

## Critic's Notebook: What to Look for at the Movies (Adaptable for Theater)

### Basics

- Name of film
- Genre
- Connection with current events or trends? Is this a timely film?
- Running time (Too long? Too short?)
- Rating (G, PG, PG-13, PG-17, R, etc.)? Did the rating match the content? Why or why not?
- Plot (Usually spend just a few sentences on this and move on to *how* the plot was relayed – and don't give away the ending!)

### Producing the film

- Who wrote the script? Who bought it? What changes were needed before it was filmed?
- What kind of budgeting issues affected the production?
- What role did the producer play in getting the film to the screen?

### Directing/editing

- Name of director
- Other recent work?
- Distinctive style?
- Pacing (Does the director keep the story moving? Dragging?)
- Unusual camera movements? Creative shots/angles? To what end?
- Transition style (What is it? Dissolve? Jump cut? Fade-out? Is it effective?)
- Does symbolism reinforce themes?
- Impressive scenes, sounds or visual effects? Any that serve as distractions or work poorly?
- Give special attention to opening and closing scenes.

### Script

- Dialogue (Snappy? Sophisticated? Strained?)
- Note particularly effective or ineffective bits of dialogue.

### Acting

- Names of lead actors
- Other recent work
- Convincing portrayals?
- What actions were most effective or ineffective?
- Names of supporting actors
- Any standout performances?
- Interesting cameos?

### Setting, costumes, makeup

- Describe the most notable elements.
- Did they make it easier or more difficult for you to suspend your disbelief?

### Summary judgment

- Did the film exceed or fail to live up to expectations?
- Was it entertaining? Worth the price of admission? (Ask yourself this question, but don't use it. At all costs, avoid all variations of "You'll laugh, you'll cry, you'll kiss 10 bucks goodbye.")

**Note:** Do not use this form as an outline for a review. It's merely a list of things to look for in a film. Select the most interesting, and focus your review on those aspects.

## Film Review Rubric

| <b><i>Bravissimo!</i></b><br>“Publish on front of A&E section!”                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <b><i>Bravo!</i></b><br>“Publish inside the A&E section.”                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <b><i>Problema piccolo</i></b><br>“Revise and we’ll talk later.”                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <b><i>Problema grande</i></b><br>“Need to see the film again?”                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
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| <p><i>This review, so polish-ed that it reads as if it were clipped from a professional publica-tion, does most or all of the following:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Fairly but critically evaluates important aspects of the film; offers a developed, firm, convincing point of view regarding those aspects.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Goes <i>well</i> beyond simply evaluating the film itself, artfully locating it in its genre, social context and/or relationship to other films from the same producer, director or cast members; readers understand how this film fits into the grand scheme of things.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Offers a compelling hook, develops a middle section and comes to a powerful close; vivid writing motivates readers to continue throughout; no clichés; shows, doesn’t tell; offers support for all claims.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Shows few, if any, errors in the conventions of written English.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Shows convincing, consistent control of language; consistent voice flows smoothly from beginning to end; shows flair, style, grace and/or pizzazz.</li> </ul> | <p><i>This review, although impressive, lacks the impact of a Bravissimo review. It still does most or all of the following:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Fairly but critically evaluates important aspects of the film; offers a developed, firm, convincing point of view regarding those aspects.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Evaluates the film in terms of its genre, social context and/or relationship to productions from the same producer, director or cast members, but perhaps not as convincingly as would a <i>Bravi-simo</i> review.;</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Draws the reader in with an interesting opening or angle, develops a middle section and comes to some sense of closure; motivates readers to continue reading, but perhaps less powerfully than a <i>Bravissimo</i> review.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Generally shows instead of tells; may slip into one or two clichés.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Shows few, if any, errors in the conventions of written English.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Shows relatively consistent voice; inconsistently offers flair, style, grace and/or pizzazz.</li> </ul> | <p><i>This review reads more like a class project than a professional review. While adequately written, it lacks the impact of a better review. This review does most or all of the following:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates that the writer has observed and analyzed various aspects of the film and developed a point of view regarding those aspects.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Indicates a vague awareness of the film’s place in its genre, social context and/or relationship to productions from the same producer, director or cast members.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Offers structure of beginning, middle and end, but does so more weakly than in a better review; readers’ motivation to continue may waver.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Offers show-not-tell evidence for some claims; might slip into clichés in several places.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Shows more than a few errors in the conventions of written English.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Shows traces of flair, style, grace and/or pizzazz seen in <i>Bravis-imo</i> and <i>Bravo</i> reviews.</li> </ul> | <p><i>This review doesn’t meet the requirements of the assignment. It not only reads like a class assignment but is flawed in noticeable and significant ways A review in this category:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates that the writer has observed and thought a little about some aspects of the film and developed a point of view regarding some of those aspects.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Indicates at best a vague awareness of the film’s place in its genre, social context and/or relationship to product-ions from the same prod-ucer, director or cast members.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Shows only a semblance of a beginning, middle and end.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Offers only margin-ally convincing evidence for claims; tells rather than shows; might routinely offer clichés.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Includes many errors in the conventions of written English.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Very little, if any, flair, style, grace or pizzazz.</li> </ul> |

