



Writing Reviews

Quick quiz: Why do people read reviews?

- A. To find out how clever the reviewer is
- B. To find out if they might enjoy the book or film being reviewed
- C. So they can skip reading the book or going to the movie being reviewed.

1. A review is not a book report. You don't have to tell everything that happened. Just tell enough so the reader has a sense of what the subject of your review is like. But do give examples to show why you liked it, or why you wish it had been done differently.

Especially, don't give away surprises, endings and other parts the reader will enjoy discovering! That's called a "**spoiler**" because it *spoils* the experience for the reader.

2. Do your homework. If the film is the third in a series, you should be familiar with the other two. If it's based on a book, you should be familiar with the book so you can tell the reader how much it is the same, and how much it has been changed. You should probably not try to review a book by a popular writer if it's the first one you've read by that author. Readers want to know if it's as good as her others.

3. Tell us what you're talking about. The name of the book or movie belongs somewhere in the first three sentences. Don't keep us guessing, and don't think putting it in your headline does the job.

4. Use comparisons. If a film or book contains a lot of magic, is it like "Harry Potter" or more like "Princess Bride?" If it's part of a series, is it like the others in that series? How is it different? Compare it to things your readers are probably familiar with.

5. Who is this for? Not every book or movie is for everybody. If it's more likely to appeal to action fans than romantics, say so. If it's too complicated or too scary for younger kids, say so. (*This is a good place to use comparisons: "If you liked 'The Incredibles,' you'll love this," or "If you thought 'Alice in Wonderland' was too intense, you'll want to stay away from this one!"*)

6. Warnings are not spoilers -- Provide them! You're doing your readers a favor by giving them a heads up over something that might lead to a less-than-good experience. When a movie doesn't make sense unless you've read the book, let them know. And if a book contains content that might be offensive or too adult for some people, say so. For instance, "This might not be a good film for young kids because of some crude language."

7. Don't forget the details! If it's a movie, we need to know the rating. If it's a book, we need to know the author and the number of pages, or at least whether it's long or short.

8. You don't have to like it. If it was disappointing, say so. Don't be a wiseguy about it and don't look for reasons to hate it, but be honest. And, if it might be fun for someone younger, or someone who likes that kind of thing (*even though you don't*), be sure to say that. But don't feel that, because you got a free copy of the book or got to attend a movie preview, that you have to pretend it was wonderful.