

Genres and generic conventions

Below is a list of some of the main genres in film. For each genre there are broad descriptions of typical plots and characters, some aspects of mise-en-scene and theme. Genre is a very fluid idea however, and a film may not easily fit into just one genre, so sub-genres are also listed. Use the column on the right to add some examples of films that fit each genre, including any films which you think suit sub-genres.

EXTENSION: for each, list 2 or 3 reasons why each example film fits in with that genre.

Genre	Conventions	Examples
Action	Action films usually feature high energy, physical stunts and chases with rapid pacing, often created via fast editing. Action films tend to feature rescues, battles, fights, escapes and destruction. Storylines tend to be full of adventure and often span multiple locations with adventurous and characters are generally often “two-dimensional” in being fairly basic and suiting broad stereotypes. Action films are designed for escapism and can also feature fantastical action or stories. Spy/espionage films will fit into this genre as well as superhero films, martial arts films and disaster films.	
Adventure	Adventure films are exciting stories, with interesting experiences and set pieces set in a variety of exotic locales. Whilst featuring many similar aspects to the action genre, adventure films tend to see characters travelling around trying to find a Macguffin. These films can include traditional swashbucklers, serialised films, expeditions for lost continents, explorations of jungles, deserts or even space, treasure hunts and any other form of “search” or “hunt”.	
Comedy	Comedies are light-hearted films that are deliberately designed to amuse and provoke laughter (with one-liners, jokes, etc.) by exaggerating language, situations, action, characters, actions and relationships. Through the history of filmmaking comedies have developed and varied and sub-genres include screwball, slapstick, spoofs and parodies, romantic comedies, absurdity and body-swaps as well as many others.	

<p>Crime & Gangster</p>	<p>Crime & Gangster films centre around the cynical and sinister actions of criminals. These can include organised crimes that involve gangsters or “mobsters”. Other characters include bank robbers, underworld characters or figures, hoodlums, petty criminals, gang members and Kingpins who operate outside the law, stealing and murdering their way through life. Criminal and gangster films can also include the classic film noir or detective-mystery films, as well as serial-killer films and many ‘police procedural’ films which follow the role of the police and detectives as they seek to punish those on the wrong side of the law with the audience following how they go about catching the criminals.</p>	
<p>Drama</p>	<p>Dramas are serious films. They are driven by intense plots that aim to portray realistic characters, settings, situations and stories that involve intense character development. Dramas tend to eschew special-effects or action though some of these elements may feature. Traditionally, dramatic films are probably the largest film genre but perhaps because it is a very broad genre that can apply to a wide range of sub genres. Some examples include melodramas, epics (historical dramas), or romantic genres. Dramatic biographical films (or "biopics") are a major sub-genre.</p>	
<p>Epics/Historical</p>	<p>Epics and Historical are the films that generally deal with history, of grand occasion and large, significant events that shape the history of the world or the world of the film. Typical sub-genres include costume dramas, historical dramas, war films and films involving medieval periods of time. Often these films cover a large expanse of time and tend to be set against a vast, panoramic backdrop. Epics and Historical films often share elements of with adventure films genre, often featuring quests or hunts. Key to an Epic and Historical film is the character of the heroic figure and often the broadly played villain. Setting and costumes tend to be lavish and expensive in ambition and the films tend to high production values. Another key name for a sub-genre of these films is the “sword and sandal” film, popular in Hollywood in the 1930s-60s.</p>	

<p>Horror</p>	<p>Horror films are designed to frighten and to invoke our worst fears. Horror films often provide a cathartic experience and the use of a terrifying and/or shocking finale is key to this. Horror films cover a wide variety of style and sub-genres, from the earliest silent films that used lighting and shadow to create the sense of a malevolent threat, to modern CGI monsters and hyper-real humans with detailed special effects. Horror films are very flexible films in terms of story and genre, meaning that they can be set in space as a sci-fi film, with the menace or monster coming from another planet, or when Earth is threatened by aliens. More traditional horror films however include the slasher film, serial killer films, zombies, mutated monster films and traditional folk tales turned into something even more ghoulish, such as vampires and sea creatures.</p>	
<p>Musical</p>	<p>Musical/dance films are cinematic experiences that use full-scale scores or song and dance routines as part of the narrative. Often, they use the song and dance as a way to help explain the story and develop the narrative, as well as explore the emotions of a character. Musicals were once a very popular genre in Hollywood and continue to be in other cultures and cinema across the world, but they've influenced the way that choreography and staging is used across a wide variety of genres including the martial arts genre and the romantic comedy. Major subgenres include the musical comedy or the concert film.</p>	
<p>War</p>	<p>War (and anti-war) films demonstrate how combat fighting (against nations or humankind) on land, sea, or in the air provide the primary plot or background for the action of the film. These often help to then portray key themes about humanity. War films are often infused with elements from other genres, such as action, adventure, drama, romance, dark comedy, suspense, and even epics and westerns. Many war films will reflect real-world events and recreate key moments from history, but equally they can portray imaginative and fictional events.</p>	

<p>Westerns</p>	<p>Westerns were one of the first major genres of the American film industry, helping to define the days of the expansive American frontier and ultimately, the death of it. They are one of the oldest, most enduring genres with very recognisable plots, elements, and characters (six-guns, horses, dusty towns and trails, cowboys, Indians, etc.). Over time, westerns have been re-defined, re-invented and expanded, dismissed, re-discovered, and spoofed.</p>	
<p>Science Fiction</p>	<p>Sci-fi films are imaginative, visionary and often fiercely ambitious films. Many are set in space or the future and tend to feature morally-sound heroes and shadowy villains. Key elements include aliens, distant planets, impossible quests, improbable settings and fantastical technology. Elements cut as dangerous technology and power and extraordinary monsters or other are often created by mad scientists or megalomaniacs with vast ambitions. They are sometimes an offshoot of fantasy films or superhero films and share some similarities with action/adventure films, especially in the use of key action set-pieces. Science fiction often expresses the potential of technology to improve or destroy humankind.</p>	