PROVA: A LICENCE TO SELL

EXAM

A LICENCE TO SELL

A few years ago, cinema audiences would watch a few adverts before sitting back to enjoy a film. At home, TV viewers patiently sat through the adverts that interrupted their favourite programmes. Today, however, it is sometimes difficult to know when the adverts start or finish. Some films and TV shows feel like one long advertisement and it's all thanks to an advertising technique called 'product placement'.

Product placement involves using a product in a film or TV programme and making it appear to be part of the story. Although this form of advertising has become common over the last few decades, it has actually been around since the nineteenth century. The French writer Jules Verne, who was famous for his adventure stories like *Around the World in Eighty Days*, regularly included the names of real transport and shipping companies in his novels. But it wasn't until the end of the twentieth century that product placement really started to appear on our TV and cinema screens.

The invention of the video recorder in the 1980s changed TV viewers' habits. The owners of the first recorders made an important discovery. You could record a programme or film, watch it later and use the fast-forward button when the adverts came on. Thirty years later, new recording devices were invented that automatically switch off when it's time for the adverts. These new technologies were a problem for the advertisers; product placement was the solution.

Today, product placement has become a multi-million-dollar industry. Advertising companies find the right TV programmes and films for the products that they want to sell. They receive scripts from TV and film producers and then look for products that might fit 'naturally' with the story. For example, imagine a Hollywood studio wants to make a film about a teenager who is going to university. First, they might look for branded clothes to dress him in. Then, they would find a laptop computer, a mobile phone and a car provided by manufacturers who want their goods to appear in the film. These are all products that most American students own, so it would be easy for the camera to focus on the brands without damaging the story too much. The problems begin when nobody worries about the story.

Ian Fleming, who wrote the James Bond novels, gave his hero a 'licence to kill'. Today, many people say the James Bond films have given him a new licence: a licence to sell. The Bond films involve filming in different exotic locations and creating a lot of special effects. As a result, they are very expensive to make and product placement helps to pay for film production costs. So when Bond isn't using the latest mobile phones, GPS devices or handheld tablets, he is driving cars, wearing watches and flying with airlines that have all been placed in the films in return for very large amounts of money. Companies paid $45 million for their products to appear in the latest Bond film, which covered one third of the cost of making the film. Unfortunately, many Bond fans think that the film producers use product placement so much that it distracts audiences' attention away from the story.

Product placement now occurs in most TV programmes and films and, so far, audiences appear to accept it. Nevertheless, many film and TV critics feel that if advertising products becomes the only reason for making programmes and films, product placement will become a new problem for advertisers because audiences could switch off their TVs and stop going to the cinema.

video recorder – càmera de video / cámara de vídeo
handheld – de mà / de mano

Part 1: Reading comprehension

Choose the best answer according to the text. Only ONE answer is possible.
[0.5 points for each correct answer. Wrong answers will be penalized by deducting 0.16 points. There is no penalty for unanswered questions.]

1. **Product placement …**
   a) appears before a film starts.
   b) has a clear beginning and end.
   c) turns some programmes and films into non-stop adverts.
   d) appears during a break for advertisements in a TV show.

2. **Product placement …**
   a) has only appeared in TV and films.
   b) was invented a few decades ago.
   c) describes a TV programme that is about a product.
   d) can be found in literature.

3. **TV viewers' habits changed in the 1980s because of …**
   a) a new device.
   b) an increase in advertising time.
   c) repeated programmes and films.
   d) the introduction of product placement.

4. **TV and film producers send scripts to advertising companies so they can …**
   a) suggest changes to the story.
   b) find suitable products to go with the story.
   c) add products that American students like.
   d) find solutions for any problems in the story.

5. **Product placement causes problems when …**
   a) the products become more important than the story.
   b) the products fit naturally with the story.
   c) the camera focuses on some products.
   d) there aren't many products in the story.

6. **Product placement contributes to ...**
   a) giving James Bond new skills.
   b) increasing the film production costs.
   c) creating an exotic location in a studio.
   d) paying for the costs of making a film.

7. **One of the complaints about product placement in James Bond films is that ...**
   a) audiences want to buy the products they see immediately.
   b) it's very expensive for companies.
   c) it makes the story very difficult to follow.
   d) audiences can't concentrate on the story.

8. **In the future, audiences might consider product placement ...**
   a) a reason for switching off their TVs and going to the cinema instead.
   b) a reason for finding alternative forms of entertainment.
   c) a new problem for film and TV critics to discuss.
   d) the only reason for watching TV programmes and films.

Part 2: Writing

Choose ONE topic. Write about number 1 or 2. Minimum length: 100 words.
[4 points]

1. You and your friend want to see a film together at the weekend. You want to go to the cinema to see a new film that has just come out. Your friend wants to watch a film on the internet at home. Write the dialogue between you and your friend. Make sure you do NOT use your own name in the dialogue.

2. Advertising encourages people to buy products that they do not need. Do you agree with this idea? Write an opinion essay.