

Roadside America: A First-Year Seminar

Dr. Bob Bednar

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Communication Studies**

Southwestern University

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OFFICE HOURS: Mondays 2:00-3:00; Tue 4:00-5:00; Th 4:00-5:00; and by appointment
CLASS MEETINGS: 10:00 – 11:15 Tu/Th, PRC 147

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course explores the interrelationships between representations of driving, street and highway landscapes, and the figure of “the road” in contemporary American car culture, popular culture more generally, and our own personal stories of living with and living through cars.

Asphalt and neon. Road trips and freedom. Car crashes and traffic-stop killings. These are all icons of Roadside America, a real-and-imagined place filled with drivers, cars, streets, and roads, and surrounded by landscapes and buildings as well as cultural narratives and ideologies. It is a distinctive kind of physical, social, and cultural space called “automobility,” where drivers use the same public resources for divergent purposes, forming a microcosm for understanding the tensions that are central to identity and culture in the contemporary United States-- between mobility and control, roots and routes, home and elsewhere, freedom and cooperation, belonging and exclusion, self and society. What does it mean to live with and within this world, and what does it mean to study it?

As we explore these phenomena of automobility, you will also embark on a different type of mobility: your journey as a student here at Southwestern. As one of several First-Year Seminars, this course is designed to introduce you to the processes of participatory learning in a liberal arts college environment, helping you begin to practice an education that arcs over the whole course of your experience and across the curriculum, connecting the questions and perspectives you encounter and the skills you develop to each other and to the world. While it serves first to introduce you to Southwestern, it is a concurrent rather than preliminary experience, focused on exploratory topics or themes that help you think about what you are learning in your other classes and your larger education.

Therefore, through a variety of individual and collaborative assignments, workshops, modules, and discussions, this Seminar will focus on developing your abilities in the following areas that will be useful to you as a student here and as a lifelong learner: formulating cogent questions, forging connections between methods of inquiry, recognizing and challenging

assumptions, seeking out and listening to multiple perspectives, creatively approaching the world with curiosity, developing a critical thinking perspective, and rethinking/redefining the role of reading, writing, creativity, and discussion in student-centered learning.

Buckle up. Let's go for a drive...

GRADING:

I design my classes with a number of different kinds of low stakes and high stakes assignments designed to both draw out your strengths and facilitate growth, focusing on different assignment formats to make sure that each student has maximum potential to demonstrate and extend existing skills and knowledge while developing new ones. I go into every class, every assignment, and every student encounter with a growth mindset--the belief that every student is capable of both succeeding and improving--and see that my responsibility is to give you the tools you need to succeed and improve while also being clear about my expectations and evaluations.

Grades are given a lot of power in dominant culture, but it is important to remember that grades are not a reflection of your worth as a person but a reflection of your performance under a certain set of defined constraints. To level the playing field and fight against a scarcity model of grading, which reinforces unearned advantages and inherited cultural power, I do not grade on a bell curve to place your graded assignments or final grade into a pre-determined grade distribution, where only a certain number of students can get an A, B, C, D, or F. The grades I assign reflect my evaluation of your performance within the constraints outlined in the syllabus and in assignment handout rubrics. Grades for particular assignments thus measure your performance on that assignment relative to the requirements of the assignment, not relative to other students, and final course grades measure your performance in the class overall.

Based on my goal to both minimize grade focus/anxiety while also teaching you to be independent thinkers and self-advocates, I do not post grades that are calculated in real-time throughout the semester. Increasingly, students are being trained to expect real-time grades computed as courses unfold, which creates an unbalanced extrapolation of a snapshot of your performance, treating your current performance as a predictor of your final grade. I myself do not compute your grades until the very end of the semester unless I see a major concern emerge or a student requests it. Because the work we do continues to build to higher and higher stakes over the course of the semester, I see grades on smaller assignments along the way as signals about what to do in the future, not an accurate prediction of what your final grade will be. The only way they become predictive is if you ignore the feedback you are getting along the way or do not take it as a stimulus for growth.

If you ever want to compute your emerging overall grade average yourself at any point during the semester, here is what you need to know to compute grades yourself in this class. Final course grades are assigned a final letter grade based on a range of averages for individual assignments based on a 100-point scale. For example, a final average of 88-89% would be recorded as a B+; a final average of 83-87% would be recorded as a B; and 80-82% would be recorded as a B- (extrapolate from there if it is higher or lower than a B). For the purposes of averaging individual project letter grades into a final grade, I use the following system to assign a numerical grade based on a letter grade on an assignment: B+=88%; B=85%, and B-=82% (and so on). For example, if you got a B- on an assignment that was weighted 25% of the final grade, you would receive 20.5 points for that assignment (or *lose the possibility of getting* 4.5 points overall). The only exception for that is if you achieve an A+ on an individual assignment, where it will score as a 100% of the available points, where in this example you would receive the full

25 points.

At any point along the way, if you are curious, you can see how your grade is tracking: multiply the score of an individual assignment grade by the percentage it is weighted and that will reveal the total points you have earned for that assignment grade; add it to other determined grades; and then divide it by the highest potential scores for all the completed assignments combined. For grades that are composite, such as graded Classwork, you can calculate it the same way to track your ongoing composite score. If Classwork is determined by completion grades instead of through scoring, you can average that score based on the number of assignments you have completed divided by the ones you have not. Please note that I do not compute cumulative class participation grades until the very end of the semester, so if you want to get a sense of where this score is tracking before that, you will need to discuss it with me. Finally, if you have absences in excess of the stated policy or a pattern of late submissions, you will need to factor them in as well. If you have questions about this grading system at any time, please consult me.

Here is how each assignment or set of assignments is weighted in this class:

Individual Project #1: <i>Mobility Without Mayhem, Wanderlust, Gun Crazy & Thelma & Louise</i>	10%
Individual Project #2: Road Nonfiction Narratives	10%
Individual Project #3: Road Fiction Narratives	10%
Individual Project #4: Final Self-Evaluation	10%
Collaborative Project: Georgetown Road Stories	10%
Creative Nonfiction Road Narrative	15%
Final Research Project	15%
Classwork and Class Participation	20%

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Jeremy Packer, *Mobility Without Mayhem: Safety, Cars, and Citizenship* (2008)

Four Films: *Wanderlust* (2006), *Gun Crazy* (1949), and *Thelma & Louise* (1991)

All other PDF readings for the class will be located at the course web resource page:

<http://people.southwestern.edu/~bednarb/roadsideamerica>

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

This course shares with other First-Year Seminars the following student learning outcome objectives.

Students will demonstrate:

- an understanding of college-level expectations of critical reading.
- an understanding of college-level expectations of writing cogently.
- an understanding of college-level expectations of critical and creative thinking.
- an understanding of college-level expectations of informed discussion.
- an understanding of college-level expectations of research.

ASSIGNMENTS, PROCEDURES, AND POLICIES:

We will discuss the class assignments more as the course unfolds, but this short outline will help orient you now:

- **INDIVIDUAL CRITICAL CONNECTIONS PROJECTS:** You will produce four short Individual Critical Connections Projects in this class that critically engage (that is, specifically analyze and reflect upon) the readings and screenings we do for the class. The first 3 of these will be 2-page take-home writing assignments that address a question I give you related to the readings and/or movie screenings for the day or week with the goal of connecting the different things we are studying to your own perspective. Individual Project #4: Final Self-Evaluation will be 2 pages long and will critically reflect on your experience in the class as a whole. The Individual Projects will be evaluated on a 10-point scale.

- **COLLABORATIVE PROJECT: Georgetown Road Stories:** You will produce one collaborative project in this class. Georgetown Road Stories will be a 5-minute in-class presentation based on fieldwork you do on the road in the city of Georgetown with 1-2 other students from the class. The presentations must involve each member of the group; all work presented must be collaborative and not simply a series of individual projects. Each member of a collaborative group is responsible for the output of the group, and each member of is responsible for the effective functioning of the group; thus each member will receive the same grade as everyone else in the group. (See note below on Academic Integrity for more details about my approach to managing and evaluating collaborative projects.) Georgetown Stories will be evaluated on a 10-point scale.

- **CREATIVE NONFICTION ROAD NARRATIVE:** Your Creative Nonfiction Road Narrative will be 4-5 pages long and will explore your ideas about automobility by telling the story of a particular personal experience you have had with automobiles and car culture. This Project will be drafted and will involve a peer critique workshop and revision before it is graded on an A-F, plus/minus system.

- **FINAL RESEARCH PROJECT:** You will each produce a 4-6 page researched essay that analyzes and interprets some clearly-focused aspect of American automobility: a road movie, a road novel, a road travel destination, a set of road photographs, a particular highway, a particular crash, a particular traffic-stop death, a billboard ad campaign, a bumper sticker/magnet phenomenon, a particular kind of vehicle, a roadside building, a driver's training film, a set of car advertisements, a car-related subculture, etc. Your project must critically engage at least 7 sources we haven't read in class (with at least 3 of them being peer-reviewed, scholarly books, book chapters, or journals). This project includes a proposal and a short presentation to the class and will be drafted, peer critiqued, and revised before it is graded on an A-F, plus/minus system. You will also produce a poster and share your project publicly in person with SU Community members at First Symposium, an exhibition of work done by FYS and AES students on October 26.

- **CLASSWORK and CLASS PARTICIPATION:** This is not a lecture class, where you come to class every day expecting the teacher to deliver knowledge to you. This is a seminar, where we all will work together to produce knowledge in active and critically engaged dialogue. I will lead the discussion, but the class depends on and rewards your active participation. We will be doing a lot of different things in this class, from screening films to having discussions to critiquing your colleagues' writing, to participating in modules other FYS sections will also be participating in. This variety will hopefully keep you on your toes, but it also demands that you have an open and engaged and collaborative attitude throughout the course. Good Class Participation means more than merely attending class, which to me is a given. Minimally, it means reading the

assigned course materials and coming to class ready to critically engage them—and actively contributing to the class discussion by speaking *and* listening not only to me, but to your classmates as well. More substantially, it means working to make our class a space of open, respectful, responsible, and challenging engagement with ideas, perspectives, and voices both similar to and different from your own. Good Classwork means doing everything you can to produce assignments on time, come to class prepared and ready to engage topics and materials, and provide your colleagues detailed constructive feedback in Critique Workshops. Missing a Critique Workshop will have a significant impact on your Classwork and Class Participation grade, but will also have significant impact on your revision process. Classwork and Class Participation will be evaluated on a 20-point scale.

- **ATTENDANCE:** Also because this is a discussion seminar, it assumes that you are in class every day. But given that we are still working within a tense public health situation that will keep all of our work under the threat of disruption, and given that many of us are in situations that are beyond our control, I know that all of us will be in a fluid and distracted emotional and mental space. I expect that might translate into more fluid attendance and engagement, but I also expect that you will do whatever you can to meet us all in the middle to make this work for all of us. Bottom line: to be flexible but also clear about my expectations, I will not enforce a pre-determined penalty for absences, but you are accountable for making up whatever work you miss due to an absence.

- **READING ASSIGNMENTS:** All reading assignments must be completed before class on the day scheduled for discussion of the readings.

- **WRITING ASSIGNMENTS:** Unless indicated explicitly otherwise, you should assume that all writing assignments for this class must be produced and/or revised using a word processor and turned in as an email attachment by the stated deadline. While I am open to most fonts, the page limits assume double-spacing, standard 1" margins, and the default of Times 12-point font. Citations should be rendered consistently either in Chicago, MLA, or Harvard format, with in-text citations in the essay and full bibliographic citations in a separate "Works Cited" page at the end of the paper. For major assignments (The Nonfiction Road Narrative and Final Research Project), late papers will be penalized a full letter grade for each weekday that they are late. Because the more frequent Individual Critical Connections Project assignments are designed to help prepare you to better participate in class discussions and because our discussions will subsequently work through the material in class, you cannot receive full credit for missed Individual Critical Connections Projects made up after an absence or late paper. *Thus make-ups after the fact for missed daily Critical Connections Papers will count for no more than half of the original assignment grade, meaning that you would be able to score at most 5 out of 10 points instead of 10 out of 10.*

- **WORKING TOGETHER DURING A PANDEMIC:** Most of the time, we will be working together in our classroom, where the structure of the classroom set-up will help us maintain default distancing between us, and we should all be safe to be around each other if we respect that default space and properly wear masks covering our nose and chins at all times when we are indoors. But there will be times--when we enter and exit the classroom, do any group work within class, or transition to having class outside and have class outside, or if you work with each other one-on-one or in study groups outside of class, for instance—when you will need to negotiate distancing and masking boundaries. The best approach here is not to make

assumptions but to discuss it directly in terms of consent: volunteer your own boundaries, ask people about their boundaries, and speak up when you observe someone ignoring those boundaries, including me.

- **ACCOMMODATIONS:** As an advocate for an inclusive and diverse learning community, I know that there can be significant differences in how students learn and perform their knowledge in an academic setting, which is why I include many different kinds of assignments in my classes. If you ever feel that you are not being fairly assigned work or being fairly evaluated for that work, you should talk to me directly right away. I know students can be intimidated by faculty in general, but personally I would always rather have the opportunity to address an issue directly when it is happening than after the fact. I also will make reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities. Students should contact the Center for Academic Success to determine their eligibility to receive accommodations. It is your responsibility to discuss any necessary accommodations with me as well.

- **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:** It is your responsibility to understand and live by the Southwestern Honor Code, so you should review its policies and procedures outlined in the *SU Student Handbook*. We will do a short module on the Honor Code in class the first week. Students who violate University policies on Academic Dishonesty by representing another's work as their own or who commit some other academic integrity violation are subject to review by the Honor Code Council, which includes the possibility of disciplinary penalties, including dismissal from the University. For this particular class, all individual and collaborative in-class and out-of-class assignments are subject to the Honor Code. Therefore, any individual writing assignment you turn in must include a full statement of the Pledge ("I have acted with honesty and integrity in producing this work and am unaware of anyone who has not.") followed by your signature. If both the pledge and your signature are not present on your paper, I will assume that you either have committed an Honor Code violation or have witnessed an Honor Code violation and wish to pursue it. The Honor Code also applies to any group Collaborative Projects as well. To act with integrity in a Collaborative Project group is a little more complex than in individual work, but it is no less important. It means not only that you take responsibility for "carrying your weight" by producing your part of the group's work with integrity (as you would with individual work), but also that you have produced the work *as a group*, which means that you have tried your best to make space in your busy life to collaborate with your classmates, that you respect the similarities *and* differences of your group members, and that you take responsibility for working together productively with your group to find common ground. In other words, to act with integrity in a collaborative group, you need to take an active role in the group, find ways to use your strengths as a collaborator, identify and foster the strengths of your group members, make your best effort to make the group itself work as well as it can, *and* produce the group's best work. If collaborative issues emerge in the group, they need to be resolved *within the group*.

PLANNED SCHEDULE

Orientation Week, August 16--20

Aug 16 (Mon, 10-12):

Introductions; "Roadside America Geography Challenge"

REVIEW/FINISH READING: Summer Reading from *Mobility Without Mayhem*

Aug 17 (Tue, 9-12):

Screen *Wanderlust* (2006);

Module: Honor Code 11:30-12:00

READ: Cohan and Hark, Introduction to *The Road Movie Book* [Course Webpage]

REVIEW/FINISH READING: Summer Reading from *Mobility Without Mayhem*

Aug 18 (Wed, 10-12):

Screen *Gun Crazy* (1949)

READ Mills, "Introduction"; Mills: "Rewriting Prohibitions" {see PDF of end notes and works cited included in separate link} [Course Webpage]

REVIEW/FINISH READING: Summer Reading from *Mobility Without Mayhem*

Aug 19 (Thu, 9-12):

9-12 Screen *Thelma & Louise* (1991)

READ: Creekmur, "On the Run and On the Road"; Graff & Birkenstein, "The Art of Quoting" [Course Webpage]

REVIEW/FINISH READING: Summer Reading from *Mobility Without Mayhem*

Aug 20 (Fri, 10-12):

Discuss *Mobility Without Mayhem* (Summer Reading), *Gun Crazy*, *Thelma & Louise*, and *Wanderlust*

READ: Man, "Gender, Genre, and Myth in *Thelma & Louise*"; Heller-Nicholas, "The F Word" [Course Webpage]

REVIEW/FINISH READING: Summer Reading from *Mobility Without Mayhem*

DUE: Individual Project #1: Critical Connections Analysis of *Mobility Without Mayhem*, *Wanderlust*, *Gun Crazy*, and *Thelma & Louise*

[After Orientation Week, unless otherwise indicated in the Syllabus Schedule, we'll meet from 10:00-11:15 Tuesdays and Thursdays in our regular classroom, PRC 147]

Week One

Aug 24 (Tue): Review Orientation Week; Discuss Georgetown Road Stories Project; Module: Writing Center

[Bring your laptops and Meet in Library lobby for 1st part of class, 10:00-10:30]

READ: Dietz, "Hip To Be Square" [Course Webpage]

Aug 26 (Thu): Discuss American Road Nonfiction Narratives

READ: Steinbeck, excerpt from *Travels With Charley*; McMurtry, excerpt from *Roads*; Dembling, "The Bus Stops Here"; Gough, "Travels With Chester"; Lewis-Kraus, "On the Road" [Course Webpage]

DUE: Individual Project #2: Critical Connections Analysis of American Road Nonfiction

Week Two

Aug 31 (Tue): Discuss American Road Fiction Narratives

READ: Kerouac, Excerpt from *On the Road*; Craven, excerpt from *Fast Sofa*; Lopez, excerpt from *Flaming Iguanas*; Hawke, excerpt from *Ash Wednesday* [Course Webpage]

DUE: Individual Project #3: Critical Connections Analysis of American Road Fiction

Sep 2 (Thu): Presentations of Collaborative Project: Georgetown Road Stories

Week Three

Sep 7 (Tue): Countercultures of Automobility

READ: Packer, Ch. 2-3

Sep 9 (Thu): "Driving While Black"

READ: Packer, Ch. 5

EXPLORE: <http://libguides.southwestern.edu/roadsideamerica>

Week Four

Sep 14 (Tue): [Writing Consultations]

Sep 16 (Thu): [Writing Consultations]

Week Five

Sep 21 (Tue): Discuss Critique Workshop Process and Final Research Projects

DUE: Creative Nonfiction Road Narrative Draft

Sep 23 (Thu): Module: Library Research [**Meet in Library Lobby**]

EXPLORE: <http://libguides.southwestern.edu/roadsideamerica>

DUE: Research Project Proposal

Week Six

Sep 28 (Tue): Writing Critique Workshop: Creative Nonfiction Road Narratives

DUE: Notes on your critical response to the Drafts of people in your WorkGroup

NOTE: Special Time, split into WorkGroup1 @ 10-11; and WorkGroup2 @ 11-12

Sep 30 (Thu): Research Project Workshop; Module: Exploring Majors and Careers

DUE: Revised Creative Nonfiction Road Narrative

Week Seven

Oct 5 (Tue): Module: Diversity/Social Justice

Oct 7 (Thu): Module: Integrated Learning; Research Project Workshop

Week Eight

Oct 12 (Tue): [Fall Break]

Oct 14 (Thu): The Futures of Automobility

READ: Packer, Ch. 7

Week Nine

Oct 19 (Tue): Discuss Final Research Project Critique Process and Project Posters

DUE: Final Research Project Draft

Oct 21 (Thu): Writing Critique Workshop: Research Project Drafts

DUE: Notes on your critical response to the Drafts of people in your WorkGroup

NOTE: Special Time, split into WorkGroup1 @ 10-11; and WorkGroup2 @ 11-12

Week Ten

Oct 26 (Tue): **First Symposium** (Exhibition of your Research Projects with other FYS/AES students), **9:00-11:15am, Bishops Lounge**

Oct 28 (Thu): Final Research Project Presentations; Course Evaluations; Conclusions

DUE Revised Final Research Project

Individual Project #4: Final Self-Evaluation

Course PDF Readings

- Cohan, Steven, and Hark, Ina Rae, "Introduction," in Steven Cohan & Ina Rae Hark (eds.), *The Road Movie Book* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 1-14.
- Craven, Bruce, Excerpt from *Fast Sofa* (New York: Quill/William Morrow, 1993), pp. 136-150.
- Creekmur, Corey K., "On the Run and On the Road: Fame and the Outlaw Couple in American Cinema," in Steven Cohan & Ina Rae Hark (eds.), *The Road Movie Book* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 90-109.
- Dembling, Sophia, "The Bus Stops Here," in Marybeth Bond (ed), *A Woman's World: True Stories of Life on the Road* (San Francisco: Traveler's Tales, 1999), pp. 62-73.
- Dietz, Dan, "Hip To Be Square: An Austin Hipster Digs Downtown Georgetown," *Austin American-Statesman XLENT Magazine*, June 9, 2005, pp. 35-43.
- Gough, Laurie, "Travels With Chester," in Marybeth Bond (ed), *A Woman's World: True Stories of Life on the Road* (San Francisco: Traveler's Tales, 1999), pp. 349-367.
- Graff, Gerald, and Birkenstein, Cathy, "As He Himself Puts It: The Art of Quoting," in Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein, *They Say, I Say: The Moves That Matter in Persuasive Writing* (New York: Norton, 2007), pp. 39-47.
- Hawke, Ethan, Excerpt from *Ash Wednesday* (New York: Vintage, 2002), pp. 158-168.
- Heller-Nicholas, Alexandra, "The F Word: Power and Gender in *Thelma & Louise*," *Screen Education* 66 (2012), pp. 105-110.
- Kerouac, Jack, Excerpt from *On the Road* (New York: Penguin, [1957] 2000), pp. 1-10; 120-160.
- Lewis-Kraus, Gideon, "On the Road," in Lauren Collins (ed.), *The Best American Travel Writing 2017* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), pp. 148-155.
- Lopez, Erika, Excerpt from *Flaming Iguanas* (New York: Scribner/Simon & Schuster, 1997), pp. 1-8, 70-93.
- Man, Glenn, "Gender, Genre, and Myth in *Thelma & Louise*," *Film Criticism* 18/1 (1993), pp. 36-53.
- McMurtry, Larry, Excerpt from *Roads: Driving America's Great Highways* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), pp. 11-23.
- Mills, Katie. "Introduction: What Automobility Offers Cultural Studies," in Katie Mills, *The Road Story and the Rebel: Moving Through Film, Fiction, and Television* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2006), pp. 1-16.
- Mills, Katie. "Rewriting Prohibitions With Narratives of Possibility," in Katie Mills, *The Road Story and the Rebel: Moving Through Film, Fiction, and Television* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2006), pp. 17-34.
- {—notice that the Endnotes and Works Cited for these Mills readings are included as a separate PDF}
- Steinbeck, John, Excerpt from *Travels With Charley: In Search of America* (New York: Bantam, 1961), pp. 3-9.

Bednar
Roadside America

Doing Critical Connection
Writing Assignment Projects

You will complete several individual writing assignment projects in this course that ask you to critically analyze, interpret, and connect pieces of writing and/or films. I will give you separate handouts for each of these assignments.

Regardless of the particular framework for each assignment, however, there are some common concerns to keep in mind. First, these critical analysis/interpretation essays will be obviously selective. There is no way that you can account for *all* of the things you see in a piece of writing or a film (or especially a *group* of films and/or texts, as you will be doing here) in any meaningful way in a few pages, so you will need to make good choices. Whenever you write critical essays for this class, do not try to be definitive, just provocative and interesting. Stay focused, but ask questions and search for answers that help us understand the way you “read” the novel and/or films.

When deciding on a particular focus, it’s better to choose fewer specific things to explore in depth than it is to make sweeping and vague generalizations about a lot of things. Use detailed analysis and interpretation of specific elements of the novel and/or films to show how the big picture is rooted in concrete details. As you do, also remember your **audience**: you are writing to me and your colleagues in the class, which means that you should assume two things: (1) that we have read the readings and seen the movies ourselves (steer clear of extensive plot summaries!), and (2) that even though we have read the readings and seen the movies, we always want to consider other responses and critical analyses/interpretations that will help us understand them more fully and understand different aspects we might not have thought about.

When I evaluate your Critical Connections Projects I will be looking first to see that you show clear evidence of three main things: (1) that you have studied the readings and/or films and thought critically about them in terms of form *and* content, (2) that you have made choices about what to focus on and that these choices make sense in the context of both the assignment and your essay, and (3) that you have tried to understand the texts and/or films in relation to this particular course, which means that you’ll need to connect your analysis, interpretation, and response to the other readings and films we have encountered up to that point in the course—including the critical essays *about* the stories we’re encountering. In short, show that you have thought about the texts, films and our other course materials enough to select out the issues/aspects you are most interested in, show us that you can build an essay that argues a coherent interpretive thesis based on specific analysis, and show us that you are interested in participating in a written dialogue in the same way that you participate in our group discussions in class.

The more specific your essay is, the more successful it will be. This means that you must constantly refer specifically and directly to specific passages in written texts

(including page numbers in in-text citations) and specific scenes in the films, and you must build detailed and specific interpretations of the things you describe and analyze. Generalizations are more meaningful when they have been developed explicitly from analysis and interpretation of specific examples, so it is important to draw your interpretive generalizations and responses directly from your analysis/interpretation of specifics, and not vice-versa. Move towards the big picture, but always keep your eye on the details and detailed analysis and interpretation of them.

It should go without saying that an essay cannot be effective unless it is also organized and expressed clearly. Efficient, concise writing can communicate much in few words. See the handout called “Crash Course in Grammar and Mechanics” for more details.

The essay prompts I prepare for you are meant to establish the framework for your essays, but not constrain you too much to a single idea or perspective. Therefore, the final challenge I will mention here is that you must find ways of constructing essays that speak to and from the framework of the assignment but chart out your own path within that framework to build your own argument. As you chart your own path, you may want to consider the following partial list of possible points of interrogation that could structure your attention and help you articulate what you think about the things we are seeing and reading:

IMAGERY. Are there recurrent visual images or word images used in the work? How do they function? How do they mean? What do they tell us about automobility, car culture(s), and Roadside America in general?

SETTING. How does the physical environment of the work influence or give structure to the events and meaning? Which objects manipulated in the story are particularly symbolic or meaningful, and why?

STRUCTURE. Show how the author's use of organizational techniques affects/effects the work's meaning.

POINT OF VIEW. Whose voice and/or perspective conveys the story? How/why does it matter?

STYLE. Demonstrate how and why the author's particular use of language—written language in a novel, and spoken, musical, and visual languages in films--determines meaning.

CHARACTER. Trace the development of a particular character or characters throughout the work, paying attention to what the character does and says and what other characters (including the narrator) say about the character. What do these things mean in larger contexts? What do we learn about the relationships between identity formation and road travel from this story/film?

IDENTITY. How is gender portrayed? How is sexuality performed and represented in the work? How are racial and/or ethnic identities constructed in the work? What about socioeconomic class? How do these identity representations function and what do they mean within the context of the work? What can they tell us about automobility in general?

Pronouns and Possessives:**its = possessive pronoun**

e.g. the essay's point of view => its point of view

it's = contraction of it + is

e.g. It is a fine day => It's a fine day

their = possessive pronoun

e.g. Hondo and Jo Jo's dog roams the neighborhood => Their dog roams the neighborhood

there = adverb indicating place

e.g. Their dog usually leaves its mark on that tree over there.

they're = contraction of they + are

e.g. Hondo and Jo Jo are looking for their dog => They're looking for their dog.

Punctuation/Sentence Structure Problems:**fragment (frag)**

A fragment is an incomplete sentence that lacks a subject, a verb, or both.

e.g. Washing the car. (no subject, incomplete verb, and incomplete thought)

comma splice (cs)

A comma cannot, on its own, join two independent clauses.

e.g. Jo Jo likes barbecue, Hondo prefers tofu => Jo Jo likes barbecue; Hondo prefers tofu.

=> Jo Jo likes barbecue, but Hondo prefers tofu.

=> Jo Jo likes barbecue. Hondo prefers tofu.

fused sentence (fs)

A fused sentence lacks the punctuation necessary to separate two independent clauses.

e.g. Jo Jo likes barbecue Hondo prefers tofu => see comma splice corrections above

semicolon errors

A semicolon can only be used in an extensive series or to separate two independent clauses.

e.g. Hondo stumbled; washing the car => Hondo stumbled; he was washing the car.

=> While he was washing the car, Hondo stumbled.

run-on

A run-on sentence proliferates verbs and subjects and objects without attention to grammatical structure.

awkward (AWK)

An awkward sentence stumbles over itself as it tries to communicate its point, rendering the writing confused/confusing. Often the fix is to "write to the point" more directly.

using the word "however"

The word "however" is not an interchangeable synonym for the word "but" or "although." It cannot be used to indicate contradiction unless you use punctuation to interrupt the flow of the sentence. If a sentence begins with the word, it must be followed by a comma; if a sentence ends with the word, it must be preceded with a comma. If it is used in the middle of a sentence, it must be set apart either with a set of commas before and after it or with a semicolon and a comma (see also **fs**, **cs**, and **run-ons**).

e.g. Winefred says she does not know how their dog gets out; however, I know that she does.

e.g. Winefred says she does not know how their dog gets out. However, I know that she does.

e.g. Winefred says she does not know how their dog gets out. I know, however, that she does.

Apostrophes:

A singular noun that does not end in "s" takes "'s" to indicate possession.

e.g. the woman's dog (the dog belongs to one woman)

A plural noun that already ends in "s" takes an "'" only to indicate possession.

e.g. the boys' dog (the dog belongs to more than one boy)

e.g. the ladies' house (the house belongs to more than one lady)

A plural noun that does not end in "s" takes "'s" to indicate possession.

e.g. the children's dog (the dog belongs to all the children)

e.g. the women's house (the house belong to the women)

A singular noun that ends in "s" takes either "'" or "'s" to indicate possession.

e.g. Charles' spaniel or Charles's spaniel (the spaniel belongs to Charles)

Punctuating quotes and citations:

I expect you to critically engage other writers as you develop your own arguments. Document all citations (including direct quotations, paraphrases, and "general indebtedness") using MLA, Harvard, Chicago, or some other standard in-text citation format within the essay and then list all of your cited sources in a Works Cited section at the end of the paper. Notice that the standard format for documenting a quote ends the quote, includes the citation, and only then provides the sentence's end punctuation, as in the following example: As Patrick Phillips argues, "There is a fine line between determining and overdetermining the meaning of a film text" (Phillips, 157).