

Films of 2015



Rules: 1) Must be English language, 2) Must be a non-documentary feature. Sorry, otherwise this list gets much longer, and I do not have that much time. 3) US Theatrical release in 2015 (some of these films might have imdb years for earlier due to film festival releases).

Let's start with a little bit of criteria for how I chose this list: 1) Oscar Nomination in the following categories; Picture, Director, Actor, Actress, Supporting Actor, Supporting Actress, Original Screenplay, Adapted Screenplay, and Cinematography, 2) Golden Globe Nominations were selectively chosen, 3) SAG Nominations were selectively chosen, 4) Independent Spirit Awards; Picture, Director, Screenplay, First Screenplay, First Feature, Male Lead, Female Lead, Cinematography, Editing, John Cassavetes. Note: some of these films are not English language, or were not given a theatrical release until 2016. 5) Sundance winners that fit the initial criteria. 6) National Board of Review, 7) AFI Top Films, 8) I saw a trailer and wanted to see the movie. 9) I respect certain actors/actresses/directors so I seek out their work, regardless of quality. 10) The film opened with the short *Frozen Fever*.

Within a Tier, you can convince me my ordering is wrong. Between tiers I feel there is a distinct difference in quality.

Tier 10: Naps are Fun

103. **She's Lost Control:** About a sex surrogate trying to pay for her masters degree. So boring you would rather be in a masters degree level class.
102. **Cinderella:** The costumes were excellently designed. Besides that the movie was just plain bad. I assume there are better live action Disney films.
101. **Irrational Man:** Woody Allen directing and starring Emma Stone and Joaquin Phoenix should produce a better film. It is about a man who finds purpose in life; said purpose is attempting to kill someone. This was a major miss by Woody Allen.
100. **Queen of Earth:** I need to rewatch this. I was low on it, other people are rather high on it.
99. **Appropriate Behavior:** The idea of the film; a bisexual middle eastern women, who has not come out to her parents despite being in her 30s and living with her (female) partner. However the movie plods along and becomes a tad predictable. But if you enjoy New (New) Queer Cinema, it is worth a watch.

Tier 9: Indies That Did Not Work

98. **The Stanford Prison Experiment:** Overly dramatizes an event that did not need over dramatization. It also wanted to make sure you got the message of the film, that it locked you in a jail cell until you got the message of the film.
97. **Meadowland:** One would think that a film with Luke Wilson and Oliva Wilde about parents that lost their child would have been more captivating. Instead it was just slow and over the top. We might have reached peak Movies-About-Parents-With-Dead-Children.
96. **Out Of My Hand:** A film with two distinct acts; one in Africa, the other in NYC. The African act takes too long. And the NYC act attempts to add more depth to the main character via his old acquaintances, but by that point you are ready to move on.
95. **Buzzard:** An interesting take on the loner anti-social millennial. However the main character is so extreme that their feasibility as a real person is always in doubt; almost more of a caricature. If you like metal they play a fair bit. The scene where the main character eats meatballs is well done.
94. **Heaven Knows What:** A gritty and realistic look at the heroin epidemic and homelessness. However, it has the typical indie faults of hoping the over-arching idea of the film can overcome a slow moving plot.
93. **Howl:** A mediocre horror film, that does not exactly deliver the scares. The idea of being stuck on a train in the wilderness, just doesn't work as well as it needed to.
92. **The Lady in the Van:** Maggie Smith can not make this film interesting. The title character is interesting, but the film attempts to cram fifteen years worth of activity into ninety minutes. Luckily they went with ninety minutes instead of one hundred.
91. **I Smile Back:** Sarah Silverman was rather good. She deserved the praise she received. However all other characters in the film are not developed. Also slow. If you've noticed the trend of these lower ranked films, is that they are too slow to be worth watching.
90. **The Walk:** Gordon-Levitt should not do a French accent.
89. **6 Years:** Although a good idea of examining how a relationship comes to an end, the film is too slow.
88. **99 Homes:** Andrew Garfield's coming out party (*Hacksaw Ridge* and *Silence* will be featured for the films of 2016). Also Michael Shannon is highly underrated. But the film bogs down in overt morality.
87. **Far From the Madding Crowd:** Carey Mulligan is a great actress. But films based on 1800s Britain are usually not that good for some reason. This fits the bill. A decent feminism film.
86. **The DUFF:** Although it brings a few new things to the high-school-love-story genre it doesn't bring enough new items. The cast is rather good, but not used to its full potential.
85. **The Minions:** Did we need this spin-off/stand-alone film? No? Was it a fun and dumb watch? Yes.

Tier 8: Indies with Flaws

84. **Glass Chin:** Take a 1930s Gangster/Boxing film and set it in the modern era. Make it just as predictable. But add in some rather nice visuals.

83. **Legend:** Take a Gangster film and add Tom Hardy and Tom Hardy. But then make it too long, too predictable, fail to give characters enough depth and direction. However having Tom Hardy play twins, salvages the film. Tom Hardy fans should watch because Tom Hardy is awesome.
82. **Christmas Again:** Generic and predictable plot. However it is the poster child for how to make a decent film cheaply.
81. **Advantageous:** Great premise, interesting work of Science-Fiction/Futurism. But a tad predictable and slow paced. Nice diversity.
80. **The Visit:** The film isn't great, but it shows M. Night Shyamalan is still capable of making movies that people do not hate.
79. **Bone Tomahawk:** Good cast (Kurt Russell and Matthew Fox for example), a sort of 'horror' Western. Is a tad too slow at times, but an interesting take on a familiar Western theme. A nice late-night time-killing watch.
78. **Digging For Fire:** An AMAZING cast can not overcome a film that is a little slow and a tad aimless. Another good late-night watch.
77. **Woman in Gold:** Ryan Reynolds is good. Helen Mirren is a treasure. But a plot that is decent, only mild character development hurt the film. The leads and production value save it.
76. **Results:** A good-enough rom-com that relies on Cobie Smulders being enjoyable.
75. **Welcome to Me:** Put Kristen Wiig, playing a millionaire lottery winner with mental health issues, in front of a camera (figuratively and literally). Wiig carries the film, the film is her. But the characters are weak, the film is predictable. Wiig is just a good (comedic) actor.
74. **The Gift:** Jason Bateman plays a typical Jason Bateman character, and does it well. The plot is interesting, if at times a tad out there; which slows down what could have an extremely brisk film. A rather good suspense film.
73. **The Mend:** Improves as the film moves along but it starts off slow and never really recovers. There is a great Citizen Kane reference though.
72. **MacBeth:** It is difficult to turn Shakespeare into film; unless you make *West Side Story*. That being said Fassbender and Cottard were amazing.
71. **Joy:** David O. Russell gets together his normal cast of A list actors and his excellent technical skills. Except here, the story just isn't as compelling and the characters not as developed.
70. **Queen and Country:** The sequel to *Hope and Glory*. However like the original the film is slow and attempts to be a comedy set in times that are not humorous, but never fully commits to the comedy, and in doing so loses some of the dramatic elements.

Tier 7: Star Wars

69. **Star Wars: The Force Awakens:** It was not awful. It was not great. It was visually impressive. The plot had been done before.

Tier 6: Mainly Light-Hearted Indies, but Not All

68. **Spectre:** The only real good part of the film is the issues surrounding surveillance. Otherwise it continues the even-numbered Craig Bond films being misses. Though, this film is no where near as bad as *Quantum of Solace*.

67. **Trainwreck:** Amy Schumer is good. Bill Hader is good. LeBron James is good. The film is an enjoyable and funny rom-com.
66. **Experimenter:** The film is held together by Peter Sarsgaard. The breaking of the fourth wall to explain the experiments was a nice touch.
65. **Shaun the Sheep Movie:** The claymation is good enough, the plot is fun. It generally achieves what it aimed to do.
64. **Time Out of Mind:** Richard Gere was rather good, plus the cast had a few great surprises in bit roles. The cinematography was rather good, but one scene needed to be in deep focus. Supporting characters needs some more development and the film needed to be twenty minutes shorter. That being said, rather well done look at homelessness.
63. **Mississippi Grind:** Imma say it. Ryan Reynolds is a good actor. At least when he can the the semi-mysterious, outgoing lead. And here Ryan Reynolds does. The plot has holes, but the characters are better. Ryan Reynolds helps carry the film.
62. **Cop Car:** Two great performances by child actors, and Kevin Bacon. A fast paced film, but an interesting story; two kids steal a cop car. Character development and meaning are lacking, but an enjoyable film worth watching at night.
61. **While We're Young:** Ben Stiller is his funny self, but in a very age appropriate role. Underneath the good acting and decent script is an important question about what constitutes the truth.
60. **Mr. Holmes:** An interesting take on Sherlock Holmes. Rather than a young hyper-observant Holmes, we see an elderly Holmes that is losing his edge. Ian McKellen is rather good in the role.
59. **Danny Collins:** Al Pacino plays a washed up former music star that attempts to reconnect with his family. It is a good light-hearted film. A nice easy watch.
58. **Drunktown's Finest:** Some cliches, but overall a decent look at three people living near a reservation.
57. **52 Tuesdays:** An interesting thematic look at how transitioning can affect a family. The novel idea of shooting each Tuesday for year was nice, and the character of the daughter was rather well done. Except the film drags at times.
56. **Creep:** Another Blumhouse Production (some of their horror films are awful, but man they can knock it out of the park at times). Semi-brisk with interesting plot twists, and good cinematography. Also Mark Duplass kills it.
55. **She's Funny That Way:** I am biased; I love Peter Bogdanovich and I love screwball comedies. I found it funny, even though the reviews were not too flattering.
54. **Infinitely Polar Bear:** This movie is far from perfect. It has little in the way of lofty expectations. But Mark Ruffalo is great and it does a good job portraying mental health issues.
53. **The Second Best Exotic Marigold Hotel:** Don't care. I loved the first. I like old people falling in love. Deal with this ranking. But it is no where near as good as the first.
52. **What We Did On Our Holiday:** A hilarious look at a dysfunctional British family, with the proper level of sentimentality included. The film is not a knockout but rather enjoyable.
51. **The Diary of a Teenage Girl:** One of the better coming of age films; especially in regards to female teenage sexuality. It also benefits from being set in 1970s San Francisco. The dynamics of male and female sexuality and the roles each gender is suppose to play are nicely done.

50. **Me & Earl & The Dying Girl:** Another coming of age film. This has a tad more realistic plot, and Nick Offerman in a supporting role. It does a decent job of developing the supporting characters. Also they make parodies of famous films.
49. **The Overnight:** The late-night Netflix watch of the year. A hilarious sex comedy. There is nudity and you get rather acquainted with Jason Schwartzman. It is fast paced and funny. But there is nothing serious or ground braking.
48. **Suffragette:** See the review for *Far From the Madding Crowd*; Mulligan is great. A good feminism film; women getting the right to vote is more interesting than women running a farm. Rather moving. But at times slow. Another one of the not light-hearted films.
47. **'71:** Here is one of those not light-hearted films. This is about a soldier stuck behind enemy lines during the Irish-Britain conflict. There are some nice shots of the soldier moving around in the city. Where the film excels though is getting at the political issues of war and undercover agents. There are better war films, but this was a good one.
46. **I'll See You in My Dreams:** Remember how I said I loved old people falling in love? Blythe Danner was amazing, as well as Sam Elliot (*Digging for Fire*). Also it includes old people smoking pot. In all seriousness, the film deals with aging, death and marriage in a nice manner.
45. **The Voices:** Ima say it again; Ryan Reynolds is a good actor. Here he plays a factory worker with some mental health issues; specifically he hears the voices of his dog (good) and cat (evil). This is because cats are awful and dogs are awesome. The film does a great job of the world view Reynolds' character has and the actual world. It is just a well made enjoyable film. Also Anna Kendrick is in it (*Digging for Fire*).

Tier 5: Better Indies and Good Large Productions

44. **45 Years:** Charlotte Rampling received a Best Actress nomination for a reason, she was amazing. The film is a little slow, but the plot is amazing; a couple celebrating their 45 wedding anniversary finds out that the body of the husband's former "friend" is finally discovered (thanks in part to global warming). Watching Rampling's character is amazing.
43. **Black Mass:** Johnny Depp is a decent actor, who knew. The sets were decent, but the film did not delve deep enough into the character of James "Whitey" Bulger.
42. **Concussion:** Possibly the most important film of the year; in terms of saving lives. And showing how silly the NFL is. However, Will Smith's accent is out there and the film is way too self righteous.
41. **The Big Short:** The separate stories never really come together as they should. It almost seems to be more of an anthology piece. I did not care for the breaking of the fourth wall, even if it was done in a creative way. The stellar cast are not given good enough characters to shine, although Steve Carell comes close.
40. **Hidden:** A well-written and directed (by the Duffer Brothers, *Stranger Things* thriller-horror film.
39. **The Good Dinosaur:** Great animation. Predictable plot. But I do not care it was uplifting and awesome.
38. **The End of Tour:** Based on David Foster Wallace, one of the greatest authors of all time, and a character (Jason Segal) who is interviewed by a writer (Jessie Eisenberg). The film has its strength in the acting of the leads, the comparison of a successful writer to a struggling writer, and just two people with interesting world views.

37. **Inside Out:** Honestly the film is overrated. It was rather good, but Pixar has made better.
36. **Bridge of Spies:** Exactly what you'd expect from Spielberg; great production value, great acting, but an overly predictable and uplifting plot.
35. **Trumbo:** Bryan Cranston is great, as one would assume. Louis CK is a (pleasant) surprise. But the film beats you over the head with the downsides of the Hollywood Blacklist.
34. **Crimson Peak:** Great visuals. Great set. Good acting. But the film was too long and disjoint; it is set in two different locations and the amount of time devoted to each location is wrong.
33. **Love & Mercy:** Brian Wilson and The Beach Boys are amazing, so of course I will love a film about Brian Wilson. If you like music it is a must see.

Tier 4: Top Level Indies and Better Wide Releases

32. **Henry Gamble's Birthday Party:** Such an amazing look at the results of repressing feelings (sexual, guilt, etc) in the name of religion. A great take on the party-from-hell genre, everything goes wrong, but everything is from well-developed characters.
31. **The Danish Girl:** Great acting. Great set design. Too much Oscar bait (Eddie Redmayne plays a trans painter). And too long.
30. **Faults:** One of my sleeper films. From a plot and acting perspective it is great. The set up of the plot is a struggling expert on cults is asked to help "save" the daughter and in need of money the expert jumps on the opportunity. Highly recommend as it is one people may have never heard of. Oh did I mention the daughter in need of saving is Mary Elizabeth Winstead?
29. **Steve Jobs:** Decent cinematography. A good script (Sorkin). Also Fassbender and Winslet are great actors. But the sentimentality feels a tad forced.
28. **Slow West:** Did I mention Fassbender is amazing? An interesting new take on the Western. The new take (along with Fassbender) is the main attractive. Not a comedy, but funny moments, nice visuals.
27. **We Are Still Here:** A well-done horror film. The plot is interesting, and the set matches the 1970s well. A must see film for horror fans.
26. **Mistress America:** Fast paced, quick, funny, with some meaning. But let's be honest Greta Gerwig is the star. The film is a way to show her talents. And she is a talent.
25. **The Duke of Burgundy:** The best S&M film I've ever seen. But seriously, it is an amazing film about sexual desires, love, and relationships. The cinematography is also amazing. The film is not for everyone, but very powerful and worth watching.
24. **Sicario:** The film was nominated for Best Cinematography and it deserved it. The cinematography only amplifies the action. The sound was also great (another Oscar). It was also directed by Villeneuve (*Arrival*). Emily Blunt and Benicio del Toro were good, but the production value carried the film.
23. **Beasts of No Nation:** Idris Elba was not nominated for Best Supporting Actor (at the Oscars). He should have won the Oscar. He was amazing. The film also does a good job of portraying civil war on the African continent. The grittiness shown was nice.
22. **Dope:** Dope is dope, dope. But seriously, a great coming of age film. It is also from a minority perspective.

21. **Brooklyn:** A good plot about immigrants (no, they did not destroy America), with good acting, and nice costume design. It does a good job at getting at the (white) immigrant experience. It just never reached greatness. I would not have given it a Best Picture nomination.
20. **Creed:** I was not expecting *Creed* to be as good as it was. However, with Ryan Coogler (*Fruitvale Station*) directing, I should not have been surprised. Also Michael B. Jordan might still be an underrated actor. Stallone was also surprising not awful.
19. **Man From Reno:** This is how you make a modern film noir. If you enjoy mysteries, and investigative crime films this one is top notch. The visuals are also rather good. But it the script (along with decent acting) that make this a very good, must watch film.
18. **James White:** Only 85 minutes, but absolutely great. The titular lead (Christopher Abbott) was amazing. Abbott might have given the best male performance of the year. The film is about James White, his life, and his relationship with his mother. It is a must see. Probably the best of the hidden gems.

Tier 3: Damn Good Movies, But Not Elite

17. **Grandma:** Lily Tomlin plays the titular character, who helps her granddaughter collect enough money to pay for an abortion. Hilarity ensues. An all around enjoyable film.
16. **Mad Max Fury Road:** What else can be said? Visually striking, shockingly feminist. However, I was not as high on the film as others. I thought the acting and characters could have been improved (they were both good, but we are among the best of the year).
15. **Tangerine:** They say *La La Land* is a tribute to Los Angeles. However, do not forget *Tangerine* as a film that shows a far grittier side to the city, when discussing great films about LA. Technically innovative (shot on iPhones), but the same innovation is problematic as the camerawork seems jumpy at times, which distracts from the quality of the acting and the plot. The characters and their performances carry the film. One of the best films of the year that too many people may not ever see.
14. **It Follows:** Horror might be the best genre in film right now (*We Are Still Here*, *Crimson Peak*, *Creep* from this year). Following up last year's *The Babadook* (and *Oculus*, *Honeymoon*, *Housebound*) it continues the trend of amazing horror films. *It Follows* is an amazing and innovative. Also it continues Maika Monroe's coming out party (*The Guest* from 2014).
13. **The Martian:** Nominated for Golden Globes in the comedy categories was a semi-odd choice, however the film had its comedic moments. The production level was top notch and the film was well made. The scientific accuracy (other than the gravity on Mars) was nice to see. Matt Damon's character could have used a little more development.
12. **Spotlight:** A well made, well written, well acted movie on a powerful subject. However there was nothing innovative. Nothing that stood out. It was a safe choice for Best Picture, but it was not the Best Picture.
11. **Boy Meets Girl:** The plot has a few holes, the last twenty minutes the film loses focus, and the ending could have been a tad better. That being said, the film is an amazing look at what is love, sexuality, and gender.
10. **What We Do In the Shadows:** Remember how I said horror is the best genre in film? This is an amazing comedy-horror film. The horror is almost nonexistent but the comedy is top notch. However anytime you make a mockumentary about modern day vampires it is going to be good. This film was great. A perfect watch to end a long day.

9. **Spring:** Remember how I said horror is the best genre in film? Best described as a body-horror film. Once again an innovative plot and it is combined with decent visuals. Some might say the film got a tad too cliché, but I liked it.
8. **Anomalisa:** This film could be ranked higher. A beautifully done stop-motion film. It was the best animated film of year. I can only assume the reason it did not win is that Disney and *Inside Out*'s box office rake is too much to overcome. The plot and the main character are amazingly well written.
7. **Straight Outta Compton:** The film was rightfully a smash hit. I feel safe assuming most people reading will have seen this film (or want to), so I do not feel the need to say much. Other than go see it, or see it again.
6. **Carol:** Cate Blanchett and Rooney Mara are both amazing (in this film and in life and in other films). However the film is good enough it does not rely on them to carry it, only improve it. The sets and costumes are great (it is period piece). It also has sneaky good visuals.
5. **Clouds of Sils Maria:** We need to acknowledge how good of an actress Kristen Stewart is. Full stop. Add in an interesting approach on the topic of death the film only improves. Lastly the visuals are rather impressive.
4. **The Revenant:** The acting was overrated. The plot was decent. The visuals/cinematography might be the best of all time. Downgrade the visuals even a moderate amount this film plummets in the rankings. *The Revenant*'s visuals make it a must see. The opening scene could have for the best short film of all time, that is how good the visuals are. Get a blu-ray copy, get the best tv you can find and enjoy.
3. **The Hateful Eight:** In a normal year I would go on and on about the cinematography of the film. Except it was not an ordinary year, *The Revenant* came out. However, *The Hateful Eight* has much better acting, an enjoyable plot, and a decent comment on race relations. Those qualities but it above *The Revenant*.

Tier 2: So Close

2. **Ex Machina:** An extremely innovative plot, that just on its own would rank the film high on the list. However Oscar Issac is in it (see everything he is in), and so is Alicia Vikander (won an Oscar for *The Danish Girl*, but should have won for *Ex Machina*). The cinematography was rather good, along with the set. *Ex Machina* was the biggest snub of the Awards season.

Tier 1: The Best Film of 2015

1. **Room:** You should have guessed that from the picture that accompanies this note. The film excels primarily on the script and the acting of the two leads (Brie Larson – I told you about Brie Larson years back with *Short Term 12* and *The Spectacular Now* – and Jacob Tremblay). The film will move you to tears multiple times. It is an elite film.