



W. L. Adams Center for Writing

WRITING BOOK AND FILM REVIEWS

Reviewing a book or film involves reading or viewing the work carefully and then writing a review that includes the following:

- Introduction
- Summary
- Analysis/discussion
- Evaluation

Introduction

To set the stage for your review, an introduction should include:

- Information on the work's background information;
- A brief discussion on the author/director;
- Establishing an audience;
- Share an insight about your reading/viewing experience, such as the writer's or director's purpose.
- Consider ending your introduction with a statement of your own thesis, argument, or an indication of the focus of your review.

Summary

Your summary should provide your reader with an overview of the work you are reviewing but should not go into great detail. It should constitute only one fourth to one third of your total review. Remember that your summary is only a part of the total review and not necessarily the main part. Use present tense when summarizing, as books and movies continue to exist after they are published or produced.

Analysis/Discussion

After the brief summary, you are ready to begin your own analysis and/or discussion. Some reviews are persuasive, including an argument for a unique evaluation or interpretation. Or, you may choose to emphasize a particular element of the work (the setting of a novel, the bias of the work, etc.). Regardless, it is important to have a focus.

Focusing on one or two elements will enable you to write a better review.

Once you have narrowed your focus to a few particular elements, you need to analyze them. To analyze means to take something apart, examine its individual parts, and determine how they function in relation to the whole work. Through analysis, you point out not only **what** happens but also **how** and **why**—you will be more informative and, ultimately, more persuasive. For example, if you claim that the author of a book is biased, you need to provide instances of bias. Below are some of the criteria on which reviewers most often focus:

Book Reviews	Film Reviews
Plot, characters, theme, prose style, narrative techniques, credibility and/or qualifications of the author, tone, arguments/supporting evidence, and accuracy of information.	Director, actors, plot, setting, characters, cinematography, special effects, performances, musical score, and script.

Evaluation

The final evaluation of a work usually constitutes the conclusion of your review. View this as your opportunity to discuss the work's strengths and weaknesses. To be convincing, however, you must do more than mention what you liked and did not like about the work. Most reviewers identify both the strengths and weaknesses of a work although, on occasion, you may want to focus strictly on one or the other. Consider, a review is only successful if the points are well explained and structured, and the review is honest regardless of offering praise or criticism.

Common Style References

Citing a Film in MLA Style, 9th ed.

In-Text Citations	Works Cited Page
Include the title and/or director, as well as other relevant contributors in text rather than parenthetically, or cite by title as with a television or radio broadcast.	List films by their titles. Include the name of the director, the film studio or distributor, and the release year. If relevant, list performer names after the director's name. ¹
Example	Example
Often cited as revisionist Native-American history, Arthur Penn's <i>Little Big Man</i> (1970) portrays the U.S. Army in a negative light, causing some critics to review it as an anti-war film.	<i>Speed Racer</i> . Directed by Lana Wachowski and Lilly Wachowski, performances by Emile Hirsch, Nicholas Elia, Susan Sarandon, Ariel Winter, and John Goodman, Warner Brothers, 2008.

¹ *Purdue Owl*. "MLA Works Cited: Other Common Sources," n.d., [MLA Works Cited: Other Common Sources - Purdue OWL® - Purdue University](#).

Citing a Film in APA Style, 7th ed.

In-Text Citations	Reference Page
All in-text citation appears within the body of the paper (or in a table, figure, footnote, or appendix) and briefly identifies the cited work by its author and date of publication. This enables readers to locate the corresponding entry in the alphabetical reference list at the end of the paper. ²	Provide the director in the author element of the reference, followed by the notation “(Director).” Provide the production company or companies in the source element of the reference. Separate multiple production companies with a semicolon. ²
Example	Example
(Verrette, 2021)	Verrette, T. (Director). (2021). <i>Zero gravity</i> [Film]. Skylight Cinema; 20th Digital Studio.

Citing a Film in Chicago Style, 18th ed.

In-Text Citations	Reference Page
In text citations follow the author-date format in parentheses. ³	In this order, list the director, film title, year of release, production company, and the medium used to view the film (DVD, Blu-ray, Netflix, etc.) ⁴
Example	Example
(Cuarón 2013)	Cuarón, Alfonso, dir. <i>Gravity</i> . 2013; Warner Bros. Pictures, 2014. Blue-Ray Disc, 1080p HD.

² *APA Style*. “Style and Grammar Guidelines,” last updated February 2024, <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines>.

³ University of Chicago Press. *The Chicago Manual of Style*. 18th ed. Page 840. University of Chicago Press, 2024.

⁴ University of Chicago Press. *The Chicago Manual of Style*. 18th ed. Page 932. University of Chicago Press, 2024.