English 1B Fall 2015 **Critical Analysis Sample Outline**

**Note:** This is the most basic outline you could use to be sure you covered all of the tasks this assignment requires. You will find that most professional writers about films will usually alternate between analysis, evaluation, and plot summary. Usually there is more plot summary in the beginning and more analysis/evaluation toward the end, but otherwise there is no set pattern. Obviously, I won’t penalize anyone who wants to try a more sophisticated structure than this sample, as long as there is an overall sense of clarity and coherence. Each paragraph should have a clear focus and task. Also, since you aren’t writing in skinny columns, your paragraphs will likely be longer than the typical newspaper paragraph, such as the sample reviews for *Gattaca*.

1. **Introduction to the Essay:** There should be some sort of hook to keep the reader going, something that establishes a reason for discussing *this* film with *this* audience at *this* time, something more than just the fact that it’s in the theaters now and the audience might want to see it. It usually relates to the ***Kairos***: what is going on in this society or the world at large that this film is commenting on. Also, offer brief overview of ***your thesis***: your main interpretive point about the film and whether you thought it was strong, weak, or somewhere in between. For example: here is the opening of a professional review of *Gattaca* by Roger Ebert:

“What is genetic engineering, after all, but preemptive plastic surgery? Make the child perfect in the test tube, and save money later. Throw in perfect health, a high IQ and a long life-span, and you have the brave new world of *Gattaca*, in which the bio-formed have inherited the earth, and babies who are born naturally get to be menial laborers. This is one of the smartest and most provocative of science fiction films, a thriller with ideas. Its hero is a man who challenges the system. Vincent ([Ethan Hawke](http://www.rogerebert.com/cast-and-crew/ethan-hawke)) was born in the old-fashioned way, and his genetic tests show he has bad eyesight, heart problems and a life expectancy of about 30 years. He is an ‘In-Valid,’ and works as a cleaner in a space center.”

1. **Set the film or story in its specific cultural and historical context**: Even if you introduce the essay this way, you will probably go into more detail elsewhere. Here you could work in some details about the plot as they relate to the themes you will discuss, but don’t tell the plot otherwise.

For example: with *Gattaca*, you would likely discuss the latest breakthroughs in “test-tube babies” and genetic engineering (Dolly the sheep, etc.) and the controversies those developments aroused. You could also relate this film’s treatment of the theme with other similar works. For example: You could discuss how this film relates to movies that explore human cloning, such as *The Island* and *Never Let Me Go*.

1. **Analysis:**
   1. **Identify/discuss the film’s or story’s enduring human concerns** These are issues that go beyond the cultural moment of the film. For example: *Gattaca*, like *Hamlet,* deals with sibling rivalry and its impact on a person’s self-definition, and like many other classic works, it shows a hero struggling against society’s limiting definition of his status and potential for achievement. The ways discrimination lead to social injustice is another theme.
   2. **Interpret a theme and thesis in the work:** In this section you would pick one of the themes listed above and dig further into it. For example: If you like the theme of a hero who defies limits society puts on him based on his origins, you could explore that theme in *Gattaca,* offering your interpretation of what the film is saying about that and how it gets the message across (specific plot developments, lines of dialog, symbolism in the set design).
2. **Evaluation:** Explain what you see as the film’s key strengths and weaknesses. **Be specific about the criteria** you are using and don’t choose too many. Don’t feel this needs to be one paragraph, either! Use a paragraph block (series of smaller paragraphs that work together to make a section). For example: Strengths of *Gattaca* include interesting ideas and story, compelling characters, good acting, and really well thought-out set design. I can’t think of any weaknesses.
3. **Response:** You can also include your personal response to the film/book, most likely in the beginning or the end, but don’t take up too much space doing that.