

# Gravity (Cuaron, USA/UK, 2013)

Introducing some key points about production, distribution and exhibition

## Production budgets and distribution

There are various ways of describing high budget, mainstream films:

- blockbusters (the word journalists tend to use)
- high grossing films (industry terminology)
- ‘tent-pole’ films – also industry terminology, used to describe the high grossing films the industry want to ‘hang’ their other releases on (once audiences have been drawn into the cinema, the idea is that they will return)
- high concept films (possibly a more academic term to describe films based on one simple idea that can be easily pitched – often accompanied by a defining soundtrack).

High budget films support a studio’s other releases during the year and tend to have budgets of at least \$100 million and some can exceed \$200 million. The highest budget film is usually quoted as *Spider-Man 3* (2007), which had a budget of approximately \$258 million.

It’s often useful when looking at the US and UK film industries to have a rough idea of the approximate size of films’ production budgets. Generally speaking, the lower the budget, the lower the distribution spend – which means, screening on a more limited range of cinemas and spending less on marketing.

The most common ways of describing film production budgets and release patterns are: high, medium and low budget and saturation, wide and limited release. The industry does, however, use more specific categories (such as key cities, selected cities etc.). You can see some of this detail on the UK Film Distributors’ Association’s [‘Launching Films’ website](#).

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Production		Distribution Approximate number of screens - USA (UK)		
		Saturation release 4500 (500)	Wide release 3000 (300)	Limited release 50 – 2500 max (50 – 250 max)
'Blockbuster'/ high grossing films	\$100m +	✓	✓ Some lower budget blockbusters given wide release	
Medium budget	Approx. \$5m to \$100 m		✓ Some upper medium budget films are given wide release	✓
Low budget	Less than \$5 m			✓ Some low budget films go straight to DVD
Micro budget	Less than \$1.25m			✓ Or straight to DVD

## Other release patterns

Major 'tent-pole' films are generally given a so-called **saturation release** – which means that the film is shown at the maximum number of screens available (at least one screen in every cinema). In the USA, this involves approximately 4000 and often significantly more screens and approximately 500 screens in the UK. In that case, the film is generally released simultaneously in several countries around the world.

Similarly, some significant medium budget films are given wide release.

On occasion, films are given a platform release. This is when a film is released in a limited number of cinemas initially but gradually given a wider release if the film turns out to be more popular than the distributors had predicted. *American Beauty* (1999) is a notable example from the past but subtitled films are often given a similar release pattern.

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## Task 1

Complete some online research (using, for example, [imdb.com](http://imdb.com) or [boxofficemojo.com](http://boxofficemojo.com) or the [UK Film Distributors' Association website](http://ukfilm.com)) and find examples of high, medium and low budget films giving an indication of their release pattern.

Budget	Film	Distributor	Release pattern
Blockbuster/High grossing film			
Medium budget			
Low budget			

## Task 2 (Digital resource 1a)

Look at the highest grossing films of 2013 and 2014, based on figures collected from Box Office Mojo (rounded to the nearest \$ million).

### Highest-grossing films of 2013

Rank	Title	Studio	Worldwide gross (\$ million)
1	<i>Frozen</i>	Disney	\$1274
2	<i>Iron Man 3</i>	Marvel Studio	\$1215
3	<i>Despicable Me 2</i>	Universal / Illumination	\$971
4	<i>The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug</i>	Warner Bros. / New Line / MGM	\$958
5	<i>The Hunger Games: Catching Fire</i>	Lionsgate	\$864
6	<i>Fast and Furious 6</i>	Universal	\$789
7	<i>Monsters University</i>	Disney / Pixar	\$734
8	<i>Gravity</i>	Warner Bros.	\$716
9	<i>Man of Steel</i>	Warner Bros. / Legendary	\$668
10	<i>Thor: The Dark World</i>	Marvel Studios	\$645

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## Highest-grossing films of 2014

Rank	Title	Studio	Worldwide gross (\$ million)
1	<i>Transformers: Age of Extinction</i>	Paramount Pictures	\$1000
2	<i>Guardians of the Galaxy</i>	Marvel Studio	\$771
3	<i>Maleficent</i>	Walt Disney Pictures	\$758
4	<i>X-Men: Days of Future Past</i>	20th Century Fox	\$746
5	<i>Captain America: The Winter Soldier</i>	Marvel Studios	\$714
6	<i>The Amazing Spider-Man 2</i>	Columbia Pictures	\$709
7	<i>Dawn of the Planet of the Apes</i>	20th Century Fox	\$708
8	<i>How to Train Your Dragon 2</i>	20th Century Fox / FreemWorks Animation	\$619
9	<i>Interstellar</i>	Paramount Pictures / Legendary Pictures	\$542
10	<i>Godzilla</i>	Warner Bros. / Legendary Pictures	\$525

In pairs, discuss the following questions:

- Choose *three* films which you have seen from the list. What makes these films blockbusters? Why do you think they were popular with audiences?
- Why are high grossing films important to the film industry?