PART 1: This part is your Introduction Paragraph!!!

Drafting Your Review

I.   **Start with a compelling fact or opinion on the movie.** You want to get the reader hooked immediately. This sentence needs to give them a feel for your review and the movie -- is it good, great, terrible, or just okay? -- and keep them reading. Some ideas include:

- **Comparison to Relevant Event or Movie:** "Every day, our leaders, politicians, and pundits call for "revenge"-- against ISIS, against rival sports teams, against other political parties. But few of them understand cold, destructive, and ultimately hallow thrill of revenge as well as the characters of *Blue Ruin.*"
- **Review in a nutshell** "Despite a compelling lead performance by Tom Hanks and a great soundtrack, *Forrest Gump* never gets out of the shadow of its weak plot and questionable premise."
- **Context or Background Information:** "*Boyhood* might be the first movie made where knowing how it was produced -- slowly, over 12 years, with the same actors -- is just as crucial as the movie itself."

End the INTRODUCTION PARAGRAPH with your THESIS— your opinion of the film!!!

II.   **Give a clear, well-established opinion early on.** Don't leave the reader guessing whether you like the movie or not. Let them know early on, so that you can spend the rest of the time "proving" your rating.

- Using stars, a score out of 10 or 100, or the simple thumbs-up and thumbs-down is a quick way to give your thoughts. You then write about why you chose that rating.*why* you chose that rating.
- **Great Movie:** "is the rare movie that succeeds on almost every level, where each character, scene, costume, and joke firing on all cylinders to make a film worth repeated viewings."
- **Bad Movie:** "It doesn't matter how much you enjoy kung-fu and karate films: with *47 Ronin,* you're better off saving your money, your popcorn, and time."
- **Okay Movie:** "I loved the wildly uneven *Interstellar* far more than I should have, but that doesn't mean it is perfect. Ultimately, the utter awe and spectacle of space swept me through the admittedly heavy-handed plotting and dialogue."

III. **Write your review.** This is where taking notes during the movie really pays off. No one cares about your opinion if you can't give facts that support your argument.

- **Great:** "Michael B. Jordan and Octavia Spencer's chemistry would carry *Fruitvale Station* even if the script wasn't so good. The mid-movie prison scene in particular, where the camera never leaves their faces, show how much they can convey with nothing but their eyelids, the flashing tension of neck muscles, and a barely cracking voice."

- **Bad:** "*Jurassic World's* biggest flaw, a complete lack of relatable female characters, is only further underscored by a laughably unrealistic shot of our heroine running away from a dinosaur -- in heels."

- **Okay:** "At the end of the day, *Snowpiercer* can't decide what kind of movie it wants to be. The attention to detail in fight scenes, where every weapon, lightbulb, and slick patch of ground is accounted for, doesn't translate to an ending that seems powerful but ultimately says little of substance."

The following details go in your BODY PARAGRAPHS!!!

IV. **Move beyond the obvious plot analysis.** Plot is just one piece of a movie, and shouldn't dictate your entire review. Some movies don't have great or compelling plots, but that doesn't mean the movie itself is bad. Other things to focus on include:

- **Cinematography:** "*Her* is a world drenched in color, using bright, soft reds and oranges alongside calming whites and grays that both build, and slowly strip away, the feelings of love between the protagonists. Every frame feels like a painting worth sitting in."

- **Tone:** "Despite the insane loneliness and high stakes of being stuck alone on Mars, *The Martian's* witty script keeps humor and excitement alive in every scene. Space may be dangerous and scary, but the joy of scientific discovery is intoxicating."

- **Music and Sound:** "*No Country for Old Men's* bold decision to skip music entirely pays off in spades. The eerie silence of the desert, punctuated by the brief spells of violent, up-close-and-personal sound effects of hunter and hunted, keeps you constantly on the edge of your seat."

- **Acting:** "While he's fantastic whenever he's on the move, using his cool stoicism to counteract the rampaging bus, Keanu Reeves can't quite match his costar in the quiet moments of *Speed,* which falter under his expressionless gaze."

V. **Bring your review full-circle in the ending.** Give the review some closure, usually by trying back to your opening fact. Remember, people read reviews to decide whether or not they should watch a movie. End on a sentence that tells them.

- **Great:** "In the end, even the characters of *Blue Ruin* know how pointless their feud is. But revenge, much like every taut minute of this thriller, is far too addictive to give up until the bitter end.""

- **Bad:** "Much like the oft-mentioned "box of chocolates", *Forest Gump* has a couple of good little morsels. But most of the scenes, too sweet by half, should have been in the trash long before this movie was put out."

- **Okay:** "Without the novel, even revolutionary concept, *Boyhood* may not be a great movie. It might not even be "good." But the power the film find in the beauty of passing time and little, inconsequential moments -- moments that could only be captured over 12 years of shooting -- make Linklater's latest an essential film for anyone interested in the art of film."

PART 2: This part further details each part of your essay.
Studying Your Source Material

The following details go in your INTRO PARAGRAPH!!!

I. **Gather basic facts about the movie.** You can do this before or after you watch the movie, but you should definitely do it before you write the review, because you'll need to weave the facts into your review as you write. Here's what you need to know:

- The title of the film, and the year it came out.
- The director's name.
- The names of the lead actors.
- The genre.

II. **Take notes on the movie as you watch it.** Before you sit down to watch a film, get out a notepad or a laptop to take notes. Movies are long, and you can easily forget details or major plot points. Taking notes allows you to jot down little things you can return to later.

- Make a note every time something sticks out to you, whether it's good or bad. This could be costuming, makeup, set design, music, etc. Think about how this detail relates to the rest of the movie and what it means in the context of your review.
- Take note of patterns you begin to notice as the movie unfolds.
- Use the pause button frequently so you make sure not to miss anything, and rewind as necessary.

The following details go in your BODY PARAGRAPHS!!!

III. **Analyze the mechanics of the movie.** Analyze the different components that came together in the movie as you watch. During or after your viewing, ask yourself what impression the movie left with you in these areas:

- Direction. Consider the director and how he or she choose to portray/explain the events in the story. If the movie was slow, or didn't include things you thought were necessary, you can attribute this to the director. If you've seen other movies directed by the same person, compare them and determine which you like the most.
- Cinematography. What techniques were used to film the movie? What setting and background elements helped to create a certain tone?
- Writing. Evaluate the script, including dialogue and characterization. Did you feel like the plot was inventive and unpredictable or boring and weak? Did the characters' words seem credible to you?
- Editing. Was the movie choppy or did it flow smoothly from scene to scene? Did they incorporate a montage to help build the story? And was this obstructive to the narrative or did it help it? Did they use long cuts to help accentuate an actor's acting ability or many reaction shots to show a group's reaction to an event or dialogue? If visual effects were used were the plates well-chosen and were the composited effects part of a seamless experience? (Whether the effects looked realistic or not is not the jurisdiction of an editor, however, they do choose the footage to be sent off to the compositors so this could still affect the film.)
- Costume design. Did the clothing choices fit the style of the movie? Did they contribute to the overall tone, rather than digressing from it?
- Set design. Consider how the setting of the film influenced its other elements. Did it add or subtract from the experience for you? If the movie was filmed in a real place, was this location well-chosen?

- Score or soundtrack. Did it work with the scenes? Was it over/under-used? Was it suspenseful? Amusing? Irritating? A soundtrack can make or break a movie, especially if the songs have a particular message or meaning to them.

  IV. **Watch it one more time.** It's impossible to fully understand a movie you've only seen one time, especially if you're pausing it often to take notes. Watch it at least once more before you compose your review. Pay attention to details you might have missed the first time around. Pick new points of focus this time; if you took a lot of notes on the acting the first time you watched the movie, focus on the cinematography the second time around.

PART 3
Composing Your Review

The following details go in your INTRO PARAGRAPH!!!

I. **Create an original thesis based on your analysis.** Now that you've thoroughly studied the movie, what unique insights can you bring to the table? Come up with a thesis, a central idea to discuss and back up with your observations on the various elements of the film. Your thesis should be discussed in the first paragraph of your review. Having a thesis will take your review beyond the plot summary stage and into the realm of film criticism, which is rightfully its own art form. Ask yourself the following questions to come up with a compelling thesis for your review:

- Does the film reflect on a current event or contemporary issue? It could be the director's way of engaging in a bigger conversation. Look for ways to relate the content of the film to the "real" world.
- Does the film seem to have a message, or does it attempt to elicit a specific response or emotion from the audience? You could discuss whether or not it achieves its own goals.
- Does the film connect with you on a personal level? You could write a review stemming from your own feelings and weave in some personal stories to make it interesting for your readers.

This could be a short TRANSITION PARAGRAPH after your INTRO PARAGRAPH

II. **Follow your thesis paragraph with a short plot summary.** It's good to give readers an idea of what they'll be in for if they decide to see the movie you're reviewing. Give a brief summary of the plot in which you identify the main

characters, describe the setting, and give a sense of the central conflict or point of the movie. Never break the number one rule of movie reviews: don't give too much away. Don't ruin the movie for your readers!

- When you name characters in your plot summary, list the actors' names directly afterward in parenthesis.
- Find a place to mention the director's name and the full movie title.
- If you feel you must discuss information that might "spoil" things for readers, warn them first.

The following details go in your BODY PARAGRAPHS!!!

III. **Move into your analysis of the movie.** Write several paragraphs discussing interesting elements of the movie that support your thesis. Discuss the acting, the direction, the cinematography, the setting, and so on, using clear, entertaining prose that keeps your readers engaged.

- Keep your writing clear and easy to understand. Don't use too much technical filmmaking jargon, and make your language crisp and accessible.
- Present both the facts and your opinion. For example, you might state something such as, "The Baroque background music was a jarring contrast to the 20th century setting." This is a lot more informative then simply saying, "The music was a strange choice for the movie."

IV. **Use plenty of examples to back up your points.** If you make a statement about the movie, back it up with a descriptive example. Describe the way scenes look, the way a certain person acted, camera angles, and so on. You can quote dialogue to help you make your points as well. In this way you are giving your readers a feel for the movie and continuing to express your critique of the film at the same time.

V. **Give it some personality.** You could treat your review like a formal college essay, but it's more interesting if you make it your own. If your writing style is usually witty and funny, your review should be no exception. If you're serious and dramatic, that works, too. Let your language and writing style reflect your unique perspective and personality - it's much more entertaining for the reader.

The following details go in your CONCLUSION PARAGRAPH!!!

VI. **Wrap up your review with a conclusion.** It should tie back to your original thesis and provide some guidance as to whether the audience should go see

the movie. Your conclusion should also be compelling or entertaining on its own, since it's the end of your piece of writing.

PART 4
Polishing Your Piece

    I.   **Edit your review.** Once you've finished the first draft, read it through and decide whether it flows well and has the right structure. You may need to shift paragraphs around, delete sentences, or add more material here and there to fill out parts that are stunted. Give your review at least one editorial pass, and maybe two or three, before you consider it to be editorially sound.

- Ask yourself whether your review stayed true to your thesis. Did your conclusion tie back in with the initial ideas you proposed?

- Decide whether your review contains enough details about the movie. You may need to go back and add more description here and there to give readers a better sense of what the movie's about.

- Decide whether your review is interesting enough as a stand-alone piece of writing. Did you contribute something original to this discussion? What will readers gain from reading your review that they couldn't from simply watching the movie?

    II.   **Proofread your review.** Make sure you've spelled all the actors' names correctly and that you got all the dates right. Clean up typos, grammatical errors, and other spelling errors as well. A clean, proofread review will seem much more professional than one that's full of silly mistakes.

    III.   **Publish or share your review.** Post it on your blog, share it in a movie discussion forum, put it up on Facebook, or email it to your friends and family. Movies are the quintessential art form of our time, and like all art, they spark controversy, provide a venue for self-reflection, and greatly influence our culture. All this means they're worth discussing, whether they're flops or works of pure genius. Congratulations for contributing your valuable opinion to the discussion.