

Seminar in Composition: Film  
Essay 1 Prompt

*Foxy Brown* played in theaters in 1974; it came out on DVD in 2001, and was digitized in High Definition in 2010. It is, then, an object that circulates outside its original context, reaching people and places its makers never envisioned. For this essay, I want you to consider how you – as viewer and as writer – approach a film when you’re not part of its target audience. In the context of *Foxy Brown*, how do you deal with features that seem of another time (or place)? Do critics’ opinions matter (from 1974 or from today)? What does it mean to watch this film on a computer in your room rather than in an urban theater?

You’re not expected to answer all of these questions. You don’t have to answer any of them: they’re meant to get you thinking, not dictate the course of your essay, and your own interests and investments should guide your writing. The only hard requirements are that you **engage with *Foxy Brown*** and with **at least one piece of writing relevant to it**. This can be something I’ve assigned or something you find. Either way, be sure to cite your sources.

People have been talking about *Foxy Brown* for decades, and the goal here is for you to enter into that conversation. You should be making an argument, saying something that’s different from/an addition to/a rejection of what other people have said before you. Essays should be **1250-1500** words, so be sure to choose a topic manageable in that space.

**Due Tuesday, 9/9. Email me a Word document before 9:30AM, and bring 3 hard copies with you to class.**

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Essay 2 Prompt

For this essay, you're not writing about *The LEGO Movie*. Your task is to create a world around a material, branded object; think of what *The LEGO Movie* does with LEGO toys as one potential model.

Choosing an object (as you've done for today) is the first step. In moving forward, you'll need to think about the following: what qualities and associations does your chosen object have? What sort of stories might it participate in, and what audience would want to hear them? Consider as well the social dynamics of your object's world. Who is speaking (your object? someone/thing else?), and in what voice does it speak? Who is it talking to - does your object have friends? Enemies? Vague acquaintances?

You can structure this essay however you like. It may be a linear narrative (like *The LEGO Movie*), a series of events or descriptions, or anything else you come up with. The form you choose should make sense, however – you should be able to tell me why you picked it and how it grows out of your object.

Send me a **paragraph** of your essay by **5PM Monday, 9/22**.

The completed essay should be **at least 1250 words**, and is due **Thursday, 9/25**. Email me a Word document before class and bring 2 copies with you.

SC: Film  
Digital Assignments

You have already written about images (Essay 1) and used writing to conjure images (Essay 2). In Essay 4, you will write by means of images. Your task is to convey meaning through the making and arranging of animated .gifs; you can also use text, but it should not be the primary mode through which you communicate. Your .gifs should be important, in other words, essential to your composing rather than afterthought or decoration.

You can write about whatever you want – the topic is completely up to you. You must, however, make an argument: have a claim that you are either for or against, a question that you commit yourself to answering. Thus a description of how Tumblr works would be unacceptable here; an argument that how Tumblr works makes it better than Flickr at community building would, in contrast, be completely fair game.

**You must use at least 3 .gifs that your classmates have made.** You're welcome to supplement with as many others as you like, whether made or found, and to write as much or as little accompanying text as you feel necessary. The goal of this project is to get you thinking about what moving images (and particularly the short, looping video that constitutes .gifs) offer in terms of composition. Consider what you want a viewer to walk away with, and how you might communicate that in visual form.

Alongside your digital composition, write a reflection on your process of making it: this should be **at least 400 words**. What worked, and what might've gone better? What does the .gif format allow you to do (or make it hard to do effectively)?

**Post your digital essay on Tumblr before class Tuesday, 11/4. Email me a copy of your reflection and bring a printed one with you to class.**

There are two preliminary assignments to help you work towards this essay:

**.gif post – due Sunday, 10/26 by 5PM**

Make two .gifs and post them to the class Tumblr. For one of the two, explain your process of composition: what source is the .gif taken from, and why do you begin and end where you do? What effect do you imagine it having on a viewer? This explanation need not be more than a few sentences: just give a sense of the choices you faced in making this .gif and how you resolved them.

**Response 5 – due Tuesday, 10/28 in class**

In this response, give a tentative plan for your digital essay. Identify the topic or question that motivates it, and begin working out how you want to construct it. What .gifs might you use, and how will you arrange and move between them? What problems do you anticipate? This should be at least 250 words; post it to the discussion board and bring a hardcopy with you to class.

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Essay 5 Prompt

The experience of viewing isn't just about the object on-screen: going to a movie in theaters is different from seeing it on television, which is different again from watching on your laptop. In this essay, your task is to give me a sense not of what you watch but *how* you watch it.

Think of a media experience where the scene of viewing is particularly important. Have you, for example, enjoyed a film because of who you watched it with (or where you were when you saw it)? Do you pay attention to certain parts of a TV show because you know you'll talk about them with a friend later (or in that moment, via text or Twitter)? Why is it more awkward to see *Masters of Sex* in a 20-person class than alone in your room? Does background audio make it frustrating to watch things online?

Each act of watching has a context, and in this essay I'm asking you to think about when and why that context is important. Anything that influences your watching experience is fair game here: the smudges on a laptop screen, the taste of popcorn, restraining your reactions because you're watching football with a fan of the other team. Be sure to make clear the impact of your mode of watching: this assignment is about analysis as much as description.

Essay 5 is due **Thursday, 11/20** at the start of class. **Bring three hard copies with you and email me a digital version.**

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Final Portfolio

### **Monday, December 1: Response 7 Due**

In this response, outline your plan for Essay 6. This is your opportunity to ask me questions and get feedback on ideas, so be sure to voice any concerns you have. As usual, your response should be about 300 words (though you're welcome to go longer if you have more to say). If you've started writing, you could also turn in a piece of Essay 6. I'll get Response 7 back to you with brief comments by Thursday, 12/4.

### **Tuesday, December 9: Final Portfolio Due**

Your final portfolio is a two-pocket folder containing two groups of material:

1. In one pocket, place copies of all your alphabetic essays with my comments, including the reflection from your digital essay.
2. In the other pocket, place Essay 6 and your Letter of Reflection, both of which are explained below.

Put the folder in my mailbox (in CL 501) by **5PM**.

### **Essay 6**

For Essay 6, you can revise any of your previous essays in whatever medium you wish. This is the last assignment you'll complete in this class, and I want your interests to determine how you go about doing it. You might change an essay's medium: make the .gif composition a text essay, incorporate images or .gifs into a text composition, or enact any other transformation that appeals to you (if you have video editing skills, for example, this is an opportunity to use them). You might also revise without changing the medium, being sure to further develop your ideas and examples.

In any case, Essay 6 should be a **substantial** revision, which means that you are fundamentally rethinking, re-seeing, revising your essay: **at least 50% of Essay 6 should be new material**. This essay may end up almost entirely new – you must be working with ideas from the class in some way, but otherwise go wherever your ideas take you.

If your essay takes digital format, it doesn't need to be physically included in your portfolio. Depending on format, you can upload it to our shared Tumblr, post it to YouTube, or email it to me at [klc122@pitt.edu](mailto:klc122@pitt.edu). Just be sure to get it to me in some way by 5PM on the 9<sup>th</sup>.

## **Letter of Reflection**

In this letter, you should reflect on and introduce the body of work you've produced in this class. Looking back at your essays, how would you describe yourself as a writer? Has your writing changed over the course of the semester? How will the work you've done in this class translate to your broader academic career? Be sure to address Essay 6 specifically: how did you go about revising, and what do you hope to accomplish through your particular mode of revision? What do you see Essay 6 doing in the context of your larger body of work?

You're also free to include anything else you want me to know about your writing or the class in general.

This letter should be **no less than two double-spaced pages**.

**In addition to turning in the physical portfolio, please email me Essay 6 by 5PM on December 9.**