

Critical Reviews

FOR *Journalism*
TEACHERS ONLY

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Critiques of movies, music and plays add interest to paper.

A review is not a report. Its primary function is to be critical. Although it does contain factual information on which the writer's opinion is based, the focus should be on the elements the reporter found to be worthy of mentioning.

What should a review do?

- Make sense to the reader, whether or not he/she saw the movie, attended the play, or listened to the music.
- Extend one's appreciation of the performance.
- Convey honest and fair criticism, pro or con. (Usually a good review includes both elements, although not necessarily in balance.)
- Offer a unique perspective, one reflecting the production as a whole, and one stressing a significant, fresh angle.
- Cite tangible, observable evidence for all conclusions.
- Build on accurate observation and appropriate reporting (listening, watching, reading--often more than once--as well as interviewing background sources).
- Make the reader feel, "That's right! That's what I thought or felt even though I couldn't express my reactions in those words."

How should a review be written?

- Combine elements of feature writing and of opinion writing.
 - a. Use colorful, sight-sound details.
 - b. Express a meaningful, clear viewpoint.
- Begin with a novelty (feature) lead.
- Give the writer's overall impression of the art form being reviewed early.
- Organize the experience in a meaningful way, often by artistic concerns (effect, style, tone, acting, staging, sound quality), rather than in a chronological order.
- Include details to support the criticisms, both good and bad.
- Reflect artistic sensitivity and avoid condescending manners and simplistic statements (It was fantastic...beautiful...brilliant...etc). Show me how it was fantastic, beautiful or brilliant.
- Use transitions to lead reader from one part of the story to the next.
- Conclude with paragraph that ties the review together which repeats a key element from the lead.

What kinds of art forms can be reviewed?

- Drama
- Music (concerts, albums)
- Art (painting, sculpture, architecture, photography)
- Film, Media (tv, radio)
- Publications (books, periodicals)
- Restaurants
- Travel
- Software (games, new programs)

Adapted from "Review Writing" by Howard Spanogle