

# How To Write a Theatre Review

Theatre reviewing will help you develop your understanding of drama and the theatre. Review writing will help you be more responsive to what you see and more comprehensive and exact in your account of it.

Different kinds of plays and productions will be reviewed differently. You need to respond to the particular experience provoked by a performance.

## **Some questions before you attend the show.**

1. What is the play called?
2. Who is the director?
3. Who is the designer?
4. Who wrote it?

## **What kind of play is it, and what is it about?**

A brief summary of the main action is a good way to start before talking about the main themes of the play and the issues it confronts.

## **What is the style of performance?**

Is the play typical of one particular genre? Is it a comedy, a tragedy, absurd, naturalistic or postmodern?

Explain how this is portrayed in the performance, (ie techniques).

## **Is the play based on a novel?**

Discuss whether the script was faithful to the original text?

Was the script written by the author of the original text or by someone else?

## **Is the play also a film?**

How does the screenplay compare to the stage production?

What differences are there in the action?

What worked better on the stage, or in the film?

## **Who are the main actors, the supporting actors?**

What are the main characters of the play?

Do you think the actors understand the work?

How convincing did the actors seem in their portrayal of their characters?

What is their relationship with the other characters on stage and how well do they work together?

How well did they use their voice, movement or gestures to express their character?

Is there someone that stands out? Describe why.

## **How good is it?**

Distinguish here between the text and the performance.

What effect does it have on you? Positive, negative, indifferent or some combination of these.

What's missing, what's worth seeing, what it is you value the most from the production?

Here are some words to help you explain the performance;  
Compelling, difficult, complex, simple, overwhelming, aesthetically appealing, vague, dry, humorous, inviting, stale, logical, warm, frightening, abstract, dark, invigorating, mechanical, predictable, sophisticated, grotesque, energetic, enjoyable or abrasive.

**If you read the script before you attend the performance, analyse the performance against the written text.**

Does the performance realise its potential?

Do the actors fit the description of the characters you had in mind?

**Describe aspects of the performance in detail.**

Back up your judgement with evidence from the performance.

Topics to include are; direction, imagery, grouping, pace and timing, atmosphere or mood.

**What is the nature of the theatre experience?**

Your response to the play, but also notice how other audience members respond and the atmosphere of the evening.

**Technical aspects**

Ask yourself about the blocking, lighting, stage design, and costumes and how they influence the outcome of the play. Keep in mind that the lights, sound, costumes, etc. are there to enhance the performance, not to be the main focus. Try to use theatre terminology to define the technical aspects of the show.

**Is the script complicated or complimented with the use of special effects, flashbacks, recurring image motifs, lights, staging, or other visual elements?**

**Lighting**

Are the lights indicative of the time of day or the season?

Was special lighting used at any time for a particular effect?

**Sound**

Does the sound accent the style and format of the play?

Did this enhance or detract from the performance?

If they are using microphones, look for the quality of sound coming from them?

How did lighting and sound establish location and create atmosphere?

**Costume Design**

Do the costumes portray the time period and part of each character's personality.

How did the choice of colours and designs suit the overall look of the performance?

**Set Design**

Was the set an effective use of space? Did it enhance the performance?

Was it easy for the actors to manoeuvre around?

If there were any difficult technical elements discuss how they worked.

How did the design elements compliment the directorial concept?

## **FORMATTING YOUR REVIEW**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This should include the name of the play, the playwright, where the performance was including the date.

### **PLOT**

Try to give a brief description of the story.

### **THEMES AND ISSUES**

Outline the important themes and issues of the play. You should also discuss the director's interpretation of the play and how the style and form of the play communicates the play's themes.

### **ANALYSE CHARACTERS**

Describe and analyse the characters. (Often the main two)  
Talk about the character's motivation or objectives.

### **EVALUATE THE PERFORMER**

Choose two performers and evaluate their performance.

### **ELEMENTS OF THE PRODUCTION**

Discuss how effective you think the use of sound, lighting, set and costume were in the performance.

### **RESOURCES**

[http://www.sarasota.k12.fl.us/bhs/bryan/bryan\\_therev.html](http://www.sarasota.k12.fl.us/bhs/bryan/bryan_therev.html)

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<http://www.ecuad.ca/wc/theatrereview2.html>