# INTO FIL

# Creating Effective Film Reviews – Secondary

Our resources are designed to be used with selected film titles, which are available free for clubs at www.intofilm.org

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### Leaders' notes

**Creating Effective Film Reviews – Secondary** 

### Introduction

Into Film Club members are encouraged to voice their opinions in discussion, create reviews and publish their responses on the Into Film Clubs website <u>www.intofilm.org</u>. This resource is designed to introduce club members to the art of reviewing and develop their critical thinking and literacy skills.

By sharing their reviews online, students can develop their own critical voices and communicate with a real audience of other young people. Every single review submitted online at <u>www.intofilm.org</u> is read by an Into Film member of staff. Each week, ten reviews are chosen as 'reviews of the week' and one review will be featured at the top of the list as the 'featured review', with the reviewer winning a special Into Film goody bag.

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Not only do we enjoy watching films as a group, but we comment and discuss views on various aspects of the film such as directing, lighting and props. Film club is not only a great way to have fun with your friends and enjoy watching films, but it opens our eyes to viewing films in a completely different way. We get to understand what elements a film needs to be successful and special.

Nicola, club member, Dr Challoner's High School, Buckinghamshire

### How to use this resource

This guide offers flexible approaches to reviewing films and is designed for film club sessions or classroom use. It will work with any film and can be easily adapted to suit your group and the time you have available.

#### This resource features:

- Step-by-step guide, featuring fun and accessible activities (pages iv-vii)
- Member workbook for club or classroom sessions (pages 1-18)
- Creating Effective Film Reviews Secondary presentation, available to download at <u>www.intofilm.org/review-</u> writing-secondary.

### Leaders' notes

The Member workbook guides members through the review writing process and includes the following activities:

| Member workbook activities                                           | Workbook page number |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Preparing to watch the film                                          | 2-3                  |
| Film viewing mind map                                                | 4                    |
| Discussing the film                                                  | 5-6                  |
| Drawing picture reviews                                              | 7                    |
| Describing the film                                                  | 8                    |
| Making creative comparisons                                          | 9                    |
| Top tips for review writing                                          | 10                   |
| Effective reviews                                                    | 11                   |
| Writing snappy synopses                                              | 11                   |
| Film review writing                                                  | 12-13                |
| Writing to explain, describe and persuade (GCSE review writing tips) | 14-15                |
| Planning your filmed review                                          | 16-17                |
| Tips for spoken film reviews                                         | 18                   |

### **Inclusive activities**

Activities in this guide are designed to encourage all young people to express their opinions about the films they have watched. Young people with SEN or EAL needs could benefit from mixed ability pairings and recording oral reviews. The SEN symbols on the Into Film website also offer an excellent learning support tool. These picture exchange communication symbols (created by Widgit) can be printed and laminated: <u>www.intofilm.org/review-writing-secondary</u>

### What are the benefits of Into Film Clubs?

There are over 10,000 Into Film Clubs around the country, all of which enjoy the following benefits.

- Joining Into Film is **completely free**, and starting a film club gives your school access to thousands of fantastic films to watch, as well as opportunities for members to develop skills in reporting, programming and reviewing.
- Clubs can access **free** educational resources and get support for filmmaking, putting youth voice at the very heart of the scheme.
- Through participating in a film club, children and young people can engage directly with members of the film industry, discover career opportunities and learn how to develop their skills.
- Club leaders can benefit from training and CPD to develop the use of film as a learning tool and access support on introducing filmmaking into your club.
- Through film industry support, Into Film is able to offer **free** cinema events, including the Into Film Festival and year-round screening events and activities.

# Step-by-step guide

**Summary:** This section features a range of activities divided into two parts, 'Getting started' and 'Developing skills'. Activities are supported by the **Member workbook** pack. You can work through these activities in order or pick those that best suit your group and your available time.

### What you will need:

- Copies of the Member workbook (pages 1-18 of this pack)
- Internet access
- Access to cameras, tablets or audio recording equipment (optional)
- Creating Effective Film Reviews Secondary presentation

# **Getting started**

These introductory activities are divided into before, during and after viewing a film with your club.

### Before viewing the film

- Give members time to write short responses to the questions on pages 2-3 of the Member workbook.
- Show members a poster or a still from the film they are about to see (these can easily be found via an online search or on the Into Film Clubs website). There is space on page 3 for members to record their predictions about characters, settings and story.
- Encourage members to conduct some research on the Into Film Clubs website so they understand what the film is setting out to do this will help them evaluate whether or not it was successful when they come to review it.
- Ask members to discuss their answers to these questions in pairs or small groups. The questions are also included on slide 2 of the **Creating Effective Film Reviews Secondary presentation**.

### During the film

- Encourage active viewing wherever possible by engaging members with key themes and enabling them to make connections to their own experiences. This will help them to discuss the film more fully with their peers later on.
- The **Film viewing mind map** on page 4 of the **Member workbook** is designed to encourage active viewing by enabling members to record their feelings whilst they watch the film. This also helps them to recall and apply these thoughts and feelings later on when they come to write their reviews.

### After viewing the film

- Ask members to give the film a star rating at the bottom of their Film viewing mind map on page 4 of the Member workbook. They could share these with the group by holding the same number of fingers up – use this to visually compare ratings and facilitate discussion.
- Members should now complete the After viewing questions grid on pages 5-6 of the Member workbook by themselves, before using these questions to film vox pop responses with each other. There are also questions on slide 3 of the Creating Effective Film Reviews – Secondary presentation, which can be used as a visual prompt during the vox pop activity.
- Filming these vox pops on cameras, tablets or on their phones will enable the group to revisit and reflect on their initial responses in later sessions, and assess how their thoughts and feelings about a film can evolve with increased reflection time.

### **Picture reviews**

Use the prompts on the **Picture reviewing sheet** on page 7 of the **Member workbook** to review using images only. Picture reviewing can be more accessible for some students, and can offer scope for creativity for others.

- Encourage members to swap their pictures and see if they can decode the images and understand how their partner responded to the film.
- For a further challenge, extend this activity into a photography project. Members can take photos that represent their review of the film. These could be displayed as a photo gallery with captions to explain the photos on the walls or even on the school's virtual learning environment.
- The SEN symbols on the Into Film website could also be used to give immediate responses members could select and hold up the symbols that most apply to their feelings about the film see <a href="https://www.intofilm.org/review-writing-secondary">www.intofilm.org/review-writing-secondary</a>

# **Developing skills**

A selection of activities to build on the introductory activities to develop members' reviewing skills and their confidence in expressing and sharing opinions.

### Create a word bank

- Explain the importance of using accurate vocabulary in a film review. Ask members to circle any words on page 8 of the **Member workbook** that reflect the way they felt about the film they have watched.
- Challenge members to create their own word bank, of five words or more, to summarise the way they feel about the film they have just watched. These words could describe the story, an actor's performance, a particular scene or the film as a whole. Explain that these adjectives can be used to enhance their film review later on. Provide members with access to a dictionary if they are unsure about the meanings or use a thesaurus to help extend their vocabulary.
- These words could be used in a word bank wall display to extend vocabulary and give members ideas for words to use in their reviews. You could offer a reward for the most interesting or descriptive words to create a sense of competition.

### The 'creative comparisons' challenge

- Members can put their creative thinking skills to the test by completing the **Creative comparisons challenge!** on page 9 of the **Member workbook**. These can be shared in a number of ways, eg through a group discussion or even as an artistic response (such as creating a poster).
- Challenge more able members by asking them to come up with their own creative comparison categories and examples.

### Top tips from a professional film critic

- Watch the clip 'Behind The Scenes with Mark Kermode' on slide 4 of the Creating Effective Film Reviews Secondary presentation (time code 00:00:38 00:07:38)
- Ask members to identify three tips that Mark Kermode gives for effective film reviewing.
- Whilst watching, members should record these top tips as a mind map on page 10 of the Member workbook.
- If you are unable to show the clip, ask members to come up with their own tips and discuss these to form a group list.

#### What makes a good film review?

- Using the two example film reviews on page 11 of the **Member workbook**, ask members to evaluate the reviews and identify which is the most effective review.
- They could record any additional thoughts and insights on what makes a good film review in the **top tips** mind map on page 10 of the **Member workbook**.

### The 'snappy synopsis' challenge

- Direct pupils to the **Snappy synopsis challenge** on page 11 of the **Member workbook**. In less than three sentences, they must write a short synopsis for a film that they have seen recently, avoiding the use of spoilers.
- They can then share this with a partner, who will try and guess which film they have summarised and suggest one way the writer could further improve their synopsis.

### Get them reviewing!

• Members write their own review of the film using all their ideas from the workbook and the writing frame on pages 12-13 of the **Member workbook**.

#### Improving their review writing

- Once members are happy with their written reviews, encourage them to read them aloud to each other in order to improve them further. Allow members the opportunity to assess each other's film reviews against their mind map of **top tips** on page 10 of the **Member workbook** or the success criteria at the bottom of page 13.
- There is extra advice for members who want to revise review writing for GCSE English on pages 14-15 of the **Member workbook**.

### Filming a review

If cameras, tablets or smartphones are available, ask members to work in pairs and use the examples and top tips on slides 5-8 of the **Creating Effective Film Reviews – Secondary presentation** to help them record their reviews. There is also a planning sheet included on page 16 of the **Member workbook**. These can be saved and shared, revisited later and used as self or peer assessment tools to help develop members' confidence in sharing their opinions.

**Extension:** You could set specific challenges for these filmed responses, linking them to speaking and listening assessment objectives, for example:

- Individually present a talk to camera about a film of interest and then answer questions from the rest of the group.
- In a group of three or four, discuss the choice of films on at the cinema at that time as part of a magazine-style entertainment and review show.
- As a pair, role-play a media interview about a film you have all seen.
- Perform a persuasive, three-minute review slot for breakfast television show called 'what to see at the cinema today'.

### Recording a radio review show

- A fun alternative to filming reviews could be to record as audio files and then edit them into a school radio podcast. This will also help members to practise their oracy skills by creating and performing spoken reviews.
- Listen to film reviews on FunKids Radio, <u>soundcloud.com/filmclubuk</u> and use the sheet on page 18 of the **Member workbook**.
- To start with, members can think about what they would like to say about the film and start to use notes, pictures or symbols as prompts to help them when talking out loud.
- They can prompt each other to talk and share ideas as they go, and could think about how to share their enthusiasm and their opinions with listeners through their tone of voice, emphasis and volume.
- Members can create their own radio or podcast film review versions, in pairs or small groups, discussing the films you have watched in your film club. Podcasts could be posted on the school's VLE and shared with other students that are interested in film.

### Share!

- Reviews can be published on the Into Film Clubs website: when members are logged into the site, they just need to find the film that they would like to review they can use the search bar on the top right hand side of the screen and click the 'write review' wording in turquoise.
- Once they have typed their review and given the film a star rating by rolling the mouse over the star icons, they then click 'preview my review' and get the chance to 'edit' or 'post'.
- You may also want to share reviews in school on your website or film club display board.



# Member workbook

This is the Into Film guide to writing effective film reviews. By completing the activities in this workbook, you will begin to view, think and write about films with confidence and enthusiasm.

Remember you can submit your reviews to the Into Film website for a chance to be selected as film review of the week.

See, think, make. Imagine



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# Before you watch the film

Take some time to answer these questions in the spaces provided. You will be discussing your ideas afterwards, so think carefully about your answers!

1. Which two great films have you watched recently and why were they so good?

2. What is your favourite genre of film (romance, horror etc) and why?

3. Which genre does the film that you are going to watch belong to and how do you know this? (comedy, action etc)

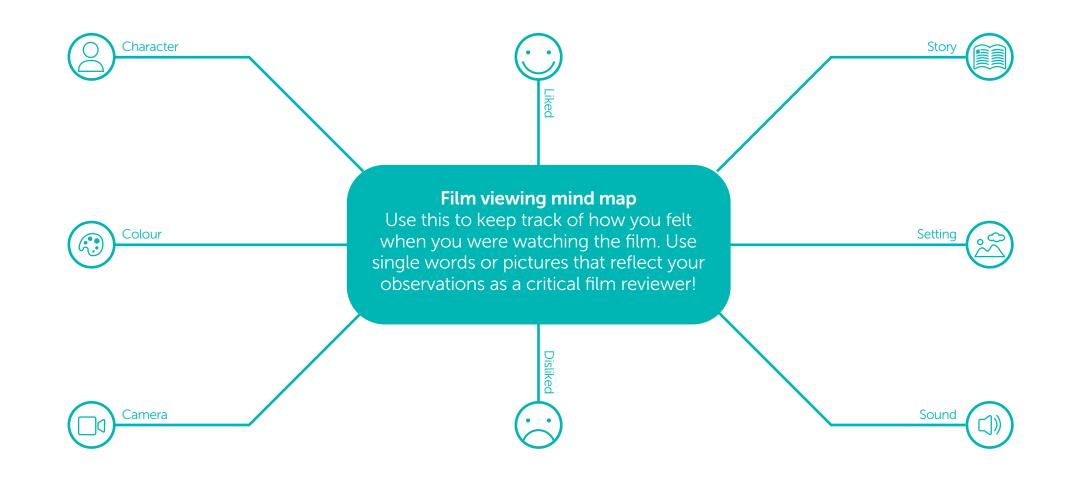


# 🕏 Before you watch the film

4. If you can, look at the poster or still from the film you are about to watch. Look for any clues about the characters and story. Write a prediction below, describing what you think the film might be about:

5. Research the film you are about to watch using the Into Film Club website or another films website. Find out about the context of the film, for example who was involved in making it, where and when it was made and what issues and themes it deals with. Write any interesting facts you find in the space below:

The 3Cs and 3Ss are an effective tool for organising your thoughts about a film. Use the film viewing mind map below to make notes while you watch a film.



At the end of the film give it a rating out of five by colouring in the stars. Briefly explain why you have given it this rating.



# After viewing questions

Adverts for films sometimes use audience reactions and vox pop interviews (short interviews with people on radio or television programmes) to show how good a film is and encourage people to go and see it. This is because film promoters recognise that positive 'word of mouth' reviews are influential and play an important part in whether a film is a success or not.

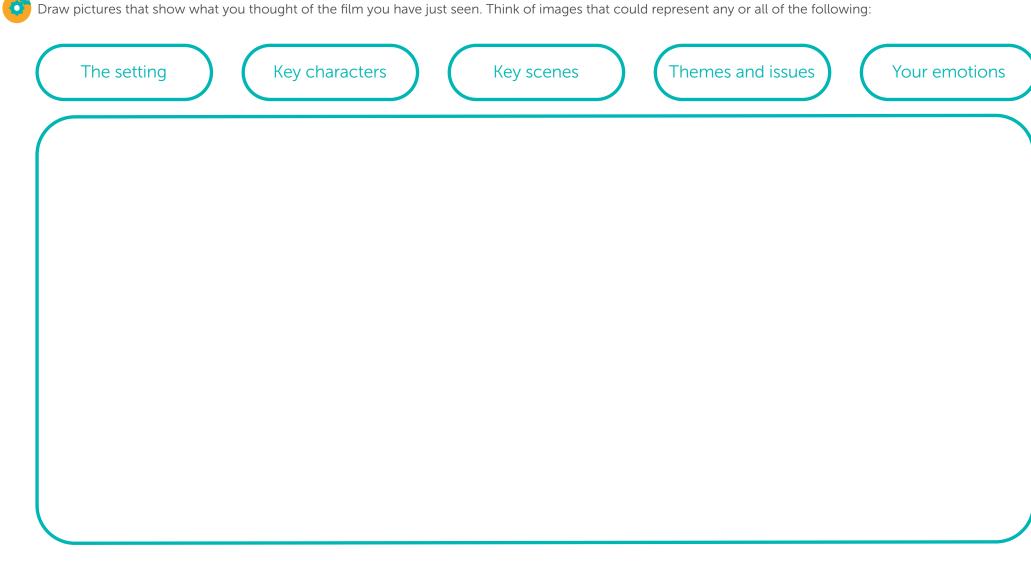
Get ready to share your first reaction to the film you have just seen by answering the questions below. Then, use these questions to record vox pop interviews with each other about the film.

You can watch these back later on, as a class, to see if your ideas have changed over time.

|           | /hat did you like<br>bout this film?                                |                    |
|-----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
|           | /hat did you dislike .<br>bout this film?                           | 5                  |
| th        | /as there anything<br>nat confused or<br>urprised you?              | 5                  |
| m         | /hat was most<br>nemorable about<br>and why?                        | 5                  |
| fil<br>it | lave you seen this<br>Im before? If so, was<br>different this time? | 5                  |
|           | id you notice anything<br>ew this time?                             | $\overline{\zeta}$ |

# • After viewing questions

| 6. From the opening,<br>what kind of film did<br>you think it was going<br>to be? Did it continue<br>as you expected?            |   |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| 7. Have you seen any<br>other films like it?<br>How is this one<br>the same?<br>How is it different?                             |   |
| 8. If you had made this film, what would you have done differently?                                                              |   |
| 9. Did the film seem<br>'true to life'? Did the<br>film make you think<br>differently about similar<br>experiences in real life? |   |
| 10. Would you like to<br>watch it again?<br>Why?                                                                                 |   |
| 11. What will you tell<br>your friends or family<br>about this film? Who<br>do you think would<br>especially like it?            |   |
|                                                                                                                                  | 5 |



Swap your picture reviews with a partner. Can you decode their review of the film by interpreting the pictures they have used?

**Challenge:** Develop this into a photography project that reviews the film using photos you have taken yourself. Add captions that communicate the ideas reflected in your images. Display these visual reviews on the walls where your club meets, or share on your school's VLE. For even more of a challenge, try redesigning the film poster to emphasise the aspects of the film that you thought were the most important.

# **One-word reviews**

Film critics' reviews are often used to promote the film on the trailer or the poster. One-word reviews that sum up the film are usually selected for this purpose.

Circle any words that you feel describe the film you have seen.

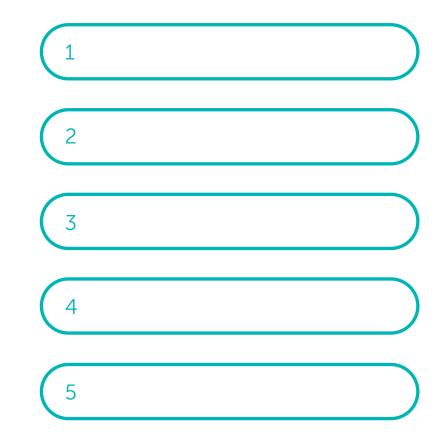
| STRIKING              | Funny    |
|-----------------------|----------|
| VISCART               | UNIQUE   |
| <b>&gt;ISTINKTIVE</b> | First-ra |
| bleak                 | perplex  |
| Magnificent           | HILARIO  |
| STRANGE               | PRETENT  |
| Joyful                | PREPOST  |
| DIRE                  | Depres   |
| Pacey                 | Frustra  |
| Remarkable            | Mugicul  |

Inane First-rate perplexing **IILARIOUS** PRETENTIOUS PREPOSTEROUS Depressing **Frustrating** 

SIDE-SPLITTING melancholy **Monotonous EXCITING** CHILLING ORIGINAL terrifying Disturbing heart-warming

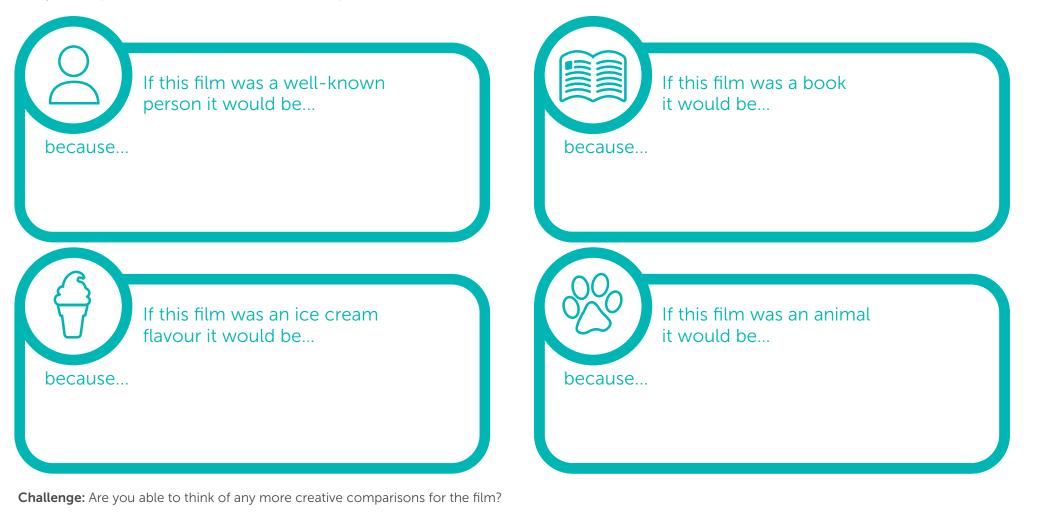
# Word bank:

Come up with at least five words of your own to describe the film you have just seen. You can use a thesaurus to find interesting words, but always double-check their meaning with a dictionary to ensure they are accurate and reflect what you want to say about the film.



# Creative comparisons challenge!

One of the best ways to help someone understand something they haven't experienced yet is by comparing it to something that they *have* experienced. Can you complete the sentence for each of the comparisons below?



# Top tips for writing a good film review

Watch the video clips on the PowerPoint. As you watch, mind map any top tips you pick up for writing a fantastic film review here:

# What makes a good film review?

Read the reviews below. Use your top tips for writing a good film review as a success criteria and give each review a **WWW (what went well...)** and an **EBI (even better if...)** Which do you think is best and why?

| Review one:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                 |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| This film is about two girls who are sisters. They<br>have some troubles. This film was good because<br>a snowman sang. I liked the bit where the wolves<br>chased the sled. It was scary. Everyone should<br>watch this film because it was good. I would not       | WWW:                            |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | EBI:                            |
| recommend this film for old people.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                 |
| Review two:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                 |
| In a kingdom far, far away, two young princesses who were once close now live a quiet and lonely                                                                                                                                                                     | WWW:                            |
| life in their castle. But when elder sister Elsa is<br>asked to take the throne, a secret is revealed –<br>with serious consequences for the two sisters                                                                                                             | EBI:                            |
| and for the whole kingdom. <i>Frozen</i> is a beautiful CGI animation. It features strong characters,                                                                                                                                                                |                                 |
| including a hilarious supporting cast of a reindeer<br>and shape-shifting snowman. The icy landscapes<br>and wintery colours are visually stunning and the<br>songs are catchy, making this film a feel-good<br>festive treat. The story is fun but definitely aimed | I think reviewis better because |
| at girls and this film is definitely one to watch<br>with your sister!                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                 |

# The snappy synopsis challenge!

The part of a review that describes the plot is called a 'synopsis'. We want a review to tell us a little bit about what happens in the film – but not too much! Too much detail can be boring for the reader and might even ruin the film. That's why giving away the end of the film in a review is called a 'spoiler'. Pick a film you have seen recently and describe what it is about in no more than three sentences:

**Challenge:** Tell a partner about a film just by giving a short synopsis – can they guess the film you are describing? **Remember: no spoilers!** 



# Use this writing frame to draft your film review:

# Title

### Introduction

What kind of film is it? What is it setting out to achieve? Why might people be interested in this film?

### Snappy synopsis

Briefly describe what happens in the film. Remember: no spoilers!

### The good, the bad and the ugly

Revisit your 3Cs 3Ss mind map on page 4 and pick out any key elements. Try and comment on as many of the 3Cs and 3Ss as you can!

# Paragraph 3 – Evaluation

Summarise your review and give your personal opinion. Use your best words and creative comparisons on pages 8-9 to help your reader understand what watching the film is like.

# Swap your review with someone else and evaluate someone else's review.

Peer-assessed by:

WWW:

EBI:

# Five things to include in your review:

- 1. An interesting introduction that makes your reader want to read on.
- 2. A short synopsis (plot summary) what happens in the film with NO SPOILERS!
- 3. Interesting information about the film the genre, who it would appeal to, any interesting cast and crew or awards.
- Evaluate what did you like or dislike and why? Use the 3Cs and 3Ss to focus your review and make it sound professional.
- 5. A personal opinion about the film overall.

# O

# Improving your review writing skills for GCSE English

Read these top tips from about what makes a great film review, from Carmen Gray. Carmen is Film Editor for *Dazed & Confused Magazine* and a freelance film critic for *Sight & Sound* and *Total Film*.

# How should I structure my film review?

- Introduction a few sentences to grab the readers' attention, get them interested, and make them want to read more
- 2. Summary what is the film about?
- 3. Critique of the characters and the acting
- 4. Style Sound, colour, tone, pace and how these stylistic elements add to the atmosphere of the film
- 5. Conclusion sum up, taking into account those main points, how was the film?

# What information should I include about the film?

The most important word to remember when writing is "respect". A review is not just an excuse to show how funny or devastating you can be. A film takes a great deal of effort to make. You owe it to both the filmmakers and your readers to be as constructive as possible, balancing your review with any positives and negatives you find in the film.

Try to think about what the filmmakers were trying to achieve and why, when they made this film. Did they manage this? Is there any value in what they were trying to do? Above all, be honest. If you hate the film, it's fine to say it. After all, you also owe it to your readers to warn them what they're in for! And to express it to society if you think the film is damaging in its perspective in some way. Trust your own ideas and impressions but remember to provide reasons and examples for every point that you make.

# Improving your review writing skills for GCSE English

# What language should I use?

A review needs to inform, explain and engage. The most important thing is to convey the information about what the film is like that the reader will be wanting to know. If you write a beautifully lyrical, off-the-wall masterpiece of poetry, that's all well and good (and you should move on to your first novel!), but if the reader finishes it knowing little more about the actual film than when they started, is your review really doing its job?

On the other hand, if your review is conscientiously packed with facts, but the reader is slumped asleep on the desk by the end, that's not ideal either. So, make sure you cover all the aspects of the film mentioned above. Don't forget to describe the film. A film is an experience of images, sounds, emotions. Use words so that the viewer can see and hear the film in their mind. Don't just use the first ones that come into your head – search for the really accurate adjectives. What was the exact colour of the dress that was so significant in that important scene? And that character's personality? What scene or moment told us what they were really like? And how did the colour of the sky, the mood of the lighting add to that impression?

Most importantly, have fun with your writing. It's a chance for you to show your personality – the one that is unique to you. If you're true to your own impressions, you'll write something people will enjoy reading, because it will feel authentic.

# How do I speak to the target audience?

One of the most important things to remember when writing a review is who you are writing for. Why are they reading the review, and what information do they need to know? If you imagine yourself talking to this person, it will help you speak in the right kind of voice for your reader, and add personality to your writing.

Most people read reviews to find out if they want to see the film (so, first telling them what it's about is essential – but remember, no spoilers of unexpected endings!!) so imagine what you would like to know in their situation, if you hadn't seen it yet. Or, if they have seen the film already, they read to be inspired with ideas about the film they hadn't thought of before, to stretch their responses, or to challenge or confirm their impressions.

You owe it to yourself and to them, to tell the truth about what you think. Remember, your beliefs and impressions are just as important as the next person's!

# Plan your shoot here:

Location:

Equipment needed:

Shot types to use:

Performance notes:

# Top five tips to make recording your review a success

# Camera framing

Would a long shot or close up best suit the activity you have in mind?



### 2 Camera positioning Where is the best pla

Where is the best place to position the camera to get a clear shot?





# Lighting

Are the people being filmed facing the light source rather than standing with their backs to it?



# 4

Sound Have you chosen a suitable location to cut out background noise? Is the mic close to the person who is speaking to camera?





### Using a tripod

If you are without access to a tripod, have you minimised camera shake with your elbows on a table, shelf or wall?



# Planning a radio film review show

You can find examples of spoken film reviews on this online radio station: <u>soundcloud.com/filmclubuk</u>.

When you listen to a spoken review – such as a radio programme or a podcast – what do you notice? As you listen, consider these questions:

How long did the review last and how many people were speaking?

What information did they include about the film?

How did they make the review interesting to listen to and easy to understand?

My top tips for a radio film review:

Notes for my own radio film review

Things I would like to say about the film:

I should remember to... (eg talk clearly; not speak too quickly etc)