**How to Analyze Movies**

By Contributor

How to Analyze Movies. A true movie critic must know how to explain why a movie works or doesn't work, looking beyond the obvious elements added to sell a movie to the audience. You've got to analyze the specific details that allow viewers to experience the story on many levels. Grab your notebook, head to the theater, and prepare to enter the world of the movie critic.

Find the theme of the movie. If you can't discern the message the movie is trying to convey, try describing the movie to someone else. You tend to talk about what struck you the strongest, usually the theme. Be aware that smaller themes can also be contained in a movie in support of the larger theme.

Look at the storyline. Analyze whether the plot flows easily from one scene to another. Note if the screenwriters followed a well-used formula from the hero cycle or added twists that make the plot more believable and draw the audience into the story.

Listen to the dialogue to analyze if it's believable or contrived. Forced explanations should not be sprinkled into the characters' conversations to explain the story to the audience.

Look at the set and scenery used for the movie. The atmosphere of the film is often enhanced with the use of lighting, special effects, costumes and backgrounds. These elements of the film should work together to bring the audience into the story but shouldn't overwhelm our senses and detract our attention.

Consider the roles of the main and supporting characters. It's not always the heroes that draw us into a story but the damsel in distress or villain who plays a role that makes the film memorable. Stereotypical characters are often the easiest to spot; however, their role is usually of little importance to the theme.

Watch for scenes that do not add to the story and should have been edited out. Editing a movie is an art, and needless pieces should be left on the cutting room floor. Also when analyzing editing, keep your eye out for the way the scenes move from one to another; the audience shouldn't lose track of the story because the movie jumped around from scene to scene.

# Watch for symbolism, used to represent some topic or idea from the theme. This could be a repeated object that the camera focuses on throughout many scenes, or a word or phrase that is repeated. Be careful not to find symbolism everywhere, an easy thing to do if you're looking to make meaning where none is intended by the director.How to Write an Evaluation Essay on a Movie

By Christina Hamlett

Whether you're an aspiring movie critic who wants to break into print or you're assigned to write an essay for your film appreciation class, understanding some of the elements inherent in this medium is as important as being able to articulate what you liked and did not like about a specific movie's content. In addition to examining the merits of the work itself, a movie evaluation essay often compares and contrasts the film to others with similar themes and to prior works by the same director and/or actors.

### Instructions

Identify the genre of the film and its central theme. Comedy, drama, horror, western, fantasy, science fiction, and coming of age are a few of the many types of film genres. Although movies often borrow elements from multiple genres, there is always a main genre that prevails. Genre is what dictates how the movie will be categorized at the video store. Movie themes can generally be distilled to a single sentence or proverb. For example, "Love conquers all," "Blood is thicker than water," "All that glitters isn't gold".

Describe the inciting incident that establishes the story's major conflict. An inciting incident is an event that upsets the status quo and forces the characters to take a series of actions and risks predicated on reward, revenge or escape in order to resolve the conflict. For example, inciting incidents may be a murder, an alien invasion, a misunderstanding, a tsunami. Identify the film's protagonist and antagonist and discuss the respective strengths and weaknesses that make them compelling characters.

Analyze the actors and the characters they portray. Evaluate the depth and credibility of their performances. For example, discuss whether the role is a radical departure from characters the actor typically portrays or whether the role is virtually interchangeable with past characters he has performed. Cite specific scenes and lines of dialogue that shocked you or moved you to laughter or tears.

Examine the director's role in the production. Also include your impressions of the cinematography, lighting, costumes, makeup, sets and music. If the movie utilized special effects and computer-generated imagery, explain whether you felt these elements enhanced your enjoyment of the film or were a distraction to mask an otherwise weak plot. Take into account the visual nature of the film and whether the storyline and character relationships could still have been followed if you watched it with the sound turned off.

Analyze how the movie compares to previous films on the same topic. For example, multiple films have been made about the tragedy of the Titanic. While advances in cinematography have improved the realism of the ocean liner's sinking, the film may have suffered if less attention was given to character development and the crafting of memorable dialogue. If the film you evaluate is an adaptation of a novel or stage play, discuss how the plot was modified to accommodate the film's compressed time frame or budget requirements.

#### Tip

Provide specific examples of the movie's merits and flaws. Saying the film got off to a sluggish start, was replete with historical inaccuracies, or the chemistry between the romantic leads wasn't convincing is a more insightful critique than just stating it was the worst film you've ever seen.

**The Language of film analysis**

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| **CAMERA RANGE** *(=the distance between the camera and object)* |
| **extreme long shot** *(super totale Einstellung)* | shot of, e.g. a large crowd scene or a view of scenery as far as the horizon*"What is the effect of the ~?"* |   |
| **long shot***(Totale, totale Einstellung)* | a view of a situation or setting from a distance*"the camera pulls away from the close-ups to a long shot of the Boston skyline."* | http://www.schuleplus.de/Englisch/films/image002.jpg |
| **medium long shot***(halb totale Einstellung)*  | shows a group o f people in interaction with each other, e.g. a fight scene, with part of their surroundings in the picture | http://www.schuleplus.de/Englisch/films/image004.jpg |
| **full shot** *(Halbnaheinstellung)*  | a view of a figure's entire body in order to show action and/or a constellation of characters | http://www.schuleplus.de/Englisch/films/image006.jpg |
| **medium shot, mid shot, medium close shot** *("amerikanische Einstellung")* | shows a subject down to his or her waist, e.g. showing head and shoulders of two people in conversation*"What is the purpose of the high angle medium close shot?"* | http://www.schuleplus.de/Englisch/films/image008.jpg |
| **close-up** *(Großaufnahme)* | a full-screen shot o f a subject's face, showing the finest nuances of expression*"The camera suddenly cuts to a close-up."* *"What does the series of close-ups show?"* | http://www.schuleplus.de/Englisch/films/image010.jpg |
| **extreme close-up (shot)** **detail (shot)** *(Detailaufnahme)* | a shot of a hand, eye, mouth or object in detail |   |
| **POINT OF VIEW (VIEWPOINTS)** *(= the position from which the camera is filming)* |
| **establishing shot** | often used at the beginning of a scene to indicate the location or setting, it is usually a long shot taken from a neutral position*"The scene starts with an ~."* |
| **point-of-view shot, POV-shot** *(subjektive Einstellung)* | shows a scene from the perspective of a character |
| **over-the-shoulder shot** | often used in dialogue scenes, a frontal view o f a dialogue partner from the perspective of someone standing behind and slightly to the side of the other partner, so that parts of both can be seen |
| **reaction shot** *(Gegeneinstellung)* | short shot of a character's response to an action*"He decided to hold a ~."* |
| **insert (shot)** | a detail shot which quickly gives visual information necessary to understand the meaning of a scene, for example a *newspaper* page, or a physical detail |
| **reverse-angle shot** | a shot from the opposite perspective, e.g. after an over-the-shoulder shot |
| **hand-held camera** | *"What effect does the ~ have in the party scene?"* |
| **CAMERA ANGLES** *(= Kameraperspektive)* |
| **aerial shot***or* **high angle***or* **overhead** *(Vogelperspektive)* | long or extreme long shot of the ground from the air*"How does the sequence of aerial and tracking shots support the voiceover commentary?"*  | http://www.schuleplus.de/Englisch/films/image012.jpg |
| **high-angle shot** | shows people or objects from \ above, i.e. higher than eye level  |
| **low-angle shot***or* **below shot** *(Froschperspektive)* | shows people or objects from below, i.e. lower than eye level |
| **eye-level shot***or***straight-on** **angle** | views a subject from the level of a person's eyes*"In the first part the straight-on angle of the camera puts the viewer on the same level as Mrs Robinson."* |
|   | *"How do the varoius camera shot angles highlight the power of Mrs Robinson?"* |   |
| **CAMERA MOVEMENT** *(movement of the camera during a shot)* |
| **pan(ning shot)** *(horizontaler Schwenk)* | the camera pans (moves horizontally) from left to right or vice versa across the picture*"The camera pans across the picture."* |
| **tilt (shot)** *(vertikaler Schwenk)* | the camera **tilts up** (moves upwards) or **tilts down** (moves downwards) around a vertical line |
| **tracking shot / trucking shot**  | the camera follows along next to or behind a moving object or person |
| **zoom** | the stationary camera appears to approach a subject by 'zooming in' ; or to move farther away by 'zooming out'*"The camera zooms in(zooms out) on Ben's face."* |
| **EDITING / Montage** *(= the arrangement of shots in a structured sequence)* |
| **master shot** | main shot of a whole scene taken by one camera in one position, which is then intercut with other shots to add interest |
| **cutaway** | shot of something not shown by the master shot of a scene, but connected to the main action in some way |
| **cross-cutting***or* **parallel action** | intermingling the shots of two or more scenes which are taking place at the same time |
| **flashback** *(Rückblende)* | a scene or sequence dealing with the past which is inserted into a film's 'present time' |
| **flash-forward** *(Vorausschau)* | a scene or sequence which looks into the future |
| **match cut** | two scenes connected by visual or aural parallelism, e.g. one door closing and then another one opening |
| **split screen** *(Bildteilung)* | division of the screen to show two or more pictures at the same time |
| **PUNCTUATION** *(= the way in which shots are linked)* |
| **casting** *(Besetzung)* | choosing actors to impersonate the characters |
| **cut** | a switch from one image or shot to another*"What effect does the sudden cut from the pool to Ben's room have on the viewer?"* |
| **jump-cut** | (a) switching back and forth between two or more persons who are closely involved with each other, e.g. in a conversation or a chase scene; (b) using cuts to create an effect o f moving rapidly towards a subject |
| **fade-in** *(Aufblende)* | from a black screen or ground, the gradual emergence o f an image, which slowly becomes brighter until it reaches full strength |
| **fade-out** *(Abblende)* | the gradual disappearance of an image until the screen or ground is completely black; a device used to end a scene |
| **dissolve, dissolving shot***or* **cross-fade** *(Mischbild)* | following a fade-out with a fade-in in order to move slowly from one scene to the next |
| **Miscellaneous** |
| **backlighting** | filming a person or event against a background of light, especially the sun, which produces an idealized, sometimes romantic effect |
| **background music** | the music accompanying scenes*"What ~ would you use?"* *"What effect does the ~ have?"* |
| **camera operator** | the person behind the camera(s); in major productions, the head of the camera team is usually called the **director of photography** |
| **caption** | words that are shown on a cinema or television screen, e.g. to establish the scene of a story |
| **clip** | short piece of film or video. |
| **composition** | the arrangement of people or things in a painting, photograph, film scene, etc. |
| **(film) director** (Regisseur) | the person responsible for the artistic production of a film, i.e. the lightning, camera work, action, and the actors' interpretation of their roles*"What do you think the director's intention is?"* *"Why does the director use this shot?"* |
| **credits** (Vor-/ Abspann) | list of people who helped to make a film or programme. |
| **editor** | the person responsible for arranging the camera shots and splicing (cutting / pasting) the shots together |
| **film transcript** | transcript of the final film according to the individual shots giving field size, camera angle, camera movement, action, dialogue etc. |
| **footage** (das Material) | Piece of film or video.*"Where is the ~ being filmed from?"* *"What sort of TV programme uses footage like this?"* |
| **freeze-frame** (eingefrorenes Bild) | effect when all movement is stopped. |
| **motion picture** | a US and Canadian term for **film** |
| **producer** | the person responsible for the overall organization, especially the financing and marketing, of a film or TV production |
| **scene** | a **shot** or a series of shots that deal(s) with a single action |
| **screenplay** (Drehbuch) | film script with dialogue, location descriptions and some camera angles andmovements. |
| **sequence** (Teil des Filmes) | Connected piece of film, perhaps a complete scene.*"What does the ~ of close-up and extreme cluse-up shots focus on?"* |
| **setting** | the location of a film*"If you were the director of the film, what kind of setting would you choose?"* |
| **shot** (Einstellung) | Single piece of camera work, e.g. a cutaway.*"What sort of shot has to be used for an event like this?"* *"Watch the film as far as the first shot of Ben in his room."* *"The director uses ...shots to ..."* |
| **soundtrack** | All sound for a film, including voices and music. |
| **still** (Standbild, auch: das Insert) | Single frame of a film, like a photo.*"What could the connection between the title and the stills?"* |
| **storyboard** (Aufnahmeplan) | series of simple pictures showing the sequence of main shots, often with notes an camera angles and movements. |
| **subtitle** (Untertitel) | Printed words, usually below the picture, and usually used to translate dialogue in aforeign film. |
| **time-lapse photography** (Zeitraffer, auch: Einzelbildschaltung) | Technique of filming very short bursts from a fixed position at fixed time intervals,so that action appears very rapid when the film is played back at normal speed. |
| **(voice)off** | not to be seen but to be heard (especially a narrator, a character voicing thoughts or a news correspondent commenting on pictures that are being shown) |
| **voice-ove**r (Filmkommentar) | commentary heard by the viewer without the speaker being in-shot.Often used in documentaries. *"The voice-over comments break the scene into four sections."* |

## Filmanalyse: Vokabelliste und Formulierungen

Wir haben dir hier eine Liste mit **allgemeinem Vokabular** und eine mit **vorformulierten Sätzen** zusammengestellt, die dir helfen, über einen Film zu sprechen und ihn zu analysieren.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Englisch** | **Deutsch** |
| cast | Besetzung (Gruppe der Schauspieler/innen) |
| actor | Schauspieler |
| actress | Schauspielerin |
| director | Regisseur |
| scene | Szene |
| opening scene | Eröffnungsszene |
| closing scene | Schlussszene |
| sequence | Filmausschnitt |
| still | Standbild |
| subtitle | Untertitel |
| credits | Vor-oder Abspann |
| film adaption | Filmversion (ein Film, der auf einem Roman oder einer Kurzgeschichte basiert) |
| film review | Filmrezension |
| screen play | Drehbuch |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Englisch** | **Deutsch** |
| The film was produced in … | Der Film wurde in  … gedreht. |
| The film is popular for its music. | Der Film ist wegen seiner Musik beliebt. |
| Sound effects and music are used to make suspense grow. | Klangeffekte und Musik werden verwendet, um die Spannung zu erhöhen. |
| The flashback of the protagonist shows what he/she remembers. | Die Rückblende zeigt, woran sich der Protagonist erinnert. |
| The film (“title”) is based on the novel (“title”) by (author). | Der Film („Titel”) basiert auf dem Roman („Titel“) von (Autor). |
| “Title” tells the story of … | „Titel” erzählt die Geschichte von … |
| The girl’s face has been taken in a close-up to show her feelings. | Das Gesicht des Mädchens wurde aus der Nähe gefilmt, um ihre Gefühle zu zeigen. |

## Filmanalyse: Vokabelliste Figurenanalyse

Ein Bestandteil einer Filmanalyse ist die Figurenanalyse. Dabei solltest du herausstellen, wer die Haupt-und Nebenfiguren sind und ihre Beziehung zueinander beschreiben können. Mit den folgenden Vokabeln fällt es dir vielleicht leichter, deine Figurenanalyse auf Englisch zu formulieren.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Englisch** | **Deutsch** |
| protagonist | Hauptfigur/Protagonist |
| antagonist | Gegenspieler/Antagonist |
| protagonist couple | Protagonistenpaar |
| constellation of characters  | Personenkonstellation  |
| feature | Merkmal |
| characteristic | (Charakter-) Eigenschaft |
| The person changes his opinion when … | Die Person ändert ihre Meinung als … |
| The protagonist changes his/her way of thinking. | Die Hauptfigur ändert ihre Denkweise. |
| The antagonist changes sides in a conflict between … | Der Antagonist wechselt die Seiten im Konflikt zwischen … |
| (to) develop | sich entwickeln |
| (to) change | sich verändern |
| Because of the way the person treats others he/she can be described as … | Aufgrund der Art, wie die Person andere behandelt, kann sie als … beschrieben werden. |
| (to) behave ... towards so. | sich ... gegenüber jmd. verhalten  |
| (to) be jealous of  | eifersüchtig sein |
| (to) support so./sth. | jmd./etw. unterstützen  |

**Redewendungen Film**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Englisch** | **Deutsch** |
|   |
| Einleitung |
| (Title) is a film by (director). | (Titel) ist ein Film von (Regisseur). |
| (Title) is based on a novel by (author). | (Titel) basiert auf einem Roman von (Autor). |
| The story is about (topic). | Die Geschichte handelt von (Thema). |
| (Title) tells the story of (hero/topic). | (Titel) handelt von (Held/Thema). |
| (Title) is the story of (hero/action/...). | (Titel) ist die Geschichte von (Held/Handlung/...). |
| (Title) is set in the period of (event). | (Titel) spielt in der Zeit von (Ereignis). |
| (Title) tells of (hero), who ... | (Titel) erzählt die Geschichte von (Held), der ... |
|   |
| Inhalt |
| As the story begins, ... | Zu Beginn der Geschichte ... |
| During ... | Während ... |
| While ... | Während ... |
| As/When ... | Als ... |
| Since/As ... | Weil ... |
| Just then ... | Genau in diesem Moment ... |
| After ... | Nachdem ... |
| Before ... | Bevor ... |
| Before long ... | Nicht lange danach/Bald darauf ... |
| Soon ... | Bald darauf ... |
| Soon afterwards ... | Bald darauf ... |
| As soon as ... | Sobald ... |
| One day/evening ... | Eines Tages/Abends ... |
| The following day ... | Am folgenden Tag ... |
| Some time later ... | Einige Zeit später ... |
| Hours/Months/Years later, .... | Stunden/Monate/Jahre später ... |
| By morning/the next day/the time ... | Bis zum Morgen/nächsten Tag/Zeitpunkt als ... |
| Meanwhile ... | In der Zwischenzeit ... |
| However, ... | Jedoch/Wie dem auch sei ... |
| Again/Once again ... | Wieder einmal ... |
| At this point ... | Zu diesem Zeitpunkt ... |
| To his surprise ... | Zu seiner Überraschung ...  |
| This incident is/was followed by ... | Diesem Ereignis folgt(e) ... |
| To make matters even worse ... | Was die Sache noch verschlimmert(e) war, dass ... |
| Eventually, .../Finally, ... | Schließlich ... |