *topoi*, updating Fahnestock and Secor (1991) while also attempting to show connections in a "discourse community that is recognized by all who participate in it as extremely diverse and divisive" (Wilder, 2005, p. 79). This tendency to use the *topoi* as a rhetorical lens to identify argumentation types also shows up in analysis of paleontology (Northcut, 2007), STEM (Walsh, 2010), and pain science (Graham & Herndl, 2011) to name a few of the many areas research continues to mine for insights about how disciplinary argumentation works. Adding an examination of film studies argumentation to this growing list will, to quote Wilder (2005), "not only be useful to those interested in the definitional limits of the abstract entities known as discourse communities but also to those

interested in what is attempted each semester in courses designed to introduce" this discipline to students (p. 79).

This chapter analyzes three distinct genres of professional writing in film studies to find the argument types and rhetorical moves professionals use in the discipline. A survey of all three genres gives evidence about whether certain genres utilize particular *topoi* more prominently than others, and reveals the techniques professionals use to elaborate on, and emphasize, those arguments. Identifying these aspects of writing about film ultimately has pedagogical implications, helping instructors more clearly identify the argument types and accepted rhetorical strategies in the discipline. The writing genres of film studies all share similar disciplinary goals to those identified in the second chapter of this study. Those goals include:

1. defining a film (or set of films) as either evaluatively or interpretively appropriate for study
2. applying historical, theoretical, or aesthetic approaches to a film as evidence to show how a film's components cause films to contain certain evaluative or interpretive meaning
3. crafting original and plausible disciplinary arguments through research, comparison, or showing connections between society and cinema

However, even though these goals appear in each genre of film writing, the genres differ on how to approach those disciplinary goals, and the types of arguments each genre utilizes to accomplish those goals provides different challenges for writers. Therefore, an examination of how each genre of professional writing in film studies uses both the common *topoi* and special argument types elucidates the conventions of the discipline while also providing faculty with

some argument types they can use to help students invent more discipline-specific arguments in undergraduate film classes.

To categorize the three genres of film studies rhetoric I use Bordwell's (1989) division of the three "macroinstitutions" of film criticism: journalistic criticism, essayistic writing, and academic scholarship (p. 19). The first genre, journalistic film criticism, remains the most popular form of critical writing on the cinema. Journalistic reviews still appear weekly in most news outlets, and the status of such criticism accounts for the popularity of such aggregate sites as RottenTomatoes.com and MetaCritic.com which collect and display film reviews to help guide viewers in making decisions on which films to see. This chapter analyzes a selection of work from six prominent American film critics—Roger Ebert, Stephen Hunter, Joe Morganstern, Wesley Morris, Stephanie Zacharek, and Manohla Dargis—all of whom have either won, or were nominated for, the Pulitzer Prize in criticism. I have chosen ten articles from each of the critics listed above, creating a corpus of sixty film reviews. This collection of reviews provides an historical sample of contemporary film criticism, with reviews spanning from the late 1960s through the late 2010s. Choosing to analyze the work of these six critics, therefore, provides not only a representative sample of criticism recognized for its quality, but also shows how consistent the rhetorical moves and argument types in the genre have been over the last half-century.

Essayistic criticism is the second macroinstitution of film writing and falls somewhere in-between the journalistic piece and the academic article. Essayistic pieces certainly cater to a more specialized audience of film viewer than journalistic reviews, and often appear in magazines devoted to cinematic topics. We can trace much of the success of essayistic criticism

to the mythical aura surrounding seminal essayistic writing in *Cahiers du Cinema*, along with other prevalent names in the history of the field such as *Movie* and *Film Comment*. I use twenty-five total articles from four such magazines in this chapter to identify the rhetorical moves separating essayistic criticism from its journalistic relative. These articles come from the journals *Film Comment*, *Cinema Scope*, *Sight and Sound*, and *The Current*, a selection encompassing three countries as well as varying ideological focuses. The articles, all written within the last decade, will provide for a current assessment of the rhetorical strategies at work in this genre.

The third genre of film writing is the academic article which is most often written by university professors and found in scholarly journals. These peer-reviewed articles often function as the lifeblood of professional scholarship, not only casting the vision for new trends in the field but also providing faculty members a publishing outlet to achieve tenured positions within college and university departments. Academic articles discussing film-related topics are certainly a more recent development to the field than the movie reviews and essayistic criticism of the other macroinstitutions. However, as evidenced in the previous chapters of this study, the analytical writing found in the academic article sets the standards by which many film courses base their writing assignments. I use a sample of twenty-five scholarly articles in this chapter to highlight the rhetorical conventions of the genre while also comparing these pieces to those in the other macroinstitutions. The articles come from the *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies* (formerly *Cinema Journal*), *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, *Journal of Film and Video*, *Black Camera*, and *Film History*, and will therefore capture a wide-ranging sample of academic film criticism with which to identify prevalent methods of discourse and argumentation.

Journalistic Criticism

Journalistic film criticism relies heavily on three of the common *topoi* to elucidate arguments: definition, comparison, and cause/effect. The most prominent *topos* is the definitional/genus *topos* as the critics attempt to define the evaluative quality of the movies they review. These definitional arguments occur most overtly in any star ratings associated with the review, but also appear throughout the reviews in the form of definitional statements. Critics inform readers whether a film is worth watching through these definitional claims, such as when Ebert (1974e) opines that *Images* "inspires admiration rather than involvement" because it is "a technical success but not quite an emotional one." Hunter (2002i) provides another example of this type of definitional argument by writing that "if your idea of a movie comprises one word and that word is 'story,' you're going to be disappointed" in *Gangs of New York*. Similar definitional statements appear in each of the journalistic reviews, with films described as going "by like a fevered dream of love, but one you remember vividly, with profound pleasure" (Morgenstern, 2004b), or as weighing "so much, yet contain[ing] so little" (Morris, 2011g). Each review provides such statements to recommend whether the readers should watch the movie and to suggest how readers should feel about the movie if they decide to watch. Many reviews also present definitional statements that place the films in question into other categories, such as film genres or thematic subjects. Examples of such definitions within the sample appear when the critics refer to *Mr. Turner* as "a biopic, of sorts" (Zacharek, 2014i), *Closer* as "an airless joyless drama of sexual politics" (Morgenstern, 2004h), or *The Revenant* as "an American foundation story" (Dargis, 2015j). Such definitions go beyond the categories of "good" and "bad" and begin connecting films with other story experiences readers have encountered.

These definitional moves ultimately lead to another prominent *topos* the critics used in every review sampled: comparison/contrast. Many of these comparisons connect to genre conventions and even explicitly mention other films. Such moves not only place the film under review into a broader context but also establish a critic's *ethos* as someone familiar with film history. Ebert (1974j) provides an example of this by writing that the "*Texas Chainsaw Massacre* belongs in a select company (with *Night of the Living Dead* and *Last House on the Left*) of films that are really a lot better than the genre requires." Other critics make similar moves, as when Hunter (2002i) believes *Gangs of New York* to be "just the old revenge melodrama, the one about the son seeking payback for the murder of his father," or when Morgenstern (2004e) derides *Forgotten* as "*The Sixth Sense* as nonsense, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* without the sunshine...or the mind." Dargis (2015b) also uses genre comparisons to note *Ex Machina* "skips right over that little problem and, like all good science fiction, asserts that the apparently implausible is absolutely here and now." Such claims appear frequently throughout the sample of reviews, and in many ways the critics use the comparison/contrast *topoi* as a shorthand way to support their definitional arguments. Quality films remind critics and audiences of other quality films within similar genres or about similar themes, whereas poor films cannot live up to standards set by other films about similar topics or within the same genre.

In addition to comparative statements about genres and themes, critics often compare the works of a director to his or her previous films, or to the work of another director. This *auteurist* approach from film critics has much the same effect as comparing a movie to others in a genre, proving a critic's familiarity with the larger state of film studies while also solidifying any definitional claims made about the film. Thus, critics can appreciate *Top Five* for being "both

lighter on its feet and more piercing than either of the two movies [Chris] Rock has previously directed" (Zacharek, 2014h) and claim a director like Martin Scorsese "has always had a genius for depicting violence…and here," in *Gangs of New York*, "he really outdoes himself" (Hunter, 2002i). Auteur comparisons also stretch beyond a single filmmaker to include other notable directors as comparison points for a film. Morris (2011d) makes such comparisons discussing Terrance Malik's *Tree of Life* when he writes that "Jean Cocteau made opium dreams" and with "David Lynch, the dreams are psychotically alive," but the films of Malik "operate at such high levels of evocative reverie that you want to drape them with 'do not disturb' signs." When discussing Wes Anderson's *Grand Budapest Hotel,* Stephanie Zacharek (2014a) describes Alfred Hitchcock's films as moving "like panthers, not like machines," while "Anderson, on the other hand, can't achieve, and perhaps doesn't care about, the illusion of fluidity." Comparisons between the works of an individual director, or between directors, provide more rationale supporting how much a certain film succeeds or fails.

Critics do not relegate these types of comparisons only to genres and directors, though, making similar comparisons between an actor's body of work. Therefore, a critic can say "Molina and Lithgow, in performances that rank among the best of their careers, fill in all the colors and shadows" (Zacharek, 2014e) when attempting to praise *Love is Strange*, or that James Caan's performance in *The Gambler* "doesn't derive . . . from other roles he's played" (Ebert, 1974h). Critics also compare actors with other actors to make statements about a film's quality. When reviewing *Mission Impossible: Ghost Protocol*, for example, Morris (2011i) praises Tom Cruise's ability to act as if he is truly in incredibly strenuous situations as opposed to other action movie stars in other films. He writes that "Ryan Gosling's performance in *Drive* encapsulates the

vogue for a kind of touchless action hero and all that he does…I love Gosling and the less archly styled Jason Statham. But Cruise is laughing at them." Similarly, Dargis (2015g) appreciates the work of Jennifer Lawrence in the *Hunger Games* series because Lawrence, unlike "a lot of screen heroines…has never settled into stereotype, which, despite the whole dystopian thing, makes her a lot like the contemporary girls and women watching her" (2015g).

Comparisons of the sort listed above ultimately lead to the use of the cause/effect *topos*. Here, critics elaborate on some of their definitional statements, using evidence from the film to support their claims about quality. Often the same topics critics use in comparisons provide the substance of cause-and-effect argumentation. For example, a film can succeed or fail because of the acting, or because of a director's handling of generic or thematic material. The reviews continually come back to the ability of actors and directors as the main reasons behind the success of a film. One such example from a review of *Weekend* uses both, stating the "achievement of both the acting and its direction is that neither [character] remains a stranger to us…and their transparency makes their emotional achievement easy to take for granted. But these are two intelligent, startlingly subtle performances" (Morris, 2011h). Another critic, in a review of *The Martian*, argues "Mr. Damon's Everyman quality…helps scale the story down, but what makes this epic personal is Mr. Scott's filmmaking, in which every soaring aerial shot of the red planet is answered by the intimate landscape of a face" (Dargis, 2015d). When a critic dislikes a film, the acting and direction also play a major role, as when Morgenstern (2004c) writes that, in *Terminal*, "it's as if the filmmakers gave up on their own nonsense in the end" while the actors "look increasingly uncomfortable or disconsolate as the movie grinds on." Yet, the acting and the directing could also be at odds with each other, supporting the notion that a

movie comes across as uneven or unsatisfying. For instance, a review of *Hotel Rwanda* argues the "movie as a whole doesn't match the level of Mr. Cheadle's art" (Morgenstern, 2004j).

Journalistic critics use the circumstance and authority *topoi* much less frequently than the three previously mentioned with several of the critics not utilizing these *topoi* at all. The lack of appeals to circumstance or authority in film reviews reveal the main impetus of journalistic criticism to be the examination of films as individual artistic expressions rather than cultural artifacts or fodder for ongoing scholarly conversation. Journalistic responses to films are immediate and, while the reactions are often steeped in comparisons with other films, meant to evaluate the aesthetic merits of the film in question rather than place it within a particular social, political, or scholarly context. There are exceptions, as when critics connect the elements of films to larger societal tendencies, often showing how films and filmmakers fail to avoid what the critics see as pitfalls of contemporary culture. Ebert (1974h) makes one such argument from circumstance when he laments *The Gambler* as "another demonstration of the inability of contemporary movies to give us three-dimensional women under thirty," thus alluding to societal sexism. Morris' (2011e) review of *The Help* also makes an argument from circumstance related to race relations when he writes "the best film roles three black women will have all year require one of them to clean Ron Howard's daughter's house" and while "white boys have always been Captain America . . . Black women, in one way or another, have always been someone's maid."

Critics, when they use the authority *topos*, do so to clarify their own argument by comparing it with either a real or hypothetical argument made by someone else. Most often this argument comes from another critic, though there is rarely an attempt to cite or attribute the argument to anyone. Morgenstern (2004g) provides an example of this when he writes that

"some have detected, in advance of the film's national release, a metaphor for Bush-era America . . . That's not my reading." Likewise, Ebert (1974e) categorizes a film as "complex and cold, although not nearly as hard to understand as some of the first reviews suggested." In one instance Hunter (2002d) uses another critic's argument to support his own, calling *Road to Perdition* "wet (full of rain all the time), which, one critic notes, is less a climatic than a moral condition." There are also instances of critics using the opinions of non-critics to similar effect. Morris (2011d) writes of people who "already feel protective" of Terrance Malick's *Tree of Life* "as if [Malick's] purity couldn't withstand scrutiny" before he begins scrutinizing the film. Zacharek (2014f) makes a similar move in her review of *John Wick*, telling of "action movie fans" who "have taken that 'Listen here, little lady' tone with" her when she complains about how audiences have "been conditioned to believe action is more exciting when it's diced to bits and presented to us in a choppy mosaic."

Essayistic Criticism

Essayistic critics also use the common *topoi* to make arguments, albeit to different effects, while also relying more frequently on arguments from circumstance and, especially, authority than their journalistic counterparts. Still, the most prominent *topos* used is definition. The definitional arguments in essayistic criticism tend to make grander claims than those of the journalistic critics, defining films as historically important artifacts worthy of continued acclaim rather than simply suggesting a film as worthy of viewing. Often the films under consideration are not new releases, placing the onus on the writer to prove why the film is worth further study or recognition. This challenge becomes evident when, for example, Andrew (2021) argues that

"with the passing years *Nashville* has come to feel still more remarkable" since the film is more "than a straightforward polemical satire of country culture" and a "massive, multi-textured tapestry depicting a society undergoing some sort of crisis." Another example comes from an essay on *Gun Crazy*, noting that the film is "certainly not the first movie to show the exploits of outlaws in love, but it is singular among its contemporaries in its flagrant sexualization of violence" (Loayza, 2021). In an essay on *Bringing Up Baby*, O'Malley (2021) calls the film "the silliest thing to happen to American comedy" and a "reminder for eighty-three years of how necessary and sneakily profound silliness can be."

Essayistic criticism also expands its research interests beyond single films, often defining the enduring qualities of directors or film movements as worthy of recognition. Archer (2018) attempts to define a growing cinematic trend in this way, writing that "today's black American and diaspora filmmakers are crafting multi-generic, cross-disciplinary media, distributed as features, short films, music videos, and installations . . . in ways that are nonlinear, collaged, essayistic, Afroscentric/futurist or, in a word, Afro-Surrealist." In an article on film director Spike Lee, Bugbee and Rapold (2018) explain that Lee "has explored existing genres, using the rigid formal structures of musicals, heist films, epic melodramas, vampire romances, and Aristophanian comedies to illuminate the social issues that drive his more narratively fluid city films." Sometimes these essays also explore actors' careers in much the same way, even tying them to particular film movements. Lin (2020) does this when he explains how, "two decades before his inspired turn in *Parasite* as a chiseling patriarch . . . Song Kang-ho became a symbol of new wave South Korean cinema by starring in a pair of iconic films as the movement was beginning to swell."

The nature of the definitional claims in essayistic criticism naturally combine with arguments of comparison, and the main points of comparison essayistic critics use—genres, directors, and actors—recall those used by journalistic critics. However, the comparative claims in essayistic criticism tend to place the work in question within a more concrete historical context than appear in the weekly movie reviews. This rhetorical move highlights the importance of the films, directors, or actors in question by placing them within, or pitting them against, historical trends. Such is the case in Enelow's (2016) study of recent teenage acting styles, arguing that "in the middle of the 20th century" the style of "Method acting dramatized the way that . . . Americans saw themselves: held down by repressive norms or psychological blocks, but ultimately glorious, full-flowering individuals with rich inner lives and wellsprings of powerful feeling," but in contrast 21st century teenage acting "shows us the micro-responses of people engaged in unspectacular strategies of survival, trying to get their minimal needs met by any means necessary." While examining *The Scary of Sixty-First,* Marceau (2021) places the director's work in the context of both genre and auteur history, writing that "Nekrasova's debut draws liberally from the classics of 70s genre cinema, as well as the works of other edgelord directors: the occult statues of *The Exorcist*; the ambient paranoia of Polanski's apartment trilogy, especially *The Tenant*; the stylish eye-for-an-eye rage of Ferrara's *Ms. 45*." Cronk (2021) also uses categorizing language to position director Alexandre Koberidze as an auteur worthy of study, arguing that "in a single scene, we have the entire M.O. of the Georgian-born Koberidze, whose freewheeling approach to storytelling has . . . produced a small but invigorating body of work that makes the majority of what passes for adventurous modern-day narrative cinema look positively pedestrian by comparison."

Essayistic critics support these comparative claims with the cause/effect *topos*. Like journalistic pieces, these essays rely on discussions of acting skill and directing prowess to evidence quality filmmaking. For example, a piece on *The Irishman* claims actor Robert De Niro makes director Martin Scorsese's multi-decade portrait of hit man Frank Sheeran "possible here, with the fuggeddaboutit delivery and, at 76, bluff good looks" (Rapold, 2019). Another writes that director Isao "Takahata continuously pushed the medium" of animated film "in bold new directions, usually taking the form of work that was more mature and less commercially viable" than his Studio Ghibli counterpart Hayao Miyazaki (Lucca, 2018). Similar claims appear repeatedly. There is, though, more use of theme as evidence of quality than was present in the journalistic pieces. One critic notes certain "disruptions and shifts in atmosphere" throughout a film as evidence of "a world that is not inert" and "teems with elemental forces" (C. Gray, 2021). Certain tendencies in another film lead Gilligan (2020) to "hear the struggle for independence" and to "see it in the women's moves toward resistance" against those things with keep "a woman from listening to her own voice or acting on her own behalf," making such struggle "the fantastic light of the film." Neal (2020) similarly reflects on theme, writing the movie "*Claudine* offered refreshing insight into the humanity of those Black women, their children, and their struggles and joys."

Essayistic critics also view cinema through a more overtly symptomatic lens than journalistic critics, making arguments from circumstance more prevalent in their writing. As discussed in Chapter Two, arguments from circumstance typically take one of two forms in film studies: either audiences cannot escape the influence of cinema or cinema cannot escape the influence of society. One clear example comes from Enelow's (2016) examination of different

acting styles across different generations, writing that "the relationship between cultural performance and professional performance is symbiotic: actors imitate what they see in the world, and non-actors in turn respond to and . . . imitate what they see on the screen." McGill (2021) also includes the circumstance *topos*, positing if "movies represent our collective subconscious, then that includes the gunk in its corner." These arguments often use evidence related to politics, gender and race relations, or economics to make their points. One such political argument appears in O'Malley's (2021) view that "surrendering to chaos without the reassurance of a rebuilt world at the end" of *Bringing Up Baby* "may not have been what audiences wanted in 1938, exhausted by a decade of financial ruin and looking with anxiety at the clouds of war darkening over Europe yet again." Lin (2020) makes an argument of circumstance related to gender by pointing out "that South Korea's women directors were left high and dry despite the wave" of international success Korean cinema received in recent decades. Gilligan (2020) does this as well when noting how little societal patriarchy has changed in the years since *Girlfriends* was released, telling readers to "chalk it up to the persistence of patriarchy" and its "stealthy power despite how clearly it goes against democratic ideals and values." Circumstantial argumentation also appears when Chan (2016) argues for the economic influence over film soundtracks, noting that the "story of [film music's] cultural primacy has been written for so long in dollar signs."

The most striking difference between essayistic and journalistic criticism appears in arguments using the authority *topos*. While rarely appearing in journalistic criticism, and almost never overtly citing specific sources even then, appeals to authority pervade essayistic criticism. These take a few different forms. One is quoting those involved with the production of a

particular film, allowing the thoughts of directors and actors to aid in interpretation. This is apparent when Ranold (2019) writes "'He's not a psychopath,' Martin Scorsese said of his protagonist, in response to a question at the first press screening for *The Irishman* in September." Balsom (2021) also uses a film director Claudia von Alemann's thoughts to direct interpretation of *Blind Spot*, noting "an interview published . . . in February 1981" when "the director ends the conversation by citing her protagonist's remark concerning how to transform an identification with the past into action in the present, connecting it to her own preoccupation with women's history." Andrew (2021) even claims a *Nashville*'s narrative "is perhaps best summed up by [film director] Altman's words to the critic David Thompson: 'It was about the incredible ambition of those guys getting off the bus with a guitar every day and, like in Hollywood, trying to make it." Another form is quoting other critics as a supporting mechanism for an interpretation, as when de Wit (2021) cites Meenakshi Shedde's quote that "Indian cinema can sometimes be lazily presented as a straight choice between Satyajit Ray and Bollywood." Tracy's (2020) examination of *Mank* uses other critics to position an argument within larger discussions about the film's subject matter, while also setting up the author's own opinion. He writes:

> To dispense with the Mankiewicz-vs.-Welles 'controversy' up front, Robert Carringer's 1978 article 'The Scripts of *Citizen Kane*' has long been recognized as the authoritative refutation of Pauline Kael's (in)famous argument, in her 1971 essay 'Raising *Kane*,' that Mankiewicz was the sole author of the *Kane* screenplay and was denied his due credit by the ruthlessly self-promoting Welles.

Such appeals to authority, along with the larger historical impulse found when using the other common *topoi*, signal essayistic criticism as more invested in the ongoing conversations of academic film studies than journalistic criticism.

Academic Criticism

A core tenet of academic writing is providing new insights to existing scholarship. This goal drives the way film studies scholars use the definition *topos*. The clearest examples of definitional arguments appear as process statements outlining the author's intention to position the essay within film studies discourse. Therefore, the writer defines not only the goal of the current study, but also the state of the existing research. Dienstfrey (2020) provides an example of this two-fold approach, first stating that "this article examines why studios chose to dramatically compromise the fidelity of their soundtracks so soon after the advent of talking pictures" before writing that "current explanations suggest that these restrictions were created to improve playback quality" (p. 24). A similar technique appears in Shaka's (2021) article, where the author tries "to define the various practices that preceded contemporary African cinema," by mapping "out some of the methodological problems plaguing the criticism of African cinema" (p. 62). The definitional moves, then, define a gap or issue in current scholarship and define the way the new article fills that gap or corrects that issue.[4] Boyd (2020) does this by "interven[ing] in these conversations" about *Blue Velvet* because "no one has yet examined how sight and sound take on gendered dimensions in the film" which the article will "elucidate" (p. 1). Another example appears in Leonard's (2018) article which "enters into [the] discourses" about race and sports films by "offering a critical discussion of *42* and *FIFA 2017/2018*" to "focus on how films like *42* stage racism as history, all in an effort to celebrate sports as crucial in bringing down the walls of racism that has led to integration, interracial friendships, the fulfillment of celebrity for

[4] Graff and Birkenstein (2014) write that "the best academic writing has one underlying feature: it is deeply engaged in some way with other people's views" (p. 3). This is certainly the formula in most academic writing in films studies.

black athletes, and so much more" (p. 178). Scholars, even when placing a film or filmmaker within the categories of genres or historical periods, position such arguments through the lens of the existing scholarship, thereby overtly defining the importance of the article's argument to the discourse. In an article exploring *A Beautiful Mind*'s place within the biopic genre, Radzinski (2021) writes that "notwithstanding earlier work done on the biopic, it is incumbent that scholars consider the role that secondary characters play in more recent biopics, which depart from earlier conventions" (p. 47). Likewise, in attempting to place film director Peter Bogdanovich in the pantheon of major New Hollywood filmmakers, Rybin (2019) argues current scholarship is "limited" and that "Bogdanovich's writings on films and his films themselves, both products of his intense love for movies, have not received similarly affectionate attention from scholars working on the topic of cinephilia," and that this essay will "seek to partially redress this oversight" (p. 18).

Consequently, academic criticism relies more heavily on the authority *topos* then the other two forms of writing in film studies to frame arguments. There are certainly times scholars in this genre use similar techniques as essayistic critics. Blake (2017), for example, quotes filmmakers Paul Schrader and Martin Scorsese repeatedly throughout his piece on their collaborations, using the filmmakers' own words to support his argument. Stephenson (2018) likewise quotes filmmaker Haile Gerima to similar effect (p. 36). Scholars also cite other scholars to provide evidence for certain claims, exemplified by Cason (2019) using the phrases "as Nicole R. Fleetwood clarifies," "as Mary Ann Doane describes," and "as Michele Wallace points out" (pp. 63-64). Different than in essayistic or journalistic writing, however, academic criticism appeals to the authority *topos* to define key terms such as "New Sincerity" (Burnetts,

2016, p. 3), “photogenie” (Cason, 2019, p. 63), and “cinephile” (McKee, 2021, p. 27) or to provide a springboard to other arguments. An example from Dienstfrey’s (2020) article proves exemplary in using another critic in this way:

> In her comprehensive study of studio-era sound designs, Hanson observes that at the time of the standard’s adoption, technicians promoted the measure as a necessary sacrifice. By reducing the acoustical quality of larger movie palaces, the industry could then regulate the quality of all theaters, thereby minimizing the distortion heard in smaller venues. However, my investigation into the broader economic history of early talking pictures indicates that this official explanation is not the whole story. (p. 25)

Additionally, academic film criticism often uses a different *topos* than journalistic or essayistic criticism to drive the main argument of a piece. Instead of making definitional statements of a single film’s quality in the vein of journalistic criticism or defining a film or director into larger categorical and historical fields based on aesthetic merit like essayistic criticism, this sample of academic criticism positions films, directors, or events as tied to the social, political, or economic norms at the time of its release. Thus, the process-based definitional claims which situate an article into the larger discourse ultimately lean on the circumstance *topos* to carry the main argument in most of the sampled articles. A clear example of how the *topoi* of definition and circumstance blend together in academic criticism appears in Monteyne’s (2018) article on the road film, which “reveals and clarifies postwar attitudes about gender, mobility, and car culture, making these issues central to a full definition and productive understanding of the genre” (p. 23). Here the critic further defines a genre of filmmaking by identifying the thoughts and attitudes symptomatic of the films’ contemporary culture. The writer argues that these two things are inseparable. For example, Monteyne (2018) connects the “release of these productions” with “a dramatic increase in car ownership,” and claims these road films tap into the “possibilities and ultimately the ‘horrors’ of women at the wheel in the postwar

era" since "car ownership and usage" at that time "were heavily policed by gender boundaries" (pp. 25-26). Another article makes this same type of argument about the Western genre as it has transitioned into modern television through series such as *The Walking Dead*, *Firefly*, and *Breaking Bad*. González notes that the "temporal and spatial displacement of the Western myth that we have identified in these series allows their creators to . . . look for new ways to articulate fears and worries in contemporary America" (2020, p. 172). One example is in *Breaking Bad*, which chronicles a masculine crisis by returning "to the strong masculinity represented by the Western genre: Walt's transformation is an effort to reclaim control following the mode of traditional frontier men" (p. 165). In analyzing 1950s "bachelor pad" films such as *The Tender Trap, Boys' Night Out,* and *Come Blow Your Horn,* Worland (2018) likewise includes a symptomatic interpretation of genre, seeing these films as providing "an evocative metaphor and a cultural starting point to engage with a series of larger social changes and evolving attitudes about sexuality and gender in the post-war period" (p. 157).

The other common *topoi* also aid the symptomatic readings produced in academic film criticism. Some critics use comparisons to elucidate their symptomatic arguments, as when Christensen (2016) "comparatively analyzes" the theatrical and alternate endings of the remake of *A Nightmare on Elm Street* to argue "that the media used in viewing the film can significantly influence how, and if, the viewer is exposed to (anti)feminist outlooks within the film" (p. 30). Kolesnikov (2020) also uses comparison to provide "a geocultural account" of how "the individuals, nations, and ideas underlying a linear narrative of general history" shaped the reception and understanding of the well-known theory of editing called the Kuleshov effect (p. 76). In comparing death-penalty films across periods in film history, Altschuler (2021) first notes

"the possibility that race plays a factor in capital punishment was not a subject that Hollywood was anxious to confront" during the 1990s and into the 2000s in films such as *The Life of David Gale*, *Dead Man Walking*, or even *The Green Mile*. However, Altschuler (2021) argues that "two 2019 films, *Just Mercy* and *Clemency*, mark a significant change" (31). This change stems from the "Black Lives Matter movement and massive demonstrations against racism and police brutality," again marking a symptomatic reading of film production and thereby using comparisons in the article as a segue to arguments from circumstance (p. 39).

It is also clear that the arguments from circumstance controlling the main theses of these articles rely on cause-and-effect reasoning for support. The Altschuler (2021) argument above follows this line of thought, suggesting that political and social actions in the real world (i.e., Black Lives Matter) cause a change in the way genres function, with those "produced in the future . . . likely to continue and probably expand upon the changes begun by *Just Mercy* and *Clemency*" (p. 39). The interrelated, cause and effect nature of society and cinema also appears in Vogan's (2018) study of closed-circuit boxing broadcasts which "illustrates how the politics and business of closed-circuit fanned [Muhammad] Ali's celebrity, informed his expulsion, and brokered his reintegration" while also showing "how attitudes surrounding Ali shaped close-circuit's history and transformation" (p. 2). Robé (2016) also uses cause and effect reasoning to support symptomatic claims in an examination of how the League of Revolutionary Black Workers attempted, but ultimately failed, to use film to support its mission. Robé writes about the League's limits resulting "from their location in Detroit, where industrial production held a predominant position that blinded them from noticing the restructuration of the US workforce in new directions," along with "their own sexism that failed to recognize the importance of the

waged and unwaged labor that many black, working-class women produced" (p. 153). According to Robé these failures "proved intractable" and caused the League's downfall (p. 153).

Summary of Common *Topoi* Usage

Based on these samples the common *topoi* play a large role in supplying the means to acceptable film studies argumentation. Each genre of writing utilizes the *topoi* in slightly different ways and to different extents. Yet, whether consciously or not, film critics and scholars continually go to these commonplaces to write about film and, depending on the genre they use, focus more heavily on certain *topoi* than others to make arguments. Table 3 shows how often the samples from the three genres used each *topos.* Table 4 indicates how often each *topos* served as the main area of argumentation in the articles.

Table 3

Percentage of Essays Where Each Common *Topos* Appears by Genre

	Definition	Cause/Effect	Comparison	Circumstance	Authority
Journalistic Criticism	100%	100%	90%	3%	17%
Essayistic Criticism	100%	96%	100%	24%	68%
Academic Criticism	100%	100%	96%	80%	100%

Table 4

Percentage of Essays Where Each Common *Topos* Served as Main Argument Area

	Definition	Cause/Effect	Comparison	Circumstance	Authority
Journalistic Criticism	98%	2%	0%	0%	0%
Essayistic Criticism	64%	0%	0%	36%	0%
Academic Criticism	28%	4%	0%	68%	0%

The tables highlight two trends. First, Table 3 shows a clear increase in the percentage of articles using all five common *topoi* from journalistic criticism to essayistic criticism and then to academic criticism, with nearly every academic article utilizing all five *topoi* on some level. This tendency to integrate more argument types illumines the increasingly complicated nature of disciplinary writing as scholars not only integrate more secondary sources to show familiarity with ongoing academic conversations but also support new arguments through more varied techniques. Second, Table 4 shows a clear shift in how writers in each genre focus their arguments, with arguments from circumstance becoming more prominent in essayistic criticism before taking over as the most common method to structure an argument in academic criticism. This tendency also signals a move to more complicated argumentation. Whereas the main definitional arguments place films, directors, and events into categories of quality, genre, or historical period, arguments from circumstance include methods of interpretation to uncover and elucidate meanings previously hidden to the viewing public. These two trends also provide insight into some findings from the pedagogical documents and textbooks used in film classrooms. Based on the above findings, both pedagogical documents and textbooks tend to encourage the academic genre more than either the essayistic or journalistic genres since those documents consistently highlighted the use of all the *topoi* and touted student writing which included appeals to circumstance. Therefore, the above analysis of the tendencies in professional writing in film studies show that the emphasis within film writing and film studies textbooks relate most closely to the argument-types found in academic style film criticism.

Special Argument Types

The samples of film writing also utilize several special argument types characteristic of film argumentation, with a few appearing very frequently both within and across the genres. These special argument types provide discipline-specific argumentative strategies that many in the discipline accept without much thought. As Fahnestock and Secor (1991) point out, discipline-specific argument types "appeal to shared values and shared perceptions" and "invoke the shared assumptions of the community" while "at the same time creat[ing] that community" (p. 84). They go on to note that appeals to such arguments are "convincing to their intended audience" (Fahnestock & Secor, 1991, p. 84).

The special argument types also connect in some way to the common *topoi*, fitting into one of those argumentation categories. Based on the samples used for this chapter, we can characterize the most prominent argument types used in film studies, with their corresponding common *topoi*, as follows:

1. The best films showcase individual or societal flaws to challenge us and make us better people/societies (definition/cause and effect)
2. The best directors control a film's meaning and quality through aesthetics (definition/cause and effect)
3. The most important films challenge social, political, gender, generic, or racial conventions (definition/circumstance)
4. Film scholarship is supposed to showcase societal flaws in films to challenge us and

make us better people/societies (definition/circumstance)[5]

Table 5 indicates the prevalence of these special argument types throughout the critical sample used for this chapter.

Table 5

Percentage of Essays where Each Special Argument Type Appears by Genre

	Special argument type #1	Special argument type #2	Special argument type #3	Special argument type #4
Journalistic Criticism	76%	47%	<1%	0%
Essayistic Criticism	60%	52%	60%	<1%
Academic Criticism	16%	56%	48%	72%

As in the previous tables there is a clear distinction between the three genres of film writing. Journalistic critics rely heavily on the first two special *topoi* to make arguments. Ebert (1974d) provides an example of the first type in a review of the Vietnam War documentary *Hearts and Minds*, writing that "Daniel Ellsworth is quoted in the film in a line that could have been used in the ads: 'We weren't on the wrong side—we were the wrong side.'" Not only does Ebert's argument comment on the theme of the film, it also consciously connects the film's theme to the thought patterns and actions of American society during that time period. Hunter (2002h) makes use of this special *topoi* as well, arguing that what *Adaptation* explores "isn't peculiar to writers" but "peculiar to humans" in that it describes "a yearning sense that somehow, somewhere, all this should be better but most of all they should be better." A similar sentiment appears in Morgenstern's (2004g) review of *The Incredibles*, which is "a work of huge . . .

[5] Critics also use these special argument types in reverse. For example, the worst films do not showcase individual or societal flaws to challenge us a make us better, and the least important films are those that do not challenge social conventions.

ambition—a vision of modern life" and "a great film about the possibility of greatness." Critics even make use of this *topos* in passing, as when Zacharek (2014d) reflects on a small scene in *A Hard Day's Night* when a young girl becomes so overcome with passion during a Beatles concert that she weeps uncontrollably. She writes:

> I know nothing about this girl, who, I presume and hope, grew up to be a woman. But I can't help superimposing her experience of this moment, of this band, onto mine. Did we get the life the Beatles promised us . . . of love and despair, heartbreak and elation, disappointment and exuberance?

These thoughts capture how critics use themes in films to explore themes in life, and how art can challenge viewers to think and act differently because of a film experience. An example from Morris (2011h) captures the essence of such arguments:

> There comes a point in your moviegoing life where you look at the screen and then you look at the world and you ask, 'What is going on?' You want the movies to show you the chaos and mess and risk and failure that are normal for a lot of us. Generally, the movies hide all of that. Sometimes you don't want to escape. You want to connect with a movie that's really about something, to listen to a filmmaker talk things out, to watch him amp everyday life without calling attention to his turning up the sound.

There are also many examples of journalistic critics arguing for the efficacy of the director in controlling meaning or quality through aesthetic choice. Dargis (2015b) argues "Mr. Garland . . . sets an eerily, cleverly unsettled stage" in *Ex Machina* while Zacharek (2014i) notes Mike "Leigh's gifts as a grouchy humanist" who "prefers all-out feeling, even when it's wrapped in tender protective layers of tissue." Hunter (2002g) also writes of director Alexander Payne as "a comic minituraist" who "imposes on the work . . . [a] brilliant discipline and a complete toughness about not breaking character" while Ebert (1974e) argues Robert Altman "demonstrates superb skill at something he's supposed to be weak at: telling a well-constructed

narrative." Overall, the auteur theory of filmmaking, or viewing the director as the main creative force behind a production, remains a dominant source of film argumentation.

The first two special *topoi* remain active in essayistic criticism. Rapold (2019) uses films to help audiences examine individual or social flaws by viewing *The Irishman* as "a way of ably simulating the actual passage of any life," as does Cronk (2021), who argues *What Do We See When We Look at the Sky* "loses none of this faith [in humanity] and . . . proves time and again its potential to be restored is often just a scene away." Many of the essayistic critics also view directors as in control of a film's meaning, with Porton (2021) seeing "women filmmakers such as Yvonne Rainer and Lizzie Borden" as "more successful in confronting the challenges of anti-authoritarian revolutionary violence" than men, and Lin (2020) viewing "*Barking Dog* [as] the visual equivalent of a filmmaker finding his generation's voice and articulating what he sees in a country in transition."

Yet, the third special *topos,* which argues that the best films are those which challenge convention, appears much more prevalently in essayistic criticism. These challenges could be against conventions of genre as in Heller's (2021) argument that "if this setup" to *The Parallax View* "sounds fairly conventional, the thriller that follows is not," or in O'Malley's (2021) belief that *Bringing Up Baby* "doesn't just go off leash; it questions the concept of leashes altogether." The challenges could also be against gender stereotypes, as in Gilligan's (2020) assertion that *Girlfriends* "shines a brilliant light on" the healthy, heterosexual friendship of two women, which "what may well be the most subversive relationship within patriarchy," making the film "about resistance." Some films challenge the political status-quo, like Tarkovsky's *Mirror,* which "was too personal, oblique, and spiritual to square with the state's demands for clear-cut

narratives extolling socialist values" (C. Gray, 2021). No matter the expectations a film challenges, essayistic critics view films which "confound expectations" as holding importance and value (de Wit, 2021).

Academic criticism also often pulls from the second and third special *topoi*, arguing that important filmmakers control meaning through aesthetics and important films challenge conventions. Boyd's (2020) argument that director "David Lynch's *Blue Velvet*" which develops an "alternative, counterhegemonic feminist masculinity within its narrative" and offers a "withering indictment . . . against sight and the role that it plays in perpetuating the hegemony of the heteropatriarchy" (pp. 1, 22) and Radzinski's (2021) argument that, in *A Beautiful Mind*, director "Ron Howard. . . subverts traditional expectations for secondary characters by making them manifestations of Nash's delusions" (p. 53) both combine the two *topoi* into singular arguments.

However, academic criticism's penchant for symptomatic arguments from circumstance alters the way critics view the place of critical interpretation in identifying, or enacting, social change. Rather than making the argument that films showcase individual or societal flaws to challenge us and make us better people/societies, academic criticism views the act of critical interpretation as the means by which social and individual flaws are revealed. This fourth special *topos* adds the caveat that social influence over cinema, and the constructs that come with society, is inevitable and unavoidable. This reality exists even "despite the filmmaker's honorable intentions" (Diffrient, 2017, p. 26). The critic, then, must stand in the gap and reveal societal flaws. An example of this appears in Christensen's (2016) analysis of *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, which posits an anti-feminist interpretation of the film in contrast to statements made

by the film's lead actress (p. 39). Another appears in Leonard's (2018) article, who argues that "amid the hegemony of colorblindness and racially transcendent meritocracy, cinematic and virtual sporting pedagogies also offer lessons that consistently imagine sports as a place of white saviors" (p. 179). Such argumentation also leads one critic to find it "difficult not to see [*Carnival of Souls*] as anything but a treatise on what happens when women 'take the wheel'" and "exceed the limited roles allocated to women within the social order," making the main theme "death and submission to the forces of patriarchy" (Monteyne, 2018, p. 46).

Conclusion

This examination of professional film criticism reinforces the findings presented in the first three chapters of this study by showing how similar the disciplinary arguments made by professionals in the discipline are to those which professors ask students to make in introductory classrooms. Of course, fidelity to professional-level writing ability is never fully expected in undergraduate classrooms, but the goals outlined in the pedagogical documents and film studies textbooks, along with the *topoi* and four special argument types presented and used, match those of professional criticism. Consciously or not, film studies classrooms utilize and expect disciplinarity from students, and adherence to many of these disciplinary argumentations connect with success in the film studies classroom. While those immersed in the discipline, and well-versed in the reading and writing of professional discourse, apply and recognize such argumentation without much thought, these common *topoi* and special argument types remain mysterious and foreign to beginning film students.

Now that I have identified the major *topoi* of film studies and shown not only how common *topoi* and special argument types function in professional discourse but also how they appear as expectations in pedagogical documentation and texts, the final chapter of this study will move back to the classroom and offer practical ways to make the implicit norms of film studies discourse more explicit to film studies students.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Revisiting the Disciplinary Expectations of Film Studies

The idea permeating this entire study has been that instructors can help foster better student writing in introductory film courses by acknowledging and explicitly presenting disciplinary expectations to students in those courses. With that idea in mind, each of the previous chapters set the stage for this chapter, which provides some ways instructors can more explicitly teach those disciplinary expectations to film studies students. Chapter One established the problem many instructors face: entry-level film students struggle to show knowledge of the subject-matter through writing. This struggle may have many root causes. In some cases, students may have never had sufficient writing instruction during their high school and early undergraduate years (Drew, et. al., 2017; Adelman 2006). In other cases, students may be struggling to transfer knowledge they learned in one writing situation (a first-year composition course, for example) to other settings (Lockhart & Soliday, 2016; DePalma & Ringer, 2011; Driscoll, 2011; James, 2010). The most prevalent issue for our purposes, however, is that instructors, through years of training and involvement within the discipline, unknowingly use certain generic and argumentative expectations to evaluate student work. Instructors relate many of these expectations to students implicitly, leaving it up to the students to achieve successful writing mainly through a trial-and-error process. If instructors do not consciously recognize the

expectations they have of students, it will be nearly impossible to relate those expectations to students effectively, leaving students and instructors frustrated by the classroom writing process (Devitt, 2014).

To help instructors consciously recognize the expectations they hold, Chapter Two examined pedagogical documents to identify both the explicit and implicit expectations film instructors use to evaluate student work. These expectations were consistent across the discipline, showing up repeatedly at the department, course, and assignment level. The expectations also aligned with what Bordwell (1989) identifies as the problems film scholars must attend to when adding to critical discourse (pp. 29-30), suggesting that instructor-held expectations are discipline-driven even at an introductory level. Chapter Three further emphasized these expectations as the norms of film studies pedagogy through analysis of "writing about film" textbooks and textbook chapters. In both chapters, it was clear that film writing relies on the common *topoi* (definition, cause/effect, comparison/contrast, circumstance, and authority) and certain special argument types to achieve its rhetorical ends. When students implicitly use such *topoi* and arguments, instructors tend to respond positively.

Chapter Four indicated that professional writing in film studies in various genres (journalistic, essayistic, and academic) relies on the same common *topoi* and argument types as those expected of students in introductory courses. While each mode of writing emphasizes a particular *topos* to a different extent than the other genres, the expectations for student writing clearly connect to, and are based on, the expectations set by professional discourse. Such connections lead directly into the main goal of this chapter, which is to provide examples of how film instructors can more explicitly integrate the common *topoi* and argument types of film

studies into their teaching. None of these suggestions are magical formulas that will result in perfect writing. However, based on the results teachers have had in other disciplines using similar instructional methods it is fair to say proper integration of more explicit disciplinary writing instruction will help students through the writing process and produce, overall, better disciplinary writing from students.

Explicit and Implicit Expectations for Student Writing

Research Question #1: What are the stated (explicit) and unstated (implicit) expectations for student writing in introductory, undergraduate film studies classrooms?

A conscious recognition of the expectations outlined in the first question is crucial to any explicit writing instruction. Based on the documents I surveyed for this study, the most explicit expectations relate to generic writing skills consistent across most academic disciplines in the humanities. Expectations about grammar, presentation and formatting, page length, and how (if at all) to cite sources all appear repeatedly in course documentation. These expectations are no less fundamental to disciplinary writing than the less explicit expectations that are the focus of this study. Professors should continue to stress these expectations and may even find it beneficial to incorporate more explicit guidance in some of these areas to help students recognize the importance of presentation when trying to present ideas to others. Explaining to students why, for example, they are to use Chicago style or MLA when writing papers in film class will help them to see how disciplines dictate presentation but also how understanding and meeting audience expectations creates less interference and, therefore, better audience reception. The important thing to realize when outlining such expectations is that disciplinary writing

encompasses much more than formatting, grammar, and syntax. The social nature of argumentation, and the genre knowledge that accompanies such argumentation, plays a large role in the process.

As such, a less overt but clearly present aspect of film studies pedagogical and professional documents is the expectation that students effectively define discipline-appropriate artifacts to study through analysis and aesthetic evaluation. This ability is at the heart of film writing and drives thesis production in both student and professional argumentation. It is for this purpose that, consciously or not, instructors spend so much class time introducing students to the formal aspects of cinema which serve as the means of such analysis and evaluation. It is also why instructors often spend several weeks introducing undergraduate students to the general theories of cinema since, without these theories, it is hard to develop any underlying meanings to films. What instructors are doing is providing students with the building blocks to think about film from a disciplinary perspective. While the pedagogical documents were not clear on how or if instructors explicitly help students make the connection between these tools and how to use them effectively in written work, there is evidence to show that these tools come from three main areas: film history, film theory, and film aesthetics. Evidence from these three areas serve as the data points students must use in defining and defending their disciplinary arguments.

Even less explicit, though very much implied in the pedagogical documents, was the expectation that quality film writing should be original and plausible. These expectations varied from assignment to assignment with some instructors expecting less originality than others. However, the documents still point to an expectation that students:

1. Effectively compare domestic and international films, filmmakers, and film genres with established categorizations,
2. Identify the ways society and cinema influence each other
3. Research and integrate existing scholarship into their arguments.

The more familiar students are with these categories, and the more they integrate such knowledge into their writing, the more aligned with the discipline their writing becomes.

While all the expectations listed above utilize the common *topoi,* the most implicit expectations for student writing appeared in the textbooks and course text chapters devoted to "writing about film," and fall into the special argument types of film studies. Such argumentative moves signal familiarity with the discipline and, based on the comments and examples found in course texts, receive positive feedback from instructors. They also relate to the expectation asking students to define why a film is worthy of study. The course texts implicitly express the following ideas:

1. The best films/filmmakers challenge social, generic, and narrative conventions
2. The best films/filmmakers purposefully challenge these conventions and control meaning while less important films/filmmakers passively allow society to dictate meaning
3. Important filmmakers, therefore, make audiences work by challenging their expectations.

Students who argue for a film's historical importance by noting how a particular filmmaker challenged the social or narrative conventions of the time would stand a good chance of receiving higher marks on an essay than, for example, a student who argued for a film's importance based solely on box office success.

Each of these expectations appear repeatedly throughout classroom documentation and form the basis of not only how students are to write in introductory film studies classrooms, but also how instructors evaluate student work. Instructors evaluate student work in this way because the discipline shapes what counts as appropriate argumentation in undergraduate classrooms. This is where the second research question comes into play since analysis of professional writing in film studies reveals the presence of similar expectations as those found in the course documents.

Professional Discourse Influences Classroom Practice

Research Question #2: What can professional film studies discourse reveal about the disciplinary expectations in film studies classrooms?

The analysis of professional film studies writing revealed striking similarities to the expectations found in pedagogical documents. Like the implicit expectations for student writers, professional writers consistently:

1. Defined a film as evaluatively or historically significant
2. Used history, theory, and aesthetics to support such definitional claims
3. Compared domestic and international films, filmmakers, and film genres with established categorizations
4. Identified the ways society and cinema influence each other
5. Relied on research to showcase the originality of their arguments
6. Integrated similar argument types to those found in the pedagogical documents

The first two research questions, therefore, evidence a strong disciplinary pull in introductory film classrooms. The connections between professional and classroom writing provide evidence to support an understanding of student discourse in film classrooms as, at some level, entering the film studies discourse community. In this way student writing falls into what Wenger (1999) calls "liminal discourse," or discourse taking place at the outskirts of a community of practice. Students are, therefore, participating in professional conversations while not being fully part of the professional community. In this "liminal" space students are expected to temporarily act as professional scholars, writing with a certain professional ethos to craft an acceptable rhetorical identity. Students who can fit comfortably into this guise are those who make similar rhetorical moves as those more seasoned in the discipline. These students generally receive higher grades on papers in large part because they enter this "liminal" space more as participants than as outsiders. Their rhetorical maneuvers reveal their participation.

Therefore, the more a student becomes aware of the rhetorical moves necessary to succeed in the "liminal" space of the film studies classroom, the more successful that student can become. Making students aware of the types of arguments accepted in the field helps them to recognize and respond to the writing problems they find in the classroom through a disciplinary lens.

Does this mean instructors should view introductory film courses, which often include many students who are not film majors and never plan to become professionals in the discipline, as courses meant to professionalize undergraduates? I would not suggest professors go that far. Instead, it is helpful to view the "liminal" space of the classroom as a place where students encounter problems associated with a particular discipline. As Flower and Hayes (1981) point

out, novice writers differ from more experienced writers in the way they construct problems throughout the writing process, arguing that "good writers are simply solving a different problem than poor writers" (p. 30). The problems a good writer addresses relate to the social aspects of writing and the "complex idea of exigence, audience, and authorial persona" while novice writers "often flatline around fulfilling the details of the prompt, including word count and other conventional details" (Rice, 2015, p. 121). Majdik and Keith (2011) likewise argue that expert writers invoke "not a relationship to specialized knowledge but to the ability to respond appropriately to problems" (p. 373). For example, a prompt from an introductory film course may ask a student to analyze the editing in a film from class while using the terms from class readings to inform the analysis. Such an assignment requires students to formulate the actual problem at hand before solving that problem through writing. Novice students, therefore, will struggle to approach this prompt in a way that meets the expectations of the instructor, and will most likely resort to plot summary along with a summary of what the textbook says about editing. Students who can formulate a more disciplinary problem for themselves, however, will realize that they can frame the editing as a reason (cause and effect) for why this film is worth studying (definition). These students may also know that they can compare the editing in this film to other films (compare/contrast), emphasizing how such techniques guide the film's qualitative meaning (definition), or even placing the film as within or outside the conventions of society or genre (circumstance). Rice (2015) argues, therefore, that "expertise is less an individual quality than it is a description of the activity of posing problems (and, consequently, solving them)," making the "way a problem is posed . . . central for deciding whether and how to take action" (p. 122).

The role of the instructor in film studies classrooms is to help students recognize the specific problems placed before them. This is not necessarily a call to professionalize the students. Instead, it is a challenge to answer similar questions to those posed by Rice (2015): "How do we help prepare all kinds of people—from experts to novices—to represent problems to themselves? How should we help nonexperts become better problem posers?" (p. 122). The benefit of familiarity with the *topoi* is their direct connection to the problems posed by film scholarship and their ability to solve those problems. The *topoi* are such a powerful tool in helping students write in a disciplinary setting because they help to formulate and solve the problems implied by the writing prompts in film courses. They also help students navigate the "liminal" space of the classroom in the guise of a professional, helping them formulate similar problems, and solutions, as their instructors.

Pedagogical Implications of the Research

Research Question #3: What pedagogical implications result from the similarities/differences between classroom and professional disciplinary writing expectations?

One implication resulting from the findings of this study is that instructors should learn to recognize the disciplinary assumptions they bring to their teaching and how such assumptions influence their grading. Discovering these assumptions may lead teachers to realize the need for a more explicit and forthright approach affording students an opportunity to understand the disciplinary problems at work in a course and allowing them to respond in kind. Recognizing how disciplinary assumptions influence grading may also have the opposite effect, challenging instructors to change from a discipline-specific approach to a more general, critical thinking

approach aligned with goals of a general education curriculum. Any such change should reflect the stated student learning outcomes (SLOs) of the course and, if necessary, should also induce changes to the SLOs if there is any discrepancy between what instructors want students to learn and what the syllabus says students should be learning. Ultimately, this reflection on course learning goals points to the importance of alignment between curriculum, instruction, and assessment. As Pellegrino (2006) points out, alignment "in this sense, means that the three functions are directed toward the same ends and reinforce each other rather than working at cross-purposes" (p. 3). For example, if the curriculum for a course and the instruction in that course focus mainly on general critical thinking skills but the assessment of students in that course connects more with disciplinary knowledge, then the three facets of educational practice are out of alignment. This situation would cause confusion and frustration for both students and instructors. Ideally, "an assessment should measure what students are actually being taught, and what is actually being taught should parallel the curriculum one wants students to master" (Pellegrino, 2006, p. 3). Therefore, recognizing the disciplinary assumptions we all bring to our teaching can help us either move toward avoiding those assumptions during our curriculum design, instruction, and assessment, or can help us more explicitly develop curriculum, instruction, and assessment that connects with the disciplinary knowledge we expect students to produce.

Another implication leading directly from the discussion above is purposeful course design. Since my focus is on explicit disciplinary instruction, the examples I give here relate to such an approach, but similar changes, albeit with more non-disciplinary goals, would benefit anyone teaching introductory film classes with less disciplinary aims. The most extreme changes

would involve an entire course designed to teach students how to use the common *topoi* and special argument types of film studies. Wilder and Wolfe (2009) studied the effectiveness of such a course in literary studies by comparing survey responses and final papers from seven experimental sections of an undergraduate Writing about Literature course focused on the *topoi* with those from nine traditional sections of the same course. Professors of the experimental sections received varying levels of support from the researchers, though all received "published research on the topoi for background reading and sample handouts that had been used successfully in previous classes" (Wilder & Wolfe, 2009, p. 179). They also had the ability to design their own syllabi, writing assignments, and course handouts. The instructors integrated the *topoi* into the course through assigned readings, "vocabulary for discussing published literary criticism, peer review, criteria for evaluation of student writing, and as intentional heuristics for generating arguments about literature" (Wilder & Wolfe, 2009, p. 180). These professors also "asked students to read examples of student writing and published criticism and analyze them for their use of the *topoi*" (Wilder & Wolfe, 2009, p. 180). Providing students with this background on the argument types of literary studies then gave these instructors the ability to integrate the *topoi* into written comments on student work, into student conferences, and "most important of all," into "class brainstorming sessions and in nearly all discussions of literary texts" (Wilder & Wolfe, 2009, p. 180). The study found that English faculty unfamiliar with the nature of the study rated "the papers written by students in the experimental sections as significantly higher than papers written by students in the control sections in overall quality," with the number of special argument types "used in the papers [appearing] to influence the faculty's ratings" (Wilder & Wolfe, 2009, pp 185-189).

It is not difficult to see how such an approach can fit into an introductory film class. Instructors can familiarize themselves with the common *topoi* and special argument types, assign one or two readings on the topic to their students, and then utilize the vocabulary of the *topoi* throughout the semester into class discussions, analysis of other assigned readings, peer review worksheets, grading rubrics and comments, and brainstorming activities. Such an approach does not become the subject of the course, which would still be an introduction to the history, theory, and aesthetics of film studies, but it does help to clarify the rhetorical lenses students can use to successfully enter and understand discourse about the films they watch. It also gives consistent vocabulary and reinforcement to ideas and approaches many professors desire students to acquire. For example, instructors can utilize *topoi*-driven questions to help facilitate discussions over course readings. Many introductory film courses use scholarly articles to introduce students to key theoretical concepts. Instructors can have students answer the following questions when reading:

1. What is the main argument this author is making, and why is it important (definition)?
2. What evidence does the author use to support this argument (cause/effect)?
3. Does the author place the film (or films, actors, directors) in question into any categories (genres, film movements, etc.), or compare this film to other films (or actors, directors, etc.) (comparison/contrast)?
4. Does the author argue that this film (or actor, director, etc.) challenges any established norms (of genre, society, or aesthetics) (circumstance)?
5. Does the author cite any other sources in their work (authority)?

This exercise would reinforce the use of the *topoi* as an effective tool for generating quality film writing. It would also prepare students for class discussion. The classroom discussion would also stem from and reflect the main goals of cinematic argumentation, leading students to think from a more disciplinary perspective than, say, a general discussion question such as "what did you think of this article"?

Answering these discussion questions as they relate to a popular introductory film text, such as Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" exemplifies how this exercise could work.

1. The author's main argument is that the narrative cinema is told through a male, heterosexual perspective. It is important to realize this fact so scholars and filmmakers can "challenge this cinema of the past" and start telling stories from other perspectives (definition).
2. The author uses evidence from several films (*Vertigo, To Have and Have Not, Marnie*) to explain how the "male gaze" works, with a longer examination of *Rear Window* to exemplify the main point. The author also uses psychoanalysis to offer evidence of why such examples have the effect they do (cause/effect).
3. The author uses several comparisons to make a general categorization of narrative cinema. The author also compares several characters from different Alfred Hitchcock films to show how that director continued to use the "male gaze." Finally, the author makes brief mention of experimental filmmaking styles as those which have started challenging the dominant hegemony (comparison).

4. The author argues that the films examined in the article fail to challenge the dominant social ideology, but that scholars and filmmakers should challenge this ideology by breaking away from the conventions of narrative filmmaking (circumstance).
5. The author uses ideas from psychoanalysis, especially those of Sigmund Freud, to support the main argument (authority).

Answering these questions gives students a better understanding of the Mulvey article while also helping them understand how prevalent the *topoi* are in film writing. This exercise can also lead to a student writing assignment. Instructors can pose the following prompt to students after the above discussion has taken place: How well does Laura Mulvey's argument in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" fit when used to analyze two of the films we've watched so far this semester? Be sure to do the following—

- Clearly state your main argument and why it is important (definition)
- Show how examples from the films support your argument (cause/effect)
- Compare the films to each other AND to Mulvey's argument (comparison/contrast)
- Describe how the filmmakers challenge or accept the social norms Mulvey articulates (circumstance)
- Cite Mulvey's article in your paper (authority)

On the heels of the classroom discussion, this prompt further emphasizes the *topoi* as aids in creating new arguments. It also guides students to think about and use the special argument types of film studies, challenging them to view directors as agents of film meaning who either adhere to or divert from established norms.

Another implication, stemming from the idea that proper understanding of, and response to, problems is key to expert writing, is that purposeful document design is an integral part disciplinary instruction. Even professors who are not as comfortable explicitly teaching the *topoi* in a lecture-style setting or having students read scholarly articles about the *topoi* can still integrate these disciplinary ideas into the course documentation without much overt instruction. If the *topoi* guided the creation of brainstorming documentation, assignment prompts, and grading rubrics then students would naturally gravitate to using those *topoi* in their written work. As an example, even if students were provided nothing more than the prompt mentioned above asking for an analysis of the editing in a particular film, a brainstorming worksheet with the following questions could help stimulate formulation of a correct problem to solve and ways to solve that problem:

1. Why is this film worth watching? Why should we still be studying this movie even though it was made in _____?
2. What is the film's theme? What does this theme tell us about ourselves as individuals? What does it tell us about our society?
3. How does this film compare to other films
    a. In this genre?
    b. Made by the same director?
    c. Made in the same time period?
    d. Made about similar subject matter?

4. How does the director use the formal aspects of cinema (lighting, editing, camera work, etc.) to showcase the theme? Is there a particular aspect the director uses more powerfully than others?
5. How does the film break from (or fail to break from) the following conventions?
    a. Social conventions (gender, race, religious, etc.)
    b. Genre conventions (horror, science fiction, Western, etc.)
    c. Cinematic conventions (lighting, editing, storytelling, etc.)
6. What have others written/said about this movie? How does your argument connect to theirs?

These questions all relate to the common *topoi* and special argument types addressed throughout this study and lead students through the problem-solving process tacitly performed by many experts in the field. It also allows the *topoi* to function as rhetorical commonplaces writers go to formulate new arguments without necessarily getting students bogged down in the technical terminology of the *topoi*.

The brainstorming sheet would work nicely with a rubric designed around the *topoi*. Since many instructors implicitly grade student work by adherence to the common *topoi* and special argument types it would benefit all involved if those expectations were more explicitly outlined in the grading documentation. While instructors can easily modify some wording to fit their specific circumstances and aims, Table 6 provides an example of a rubric which takes the *topoi* into account and is easily altered to fit the specific circumstances and aims of individual instructors or assignments (removing the “authority” row if no sources are required, for example).

Table 6

Introduction to Film Grading Rubric

	4	3	2	1
Thesis (Definition)	The student introduces a compelling, arguable claim, taking a purposeful position on why the film is worth watching or studying further	The student introduces an arguable claim, taking position on why the film is worth watching or studying further	The student introduces an unclear or emerging claim that may or may not address why the film is worth watching or studying further	The student does not introduce an identifiable claim or position addressing why the film is worth watching or studying further
Support/Evidence (Cause and Effect)	The student effectively uses film aesthetics, history, and/or theory to provide convincing and relevant evidence to support the claim	The student competently uses film aesthetics, history, and/or theory to provide evidence to support the claim	The student attempts to use film aesthetics, history, and/or theory to provide evidence to support the claim	The student uses limited to no evidence from film aesthetics, history, and/or theory to support the claim.
Influence/Implications (Comparison & Circumstance)	The student consistently and insightfully addresses how social, generic, and/or cinematic conventions influence the film product	The student adequately addresses how social, generic, and/or cinematic conventions influence the film product	The student attempts to address how social, generic, and/or cinematic conventions influence the film product	The student fails to address how social, generic, and/or cinematic conventions influence the film product
Research (Authority)	The student clearly and persuasively integrates sources to show how the views of others relate to the claim	The student integrates sources to show how the views of others relate to the claim	The student attempts to integrate sources to show how the views of others relate to the claim	The student fails to integrate sources
Style and Conventions	The student writes in an engaging and formal tone, intentionally using standard English conventions of usage and mechanics while attending to the norms of the discipline (ex. MLA, Chicago, etc.)	The student writes in a formal tone, using standard English conventions of usage and mechanics while utilizing the norms of the discipline (ex. MLA, Chicago, etc.)	The student writes with limited awareness of formal tone and demonstrates some accuracy in standard English conventions of usage and mechanics. The student may struggle adhering to disciplinary norms.	The student writes with an inconsistent tone, demonstrating several inaccuracies in standard English conventions of usage and mechanics.

Less extreme changes could also involve the introduction of "writing about film" as a regularly scheduled class day within a semester-long course. Just as instructors currently spend one class day discussing film sound or film editing, one class day discussing writing about film could help students recognize some of the important elements instructors expect when students write papers for the course. As I outlined in Chapter Two, several introductory film textbooks include chapters on writing about film that instructors could easily integrate into the curriculum. However, this tactic, if not connected with any further discussion or integration of the *topoi,* will most likely yield minimal results. Wilder (2003), for example, found that an hour-long workshop of explicit instruction in the *topoi* of literary studies had no discernable effect on student usage of these rhetorical strategies in their papers. Yet, if connected with an increase in the number of writing workshops instructors use throughout a semester, or to universalize language instructors will later use in one-on-one meetings to discuss outlines and drafts, as well as on paper comments, then such an addition may yield more substantial results.

No doubt some instructors will hesitate to integrate the *topoi* into the curriculum in any way. Others have had similar hesitations in the past, fearing such focus on disciplinary rhetoric will lead students to rote, mechanical writing. Pullman (1994) believed that "excessively codified" argument types could lead student writers toward "too much rigidity" and "could reduce interpretation to a plodding application of rules that would produce formulaic and uninteresting interpretations" (pp. 384-385). In a similar manner, Warren (2006) thought the complex thinking writers use in disciplinary rhetoric can only appear after many years of practice and, therefore, would be very difficult to impart in any meaningful way to introductory students, even if taught explicitly.

Hopefully the examples above help to alleviate some of these fears. The *topoi*, rather than being reductive, stimulate answers to questions professionals regularly ask. As evidenced by the brainstorming questions above, the *topoi* provide ways to correctly view the writing problems posed by film studies writing prompts. The *topoi* also guide the answers to those problems, giving students the means to enter disciplinary conversations even though they may not have what disciplinary experts would consider as the knowledge base to contribute to the disciplinary discourse. Using the *topoi* with reading assignments also helps students more cogently analyze written material and prepare to discuss those readings through a disciplinary lens. Such discussion and analysis should then help guide students during their own writing process.

Suggestions for Future Research

There are a few ways future researchers can continue to study the presence and effectiveness of the common *topoi* and special argument types in film studies classrooms. The first way is through classroom observations detailing how the *topoi* and argument types explicitly and implicitly appear in specific classrooms. A study of the *topoi* as they appear in lectures, handouts, and class discussion could lead to more discoveries about how pervasive these assumptions are in interactions between instructors and students. Such a study could also include interviews with students and instructors to see what expectations each has of the course, comparing those expectations to what seems to be taking place in the learning environment.

Another area to research would be the grading practices of film studies instructors. Important research can be done by examining how influential the *topoi* are in the grading process. Researchers can analyze student papers for usage of the *topoi* before comparing *topoi*

usage to what instructors give as grades and on student papers. Such research would also benefit from interviews with instructors to gauge whether the *topoi*, and other disciplinary expectations, influence the grading process. It would be interesting to find out how instructors align their beliefs about the outcomes of introductory film classes with their teaching and assessment.

To further study the effects of explicit disciplinary instruction, researchers can also pilot experimental courses taught using the *topoi*. The results from a film studies course structured like the one described in Wilder and Wolfe (2009) could help further alleviate fears about disciplinarity overtaking the introductory film course while also providing more examples of course documents designed with the *topoi* in mind. Such a study may also involve courses that utilize *topoi*-inspired course documents but refrain from explicit instruction of the *topoi* to see how much writing success differs between courses using explicit *topoi* instruction and those only using what we can term *topoi* infusion. Doing so would offer data on student writing from traditional, experimental, and hybrid-type courses, increasing the amount of information we know about how much instruction informs student writing practice.

Closing Remarks

Finally, I hope this study helps spur an attempt to more consciously study writing in the film studies classroom. As mentioned in Chapter One, this area of inquiry needs further exploration. How are film instructors currently teaching students about writing? What are the expectations instructors have for their students? How can we better serve the students in our classrooms and help them to succeed where we want them to be successful? Any research that helps film instructors share the love of cinema with students is research worth pursuing.

I conclude by revisiting my initial anecdote at the start of Chapter One. How often are we, as professional scholars, so entrenched in our disciplines that we have a hard time realizing how much those disciplines influence the way we think, act, and, most importantly for this study, assess students? Like the kinesiology professor watching a student speech and assessing it through the lens of his discipline, often as film instructors we unknowingly allow our disciplinary lens to influence the grading of student writing. The rhetorical moves and argument-types that seem obvious to us after years of inculcation are not yet so clear to our students, especially if we have never taught them to our students. Yet, we may be penalizing our students for failing to make these unmentioned, and untaught, rhetorical moves.

Ultimately, I wanted to research the argumentative norms in film studies to show how influential the problems of film studies Bordwell (1989) identifies relate to the problems we present to our students. I also wanted to provide evidence that these problems have answers, and that we can categorize those answers in the common *topoi* and special argument types. Realizing this fact can help us teach students how to identify the problems we present them while also giving us the ability to introduce students to these *topoi*, aiding them to respond appropriately to such problems.

While this study will not be the final answer to teaching students how to write in film studies classrooms, I hope it helps foster further thought, study, and pedagogical innovation. At minimum, I hope it helps instructors analyze their own presuppositions, making them more aware of how the discipline influences their teaching and assessment. If this study accomplishes that, then I know, through more thoughtful instruction and assessment, it will also help students achieve greater writing success.

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