

Tips from the Writing Center: Writing a Review

What is a review? A review, also called an **evaluation or critique**, makes an argument about the overall quality of a subject for review—play, performance, concert, restaurant, TV show, film, or album)—by using specific examples. Approach the task as if you are persuading an audience who needs to understand why you “liked” or “did not like” the subject for review.

Section	What to include
Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Relevant context</i>: title/name, date, location, author, director, playwright, and/or local or historical context • <i>Brief summary</i>: Provide the reader with a quick basis. Focus only on key aspects that pertain to your review rather than minor details. This should be no more than 2-3 sentences that summarize your subject. For example, “The plot of <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> follows the tragic fate of two young lovers from feuding families.” • <i>Thesis</i>: State the overall review (evaluation or impression) of the subject. Include important <i>elements</i> you will analyze in the support paragraphs.
Support Paragraphs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Describe and analyze relevant elements</i>. Try to understand what they represent and how they contribute your overall review. Help the reader visualize the elements you observe, but make sure to choose details that pertain to your thesis. For example, if you analyze the choice of scenery in a play, describe the stage design and how it worked within a particular scene. Think about the choices of the director and set designer. • <i>Evaluate</i> the elements within reasonable criteria and fair context. Reasonable criteria means considering what it means to be “good” in whatever category the subject for review falls into. For instance, it wouldn’t be fair or reasonable to evaluate a fast-food burger joint by the same standards as you would a high-end steakhouse with white tablecloths and expensive entrees. How successful were the elements? A fair context means that if it was raining and the band could not use microphones, note that.
Conclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Remind your audience of the overall impression</i>: Your conclusion should not merely restate your thesis in a mechanical way. • <i>Answer “so what?”</i>: Try to show why your response is valid and significant, based on what you have described in the body of the paper. • <i>Don’t get carried away</i>: Don’t add any significant new material, but don’t be afraid to leave your reader with something to think about.

What tone should the review have? You will lend more credibility to your review if you take a fair and professional tone. For example, you wouldn’t want to write: “What was the director thinking setting *Hamlet* in 1960’s America? That seemed totally inappropriate.” Instead, you might write: “Setting *Hamlet* in America in the 1960’s had a certain amount of intrigue, but it ultimately did not mesh with the plot and dialogue.”

Each subject for review has unique *elements* to consider. You may consider several of the following or relevant elements that you or your professor specify.

Play

- Costumes
- Set
- Special effects
- Alterations to original script
- Line delivery/diction/vocal expression
- Action and gestures
- Deviations from a “standard” performance
- Audience participation/reaction

Concert

- Venue
- Ambiance/atmosphere
- Special effects
- Cost/value
- Vocals
- Timing and order
- Audience participation/reaction
- Instrumentals
- Accessibility

Restaurant

- Food
- Service
- Cost/value
- Ambiance/atmosphere
- Menu - presentation and offerings
- Location
- Accessibility

Movie or TV Show

- Costumes
- Special effects
- Camera angles
- Script
- Plot or narrative arc
- Action and gestures

Music Album

- Cover art
- Instrumentals and arrangement
- Vocals
- Lyrics
- Order of songs

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