Review

Evaluate a documentary's ambition and limits

Full exam-style C2 Proficiency Part 2 review task. Original independent practice, not an official exam paper.

An arts magazine is publishing reviews of documentaries that might change viewers' attitudes. Write a review of the fictional documentary Second Life. Briefly describe its approach, evaluate how effectively it persuades a general audience to value repair, and explain who would benefit most from watching it. The film follows three repair specialists, uses detailed workshop footage and lets damaged objects' owners explain their attachments. It gives little attention to repair costs. You may invent consistent details of individual scenes. Write 280-320 words.

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Write your response on separate paper before studying the model below.

One possible response

Second Life: the patience behind repair

A cracked radio, a torn coat and a clock that has fallen silent might seem unpromising subjects for a documentary. In Second Life, however, three repair specialists turn such objects into a quietly compelling challenge to the assumption that replacement is always progress. The film's strength lies in making attention itself interesting.

Instead of accelerating towards a succession of satisfying transformations, the camera lingers over hesitation: a seam examined twice, a component tested and rejected. These moments reveal expertise as a series of judgements rather than a miraculous talent. They also give a general audience time to understand why an apparently minor repair can demand considerable skill. I found the restraint more persuasive than a commentary announcing that our habits must change.

The owners' accounts add another dimension. One describes the radio as the remaining sound of a familiar kitchen, an association that makes its value difficult to express as a purchase price. Such testimony could easily become sentimental, but the film returns to practical work before emotion overwhelms the argument. We are invited to care about objects without being told that every damaged possession must be saved.

There is, nevertheless, an awkward gap in this invitation. The documentary barely asks what professional repair costs or how those costs compare with replacement. Viewers already sympathetic to its values may overlook that omission; those weighing a limited household budget cannot. Admiration for a specialist does not automatically make that specialist's time affordable.

I would therefore recommend Second Life most strongly to curious viewers willing to reconsider what they count as value, rather than to anyone seeking a consumer guide. It does not resolve the economics of repair, but it gives us better reasons to ask about them. As a catalyst for discussion, its thoughtful incompleteness is more productive than a tidy sermon would have been.

This is an original model, not an official marked script. Other approaches can also meet the task.

Understand the task and model

Task and audience

The magazine needs an engaging review for a general arts readership. The task requires approach, persuasive effectiveness and an audience-specific recommendation. This is not a plot summary or a general essay about recycling. The model is one possible response and uses invented scenes permitted by the prompt.

Plan

Use a title and opening judgement, then assess the workshop filming, the owners' testimony and the omission of costs. End by specifying the kind of viewer who would benefit. Each descriptive detail has an evaluative purpose: the reader learns both what the film does and why that choice matters.

Content and evaluation

"The camera lingers over hesitation" introduces a precise technique; the following sentences explain its effect on the audience's understanding of expertise. The owner's kitchen association illustrates emotional value, while the return to practical work explains why the review does not dismiss the film as sentimental. These are supported judgements, not lists of flattering adjectives.

A qualified recommendation

The cost criticism is connected to a specific audience: people on limited budgets. The conclusion then recommends the film as a catalyst for discussion rather than a consumer guide. This distinction makes praise and criticism consistent. A more negative recommendation would also work if it explained why the omission defeats the film's stated purpose.

Communicative achievement, organisation and language

The opening list attracts a magazine reader; first-person "I found" makes the evaluation personal without dominating it. "There is, nevertheless" marks the turn to criticism. "A catalyst for discussion" is precise because the ending explains what discussion the film enables. Control and clarity matter more than the number of elaborate expressions.

Pitfalls

Avoid inventing prizes, factual claims about a real film or scenes that contradict the supplied brief. Do not spend most of the word allowance describing three repairs and add a one-line recommendation. Explain why a strength or omission matters to the intended viewer; merely naming it is insufficient.

Check your own response

- Have I briefly described the film's approach?
- Have I evaluated its persuasive effect with specific details?
- Have I explained why the omission of costs matters?
- Have I identified who would benefit most?
- Do praise and criticism lead to one coherent judgement?
- Is the review 280-320 words, with a suitable magazine tone?