

**Essay II: Research Essay** (10-12 pages)**Timeline**

- Proposal due in class Tuesday 10/7
- 1- précis of your movie due in class Tuesday 10/19
- Annotated Bibliography due in class Tuesday 10/19
- Notes on at least 2 sources due in class Thursday 10/21
- 1<sup>st</sup> Draft to be posted to your workshop group by 8:00pm Monday, 10/25; hard copy due in class Tuesday 10/26
- Revision due Friday 11/5 my office
- Final revised version to be turned in with Portfolio

*NOTE: This assignment contains a lot of information. Please read it through carefully at least twice, so you can be sure that you understand it. Don't hesitate to ask questions in class (or catch me before class) if you aren't sure what this assignment is asking of you.*

**What is the goal of this assignment?** Essay II is a research essay that asks you to find information, to interpret it, and to form a thesis of your own. It should develop an idea—your thesis—in an interesting way, so that a reader sees something new about your chosen movie, about how movies express ideas and values, and about the creative process. Essay II also asks you to show that you know how to quote, paraphrase, summarize and cite information responsibly and in keeping with MLA style.

In telling a version of the life story of your subject, what story is your movie telling about creative process? What do you make of the way the movie interprets your subject's life? What is interesting to think about here? There is no one successful formula; different movies will suggest different approaches, and different viewers may emphasize different aspects of the same film. Readers will also, of course, want to know what you think of the movie—where it succeeds and/or fails, where it is entertaining, inspirational, puzzling, provocative or silly. This information can be woven into your paper, or it can appear as a separate paragraph; it may or may not be an important part of your organization and argument.

**Part I:**

Select a film from the list provided of biographical films on (real-life) creators in the arts, science, or technology. Watch your selected film at least twice, and write a brief précis (a concise summary) of it. We will also do some writing in class on your film to get at the feelings it evokes, how it does so, and the notion about creativity it expresses.

**Part II:**

Research the life of the subject of the film, focusing especially on the individual's creative process, motivation(s), inspirations, fears, collaborations, important relationships and how his or her work was received, being careful to distinguish between what is known, what is accepted by experts, and what is speculation. You may also research how the film was received—i.e., what the critics had to say. (Note that for a film such as *A Beautiful Mind* or *The Pianist*, you may find interesting discussions beyond the usual movie reviews.) In addition, you may want to research a topic connected with a theme your film explores—e.g., schizophrenia or madness and genius for *A Beautiful Mind*, the Nazi invasion of Poland or the arts in Europe under the Nazi regime for *The Pianist*.

- **Number of sources** I expect you to work with approx. 6-10 sources and to have that many sources listed in your “Works Cited.” You may, of course, look at more items than this along the way. Sources may comprise books, journal articles, magazines or newspapers, electronic sources, and interviews you have conducted.
- **Types of sources** Sources must include a minimum of 3 books. One book may be a dictionary of biography or an encyclopedia. A book on-line is still a book, just as a journal article in an on-line database is still a “real” scholarly article. Note that a journal is not a magazine—i.e., a journal is aimed at a scholarly rather than a popular audience.

**Help! How do I organize all this?** Once you’ve watched your film and gotten some basics down—summarizing it, thinking about the effect the movie has and how it achieves it—identify a theme or themes that especially interest you: the way the movie portrays the hero’s relationship with women, with music, with canvas and paint? The way the heroine defies convention? —and whether that is historically accurate, and what it might have meant at the time s/he lived and also at the time the movie was made? Whether the film seems to suggest that creativity is innate, or what it says about society’s role in fostering/blocking creativity? The way(s) in which creativity is seen as being valuable (or not) in the film. . . that sort of thing.

As you gather information addressing your questions and continue to think about your movie, sketch out a tentative thesis (or more than one) and outline. (These can be very rough.) *The important thing is to start conceptualizing your paper early:* don’t treat research as an autopilot activity. As you proceed, don’t simply take notes on sources you read; make your own marginal comments, note questions that you have and that you think your readers might have. Rather than just thinking of your theme as “relationships” or “the artist’s role in society,” articulate your sense of your theme in a complete sentence. “Refresh” your themes, your thesis, and your sense of how you want to organize your material as you consult new sources. Your key theme(s) and thesis may change considerably along the way. Let them!

Finally, when you sit down to write, think (or free-write!): What’s the most interesting thing in all of this? What’s the thing that fires *your* imagination? That’s where you start. Build your essay around that.

See if you can identify 3 or 4 main chunks of your paper, and use subheadings to set them off: subheads not only help readers navigate longer papers, they help writers organize them.

We will discuss how you integrate your sources into your essay in class. Briefly, in MLA style we don’t aim to limit our citation of sources to a parenthetical reference at the end of a sentence or paragraph; we aim to give readers information about the source as we go—for example, “As Hope Smith, Dean of Utopia University’s School of the Arts, remarks . . .”. Why should we care what Smith thinks? She’s a professor, she’s a specialist on modern art, she’s written a biography . . . whatever—let us know.)

### **Administrative notes**

**Availability of videos** If you are interested in other films, you will have to rent them, borrow them from a local library, or purchase them. (A good on-line source of movies is CDUniverse.com).

**Format and citation** For this paper we will use MLA style for in-text citations and a Works Cited page at the end. You will need to consult a guide such as the one contained in the *Bedford Pocket Style Manual*. This manual and others like it also give good tips on organizing a research paper.

NOTE: You may use “I” in this paper!

### **Taking notes**

- Make sure you know the names of the key characters in your movie, the actors who play those roles, the director, and the screenwriter (at a minimum). If a film is an adaptation of a book, let your reader know who wrote the book. Is the producer or studio important to the way the film was made? If so, let us know.
- Collect the bibliographic info for each source you use, when you use it. For any source you find on-line, this includes a URL and the date you accessed the source.
- Make sure you can distinguish between summary, paraphrase, and quote in your notes—and make sure you have the page numbers for all paraphrases and quotes.
- Quotations must be copied absolutely precisely, down to letters capitalized, punctuation, etc. It can be helpful to keep a file of quotes so that you can easily move them into your paper. Remember, though, that you don’t want huge blocks of quotes in your paper—use quotes sparingly and strategically.

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