

SM's Final Paper Hot Tips:

Your paper will need to have:

- A) A stylistic/formal element
- B) A defined pattern
- C) A proposed function
- D) An argument about how the element's pattern functions throughout the narrative structure of the film

Ensure that your element is:

- A) An element of **style** as opposed to a thematic, narrative, or symbolic element.
 - a) For example, long takes are an element of style; religion, family, or love are thematic elements.
- B) Specific! General elements will not give you enough specificity to trace a pattern across the film's narrative structure.
 - a) For example, "shot scale" is too general, but "CUs" are specific.

Once you have identified your element, ask yourself these questions:

- How many times has the element appeared?
- When is the first time it appears?
- When is the last time it appears?
- When is it present and when is it absent?
- Is it associated with particular characters or settings?
- Is it used a lot, or a little?
- Does it change?
- What is its function?
- How does it change the way I experience the film?
- Does it tell me anything about the film that I didn't understand until a rewatch?

Trace your element across a four-act structure:

- Act I: Set-Up
- Act II: Complicating Action
- Act III: Development
- Act IV: Climax + epilogue

Take note of when your element increases, decreases, or gets interrupted over these acts. Is it more prevalent in Act I? Does it disappear during Act III? Does it return?

Elements of film style that I advise against:

- Colors
- Props
- Setting

Elements of film style that will work for this final paper (this is not an exhaustive list!):

- Mise-en-scene
 - Lighting
 - High key, low key, motivated, unmotivated
 - Staging
 - Deep space, planimetric staging, actor blocking
 - Aspect ratio
- Cinematography
 - Shot duration
 - Long takes, short ASL
 - Shot scale
 - ECU, CU, MCU, MS, MLS, LS, ELS
 - Camera height
 - High, low
 - Camera angle
 - Overhead, high, low, canted
 - Camera movement
 - Pans, tilts, crane, handheld, shaky cam, dolly, tracking, following, static camera
 - Lenses
 - Wide angle, telephoto, zoom, dolly zoom
 - Focus
 - Deep focus, rack focus
 - Speed of motion
 - Fast motion, slow motion
- Editing
 - Shot transitions
 - Cuts, dissolves, fades, wipes, superimpositions, jump cuts
 - Continuity conventions
 - 180 degree rule, shot reverse shot, matches on action, crosscutting, ellipses, point of view, establishing shots, cutaways, eyeline matches, graphic matches, rhythmic editing
 - Intensified continuity
 - Extreme lenses, rapid cutting, closer shot scale, free ranging camera
- Sound
 - Off screen v on screen, objective v subjective, internal v external
 - Music
 - Diegetic v non-diegetic
 - Qualities of music: dynamics, tempo, timbre
 - Dialogue
 - Overlapping, voice-over, dynamics (loud v soft)
 - Silence

Writing about film:

- Film titles are always stylized in italics—never in quotation marks.
- The first time you mention a film, you must also indicate the film's director and release year.
 - Examples:
 - *Good Time* (Josh Safdie and Benny Safdie, 2017)
 - *Joyland* (2022), directed by Saim Sadiq
 - Charlotte Wells' 2022 film *Aftersun*
 - The 2018 film *Ad Astra* (James Gray)
- The first time you mention a character, put the actor's name in parentheses.
 - Examples:
 - Calum (Paul Mescal)
 - Connie (Robert Pattinson)
 - Biba (Alina Khan)
- Avoid plot summary. I've seen the films.
- Avoid any evaluative language. This assignment does not ask you whether the film was good or bad, effective or ineffective, successful or not successful, enjoyable or not enjoyable etc. We are interested in investigating the way a formal element is patterned across the film, and the ways in which it serves characterization, narrative, thematic, or other functions.
- Do not use first-person voice such as "I think..."
- Select 2-3 scenes in which your element appears for close analysis.
 - Justify your examples—why choose these sequences over others?
- Be specific and get to the point—don't waste words.
 - Points off for off-topic digressions, plot summaries, etc.
- Research is not required for this assignment and may very well be unnecessary.
 - However, if you choose to use outside research, you must cite your sources using MLA or Chicago style citations with a bibliography at the end of your paper.
- Filmmaker motivation:
 - Avoid assigning motivation to the filmmaker. Instead, focus on the function. What I mean by this is, is that we don't always know what a filmmaker's intentions were

when they were working and speculation is outside of the purview of this assignment. Even if we do know the intention, we aren't concerned about it.

- Ex: Last semester many students wrote about the use of VO narration in *Ad Astra*. Some students wrote things along the lines of "James Gray used VO narration in order to..." But James Gray didn't. The VO narration was put in after the fact by studio demands. Gray himself was incredibly opposed to the decision.
- By avoiding motivation, you can then focus on function: how does your element work in terms of narrative, characterization, and viewer experience?
- Symbolic readings:
 - This assignment does not ask you to make claims about symbolic/metaphorical meanings. I discourage you from symptomatic readings for this assignment—meaning, do not interpret things outside of the text.
 - For example, a symptomatic reading of *The Wizard of Oz* argues that the film is *about* queerness, or a symptomatic reading of *The Birds* argues that the film is *about* motherhood. These readings may be thought-provoking and worthwhile academic pursuits, but it is not within the scope of this assignment that asks you to closely examine film style and structure.