



AN INITIATIVE BY **LANDMARC**FILMS

# BASIC GUIDELINES FOR STUDENTS ON WRITING CRITICALLY ABOUT FILM

FEATURING



A MARATHI FILM

## Why do we watch films?

Most of us watch films to escape into a world different from our own. The very act of watching a film in comfortable darkness, closed off from the everyday, is a delicious experience. Gifted with consciousness and imagination, human beings have a tendency to pin together experiences into a structure and narrative. It is this tendency that draws us to all media, especially the visual kind. Films in particular provide us with a kind of "dream-reality". We're watching stories unfold that are unknown yet familiar, with characters with whom we can connect.

When watching films, we want a different kind of truth. The kind of truth that takes us to worlds beyond our immediate one, and allows us to experience these worlds without the need to respond to them immediately. It frees our imagination, giving us insight into our interactions with ourselves, and the world around us.

## Why write about film?

We write about film to understand and then articulate our thoughts and feelings in a structured manner. This act of writing about a film we watched helps us frame what we have watched, and serves to explain the what, why, and how to those with whom we wish to share this insight. We also write about film to understand the medium better. This could be in realising its potential, or tracing why its potential could not be realised. Last but not least, writing about film is a way by which we learn what the film has to say, its underlying message, and nuances that hint at the larger human condition.



## **What goes into writing about film?**

When writing about film, it is important to understand film history, film genres, as well as a few aspects of filmmaking. This helps provide the vocabulary to articulate and justify how you feel, think, and write about film.

A good film critique provides the reader with a basic idea of what the film is about. It is more than a film review. It is deeper. It encompasses both subjective and objective viewpoints by exploring the emotional and technical aspects of the film. For the writer, the critique is an opportunity to share a critical awareness of the elements of the film, as well as the delight and pleasure, or frustration and disappointment, that the film offers the viewer.

## **How does one write about film?**

First and foremost, it helps to keep some basic questions in mind before going to watch a film. Some examples have been shared below.

### ***Questions to keep in mind before going to, and while watching a film***

- Is the film adapted from fiction or drama, or is it based on an original idea and screenplay? Does it sacrifice the original work for unnecessary cinematic devices? If the story is original, how fresh or innovative is it?
- Are the characters believable?
- Are the actors appropriately cast?
- What is the theme of the film? Do the plot, acting, and other elements in the film successfully communicate the theme to the viewer?
- Is the setting/locale appropriate and effective?
- Is the cinematography effective? Does the film make certain use of color, texture, lighting, etc. to enhance the theme, mood, setting?
- Is the soundtrack effective? Is the music appropriate and functional, or is it inappropriate and obtrusive?
- Are camera angles used effectively? Are they ever used for a particular effect?

- Are there special effects (and/or special effects makeup) in the film? If so, are they essential to the plot? Do they serve a necessary function, or does the film sacrifice plot or characterization for the effects themselves?
- Does the film make use of symbols or symbolism?

Secondly, always use the present tense when writing your critique. Avoid generic descriptions such as 'great', 'excellent,' and the all-encompassing 'really good'. When it comes down to the actual act of writing, a basic structure is important to provide a framework to your thoughts.

### **A basic structure comprises:**

#### Introduction and plot summary

This includes facts of the film, and states what the film is "about". The context of the film is provided, though a plot summary is not necessary. A plot overview is helpful to give the reader an idea of what happens in the film. If you provide only a plot summary, you are not writing a critique, you're writing the equivalent of a book report.

Once you introduce the main characters and devote a few lines to the plot in order to give the reader a good overview, get down to the job of convincing the reader that you have something interesting to say about the film. For example, "the plot is trivial", "the hero is not really a hero", "the plot and characters are fine but the camera work is needlessly tricky", or whatever else you want as your main argument.

#### Analysis

This is the meatiest part of the critique. It looks at how the film makes you feel and think, and how the craft of filmmaking achieved that. It is important in this section to talk about how creative aspects like narrative, characterisation, background, etc. and technical aspects like camerawork, music, sound, editing, etc make the film what it is. This part assesses the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the film, supported by evidence.



*Some questions to keep in mind for the analysis are:*

- How did the film make you feel and what do you think helped cause this feeling?
- Did you identify with any characters in the film? If so, why?
- Describe what was the most moving scene or incident in the film for you and why it moved you.
- Identify what you see as the main idea of the film (for example, is the main idea of the film, family, social issues, success and failure, patriotism? any other?) and then talk about the three primary ways in which that idea has been developed. For this, you want to cite specific details, examples and illustrations from the film.
- What did you think of filmmaking aspects such as 'cinematography', 'mise-en-scene', 'sound design', 'music', etc.?
- What do you see as the importance or relevance of the film: what do you learn from watching this film?

**For example:**

If the purpose is to inform, has the material been presented clearly, accurately, with order and coherence?

If the purpose is to persuade, look for evidence, logical reasoning, contrary evidence

If the purpose was to entertain, determine how emotions are affected: does it make you laugh, cry, angry? Why did it affect you?

**Conclusion**

In this section, the main argument, or the multiple smaller arguments are tied up, and ideally a recommendation to watch or not watch the film is shared, with one's opinion.

## Links

<https://classroom.synonym.com/write-film-analysis-essay-4125.html>

<http://online.missouri.edu/exec/data/courses/2486/public/lesson01/lesson01.aspx>

<https://custom-writing.org/blog/writing-film-analysis-essay>

<http://sdfilmfest.com/how-to-analyze-a-movie-step-by-step-guide-to-reviewing-films-from-a-screener-point-of-view/>

## Introduction to film analysing

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dsRnBB\\_MqEs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dsRnBB_MqEs)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IFliG38VoyM>

## Glossary

<https://filmglossary.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/term/>