

Gordon Sullivan

SC: Film

Essay 1 – The Personal Essay

As I hope you have gathered from reading David Foster Wallace’s “Authority and American Usage,” a review needn’t be a simple affair. We do not live in ancient Rome, and Roger Ebert has ceased to rate films with his thumb. In that spirit, this essay will ask you to review a film. Specifically, this assignment asks you to review a horror film, one that you haven’t seen before, in the spirit of David Foster Wallace’s essay. To put it another way: use this essay as an opportunity to both say something about a particular film (good or bad) *and* something about another topic (or topics).

Caveats:

We will be using a loose definition of horror, which is a genre that covers a broad spectrum to begin with. So, *We’re the Millers* is not a horror film; *Elysium* might be. You can, in fact, make the entire essay a justification for why you think that *Grown Ups 2* is a horror film.

The film must be new to you. It doesn’t have to be recent, nor does it have to be a classic. Horror films are readily available, so go wild. If you have trouble picking a film I’m happy to discuss it with you and make a recommendation.

When I say “in the spirit of” I mean that this essay should in some way be “personal” and deal with a subject that is important to you (as language is obviously important to David Foster Wallace). This also means you have incredible freedom to approach and structure the essay. Keep in mind questions of tone, of how the essay will look on the page, and how the structure of your essay can support the point(s) you’re trying to make.

This essay must, as with all your essays, be 1200 words **at a minimum**. If you need more space, take it. Much like everything in adulthood, you’re responsible for yourself. My general preferences are for 12 point Times New Roman font with double spacing. I like a title. But these are guidelines – the only hard and fast rules are that the majority of the thing needs to be in English and at least 1200 words.

Finally, this is not your typical English essay. You've had to read David Foster Wallace, but this essay is in no way related to the *content* of his argument. There is, as such, no reason to mention Wallace or his various opinions. I mention this because most students out of high school are trained to read a text and then write about it. We're not doing that here. You won't lose points or anything for mentioning DFW, but if you feel the irresistible urge to do so, please talk about it with me first.