

# [Do film genres change over time essay sample](https://assignbuster.com/do-film-genres-change-over-time-essay-sample/)

Genres are continuously evolving to meet the audience’s changing desires so that contemporary films encompass new elements from the paradigm. As older ingredients become less popular a genre must introduce fresh ideas to remain successful and retain their appeal. The horror genre follows this trend closely with some common threads constant throughout, linking the old and the new, but numerous significant transformations have occurred over time.

Traditionally horror films have relied heavily on the supernatural to shock and scare the viewer but modern films have taken a different approach by attempting to create realistic aesthetics. Typical early horror movies such as Frankenstein (1910) or Nosferatu (1922) were dependent on their monsters (vampires, zombies, werewolves etc.) from folklore to create an impact and be unique. Andrew Tudor distinguishes this as a “ common-sense” level of horror. He states that this type of horror can be defined through its monsters, the source of their power and threat, and the ways in which they can be defeated. This suggests that filmmakers exploited society’s fear of the unknown by portraying mythical beings as their evil monsters. The loss of identity in Nosferatu through vampirism especially shows that social status and the fear of foreign beings was important.

The 1950s introduced the science fiction horror hybrid. There were very few dedicated horror movies at this time and the majority of successful films were low budget ‘ B-movies’. The Thing (1951) and The War of the Worlds (1953) were amongst the first crossover films to be in colour and due partly to their novelty value they were extremely popular. Later in the decade the genre became resurgent mainly due to ‘ Hammer’ horror. These were mainly adaptations of the early horror films such as The Curse of Frankenstein (1956) and Dracula (1958) and relied heavily again on the supernatural.

As society became increasingly fragmented people came to fear each other. The release of Alfred Hitchcock’s Psycho (1960) marked a complete change in the nature of horror. The popularity of this film has resulted in ‘ slasher’ becoming the most successful spin-off of the genre. Psycho moved away from the paranormal towards realism; portraying a psychopath as the main character. This film broke away from the conventional approach of the villain being supernatural by bringing a human face to the killer. Psycho was revolutionary because it broke away from the conventional approach of the supernatural by bringing a human face to the killer. This helped to make the narrative appear realistic and plausible to the audience, which deeply terrified the audience because it was the first time this approach had been undertaken.

A recent film, The Blair Witch Project (1999), best illustrates this drive towards realism in horror. This low-budget movie adopted a documentary style approach in following three characters as they investigate the truth behind the mysterious Blair Witch. It had no special effects to speak of and relied instead on the audience empathising with the characters and sharing their fear. This film marked a return to the traditional values of the genre to an extent but was also unique in its recording technique.

The change of direction towards ‘ slasher’ spawned a series of imitations and sequels that focused more on graphic content as censorship rules were relaxed. Originally horror had not relied heavily on this aspect in order to allow them as wide an audience as possible and strict censorship. Early horror depended on the viewer’s fear and trepidation of what is about to happen of the moment rather than the actual death. The filmmakers however soon realised that the teenage audience was attracted by blood and gore. This led to The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (1974) and Friday the 13th (1980) being released, films which were far more explicit than anything before them. This move towards graphic violence has continued in modern horror with films such as A Nightmare on Elm Street (1984).

The horror genre inevitably goes through a cycle of popularity and decline. An innovative film will make horror fashionable again and then an incessant stream of imitations and parodies will flood the market until we become tired of the formula. This scenario was what the horror genre had faced in the late 80s and early 90s. Horror became franchised to the extent that it no longer scared the audience and instead became a parody of itself. Series such as Nightmare on Elm Street and Friday the 13th overexposed Freddy and Jason respectively so that they were no longer scary.

Another aspect of the genre that has changed since Nosferatu is the portrayal of gender within horror. The perpetual victims in early horror were weak women who lacked any ability to defend themselves and were utterly dependent on men for their rescue. Men are stereotyped as being intelligent, brave and strong while they are always one step ahead of the villain. However, this representation of gender has changed greatly with films such as Halloween (1979) and Scream (1996) have female heroines who are strong, independent and resourceful. This has helped to broaden the appeal of horror by showing a female ‘ role-model’ for viewers. There are aspects of representation which has not changed for example the ‘ baddie’ has been disproportionately male since the beginning of horror. Especially in ‘ slasher’ they will be shown to be amoral, relentless and vindictive.

A theme recurring throughout the history of the horror genre is the fact that these films are strongly moralistic. Although the roles of gender within horror have changed greatly the characters in most films of this genre can be clearly categorised. The villain functions as ‘ judge, jury and executioner’ by killing those he believes to have sinned in some form e. g. sex, alcohol, drugs etc. The hero/heroine has always been portrayed in horror as morally and ethically ‘ correct’. This means that they will be portrayed as pure through virginity, religion or some other form and this is shown to be the reason for the triumph. Modern horror has attempted to become less moralistic because they do not always resolve the good versus evil battle in such a clear manner in order to pave the way for sequels.

There are many ways in which genres change over time however they do retain aspects of their previous identities. There are elements within Scream which are common to ‘ the granddaddy of slasher’ Psycho but of course as the demographic of audience for horror films changes so must the content as well. The horror genre is cyclical at its core with films combining the new with old to create a new package for the current generation.

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