

Key success factors

- being able to express a reasonably sophisticated opinion
- using a range of vocabulary to describe what you are reviewing (plot, dialogue, characters, etc.)
- being able to summarize

ANALYSING A MODEL TEXT

- a Which of the following would normally influence you to read a certain book?
- A friend of yours has recommended it.
 - It's a best-seller – everybody is reading it.
 - You've seen and enjoyed a film based on it.
 - You were told to read it at school or university.
 - You have read a good review of it.
- b Read this newspaper book review. In which paragraph do you find the following information? Write 1–4 in the boxes, or DS if the review doesn't say. Does the review make you want to read the book?

- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | The strong points of the book |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | The basic outline of the plot |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | What happens in the end |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Where and when the story is set |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | The weaknesses of the book |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Whether the reviewer recommends the book or not |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | How good the English translation is |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Who the author is |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Who the main characters are |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | How much the book costs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Who the book is suitable for |

When writing a book or film review, give your reader a **brief** idea of the plot (without giving away the whole story!). Try to make your description as concise as possible to leave you space to give your own opinion.



The Girl Who Played with Fire

The Girl Who Played with Fire is the second novel in the Millennium trilogy by Swedish writer Stieg Larsson. A thriller, set in modern-day Sweden, it immediately became an international best-seller.

In this book the same main characters from the first book reappear, journalist Mikael Blomkvist and the extraordinary girl Lisbeth Salander, a freelance investigator. This time Lisbeth herself becomes the suspect of a triple murder. Three people are shot on the same day, and her fingerprints are found on the murder weapon. She goes quickly into hiding, and Mikael, whose life she saved in the previous book, is determined to prove her innocence. Devastated by the fact that two of the murder victims were colleagues of his, but convinced that Lisbeth cannot possibly have been involved, he works first on his own, and then with the police, to discover what really happened. Meanwhile Lisbeth, carefully keeping out of everyone's sight, is making her own investigations...

The great strength of this book, and what makes Larsson's books so different from other recent detective fiction and thrillers, is the character of Lisbeth. Most famous fictional detectives or investigators tend to be either middle-aged policemen with marital problems, female forensic scientists, or middle-aged male intellectuals. Lisbeth, however, is a young slightly autistic girl from a broken home, who is also a computer genius. She is an intriguing character, and in this book we find out a lot more about her, among other things who her father is, and why she spent her teenage years in a psychiatric hospital. My only criticism of the novel would be that the early sub-plot about Grenada is not very relevant and could have been cut.

Not only is this a complex and absolutely gripping novel, but it also tackles real problems in society, and most unusually I think for a sequel, is even better than its predecessor. For all lovers of crime novels and thrillers the Millennium trilogy is a must.

- c Look at these extracts from the second paragraph. Which words did the author leave out to make it more concise? Then read the rules for **Participle clauses** to check.

Because he is devastated by the fact that two of the murder victims were colleagues of his, but he is convinced that Lisbeth cannot possibly have been involved, he works first on his own, and then with the police, to discover what really happened.

Meanwhile Lisbeth, who is carefully keeping out of everyone's sight, is making her own investigations...

Participle clauses

The writer uses participles (*devastated, convinced, keeping*) instead of a subject + verb. Past participles replace verbs in the passive, and present participles (*-ing* forms) replace verbs in the active. The subject of the clause is usually the same as the subject of the main clause.

Participle clauses can be used:

- instead of a conjunction (*after, as, when, because, although, etc.*) + subject + verb, e.g. *Devastated by the fact...* instead of *Because he is devastated...*
- instead of a relative clause, e.g. *carefully keeping* instead of *who is carefully keeping*.

- d Rewrite the **highlighted** phrases to make them more concise using participle clauses.

- 1 As she believes him to be the murderer, Anya is absolutely terrified.
- 2 Armelle, who has been forced to marry a man she does not love, decides to throw herself into her work.
- 3 Simon, who realizes that the police are after him, tries to get out of the country.
- 4 It was first published in 1903 and it has been reprinted many times.
- 5 Because he is deeply ashamed of how he has behaved, Luke cannot face his family and friends.
- 6 It is set during the First World War, and it tells the story of a young soldier.
- 7 When he hears the shot, Mark rushes into the house.

- e Underline the adverbs of degree in these phrases from the review. What effect do they have on the adjectives?

Lisbeth, however, is a young, slightly autistic girl from a broken home...
Not only is this a complex and absolutely gripping novel...

- f Use your instinct. Cross out any adverbs which don't fit in these sentences. Tick if all are possible.
- 1 My only criticism is that the plot is **a bit** / **slightly** / **a little** implausible.
 - 2 The last chapter is **really** / **very** / **absolutely** fascinating.
 - 3 The end of the novel is **rather** / **pretty** / **quite** disappointing.
 - 4 The denouement is **rather** / **incredibly** / **extremely** thrilling.
- g Where all the adverbs are possible, is there any difference in meaning or register?

PLANNING WHAT TO WRITE

Brainstorm the content

- a Think of a book or film that you have read or seen recently. Write a paragraph of approximately 100 words explaining who the main characters are and summarizing the plot, but without giving away the ending. Use the present tense, and try to include at least one participle clause.
- b Swap your paragraph with other students to see if they can identify the book or film.

TIPS for writing a book / film review

- Choose a book or film that you know well.
- Organize the review into clear paragraphs.
- Make sure you use a suitable style, neither very formal nor informal.
- Use the present tense when you describe the plot. Using participle clauses will help to keep it concise.
- Try to use a range of adjectives that describe as precisely as possible how the book or film made you feel, e.g. *gripping, moving*, etc. (see page 41). Use adverbs of degree to modify them, e.g. *absolutely gripping*.
- Remember that even a good review will usually include some criticism as well as praise.

WRITING

A student magazine has asked for reviews of recent books and films. You are going to write a complete review.

DRAFT your review, using the same paragraph structure as the model. It should be approximately 250 words.

- Paragraph 1: The title of the book or film, and the author or director. Where and when it is set.
- Paragraph 2: The plot, including information about the main characters.
- Paragraph 3: What you liked about the book / film, and any criticisms you may have.
- Paragraph 4: A summary of your opinion and a recommendation.

EDIT the review, making sure you've covered all the main points and making sure it is the right length.

CHECK the review for mistakes in grammar, spelling, punctuation and register.