Writing a Successful Theatre Critique

Step One: Go see the play. Take notes and jot down a summary of each act while it is fresh in your mind. Do not rely on someone else’s memory. Utilize your own experience.

Step Two: After the play, read over the notes you took during the play and expand upon it now that you have seen it in its entirety. Add analysis and evaluate if necessary.

Step Three: Using your notes from Step Two, locate technical terms used in the course. These enhance your paper and give it greater credibility. In short, using technical terms shows that you know what you are talking about. Keep in mind things such as the director’s interpretation of the play, the acting, costumes, lighting, set, character depiction, technical aspects, music (if any), and any special effects.

Step Four: Make sure to answer or address any specific questions that you have been given by your instructor, which means you will have to read and interpret the assignment.

Step Five: Using all the previous steps, come up with a thesis. The purpose of a thesis statement is to give your reader a guideline for what you will be discussing in a clear and concise way. It should appear at or near the end of your introductory paragraph. And saying, the play was good, does not work. Explain why it was good. Show us with specific examples. As a matter of fact, if you can leave out the words good and bad altogether, you are a lot better off. State your opinion as fact. Leaving out phrases such as, I thought, makes for a stronger paper. Remember that your opinion is valid, and in fact an important part of a review. Do not be afraid to assert your voice. Make bold statements as long as you are able to support them. It is easiest to limit the paper to a few things that you can talk about in great detail and then do so. The paper will be easier to follow and to write. For example, in reference to the production of Romeo and Juliet in 2000, you could write something like this for a thesis paragraph:

Romeo and Juliet is a classic story that everyone knows. Yet, there are many ways to interpret Shakespeare’s original play in order to make it more relevant to a modern audience. WCU’s post-apocalyptic production was not only interesting but was extremely successful in bringing home an old story and making it new. The costumes, set, and acting were crucial and spectacular in pulling off the desired effect. They were used well together, with obvious attention to detail, to make the audience believe that this story was one that could happen, once again, in the future.

Step Six: After writing a simple, yet bold thesis statement, support it throughout the body of the paper with as much detail and technical terminology as is necessary to achieve the aim of the paper—to convince the reader that your opinion is based on solid evidence. One way you could set up your paper if you were supporting the thesis in the
paragraph above is to discuss different aspects of the play paragraph by paragraph. The next paragraph could be about the costumes, then the third paragraph could be about the set, and the fourth paragraph could be about the acting. The fifth paragraph would be how they all worked together to make the show believable. Remember that each paragraph needs a topic sentence in order for the paper to flow properly and allow your reader to follow your thoughts. Finally, sum up what you have said in a thorough but brief conclusion (in the example above, that would be your sixth paragraph); meaning, tell us what you are going to tell us, then tell us, and then tell us what you told us. Make sure you use analysis intermingled with summary throughout your paper as a way to show your understanding and opinions of the play. Pay attention to the specific formatting guidelines detailed on the CMTA104 web site at http://www3.wcu.edu/~bstrauss/cmta104/104syllabus.html

Step Seven: Have someone else read it. If this means bringing it in to the Writing Center, then do so. We are paid to read these things. It is our job, and honestly, we don’t mind. Some of us even like it!

. . . composed by Nací Morris, Writing a Successful Theatre Critique, 2001, University Writing Center, Western Carolina University. Revised by the Writing and Learning Commons, 2012.