



Film Studies – Preparation for A-Level

Before your new course starts, you can prepare by watching films, reading about films and writing about films!

Here's some basic information to begin with – shot types:

<https://www.empireonline.com/movies/features/film-studies-101-camera-shots-styles/>

There's lots of extra great resources here that you can look at:

<https://www.empireonline.com/movies/features/film-studies-101/>

For the task itself, a good place to start is the work of Mark Kermode. He's one of the most popular film reviewers, presenters and writers in the industry.

His new series is here and it's a great introduction to genres – try to catch up on older episodes too: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episodes/b0bbn5pt/mark-kermodes-secrets-of-cinema>

His reviews are published here (it will be worth downloading The Guardian app for your phone too): <https://www.theguardian.com/profile/markkermode>

You could order a book of his from the library or buy one online to extend your knowledge, such as: https://www.amazon.co.uk/Good-Bad-Multiplex-Mark-Kermode-ebook/dp/B005HC177O/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=mark+kermode&qid=1585908946&sr=8-1

The Task

Write a film review of between 750-1000 words. Choose a film or feature length documentary that you can watch at home on DVD/BluRay/Netflix etc. The information below will give you very thorough guidance on how to complete the task – good luck and enjoy!

Step-by-Step Guide to How to Write a Film Review

Beginnings are always the hardest. This is the point where you set the pace and determine how to approach this assignment in the most efficient manner. Here are some useful tips to kick-start the film review writing process:

- **Watch the film or documentary twice** and take notes of both major and minor events and characters. It's a mistake to rely on the power of your memory only, there's always something we overlook or forget.
- **Carry out a thorough research.** Watching the film isn't enough, research is equally important. Look for details such as the name of filmmaker and his/her motivation to make that film or documentary work, locations, plot, characterisation, historic events that served as an inspiration for the film (if applicable). Basically, your research should serve to collect information that provides more depth to the review.
- **Analyse the film after you watching it.** Don't start working on the review if you aren't sure you understand the film. Evaluate the film from beginning to an end. Re-watch it, if necessary, if you find some parts confusing. Only when you



understand events that happened on the screen will you find it easier to create the review.

- **Draft an outline** that you will follow to write the review in a concise and cohesive fashion. Include examples for claims you make about the film. If the plot has holes, then mention an example of a situation or scene when that was evident. Also, if the character(s) is poorly developed or bad casting affected the film quality, name examples too. Provide examples when commenting on dialogue, locations, plot, everything. If you want the reader to agree with you, it's essential to back up your claims with evidence. You don't want to make it seem like you're praising or criticizing the film without any reason whatsoever.
- **Consider and comment a film's originality and quality of scenes.** Explain how the film stands out or whether it just uses the same approach that worked for previous works in the industry.

How to organise your film review

Quality of your paper depends on the level of organisation you implement. Never underestimate the importance of well-structured outline, regardless of the type of paper you have to write. Outlines help you focus on the subject and contribute to a logical flow.

In addition, getting things organised before you start writing is a great way to save time later on. Instead of trying to figure out what to include, you'll have a well-structured plan to follow. It's needless to mention you won't be too stressed out. Here's how to organise your review:

- *Introduction (with title, release date, background information)*
- *Summary of the story*
- *Analysis of the plot elements (rising action, climax)*
- *Creative elements (dialogues, characters, use of colours, camera techniques, mood, tone, symbols, costumes or anything that contributes or takes away from the overall plot)*
- *Opinion (supported with examples and facts from the story)*
- *Conclusion (announcing whether the filmmaker was successful in his/her purpose, re-state your evidence, explain how the motion picture was helpful for providing a deeper understand of course topic)*

Film Review Elements

- **The title of the film/documentary** – just because your headline features the name of the film or documentary it doesn't mean should skip mentioning it in the text. Always name the feature you've watched in the introductory paragraph. This may seem like a stupid thing to point out, but it's one of the most common mistakes that students make
- **Summary** – the whole point of the review is to summarize the documentary or film for people who haven't watched it yet. To make this as effective as possible, always assume that the reader hasn't seen it either. Why is this important? You won't leave out some important details thinking he/she watched it already so they won't bother. As a reviewer, your job is to explain what happened in the film and



express whether the filmmaker failed or succeeded. Again, saying you liked or disliked it isn't a viable comment. Your opinion has to be supported by specific reasons and examples from the feature itself

- **Filmmaker** – do a little research on the person who directed the piece. Is that person a controversial figure? Is he/she known for a political stance? Does the filmmaker have a significant background? Devote a paragraph or two to the person behind the film and their other works in order to establish the significance of the film you are reviewing for the director's career
- **Creative elements** – filmmakers work hard to include creative elements into their motion pictures. How are these elements important to the plot and film in general? For example, costumes can either enhance the film or betray its intent. Colours can be vivid and lift the atmosphere or mood in the film or they can be dull and make it seem depressing. Good sound effects enrich the viewing experience while bad ones only destroy everything. Moreover, camera movements and angles also add elements to the story. Take notes of symbols in the story, if any.
- **Actors** – let's not forget the casting! Were the actors realistic? Did they portray the role of a specific character successfully? Did they have good acting skills? Do you believe that some particular actor was the right fit for the role?

Checklist / Outline for a Good Film Review

- Introduction (title, topic, release date, background information)
- Accuracy of depiction
- Use of sources in the documentary (if applicable)
- Creative elements that enhance or tarnish the overall story (quality of script, visual design, performance, lighting, hair, and makeup, costume, set design, symbolism)
- Your opinion
- Conclusion

Mistakes to Avoid

- Not focusing on the film – while connecting the plot to some specific historical event is a good idea (when applicable), strive to avoid writing about unnecessary details or introducing irrelevant information such as the history of cinematography or that particular genre, snacks, among other things
- Inserting yourself – you're the one who's writing the review. The paper reflects your understanding and opinion of the motion picture you've seen and there is no need to write in first person all the time: I noticed this, I saw that I liked this, I disliked that
- Failing to check facts about film background and release date, director, casting etc.
- Giving out your opinion without mentioning any reason why you think that way
- Talking about irrelevancies
- Writing a review without a structure
- Writing generalities such as *great acting*, *cool effects*, *a good film*, *it was bad* etc. Writing a review without substance or analysis of the feature.