FACILITATING INCLUSIVE CRITIQUE SESSIONS

In diverse classrooms, some students may be less inclined to speak up during class discussions. When it comes time for students to give feedback on their peers' projects, the instructor may need to work harder to ensure that all students feel comfortable offering their opinions in a large group. Based on an EDIT Media workshop at the University Film and Video Association Conference in 2018, here are a set of tips, guidelines and techniques to encourage rich discussion amongst all students. This document was made specifically to address issues of participation in classrooms with English as Second Language (ESL) students but can apply to many situations.

I.   REFRAMING PARTICIPATION
   a. Try to familiarize yourself with the different cultural norms for participation. Some students, like international students, may be less prepared to participate based on prior educational experiences.
      i. Consider not grading participation, or if grading participation, only using small group or individual exercises to assess
   b. When showing examples in class, use media that put students on a more even playing field.
      i. Use media that represent and/or were made by people from the different cultural groups present in class.
         1. Consider taking an anonymous poll to find out students' native languages and/or cultural experiences
      ii. Show work with English subtitles so students who aren't familiar with the variety of accents in English or certain idiomatic expressions can see them written down.
   c. Give assignments that allow students to show something about themselves or their experiences
      i. Ex. For the first day of class, they must write or tell a short story about something that happened to them or someone they know
      ii. Ex. Ask each student to find and bring in a video when you want to analyze or discussion things like structure, editing, etc.
   d. In production classes, consider designing the first assignment around visuals only, rather than visuals and sound.

II. REFRAMING FEEDBACK
   a. At the start of the semester, assign cultural competence self-assessments
      i. See free assessment by [Central Vancouver Island Multiculural Society](). Some departments might consider paid programs like the [Intercultural Development Inventory]() or the [Intercultural Conflict Style Inventory]()
      ii. Remind students that we all have different communication styles and to recognize that when giving and receiving feedback

b. Make sure to give students clear guidelines on how to give and receive feedback on creative work.
   i. Can include handouts like the one in Appendix A
   ii. Remind students that giving and receiving feedback will be important throughout their creative lives
   iii. Remind students that giving/receiving feedback is practice in building interpersonal communication and professional skills.

III. FEEDBACK TECHNIQUES
   a. Don't expect students to know how to give feedback, model how to do it and let students practice with a video that is not made by a student
      i. Consider using a video that allows ESL students to have a greater understanding, perhaps one that is translated from their language
   b. Assign a feedback leader for each assignment or video
      i. This means that everyone has to speak up at some point, and encourages them to do so after the requirement
   c. Give students very specific elements to comment on
      i. Consider giving each student a topic they have to respond to ("Your job is to comment on cinematography"). This changes for each video they watch. This might take away pressure on how to respond. This can be very structured for the first feedback session and can loosen once students get the hang of it
      ii. If the option above is too structured, give a list of acceptable topics to discuss, like sound, lighting, etc. See Appendix B for a sample handout to guide discussion.
   d. Give students time to reflect and write down their feedback before you ask them to deliver it in class
      i. Gives shy or ESL students more confidence in their responses
   e. Consider asking the student receiving feedback to report back to the professor what they heard in the critique.
      i. This can include which advice they plan on taking and why.
      ii. Encourages them to write down critique so they can remember later
   f. Consider assigning feedback as homework
      i. Allows ESL students to watch multiple times and take time with their feedback
      ii. See Appendix C for a sample online or silent critique form

APPENDIX A

Film Critique and Media Analysis

Engaging in the film review process will hone your active, critical viewing skills. You will be able to identify and assess the elements of film in practice; thus deepening your understanding of how film creates and communicates meaning. You will also learn to communicate effectively and professionally as you engage in a dialogue relying on the language of the medium.

Through film analysis, filmmakers can more objectively evaluate their own work in terms of form and content. The critique allows the filmmaker to make adjustments for future projects and/or edits. By learning what works and what could be improved, filmmakers strengthen their form and often improve the reception of their work. The group critique also promotes group learning as participants learn from one another - and if they are lucky, they may even find inspiration.

What to Look For in Media Analysis

1. **Technical Code**
   - Mise-En-Scene
   - Lighting Techniques
   - Camera Techniques
   - Editing Techniques
   - Audio Techniques
2. **Verbal Code**
   - Spoken
   - Written
3. **Symbolic Code**
   - Clues about character, setting, story, and theme.
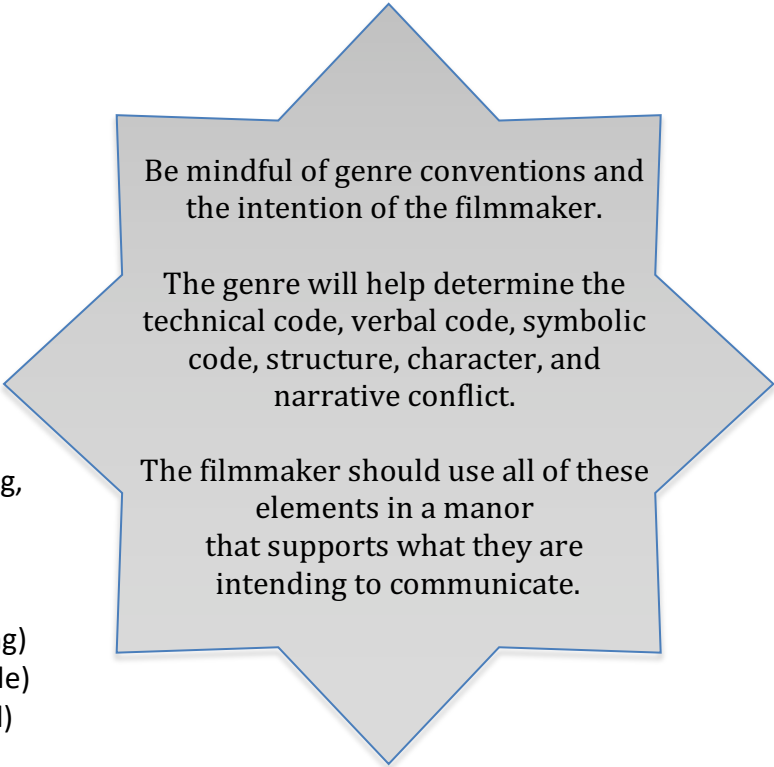4. **Structure**
   - Todorov's Theory
     1. Equilibrium (Beginning)
     2. Disequilibrium (Middle)
     3. New Equilibrium (End)
   - Story Themes
5. **Character**
   - Protagonist
   - Antagonist
   - Others: Heroin, Helper, Donor, Mentor
6. **Narrative Conflict**
   - Opposing forces

Be mindful of genre conventions and the intention of the filmmaker.

The genre will help determine the technical code, verbal code, symbolic code, structure, character, and narrative conflict.

The filmmaker should use all of these elements in a manor that supports what they are intending to communicate.

Critique Guidelines
*Modified only slightly from Taylor

1. **Acquire cinematic concepts.**
   Prepare for each critique by first reading, then reviewing, the relevant chapters from your text and course lessons. Then, as you watch the film, take note (mentally **and** literally) of <u>what concepts from the text or course concepts</u> are apparent in, or illustrated by, the film you have watched, <u>including the concepts from previous chapters.</u>

2. **Use concrete details**.
   Be sure to discuss specific moments, images, sounds, or effects from the film, in order to support the conclusions you make about composition, technical and aesthetic style, or the narrative, for instance.

3. **Examine social, cultural and moral implications.**
   Make your comments, more on the penetrating and probing side, rather than the superficial. Avoid saying the obvious and leaving it at that. Good pieces of art bear deep and thoughtful consideration: your ultimate goal is not just to connect the text to the film, but also to do so in a meaningful way. That is, you haven't really made a point unless you use the ideas from the text to *critique* the film -- make a judgment, draw a conclusion. Connect the social, cultural, or moral to the film.

   For example, labeling *On the Waterfront* a film that focuses on the complexity of human nature is just a start -- you need to finish the critique by saying (for instance) that the complexity consists in the way Terry is conflicted over wanting to have the satisfaction of fulfilling society's conventional definition of what he should be as a man (what Johnny Friendly can give him) and what he knows will give him ultimate satisfaction as a human being --i.e., investigating events, exposing society's ills, standing up for the truth (what Edie gives him.)

4. **Apply cinematic concepts.**
   In all of your critiques, make use of whatever concepts from the text/course are relevant to the film you are discussing -- not <u>just</u> the concepts for the chapter for the week in which you are writing the critique. In other words, each successive week you will have more cinematic terms and criteria from the text/course, to use in your critique; don't avoid using concepts from earlier lessons.

5. **Use *specific* concepts**
   In all your critiques; use specific concepts from the text/course. For instance, not just noting that characterization is effective in *Smoke Signals*, but saying that Thomas is an effective foil for Victor and explaining and illustrating why or not just noting that *Eternal Sunshine* uses reverse chronology in narrative structure, but explaining that this is done to give the audience the feeling of having their own memory erased, and to create a sense of confusion and uneasiness.

6. **Apply critical thinking.**
   Be critical in your thinking: that is, use your brain to direct your emotions, rather than the

other way around. Complete your points. Make inferences. Draw conclusions. Make judgments. Don't just apply labels. Try to be thoughtful and incisive with your comments. Think through what you mean to say, and say what you mean.

7. **Speak responsibly.**

Make your comments clear, express yourself directly and with purpose, aware of emotionally charged language, and avoid profane or other offensive usage.

8. **Follow up.**

It isn't uncommon to follow up. A Critique is a discussion, someone might challenge your thoughts, or inspire new ones, and follow up is beneficial.

Source:
Taylor, G. (n.d.). "Guidelines for Film Analysis" In *Drama 120: The Art of the Film* (guidelines). Retrieved from http://www.instruction.greenriver.edu/gtaylor/film/bbfilmcritique1.htm

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APPENDIX B

Classroom Critique Guidelines

What did you like best about the film?

Comment on the exposure (over? under? just right? consistent?).

Comment on the lighting. What kind of lighting was used (natural, 3-point)? How does the lighting contribute to the film?

Comment on the cinematography. What types of shots were used? How effective were the shot choices? Is there one shot that stands out (effective or misused, solid composition)?

Comment on the editing. What types of edits were used? How effective was the pacing? How did the edits influence your understanding of the story? Your mood?

Comment on the sound. What types of sound were used (music, dialogue, sound effects)? Did the sound compliment or interfere with the images? How so?

Comment on the story. What story elements were the strongest? Which ones could be improved?

Comment on the intent. Does the film align with the director's intent? Why or why not?

Comment on the acting and/or the characters. Were the actors believable? Were the characters compelling?

What is your take away? What did the film represent or mean to you? Were there particular elements technical or aesthetic (light, set, sound, story, editing, acting, style, perspective, sequence) that influenced your experience more than others?

Comment on the set/location. What was the setting? What was the location (physical or otherwise)? Was that appropriate fit for the story?

Comment on the goals of the assignment. Does this match with the task as hand? Why or why not?

APPENDIX C

Silent or Online Critique

Directions
View the film. Use this form to offer an anonymous written critique of the footage presented.

Film Title/Name: _____

☐ Yes ☐ No   The intent aligns with the film.

☐ Yes ☐ No   The film was exposed properly.

☐ Yes ☐ No   The film was in focus.

Comments (Check at least one area and provide comments)

☐ Lighting   Comments:
☐ Camera Angles   _____
☐ Camera Movement   _____
☐ Depth of Field   _____
☐ Acting   _____
☐ Location   _____
☐ Meaning   _____
☐ Structure   _____
                    _____
☐ Other   _____
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