

Notes on How to Write About a Performance

Movement Description: What are the movements? Discuss what body actions the dancers performed (glided, skipped, dove, rolled, lunged, kicked leg, jumped), what body parts were used (head, left foot, right pinkie), where in space did the movement occur (in the corner, in a circular pattern, in a straight line, what shapes did their bodies make (round, line like the letter V with her arms), and what qualities (quick, slow, fluid, sharp, heavy, light, direct, open, etc.)

Imagery: What kinds of images did certain movements inspire in you? Discuss what physical movements the dancers performed that made you think of your image. Did they flock like birds? Did their arms slice through the air like helicopter blades? Did the theatricality of the intent make you think of a birthday party?

Choreography: How are the movements arranged in terms of structure? Did the work have a clear beginning, middle and end? Was it linear, cyclical, a collage of images, in sections, or another format? Were there groupings of dancers and how many? [Solo=1, Duet=2, Trio=3, Quartet=4, etc.]

Performers: Discuss the performers' technical and expressive abilities. Pick one performer that you are drawn to and describe in more detail.

Theatrical Effects: Discuss the sound/music, lighting, costumes, text, sets, and props and how they contribute to the piece as a whole. [Do not spend the whole paper talking about costumes even though there may be much to say on the topic.]

Context: Is there any social, historical, or cultural context for the piece? Make connections to class material and/or discussions and other aspects of your life and experiences. This can be gathered from the pre-performance discussion, class discussion, program notes or web site info if the artist provides one.

Reaction/Response: Do you have questions about the dance? What impression do you walk away with? How do you value what you saw as art, compared to other dance you've seen or other art forms: theater, music, visual art, etc.

Sentence Construction: Attempt to be creative with how you phrase your words. Try to bring the dance to life with your descriptions. Write as if you're describing the dance for somebody who hasn't seen the performance. What is your personal point of view – don't be generic!

Example:

Generic: "I noticed the dancers did kicks and jumps. They looked like animals."

Expressive: "The sharpness and power of their whip-like turning kicks brought an edge to the work, creating an atmosphere of a feral jungle, where competition between species brings harshness to relationships."

Vocabulary:

The area where the dancers are performing is the "stage" and they can be "onstage" or "offstage" as they enter and exit. Towards the audience is "downstage" and away from them is "upstage". "Stage right" is the audience's left and "stage left" is the audience's right.

The entire program is a "performance" or "concert" or "show" **not** a "recital."

The separate dance items in a program are "pieces" or "works", unless they are part of a single ballet or composition as noted in the program. In the latter case, the composition may be divided into "acts" and/or "scenes."

What the dancers do are: "movements" or "phrases" and **not** "moves."

Please do not assume you can speak for the entire audience. Incorrect="The audience was enthralled with the female soloist in the first piece, because of her ethereal gestures and mesmerizing footwork."

Correct="I was enthralled...."

Spell-check does not catch everything.