

## Topic 45

### Film Reel

**Reel**, in motion pictures, is a light circular frame with radial arms and a central axis, originally designed to hold approximately 1,000 feet (300 m) of 35-millimetre motion-picture film. In the early days of motion pictures, each reel ran about 10 minutes, and the length of a picture was indicated by the number of its reels. A film was a “one-reeler,” a “two-reeler,” or longer.

The number of reels in a motion picture became a point of controversy in the United States when the Motion Picture Patents Company (1909–17), a trust of major film producers and distributors who attempted a monopoly of the industry from 1909 to 1912, limited the length of films to one or two reels because the viewing audience was considered incapable of appreciating motion pictures of greater duration. Multiple-reel films achieved widespread acceptance in 1912, however, becoming known thereafter as “feature” films. The word reel has lost its original meaning in terms of time, since a modern projector accommodates reels holding from 2,000 to 3,000 feet of 35-millimetre film, while the so-called mini-theatres often mount an entire movie on a single reel.

It is traditional to discuss the length of theatrical motion pictures in terms of "reels". The standard length of a 35 mm film reel is 1,000 feet (305 m), which runs approximately 11 minutes for sound film (24 frames per second) and slightly longer at silent film speed (which may vary from approximately 16 to 22 frames per second). Most films have visible cues which mark the end of the reel. This allows projectionists running reel-to-reel to change over to the next reel on the other projector.

A so-called "two-reeler" would have run about 20–24 minutes since the actual short film shipped to a movie theater for exhibition may have had slightly less (but rarely more) than 1,000 ft (305 m) on it. Most modern projectionists use the term "reel" when referring to a 2,000-foot (610 m) "two-reeler", as modern films are rarely shipped by single 1,000-foot (305 m) reels. A standard Hollywood movie averages about five 2000-foot reels in length.

The "reel" was established as a standard measurement because of considerations in printing motion picture film at a film laboratory, for shipping (especially the film case sizes) and for the

size of the physical film magazine attached to the motion picture projector. Had it not been standardized (at 1,000 ft or 305 m of 35 mm film) there would have been many difficulties in the manufacture of the related equipment. A 16 mm "reel" is 400 feet (122 m). It runs, at sound speed, approximately the same amount of time (11–12 minutes) as a 1,000-foot (305 m) 35 mm reel.

A "split reel" is a motion picture film reel in two halves that, when assembled, hold a specific length of motion picture film that has been wound on a plastic core. Using a split reel allows film to be shipped or handled in a lighter and smaller form than film would on a "fixed" reel. In silent film terminology, two films on one reel.

As digital cinema catches on, the physical reel is being replaced by a virtual format called Digital Cinema Package, which can be distributed using any storage media (such as hard drives) or data transfer medium (such as the Internet or satellite links) and projected using a digital projector instead of a conventional movie projector.

Actors may submit a demo reel of their work to prospective employers, often in physical reel format.