TIPS FOR WRITING ABOUT FILM

Adapted from "Writing About Film," Dartmouth Writing Program. Note key terms related to film techniques in bold.

You don't need to be an expert on film to write a compelling essay about it. Film analysis includes discussions that are common to discussions of literature (**characters**, **plot**, **language**, etc.), but it should also focus centrally on the visual and sound strategies that the filmmakers employ. Film is an incredibly complex medium. Just take a look at the credits at the end of any film. Each of the people listed there has contributed something essential to the film's production - from **lighting**, to **sound**, to **wardrobe**, to **editing**, to the written **screenplay**, to **special effects**. Because there's so much to talk about, you'll have to be selective if you want to write a good, focused essay.

Then, when sitting down to watch a particular film, choose from among these many elements one or two that interest you. Is the **editing** particularly effective? What about the **frame** of the images -- does the frame focus in on an individual character or take in a broader scene or landscape? When the filmmaker makes a "**cut**"--a transition from one visual frame to another--what is the purpose? How do shifts in **framing**, **lighting**, or **perspective** create **moods** or suggest **arguments**? Watch closely when these cuts occur. Perhaps the director has used **jump cuts** (moving between the perspective of two people, often facing one another) consistently whenever characters are engaged in intimate conversations. What is (s)he trying to convey through this technique?

Make sure to observe carefully first, writing down notes on the visual form and sound effects. You will probably need to view the film multiple times in order to begin to "see" the film techniques that you need to write about. Do not focus solely on the language spoken by the characters.