

Young Film Critic Resource

1. Why write a film review?

People have been reviewing films for almost as long as there have been films. Many people read film reviews to help them gain an understanding of what films are available and what they are about.

Here are some more reasons why people read film reviews on the Internet, in newspapers or watch them on television.

- A review is important as a means of helping people decide which film they might want to see.
- A review can be read simply as a fun and entertaining piece of journalism.
- A review can give people information about an actor or filmmaker that they are interested in.
- A review can encourage the reader to go and see a film they might not have known about or wanted to see otherwise.
- A review can provide more honest and critical information that may not be found in trailers, posters and other promotional material.
- A review can help give the reader a clearer view about the genre of a film and whether or not it might appeal to them.
- A review is great to read after seeing a film – it's a way of thinking how you felt about the film yourself.
- A review is a way of learning more about a film or getting a better understanding of it.
- Reviews become a historical record of a film – people can look at them for years to come.

Activity 1

Can you think of any more reasons why people want to read film reviews? Think of reasons why you like them.

Read a review of a film that you saw together as a class or of a film that most of you have seen. Work through the statements and work out which ones can be applied to the review.

2. Your review

Choosing your film

- Be adventurous! Try to review a film that is not a big Hollywood blockbuster. An original choice of film will mean your review will stand out from the others.
- Think about why you have chosen it. If it's a film you have seen before, did you choose it because you loved it or hated it? Does it star an actor that you like/dislike? A strong opinion is always a good place to start.

Watching your film

- Try to make sure you give the film your full attention. Don't let yourself get distracted, as you need to remember lots of information for when you write the review. If it helps, take some notes.
- When taking notes, you can think about the following:
 - What can you see/hear?
 - What different words can be used to describe what you see/hear?
 - What does the film make you feel and how does it do this? For example, if the film makes you feel happy, is it just because you like the characters and the story? Or is it also because the film is colourful and bright?

Reviewing your film

Write for a Martian! It's often a good idea to imagine your review is an alien's first and only experience of this film: tell the Martian as much as possible about it. But remember to leave the Martian guessing what will happen in the end.

Think about the words you use to describe what you see and hear. Make it as entertaining and fun as possible; you want the Martian to enjoy your review!

Here are a few questions to think about when you come to write your review:

The **WHAT** questions:

1. What film are you reviewing?
2. What is it about?
3. What genre does the film belong to?
4. What is the tone of the film? What is the mood?

The **WHEN** and **WHERE** questions:

1. When was the film made?
2. When does the action of the film take place?
3. Where is the film made?
4. Where is the film set?

The **WHO** questions:

1. Who has directed the film?
2. Who has written it?
3. Who has acted in it? Are there big stars in it? What expectations do you have about the film given the cast.
4. Who do you think would enjoy the film? Children? Adults? Teenagers?

The **HOW** questions:

1. How long is the film? Did you think it was too long or too short?
2. How does the film make you feel? Happy? Sad? Is it funny? Scary?
3. How do you think it achieves this?

Finally, the **IS IT** questions:

1. Is it a good film overall? Did you like it? Why/Why not?
2. What is it specifically that you liked or disliked?

(Source: Cambridgeshire Film Consortium – Young Film Critics Pack 2009)

You don't need to answer all of these questions, nor do you need to answer them in order. Remember you can be as creative as you like, and overall, it is your opinion that is the most important part.

As a starting point, you can structure your review into three paragraphs with the following headings:

1. What do you know about the film and its background?
2. What is the film about?
3. What did you think?

As your review comes along, you can take away the headings and expand on these ideas.

Activity 2

In preparation for writing; think critically, analyse and experiment with language to describe your viewing experience.

In groups watch a film trailer.

Together think of words to describe what you can see/hear/feel. Think of words to describe what genre you think the film belongs to and what you can understand about the characters.

Discuss what you think the film is about and whether you would like to see it and why.

Explain to the class what the film is about and whether you think others should go and see it and why.

Talk about your choice of words and why you have chosen them.

Activity 3

You can read last year's winning Junior Film Critic review at <http://www.youngfilmcritic.org/>. You can see how the winning review was written and it should also be quite reassuring.

Summative Exercises

Summative Exercise 1: Write a review of a film you've seen in the cinema in the last year – approx. 250 words – and enter it for the current Junior Film Critic of the year Award.

Summative Exercise 2: Gather your reviews and create a film review programme or create a film review magazine.

Summative Exercise 3: Why not find out about a film that your parents/grandparents/older friend or relative remember having some significance to them when they were growing up. You can interview them about the film and why it mattered and, perhaps, watch that film with them.