

Ques: How would you answer the question that what exactly is the difference between a novel and a film that is based on the same novel? Is it exactly the same or becomes different from the text when put on screen?

When a film is made from a novel, a common but misleading assumption is that the film should be *exactly the same* as the literary text. This expectation rests on the idea that adaptation is a matter of simple translation from one medium to another. In reality, however, a novel and a film—even when they share the same story—are fundamentally different artistic forms, and the process of putting a novel on screen inevitably produces difference rather than duplication.

At the most basic level, the difference arises from the nature of the two media. A novel is a verbal, linguistic, and imaginative form. It unfolds through language, interiority, narrative voice, metaphor, and temporal elasticity. A film, by contrast, is a visual–auditory medium that communicates primarily through images, sound, performance, editing, and mise-en-scène. What a novel can explore internally—thoughts, memories, hallucinations, philosophical reflections—a film must externalize through action, dialogue, facial expression, camera movement, or symbolic imagery. As a result, a film cannot simply “copy” a novel; it must rethink and reconfigure the material in accordance with cinematic grammar.

One of the most significant differences lies in narrative perspective and interiority. Novels have privileged access to a character’s inner consciousness. First-person narration, free indirect discourse, and psychological depth are central to the novel form. Films, unless they rely heavily on voice-over (which has its own limitations), must convert inner states into visible or audible signs. Consequently, many adaptations reduce or alter complex narrative voices. What is a rich interior monologue in a novel often becomes a gesture, a silence, or a visual motif on screen. This shift does not necessarily mean loss, but it does mean transformation of meaning.

Another crucial difference concerns structure and duration. Novels can be expansive, digressive, and slow-moving; they may dwell on description or philosophical reflection for pages. Films, constrained by time (usually two to three hours), require compression, selection, and omission. Subplots may be removed, characters merged, and events rearranged to maintain narrative

momentum. Therefore, a film adaptation is always an interpretive act: it decides what the “core” of the novel is and what can be sacrificed without collapsing the story.

Moreover, adaptations are shaped by historical, cultural, and ideological contexts different from those of the original text. A novel written in one period may be adapted decades later, and the film inevitably reflects the values, anxieties, and sensibilities of its own time. Thus, even when the plot remains largely intact, the *emphasis* may shift. What was radical or ambiguous in the novel may be softened, intensified, or reframed in the film to suit contemporary audiences or dominant cinematic conventions.

From the perspective of adaptation theory, critics like Linda Hutcheon argue that adaptations should not be judged by their “fidelity” to the source text. Fidelity assumes that the novel is an original, authoritative standard and the film a secondary, derivative copy. Instead, adaptations should be understood as creative reinterpretations, “palimpsests” that carry traces of the original while asserting their own artistic autonomy. A film is not a visual substitute for a novel but a new text in dialogue with it.

In conclusion, a film based on a novel is never exactly the same as the text—and cannot be. The shift from page to screen involves changes in medium, narrative technique, structure, sensory experience, and cultural context. Rather than asking whether a film is “faithful” to a novel, a more productive critical question is how the film reimagines, reframes, and rearticulates the novel’s concerns through cinematic language. Difference, not sameness, is the defining condition of adaptation.