**Elements of a Film Review**

**Overview**: Reviews are evaluations, so all of them at some point state the author’s judgment about the value of the item being reviewed, usually discussing both strengths and weaknesses with support.

However, a review of a film, book, or other related artistic production is a flexible form with many options, as I hope you have noticed from the models we’ve been discussing. To give some sense of your options when writing your own review, below is a list of elements one might find in a review.

**Choose** which of these elements will work best for your particular book or movie; then decide on a pattern of organization based on what will hook your audience’s interest and keep them reading, leaving them with a strong impression at the end. Your text gives you two possible organization patterns, but there are many more options.

Please resist the magnetic pull of the 5-paragraph essay format! Restricting yourself to simplistic formulas paralyzes the mind and bores the reader.

**Elements of a Review**:

Required elements

* **A thesis**: an arguable claim about the value of the work with reasons.
* **Evaluative statements**, usually a combination of overall evaluation and specific strengths and weaknesses of the work.
* **Description** of the work: How it looks, sounds, feels, tastes, smells (if relevant). Sometimes more esoteric elements are described, such as the tone, stance, or political orientation. Sometimes its effect on the viewer is described.
* **Plot summary**, sometimes a separate section, sometimes woven in with evaluation and analysis.

Elements usually or often included

* **Discussion of relevant criteria**, with maybe an explanation of why these are the most important. For films, consider which elements of a film get awards. Most often discussed are directing, acting, plot, and cinematography. More general criteria include depth of thinking, emotional impact, authenticity in relation to what is being depicted, wit or cleverness of the writing, and originality.
* **Background information to provide context**. This can be information about the historical setting, people, or events; the society depicted; other works produced by the filmmaker or writer; key ideas involved in the work (e.g. political, philosophical, or artistic ideas), and production history.
* **Comparison**/ **Contrast** with other similar works, with the source material, with sequels or prequels, etc.
* **Classification/Division:** a work can be placed in a class, such as a particular genre (e.g. sci-fi, historical drama, documentary, French New Wave) and then distinguished from other items in that category.
* **Reception**: How the film was received by audiences and/or critics; awards it has won.
* **Analysis**: Discussion of how the film works, what makes the characters tick, what the film says about the society that produced it, why audiences responded as they did, etc.
* **Narrative:** Sometimes a story of the reviewer’s experience with the film or the issue it depicts is relevant and interesting. For example, a war movie reviewed by a soldier who fought in it or a refugee who fled from it has an added emotional heft if the reviewers discuss their experiences, particularly while evaluating the film’s authenticity.

**Mini-review for Analysis**: How many of the above elements can you find in Mark Kermode’s 1-paragraph review of Slumdog Millionaire, which he published when the DVD came out?

With its "feelgood film of the decade" status assured and a best film Oscar under its belt, it's easy to forget just how grim **Slumdog Millionaire** (2008, 15, Pathe £19.56) really is. Yet despite a ludicrously misleading advertising campaign, Danny Boyle's cross-cultural masterpiece is unflinching in its ground-level depiction of the streets of Mumbai in which homeless children are abused and exploited while TV screens spew forth win-a-million fantasias. It's a credit to the film-makers that Slumdog is such an uplifting experience, with Boyle focusing on the vitality of the human spirit just as he did in Trainspotting, even as his characters are literally plunging down life's lavatory. Anthony Dod Mantle's vibrant camera races from gutters to rooftops, injecting life into the squalor - there's nothing "abject" about this poverty - while AR Rahman's score keeps the heart pumping and the pulse racing. Full Monty screenwriter Simon Beaufoy works wonders with Vikas Swarup's source novel and the cast, led by Skins star Dev Patel, rise to the challenge with aplomb. Honestly, it's hard to remember a better "best film."