

Advanced English: Has Movie Criticism become “Has-Been”?

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This course is meant for students of the advanced C1 and C2 levels. Theme-based language classes aim at developing written and oral skills through the study of a specific topic.

Course Description

This 12-week course aims to answer two questions:

- Do cinema studies and film criticism hold relevance in Gen Z's media consumption?
- Can new media platforms (primarily TikTok) usher in a new vision of film criticism, one that still takes into account the academic history of the form while adapting itself to fit the concerns and interests of Gen Z?

Recent studies have shown that Gen Z is increasingly uninterested in watching movies. (See for example Deloitte's 2021 Digital Media Trends survey: "Only 10% of Gen Z respondents said watching TV or movies was their favorite entertainment pastime.") Cinema writing as a field of study has also grown less popular as Gen Z seems to divide the media landscape into "creators" and "consumers", while "commentators" must belong to one of these categories. As a result, there is a marked downturn in Gen Z's ability and/or willingness to engage with more "difficult" movies (in terms of their structures and/or stories) which is also not helped by drastically decreasing attention spans. (In stark contrast, even the most reluctant student has been trained to accept that reading longer/more complicated books is proof of being cultured and/or educated.)

This class will first study the roots and influences of English-language film criticism (from Iris Barry and Lester Walton to Pauline Kael and Rogert Ebert) before exploring how its purpose and forms have shifted. Today, the divide between film critics and "regular" filmgoers (which has always existed, largely based on the assumption that both groups seek out movies for wildly different purposes) has expanded exponentially. MovieTok benefits from this, as these creators position themselves as "anti" traditional film critics, which seems to attract younger viewers/consumers.

Do we no longer need film criticism? And if we do, what forms should contemporary criticism take? Do movies still serve a real purpose beyond mere entertainment? How has the current film market helped or hindered the optics and relevance of film criticism? Students will read film history texts as well as film criticism, but the class will also function as an active development lab, where students will be asked to use

readings and discussions to think about how one might develop a social media platform model that fosters engagement between younger viewers and older movies.

The main objectives of this course are:

- When and where did film as an academic area of study really take off?
- Why do we watch movies?
 - Does cinema offer entertainment alone, or does it have other, valuable purposes?
- What purposes does film criticism serve? Must these be re-envisioned for contemporary audiences?
 - Is it simply to help sell movies?
 - Criticism of MovieTok.
 - Is it to train a new generation of film critics/filmmakers/film enthusiasts?
 - Do we need new film critics? Why?
 - Does it matter if most people stop watching movies? Why or why not?
- When did film criticism as an art form begin to emerge?
- What countries led the way?
- How has its use evolved throughout history?
- Using relevant information/data, is there a way to use social media platforms to adapt film criticism to a new generation of statistically uninterested consumers? And if yes, is it worth it?
- What do we (our societies, our cultures, our generation) lose when we stop taking movies seriously?

The course will enable students to enhance their skills in the following areas:

- **Speaking:** students will contribute to in-class discussions on selected works and student-led presentations.
- **Writing:** students will choose a filmmaker, genre, period, or country and prepare a substantial précis of the relevant, related criticism.
- **Listening:** students will watch English-language films, including selected film excerpts that will be shown in class, and provide in-depth, thoughtful commentary.
- **Reading:** students will read a variety of English-language film criticism from multiple decades.