Some Critical Questions/Comments to Consider

When approaching popular culture from a critical perspective, the goals become focused around *making meaning* of the text. As you work to explore different media texts this summer, I want you to learn how to hone in on critical thinking, thoughtful analysis and active meaning making. The following examples may help you think about new questions/comments that will help you develop your critical and analytical skills.

NOT VERY USEFUL — try to avoid	TRY INSTEAD…
That would never really happen in real life! That film is so unrealistic! OR Wow! That movie was so real. I can't say anything critical about it because it was so true!!	In many ways, the question of realism is irrelevant. Realistic or not, the more interesting question is how does this film teach us about the subject at hand? What do we learn about the topic (gender, schools, race, disability, astronomy) from this text? What role does this text play in our culture? Why is it popular? Who is watching it and why? How is it marketed and why is it so successful (or not)?
That character was so unbelievable. A teacher/teenager/ suburban mom/babysitter/gang member (insert your favorite character here) would never act that way!	Again, even the most poorly written or poorly acted character contributes to our knowledges about ourselves and each other. What work does this character do in the context of the film to bring a message or capture the film's values?
I thought that the character made good choices in the film. She was smart and responsible.	Characters are not people with free will. They are the product of a writer, actor and director and they are not real. So the more important questions is, *how did the film work* to help you understand her as "smart and responsible?" Are there cues in the dialogue, lighting, music, cinematography, narrative that help you read her in a sympathetic light?
The critics loved this film and it got three Academy Awards so it must be good.	Critics (and awards) play an important role in our culture as they help teach the public how to evaluate and make meaning from popular cultural texts. But be mindful about what makes a "good" film in the eyes of mainstream critics. Sometimes, the most ideologically tame, safe and dominant (read white, middle-class, etc) texts resonate most with mainstream movie-goers. Reviews can be very helpful to teach us about how the film was received, but often the reviews tell us very little about the ideological or cultural significance of the text. It may be more interesting to ask, why did this film get such rave reviews? Who liked it and why?
I hated/loved this film.	It is important to notice what brings us pleasure. But the more important issue is, *why?* Where does your pleasure (or rejection) come from? How does the film work to invite you in or alienate you? How does the film work to make you a sympathetic audience? Why are you enjoying it? And if not, why not?
You're reading too much into it… It's just a movie!	A critical perspective on the media encourages us to think about every text as meaningful in some way. There is always an ideological component to the media and we should not dismiss it as merely entertainment. We are not robots. We can resist the messages they impart. But we have to understand them first.
Don't blame the director/actor/writer… she didn't *intend* to be racist/sexist/homophobic.	Sometimes, beyond our best intentions, we end up reproducing the dominant ideologies of our culture. Popular culture often does the same thing. Thus the question of *intention* is not really very useful. We are more interested in the *implications* that the text has on how we come to know and understand our world.

*created by Dr. Lesley Bogad