How to write a film review

Film reviewing is an art, not a science, but that doesn't mean you can just throw your paint at the canvas like a monkey flinging mud. Here are some pointers to keep in mind ...



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Everyone's a critic? Film reviewing may seem like a dream job, but to call it easy would require some suspension of disbelief. Photograph: Pgiam/E+

**Do**: Think of a hook to draw us in. Why is the film interesting? Is there a scene that has everyone talking? A star who's rising on the hot list (or the not list)? Ask a question: we'll want to keep reading to learn the answer.

**Don't**: Give the whole plot away. While it's important to summarise the story, especially the main conflict driving the action forward, it's equally important to make sure you don't go too far. There's nothing more annoying for readers than learning in advance that the Alien kills everyone on the Nostromo before marrying Ripley. (Just kidding. You'll have to see the film to discover the real ending – as your review should insist, too.)

**Do**: Ask yourself honestly what works about the film, and what doesn't. Be fair: most films have some good points, and few films are perfect. The acting is a key element, of course, but don't get too mired in it; other points that can be just as important include how the film is shot, the music, or the pacing. What aspect of the story or characters is plausible or moving? What seems contrived?

**Don't**: Judge a film by what it's not. There's no point complaining that Die Hard doesn't show Bruce Willis's romantic side or that Mean Girls isn't a heartstopping horror. (Although on both counts, are you sure?) Judge a film by what it has set out to be: a comedy by its laughs, a thriller by its thrills, a blockbuster by its, uh, busted blocks. A family movie is trying to entertain families, not necessarily to entertain you. Bear that in mind when judging its success.

**Do**: Have fun! Write as if you're talking to a friend. Don't be afraid to crack jokes. Never use a long word when a short one will do. And unless you have a really, really good reason for it, put away that thesaurus.

**Don't**: Try to be someone you're not. Reviewing, like all writing, ultimately boils down to trust. Do readers believe you're being honest with them? If so, then you stand the best chance of getting through to them. But if they think you're pretending to be more avant garde or conservative or patient (or anything else) than you really are, they'll call your bluff pretty quickly. An audience is something you build over time: so treat them right.[[Print this](http://www.guardian.co.uk/the-paperboy-movie/how-to-write-a-film-review/print)Print this](http://www.guardian.co.uk/the-paperboy-movie/how-to-write-a-film-review/print)

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