

## The formula for a hit film sequel

### Level 1 • Elementary

#### 1 Warmer

a. Have you seen any of these films?

Spider-Man 2 ☐

Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End ☐

Ice Age 2 ☐

Star Trek (2009) ☐

Shrek 2 ☐

Slumdog Millionaire ☐

Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back ☐

b. Which of the films above is the 'odd one out' (i.e. different to the others) and why?

#### 2 Key words

Write the key words from the article into the sentences below. The paragraph numbers will help you.

analytical thinking

genre

financial investor

sequel

industry

formula

safe bet

1. A \_\_\_\_\_ is a (mathematical) plan or method for dealing with a problem. (title)
2. A \_\_\_\_\_ is a book or film, that continues the story of an earlier one. (title)
3. When something is a \_\_\_\_\_ it has a low risk factor. (para 2)
4. A \_\_\_\_\_ describes a particular style or type of film. (para 3)
5. An \_\_\_\_\_ is a particular business, trade or service and the people who work in it. (para 4)
6. \_\_\_\_\_ is a method of separating things into their parts in order to examine and understand them. (para 4)
7. A \_\_\_\_\_ is someone who puts money into a business. (para 5)

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|                  |                 |              |
|------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| franchise        | film critics    | on the whole |
| stand-alone film | characteristics | comparable   |

8. A film \_\_\_\_\_ contains the characters, setting and trademarks of a film or a series of books, e.g. *Harry Potter*, *James Bond*. (para 5)
9. A film that does not have a sequel or a continuing story. \_\_\_\_\_ (para 6)
10. \_\_\_\_\_ are particular things that are typical of something. (para 6)
11. Something that is \_\_\_\_\_ to something else is similar to it. (para 6)
12. A phrase meaning *in general* or *generally*. \_\_\_\_\_ (para 8)
13. \_\_\_\_\_ are people whose job it is to write what they think about new films. (para 11)

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#### The formula for a hit film sequel

Katie Allen

8 November, 2009

- 1 Why was *Spider-Man 2* a success and *Basic Instinct 2* not a success? Now a group of researchers have a formula which they say will tell us whether a film sequel will be a success or not.
- 2 Hollywood has known for a long time that a sequel or follow-up film is a fairly safe bet. Sequels of films such as *Pirates of the Caribbean* and *Star Wars* have been on cinema schedules for years.
- 3 The researchers say they can calculate how much money a film will make compared to a film in the same genre that is not a sequel. They have based their calculations on factors such as whether key film stars are still involved in the film project, how long it has been since the last film, and how well the last film did.
- 4 "It is the industry of dreams, an industry of illusions, and lots of people lose money. The idea here is to put some more analytical thinking into the business process," says Professor Thorsten Hennig-Thurau, of Cass Business School in London.
- 5 Because follow-up films have widespread box office success and strong DVD sales, financial investors and film companies often pay a lot of money to get the rights to a sequel. The *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* franchise was recently sold for \$60 million (£36 million).
- 6 The research, which will be published in the *Journal of Marketing* this month, examined data from all 101 movie sequels released in North American cinemas between 1998 and 2006 and a sample of stand-alone films with similar characteristics. According to the formula, the new sequel *The Twilight Saga: New Moon* should make \$34 million more for the producers in the US than a comparable vampire/teen romance movie with the same characteristics that is not a sequel.
- 7 "Movies like the *Twilight* sequel *New Moon* make a lot of money and are relatively safe bets if key factors, such as the original stars, are kept," says Hennig-Thurau. Not having the same film stars is where *Basic Instinct 2* went wrong – Michael Douglas did not star in it and also the time difference between the two films was very, very long.
- 8 On the whole, however, sequels do well: often better than the original. That is especially true now that studios are making films with a storyline that continues throughout several films. "We are not really talking about sequels any more. We are saying to the audience: 'This is a story, you have got to stick with it,'" says David Hancock, head of film and cinema at media research company Screen Digest.
- 9 This year's new *Star Trek* film, made £21 million in UK cinemas, which is more than double the amount of money made by any of the previous 10 *Star Trek* feature films. Mark Batey, chief executive of the Film Distributors' Association, says that people who go to the cinema clearly like new stories which take their favourite characters on new adventures.
- 10 For film producers fighting poor DVD sales, sequels bring an added benefit. Hennig-Thurau's research showed that DVD sales of the original movie often increase when a sequel comes out at the cinema. And then, when the sequel is out on DVD, it will usually sell well.
- 11 DVD charts and cinema rankings containing sequels such as *Shrek the Third*, *Transformers 2* and *Ice Age 3* have, of course, made film critics worry that film are becoming less creative. Some cinema-goers have also complained that there are too many sequels.
- 12 But there are still many original stories at our cinemas. *Slumdog Millionaire* is one of the top films of 2009 while *The Full Monty* remains one of the most successful British films ever. "With 500 new films in UK cinemas each year, the blockbuster sequels often do well but there's plenty of other choice for film fans during the year," says Batey.

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#### 3 Comprehension check

Match the sentence halves to summarize the article.

- |                                                       |                                                       |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. A sequel has a better chance of success if ...     | a. ... should not be too long.                        |
| 2. The time between the first and the second film ... | b. ... sequels and similar stand-alone films.         |
| 3. Movie-goers like to watch films that contain ...   | c. ... DVD sales of the previous film increase.       |
| 4. When a sequel comes out at the cinema, ...         | d. ... stand-alone films being produced.              |
| 5. The researchers compared the money made by ...     | e. ... better than stand-alone films.                 |
| 6. Overall, film sequels are doing ...                | f. ... it has the same movie stars as the first film. |
| 7. Critics are worried that too many sequels ...      | g. ... characters they already know.                  |
| 8. There are still very successful ...                | h. ... mean that the films are no longer creative.    |

#### 4 Language: Prepositions

Which prepositions fit into the sentences? Check your answers in the article.

between

during

of (x7)

about

as

at (x2)

- a group \_\_\_\_\_ researchers
- films such \_\_\_\_\_ *Pirates* \_\_\_\_\_ *the Caribbean*
- lots \_\_\_\_\_ people lose money
- We are not really talking \_\_\_\_\_ sequels.
- head \_\_\_\_\_ film and cinema \_\_\_\_\_ media research company Screen Digest
- double the amount \_\_\_\_\_ money
- time difference \_\_\_\_\_ the two films
- many original stories \_\_\_\_\_ our cinemas
- one \_\_\_\_\_ the most successful British films ever
- plenty \_\_\_\_\_ other choice \_\_\_\_\_ the year

#### 5 Discussion

Do you like to watch film sequels? Why / Why not?

#### 6 Webquest

a. Choose one of the films in the article and find the official trailer for it on the internet using the websites below:

<http://movies.yahoo.com/trailers/>

<http://www.apple.com/trailers/>

You could also visit the film's official website and/or YouTube.

Explain what the film is about (as you understand it from watching the trailer).

b. Find a chart of the current top 20 films in your country. How many of these are sequels?

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### Level 2 • Intermediate

#### 1 Warmer

a. Have you seen any of these films?

Spider-Man 2 ☐

Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End ☐

Ice Age 2 ☐

Star Trek (2009) ☐

Shrek 2 ☐

Slumdog Millionaire ☐

Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back ☐

b. Which of the films above is the 'odd one out' (i.e. different to the others) and why?

#### 2 Key words

Write the key words from the article into the sentences below. The paragraph numbers will help you.

go bust

outperform

sequelitis

safe bet

triumphed

bombed

brand extension

franchise

stand-alone film

genre

gross

- a verb which describes how well a film did \_\_\_\_\_ (para 1)
- a verb which describes how badly a film did \_\_\_\_\_ (para 1)
- When something is a \_\_\_\_\_ it has a low risk factor. (para 2)
- A film \_\_\_\_\_ is an intellectual property involving the characters, setting and trademarks of an original work of fiction, such as a film or a series of books, e.g. *Harry Potter*, *James Bond*. (para 2)
- to earn a particular amount of money before taxes or costs have been taken out \_\_\_\_\_ (para 3)
- A \_\_\_\_\_ describes a particular style or type of movie. (para 3)
- to fail financially and lose all your money \_\_\_\_\_ (para 4)
- \_\_\_\_\_ is a business term used to describe a new product that is related to one that already exists. (para 5)
- a film without a sequel or an ongoing storyline \_\_\_\_\_ (para 6)
- to do something better than someone or something else \_\_\_\_\_ (para 8)
- a newly invented word which describes the unwanted growth in the number of sequels \_\_\_\_\_ (para 11)

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### Level 2 • Intermediate

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Katie Allen

8 November, 2009

- 1 Ever wondered why *Spider-Man 2* triumphed and *Basic Instinct 2* bombed? Now a group of academics have come up with a formula to predict the success of a film sequel.
- 2 Hollywood has long known that a follow-up film is a fairly safe bet and franchises from *Pirates of the Caribbean* to *Star Wars* have dominated cinema schedules for years.
- 3 Based on factors such as whether key film stars are still involved in the project, how long it has been since the last film, and how well it did, the researchers now say they can calculate what producers can expect to gross compared to a film in the same genre that is not a sequel.
- 4 "It is the industry of dreams, an industry of illusions, and lots of people go bust. The idea here is to put some more analytical thinking into the process," says Professor Thorsten Hennig-Thurau, of Cass Business School in London.
- 5 With follow-up films enjoying widespread box office success and strong DVD sales, financial investors and film companies fight to acquire sequel rights. The *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* franchise was recently sold for \$60 million (£36 million). "I want this industry to recognize that it is not as different to other sectors as it thinks it is. What we are talking about here is brand extension," says Hennig-Thurau.
- 6 The research, which will be published in the *Journal of Marketing* this month, examined data from all 101 movie sequels released in North American cinemas between 1998 and 2006 and a sample of stand-alone films with similar characteristics. According to the formula, upcoming sequel *The Twilight Saga: New Moon* should be expected to make \$34 million more for the producers in the US than a comparable vampire/teen romance movie with the same characteristics that is not a sequel.
- 7 "Movies like the *Twilight* sequel *New Moon* make a lot of money and are relatively safe bets if key factors, such as the original stars, are kept," says Hennig-Thurau. Star continuity is where *Basic Instinct 2* went wrong – Michael Douglas did not star in it and the time difference between the two films was very, very long.
- 8 On the whole, however, sequels do well and often outperform the original. That is especially true now studios are presenting films as a franchise with a storyline continuing throughout several films. "We are not really talking about sequels any more. We are saying to the audience: 'This is a story, you have got to stick with it,'" says David Hancock, head of film and cinema at media research company Screen Digest. Underlining the importance of audience loyalty, Hancock notes that in the US last year, just 4.2% of releases were franchise films but they accounted for 20.6% of box office takings.
- 9 This year's new *Star Trek* film, grossed £21 million in UK cinemas, which is more than double the amount of money made by any of the previous 10 *Star Trek* feature films. "There is clearly a public appetite for new stories taking favourite characters on new adventures," says Mark Batey, chief executive of the Film Distributors' Association.
- 10 For film producers fighting poor DVD sales, sequels bring an added benefit. Hennig-Thurau's research showed that DVD sales of the original movie often increase when a sequel hits the cinema screens. Once that sequel is out on DVD it also has a good chance of strong sales.
- 11 DVD charts and cinema rankings containing sequels such as *Shrek the Third*, *Transformers 2* and *Ice Age 3* have, of course, made film critics worry about a lack of creativity. Cinema-goers have also complained of "sequelitis". Such criticism may have been justified in the days when making a sequel was a relatively lazy process but sequels are now produced in a more thoughtful manner.
- 12 The Film Distributors' Association is keen to argue, that sequel mania does still leave room

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### Level 2 • Intermediate

for original stories. *Slumdog Millionaire* is one of the top films of 2009 while *The Full Monty* remains one of the most successful British films ever released. "With 500 films released in UK cinemas each year, the blockbuster sequels tend

to do well but there's plenty of other choice for film fans during the year," says Batey.

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### 3 Comprehension check

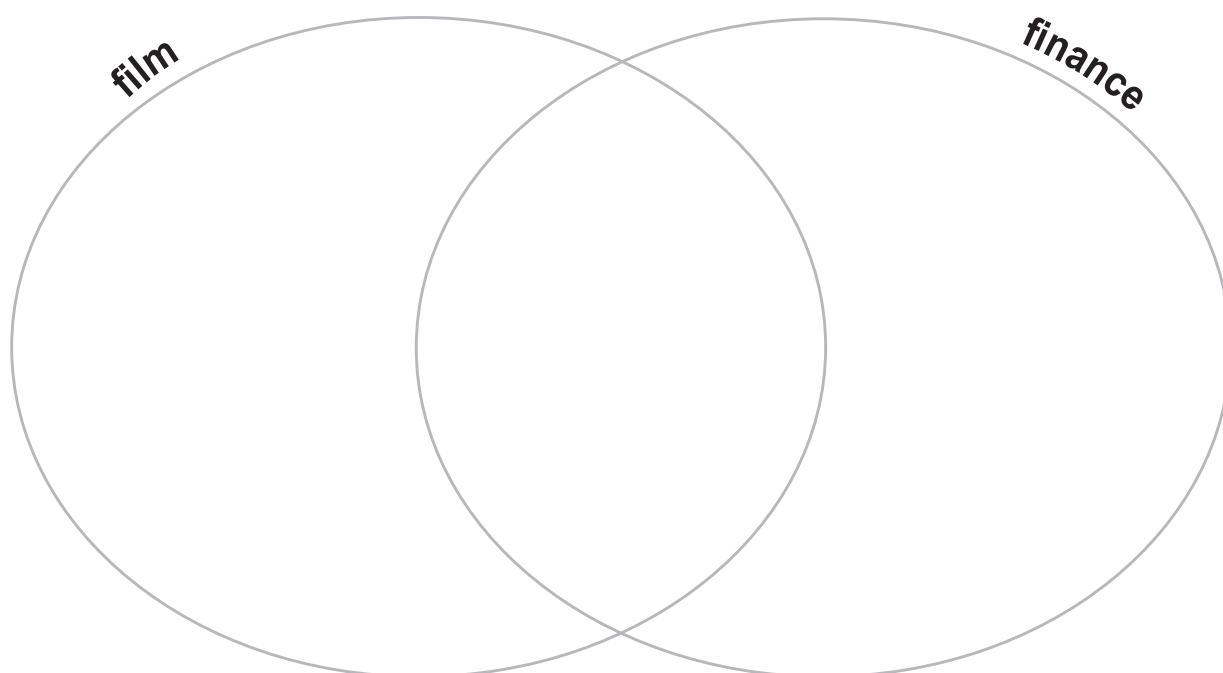
According to the information in the article, are these sentences true (T) or false (F)?

Correct any false sentences.

1. It makes no difference whether the same movie stars appear in film sequels.
2. For a sequel to be successful, it should appear soon after the previous film.
3. Movie-goers like to watch films that contain characters and settings they already know.
4. When a sequel comes out, DVD sales of the previous film fall.
5. The researchers compared the success of sequels with stand-alone films in the same genre.
6. According to Professor Hennig-Thurau, the film industry is no different to other industries in that it markets a brand.
7. Overall, film sequels are not as successful as stand-alone films.
8. Critics say fear this could be the end for original stories and stand-alone films.

### 4 Language: Vocabulary fields

Find words and phrases from the article that relate to 'film' and 'finance' and write them in the correct ovals below. Write words that relate to both subjects in the central field.



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### Level 2 • Intermediate

#### 5 Discussion

Do you like to watch film sequels? Why / Why not?

Are there any stand-alone films that do not have a sequel but that you would like to have a sequel?

#### 6 Webquest

a. Choose one of the films mentioned in the article and find the official trailer for it on the internet using these websites:

<http://movies.yahoo.com/trailers/>

<http://www.apple.com/trailers/>

You could also visit the film's official website and/or YouTube.

Explain to your class what the film is about (as you understand it from watching the trailer).

b. Find a chart of the current top 20 films in your country. How many of these are sequels?

## The formula for a hit film sequel

### Level 3 • Advanced

#### 1 Warmer

a. Have you seen any of these films?

Spider-Man 2 ☐

Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End ☐

Ice Age 2 ☐

Star Trek (2009) ☐

Shrek 2 ☐

Slumdog Millionaire ☐

Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back ☐

b. Which of the films above is the 'odd one out' (i.e. different to the others) and why?

#### 2 Key words

Find the key words in the article and write them into the sentences below.

- a verb which describes how well a film did \_\_\_\_\_ (para 1)
- a verb which describes how badly a film did \_\_\_\_\_ (para 1)
- A film \_\_\_\_\_ is an intellectual property involving the characters, setting and trademarks of an original work of fiction, such as a film or a series of books, e.g. *Harry Potter*, *James Bond*. (para 1)
- two inexact methods of measuring things based on experience and feeling \_\_\_\_\_ (para 2)
- When somebody is \_\_\_\_\_ they are involved in a project. (para 3)
- to earn a particular amount of money before taxes or costs have been taken out \_\_\_\_\_ (para 3)
- to fail financially and lose all your money \_\_\_\_\_ (para 4)
- a film without a sequel or an ongoing storyline \_\_\_\_\_ (para 6)
- Something that makes a large amount of money is \_\_\_\_\_. (para 7)
- the process of becoming successful or popular again \_\_\_\_\_ (para 9)
- a four-word phrase meaning *a good reputation based on what has happened before* \_\_\_\_\_ (para 9)
- a phrase meaning *to make someone very angry* \_\_\_\_\_ (para 11)
- a new blended word made up of two known words to describe the unwanted growth in the number of sequels. \_\_\_\_\_ (para 11)

## The formula for a hit film sequel

### Level 3 • Advanced

#### The formula for a hit film sequel

Katie Allen

8 November, 2009

- 1 Ever wondered why *Spider-Man 2* triumphed and *Basic Instinct 2* bombed? Now a group of academics have come up with a formula to predict the fortunes of a film sequel.
- 2 Hollywood has long known a follow-up is a fairly safe bet and franchises from *Pirates of the Caribbean* to *Star Wars* have dominated cinema schedules for years. But, until now, decisions about what to invest in a film sequel or how much to pay for the rights to a franchise have been based on some simple rules of thumb and gut feeling.
- 3 Based on factors such as whether key stars are still on board, how long it has been since the last film and how that performed, the researchers now say they can calculate what producers can expect to gross relative to a film in the same genre that is not a sequel.
- 4 "It is the industry of dreams, an industry of illusions, and lots of people go bust. The idea here is to put some more analytical thinking into the process," says Professor Thorsten Hennig-Thurau, of Cass Business School in London.
- 5 With follow-up films enjoying widespread box office success and strong DVD sales, financial investors and film companies compete aggressively to acquire sequel rights. The *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* franchise was recently sold for \$60 million (£36 million). "I want this industry to recognize that it is not as different to other sectors as it thinks it is. What we are talking about here is brand extension," says Hennig-Thurau.
- 6 The research, which will be published in the *Journal of Marketing* this month, examined data from all 101 movie sequels released in North American cinemas between 1998 and 2006 and a sample of stand-alone films with similar characteristics. According to the formula, upcoming sequel *The Twilight Saga: New Moon* should be expected to return \$34 million more for the producers in its US run than a comparable vampire/ teen romance movie with the same characteristics that is not a sequel.
- 7 "Movies like the *Twilight* sequel *New Moon* are highly lucrative and relatively safe bets if key parameters, such as original cast, are maintained," explains Hennig-Thurau. Star continuity is where *Basic Instinct 2* went wrong – no Michael Douglas. "The time difference between the two films was very, very long and actor continuity was halved in that you only had (a much older) Sharon Stone."
- 8 On the whole, however, sequels do well and often outperform the original. That is especially true now studios are presenting films as a franchise with a narrative woven throughout several instalments. "We are not really talking about sequels any more. We are talking about films that are conceived of as longer plays than one film. You are saying to the audience: 'This is a story, you have got to stick with it'," says David Hancock, head of film and cinema at media research company Screen Digest. Underlining that audience loyalty, Hancock notes that in the US last year, just 4.2% of releases were franchise films but they accounted for 20.6% of box office takings.
- 9 The revival of the *Star Trek* franchise this summer saw JJ Abrams's new film gross £21 million in UK cinemas, which is more than double the return of any of the previous 10 *Star Trek* feature films. "There is clearly a public appetite for new stories taking favourite characters on new adventures and from an industry point of view, there is less risk in investing in the production and release of a film which has a proven track record," says Mark Batey, chief executive of the Film Distributors' Association.
- 10 For film producers fighting poor DVD sales, sequels bring an added benefit. Hennig-Thurau's research showed that DVD sales of the original movie often peak when a sequel hits the cinema screens. Once that sequel is out on DVD it also has a good chance of strong sales.
- 11 DVD charts and cinema rankings containing sequels such as *Shrek the Third*, *Transformers 2* and *Ice Age 3* have, of course, incited the

## The formula for a hit film sequel

### Level 3 • Advanced

wrath of film critics worried about a lack of creativity. Cinema-goers have also complained of "sequelitis". Such criticism may have been justified in the days when making a sequel was a relatively lazy process but sequels are now produced in a more thoughtful manner.

- 12 The Film Distributors' Association is keen to argue that sequel mania does still leave room for original stories. *Slumdog Millionaire* is one

of the top films of 2009 while *The Full Monty* remains one of the most successful British films ever released. "With 500 films released in UK cinemas each year, the blockbuster sequels tend to do well but there's plenty of other choice for film fans during the year," says Batey.

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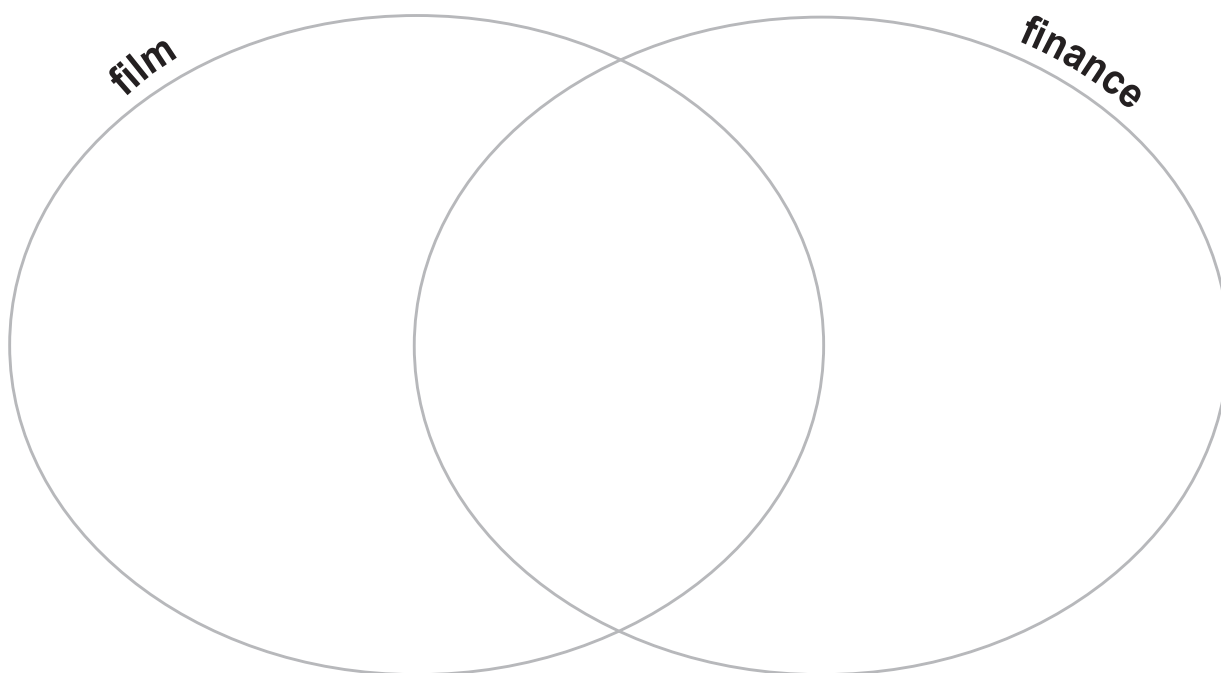
### 3 Comprehension check

Write answers to these questions based on the information in the article.

1. What qualities does a film sequel need to make it success?
2. What attracts the public (movie-goers) to watch sequels?
3. What effect do sequels have on DVD sales?
4. What did the researchers compare in order to come to their conclusions?
5. How is the film industry described?
6. Is this the end for original stories and stand-alone films?

### 4 Language: Vocabulary fields

Find words and phrases from the article that relate to 'film' and 'finance' and write them in the correct ovals below. Write words that relate to both subjects in the central field.



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Level 3 • Advanced

### 5 Discussion

Do you like to watch sequels? Why / Why not?

Are there any stand-alone films that do not have a sequel but that you would like to have a sequel?

### 6 Webquest

a. Choose one of the films mentioned in the article and find the official trailer for it on the internet using these websites:

<http://movies.yahoo.com/trailers/>

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You could also visit the film's official website and/or YouTube.

Explain to your class what the film is about (as you understand it from watching the trailer).

b. Find a chart of the current top 20 films in your country. How many of these are sequels?

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### Level 1 • Elementary

#### KEY

##### 1 Warmer

- b. *Slumdog Millionaire* is the odd one out as it is not a sequel and is not likely to have a sequel in the future.

##### 2 Key words

1. formula
2. sequel
3. safe bet
4. genre
5. industry
6. Analytical thinking
7. financial investor
8. franchise
9. stand-alone film
10. Characteristics
11. comparable
12. on the whole
13. Film critics

##### 3 Comprehension check

1. f
2. a
3. g
4. c
5. b
6. e
7. h
8. d

##### 4 Language: Prepositions

1. of
2. as; of
3. of
4. about
5. of; at
6. of
7. between
8. at
9. of
10. of; during

## The formula for a hit film sequel

### Level 2 • Intermediate

#### KEY

##### 1 Warmer

- b. *Slumdog Millionaire* is the odd one out as it is not a sequel and is not likely to have a sequel in the future.

##### 2 Key words

1. triumphed
2. bombed
3. safe bet
4. franchise
5. gross
6. genre
7. go bust
8. Brand extension
9. stand-alone film
10. outperform
11. sequelitis

##### 3 Comprehension check

1. F
2. T
3. T
4. F
5. T
6. T
7. F
8. T

##### 4 Language: Vocabulary fields

(some suggested answers)

1. Film: blockbuster, ranking, actor, sequel, cinema, audience, instalments, movies, critics, stars, features, screen
2. Finance: calculate, gross, fortunes, go bust, return, invest, pay
3. Both: triumph, bomb, sales, franchise, box office success

## The formula for a hit film sequel

### Level 3 • Advanced

#### KEY

#### 1 Warmer

- b. *Slumdog Millionaire* is the odd one out as it is not a sequel and is not likely to have a sequel in the future.

#### 2 Key words

1. triumphed
2. bombed
3. franchise
4. rule of thumb; gut feeling
5. on board
6. gross
7. go bust
8. stand-alone film
9. highly lucrative
10. revival
11. a proven track record
12. incite the wrath of
13. sequelitis

#### 3 Comprehension check

1. star continuity, a short time between the original and the sequel, and the success of the first film
2. The public have an appetite for new stories taking favourite characters on new adventures and/or continuing storylines.
3. DVD sales of the original movie often peak when a sequel hits the cinema screens. Once that sequel is out on DVD it also has a good chance of strong sales.
4. The researchers examined data from all 101 movie sequels released in North American cinemas between 1998 and 2006 and a sample of stand-alone films with similar characteristics.
5. the industry of dreams and illusions
6. No, the recent success of *Slumdog Millionaire* proves that stand-alone films can still be successful.

#### 4 Language: Vocabulary fields

(some suggested answers)

1. Film: blockbuster, ranking, actor, sequel, cinema, audience, instalments, movies, critics, stars, features, screen
2. Finance: calculate, gross, fortunes, go bust, return, lucrative, invest, pay
3. Both: triumph, bomb, sales, franchise, box office success