Analysis of the Whole Film

- The Basic Approach: Watching, Analyzing, and Evaluating the Film
  - **Theme**: unifying central concern (message)
  - State the theme in a sentence (i.e., “You reap what you sow” – actions have consequences).
  - The **Relationship of the Parts** to the Whole:
  - How do these elements relate to your stated theme?
  - Story, **dramatic structure**, symbolism, characterization, conflict, setting, title, irony, cinematography, editing, film type, sound / special effects, dialogue, musical score, and acting.
The Film’s Level of Ambition

Adjust our expectations to the level of the film; if it is just meant to entertain, it is different from a serious film that tries to make a point and may not care if it “entertains.”

Still, you should have “standards” in place.

Objective Evaluation of the Film

How well does the film succeed in what it tries to do?

Assess each of the individual areas (acting, etc.) and explain why they help or hinder the film in its ambition.
Subjective Evaluation of the Film

Feelings, prejudices, and biases as well as life experiences, moral conditioning, age, culture, etc. all tie into our “enjoyment” of the film.

What is our personal reaction to the film and what are our personal reasons for liking or disliking it?
The Film as **Technical** Achievement (how the director communicates)

The Film as Showcase for the **Actor**:

The Personality Cult (casting – fits role, traits, personality, similarities to other roles, etc.)

- The Film as Product of a **Single Creative Mind**: The *Auteur* Approach
  - Director’s style, personality, and philosophy

- The Film as Moral, Philosophical, or Social Statement
  - **Humanistic approach** – what lesson does the film teach? (emphasizes intellectual experience)

- The Film as **Emotional** or Sensual Experience

- Judges reality and intensity of emotional impact rather than the intellectual
The Film as Repeated Form: The Genre Approach

- Western, horror, etc. have established characters, plots, etc. - Does the film meet our genre expectations? Does it have enough variances to have novelty?

- The Film as Political Statement/Marxist implications: socioeconomic lessons?

- The Film as Gender or Racial Statement: how are women / minorities treated and portrayed?
The Film as Insight to the Mind:
The **Psychoanalytical Approach**

- **Freudian Criticism**: psychoanalyzes the auteur and the audience: unconscious, repressed wishes, desires, fantasies, and dreams.

- **Jungian Criticism**: locate archetypes (universal patterns, myths, experiences, images, etc.)

- **The quest** has a protagonist who must gain independence; he must free himself from the Great Mother (any image of debilitating dependency). Then he is rewarded with a union to his feminine ideal.

- *Star Wars, The Wizard of Oz,* and *Harry Potter* all use the Hero’s Journey

- The **Eclectic Approach**: all approaches have some validity, so select the appropriate approach for the “type” of film.
Rereading the Reviews: what do you agree/disagree with and why

Evaluating the Reviewer: just factual? Approaches? Objective? Film elements covered?

Developing Personal Criteria: what are your standards, approaches, etc.?
Questions for Analyzing the Whole Film

On the Basic Approach: Watching, Analyzing, and Evaluating the Film

- What seems to be the director’s purpose or primary aim in making the film?
- What is the true subject of the film and what kind of statement, if any, does the film make about that subject?
- How do all the separate elements of the film relate to and contribute to the theme, central purpose, or total effect?
- What is the film’s level of ambition?
Questions for Analyzing the Whole Film

On the Basic Approach: Watching, Analyzing, and Evaluating the Film

- Given the film’s level of ambition, how well does the film succeed in what it tries to do? Why does it succeed or fail?

- Which elements or parts make the strongest contribution to the theme and why? Which elements or parts fail to function effectively? Why do they fail?

- What were your personal reactions to the film? What are your personal reasons for liking or disliking it?
Questions for Analyzing the Whole Film
On Evaluating the Reviewer

- Of what film reviewers in the popular press (newspapers and magazines, local and beyond) are you aware? Do you read their work regularly? If not, choose one critic whose writing is available to you and read carefully at least five of his or her reviews. Can you discern a pattern of central expectations upon which this reviewer’s observations are based? Attempt to record them succinctly.
Questions for Analyzing the Whole Film

On Evaluating the Reviewer

- Choose two of the nationally known film critics listed below and on the next slide. Then, make a comparative study of their work by locating, through research, each reviewer’s opinions of three of your favorite movies. Some influential film reviewers:

  - Anthony Lane or David Denby (*The New Yorker*)
  - Stanley Kauffmann (*The New Republic*)
Questions for Analyzing the Whole Film
On Evaluating the Reviewer

- Roger Ebert (*Chicago Sun-Times*)
- Richard Schickel or Richard Corliss (*Time*)
- Kenneth Turan (*Los Angeles Times*)
- Joseph Morgenstern (*The Wall Street Journal*)
- Peter Travers (*Rolling Stone*)
- Owen Gleiberman or Lisa Schwarzbaum (*Entertainment Weekly*)
Questions for Analyzing the Whole Film

On Developing Personal Criteria

- Construct a set of five to ten questions that you think you should answer when judging the merits of a film, or list five to ten qualities that you think are essential to a good movie.

- If you lack confidence in the validity of the qualities you’ve listed as essential, try another approach: List your ten all time favorite films. Then answer the questions on the following slides about your list, and see what your answers reveal about your personal criteria for film evaluation.
Questions for Analyzing the Whole Film
On Developing Personal Criteria

- Consider each film on your list carefully, and decide what three or four elements you liked best about it. Then decide which of these played the most important role in making you like or respect the film.

- How many of the films on your list share the qualities that most appeal to you? Which films seem to be most similar in the characteristics you like best?

- Do the qualities you pick show an emphasis on any single critical approach, or are your tastes eclectic? To decide this, answer the following questions:
Questions for Analyzing the Whole Film
On Developing Personal Criteria

- How many of the films on your list do you respect primarily for their technique?
- Do several of the films on your list feature the same actor?
- How many of your favorite films are made by the same director?
- Which of the films on your list make a significant statement of some kind?
- Which of the films have a powerful, intense, and very real emotional or sensual effect?
- Which of the films on your list could be classified as genre films, and how many of them belong to the same genre?
- Which films deal with basic conflicts between the “haves” and “have nots”?
Questions for Analyzing the Whole Film
On Developing Personal Criteria

- Which films show women (and members of minority groups) breaking out of traditional, stereotypical roles?
- Which of the films on your list rely heavily on complex symbols that require interpretation?
- What do your answers to the previous questions reveal about your personal preferences? Do your tastes seem restricted?
- How does your list of favorite films measure up against your first attempt to establish personal criteria for evaluation? How can your standards be changed, perhaps added to, in order to better match your list of film favorites?