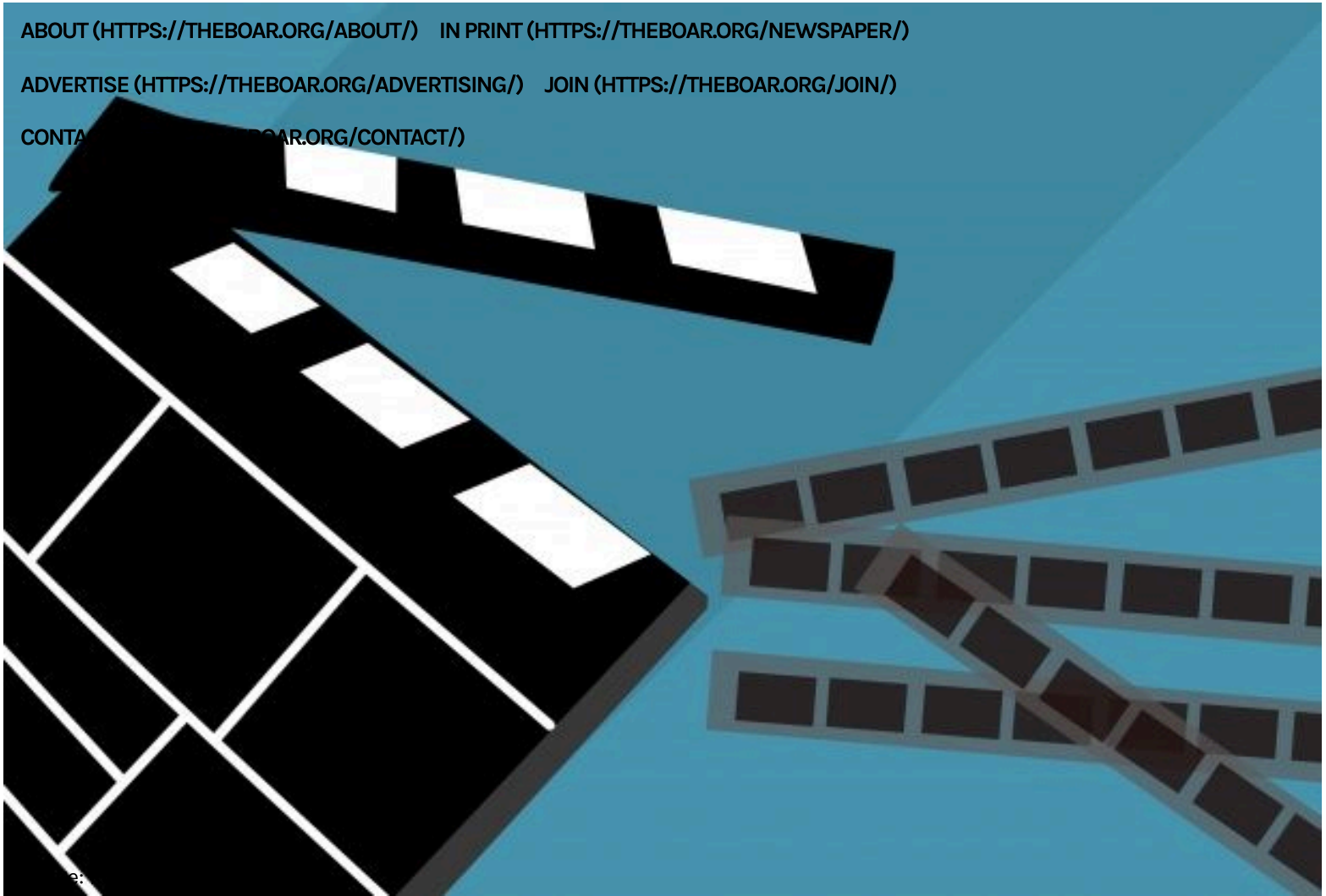


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# What makes a good film review? (<https://theboar.org/2020/05/what-makes-a-good-film-review/>).

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By James  
Palmer  
(<https://theboar.org/author/james-palmer/>)

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**A**s someone who has spent most of their teenage life reading and listening to many people's opinions about films, I have read an excessive amount of film reviews. Now being the editor for the film section, I have to read many reviews with a critical eye

May 12, 2020 and seemingly “review the review” in a rather meta turn of events. But what makes a film review worth reading? [\(https://theboard.org/author/james-palmer/\)](https://theboard.org/author/james-palmer/) More importantly, what gives someone the qualifications to be a film reviewer? What makes one judgment necessarily better than another with regards to film? Isn't it all just purely subjective anyway? Why even read film reviews at all if that's the case, yet considering the usual correlation between the amount of praise a film receives and its box office returns, clearly there is a use in film reviews and there is such thing as an ideal film review.

I can tell you what makes a bad film review quite easily. Thankfully I can't say I've actually seen any since taking on editor, but I can say that in the 4 years of film 'journalism' I have done, I have pumped out some real duds. A bad film review can fall into a number of bad habits. It can spend too much time listing the actors and crew members involved – which offers no analysis of a film and is not exciting to read. Another bad habit comes from people having no real idea what they are talking about, you'll get blanket statements like 'The cinematography was good' or 'This actress gave an amazing performance' and there will be nothing to describe how the cinematography was good or why she gave a great performance. These two usually go hand-in-hand in bad reviews. One of the quotes above may even be me quoting myself...

Sometimes I think that film reviews are bad just because there isn't really much to say about the film. When writing a review for *The Gentlemen* I found it a bit of a struggle to fill the word count demanded by the then (much meaner than me) film editor, hence listing people in the film is just an easy way to fill out the word count. On the other hand, having watched films like *Sonic*, *The Platform*, *Casino*, *Shame*, *Out of Blue*, all of these films I felt had elements that could be dissected and talked about.

My least favourite buzzword commonly used in film reviews is 'subtle'. Whenever a performance or any element of a film is described as subtle, usually that translates to a reviewer saying 'I don't really understand why this was good but it was good'. Of course, this word is fine to be used when it is then explained how the element of the film was subtle and why it was effective.

**Whenever a performance or any element of a film is described as subtle, usually that translates to a reviewer saying 'I don't really understand why this was good but it was good'.**

A problem that many film reviews also have is that they are incredibly dry reads which aren't the most insightful pieces of literature you'll ever read. This can be due to the film being reviewed having nothing much to be said about it, but this can also be due to the reviewer being limited and required to be overly formal. I think the latter arises from news media having the outdated worldview that film reviews should be written as if they are as objective as possible – which I see as completely unnecessary. Roger Ebert, probably the most famous film critic ever, was known for being charismatic as well as being able to still get across what made a film good or bad. YouTube stars like Jeremy Jahns and Ben 'Yahtzee' Croshaw have audiences who watch their content as much for their personalities as watch for their reviews. Mixing your personality in with your reviews shouldn't be as chastised as it is in so-called 'mainstream' film reviews as it is.

Of course, you can have too much personality in your reviews as well. I've read some reviews where someone goes on about their personal life too much instead of reviewing the film I read this article to hear about.

Personally, I think that the ideal film review strikes this balance while really explaining to the common reader why a certain film is good or bad. A baseline knowledge of how films are made, the equipment used for making them, what makes good writing and what makes a good performance is key to explaining the quality of the film and hopefully for would-be film reviewers reading, your personality should do the rest!

**Mixing your personality in with your reviews shouldn't be as chastised as it is in so-called 'mainstream' film reviews as it is.**

A good question to ask while wrapping up is what is the purpose of reviewing a film and publishing your review for many to see? Is the main purpose to make sure that scammers parading as artists have their films exposed for the cons they are? Is the purpose to inform the public merely what's worth watching and what isn't? Should every film reviewer have an idea of what their ideal film industry is? Personally I think a film reviewer should be scrupulous in taking apart a film, there's a difference between how a reviewer watches a film versus how the public will watch a film. A film being just entertaining is fine for public consumption, yet a film reviewer should be offering suggestions as to where it could be better still. If they aren't relentless in their analysis, what's the point?

Anyone can tell me that a summer blockbuster or some Oscar-bait drama is fine, yet a film reviewer needs to suggest where it could be better.

But of course, this is all subjective opinion (much as film reviews are similarly subjective takes on someone's work). Yet I think that trust and experience are key factors which can make certain opinions more valuable than others. I wouldn't ask my bus driver his opinions on my health, I'd ask my doctor. Likewise, I wouldn't ask the books editor for her opinion on a film, I'd ask one of the film writers, some of whom have seen many more films than I have...

Of course, I can't say that my credentials make me qualified to tell you what the best way of writing a film review is, yet here we are 1000 words later. At least this saves me having to write a guide to writers as to what I'd like to see in a review. All joking aside, I like to think that what I have said above not only holds water but will also allow the untrained reader to spot more fraudulent writers (of which there are too many in mainstream film criticism).

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## Comments (16)

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Obal Erhagbowa 2 weeks ago

(<https://theboar.org/2020/05/what-makes-a-good-film-review/#comment-547872>) : ➡ Reply

(<https://theboar.org/2020/05/what-makes-a-good-film-review/?replytocom=547872#respond>)

This article is truly enlightening to me. I often feel film review is just about explaining what you see happening during the scenes. This has broadened my scope on film review, that it must have impactful comments to build on for future films.

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William Tshani 2 weeks ago

<https://theboar.org/2020/05/what-makes-a-good-film-review/#comment-547496>) : ➡ Reply  
(<https://theboar.org/2020/05/what-makes-a-good-film-review/?replytocom=547496#respond>)

I love to watch all sort of movies and review them as I watch. Reading this article gives me more insights of things to look out as I do my personal review of movies. James Palmer made a very insightful statement, “A baseline knowledge of how films are made, the equipment used for making them, what makes good writing and what makes a good performance is key to explaining the quality of the film and hopefully for would-be film reviewers reading, your personality should do the rest!” I love this statement because it kind of give an idea of things to look out when I do my movie review.

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Okam Ogbonyialu Moses 3 months ago

<https://theboar.org/2020/05/what-makes-a-good-film-review/#comment-533509>) : ➡ Reply  
(<https://theboar.org/2020/05/what-makes-a-good-film-review/?replytocom=533509#respond>)

this article is educating

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Francis Mmbulika Kazomwa 4 months ago

<https://theboar.org/2020/05/what-makes-a-good-film-review/#comment-531903>) : ➡ Reply  
(<https://theboar.org/2020/05/what-makes-a-good-film-review/?replytocom=531903#respond>)

I have gathered that reviewing a film requires that one is objective and ready to support his comment.

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Ebidunnieshosawyerr 4 months ago

<https://theboar.org/2020/05/what-makes-a-good-film-review/#comment-531842>) : ➡ Reply

<https://theboar.org/2020/05/what-makes-a-good-film-review/?replytocom=531842#respond>

Am always glad and happy because of BYU for there relentless effort of exposure on terms of good materials that will help one to navigate through his or her academic pursuance. The expository aspect is very good because it's drives in a lot about the author article and experience. I have learnt alot about reviewing that will also helps us to write a paper. Bravo.

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ABIGAIL SEADE 4 months ago

<https://theboar.org/2020/05/what-makes-a-good-film-review/#comment-531809>) : ➡ Reply

<https://theboar.org/2020/05/what-makes-a-good-film-review/?replytocom=531809#respond>

I love this article. I always think a review is all about sharing one's experience about something or just giving a summary. However, I have had greater insights after reading this. What caught my attention was "A film reviewer should be offering suggestions as to where it could be better still". This helped me to recall a principle I learned in quality management class known as kaizen. We still need to look for ways to improve after having the best practices.

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Goitsemodimo Gordon Phejane 8 months ago

<https://theboar.org/2020/05/what-makes-a-good-film-review/#comment-518904>) : ➡ Reply

<https://theboar.org/2020/05/what-makes-a-good-film-review/?replytocom=518904#respond>

The article shows the great command of rhetoric by the author, but not only that, he displays his vast experience as a film critic.

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Williams Nwudu 8 months ago

<https://theboar.org/2020/05/what-makes-a-good-film-review/#comment-518730>) : ➡ Reply

<https://theboar.org/2020/05/what-makes-a-good-film-review/?replytocom=518730#respond>

This article has helped me to calm down and reason when it comes to film. Reading it is a good way to start practicing how to do your own reviews. Thanks.

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Goitsemodimo Gordon Phejane [8 months ago](#)

<https://theboar.org/2020/05/what-makes-a-good-film-review/#comment-518288>) : [➡ Reply](#)

<https://theboar.org/2020/05/what-makes-a-good-film-review/?replytocom=518288#respond>

The article is beneficial to all those still learning to become not good film analyst, but good writers as well.

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LUIS REDIN [8 months ago](#)

<https://theboar.org/2020/05/what-makes-a-good-film-review/#comment-518254>) : [➡ Reply](#)

<https://theboar.org/2020/05/what-makes-a-good-film-review/?replytocom=518254#respond>

Cinematography and performance' usually go hand-in-hand in bad reviews. A baseline knowledge of how films are made, the equipment used for making them, what makes good writing and what makes a good performance is key to explaining the quality of the film and hopefully for would-be film reviewers reading, your personality should do the rest!

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Jaiyesimi Oluwadamilola Sarah [8 months ago](#)

<https://theboar.org/2020/05/what-makes-a-good-film-review/#comment-518238>) : [➡ Reply](#)

<https://theboar.org/2020/05/what-makes-a-good-film-review/?replytocom=518238#respond>



knowing the importance of what makes a good film review, i have been able to learn that when making a review i must be able to identify why the movie is good or bad. This article is very educative.

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Solomon Ndifreke 8 months ago

(<https://theboar.org/2020/05/what-makes-a-good-film-review/#comment-518087>) : ➡ Reply  
(<https://theboar.org/2020/05/what-makes-a-good-film-review/?replytocom=518087#respond>)

This is very educative.

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Darwin 1 year ago (<https://theboar.org/2020/05/what-makes-a-good-film-review/#comment-508091>) : ➡ Reply  
(<https://theboar.org/2020/05/what-makes-a-good-film-review/?replytocom=508091#respond>)

This is very interesting and very informative. It's opened my brain. Thank you a lot

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Maureen 1 year ago

(<https://theboar.org/2020/05/what-makes-a-good-film-review/#comment-501665>) : ➡ Reply  
(<https://theboar.org/2020/05/what-makes-a-good-film-review/?replytocom=501665#respond>)

Thank you for the information. It has allowed me to stay focus and have novel ideas.

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victoria 1 year ago (<https://theboar.org/2020/05/what-makes-a-good-film-review/#comment-501335>) : ➡ Reply  
(<https://theboar.org/2020/05/what-makes-a-good-film-review/?replytocom=501335#respond>)

This was a superb informative article, now I know I have been given awful reviews. Thanks to this directly in the future I hope to help get better at it.

KAREN LYNN PADUA UMITEN

(<https://theboar.org/2020/05/what-makes-a-good-film-review/>) 1 year ago

(<https://theboar.org/2020/05/what-makes-a-good-film-review/#comment-501300>) : ➡ Reply

(<https://theboar.org/2020/05/what-makes-a-good-film-review/?replytocom=501300#respond>)

This is very informative. It has given me lots of ideas on how to give effective review

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