

## Writing Films Reviews for American History and Film Class

The standard film review is between 500 and 750 words long, or between 2 and 3 1/2 pages long. A good film review is not just a summary of a movie, but a critical analysis that examines why and how a film works and whether the movie succeeds in its presentation. A film reviewer often judges whether a movie succeeds or fails with its intended audience. So when writing film reviews, always consider who the intended audience is for the movie and the audience you are writing for. In fact, a good film reviewer will often tell the reader who the film's intended audience is. A film reviewer remembers that a good movie always allows, and even encourages, multiple readings. A film reviewer always assumes that the reader hasn't seen the movie and tries not to give away the climax or ending. Try to include the basic "boilerplate" information about the film at the beginning of your review. One of the first things a reviewer looks for is what is the film's setting, its tone and genre, when it was made, and who is the director and major actors. Try to compare this movie with other recent movies your reader has seen. Good movies often borrow from the style, dialogue, and structure of other great movies.

A good review not only summarizes but evaluates and critiques a movie. When writing your review, try to remember the full range of reactions to a movie--from "panning it" to writing a "rave review." There are a number of different approaches to writing a review: 1) a plot-driven review, 2) a thematic or idea-driven review, or 3) a director- or actor-driven review. A good film review can even contain elements of all three different approaches. When writing your film reviews, use the "star system", from "\*" (1) to "\*\*\*\*" (4) stars. Focus your film review around a larger argument, such as why the movie works or fails to work and what are both the successful and unsuccessful elements of the movie. Make sure that you have a central thesis and a set of supporting arguments. A good review uses scenes and dialogue from the movie to support its larger argument. In the end, a good movie review focuses on whether and how a film works and whether the reviewer recommends the movie.

**Finally, a good movie reviewer discusses how a movie works both psychologically, emotionally, intellectually, and even spiritually. When writing your reviews, think about some of your favorite movies. Does the film you are reviewing have the same powerful effect that they do. Does the movie provoke, stimulate, mesmerize, or enchant you? Film reviewers love movies and want to share their love of and insight into great movies. Good film reviewers know that the power of a great movie can even be life-changing. In fact, there are some movies that most reviewers think that anyone who loves movies should see. Seeing great movies can change or alter the way we understand and see the world. A good film reviewer understands and recognizes the power of movies to transform our lives. So write your film reviews for this class assuming you are a film reviewer who loves movies and wants to share that love with others.**