

ICTV WRITING GUIDELINES

FILM REVIEWS

While many ICTV programs cover films in varying ways, there is a basic structure for the content of these reviews that all programs should follow. This guide contains this basic structure, as well as general tips for content.

STRUCTURE

A film review should have three sections: the introduction, body, and conclusion.

Introduction:

- Opening Hook. Start your review with a catchy sentence, quote, or question
- Introduce film and give a one or two sentence summary of the film
 - When you reference characters, say the name of the actor who is playing them
 - Do not give lengthy character descriptions. If you have to describe a character in the summary, use one adjective maximum
 - **NEVER GIVE AWAY THE ENDING. EVER.**
 - You can speak about a big event, but **mark this by saying “spoiler”**

The purpose of the introduction paragraph is to introduce the viewer to the film, not to the reviewer's opinion. This paragraph should purely be informational, the only exception being the lead, which can have a more informal tone.

Body:

- Discuss Aspect #1 of the film
 - Describe it
 - Explain why it worked or didn't work
 - Tell the viewer how it affected the overall film
- Discuss Aspect #2 of the film
 - Describe it
 - Explain why it worked or didn't work
 - Tell the viewer how it affected the overall film

In the body paragraph, the bulk of the film review, the reviewer needs to talk about the film and combine information with opinion. **Tell** the viewer about a part of the film, and then rate it. Be sure to tie it to the overall film as well – why was it important that [aspect] was good or bad? Remember, a review is essentially an argumentative essay. Support your argument!

Unless you're writing a longer review, do not focus on more than two aspects in the body section.

Conclusion:

- Summarize your argument. Don't rehash the same points, but find a new way to say what you've already said.
- Rate the film!
 - Ex: *The Screening Room* uses See it, Rent it, or Skip it
 - Create a system specific your program's tone/style
- "Closing Hook." Similar to your opening, but it needs to conclusively end the official review

The conclusion paragraph is your "recap" paragraph. Summarize your argument and give your final opinion. Depending on how it is worded, you can include a sentence that references a new aspect in your conclusion so the review links to talking points (if you use those).

Extra Talking Points:

For shows that spend screen time discussing the film after it has been reviewed, here are some guidelines to picking Talking Points.

- Choose different aspects than ones already talked about.
- **NEVER** give away a big event in the film. Instead, hint at it.
- Choose something that interests you.
- Don't be afraid to branch out from the film. You can discuss...
 - Films with related themes
 - Other movies a particular actor/director/producer has done
 - Films made by the same studio
 - Other box office films that are similar
 - Potential sequel/prequel plans

GENERAL GUIDELINES

- Be sure to vary the aspects you talk about from week to week. Potential aspects include:
 - Editing
 - Cinematography
 - Art direction
 - Acting
 - Directing
 - Writing
 - Music (songs and/or soundtrack)
 - Themes
 - Story
 - Special effects
- Use short sentences. It makes it easier to the viewer to follow what's being said.

- **NEVER** refer to another review, reviewer's opinion, Rotten Tomatoes rating, or anything similar. It lessens your authority.
- Do more research than necessary so you're familiar with your topic.
- Always speak as if you've seen the film. You should try to see the film whenever possible, but if you haven't **act like you have**.
- **No inside jokes!** If a completely objective viewer wouldn't understand it, then don't say it.
- Don't ramble. Make your point and then move on. Nobody likes a rant.
- **Find your flare.** This is different for every reviewer, but find out what your personal style is and stick with it. Your review is a reflection of your thoughts and opinions, so treat it as an extension of yourself!

If you're a host and you're writing your own review...

- **Write how you talk.** Make a point to sound natural and use vocabulary that you normally use
- Write out a hard-to-pronounce name phonetically to help you reading the review
- Make sure you know which parts of sentences to stress, which words to inflect, etc.

Or if you're a writer and you're writing a review for a host...

- Take some time to get to know that host. Learn how they speak, words they use, etc.
- When possible, co-write with the person who is reading the review

SAMPLE REVIEW

Steven Soderbergh made a big deal about "Side Effects" being his last full-length feature film, and his last narrative film does not disappoint. "Side Effects" tells the story of Emily, played by Rooney Mara, who has trouble dealing with the side effects of the antidepressants she's been taking. She and her husband, played by Channing Tatum, meet with Dr. Jonathan Banks, Jude Law, who prescribes an experimental drug to Emily with devastating effects.

The movie can be called a lot of things – psychological thriller, pharmacological drama, emotional drama, and so on – and they're all accurate. "Side Effects" starts off in one place and ends up in a completely different one. Instead of making the film scattered, it only adds to the intensity and moral confusion of the story.

It's worth noting that Soderbergh, along with the screenwriter Scott Z. Burns, also created the film "Contagion," which is similar in subject matter. There are some similarities between the two films but "Side Effects" has a smaller scale and is more relatable, which ultimately makes it more terrifying. This movie is definitely a "see it." It's a thrilling movie that will have you on the edge of your seat the entire time and it's definitely worth checking out.

SAMPLE TALKING POINTS

- Channing Tatum in a dramatic role
- Steven Soderbergh's swan song
- Screenwriter also wrote "Contagion," Jude Law in both
- Lots of twists