

## How to Write an Effective Theatre Review

### Task:

You are required to write one review of a live theatre performance. Your review must be 1-2 pages in length, it must be handed in typed, double-spaced and Times New Roman Font, size 12.

Review draft due date: \_\_\_\_\_

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### Viewing Tips:

You may ask yourself, what should I look for when watching a live performance?

First, take notes either during the performance or immediately after to keep the examples while they are fresh in your mind.

Second, decide on a couple of elements to focus on in your critique including: *Directorial Choices/Vision, Acting, Lighting, Sound, Costumes, Props, Set, Special Effects/AV effects etc.*

### Writing Tips:

Your review needs a brief opening, similar to an introduction of an essay that states the title of the show, the director, the venue and the key elements of the production you are going to elaborate on in your review.

Choose 2-3 elements to critique, as too many elements will not allow you to go into depth. Possible elements to critique: *Directorial Choices/Vision, Acting, Lighting, Sound, Costumes, Props, Set, Special Effects/AV effects etc.*

Your review should have an overall tone, this tone should answer the question whether or not you enjoyed the production.

Remember to not just “bash” a production, focus on the positive and the negative.

Allow your personality to come through in your writing, if you use sarcasm or humour normally, allow this to seep into your reviews.

Be honest, if there were things you really liked and things you hated, write about that, just be sure to have an overall tone that is consistent throughout your review.

Play with the language. Adding in rhetorical devices helps to convince your reader of your point, and it gives credibility to your argument.

Remember, the review should be persuasive. Reviewers that work for magazines and newspapers are hired to let people know whether a production is worth seeing or not. Make sure you are clear about whether or not you recommend seeing the production.

Add a creative flair. Your review should have a creative title, it should end with a creative statement, and you may even wish to add the “star rating system” to your review.

*Attached is a review I wrote as an example.*

Name  
Date  
Course Code  
Teacher's Name

### *Don Juan or Don Yawn?*

When attending a Stratford show one has expectations of a high caliber production that leaves the audience feeling entertained. Often times these expectations are fulfilled creating a reputation that the Stratford Festival produces solidly entertaining shows. Other times these expectations are drop-kicked at the door, and you are left yawning throughout a three-hour muddled mess.

The Stratford Festival's rendition of Moliere's *Don Juan* directed by Lorraine Pintal starring Colm Feore at the Avon Theatre and translated by David Edney, serves as a reminder that translated productions often fail. Lost in translation, the script loses the humour, wit and brilliance first created by Moliere. The result is a bumpy script off-set with a series of mish-mashed theatrical elements lacking a unified directorial vision.

The production opens with an engaging ensemble improvising in a commedia d'ell arte fashion creating a light, comedic tone. This atmosphere is soon disrupted by the beautifully painted scrim rising above the proscenium revealing a bath tub, candelabras and a series of female mannequins housing elaborate period costume pieces. The simplistic set designed by Daniele Levesque does not lack in conventionality, in fact the most fascinating moments of this production involve the set evolving from one scene to the next in a graceful manner. But the unique set choices do detract from the attention the audience should be paying to the actors; nonetheless, it serves as a refreshing break just when you are about to gauge your eyes out from boredom.

The middle-aged, balding Colm Feore struggles to convince us that he is a young, attractive seducer of twenty-something tarts; he struggles to command the stage with his feeble presence. His usually admirable delivery of lines, are hollow and rigid, lulling one back to sleep. The character Sganarelle (played by Benoit Briere) immediately stands out as being the star in a mediocre cast. Briere plays Don Juan's trusty servant who struggles with morality. Briere balances just enough emotional realism with physical humour to allow a great deal of empathy while still receiving a number of laughs. The strongest moment for Sganarelle was his powerful, emotionally packed monologue at the end of the play concerning his wages. This moment also accredited Briere as being more than capable of honing in his humour for a moving closing monologue.

There is something to be said about the elaborate costume pieces used in this production. Costume designer Francois St-Aubin states in the program that the costumes “were not designed with a specific period in mind, although there is a period look to them.” St-Aubin certainly achieved this disjointed lack of vision; combining meticulous costume pieces like the red, Japanese-style kimono Don Juan wears in the bedroom scene, with leather jackets and pants sported by the greasy-looking Don Carlos (Paul Essiembre) and Don Alonso (Stephen Gartner), and baffling us further Don Louis (Jean-Louis Roux) who looks like the epitome of 15<sup>th</sup> century barrister. St-Aubin succeeded in an array of visually appealing period-jumbling costume pieces that make absolutely no sense at all.

Joining the confusing costume design was the lighting design, designed by Axel Morgenthaler. In similar fashion, the lighting design consists of a series of beautiful, visually appealing lighting concepts used to create dramatic effect but lacking a unified artistic vision to add to the production. For example, in the forest scene there was a backlight on the scrim creating a mystical visual component with shadow effects, this coupled by a series of white squares scattered throughout the stage floor for no apparent reason other than to look “cool”, and finally a realistic, bright outdoor lighting scheme, again left one questioning: was there ever a vision to begin with? The lighting, however “cool”, creates more of a distraction rather than compliment the production as a whole.

A final baffling element used in this production was an audio-visual component of the deceased Commander (played by Christopher Plummer) via a video-recording on a data projector whom Don Juan actually interacts with, think Dorothy at the end of *The Wizard of Oz*. The director’s decision to have Colm Feore, who is supposed to symbolize a great deal of humanity and realism as Don Juan, interact with a twenty foot video-recorded talking-head, was a humorous, yet weak directorial decision. The mellow-dramatic portrayal of the Commander added a comical aspect to the intended seriousness of these scenes and turned what was meant to be dark moments into a slapstick farce as Don Juan and Sganarelle cowardly hid from the giant Commander on the screen. This combination of attempted realism overlapped by unintended farce, further contributed to the production’s sloppy style.

Stratford’s muddled mess of *Don Juan* and the lack of focus falls directly on Pintal’s head. Combined with Edney’s bumpy translation of Moliere’s text, this attempt at *Don Juan* affirms that even if a show has a lavish budget, facility, actors and a solid festival reputation, it is still possible to leave groggy, and questioning where my money went.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Theatre Criticism – Rubric**

/40

	Level 4 (8-10/10) Reader is immediately engaged	Level 3 (7-8/10) Reader is engaged	Level 2 (6-7/10) Reader is moderately interested	Level 1 (5-6/10) Reader is not engaged	Below Level (5-0/10)
<b>Introduction (10)</b>	Introduces play and director and provides direction for discussion	Mostly clear (play introduced and director) and some direction provided	Introduction needs more focus or clarification	Introduction is weak (little or no direction for discussion)	Introduction is unclear (play and/or director not introduced, no direction for discussion)
<b>Body of the Review (10)</b>	2-3 elements are clearly, and thoughtfully critiqued throughout the review and a lot of detail is provided Sentences are clear, and build upon one another to create a strong opinion Wraps up main points clearly, and leaves reader with a lasting impression	2 elements are critiqued throughout the review, some detail is given Sentences and opinion are clear, and build to create an argument	1-2 elements are critiqued throughout the review, not always clear, little detail is given Sentences and opinion are somewhat clear, and but do not create a strong argument	1-2 elements are critiqued throughout the review, not always clear, little or no detail Sentences and opinion are not clear, and no argument is present	No evidence of theatre elements critiqued in review, no examples are given Sentences are unclear, and re-tell plot rather than build argument
<b>Conclusion (10)</b>	Wraps up main points clearly, and leaves reader with a lasting impression	Wraps up main points; does not leave reader with a lasting impression	Concluding sentence is ordinary -- doesn't wrap up main points; attempts to leave a lasting impression	Concluding does not adequately wrap up main points or leave a lasting impression	Conclusion is very weak; does not wrap up main points; no attempt at lasting impression
<b>Style and Mechanics (10)</b>	Sophisticated sentence structure and formal tone carried throughout, few to no spelling, grammar, punctuation errors	Good sentence structure and formal tone maintained throughout, some spelling, grammar, punctuation errors	Minor problems in sentence structure; inconsistent tone, several spelling, grammar, punctuation errors	Major problems in sentence structure; inconsistent or improper tone, many spelling, grammar, or punctuation errors	Very poor sentence structure; improper tone throughout, very many spelling, grammar, or punctuation errors; not proofread

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