

Level 2 English

# Everyone's a Critic

Produce crafted and developed formal transactional writing  
Credits: 3

**Task:** In this activity you will write a film review of 'The Shawshank Redemption.'

**Audience:** The review will be suitable for publication in a school newspaper, with a readership of Year 12 students and your teacher.

**Length:** Your writing will be at least **1500 words** long.

**You will be assessed on how well you:**

- express, develop and support your opinions about the film 'The Shawshank Redemption'
- your ability to use a writing style that is appropriate for a film review
- how well you organise your material
- your accuracy in spelling, punctuation, grammar, syntax, paragraphing.



**Task 1: What is my opinion of the film? What makes a successful film?**

A film needs to have the following qualities.

- A good story.
- Meaning. Good short films contain ideas that universally significant – something that the audience can relate to and perhaps go on thinking about.
- Have a believable setting. The “world” of the character needs to be recognisable to the audience.
- Have engaging, believable characters. Usually the character is driven by a particular need or desire. The audience needs to care about / relate to the character.
- Well-crafted. This relates to the technical side of the film. How have shots, camera movements, lighting, costume, and the overall style of the film been used? Does the film feel cohesive? Does it look good on the screen?

In your planning notes, comment on how well the film The Shawshank Redemption achieves each of these things.

## Task 2: The language of film reviews

Read the following film reviews of animated films and short films.

- a) Highlight words and phrases used to describe the film.
- b) Label the following: (1) plot synopsis (2) music (3) theme (4) visual effects (5) reviewer's opinion
- c) Notice how factual details e.g. quotations, technical information, actors, musicians' names have been incorporated into the review,.

### Happy Feet gets toes tapping



When I first heard about *Happy Feet*, I admit, I was sceptical. A movie about singing, tap dancing penguins? Really?

But somehow, it works. *Happy Feet* is a fast-paced, energy-packed extravaganza of song, dance and of course, penguins. It's been called a cross between *Moulin Rouge* and *March of the Penguins*, with a soundtrack that includes songs by the Beach Boys, Prince, Stevie Wonder, Queen and Frank Sinatra. These are accompanied with some incredible choreography - it's amazing what they can do these days with technology to create thousands and thousands of penguins all dancing with their own distinctive, individual styles.

*Happy Feet* tells the story of Mumble the emperor penguin. Mumble (voiced by ex-hobbit Elijah Wood) has troubles when he is born with the worst singing voice in the world, which is pretty tough when the penguins use their 'heartsong' to find a mate. The fact that his parents sound like Marilyn Monroe and Elvis makes it all the worse. Instead of a singing voice, Mumble has been given the gift of 'happy feet', meaning he can tap dance up a storm. While his mother (voiced by Nicole Kidman) loves her son even though he's different, his dad (Hugh Jackman) isn't so accepting, telling Mumble; "It just ain't penguin, son". After the emperor penguin elders shun Mumble's strange hippity-hoppity ways, blaming him for the recent lack of fish in the ocean, he sets off on a quest to discover why the fish are running out. He meets up with the Adelie Amigos who are in awe of his tap dancing talent. They accompany Mumble to solve the mystery and win the heart of his true love Gloria (Brittany Murphy).

The graphics in this film are incredible. The movie has been made using state-of-the-art CGI technology, meaning the penguins look so detailed and realistic. You want to just reach out touch the little furry penguin chicks. The scenery is spectacular, due to the fact camera crews travelled to Antarctica to capture footage of textures, light and landscapes, to help create the photo-reality for the majestic surroundings.

While the film's environmental message was important, I feel it came down a bit heavy. One minute everyone's dancing round and bursting into song - next thing you know it's all serious talk about regulating fisheries in the Antarctic Ocean.



But as well as this hard-hitting environmental message, *Happy Feet* also has a significant underlying theme about embracing individuality and appreciating others for their uniqueness. You'll love the photo-real penguins, the dazzling dance scenes and the fantastic singing performances - Brittany Murphy is especially fabulous as Gloria with her impressive vocal performance of Queen's 'Somebody to Love'.

Head along with your little brother or sister (but beware of the elephant seal scenes - those things are freaky!). Although, remember that this isn't just another kid's talking-animals movie - you'll get as much of a kick out of it as the children will.

(Review by Eve from NZ Girl.com)

Add any phrases / words from the review above to the 'toolbox' below...

### Film Review Vocabulary Toolbox

<p><b>Visual effects / production</b></p> <p>visually stunning technically superb dull dramatic</p>	<p><b>Soundtrack</b></p> <p>sumptuous evocative atmospheric haunting</p>	<p><b>Special Effects</b></p> <p>over-the-top stunning budget state-of-the-art</p>	<p><b>Characters</b></p> <p>convincing believable unrealistic engaging</p>
<p><b>mood</b></p> <p>ominous sinister brooding cheerful light-hearted</p>	<p><b>Plot</b></p> <p>predictable original muddled climax familiar</p>	<p><b>Dialogue</b></p> <p>leadен stilted realistic contrived minimal</p>	<p><b>Pace</b></p> <p>drawn-out bum-numbing tightly-scripted fast moving fast-paced</p>

### Task 3: Planning your review

a) Record important details about the film you class has viewed such as: the title, director, genre, date of production, country of origin, and names of main actors.

Record notes on these questions:

- what is the director's main aim?
- who is the target audience?
- how is the film intended to make them feel or think?

b) Decide whether your review will be positive, negative, or mixed.

### Task 4: Reading a student's Excellence-level review

Read the following review that one student wrote about the film Bram Stoker's Dracula directed by Francis Ford Coppola. Also read the annotations about **structure** and **language** and answer the questions.

**STRUCTURE**

**Introduction**

- background information
- genre
- director
- writer's opinion of

**Plot Overview**

Summarises the film to give reader a general idea of what the film is about without 'ruining' it by giving away any surprises.

**Acting**

Gives two brief contrasting evaluations with supporting details

**Deadly Dull Dracula**

*Review of Bram Stoker's Dracula directed by Francis Ford Coppola*

*I am the Count and I luvvvve to count. Anyone who has taken on the huge job of counting all the Dracula and vampire stories which have been made now has one more to add to their list – Bram Stoker's Dracula directed by Francis Ford Coppola. We all know how it goes: nocturnal, neck-biting, blood-sucking, castles, coffins, garlic, stakes through the heart. We already know every Dracula cliché there is. We've seen Buffy. And Sesame Street. Do we really need another vampire film? Does it add anything? Does it really, count? I don't think so.*

*The story begins in 1462. On finding his wife has been tricked into killing herself, Vlad takes his revenge on the world by turning himself into the blood-sucking vampire Dracula (Gary Oldman). 400 years later Jonathon (Keanu Reeves, a real estate agent, visits his castle. Dracula sees a photo of Keanu's fiancée, Mina, (Winona Ryder) who looks just like his dead wife, and decides to travel to London to see if they can patch things up.*

*There are some strong performances, and some which really need to be laid to rest - preferably six feet under. Gary Oldman is excellent as Dracula. He is totally believable as a handsome young hero at the beginning and as a love-sick vampire later. When his wife dies and he goes into a rage and stabs the cross I felt sorry for him and shocked that he could do such a terrible, blasphemous thing. When he sees the photo of Mina I felt scared for her and Jonathon. His love for her, even though perverted and murderous, was believable. On the other hand Keanu Reeves is as wooden as one of Dracula's coffins, and it is hardly believable that anyone would give up their immortal soul for someone as inexpressive and irritating as Wynona Ryder.*

**Language**

In the introduction, find an example of:

- a pun
- a rhetorical question
- listing.

Why has the writer used these techniques?

### Atmosphere

Discusses atmosphere by focusing particularly on one aspect.

Opinion is supported with specific examples.

Concludes this section by making a strong statement of the writer's opinion.

*Coppola creates a strong vampirish atmosphere, but to the point of overkill. Take his use of colour. As you might expect there is quite a bit of red and black in the film. When he stabs the cross, blood pours not just from the cross itself but from the sides and top of the screen to show the extent to which he had turned on God. When Jonathon leaves London the sky is bright blue but as he approaches Transylvania the sky is awash with red. Whenever Dracula is in the frame everything is tinted with red to create a real sense of blood and danger. This had me fascinated at first but unfortunately Coppola uses this one technique so much that you are soon longing to see a few other colours as well, and you begin to see it as an unoriginal and annoying gimmick.*

*The biggest fault in this film is the pace. The first half hour is great. I found the elaborate period costumes, the set design, and the excellent camera work all riveting. It was different from any film I had ever seen before. Unfortunately the film keeps on going, very, very slowly for another 100 tedious minutes. The pace was so slow that it gave me too much time to think, and what I began to think was boring, boring, boring!*

*Bram Stoker's Dracula is based on a famous novel, made by a famous director, and stars famous actors. There are aspects of the film that are very good when you think about them by themselves. Unfortunately, when you put them all together, you've got a film that deserves a stake through its heart.*

In the body of the review, find an example of:

- simile
- metaphor
- a pun

Why has the writer used each technique?

### Pace

Note how the writer has organised the aspects in reverse order of effectiveness. Statements about acting are reasonably positive, atmosphere less positive, and pace negative. Why is the review organised in this way?

### Conclusion

Restates writer's opinion and finishes review with a strong statement.



### Task 5: Writing your first draft

Use the following structure for your review:

<b>TITLE</b>	Write a catchy title for your review. Consider using a pun, alliteration, metaphor or cliché.
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	Write an introduction that grabs the reader's attention and clearly states: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the title of the film, director, principal actors</li> <li>the genre and the director's intention</li> <li>your opinion of the film.</li> </ul>
<b>P1: SYNOPSIS</b>	Write a short paragraph giving an entertaining overview of the film.
<b>P2: Aspect 1</b> e.g. Visual effects?	Write a paragraph about 3 different aspects of the film.  Support your points with <b>quotations</b> from the film, <b>facts/details</b> from the website / information about director's <b>purpose, effect</b> etc.  Clearly show your <b>OPINION</b> of the film.
<b>P3: Aspect 2</b> e.g. Soundtrack/Characters	
<b>P4: Aspect 3</b> e.g. Themes /symbolism?	
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	Write a concluding paragraph that restates your opinion of the film and ends your review strongly

#### LANGUAGE:

- Use a lively writing style. Rhetorical devices found in speeches like puns, rhetorical questions, alliteration, imperatives can and should be used to make your review more engaging for the reader!

### Task 8: Craft your writing

- Read over your writing and then edit it by using the techniques mentioned in the student review of Bram Stoker's Dracula in Task 6 as a checklist.
- Check all your spelling, punctuation, grammar, syntax and paragraphing.
- Before you develop your draft to its finished state, read the exemplars on pages 11 to 16. Talk about the strengths and the areas they could be improved. You may not use any of this material in your own review.
- Your finished review will be at least 1500 words long. It will:
  - develop and support your opinions about the film
  - use language appropriate for an review and for a readership of Year 12 students and your teacher
  - follow a suitable review structure

## **A.S 90376 EVERYONE'S A CRITIC**

- use writing conventions accurately (spelling, punctuation, grammar, syntax, paragraphing).