

Describing a film

If you've just seen a great film, you might want to tell your friends about it. Here are some tips for doing that. Make sure you know how to sequence your story, and use linking words to help others understand you.

Telling a story about a film

Here are some ways you can tell the story (plot) of a film you've seen.

- It's set in...(New York / in the 1950's).
- The film's shot on location in Arizona.
- The main characters are ... and they're played by...
- It's a mystery / thriller / love-story.

You can tell the story of the film in the present simple tense.

- Well, the main character decides to... (rob a bank)
- But when he drives there...

Giving your opinion

- I thought the film was great / OK / fantastic...
- The actors / costumes / screenplay are/is ...
- The special effects are fantastic / terrible
- The best scene / the worst scene is when...
- The plot is believable / seems a bit unlikely

Not telling all

- You don't want to spoil the film for your friends, so you can say something like:
- "I don't want to spoil it for you, so I'm not going to tell you what happens in the end."
- "You'll have to go and see it for yourself."
- "I don't want to ruin the surprise for you."

Useful adjectives

All these are useful words and phrases to spice up your description:

- true-to-life (a real story)
- the real story of
- remarkable (unusual, good)
- masterpiece (the best work someone has done)
- oscar-winning

Vocabulary for describing movies

- Here is a list of vocabulary that reviewers often use when describing movies.
- I have divided them into three categories: positive, negative, and neutral.
- Note that depending on the combination of words used, they may change from neutral to positive or negative.

Positive

first-rate	insightful	clever
charming	comical	charismatic
enjoyable	uproarious	original
tender	hilarious	absorbing

sensitive	riveting	intriguing
powerful	fascinating	pleasant
surprising	dazzling	thought provoking
imaginative	legendary	unpretentious

Negative

second-rate	violent	moronic
third-rate	flawed	juvenile
boring	distasteful	ordinary
disgusting	senseless	static
brutal	confused	disappointing
bloody	silly	tired
predictable	stupid	uninteresting
weak	incredibly tiresome	trite
uneven	cliché ridden	outdated
dreadful	bland	

Neutral

suspenseful	low-budget	dramatic
highly-charged	sentimental	fantasy
slow	romantic	satirical
fast-moving	oddball	picaresque
big-budget	wacky	

Movie / Film vocabulary

Actors' description

- Handsome
- Comely
- Plain
- Overrated
- Impeccable
- Boring
- Extrovert
- Sophisticated
- Agile
- Sinister
- Multi-talented
- Beautiful
- Absurd

- Versatile
- Ironic
- Glamorous
- Idiotic

Special effects:

- Spectacular scenes
- Uses simple and ordinary effects
- Technically and visually stunning
- Mediocre visuals
- A compelling work of science-fiction
- Unimaginative, implausible and ridiculous
- An eye-opening expose
- A cliché-ridden script and familiar narrative
- Chock full of high-tech dazzling action
- Features manic action

Comedy:

- Silliest blockbuster
- An offbeat but touching romantic comedy
- Slapdash comedy
- Light and entertaining
- Goes overboard with slapstick and effects
- Spiced with plenty of humor and affection
- Crude and offensive
- A funny political satire
- Lacks originality, ingenuity, humor, and charm
- Gut-busting laughs
- An overly melodramatic tearjerker

Thriller/horror/mystery/suspense:

- Mammothly entertaining stuff
- Movie is skippable
- Dark, thrilling and mysterious
- A big-reveal thriller with surprises that do NOT surprise
- A clever, heart-pounding thriller
- An obvious, predictable plot
- Suspenseful expose
- A dull and repetitive interpretation

Actor/character performance:

- Charismatic leads
- Merely passable acting
- Brilliant performance
- Poorly executed
- Unprecedented success
- Emotionally inadequate
- Refreshingly honest and utterly charming
- A tired and monotonous
- A well-acted, intensely shot, action filled war epic
- Fails to come up with interesting characters

Movie review vocabulary

Movie reviews include different elements of the movie including:

- Director – the person who directed the movie
- Rating – 1-5 number of stars, 5 stars is the best review
- Starring – the names of the actors in the movie
- Producer – the person/company that produced the movie
- Based on – used when a movie is based on a book

Movie genres

- Action/Adventure – fighting, chases, explosions, and fast scenes
- Animation – computer-animated or hand drawn characters
- Comedy – funny, funny, and more funny
- Documentary – story about someone or something that actually took place in history
- Drama – emotionally charged personal challenges
- Foreign – any movie not in English
- Horror/Thriller/Suspense/Mystery – dark, scary and bloody scenes
- Kids/Family – fun for the whole family
- Romance – a love story
- Sci-Fiction/Fantasy – not a true story, but based on make-believe, full of imaginative ideas
- and special effects
- Musical – story told with song and dance

Some other vocabulary related to film/movie

- action
- adventure
- animation
- catch a movie
- classic
- documentary
- drama
- foreign film
- go to the movies
- horror
- lines
- main characters
- movie review
- movie theater
- musicals
- plot
- romance
- science fiction
- suspense thriller
- western
- buy some popcorn
- buy tickets
- catch a movie
- get a drink
- go to a movie theater
- read a movie review

- sit in an aisle seat
- wait in line
- watch a movie trailer
- watch the credits
- watch the previews
- take a seat
- at the front
- in the middle
- at the back
- exciting
- interesting
- marvelous
- moving
- terrific
- wonderful
- absurd
- awful
- boring
- terrible
- weird

Useful phrases

- x has much to recommend it.
- X is, at heart, a(n) love/spy/adventure story.
- It is based on a book by ...
- It is set in the countryside/the future.
- The film has a quality cast.
- The film was directed by ...
- The film score is enchanting/evocative/scary.
- The film captures the spirit of ...
- The hero/heroine/villain is ...
- I felt/thought it was ...
- I was impressed by ...
- What struck me most was ...
- What I liked most/didn't like was ...
- The plot was gripping.
- The characters were very convincing/very well drawn.
- On reflection, I think it was ...
- It struck me as being ...
- What I didn't understand was how ...
- In spite of these few criticisms, I think ...
- I would have no hesitation in recommending ...