

How to review a film or TV show

The studio's guide to writing a review worth reading.

What a good review actually does

A review is not a summary and it is not marketing. It is an honest, useful judgement: you tell someone what a film or show is, what it is trying to do, how well it does it, and who it is for. The reader should finish knowing whether it is for them, even if your opinion is the opposite of theirs.

Three things separate a real review from a reaction. It is specific, it is fair, and it is honest. Specific means you point at the actual thing on screen, not a vague feeling. Fair means you judge it for what it is trying to be, not what you wish it were. Honest means you say the weak parts even when you loved it, and the good parts even when you did not.

Before you write: watch properly

Good reviews start while you are still watching. Watch once to experience it, then note the moments that stayed with you, good and bad. You do not need to pause every five minutes, but jot a few lines straight after: what worked, what pulled you out of it, one scene you will remember.

- What kind of thing is this, honestly? A prestige drama and a fun popcorn film are not judged the same way.
- What was it trying to do, and did it manage it?
- Which moments landed? Which did not? Name them.
- Who is this for? Who would love it, and who would bounce off it?
- How did it leave you feeling as the credits rolled?

The house format

Every Studio L308 review is written in the same six parts in the editor. Write these once and the tool builds the Letterboxd, Serializd and TMDB versions for you. Fill them in your own voice.

Hook.

One or two lines to grab attention. Your angle, your voice. This is what makes someone stop and read. Avoid "In this review I will..." Just start with the most interesting true thing you can say about it.

Snapshot.

A neutral sentence or two on what it is: the premise, no opinion. This is the informative backbone, and it leads the TMDB version, which sits on a public database page rather than a personal feed.

What works.

What it does well, and be specific. Not "the acting was good" but "the lead plays grief as exhaustion rather than tears, which makes the quiet scenes land." Point at performances, writing, pacing, look, sound.

What falls short.

Be honest about the weaker parts, and who might not enjoy it. Every review needs this, even a five-star one. If you genuinely cannot fault it, say what stops it being for everyone.

Verdict.

Two or three sentences summing up, and who should watch it. This is your considered judgement, not a plot recap. It closes every version.

One-liner.

A single punchy sentence that captures your take. Used as the pull-quote and the short social caption. Write it last, once you know what you actually think.

Setting the rating

Half stars exist for a reason. A considered three and a half is worth more than a lazy five. The rating should match your words: if your review is full of praise and ends on four out of five, that reads honestly. If it is a list of complaints and a four, the reader will not trust you.

- 5 - Exceptional. You would recommend it to almost anyone and can defend why.
- 4 - Very good, with minor flaws that do not spoil it.
- 3 - Solid and worth watching, but clearly imperfect.
- 2 - Weak. A few redeeming parts, but hard to recommend.
- 1 - Poor. Did not work, and you can say precisely why.

Reserve the extremes. If everything is a five, your fives stop meaning anything.

Reviewing TV is a little different

A film is one finished thing. A series is not, so be clear about what you are reviewing: a single season, the whole show so far, or a standout episode. Say so in the Snapshot. Avoid spoiling later seasons when reviewing an early one, and judge a season on its own arc as well as how it fits the whole.

TV reviews go to Serializd rather than Letterboxd, which is film-only. The house format still works: just tailor the Snapshot and What works and falls short to the season or show you are covering.

Style: how to actually write it

- Write like you talk, then tidy it. Reviews die when they sound like an essay.
- Show, do not tell. "Tense" is a claim. "I realised I had not blinked in a minute" shows it.
- Cut throat-clearing. Delete "I think that this film was quite" and start at the point.
- One idea per sentence. Short sentences hit harder than long ones.
- Avoid spoilers. If you must touch a big moment, warn the reader first.
- No plot dumps. A reader can look up the plot. They came for your take.
- Read it aloud before publishing. If you stumble, so will they.

Be fair, be honest, be kind

You can dislike something and still review it fairly. Attack the work, never the people who made it.

"The pacing sags in the middle" is criticism. Mocking an actor is not. Real people made this, often on a tight budget, and a good critic can be tough and decent at the same time.

And remember you are publishing under the studio name across three platforms. Write something you would be happy to put your name to and defend in class.

Our editorial standards

Writing for Studio L308 Reviews means following a few standards that keep the whole publication trustworthy. These are not optional extras; they are the difference between a real outlet and a personal blog, and they are what lets us build toward press access and accreditation.

- Independence. We never accept payment, gifts or favours in exchange for a review or a rating. A good review is earned by the film, not arranged.}
- Honesty. Your rating and your words must match. Do not soften a verdict to please anyone, and do not sharpen it for effect.
- Accuracy. Check names, titles, dates and facts before you publish. If you state something as fact, be sure it is true. Opinion is yours to give; facts have to be right.
- Declare any connection. If you know someone who worked on a film, or have any personal stake in it, tell the editor before you write. That review may be reassigned or the connection noted.
- Our own productions. We do not give graded reviews to Studio L308 films and shows. Studio work is covered separately as showcase pieces, never scored on the review feed. This keeps us independent of our own production arm.
- Corrections. If we get a fact wrong, we fix it and say so. Tell the editor as soon as you spot an error.

A note on the law, kept simple: a review is your honest opinion and you are entitled to it. But do not state damaging things about real people as if they were fact when you cannot back them up. Judge the work, not the person, and you stay well on the right side of this.

Embargoes: if you are ever given a film in advance, it comes with a date and time before which nothing can be published anywhere, including your own diaries and social accounts. If you are unsure when an embargo lifts, hold and ask the editor. Breaking one can lose access for the whole publication. You will sign the embargo agreement before you handle any advance material.

A quick checklist before you publish

- All six sections filled, in your own voice?
- Does the rating match the words?
- Anything specific, not just "good" or "bad"?
Any accidental spoilers to warn about or cut?
- Poster added, and format and genre set?
- Read aloud once, typos fixed?
Would you be happy for this to represent the studio?
- Facts, names and dates checked?
- Any connection to the film declared to the editor?