

Get paid to watch and review movies!

FabJob Guide to
**Become a
Movie
Reviewer**



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1. Introduction

1.1 The Work of a Movie Reviewer

When I mention that I write movie reviews for a living, people turn green with envy. Imagine having a career where you get paid to do the same thing that most people do on a Saturday night date or with their friends for pure recreation!

There is something very exciting about watching movies for free (usually before they are released), letting people know your opinion, and then being **paid** to do it. In fact, nearly everyone is **already** a film reviewer. We all sit down with friends or family to discuss and debate the merits and entertainment value of the latest films.

Movie reviews can be powerful and persuasive. We've all at one time or another said things like, "I'm not sure I want to see that movie; it's had some really bad reviews."

Despite the occasional dud (I've had to sit through appalling movies like *Species II*, *Baby Geniuses* and *Battlefield Earth* – cringing until the very end!), most people would love a job like this. Fortunately, it's worth sitting through these duds, just for all the gems you get to watch!

1.2 Benefits of Being a Movie Writer

Enjoyment

Movie reviewers have a rare chance to write about something they love. They are able to do something as part of the job that they would otherwise do for fun. What job could be better?

Meeting the Stars

"I've learned the movie studios will go to great lengths to win awards," says **Roger Tennis**, creator of the long-running syndicated series *CLIPS* and a movie reviewer for over 30 years.

"Special screenings, copies of the movies, and overall, the royal treatment ... although we must sit through more movies than even hardcore film fanatics could ever stand. Mixing with all those celebrities is very rewarding. I've gotten more stories than I could ever

tell from people like Steven Spielberg, Robert Wise, Russell Crowe, James Coburn... on and on.”

Roger Tennis Movie Review Website
<http://www.cinemaclips.com>

Movie writers have rare access to the stars. They depend on the media, so many of them are just as happy to meet you as you are to meet them.

Influence

Despite what they might say, people in the industry are always eager for good reviews. Even blockbusters can be harmed by bad reviews. (That’s partly why films like *Godzilla* and *Pearl Harbor* did well in the first week, then fizzled out in the second.)



Not for nothing were **James Agee**, **Gene Siskel** and **Roger Ebert** listed by the book *The Film 100* as among the 100 most influential people in movie history.

An independent cinema owner once phoned me a few weeks after I had written a good review of *The Spanish Prisoner*. His was the only cinema in the area that was showing this film and he wanted to thank me, because my review had saved his business! People were queuing up to see it, and it had already been extended a few extra weeks. He credited my review with its success.

Though I hadn’t set out to do him a favor (I’m a critic, not a publicist), I was happy to know that I had helped save an independent cinema.

A Chance to Entertain

Most people tend to like film reviews, even if they disagree with them. In fact, have you noticed that the reviews are sometimes more interesting or entertaining than the movies

themselves? How could we hate *Battlefield Earth*? True, it was a trial to sit through, but think of all the hilarious reviews it inspired!

Just as film buffs can recite classic quotes from the movies, they now memorize some of the best quotes from reviews. Reviewers have written some priceless one-liners.

Take **James Agee** (1909-1955), known as the man who turned movie reviews to an art form. He dismissed the musical *You Were Meant for Me* (1948) with four words: “That’s what you think.” He was even tougher on the action film *Tycoon* (1947): “Several tons of dynamite are set off in this picture – none of them under the right people.”

Many other classic quotes live on in the memory.

“Loved Ben, hated Hur.”

– anonymous capsule review of *Ben-Hur* (1959)

“Somewhere between hypnotic and immensely boring.”

– Renata Adler on *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968)

“This movie is intelligent, but in a way it’s worse than a bad movie – it has the mustiness of books that drive you out of the house in search of something trashy with a little life to it.”

– Pauline Kael on *The Getting of Wisdom* (1977)

“The only thing not transparent about this film is why it was ever made.”

– Jo Imeson on *Mommie Dearest* (1981)

“AP2 is rated R for “strong sexual content, crude humor, language, and drinking.” Thank God the MPAA doesn’t rate high schools – no student would be old enough to attend.”

– Mark Ramsey, moviejuice.com, on *American Pie 2* (2001)

Movies are supposed to be entertaining. So why not the reviews?

A Doorway to the Movies

Perhaps, because you love movies so much, you want to make them. If so, working as a movie writer can teach you about the industry “on the job”, and give you the contacts to enter one of the world’s most exciting and competitive businesses.

Many reviewers have themselves become filmmakers. **James Agee** went on to write the scripts for classic films like *The African Queen* and *The Night of the Hunter*. He even tried his hand as a cinematographer for one film. Many influential French film critics of the 1950s, including **Jean-Luc Godard**, **Claude Chabrol** and **Francois Truffaut**, went on to be influential directors. Even **Roger Ebert** scripted one film, the awful *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls* (1970). (He insists that it was supposed to be a parody.)



Whatever your reason for wanting to write movie reviews, you will find it a rewarding and exciting career.

1.3 Inside the Guide

This guide will tell you what you need to know to get work in this highly competitive arena, from writing (and publishing) your first movie review to the exciting (and lucrative) world of writing a book about the movies.

The guide also offers information about many types of “movie writing” – from celebrity interviews to news stories and feature articles. This is essential knowledge for anyone hoping to become a movie reviewer. To me, it’s also one of the best things about the job. After making my name as a reviewer, magazines, newspapers and radio stations have called on my knowledge of the movies for more and more projects. Why stop at reviewing, when there is so much **more** to explore in the exciting world of the movies? The information in the book is presented in a step-by-step manner, from developing your reviewing skills to breaking in to being successful on the job.

In **Chapter 2, Getting Ready**, we’ll cover the training and skills that you might need including resources on where to go to get them. This chapter also goes through the basics of writing movie reviews.

Chapter 3, Getting Hired, has insider advice on how to “**break in**” to the world of movie reviewing. In this chapter you will discover how to become a **regular** movie reviewer, be it for newspapers, magazines, radio, television, or the internet. This chapter also covers writing a **book**, and offers tips on getting a job as a **staff writer**.

Chapter 4, Working with Celebrities, gives inside advice on how to get dream assignments interviewing or writing feature stories about celebrities. You will learn how to make **contacts**, land interviews, and questions to ask. You’ll even get some tips on how to avoid legal problems when working with celebrities.

Chapter 5, Being Successful, gives you some valuable tips to give you the edge over your competition. You’ll learn how to succeed (and how to fail) in movie writing, and when (and how) to leave your day job, and become a **full-time** reviewer. This chapter also includes some inspiring stories of successful movie writers.

The guide also includes an **Appendix** with a **glossary** of terms so you can talk like a movie industry insider, plus valuable resources and information about writing awards.

As you will see, there is no “normal” way to become a movie reviewer. If you talk to 10 reviewers, even if they all work for the same medium, you will probably find that they became movie reviewers in 10 different ways. This guide will go through the many ways to become a reviewer, so that you know the choices that you have.

Even if those same 10 reviewers have different backgrounds, however, you can be sure of one thing: if you ask them, they will *all* say that they love reviewing movies, and that they feel very lucky to be doing it.

Read on to find out how **you** can succeed in this fabulous job.