

FILM ANALYSIS

For Beginners



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HOW TO ANALYZE A FILM



There's a lot of advice out there about writing film reviews from a critic's perspective, each with varying degrees of advice. I've personally found that reviews don't need to be complicated instead honest and encourage discussions.

Here are the steps to be taken from start to finish, when screening films.



STEP 1: BEFORE YOU WATCH THE FILM

STEP 2: WATCHING THE FILM

STEP 3: AFTER YOU WATCH THE FILM

STEP 4: WRITING THE REVIEW

BEFORE YOU WATCH THE FILM



Do not prepare much in advance before watching a film. Try and not watch the trailer of the film before you watch the film (for the first time) for the purpose of reviewing. The hardest part of this first step is going to be avoiding doing too much research or reading other reviews prior to watching the film (as tempting as it may be.) I find that it's more liberating to the experience to go in with an air of unfamiliarity.

As for reviews, reading about what others think of the film before watching or writing a review can affect your opinion heavily. And when you're in reviewer mode, you want to be as honest with your own opinion as possible, and not allow any outside voice to alter it.

Without being affected by the trailers, marketing, and other reviews before watching a film, you can really put your best foot forward to creating your authentic opinion and turning that into a film review people can trust.

Avoid trailers and other reviews prior to watching as to not sway your perception.

WATCHING THE FILM



Surrender completely to the film and let it take you along. Try and watch it without much distractions. What conventionally works is to watch the film in its entirety without distractions in order to get a grasp on what the director intended. If you spend your first viewing pausing, playing back, and re-watching segments at a time, you won't get a sense for the way the film was meant to be enjoyed.

I also try not to take many notes while I watch the film—if you're jotting down a long critique or opinion while watching the film, you can miss brief, yet vital moments. I'll however, write down a word or phrase that stands out so that I can recall scenes or story information that catch my attention and that I deem important. This will help later when I'm constructing my review—for brief summary recaps, breaking down the themes, and reflecting on the direction or acting.

In general, I think of pausing, rewinding, and taking notes as interruptions that will bring you out of the film—literally and emotionally—and that can play a role in how you view a film from a critical standpoint.

AFTER YOU WATCH THE FILM



The window of time immediately following the viewing is critical. Since I don't take a lot of notes during the film, one of the most important aspects of writing a critique is to stay focused and write down all the things that stood out to me about the film. And since collecting my thoughts after seeing a film can be chaotic, I need to be sure that I jot down everything that struck my radar as soon as it's over. It's better to get it all down on paper, and then evaluate what's necessary to convey to the reader later. Being precise in your commentary and incorporating specific examples from the film to back up your opinions is key.

This is where the checklist comes into play. When I write a review, I do my best to cover all aspects of filmmaking that went into creating the final product, including:

PLOT



- **What was the film about?**
- **Was it believable?**
- **Interesting?**
- **Thought provoking?**
- **How was the climax revealed?**
- **How did the setting affect the story?**

THEMES & TONE



- **What was the central goal of the film?**
- **Was it made to entertain, educate, or bring awareness to an issue?**
- **Was there any strong impression the film made on you?**
- **Did any symbolism come into play?**

ACTING & CHARACTERS



- ✓ **Did you like how the characters were portrayed?**
- ✓ **Did the acting support the characters, and help them come to life?**
- ✓ **Did the characters display complex personalities or were they stereotypes?**
- ✓ **Were there characters that embodied certain archetypes to enhance or diminish the film?**

DIRECTION



- ✓ **Did you like how the director chose to tell the story?**
- ✓ **Was the pacing and speed of the film too fast or too slow?**
- ✓ **Was the direction comparable to other films this director has created?**
- ✓ **Was the storytelling complex or straightforward?**
- ✓ **Was there a certain amount of suspense or tension that worked?**
- ✓ **Did the director create a captivating conflict?**

SCORE



- ❖ **Did the music support the mood of the film?**
- ❖ **Was it too distracting or too subtle?**
- ❖ **Did it add to the production and work well with the script?**
- ❖ **Were the music queues timed well for the scenes they were supporting?**

CINEMATOGRAPHY



- ❖ Were the shots used in a unique way to tell the story?
- ❖ Did the colouring and lighting affect the tone?
- ❖ Was the action coherently shot?
- ❖ How well did the camera move?
- ❖ Were actors or settings framed well?

PRODUCTION DESIGN



- **Did the sets feel lived-in and believable to the story or characters?**
- **Were the costumes suitable for the characters or story?**
- **Did the created environments heighten the atmosphere on camera?**

SPECIAL EFFECTS



- **Were the special effects believable?**
- **Did they align with the era and tone of the film?**
- **Were the effects overboard or too subtle?**
- **Did they integrate well to the purpose of the story?**

EDITING



- **Was the editing clean or choppy?**
- **Was the flow consistent?**
- **What unique effects were used?**
- **How were the transitions between scenes?**

PACE



- ✓ Did the film flow well?
- ✓ Was it too fast or too slow?
- ✓ Was it clearly organized?
- ✓ Did certain scenes drag down the film?

DIALOGUE



- ✓ **Were the conversations believable or necessary?**
- ✓ **Did the dialogue bring context to plot developments?**
- ✓ **Did the words match the tone of the film and personality of the characters?**

WRITING THE REVIEW



The most important component to address in a film review is how it made you feel. Anyone can write a summary of a film or create lists about the highlights but good reviews should convey to the audience how the film resonated with you. I make sure my thoughts are read in a cohesive manner to help my audience understand where I'm coming from. I prioritize what's most important to include and let the rest go.

If you don't put your voice into your critique, your audience will find it difficult to understand your perspective, connect with you as a reviewer, and most importantly, they may not be able to trust your opinion. And if they don't trust you, they won't come back to read more of your work. And you want your review to provide value to the reader, right? I want to ensure that my thoughts encourage readers to create a constructive discussion around the film, or help them decide whether or not the film is for them. And hopefully, the audience will have as much fun reading my review as I did in writing it.

THANK YOU



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