POINTS OF DEPARTURE
What makes you want to see a film? Is it publicity about the film in the media? Recommendations from others who have already seen the film? Film reviews in newspapers or magazines? And if a film review is positive or negative, does that influence your desire to see the film or not?

Film reviews look critically at a film and try to say whether it is successful or not according to certain criteria. The length of film reviews can vary greatly. Some are long and detailed whereas others are short and do not go into great detail. What most film reviews have in common, however, is fairly sophisticated language which invites the reader to share the reviewer’s opinion about the film. Read the following review of the film The Hunger Games. What does the reviewer focus on in judging the film?

Film Review – The Hunger Games

Prepare to be wowed by «The Hunger Games». The futuristic sci-fi thriller ushered in a new era of young adult novels, and the same applies to the movie. Move over Harry Potter. A darker, more mature franchise has come to claim your throne.

Essentially a paint-by-numbers version of the original Suzanne Collins book, this Gary Ross (“Seabiscuit”)-directed dystopian adventure keeps almost every scene from the novel intact, leaving little room for deviation or interpretation. However, since the book is such a strong narrative blueprint, the movie is instantly compelling and perfectly translates to the big screen.

Panem, a society split into 12 districts under the rule of the nefarious president Snow (Donald Sutherland), holds the annual Hunger Games where each district selects two ‘tributes’ to fight to the death in a savage arena. Volunteering on behalf of her sister, Katniss Everdeen (Jennifer Lawrence) takes the challenge. Leaving behind her best friend Gale (Liam Hemsworth) and fighting with her fellow District 12 tribute Peeta (Josh Hutcherson), Katniss aims to take down the system and restore hope to those who have none.

Like the books, the film is violent, clearly earning its PG-13 rating. The subject matter itself is rather disturbing: a group of 24 children fighting to the death. Seeing a horde of kids hunting another tribute while cheering and hollering as if they were playing a friendly game of tag is especially chilling.
But it’s not all gloom. Just as Katniss examines a beautiful butterfly in the war-torn arena, the film explores finding beauty, hope and humanity in a world stripped bare.

The film’s primary focus is character. Over a steady but lengthy pace usually reserved for adult dramas, we are given time to relate with each character, including the minor ones like Lenny Kravitz as Katniss’ costume designer and Woody Harrelson’s fabulous performance as Haymitch, Katniss and Peeta’s broken mentor.

Jennifer Lawrence is inspired casting as Katniss. While the film may be missing the book’s essential inner dialogue, revealing the young tribute’s insecurities and anger, Lawrence silently exhibits all those emotions on her innocent face. She does a superb job inhaling the fear and solemnity of a stomped-on society and exhaling flames of defiance.

The film is also accessible to those who have never read the books and even those who are not fans of the genre. The wonderful Stanley Tucci plays TV news personality Caesar Flickerman, who acts like our on-screen reference guide while also providing the most colorful performance in the film. The film is grounded in the real world, with the sci-fi gadgetry used almost as an afterthought.

While “The Hunger Games” has all the right details, all the right scenes, fine acting and cinematography, if there is a criticism, it is that it is missing that extra spark. The paint-by-numbers approach is fine and safe, but perhaps a director more experienced with lavish spectacles could have handled the ‘oomph’ of the film a bit better.

Either way, “The Hunger Games” is an excellent film, and likely the beginning of a franchise of modern classics.
1 UNDERSTANDING THE REVIEW
a In general, would you say the reviewer is favourable to the film or not? What gives you this impression?
b What does the reviewer say about the acting in the film? Is anyone in particular singled out? Who?
c How much of the plot is revealed in the review?
d Who directed the film? What does the reviewer say about the director and the choices he has made when directing the film?
e Is the film an adaptation of a novel or is it an original screenplay?
f Does the reviewer have any criticisms of the film? If so what?
g Is the review difficult to read in your opinion? Why or why not?

2 TALK ABOUT IT
a Does this review influence your own personal view of the film The Hunger Games? Do you agree or disagree with the reviewer? Explain your answer.
b Why do you think the reviewer says so little about the plot? Should the reviewer have said more, in your opinion?
c Did the reviewer leave out anything that you would have mentioned? If so, what?

3 A CLOSER LOOK AT LANGUAGE
a The language of film reviews is often quite sophisticated and difficult. Look at the underlined expressions taken from the review and explain in your own words what they mean.

1 essentially a paint-by-numbers version of the original book
2 Move over Harry Potter. A darker, more mature franchise has come to claim your throne.
3 under the rule of the nefarious President Snow
4 since the book is such a strong narrative blueprint, the movie is instantly compelling

b Working with adjectives.

As you will have noticed, film reviews use many adjectives. This is perhaps the one genre where you can really spice up your writing by generously “peppered” it with adjectives. Below you will find a “story” with no adjectives. Read the story first and you will notice that it functions fine without adjectives but comes alive with the use of unusual, descriptive words. In groups of three or four, pick out adjectives from the list below to complete the sentences. Or perhaps you would like to suggest adjectives of your own. Whatever you decide, you will probably find it useful to use your dictionaries.

PS There is no “right” or “wrong” version here. Your new versions of the story will all vary according to the adjectives that you pick. Have fun!

grotesque, pathetic, deformed, meagre, horrendous, inquisitive, unspeakable, beady, ridiculous, deserted, miniscule, bleak

The ... boy looked out the ... window and noticed a ... man in a(n) ... overcoat walking down the ... street. When he got to the corner, his ... face was illuminated by the ... light of the street lamp. He had a ... scar on his right cheek and his ... eyes looked up and down the ... street as though he was searching for something or someone. The ... boy was filled with ... terror as he looked at this ... figure of a man.
4 WRITING
Choose a film you have recently seen and write a film review. Keep in mind that a review is a highly personal and subjective genre, but give reasons for your personal evaluation. Give your review a catchy title.

Ask yourself the following questions before you start writing.
- What were the highlights of the film, in your opinion?
- Were there any parts that you found disappointing, and why?
- Were the actors good? Give your comments.
- Should anyone in particular be praised?
- Were there any special effects that should be mentioned?

Remember to mention the plot without saying too much about it and make sure you do not give the ending away. Be fair in dealing out praise and criticism. Bottom line: Is the film worth seeing and would you recommend it to others?