Writing a Dance Critique

Critique: an exercise involving careful judgment or judicious evaluation

Step 1:

Watch, listen, and experience the performance with an open mind. Do not view the dance as if it were a movie; you must involve yourself and be an active participant.

Step 2:

Do a little research. While a critique is not a term paper, having some background knowledge can help you put the work in context. Possible items to look up are the choreographer, the dance, the composer, the dance company, and the principal dancer(s).

Places to look for information:

  Library Home Page > Article Databases > Alphabetical > Oxford Digital Reference Shelf

  Library Home Page > Article Databases > Alphabetical > Oxford Music Online

- Dance in Video Online dance videos
  Library Home Page > Article Databases > Alphabetical > Dance in Video

In Print:

- International Dictionary of Ballet Reference GV 1585 .I57 1993

Videos (DVD / VHS)
GV = dance call number (located on main floor)

You may want to look in these informational sources about the choreographer, the particular dance, performances, or the company.

Library Home Page > Article Databases > General / Multi-Subject
Academic Search Premier & Master FILE Premier: great magazine coverage
ProQuest Newsstand: includes New York Times, Village Voice and others

Step 3:

Get ready to write the critique. The following prompts may help you to write your critique:

Movement

- What movements did you observe?
- What body actions did the dancers perform?
- Which parts of the body were emphasized?
- Were the dancers crawling, leaping, slithering, jumping, spinning, etc.?
- Was the dance sharp or sluggish? Deliberate or explosive?
- What forms did the dancers’ bodies employ? You can relate these to letters.
Choreography

- What was the structure of the dance?
- How did the dancers relate to each other?
- Were the dancers alone (solo), in pairs (duet), in groups (trio = 3; quartet = 4, etc.)?
- Was there repeated movement? What was it?
- Was the dance a narrative (did it tell a story)?
- Was the dance abstract (without form or story)?
- Did the work have a clear beginning, middle, and end?

Space

- How did the dancers move through space?
- Where did the movement occur?
- Were the dancers more related to the floor or the ceiling?

Performance

- What were the technical and expressive abilities of the dancers?
- What made a particular performer stand out?
- Were the dancers focused and energetic?

Music

- Was the music fast or slow?
- Was the music more rhythmic or lyrical?
- Did the music evoke a specific emotional response?

Staging

- Were the costumes appropriate for the dance?
- Did the lighting focus attention or distract?
- Were there sets? Did they add to the performance?
- Was the absence of costumes or sets meaningful?

Personal Response

- Did the dance remind you of anything?
- Did the dance make you happy or sad? Why?
- What did the dance communicate to you?
- What stood out the most?

Overall Reaction

- Can you make any connections between the performance and what you’ve learned?
- What impression did the dance make?
- What did you learn about dance from this performance?
- Did the performance create any questions for you?

Step 4:

Write the critique. Remember, when you voice an opinion, it must be backed up with actual experiences. In other words, you can’t say “the dance was very emotionally moving”; you can say “the slow, deliberate movements of the dancers expressed deep pain and grief”. Describe, don’t tell!

Step 5:

Reread, edit, proofread, read aloud, have someone else read your critique, and take it to the writing center. Remember to italicize the name of a dance just as you would the title of a book. Example: Giselle