

## HOW TO CRITICALLY WATCH A FILM

Whether you like or dislike a film is a completely subjective and personal response to the work as a whole. To critically analyze a film, you must break it down to its parts and then critique each element. Here are 3 parts to consider when you are watching a film:

### 1) SUBJECT/STORY

The film's subject matter or story can be broad or very specific, but it should always be original, clear and focused. And it should preferably offer a new perspective. For instance, if the film is about Elvis (a famous figure), does it offer a fresh perspective or information we don't already know? If the film is a documentary, consider its purpose. Does it argue for a position or is it strictly informative? Is the purpose clear?

### 2) TECHNICAL PRODUCTION

All of the technical aspects such as the cinematography, sound, and editing should be as technically professional as possible. Can you hear the characters, narrator, etc? Is the film shot in focus, with appropriate lighting? Does the editing flow and make sense? If any technical aspects of the film are gravely flawed then it will be distracting to viewers and will make the film feel less authentic. For instance, a boom mic dropping into the frame or a very choppy scene transition would be distracting and pull the audience's mind away from the story.

### 3) ARTISTIC DIRECTION

Every film should have an artistic vision. The question is - does that artistic direction best serves the subject/story? How well is it executed? Is the style of acting appropriate for the story? An artistic vision can be any aesthetic in a wide range from the traditional to the unconventional. The traditional aesthetic may look like the Hollywood hits with crisp lighting so you can see everything and an elaborate musical score. The unconventional may involve unusual lighting practices, nonlinear editing, no use of musical score, and even sometimes, no dialogue. There is no right or wrong choice as long as the choices the director has made best serves the subject/story. For example, Hitchcock's choices in lighting were crucial to the effectiveness of the film *Psycho* – the swaying single lightbulb revealing a mummified figure. A documentary filmmaker might use illustrative or suggestive materials such as animation or still photographs to convey the story. It is up to the viewer to decide its effectiveness.

There are many elements to a film you can analyze. The main elements include:

Directing	Lighting	Costume/wardrobe
Acting	Production Design	Symbolism
Screenwriting	Sound	Historical information
Cinematography	Music	Multiple media
Editing	Special effects	