

# Film poster codes and conventions

Film posters are a form of **promotion** just like a film trailer. Because a film poster is a physical piece and is not a film piece, the posters can promote the film in a lot of different places. Known places for film posters to be seen are on **big billboards**, **bus stops**, on **buses**, **underground stations** and of course, around the **cinema** to show future film releases. Because film posters are a physical thing, there is no limit on where they can advertise films.



Any poster promotes something, so they aim to **catch people's eye** for them to read information on the poster in hope of making them interested in the product and therefore interested to find out more or in this case, to go and watch the film.



Because my chosen genre is **Psychological Thriller**, I will be looking at real Psychological Thriller and regular Thriller film posters to help me when creating my own.



Icons have an important role in film posters because audiences only have the one poster for them to understand the **genre of the film**, which will result in them either liking the poster or ignoring it. If the story/theme and most importantly genre are not clear in the film poster, there is a risk that the film will lose out on an audience.

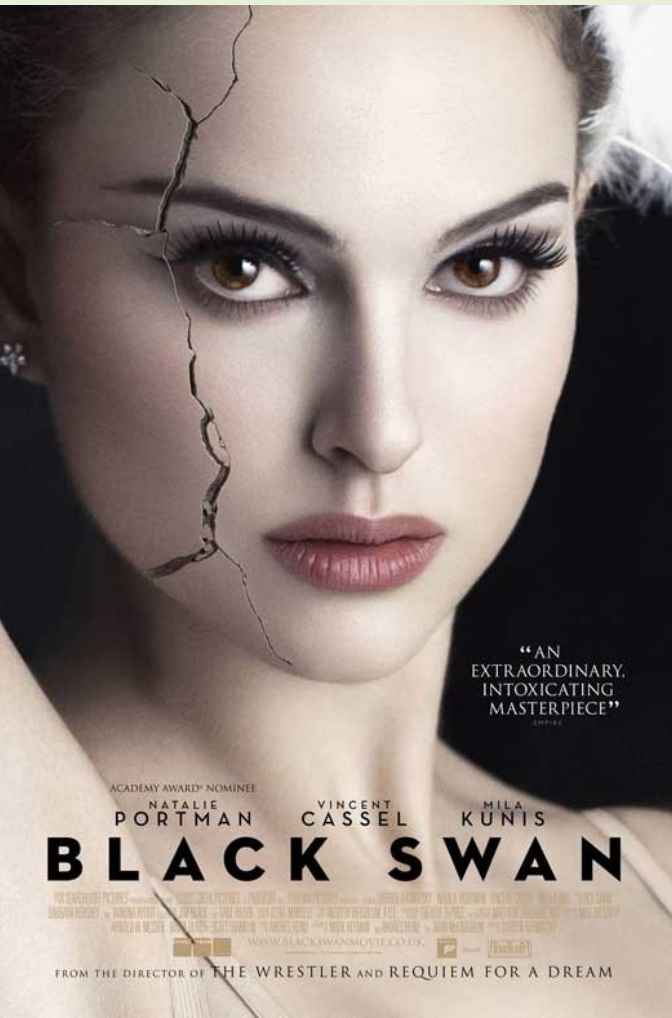
The Dark Knight poster shows a building on fire, a man in a superhero suit and the whole colour of the poster is dark. From first glance, this poster is quite obviously an **action**.

This is one of the original posters for Some Like It Hot, which shows three characters who are in a funny position carrying a woman. From the bright colours, fun font and poses of the characters, Some Like It Hot looks like a **comedy** from first glance.

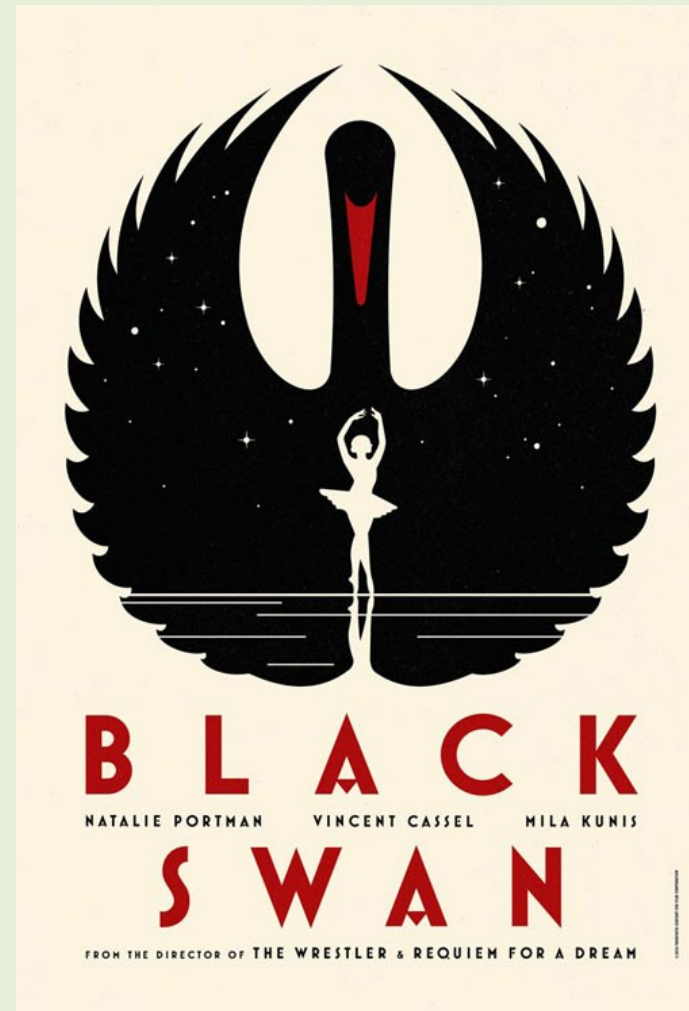


# Image

Film posters always contain a main image which is what audiences, passer-by's and people see when the poster catches their eye. These can be either stills from the film, character shots but they always contain some type of iconography to reveal the film's genre and something about the film. Images on posters portray the narrative of the film, so they have to be clear.



These are two different posters for a film. The one on the left is the official UK poster, which is an image of the main character. The feathers on the top reveal that there is something bird like in the film and the woman's face is cracked like china. This reveals something about the character's fate in the film. The one on the right is a drawing special edition poster. The drawing shows a ballerina but inside a drawing of a swan.





# Image continued...

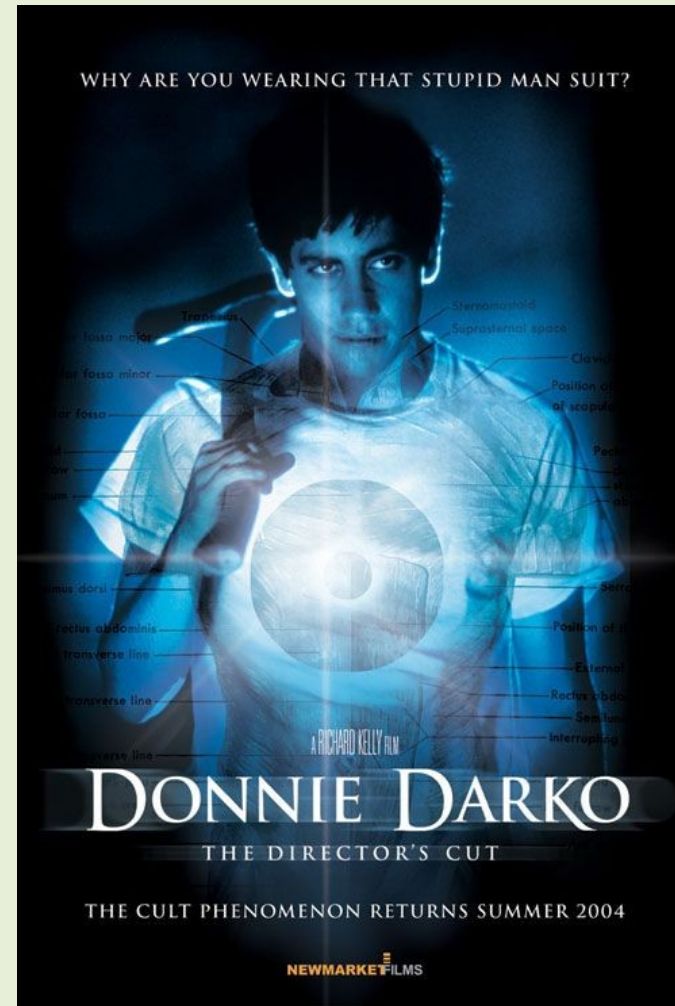
The poster on the left for Donnie Darko shows has one image over black, which is in the shape of a bunny that is relevant to the film. Inside the bunny shape there are the bunny's eyes and mouth, but there are a mixture of images of characters from the film, the most important being bigger an in the centre. The image is also quite blurred and is mainly blue, these are themes of the film.



The poster on the right was brought out to advertise the re-release, therefore it was able to use a different look in the poster.

This time, the main character is in the centre of the poster, holding a prop and having a light glow coming from his chair, all of which are relevant to the film.

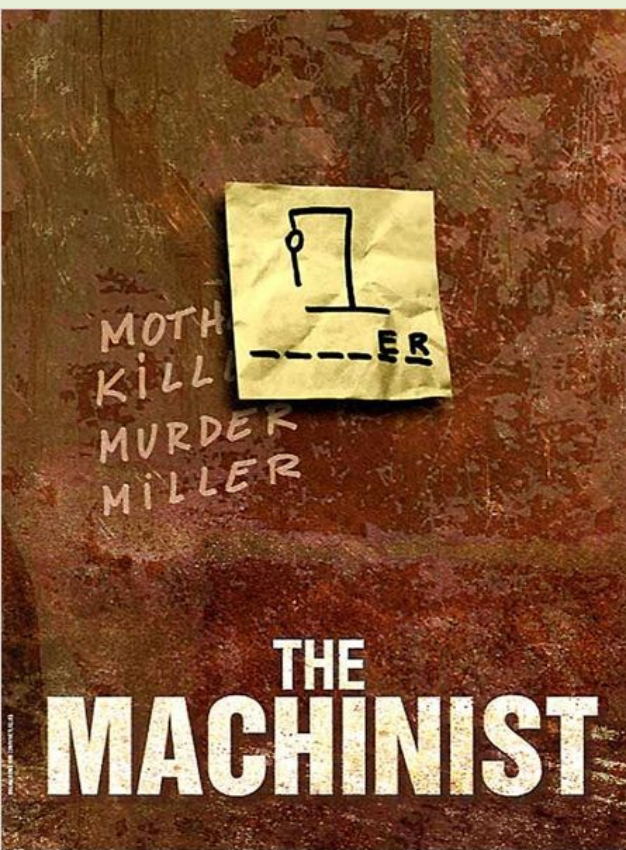
(Because this was a re-release (director's cut) the poster also used a well known line from the film as people could relate the line with the film)



# Image continued...

The poster on the left is a teaser for The Machinist, as it has no official information, actors and directors, etc... The poster on the right is a poster for the film to help promote it.

The poster on the left has only the film's title and a post-it note of a game of hangman, showing a few letters but is not complete. Under this post-it are words which end in the letters the hangman does, from Mother, Killer, Murder and Miller. All are relevant to the film's plot and show in some way that there are dark theme to the film (killer, murder). The background is quite dark and grungy, which could reflect the atmosphere of the film.



The poster on the right has an image of the main character from the film, with bruises on his face while he looks across to something past the camera's point (and therefore the audiences). His face is blocked by an image in the foreground of white blocks, these make the character look trapped and audiences would wonder why this man has to be covered up or indeed trapped. These are psychological thriller codes and conventions.



# Title

Film posters **nearly always have the film's title on it**, because if not, no one will know what the film is called and would be able to find out more information.

There are a few expectations of this when it comes to teaser posters (when the film hasn't been made yet but the film has already generated a lot of talk) or because the film is so well known, that it doesn't need the title.

An example of this is a poster for the final Harry Potter film, which didn't feature the film's title just the line 'It all ends' followed by the date. The film distribution could take this risk with Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows part 2, because it was pretty certain that the film would get an audience as there had previously been 7 films. The impact the poster has without the title is that the film is still recognisable and the images show the two central characters who have to fight for the end.

My film will not be well known in the run up to it's production and neither will it be part of a series, so my company cannot afford to not use the title of my film in the poster.





# Title continued...



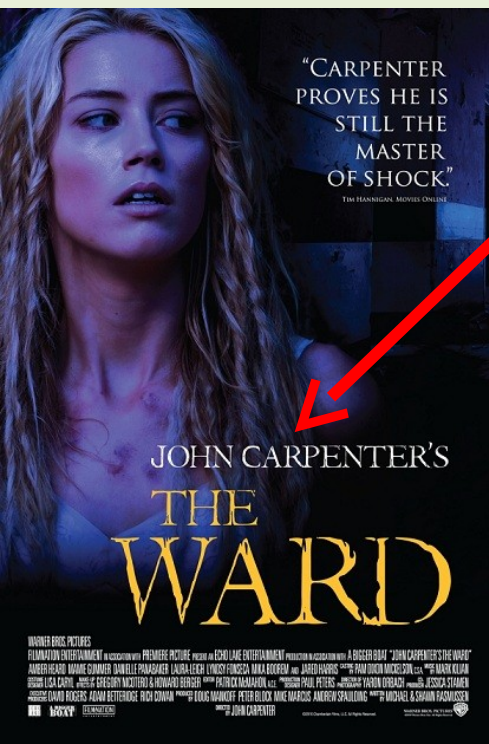
Title



# Directors, producers and actors

Usually the director and producer of the film is displayed, especially if the **director and producers are well known** and are the **main selling point of the film** (eg. big name directors like Steven Spielberg or producers like Tim Burton). If it is a big name director/producer, then the name is big on the poster, if not then it is still visible but not as obvious.

The actors of the film are listed either at the top or bottom of the poster, or at random points of the poster if the film genre can get away with random arrangements. If the film has a small cast, then only the main actors are on the poster, but if the film has a well known cast, then usually all of the big names are on the poster to sell the film.



## Director

John Carpenter is a well known director of thriller and horrors, so The Ward has his name before the film, so show that it is a creation of his and therefore, is more than likely going to be similar to previous films he has created.

## Actor

Leonardo DiCaprio is a well known actor, so by advertising that he is the lead in the film, attracts audiences who have previously liked some of his films. As he is a well known actor and has done quite a range of different films, audiences know that they should be expecting another great performance by him.



# Quotes, recommendations and ratings

Once a film has been screened to critics, the promotion team of a film can re-create posters or re-cut trailers to include positive reviews, ratings, feedback and recommendations.



This extract of a review uses a mix of different words, to show the impact that the film had on this reviewer. The words **'gut-wrenching'** and **'nerve-jangling'** show that the film has an effect on the person's emotions as well as hint to an important 'climax'.



## Dictionary definitions

### Extraordinary:

exceptional in character, amount, extent, degree

**Intoxicating:** exhilarating; exciting

**Masterpiece** a person's greatest piece of work, as in an art



This quote is from a well known magazine in the US called Rolling Stone Magazine. The magazine is dedicated to music, liberal politics and popular culture, so it is well known enough for people to take notice of the quote.

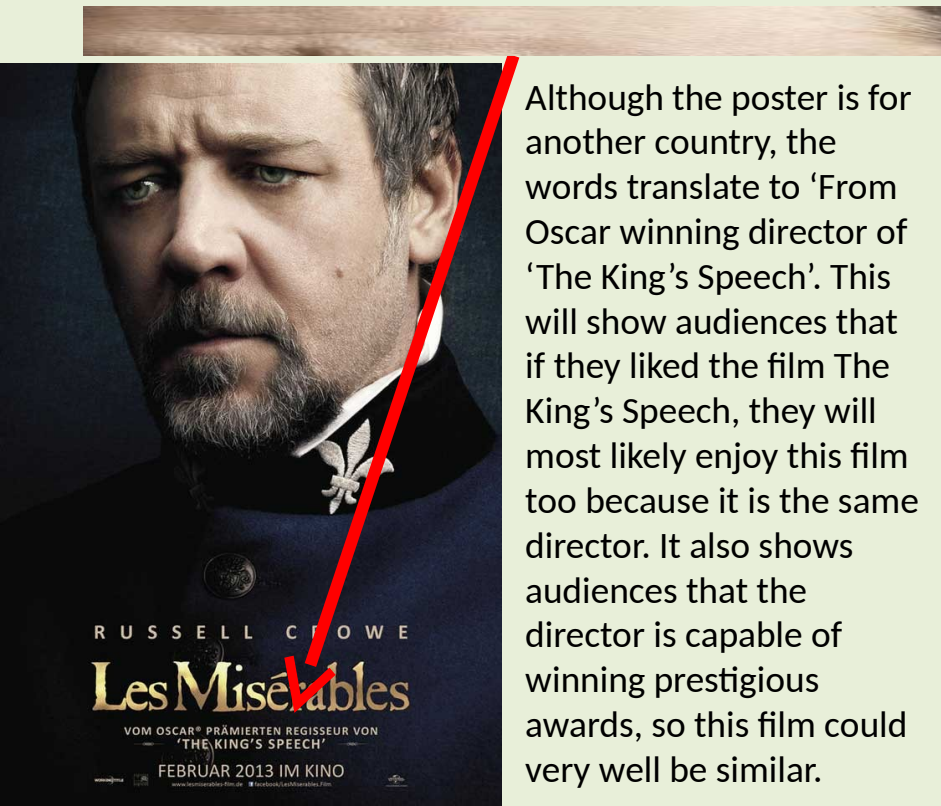
This quote is from the prestigious UK film magazine, Empire. As it is from a well known company and a nearly always reliable source in film critics, this is an important quote to help sell the film.



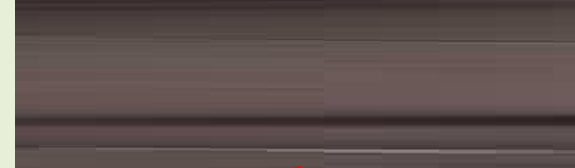
# Awards

Similarly to reviews and positive feedback, if a film is still be advertised during awards season when the team or actors are nominated for awards, the trailers and posters can include these details. If a film is nominated for an award, it must mean is a considered a well received film so audiences would be more interested in seeing it.

Likewise, if an actor in the film or a member of the production team has previously been nominated for a prestigious award or even won, this could be included in the promotion.



Although the poster is for another country, the words translate to 'From Oscar winning director of 'The King's Speech'. This will show audiences that if they liked the film The King's Speech, they will most likely enjoy this film too because it is the same director. It also shows audiences that the director is capable of winning prestigious awards, so this film could very well be similar.



The star of Black Swan had previously been nominated for an Academy Award, so the actresses has obviously been recognised as an achievable and talented actress. This is another selling point of the film, because people can expect the acting in the film to be of very fine talent, worthy of an Academy Award.

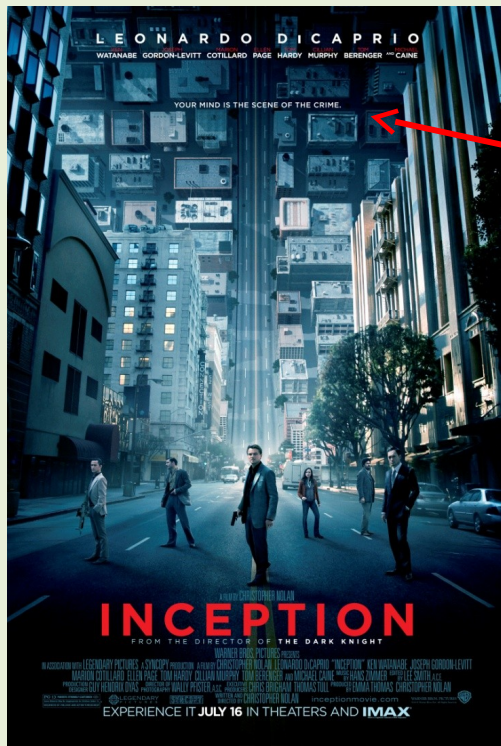


# Taglines

In film trailers, posters and other promotions, taglines are used within them all to emphasise a point about a film as well as hint to what will happen in the film for audiences. Examples of this are Alien 'In space no one can hear you scream'.

Taglines aim to be memorable for audiences, so that when they think of the tagline, they therefore think of the film. Examples of this are Monsters Inc. (2001) 'You won't believe your eye'.

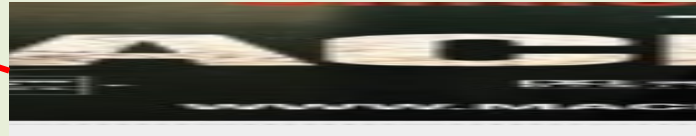
Sometimes the tagline for a film is a line that is mentioned or repeated throughout a film. Examples are Forrest Gump (1994) with the tagline 'Life is like a box of chocolates...' or "One ring to rule them all." from The Lord of the Rings (2001-2003) series.



YOUR MIND IS THE SCENE OF THE CRIME.

The tagline for Inception connects directly to audiences as they are the 'Your'. State of mind is a big theme in the film, so by suggesting that a person's mind is the 'scene of the crime', includes them into the film. The theme of mind is also quite a peculiar one, along with the set up of the poster, with a building facing vertically so audiences are intrigued as to what Inception is about.

# Taglines continued...



The tagline for The Machinist is a question, which again talks directly to the audience. As it is a rhetorical question in the sense that audiences have no one to answer to as well as the fact there isn't a well known answer, audiences who want to know the answer will have to go to see the film. Similarly to Inception, nightmares and sleeping are a theme of the film, so audiences know what to expect.

I created my own tagline for my film and used it in my trailer, so I am going to be using my tagline on my film poster as it should hopefully stick into audiences mind and interest them into the film.



# Date, rating, extra info.

Film posters need dates on them so that audiences who see the poster know when they can see it in the cinemas (or buy it on DVD if it is a DVD poster). There are different types of dates posters can use, they can be precise and use the exact date, or put the month, season or a simple 'coming soon' if the film is still in production. The dates of film depends on how well known the film is before it comes out and whether or not the promotion company will benefit from releasing posters months prior to the film's release or only a few weeks before.



# Date, rating, extra info. continued...

One of the most important parts of a film poster is all the small print information which contains the name of the director, producers, actors, soundtrack, production company, screenplay, and much more, as well as the rating, a website link to find out more and sometimes images of the production companies of the film. The information on posters is very small, so attention is not diverted from the image and other parts of the poster.



Here, for the Fight Club poster the information follows the copyright guidelines to include the production company (FOX 2000 PICTURES and REGENCY ENTERPRISES) and the company owner (LINSON FILMS). Followed by the main actors (BRAD PITT EDWARD NORTON HELENA BONHAM CARTER) and then the film's title ("FIGHT CLUB") with a few other named cast. The creators in second (Michael KAPLAN), music by (THE DUST BROTHERS (MICHAEL SIMPSON and JOHN KING). Editor (JAMES HAYGOOD), director of photography (JEFF CRONENWETH), executive producer (ARNON MILCHAN), based on the novel by (CHUCK PALAHNIUK), screenplay by (JIM UHLS), produced by (ART LINSON, CEAN CHAFFIN, ROSS GRAYSON BELL), directed by (DAVID FINCHER) along with images of sponsors and producers, along with the website link and rating.

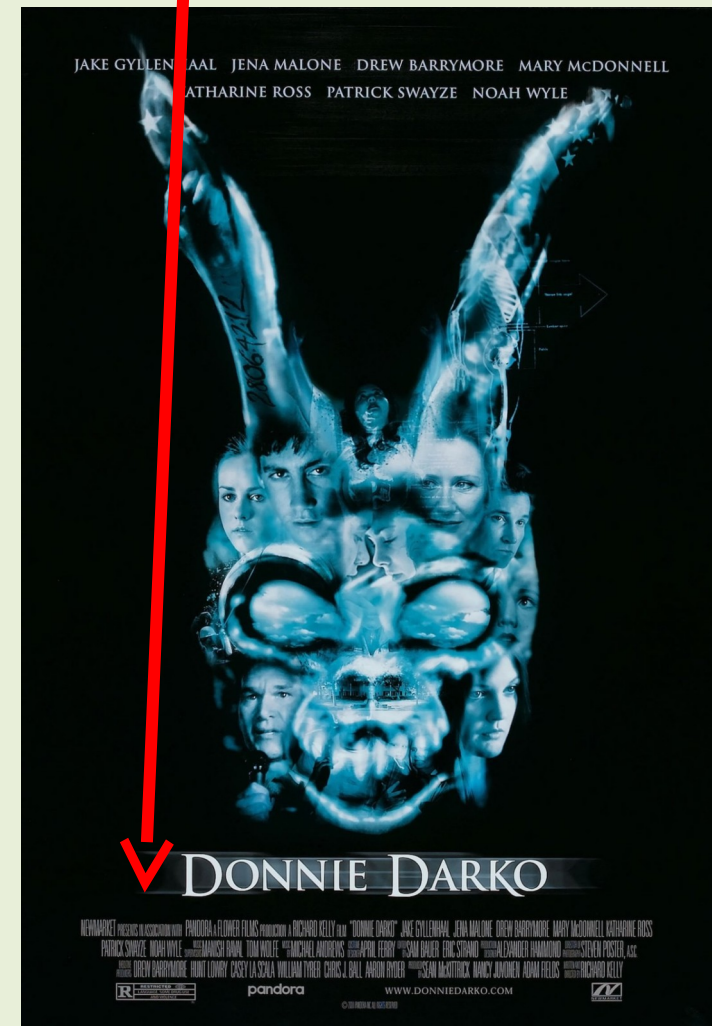
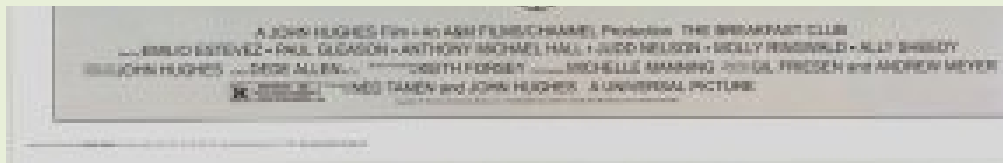


# Date, rating, extra info. continued...



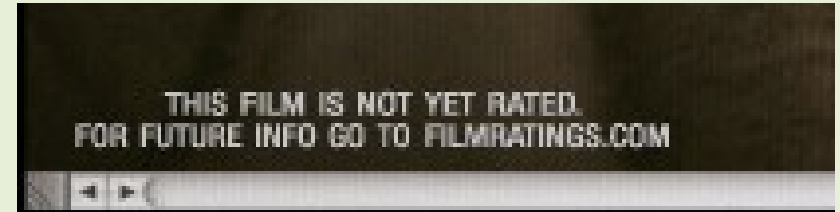
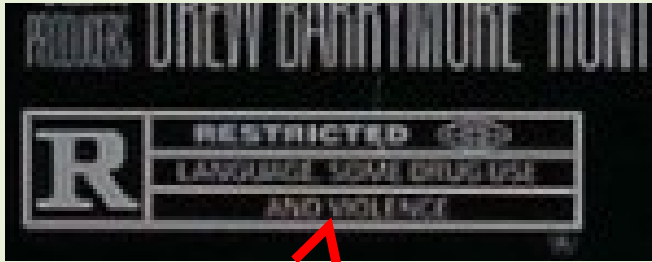
The poster for Phone Booth has the title on it's side and features a tagline on the bottom, so the extra information is in the middle of the poster, but not bright to take attention away from the title, actors, taglines and image.





# Date, rating, extra info. continued...

Most posters have to show their rating on the poster if it is near the films release, especially if it is a well known film. Most often though, these ratings are American ratings.

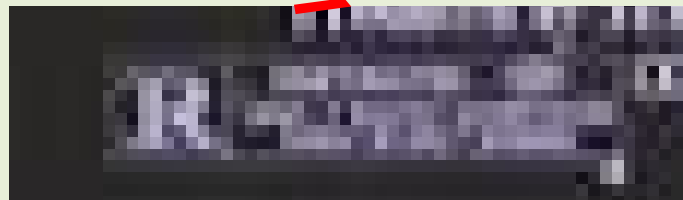
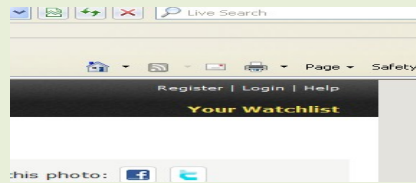


The poster for Donnie Darko shows that the film is Restricted for 'Language. Some drug use. And Violence'.

The Social Network had not been rated when the poster had been created. However it states that the film has not yet been rated and provides a link if people wish to find out.



# Date, rating, extra info. continued...





# Film theories and film posters

Now that I have looked at film poster codes and conventions, I can apply film theories to them.

## Roland Barthes: media theory

The **Action/Proairetic Code** is the idea of little actions that do not particularly raise questions, which creates tension and builds suspense for audiences to guess what happens next. This can be used in film posters, especially psychological thriller posters, as little parts of the poster may not straight away raise questions, but it could have an impact on the film.

When a text is not being fully explained, it is considered to be Barthes **Hermeneutic Code**, as audiences want to find out what happens as so far everything seems to be a mystery. This is very applicable to film posters, as audiences do not have the whole story, so they are curious to find out more.

The **Enigma Code** pushes audiences to ask questions about the film's plot, which they can do from seeing sneaks of a film's plot in film posters.

The **Semantic Code** and **Symbolic Code** look at symbols and connotations and meanings of symbols, so if lots of symbols are on a film poster, what could they imply?

# Barthes and Psychological thriller posters

## Action/Proairetic Code

The feathers do not straight away raise questions, but they could be linked to the narrative.

## Enigma Code

The crack in the woman's face makes audiences want to ask questions about the film's plot.

## Hermeneutic Code

The crack in the woman's face doesn't make much sense at the moment, so it is a mystery for audiences.

## Semantic Code and Symbolic Code

The whole image in the poster COULD be symbolic.



# Barthes and Psychological thriller posters

## Action/Proairetic Code

The people inside the bunny shape do not particular raise questions, but then audiences wonder what they have to do with the film's plot?

## Enigma Code

The whole bunny forces audiences to ask questions about it.

## Hermeneutic Code

The bunny shape has not been fully explained yet, so audiences might wonder what the bunny's significance is.

## Semantic Code and Symbolic Code

The whole 'bunny' could be a symbolic and have a meaning to the film.





# Barthes and Psychological thriller posters

## Action/Proairetic Code

The bruises on the man's face are not noticeable straight away, but then audiences would see this and wonder if it is linked to the narrative.

## Enigma Code

Objects in the poster might make audiences ask questions. Similarly, the objects in the poster blocking the man's face could raise questions.

## Hermeneutic Code

The objects are blocking the character's face, so these could become mysterious for audiences.

## Semantic Code and Symbolic Code

These blocks could have a meaning to the film.

