

writing theatre reviews

craft. care. curiosity.

the role of the reviewer

the reviewer is a...

translator: helping the public understand and access the art

witness: noticing, absorbing, and reflecting what happened onstage

guide: offering insight so audiences can choose what resonates

storyteller: writing about the show with clarity, kindness, and creativity

cultural record-keeper: documenting what's happening in the arts now

conversation partner: contributing to a larger dialogue

why arts criticism matters

criticism nurtures a healthy arts ecosystem by...

deepening understanding: encouraging audiences to think about *how* and *why* art works

sparking conversation: inviting multiple perspectives into the cultural dialogue

supporting artistic growth: offering insight and perspective artists can learn from

guiding audiences: helping people choose shows that connect with their interests

strengthening community: building a shared language around performance

preserving history: documenting creative work

why reviews matter to audiences

reviews help audiences...

discover shows they might love

set expectations about tone, content, style, and experience

understand context including themes, form, or artistic intentions

feel confident choosing what they want to see

engage more deeply with the art even after the show

explore diverse perspectives beyond their own

why reviews matter to artists

for artists, a good review can...

offer meaningful feedback they might not get elsewhere

reflect the audience's experience back to them

highlight strengths and celebrate successes

identify opportunities for growth, refinement, and clarity

support their career with pull quotes, press kits, and touring materials

document their work for grants and future projects

build confidence and community connection

writing a constructive review

a constructive review is...

clear: what did you see, how did it make you feel, what did you take away?

specific and descriptive: use examples, moments, or choices – avoid vagueness

balanced and fair: consider what worked (and what didn't) without exaggeration

focused on the work (not the artist): critique choices, structure, clarity, pacing – never personal characteristics

respectful and responsible: words have impact – write as if the artist will read it (because they might!)

contextualized: what is the work trying to achieve, who is it for?

honest, not harsh: criticism helps; cruelty harms

your voice

great reviewers write with...

honesty: say what you really experienced, not what you think you should say

curiosity: what was the show attempting? What resonated most?

compassion: respond to the work with humanity

specificity: include concrete details, moments, and observations

openness: let the show surprise you – don't lock in an opinion too early

community mindset: your words become part of an ecosystem – contribute responsibly

pitfalls to avoid

how to dodge common traps...

plot summary syndrome: if your review reads like book report, you're not reviewing, you're retelling

review the show you saw (not what you wanted to see): engage with the piece on its own terms – review what's there, not what you think should be.

buzzword overload: avoid jargon, get specific

ignoring design & technical elements: lights, sound, costumes, set, projections – it's all part of the storytelling

inconsistent tone: stay grounded and clear

spoilers! give enough info to orient your audience, not ruin the experience for them

a simple review structure

a strong review might follow this easy flow...

hook: a striking first line, a question, an impression
– something that brings the reader in

context: what's the show? who made it? what's the style, tone, or premise (without spoilers!)?

experience: what stood out to you emotionally, intellectually, or aesthetically?

evidence & description: highlight specific choices, moments, or elements (acting, writing, design, pacing)

evaluation: what worked well? how did those choices land with you?

takeaway: what might audiences get from seeing the show? who is it for?

fringe reviews

reviews.fringetheatre.ca

what it is...

a place for accredited media, emerging reviewers, and audiences to share reviews

a moderated platform grounded in Fringe Theatre's Code of Conduct, Safer Spaces, and Anti Racism commitments

a space that values respectful, constructive criticism

a way to document shows, artists, and the spirit of the Fringe Festival movement

a tool for audiences seeking guidance and artists seeking support

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quick tips for writing fast reviews...

(between green onion cakes and your next show)

write immediately after the show. Impressions fade quickly – capture them while they're fresh

start with one strong idea – a theme, a moment, a feeling. Build everything else around it.

draft quickly; edit with clarity in mind

use a template: hook -> context -> experience -> evidence -> evaluation -> takeaway

set a short timer

avoid perfectionism

use specific, simple language

trust your voice – let your authenticity shine

questions

questions to spark conversation...

what makes a review memorable to you?

how do you balance honesty and kindness?

what's the more challenging part of writing a review?

what do you think the responsibility of the reviewer is?

how should a review change depending on the show?

what excites you most about being a reviewer?