**Screening Sheet** Activity Description

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**Overview**

The Screening Sheet is a tool I developed to help engage students in the very specific work of close, analytical moving image analysis. I created this tool for my Introduction to Film Studies students, but with modifications this tool could be repurposed for many lower-division courses. Indeed, a Screening Sheet can help students meet learning objectives in just about any course that depends upon students’ ability to engage with a screening beyond the basics of the plot and main ideas.

Screening Sheets help to level the playing field amongst students, particularly in introductory courses. While we media instructors often take the pedagogical value of screenings for granted, many students have no way of knowing what to write down when we tell them to "take notes" during a screening. Screening Sheets eliminate the mystery and guide all students in *how* to watch and what to take notes on. Furthermore, Screening Sheets can easily be used to help students draw the connections between a film's form and its politics/ideological position, leaving them with an artifact to remind them of this as they produce their own media.

Side 1 of a Screening Sheet is meant to be completed during the screening itself; Side 2 is meant to facilitate critical reflection immediately afterwards. Depending on time and class structure, Side 2 can then be used as a transition into immediate post-screening discussion *or* it can be a starting point for later. Moreover, I encourage my students to use their Side 1s to study for our midterm or final exam, and their Side 2s as models for the kinds of issues they might want to write about in their essays. Some students have even used a single Side 2 as the seed for an argument in such an essay.

**How to Use a Screening Sheet**

The best way to use a Screening Sheet is for an in-class or at-home film or TV screening that occurs *after* the key concepts of the unit (formal and/or thematic) have been introduced. When distributing the screening sheets, I suggest performing a quick review or refresher on those terms and concepts, alongside an introduction to the film or TV program to be screened.

The first time I use a screening sheet with a class, I explain its purpose: to guide them through the process of taking notes about our media text for the day. You should also let them know how they will be assessed; I recommend using these as a formative assessment and offering full credit for a completed front & back of the Screening Sheet, regardless of how “correct” the information is. I then go over Side 1 instructions and give examples of what kinds of items are appropriate for the given categories (ex. a bullet point noting a moment when chiaroscuro lighting is used). I also let students know that they will have an opportunity to complete Side 2 *after* the screening and tell them when we will discuss it (immediately afterwards, next Monday, etc.).

Note: to allow students to retain these for their own future use and reference, consider having them “turn in” their work by submitting a digital document or photo of each side to your LMS (“Learning Management System,” such as Canvas or Blackboard) or email by a certain deadline, rather than relinquishing the physical copy.

You will of course have to prepare the Screening Sheet before class, and tailor it to both the film/television series at hand *and* the learning objectives of the unit you are teaching.

In my experience, key features of a successful Screening Sheet include:

* Clear visual organization on Side 1 that can be understood at a glance (in flickering light conditions), such as boxes and tables
* “Scaffolded” asks (i.e. starting Side 1 with easy identifications and ending Side 2 with critical synthetic questions)
* Simple instructions for each step
* Bolded use of key terms that tie in with already-completed reading, lecture, or discussion (assisting in easy connection and memory recall)

Students will “fill out” Side 1 during the screening. You might do it along with them, so that during discussion you can flag key examples you noticed. Students will likely surprise you by noticing details you didn’t!

Depending on time constraints, student needs, and your preference, Side 2 can be designed to be completed wholly or partially in pairs or small groups. In my experience, particularly “difficult” units or screenings really benefit from collaborative work. I recommend giving students 10-15 minutes to complete Side 2.

Post-Screening Sheet discussion can take many forms; I tend to devote at least 15 minutes to it. I begin by asking the whole group to share patterns identified on Side 1, which gets everyone on the same page regarding *what* we saw. I then ask for individuals or groups to report back on Side 2, either one question at a time or all together. This presents an opportunity to move beyond the “what” and into the “how” or “why.”