

Comparing a Play and a Film

Writing Assignment

Write an essay in which you compare a scene from a film with the play from which it was adapted and evaluate the film techniques the director uses.

Now that you've read William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, you might feel compelled to go out and rent a video version of it. Since you already know the story's tragic ending, you'd think that you wouldn't be too upset when it's shown. Still, you might find yourself feeling choked up and sad in a way that you weren't when you read the original. Somehow, the filmmakers have affected you in a way the words written on the page didn't. How did they do that?

Prewriting

Choose a Film

Cameras . . . Rolling! Begin by choosing a film that has been adapted from a play. There are many films to choose from. For example, several of Shakespeare's plays have been adapted into films, including *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. You might prefer, instead, a more modern play, such as *The Odd Couple* or *The Glass Menagerie*. You may even find that there is more than one film version of a play that you've enjoyed.

Look for film adaptations of plays in video stores and libraries. If you have trouble finding or choosing a film adaptation, look for movie reviews in newspapers and magazines and on the Internet. Consider asking friends, teachers, or family members to recommend a film adaptation they've enjoyed.

Focus on One Scene

The Scene's the Thing You won't be able to analyze an entire film in a 1,500-word essay, so you'll focus your analysis on one important scene. Find that scene by watching a video of the film. As you watch, take notes on your responses to each scene. Is there a scene that draws a strong emotional reaction from you? Is there a scene that makes you think about your own life or the larger world? After you've watched the film, review your notes. The scene to which you had the strongest reactions will be the best one for you to focus on in your analysis.

Compare the Film with the Play

Altered Tales Now, read the same scene in the play and take notes on any differences between the written text of the play and the scene in the film. Filmmakers creating movies based on plays often use

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Writing Skills

Write an essay comparing a scene from a play with its film adaptation.

narrative techniques to make changes to the written play. For example, they may choose to cut dialogue, combine several characters into one, and change the setting of a scene. To analyze the film's narrative techniques, ask yourself the questions in the chart below.



IDENTIFYING NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES IN A FILM

Plot, Characters, and Setting: Did the filmmaker make changes to the characters, plot, or settings? For example, have characters, plot events, or settings been added or eliminated? If so, how do these changes affect the story?

Dialogue: Did the filmmaker cut or add lines of dialogue? Do cuts make the story simpler? Do additions help make ideas from the play clearer?

Theme: Did the filmmaker keep the original theme, or message, of the story? How does a change in theme change the viewer's reaction to the story?

Every Picture Tells a Story In addition to narrative techniques, filmmakers also have various **film techniques**, such as lighting, camera angles and shots, sound, and special effects, with which to tell their stories. These techniques enable the filmmaker to create reactions in viewers that are very different from what readers experience. For example, when you watch a film, you often see close-up shots that show characters' emotions. However, when you read a play, you rely only on word clues to understand the characters' feelings. To analyze the film techniques used in the scene you've chosen, ask yourself the following questions.



IDENTIFYING FILM TECHNIQUES

Camera Shots and Angles: What types of camera shots are used—close-ups, long shots? From what angles does the camera shoot the characters and actions? What effects do the shots and angles create?

Lighting: How is lighting used in the scene? Does the lighting affect the mood of the scene?

Sound: What music or sound effects are present in the scene? How do they affect your reactions to the scene?

Special Effects: What special effects are included that you would not expect to see in a stage production of the play? Are the special effects distracting? Are they helpful to your understanding of the story?

On the next page are some of the notes one viewer took of the examples of narrative and film techniques he found while comparing a scene from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* to Franco Zeffirelli's 1968 film version of the play. He will use this information as **evidence** in his paper to support his thesis statement.

Plot

- The duel between Paris and Romeo at the tomb is cut out altogether.

Dialogue

- Only Prince Escalus speaks at the end. Friar Laurence's explanation of the events is cut.

Lighting

- Romeo first sees Juliet in blue-tinted darkness. White light shines on her alone.
- At the end, they are shown in golden light, as if to show the purity of their love.

Sound

- Ominous music plays as Romeo enters the tomb, but fades to crickets chirping.

Write Your Thesis Statement

What Say You? A filmmaker combines narrative and film techniques to create intellectual and emotional responses, known as **aesthetic effects**, in the film's viewers. The **thesis**, or main idea, of your essay identifies the effects created by the techniques.

To write a **thesis statement**, ask yourself, "What response was the filmmaker trying to create?" and "How did the techniques affect me as a viewer?" You'll find the answers to these questions in your notes. The example below shows one student's working thesis statement.

Franco Zeffirelli uses narrative and film techniques to reduce the final scene to an emotional essence—the two young lovers and their tragic fate.

Organize Your Essay

Getting Your Act Together Your essay really has two parts: the first part compares the narrative techniques of the film with the original play, and the second part analyzes and evaluates the film techniques. To help your readers see how your ideas fit together, organize your essay in these two ways:

- **Point-by-point order:** Discuss the narrative techniques by comparing each narrative technique from the play to the corresponding one from the film.
- **Order of importance:** Discuss the film techniques by evaluating the most important film technique first and the least important one last, or vice versa.

SKILLS FOCUS

Writing Skills

Establish a thesis statement.
Organize the essay.

PRACTICE & APPLY 1

Compare a film adaptation of a play with the original by analyzing the filmmaker's use of narrative and film techniques. Then, write your thesis statement and organize your ideas.

DO THIS

Writing

Comparing a Play and a Film

A Writer's Framework

Introduction

- Engage your readers immediately with an interesting opening, such as a question, a quote from the play, or a relevant anecdote.
- Identify the original play and the film and their creators.
- Clearly state your thesis.

Body

- Compare the narrative techniques, and organize them in point-by-point order.
- Analyze and evaluate the film techniques, and organize them in order of importance.
- Include specific references to the play and film to support your discussion.

Conclusion

- Remind readers of your thesis by restating it.
- Include a concluding thought or question to leave readers with something to think about.

A Writer's Model

A Rose by Any Other Name

Can Franco Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* smell quite as sweet as Shakespeare's original play? The 1968 film adaptation remains largely faithful to the original. The unfolding of the tragic love theme in both the play and the film is dramatic and moving. However, Zeffirelli uses narrative and film techniques to reduce the final scene to its emotional essence—the two young lovers and their tragic fate.

The final scene when Romeo and Juliet die serves as a good example of the choices Zeffirelli makes to get to the play's emotional essence. He changes the scene by cutting out plot events and dialogue, and by moving the final setting to a different location. Zeffirelli cuts out the scene at the tomb where Paris arrives, fights with Romeo, and is killed. By cutting the duel, the audience can focus on the tragic events that are about to unfold. Also, at the very end of the play, the entire cast comes onstage, and the Friar explains the tragedy. Zeffirelli moves this gathering to another place and time—the steps of the church on the following morning. The Friar's speech of explanation is cut out entirely, and the Prince bitterly tells the Capulets and Montagues that "all are punished" (V.3.295). The Prince's speech leaves the viewers to consider how the story would have ended if the Capulets and Montagues were not enemies.

(continued)

INTRODUCTION

Introduction of film, play, and creators

Thesis statement

Comparison of narrative techniques

Plot

Setting

Dialogue

(continued)

Discussion of film techniques

Camera shots

Zeffirelli also uses a variety of film techniques to create an emotional response beyond that created by the language of the play. Different camera shots allow the viewer to understand the emotions portrayed in the last scene when Romeo and Juliet die. For example, a long shot from the side provides an overview of the scene. Viewers see Juliet's still form and Romeo's anguished face as he speaks to her. Then, the camera moves to a close-up of Romeo's face as he sobs and drinks the poison. Viewers can experience Romeo's sadness and desperation as they watch him in this shot. Next, viewers see the extreme close-up on Juliet's left hand—the same one Romeo kissed as he died—as the hand stirs with life. Viewers feel hope and anguish at the same time, because even though Juliet is alive, she will soon find that her true love is not. The camera moves back to show Juliet's discovery of Romeo dead by her side. She then stabs herself and rests her head on Romeo's chest. The final close-up shot of the two lovers' faces illustrates the irony of the situation. In life the two could not be together, but in death they can.

Sound and lighting

Music and lighting also play a role in bringing out the emotional aspects of the scene. As Romeo enters this scene, he's shown on horseback approaching the tomb at night as ominous, sad music plays. The quiet of the nighttime graveyard is emphasized when the music fades and only the sound of chirping crickets remains. When Romeo enters the tomb, he sees Juliet in the blue-tinted darkness. A soft white light shines on her alone, giving a false sense of peace. As Romeo kisses her, the music swells in the full orchestral version of their love theme. Music is also played softly as Juliet's hand feels the edge of the stone bier and then her dress, but trumpets interrupt the soft music when Juliet sees Romeo dead. The rest of the scene is shot in a beautiful golden light focused on the two lovers alone, illustrating the purity of their love.

CONCLUSION

Restatement of thesis

Concluding thought

By concentrating on the deaths of Juliet and Romeo, Zeffirelli creates an emotionally wrenching and powerful scene that expresses the heart of Shakespeare's famous tragedy. Zeffirelli's treatment of this ancient tale of love allows the viewer to experience fully the tragedy of these "star-crossed lovers" (Prologue, line 6).

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PRACTICE & APPLY 2

Use the framework and Writer's Model to write the first draft of your essay. Be sure to include parenthetical citations whenever you quote lines from the play. For more on **giving credit to sources**, see page 620.

Revising

Revise Your Essay

The Big Picture The revision process is as important as any other phase of the writing process. Some even say it's the *most* important stage. When you revise, you shape both your ideas and how you express them so that they can best achieve their desired effects: strong content, clear organization, and effective style.

PEER REVIEW

As you revise, exchange papers with a classmate. He or she can help ensure that your ideas are organized in two ways: point-by-point and order of importance.

► **First Reading: Content and Organization** Evaluate the content and organization of your essay using the guidelines below as a **think sheet**. First, answer the questions in the left-hand column. If you need help answering them, refer to the tips in the middle column. Then, make the changes suggested by using the revision techniques in the right-hand column.



Rubric: Comparing a Play and a Film

Evaluation Questions	Tips	Revision Techniques
1 Is the opening engaging? Are the original play, its film version, and their creators introduced in the first paragraph?	► Underline the engaging opening. Bracket the introduction of the subjects.	► Add a relevant anecdote, an interesting quotation, or an intriguing question. Add a sentence introducing the play, film, and their creators.
2 Does the introduction include a clear thesis statement that identifies the response the filmmaker was trying to create?	► Highlight the thesis statement. Circle the part that identifies the filmmaker's intended response.	► Add a thesis statement, or reword the thesis statement to identify the response the filmmaker intended.
3 Does evidence support the discussion of each narrative and film technique?	► Put a star by each example from the play or film.	► Add evidence, or elaborate on existing evidence.
4 Is the essay well organized so that the reader can easily follow ideas?	► Label the specific narrative techniques. Number the film techniques.	► Rearrange the narrative techniques so that they are in point-by-point order. Reorder the film techniques so that they are arranged in order of importance.
5 Does the conclusion restate the thesis? Does it contain an interesting concluding thought or question?	► Highlight the sentence that restates the thesis. Circle the concluding thought or question.	► Add a sentence restating the thesis. If necessary, add a concluding thought or summary.

► **Second Reading: Style** Once you've revised the content and organization of your essay, you can concentrate on its style, or how you've expressed your ideas. One way to improve the style is to use active instead of passive voice. When a writer uses the **active voice**, the subject of the verb performs the action. When a writer uses the **passive voice**, the subject of the verb receives the action. The passive voice takes the attention away from the subject. Look at the following examples.

Passive Voice The tomb **is broken** into by Romeo.

Active Voice Romeo **breaks** into the tomb.

Notice how simple and direct the second sentence is. Follow the guidelines below to make sure your essay uses the active voice.



Style Guidelines

Evaluation Question

Tip

Revision Technique

- Does the essay contain verbs in the active voice?

► **Double underline** all *be* verbs (e.g., *be*, *am*, *is*, *are*, *was*, *were*, *been*). Do not underline *be* verbs that express a state of being or that are in quotations.

► **Reword** half of the *be* verb sentences so that the subject of the sentence performs the verb.

ANALYZING THE REVISION PROCESS

Study these revisions, and answer the questions that follow.

The Friar's speech of explanation is cut out entirely, and

reword

Prince bitterly tells the
the Capulets and Montagues ~~are bitterly told by the Prince~~ that

elaborate

"all are punished." *The Prince's speech leaves the viewers to consider how the story would have ended if the Capulets and Montagues were not enemies.*

Responding to the Revision Process

1. Why do you think the writer revised the first sentence?
2. How does adding the last sentence improve the passage?

SKILLS FOCUS

Writing Skills

Revise for content and style.

PRACTICE & APPLY 8

Revise the content, organization, and style of your essay, using the guidelines in this section. Exchange essays with a peer to get another person's ideas on how you might revise. Reviewing a peer's essay may even give you ideas on how to revise your own.

Publishing

Proofread and Publish Your Essay

A Last Look After you've revised your essay, be sure to proofread it. Check for and correct any errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics. Have someone else—a classmate, parent, or friend—proofread your essay, too. Two sets of eyes are always better than one since the other person may catch errors that you missed.

Finally, It's Showtime! Now that you have written, revised, and proofread your essay, it's time for others to read it. Here are some suggestions for publication.

- Watch the film with your family and let them read your essay. Be prepared to discuss your essay and listen to their ideas, thoughts, feelings, and opinions, too.
- With a group of classmates, form a panel discussion about the techniques filmmakers use in their movies. Use your essays as a springboard into the discussion.
- Post your essay to an online movie database or video store. Many invite people to send in comments—both positive and negative—of the videos they discuss or sell.

Reflect on Your Essay

That's a Wrap! After a sporting event, coaches and athletes often review videotapes of the game, match, or race to evaluate individual or team performance. This gives them the opportunity to see what they did well and where they may need improvement before their next outing. You, too, should look back on what you have done. Think about what you've learned in the process of writing this essay. Ask yourself the following questions to improve future writing assignments. The questions will also give you insight on how well you understand media presentations.

- What revisions do you think strengthened your essay the most? Why?
- What additional narrative and film techniques would you have used if you were doing a film adaptation of the same play? Explain each of your answers.
- How did writing this essay help you better understand the choices made by filmmakers?

PRACTICE & APPLY 4

Proofread your essay one last time. Publish your essay by using one of the ideas on this page, or think of your own publishing idea. Finally, write down answers to the reflection questions above.

TIP

Careful proofreading will help you make sure that your essay follows the **conventions** of standard American English. For example, you may have listed several different narrative or film techniques in one sentence. Check to make sure that you have used commas correctly between items in a series. For more on **serial commas**, see Commas, 12f, in the Language Handbook.

SKILLS FOCUS

Writing Skills

Proofread, especially for correct use of serial commas.