

HOW TO WRITE A PLAY REVIEW (For an A plus 10 extra points (60/50 points))

A review is a discussion and evaluation of a performance. It is not: mean, cruel, a list of unsupported or baseless two-bit opinions, an inventory of positive generalizations, or simply a list of gripes.

It should contain five paragraphs.

Each of the theatrical elements you will analyze in Paragraphs 3 & 4 of your review needs to be approached in three different steps:

FIRST – Describe what you saw in detail. Make the reader see what you saw. Be specific. Be thorough. Use adjectives and adverbs that paint a picture for the reader.

SECONDLY – Analyze what you think the director or designer was trying to achieve. Why did they design the movements, lights, sound effects, costumes that way? What were they trying to make you, the audience, feel or think?

LASTLY – Judge how effective their efforts were. Judge the performance fairly and accurately. Do not be cliché. (ie. Don't say things like: "It was awesome." "They had great chemistry." "It was good." Arghh...) Don't be afraid to tell your honest opinion, but be diplomatic. Do not be mean. If you have something positive to say, give credit to the individual. If you have something negative to say, do not point the individual out. "The individual gets the credit; the team takes the hit."

In any case, if you cannot support your opinion using specific details from the show to illustrate your points, then your judgments-positive or negative- are not really worth anything, right?

So, here is the outline to follow for writing your reviews.

Paragraph 1 - The Basics

Include the answers to these questions:

- **Where** did you see the show (name of school or theater)?
- **When** did you see the show?
- **What** is the title of the show?
- **Who** wrote it?
- **What** is the main message/theme of the show?

Paragraph 2 - The Plot

Briefly summarize the plot of the play or musical. Include the main characters and supervising crew positions and the real names of the/crew members who played each onstage and offstage role.

Paragraph 3 - The Acting & Directing

React to the performers playing the characters in the play. Be sure to use their real names and character names.

- Were they believable? Did they seem realistic? Did their relationships with the other characters seem natural and appropriate? Did they stay in character throughout the play?
- How was the actor's vocal quality (volume and articulation)?
- Did their gestures and body movement convey and stay true to the character?
- Were they engaging and interesting to watch? Why? How?
- Did the blocking make sense? Were the movement choices natural and appropriate to the character/role?

Paragraph 4 - The Design Elements: Lights, Sound, Costumes & Makeup, and Set & Props

- Set & Props: Did they establish the correct mood for the play? Did they help add to the development of the characters, the plot, and the setting (time/place)? Were they well-made?
- Lights: Did they convey the proper mood? show emphasis? draw focus to the right spots? provide appropriate illumination?
- Costumes & Make Up: Were they true to the time period of the show? to the characters?
- Sound: How did the sound effects and music contribute to the show's mood? If it was a musical, how was the orchestra?

Paragraph 5 - The Reaction/The Conclusion

Was the audience attentive? Interested? What was your opinion of this performance as a whole?

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1. Back up all your opinions with valid reasons.
2. Be objective, fair and sincere.
3. Evaluate the entire production.
4. Be constructive. Indicate good points along with those you felt needed improvement.
5. Enjoy the play or musical! Don't go to a show predisposed to be negative. *Celebrate live theater!*

Review of a Theatre Performance: A Worksheet (For 40 points, or a B)

This worksheet is intended to help you write a theatre review for a "B". Above all, you must answer the specific questions you are given.

1. **Background to the visit** What play? What company? Your particular interest in the production? The theatre, its size and décor, its audience/actor arrangements, its impact on you? (5 sentences)

2. **The text and its interpretation** What kind of play? Resembles which other plays you know or have seen? Uses what kind of dramatic conventions? What are its primary meanings? Directorial interpretation focuses on which of these? (5 sentences)

3. **Acting as interpretation** Special conventions (e.g. doubling, narrator?) Special vocal or physical qualities of acting as a whole (incl. dialects?) Strengths and weaknesses of individual actors? Projection, articulation, movement of the actors? (5 sentences)

4. Impact on audience Discuss the impact of this production on you as a member of the audience and compare your response to others in the audience (e.g. were they amused where you weren't?); summarise the reasons for your feelings, referring to your discussion of the acting, directing, design elements and the text itself. (5 sentences)

5. Staging as interpretation Set changes handled how? Exits and entrances placed where? Playing areas constructed how? Patterns of movement used symbolically? (Consider both for individual characters and for acting as a whole). Pace (overall, variations in?) How were the play's meanings conveyed through these? (5 sentences)

6. Costume design, set, sound and lighting as interpretation What artistic choices did the designers make in choosing the lights, sound and costumes? What effect did these choices have on the production? Was there a color theme, or a design theme or an historical theme to the designs?

Theatre Report

Your Name _____ Title of Play _____
Playwright _____ Performance Date _____
Location _____

1. Discuss the genre, plot, and theme of this play.
2. Did you enjoy the production? Why or why not?
3. Which actors did a convincing job? Describe their technique.
4. Describe the set and its effectiveness.
5. Discuss any props, sound effects, or lighting elements you found effective.
6. Discuss the costumes and makeup.
7. Was the publicity or program noteworthy in any way? Explain.
8. Which character would you liked to have played? Why?
9. Should we consider producing this play? Why or why not?
10. Rate the overall production, including script, acting, directing, technical, house management, etc., by circling one of the following.

Superior Excellent Good Average Needs Improvement

