

Verisimilitude in Cinema (Cinematic Realism)

SECTION ONE

By [David Price](#)

Verisimilitude, apart from being a long word that feels really nice to say, is about the appearance of reality or truth. This isn't absolute reality, *but the reality of the world [as created] in a film*. When someone says, "That wasn't realistic" about a film, what they probably mean is that it wasn't realistic within the context of the film.

Verisimilitude is enhanced by a filmmaker presenting certain facts and parameters of a film's reality, then sticking to them. So, if we're told at the beginning of the film everyone has spaceships and it takes about 40 minutes to get the moon at top speed, you can't then show them getting to an emergency on Pluto in an hour. This is unrealistic within the context of the film.

If the audience feels confident in the facts and reality of the film world, then they can suspend their disbelief, accept what they're seeing, and become immersed in the story and world the filmmaker is crafting.

To use an actual example, in *Terminator 2* we start with a look into the future where we see the human resistance fighting against machines, we're then taken back to the present day. This does two things to help foster the verisimilitude for the crazy shit that is to come; 1) we're shown that time is fluid, 2) we see that machine's are very advanced in the future and can fight in wars. With this established the audience is more likely to buy into the idea that a big

humanoid robot with an Austrian accent can be shot up by the LAPD and keep on going. In reality that whole idea is absurd, but in the reality of *Terminator 2* it's believable. If however the Terminator had gone on to run for office in an attempt to save humanity through politics that would have been unbelievable in the context of the film, as the audience is never shown that the machine has the aptitude for double-crossing and back-stabbing necessary for politics.

Guys,
although verisimilitude is related to realism it is not the same thing. Verisimilitude is realism only in the context of the film itself and not necessarily the real world outside the film. Verisimilitude is the *appearance of being real* (that is why, science fiction, for example, works). So, one can also refer to verisimilitude in films as "cinematic realism."

—Instructor

Verisimilitude doesn't just apply to science fiction and action films set in fantastical world, it's also crucial to the success of dramas, comedies and all other narrative fiction. Every story presents a certain view of reality and asks the audience to *suspend their disbelief* in some way, whether it's the fugitive escaping from right under the cop's noses or the couple in the romantic drama risking it all for love. These things may be unlikely in the real world, but if the filmmaker does their job well then we'll believe they can happen in the film world.

And that's verisimilitude, kids!

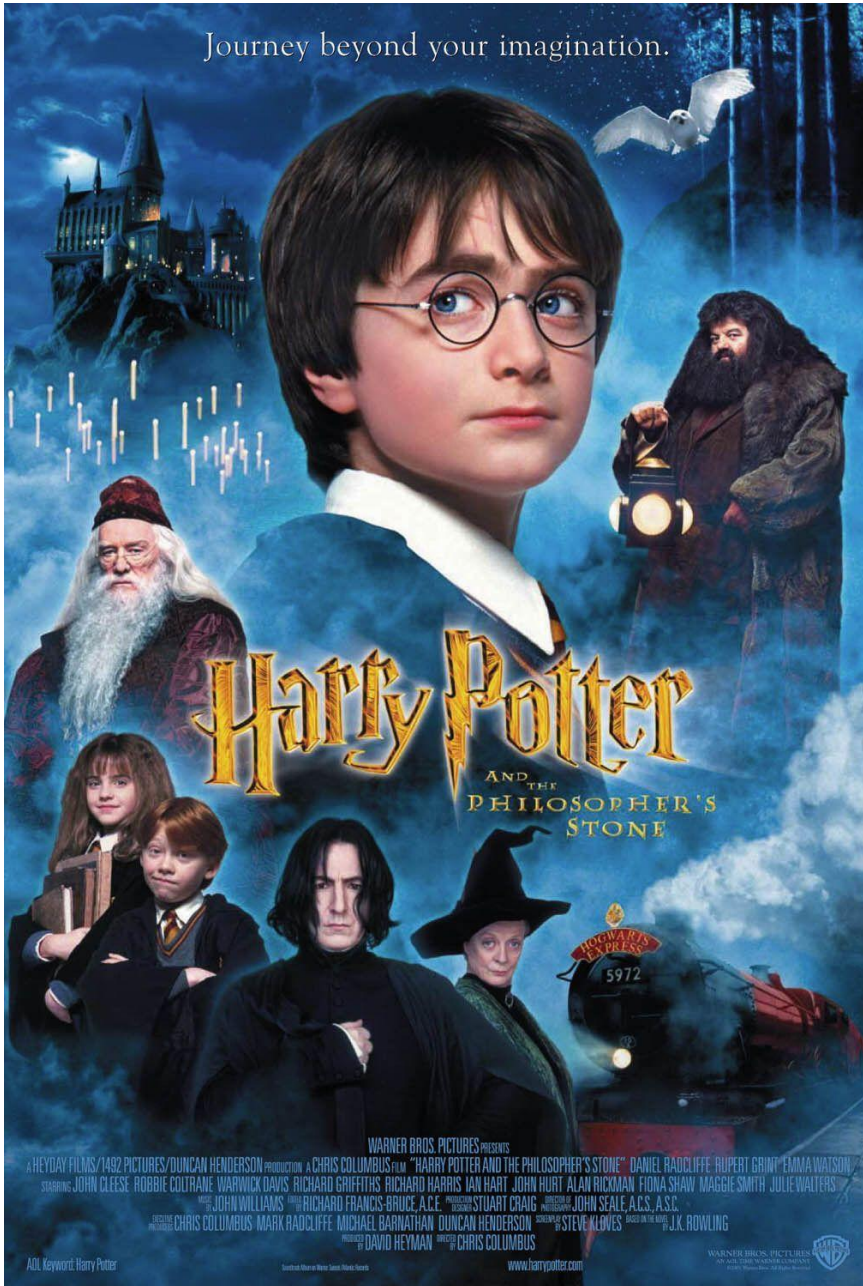
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<http://gorillafilmonline.com/features/film-stuff-explained/verisimilitude/>



SECTION TWO

What is Verisimilitude?



Aside from being fun to say, *verisimilitude* (pronounced 'VAIR-ih-sih-MILL-ih-tude') simply means 'the quality of resembling reality.' A work of art, or any part of a work of art, has verisimilitude if it seems realistic. The word verisimilitude is derived from the Latin words *verum* and *similis* meaning "truth" and "similar." A verisimilitudinous [story](#) has details, subjects, and [characters](#) that seem similar or true to real life.

Examples of Verisimilitude

A truly verisimilitudinous story can draw in the reader so much so that he or she feels sympathy for the characters, believes their dialogues could be real, and believes that what happens could really happen in the real world. Here are a few simple examples of verisimilitude:

Example 1

A typically kind [character](#) says "I'm so very sorry! It was an accident!" after accidentally tripping someone on the bus.

In this example, the story has verisimilitude because a character who is known for being kind would, predictably, apologize after accidentally tripping someone.

Example 2

As Aaron stepped out of the house into the afternoon light, his hair seemed to change color; the orange light of the [setting](#) sun reflected off hairs red, brown, blonde, and even a few white.

One common kind of verisimilitude is accurate detailed description; you have to observe things well to describe them in realistic detail.

Example 3

The sky is dark and cloudy at the beginning of a story. By the end of the day in the story, it has begun to rain.

This is a simple yet important example of verisimilitude: if you are writing a story and mention storm clouds, a storm must follow. Even the smallest details are of the utmost importance when it comes to creating a believably realistic story.

The Importance of Verisimilitude

Verisimilitude is important because stories are meant to take us into their world– to feel real as we read them. If a story has unrealistic, confusing, or illogical details, the flow of the story is interrupted and it is not believable. Just as movies cannot show actors changing into their costumes or being called by their real names off screen, stories cannot lose their verisimilitude for a moment. An author with strong verisimilitude can write in a way that is emotionally compelling and seems true. A great story can make you cry, laugh, smile, or frown due to its verisimilitude.

Related Terms

Biography and Autobiography

Two [genres](#) in which verisimilitude is particularly important are biography and [autobiography](#). Biographies are books about real people's lives, such as "Alexander the Great: The Macedonian Who Conquered the World" by Sean Patrick. On the other hand, autobiographies are biographies written by the actual person, such as "Look Me in the Eye: My Life with Asperger's" by John Elder Robison. Verisimilitude is important in autobiographies and biographies because stories that claim to represent real people must do so realistically and honestly. Works of creative nonfiction such as biography and autobiography must be carefully fact-checked before they can be published to prevent lies or mistakes from being presented as the truth.

Historical Fiction

Verisimilitude is equally important in the [genre](#) of historical fiction. Historical fiction is fiction that tells a story happening during a certain historical time period. Verisimilitude is important for historical fiction because historical fiction, by definition, attempts to represent its historical setting and characters accurately. Historicity, or historical authenticity, is key for a historical fiction piece to convince readers that they are truly stepping into another time.

Suspension of Disbelief

Samuel Taylor Coleridge coined the term "suspension of disbelief," meaning that a [narrative](#) should have enough verisimilitude so that readers can "suspend their disbelief" or choose to forget that what they're reading isn't real. Otherwise, a narrative is not doing its job, so it's crucial to write with enough verisimilitude for suspension of disbelief.

Truism

Whereas verisimilitude is resemblance to truth in description or representation, a truism is a statement that is so simply true, that most people would say it has little value; "it goes without saying." Here are a few examples:

Example 1

Tomorrow's another day.

You will often find empty truisms among "inspirational" quotes. This one definitely goes without saying.

Example 2

April showers bring May flowers.

It is also a commonly known fact that rain allows flowers to grow.

Example 3

You won't know until you try.

Another inspirational quote. These often say things that are strangely encouraging considering that they don't tell us anything we didn't already know!

Whereas suspension of disbelief and verisimilitudes are valuable kinds of truth, truisms are less so. Probably because verisimilitude is about creating something with a realistic quality, while truisms just tell you something very general.

In Closing

Verisimilitude is just how real a narrative seems, how true-to-life it is. Movies, TV shows, songs, stories, and poems with verisimilitude draw in the audience and convince us to pretend they are real.

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<https://literaryterms.net/verisimilitude/>

