

**Directions:**

1. *Annotate*, showing evidence of close reading
2. *Complete the questions*

**"[Best] Film Ever!!!" How do movie blurbs work?**

By Christopher Beam, Posted Wednesday, Nov. 25, 2009, at 6:08 PM ET, slate.com

A full-page ad in the *New York Times* for *Fantastic Mr. Fox* includes the endorsement: "Grade A. The #1 Must-See Movie' For Thanksgiving." Although this quote is attributed to *Entertainment Weekly*, it does not actually appear in the magazine's review. Likewise, in his *Rolling Stone* article on *Pirate Radio*, Peter Travers never calls the British film a "Rip-Roaring Comedy," as one newspaper ad states. How much latitude do movie studios have in writing blurbs?

A fair amount. There's no official check on running a misleading movie blurb, aside from the usual laws against false advertising. Studios do have to submit advertising materials like newspaper ads and trailers to the Motion Picture Association of America for approval. But the MPAA reviews the ads for their tone and content, not for the accuracy of their citations. When a new movie comes out, the studio's marketing department scans the reviews, picks the most positive quotes, and figures out how to represent them in advertisements. Publicity teams don't necessarily try to make blurbs line up perfectly with the original reviews. They do, however, generally avoid wild inaccuracies, so that the reviewer doesn't throw a fit or file a lawsuit.

It's typical for studios to gently fudge quotes—for brevity, as much as anything. For example, when Travers reviewed the Michael Jackson documentary *This Is It*, he wrote that "[w]atching his struggle is illuminating, unnerving and unforgettable." The newspaper ad shortened it to: "Illuminating and unforgettable." As a courtesy, studios will often run the new, condensed quote by the critic before sending it to print. Studios also frequently contact critics who they know liked a film and ask for an advance quote. (That's likely what happened with the "Rip-Roaring" example above.) Sometimes, a studio will conflate a movie review and another article about the film in the same publication. Take the *Mr. Fox* example above. The "A" grade comes from the review itself, while the "#1 Must-See Movie" quote refers to the fact that *Mr. Fox* appeared at the top of *EW*'s "Must List." The studio simply condensed all that information into one quote. Some studios are careful to use ellipses and full sentences to convey context. But proper punctuation isn't expected. Indeed, ad copy writers tend to be quite liberal with their exclamation points.

Ads do occasionally rip quotes from their context in a misleading way. For example, *Entertainment Weekly* gave the 1995 film *Se7en* a "B" grade. In the review, the critic praised the film's introductory credits sequence as "a small masterpiece of dementia." But the newspaper ads ran a banner that simply said, "A Masterpiece," as if the critic had been referring to the whole film. (The studio changed the ad when the reviewer complained.) Critics will often praise a single person's performance in an otherwise middling film, which the studio then takes out of context. A negative review of the 1997 film *Hoodlum*, for instance, praised actor Lawrence Fishburne as "fierce, magnetic, irresistible." The studio then slapped the word "Irresistible" on all their ads.

Companies will occasionally use negative quotes in promoting a film. When *Siskel & Ebert* gave 1997's *Lost Highway* "two thumbs down," director David Lynch proudly ran the quote along the top of newspaper ads, calling it "two more great reasons to see" the film. Likewise, ads for the TV show *Gossip Girl* famously blared that a newspaper called the show "every parent's nightmare."

In at least one case, a studio actually *invented* a movie critic. In 2001, Sony Pictures ran ads for films like *Hollow Man*, *The Animal*, and *A Knight's Tale* that featured rave quotes from "David Manning of The Ridgefield Press." (The blurbs praised Heath Ledger as "this year's hottest new star" and called *Hollow Man* "one hell of a scary ride.") The publication exists—it's a newspaper in Connecticut—but the critic does not. Sony had to pay the state of Connecticut \$326,000 for falsely attributing the quotes and settled a separate suit on behalf of film fans for \$1.5 million.

COMPLETE SENTENCES ONLY!!!!!! (except #3)

Look it up: What is a blurb?

In the first paragraph, what is meant by the word "latitude" in the sentence: "How much latitude do movie studios have in writing blurbs?"

Write two ORIGINAL blurbs for the book you're reading for independent reading.

Write an ORIGINAL thirty-to-forty-word capsule review for the book you're reading for independent reading.