

# Comprehensive Exam for Senior Film Majors Spring 2024

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## **Part 1: The Sequence Analysis**

"Do the Right Thing" (1989) - Racist Stereotypes

In this sequence from Spike Lee's "Do the Right Thing," cinematography, narrative structure, and race consciousness synergizes to render a contentious moment and to deliver a creative fourth wall break. This part of the movie, which starts with a camera shot over Mookie's shoulder, pulls the viewer right into Mookie's world, making it clear that this moment is from his viewpoint. This is crucial because it not only makes the audience see things from Mookie's perspective but also sets them up to think deeply about the conversation that follows between Mookie and Pino about their favorite celebrities.

Lee's choice to frame Mookie and Pino together in the same shot as they discuss this topic is intentional. It visually emphasizes the clash between their views, representing racial divides. Mookie's face is lit more brightly than Pino's physically highlighting Mookie but also positioning him as the moral center of this conversation. Because of Lee's intention to connect with black audience's experiences and to challenge Racism from a black perspective, the sequence emphasizes empathy for Mookie's perspective.

The scene peaks with a sequence where different characters look straight into the camera to deliver racial slurs. Similar to other expositional moments in the film, the montage directly involves the audience in the film's examination of racism. This montage elicits a strong emotional response, and Lee is challenging viewers to face their own biases and the widespread nature of racism.

The sequence is put together to demonstrate Lee's deep understanding of how to use film to communicate complex issues. By placing a racially charged interaction against an unblinking visual montage of racial conflict, Lee highlights how deeply embedded racism is in everyday life and across the fabric of society through implicating us in outbursts of racist rage.

Analyzing the specific sequence from "Do the Right Thing" through the perspectives of Jerome Christensen and W. J. T. Mitchell provides a nuanced understanding of the film's engagement with race and racism. Christensen's critique positions Spike Lee's work within the context of corporate influence, arguing that the film, while ostensibly exploring racial identity, ultimately succumbs to the forces of consumerism. This viewpoint suggests that the montage, rather than being purely an artistic expression of racial tensions, might also serve to commodify those tensions, packaging them in a manner palatable and marketable within the broader scope of American consumer culture.

Conversely, Mitchell's analysis praises the film for its public art virtues, highlighting its ability to stimulate societal discourse on pivotal issues like race, class, and consumer capitalism. This perspective valorizes the direct-to-camera montage as a powerful tool for societal reflection, urging viewers to confront the pervasive and systemic nature of racism. Mitchell perceives the film as a catalyst for dialogue and change, an embodiment of public art that transcends mere entertainment to probe deeply into the racial divides and the complexities surrounding them.

Re-evaluating the sequence through these lenses, the montage emerges as a multifaceted cinematic device. On one hand, following Christensen's argument, one could interpret the sequence as leveraging racial conflict as a means of engaging audiences in a manner that aligns with the interests of the film industry's corporate stakeholders. This interpretation suggests a potential dilution of the film's racial commentary through its entanglement with commercial objectives, casting a shadow on the sequence's authenticity as a critique of racism.

On the other hand, Mitchell's perspective offers a counterpoint, framing the montage as a deliberate, confrontational strategy employed by Lee to force viewers to reckon with the uncomfortable realities of racism. From this viewpoint, the sequence is not merely a narrative technique but a radical act of public art, transforming the theatre into a space for confronting societal ills. This reading aligns the montage with Lee's broader intent to provoke, challenge, and ultimately spark discourse on race relations in America.

In synthesizing these analyses, the montage at the heart of "Do the Right Thing" can be seen as embodying both the potential pitfalls of navigating racial discourse within a commercial framework, as highlighted by Christensen, and the powerful capacity of film to serve as a medium for social commentary and change, as emphasized by Mitchell. Thus, the sequence stands as a testament to Lee's innovative negotiation of artistic expression, racial politics, and the commercial realities of filmmaking, challenging audiences to engage with the layered and contentious realities of race in America.

## References

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- [3] Brian C. Johnson, "Baltimore 2015, Black Lives Matter and the Prescience of Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing*," *Film International* (16516826), vol. 15, no. 1, March 2017, pp. 23-36, [https://doi.org/10.1386/fiin.15.1.23\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/fiin.15.1.23_1).
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## **Part 2: Screenwriting Prompt**

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Prakash and The Napkin Factory

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## Part 2: Screenwriting Prompt

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INT. PRAKASH'S APARTMENT - MORNING

A small, cluttered room bathed in the grey light of dawn. The sound of distant traffic mingles with the occasional shout from the street below. PRAKASH, 25, disheveled but with a determined look in his eye, sits at a makeshift desk littered with job applications, a cheap laptop, and a cup of cold coffee.

The room is stark, with posters of famous artworks and a few personal photos adorning the otherwise bare walls. A small bed is tucked into one corner, made with military precision.

Prakash stares at his laptop screen, scrolling through job listings with a sense of urgency. He pauses on one that reads, "Napkin Folder Apprentice Needed - Immediate Start." A flicker of hope crosses his face, quickly replaced by skepticism.

He clicks on the listing, reading the details. His expression shifts from disbelief to desperation. He looks over to a government-issued poster on the wall, "**Employment is Freedom. Unemployment is Imprisonment.**"

He takes a deep breath, filling out the application with a shaky hand. Upon completion, he leans back, closing his eyes, grappling with the weight of his decision.

The silence is broken by the PING of the laptop, signaling a response to his application. Prakash opens his eyes and reads the screen.

He quickly changes into the best outfit he can muster, a slightly worn suit that's seen better days. Checking himself in a small mirror, he takes a deep breath, grabs his resume, and heads to the door.

PRAKASH  
(to himself)  
Let's fold some napkins.

EXT. PRAKASH'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Prakash steps out into a bustling city. The skyline is a mix of futuristic buildings and dilapidated structures, a symbol of a society that has advanced technologically but declined humanely. Surveillance drones buzz overhead, scanning the faces of the city's inhabitants as they go about their day.

Prakash merges with the crowd, his expression one of determination masked with apprehension. He navigates through the sea of people, each person seemingly carrying their own burden of fears and aspirations.

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2.

EXT. BUS STOP - DAY

Prakash stands at a bus stop, surrounded by advertisements proclaiming the virtues of employment and the vices of idleness. A digital screen displays the countdown to the next bus arrival while simultaneously flashing propaganda messages.

A bus arrives, and Prakash boards, swiping his ID card. The interior is cramped, filled with individuals from all walks of life, each absorbed in their thoughts or digital devices. Prakash finds a spot near a window and gazes out, lost in thought as the cityscape moves past him.

INT. BUS - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

Prakash's reflection in the window merges with the scenes of the city outside. His eyes are drawn to a large, imposing building in the distance, marked with the logo of the napkin factory. His heart rate quickens as the bus approaches his destination.

EXT. NAPKIN FACTORY - DAY

The bus stops in front of the napkin factory, a colossal, bizarre structure that looks out of place amidst the urban decay. The building is an architectural wonder.

Prakash steps off the bus and stands before the factory. He takes a deep breath, adjusts his tie, and walks towards the entrance.

INT. NAPKIN FACTORY LOBBY - DAY

Prakash enters a lobby that is as unusual as the building's exterior. The walls are adorned with intricate napkin designs encased in glass, showcasing the artistry of napkin folding. A large fountain in the center of the lobby features water cascading over folded napkin sculptures.

At the reception desk, a ROBOTIC RECEPTIONIST greets him with a mechanical smile.

ROBOTIC RECEPTIONIST  
Welcome to Napkin Corp., the world's  
premier napkin folding establishment.  
How may I assist you?

PRAKASH  
I'm here for the interview.  
Prakash... Prakash Gupta.

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3.

The robotic receptionist scans him, and a panel on the desk lights up with Prakash's details.

ROBOTIC RECEPTIONIST

Ah, yes. Mr. Gupta. Please proceed to interview room 3B. Good luck.

Prakash nods, thanks the robot, and follows the signs to the interview room, his steps echoing in the vast, surreal lobby.

INT. NAPKIN FACTORY - CORRIDOR - DAY

Prakash walks down a corridor, passing doors with viewing windows that offer glimpses into various stages of napkin production and design. Workers and machines are in harmony, creating beautiful, intricate patterns with napkins.

He arrives at 3B and takes a moment to compose himself before entering.

INT. NAPKIN FACTORY - INTERVIEW ROOM 3B - DAY

The room is unlike any traditional interview setting Prakash has ever seen. The walls are adorned with the most intricate and beautiful napkin art. In the center, a large, round table made entirely of glass sits atop a pedestal, surrounded by chairs that look more like thrones than seating for a job interview.

DEVON, 50s, eccentric in appearance with an air of arrogance about him, stands by the window, gazing out. He turns as Prakash enters, his eyes sparkling with an intensity that immediately puts Prakash on edge.

DEVON

Ah, Prakash Gupta. The latest aspirant in the noble art of napkin folding. Please, have a seat.

Prakash nods, taking a seat at the table. The chair is surprisingly comfortable despite its intimidating appearance.

DEVON (cont'd)

(continuing)

Here at the Art of Napkin, we don't just fold napkins, Prakash. We fold dreams, ambitions, and sometimes, the very fabric of reality.

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4.

Prakash tries to hide his confusion and nerves with a polite nod, unsure how to respond to Devon's poetic introduction.

DEVON (cont'd)  
(leaning in)  
Tell me, Prakash, have you ever felt  
a connection to something so mundane,  
yet found profound beauty within it?

PRAKASH  
(stammering  
slightly)  
I... suppose so. I mean, I find  
certain simplicity in everyday  
objects... beautiful, in a way.

Devon smiles, seemingly pleased with the answer.

DEVON  
Excellent. That's the first step to  
becoming a great napkin artist—seeing  
the world not for what it is but for  
what it could be. But let me ask you  
something more personal. What are you  
willing to sacrifice for this job?

Prakash pauses, the weight of Devon's question sinking in. He thinks of the oppressive society outside, the threat of imprisonment for the unemployed, and the desperation that led him here.

PRAKASH  
(uncertainly)  
Everything... In a world that feels  
increasingly constricted, the chance  
to create something beautiful... it's  
worth any sacrifice.

Devon nods, seemingly satisfied with the answer. He stands, walking to a cabinet and pulling out a single, plain napkin.

DEVON  
Then let us begin the first test of  
your journey. This napkin represents  
your past, Prakash. Fold it in a way  
that it represents your hope for the  
future.

Prakash takes the napkin, his hands trembling slightly as he contemplates the task. The room is silent except for the soft rustling of the napkin as he folds it.

Prakash only folds the napkin a single time.



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5.

Devon examines the napkin art, a look of genuine admiration on his face.

DEVON (cont'd)  
Impressive, Prakash. You've just  
taken the first step into a larger  
world. Welcome to the Art of Napkin  
Folding.

Prakash's face lights up with a mixture of relief and disbelief.

Devon's expression shifts from admiration to a more serious, almost grave demeanor. He places the napkin art back on the table, folding his hands in front of him.

DEVON (cont'd)  
Your talent is undeniable, Prakash.  
But talent alone isn't enough here.  
To truly excel, to become one with  
the art of napkin folding, you must  
be free of all worldly distractions  
and attachments.

Prakash is dumbfounded.

DEVON (CONT'D)  
We have a procedure. It's...  
unconventional. But it allows our  
napkin artists to achieve a level of  
focus and creativity unparalleled in  
the outside world. You'll need to  
undergo this procedure to continue.

PRAKASH  
(stunned)  
Procedure? What kind of procedure?

DEVON  
It's a simple medical intervention.  
Nothing too invasive. But once  
complete, you'll find that your  
attachments to the material world,  
your... distractions, they'll fade  
away. You'll live for the art.

Prakash feels a cold dread wash over him. This was not what he signed up for.

PRAKASH  
(standing up)  
I... I need to think about this.

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6.

Devon stands as well, his eyes locking onto Prakash with an intensity that borders on fanaticism.

DEVON  
There's nothing to think about,  
Prakash. This is your chance to  
escape the mundanity of existence, to  
embrace true freedom. The procedure  
is scheduled for today. Our staff is  
ready for you.

Panic sets in. Prakash backs away, shaking his head.

PRAKASH  
No, I... I can't. I'm sorry.

Without waiting for a response, Prakash turns and rushes out the door.

EXT. NAPKIN FACTORY - DAY

Prakash bursts out of the factory doors and into the sunlight. He doesn't stop to think; his legs move on their own, propelling him away from the factory, away from the bizarre offer, and away from a future he can't accept.

As he runs, the first chords of "Wake Up" by Arcade Fire begin to play, the song building in intensity with each step he takes. The music fills the air, a soundtrack to his defiance, his refusal to give in to a system that demands he erase his humanity.

MONTAGE - PRAKASH RUNNING THROUGH THE CITY

Prakash dodges through crowded streets, the people around him blurs as he focuses solely on escape.

He passes by the oppressive symbols of the society he's fleeing from - surveillance cameras, propaganda posters, policing, and the busy faces of the city's inhabitants.

Memories flash before him - his graduation, moments of laughter and hope, the face of his sweetheart.

EXT. KARINA'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Prakash finally stops, chest heaving, in front of an apartment building. He looks up, determination and fear mingling in his eyes. This is it.

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7.

INT. KARINA'S APARTMENT - DAY

The door swings open to reveal KARINA, an array of warm lights glow around her silhouette. She greets him with with a smile, one that speaks volumes.

EXT. AMERICAN WEST - REMOTE LOCATION - SUNSET

The landscape opens up around them as they drive, the vast expanse of the American West stretching out in all directions.

As the sun begins to dip below the horizon, painting the sky in hues of orange and pink, they find themselves at the edge of a lush forest, remote and untouched.

They exit the car. They begin to strip away their clothes.

Hand in hand, they disappear into the forest, the dense canopy above filtering the last light of day into a soft, ethereal glow.

## Part 3: Directing Exercise

This scene unfolds in a cozy, crowded restaurant, transitioning from a light-hearted dinner to a more somber tone with Miles's phone call to Victoria. The cinematography will focus heavily on delivering the nuance of the characters' interactions, the atmospheric conditions of the restaurant, and the internal turmoil of Miles. The dinner scene will be treated with warmth and familiarity, employing softer lighting and a mix of static and dynamic shots to emphasize the camaraderie and underlying tensions. In contrast, Miles's phone call will utilize more isolated framing and darker lighting to reflect his emotional isolation and the distressed nature of the conversation.

### Cinematography Style

Adhering to a Hitchcockian "pure cinema" approach blended with dynamic framing reminiscent of early 2000s television, the cinematography will focus on visual storytelling through movement, composition, and perspective. Wide lenses will be used for establishing shots and group dynamics, while longer lenses will isolate characters during moments of personal reflection or intense interaction. The camera work will shift from static to moving shots, employing handheld or steadicam techniques to enhance the emotional resonance of key moments.

### Directorial Approach

To direct this scene in 'Sideways', I would employ the camera as an active agent in the narrative. The camera movements would be deliberate, with steadicam shots for entering the restaurant to convey a sense of immersion into the scene, and a head mount for Miles's anxiety attack to reflect his disorientation and distress. The use of close-ups is strategic, aiming to capture the raw emotions and subtle nuances of the characters' interactions.

The scene transitions are fluid, with each shot designed to lead into the next seamlessly, maintaining the narrative's rhythm while also allowing for moments of introspection. I will lean into the power of dramatic lighting, with emphasis on natural lighting for the more intimate moments to accentuate warmth and connection, contrasted with harsher shadows during Miles's phone call to highlight his heartbreak.

In sum, this directorial vision aims to convey the contours of each character with a visually engaging narrative, utilizing innovative blocking and camera work to render the subtextual nuances of human conversation. The scene's treatment is carefully crafted to maintain a balance between the external environment and the characters' internal worlds.

## Shot List

EXT / INT	Location	#	Shot Description	Camera Movement	Lens (MM)	Angle
INT	MATTEI'S TAVERN	1	Entrance of Miles and Jack, greeted by the hostess	Static	24mm	Medium
INT	MATTEI'S TAVERN	2	Maya and Stephanie waving from the booth	OTS	85mm	Medium
INT	MATTEI'S TAVERN	3	Jack and Miles approaching the table, Jack's confident stride	Tracking	35mm	Long
INT	MATTEI'S TAVERN	4	Two Shot. Jack sitting next to Stephanie, hand on her neck	Static	50mm	Medium
INT	MATTEI'S TAVERN	5	Two shot. Miles asking Maya about her drink	Static	50mm	Medium
INT	MATTEI'S TAVERN	6	Miles tasting the wine, beginning to relax	Static	85mm	Close-up
INT	MATTEI'S TAVERN	7	Waiter describing specials to the group	Steadicam, circling table	24mm	Medium
INT	MATTEI'S TAVERN	8	Miles raising hand for wine list, then passing it	Cut to	35mm	Medium
INT	MATTEI'S TAVERN	9	Stephanie scanning wine menu, decision-making	Pan	50mm	Close-up (Menu) to Medium (Stephanie)
INT	MATTEI'S TAVERN	10	Group's reaction to "Pinot Noir" decision, high-five	Static	24mm	Medium
INT	MATTEI'S TAVERN	11	Arrival of the first wine, opening and pouring	Static	85mm	Close-up
INT	MATTEI'S TAVERN	12	Group enjoying dinner, laughter and conversation	Handheld, moves between speakers, and plates arriving	80mm	Close-up
INT	MATTEI'S TAVERN	13	Miles's growing intoxication, Jack's concern	Series of Close-ups	Varied, 50mm to 85mm	Mixed Angles
INT	MATTEI'S TAVERN	14	Jack stopping Miles from pouring more wine	Close-up (Hands)	85mm	High Angle
INT	MATTEI'S TAVERN	15	Close on Miles as anxiety builds	Static	85mm	Close-up
INT	UNDER-WORLD	16	Miles boarding boat on River Styx, Charon in background	Dolly in	35mm	Wide
INT	MATTEI'S TAVERN	17	Miles snaps back to reality, observing Jack and Stephanie	Static	50mm	Medium
INT	MATTEI'S TAVERN	18	Maya conversing with a disoriented Miles	Over-the-Shoulder	85mm	Close-up
INT	MATTEI'S TAVERN	19	'96 Comte Armand Pommard brought to the table	Static	50mm	Medium Shot
INT	MATTEI'S TAVERN	20	Jack and Stephanie share a kiss	Close-up	85mm	Eye Level
INT	MATTEI'S TAVERN	21	Miles navigating to the bathrooms, unsteady	Handheld	24mm	POV6

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INT	MATTEI'S TAVERN	22	Miles attempts the Men's room, then takes Xanax	Static	50mm	Medium Close-up
INT	MATTEI'S TAVERN	23	Miles dials phone, numbers and tones out of sync	Close-up	50mm	High Angle
INT	MATTEI'S TAVERN	24	Close on Miles during phone conversation with Victoria	Static	85mm	Close-up
EXT	DEEP CANYON	25	Miles on rope bridge across chasm (Flash scene)	Dolly out	24mm	Wide
INT	MATTEI'S TAVERN	26	Miles slips onto the floor trying to sit	High Angle	35mm	Wide

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## **Part 4: Editing Exercise**

**[Click here to access my edited version of "Horizon"](#)**