

Reviewing and Critiquing

INTRO TO THEATRE

Good criticism defines and clarifies the theatrical experience.

Dramaturg: a creative literary, performance, and cultural researcher with an eye towards production.

A reviewer guides public opinion and shapes the market for a production
A critic hopes to shape the dialogue about a work of art

“Reviewers should be very astute and attentive audience members. They need to be extremely observant of all the details of a performance. Professional critics get press packets when they come to a show. These often include previous reviews of the show, background information on the artists, notes from the director or dramaturg, and other relevant material to inform their judgments. Almost all professional reviewers come to the theatre with pen and paper and make notes about the elements of production during the course of the show. Theatre reviewers need to be educated about the theatre to write with accuracy and understanding. Not only do they need a thorough knowledge of theatre history, dramatic literature, and theatre criticism, but they must also know about acting, directing, and design elements in order to discuss their contributions intelligently.” (p.400, WOT)

In the course of writing a critique, you will want to give your reader good reasons to understand and perhaps agree with your point of view on the performance.

Engage with the emotional and intellectual intentions of the production to have some sense of the standards by which to judge it.

STYLE

Unity of elements: what is used consistently

Emphasis of elements: what is used selectively

THESIS

Create a central claim that your ensuing arguments will advance (usually a claim about the play’s function, effects or meanings.)

Step 1: Organizational Structure

How is the work put together as a whole? Make a segmentation (plot outline) as an aid.

We will be experiencing “typical” narratives: it will have a plot that cues us to construct a story; it will manipulate causality, time and space; it will have a distinct pattern of development from opening to closing; its narration will choose between restricted and unrestricted knowledge.

Step 2: Identify the Salient Techniques Used

Describe what you see. What techniques are available? What techniques are necessary?

Step 3: Trace Out Patterns of Techniques

Analyze how techniques are used systematically, as a pattern. Synthesize observations and descriptions. Identify techniques, trace out patterns of use and propose functions. Also look for unique use of techniques that may stand aside from a pattern. **Connect patterns of techniques to the thesis you have developed.** Do not try to analyze all techniques, but certainly those that have the most effect on your thesis.

Step 4: Propose Functions for the Salient Techniques and Patterns They Form

Interpret. Connect Technique to Function to Meaning.

“A direct route to noticing function is to notice the effects on our viewing experience.”

“Meaning is only one type of effect, and there is no reason to expect that every stylistic feature will possess a thematic significance. One part of a director’s job is to direct our attention, so style will often function simply perceptually.” - **YOU are to focus on those elements, however, that DO connect to the functions of meaning and are to comment on those.**

Critiques:

DO:

- Provide striking opening that foreshadows your judgment and the work’s meaning
- Identify salient techniques – describe accurately, synthesize uses and relationships of techniques
- Utilize writing skills of arresting openings, pointed wrap-ups, vivid descriptions
- Identify your judgment of the INTENTION of the play and the relative success of achieving that intention. What did the play set out to do.
- Support this judgment with incisive examples

DO NOT:

- Concentrate overly on performance
- Compare extensively to other plays
- Drivel on about likes and dislikes, personal biases and contentions with the meaning of the work – assess what IT set out to do and if it did it, NOT whether you agree with the meaning or not.

TREE: Thesis supported by Reasons which rest upon Evidence and Examples.

Play Viewing Critique and Rubric

NOTE: rubrics are intended as GUIDES. They have been designed to identify what is of importance and how it is assessed, NOT as strict “True/False” assessments.

The successful Critique will identify salient TECHNIQUES of the medium used as an application towards final artistic MEANING. Techniques include story structure and genre, performance style, use of language, aspects of mise-en-scene, and sound. Meaning is derived through analysis of these techniques of medium and must demonstrate an understanding of referential, explicit, implicit and symptomatic meaning.

The quality of a critique is based upon clarity and insight of writing and evaluation. A successful critique will provide a *qualified* evaluation of the work. A plot synopsis or segmentation should NOT be included in the critiques for UCD departmental productions – however, elements of structure and plot that support the clearly stated thesis of meaning should be included. The evaluation will be balanced, identifying positive and negative aspects of the work.

While most reviews concentrate upon acting, our analyses will expand to concentrate on a wider set of aspects of the medium we are studying (Narrative structure, form and language, Directing and Acting (live dynamics and continuous staging), Mise-en-scene (design), Sound). Analyses must be concisely and eloquently written.

Critiques must be 2 - 4 pages, Courier, Times, Bookman or Times New Roman fonts, 10 – 12 point.

Play Viewing Critique Rubric

	Superlative	Proficient	Adequate	Unsatisfactory
Grade “equivalent”	A	A to B	B- to C-	Below C-
Writing style (25%) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organization • Technical • Creative 	Stimulating read; Thesis of Meaning is clearly stated; Very few or no technical mistakes; Body is logically organized; Stimulating use of language (imagery, metaphors, etc.)	Easy to read; Thesis of Meaning is clearly stated; Few technical mistakes; Body is logically organized; Good use of language	Reasonable to read; Thesis of Meaning is clearly stated; Some technical mistakes; Body is adequately organized; Reasonable use of language	Difficult to read or follow; Thesis of Meaning is not clear; Many technical mistakes; Body is not logically organized; Ineffectual language use
Content (75%) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of Meaning • Balanced assessment • Specific examples • Identification of techniques 	Meaning is clearly identified; Evaluation is balanced, clearly stated, including positive and negative aspects; Thesis is supported and synthesized eloquently through breadth and depth of specific examples, covering a range of techniques and demonstrating quality of observations, providing a logical and convincing argument; Multiple areas of form, style and technique are addressed in support of thesis	Meaning is clearly identified; Assessment is clear and balanced; Thesis is supported and synthesized well through breadth and depth of specific examples, covering a range of techniques and demonstrating quality of observations, providing a logical and convincing argument; Several areas of form, style and technique are addressed in support of thesis	Meaning is adequately identified; Assessment is reasonably clear and balanced; Thesis is adequately supported and synthesized through specific examples, covering several techniques and demonstrating reasonable observations, providing a reasonably logical and convincing argument; Several areas of form, style and technique are addressed in support of thesis	Meaning is only vaguely identified; Assessment is unbalanced, uncritical; Thesis is feebly supported or synthesized through specific examples - examples are non-existent, generic or do not relate to assessment, lacking a demonstration of observation skills and/or ability to provide a logical or convincing argument; Areas of form, style and technique are not addressed meaningfully in support of thesis or are disconnected from meaning