

TIPS FOR WRITING CRITIQUES

What is a *critique*? It is a written paper—an essay, that critically evaluates any creative work such as a book, paintings, music, film, or television program.

Choose a feature-length film from AIA's library, public library, or a video rental facility... Firstly, you must watch the entire film. Even if you have seen it ten times, watch it! Do not rely on your memory

Your two typed pages (minimum), double-spaced in 12pt courier font essays will assess visual style, content, perspective, editing, and overall interest and effectiveness.

1. After watching the film, create an outline—a plan of what you are about to write
2. Provide a brief description of the film in the first paragraph—and tell the reader what you are attempting to accomplish in the critique.
3. A good film critique provides the reader with a basic idea of what the film is about, and the writer's critical assessment of the success/failure or effectiveness/ineffectiveness of the film supported by the evidence the writer gathers from the film. It is, therefore, more than a plot synopsis or the enthusiastic blurbs of publicity hype. Avoid words such as "great," "excellent," and the all-encompassing "really good." For the writer, the critique is an opportunity to exhibit a critical awareness of the elements of the film as well as to share the delight and pleasure (or frustration and disappointment) the film offers the reviewer.
4. Use paragraphs
5. Summarize your opinion of the film at the end.
6. Be careful writing about technical details that apply to all professionally produced work, such as: "All the shots were in focus." Similarly, don't write about the "shot selection" or "editing" unless there is something distinctive about it (positive or negative) in this particular film.
7. Don't plagiarize—attribute any quotes or comments taken from another source (book, magazine, website, etc.).
8. Don't forget to title your work.
9. Don't overuse a word—think of a synonym—a word that means the same thing.
10. Read what you write—carefully!
11. Avoid the use of passive voice.
12. Stay in the same verb tense AND watch verb endings.
13. Check plurals (they tend to have an "S" on the end).
14. Run *Spellcheck*—and check grammatical mistakes that show up on many writing programs such as Microsoft Word.

Some questions you might respond to include:

- 1) Is the film adapted from fiction or drama, or is it based on an original idea and screenplay? If it is an adaptation, does it follow the original and neglect the cinematic opportunities of the story? Or does it sacrifice the original work for unnecessary cinematic devices? If the story is original, how fresh or innovative is it?
- 2) Are the characters believable?
- 3) Are the actors appropriately cast?
- 4) What is the theme of the film? Is it obvious or only subtly evident? Do the plot, acting, and other elements in the film successfully impart the theme to the viewer?
- 5) Is the setting/locale appropriate and effective?
- 6) Is the cinematography effective? Does the film make certain use of color, texture, lighting, etc. to enhance the theme, mood, setting?
- 7) Is the sound track effective and appropriate? Is the music appropriate and functional, or is it inappropriate and obtrusive?
- 8) Are camera angles used effectively? Are they ever used for a particular effect?
- 9) Are there special effects (and/or special effects makeup) in the film? If so, are they essential to the plot? Are they handled skillfully? Do they serve a necessary function, or does the film sacrifice plot or characterization for the effects themselves?
- 10) Does the film make use of symbols or symbolism? What purpose do the symbols serve? Are they used effectively? How does the symbolism in the film contribute to or enhance the film's overall theme?