

# The Trailer

**Theatrical trailers** are 2-3 minute advertisements for movies that play in theatres before another movie. The term comes from them being originally shown at the end of a movie, though today trailers are almost always shown before the film begins.

The vast majority of trailers are made up of film scenes cut out of context. Trailers of this type are quite inexpensive to produce and are usually effective. The most common technique is to show some the highlights of the film. Thus for an action movie some of the most elaborate special effects shots will be cut into the trailer. For a comedy two or three of the funniest jokes will be put in the trailer. Dramas, which tend not to have five-second highlights, tend to focus more on plot.

There are a few films that do not use edited footage from the actual film, but instead created their own mini-movies to sell the film. When Terminator II was released, its trailer featured elaborate special effects scenes that were never intended to be in the film itself.

A common occurrence is for a trailer to include scenes that were originally filmed to be part of the movie, but were later cut. A trailer might also use a different take of a scene than the one that appears in the movie.

All trailers also emphasize what high profile stars are in the film, sometimes listing some of the awards these actors have achieved. Noted directors and producers are also listed, but since few directors and producers have name recognition among the general population far more common is to mention a previous successful film the director or producer released in the same genre.

As well as highlights from the film, another feature of the trailer is a voice-over. The voice-over is usually essential to inform the audience about the plot of the film, as brief disconnected scenes rarely can do this. Text can also help.

The end of a trailer is marked with a brief shot of a list of the main cast and production team. This list normally contains dozens of names and is impossible to read in the brief period it is on the screen. It may be insisted upon by union contracts, however.

After this listing of credits is one final clip from the film, of only two or three seconds. Research has shown that this clip is what audiences most clearly remember. In comedies it is very common for it to be a brief bit of physical comedy, often involving an injury to a character. In dramas it is more common for it to be a single line that the trailer's creators hope will create interest in seeing the entire film.

While some filmmakers leave the creation of the trailer to the studio, many others closely supervise the task. A trailer must be regarded as an important part of a film itself. Almost all of the audience that sees a film will have seen either the trailer or a briefer television commercial. What is revealed in the trailer greatly impacts on the level of suspense and the audience expectations. For instance, the fact that an entire audience is aware that a film is about a serial killer because of a trailer, will greatly reduce the surprise they feel when a character is killed.

How much to give away in a trailer is a controversial question. Filmmaker Robert Zemeckis argues that a trailer should tell everything about a film, even its ending, as audiences do not want to pay a small fortune to see films unless they know exactly what they are paying for. Most other filmmakers disagree and believe that some surprise is necessary and that a trailer should show no more than is needed to convince the audience to see a film.

Trailers before films are placed there by the film's distributor, not the cinema. Thus trailers almost always advertise another film from the same firm. This makes a hit film even more valuable as it means more people will see ads for the company's other films. This ability can also affect when films are released. If a studio has a guaranteed hit they will schedule similar films for release soon after so that the audience who saw the trailer before the first film will see the second. An extreme example of this is Miramax's decision to delay the North American release of *Hero* by two years mostly so that they could widely advertise the film before Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill 1*.

This advertising is especially valuable as it can be carefully targeted. Movies appealing to one age group or demographic will have trailers for films targeting that same group. Trailers tend to appeal to specific markets, and if you compare different trailers for the same movie, you'll find that they also portray specific themes depending on their intended market.

## Trailer Assignment

Your task is to create a trailer for a fictitious or real movie of your imagination.

### Criteria

- Include a group detailed **approved** storyboard with at least 16 frames (in Pencil)
- A full typed script
- Be completed by 4-5 people in the class
- Be 30 seconds to 1.5 minutes in length (must be in 30 second increments)
- Must contain a variety of camera angles
- Must contain theatrical voice-overs
- Must be edited to eliminate unwanted footage and have smooth transitions
- Must be professional shot (smooth, still shots)
- Must have an appropriate subject and content
- Must get the audience's attention and make them want to see the fictitious movie
- Must emphasize what high profile stars or directors are in the film
- Must contain a brief shot of a list of the main cast and production team, the release date and the green "Motion Picture Association of America" screen
- Create your own simple score in Garageband as well as use existing music.