

School of Dance

Guidelines for Writing Critique Papers

The Assignment:

You are to write a paper, at least two pages long, in response to the dance concert you have attended. The purpose of this assignment is to use written language to describe and respond to choreography. You are to describe the concert as a whole and one or two works in detail. This assignment will help you improve your observation skills and descriptive and analytic writing. Through vivid descriptions and thoughtful discussion of the work, you will develop your aesthetic judgment, and expand your critical and creative thinking skills.

The Due Date:

The syllabus lists dates when papers are due. Late papers are not accepted.

How to Prepare:

Observe, describe, analyze, interpret, evaluate

As the date for the assigned concert approaches, your professor will preview the performance in class. Listen for information about the choreographer and style of dance you are about to see. Also, be attentive to dance vocabulary you are learning in class. Note carefully images your professor may use to describe movement you perform in class. This language will help you be specific in your portrayal of the concert.

Many dance performances on campus begin with a pre-performance discussion. Arrive early to hear from the choreographer, or an expert, how the choreographer creates the work. It is wise to arrive early enough to read the program before the concert begins. Note the title of each work. Often the title is a suggestion of the choreographer's intent.

Observe the dance with an open mind. First, be attuned to the dancers and the quality of the movement. Notice the supporting elements, music, lighting, costumes and set. Recognize that your imagination is limitless. What you see is neither right nor wrong, but valued as your own perception.

Bring a pen or pencil and after each work, when the house lights come on between pieces, list words and phrases that capture the energy, mood, story or design of the piece you have just seen. Record images as they occur to you, use action verbs, adjectives and metaphors. This is the raw material that you will use to write your paper so capture as many images as possible

How to Write:

Before you begin, review the words and phrases you have written on your program. As you read your notes about a dance, reflect on the images, colors and sounds of the performance.

Make a simple plan for your paper. Begin with an introductory paragraph which sets the scene: who, what, when, where and introduces a thesis that offers an interesting insight and refers to the concert as a whole.

Next, choose one or two dances which you remember most vividly and develop your notes into descriptive sentences. Carefully choose language which conveys the essence of what you have seen. This will become the body of your paper.

After creating vivid descriptions that create a general sense of the dance as well as describing specific movements, analyze and interpret the work. What was the choreographer's intent? Was it literal? Did it tell a story? Did it convey a mood? Or was it abstract, more concerned with structure and design than telling a story? Do the supporting elements (lighting, costumes, music) strengthen the choreographer's intent? How do they contribute to your interpretation of the dance?

End your paper with a concluding paragraph summarizing and evaluating the concert. Make sure your descriptions support your interpretations and evaluations.

Remember:

Use strong action words; slice slither, melt, propel, dancers swoop, fall, run, crouch, dive etc.

Interesting adjectives: tangled limbs, piercing leaps, floating turns

Colorful adverbs: leaned heavily, tumbled fluidly, scampered briskly

Avoid overused adjectives: nice, good, wonderful, beautiful

Avoid hyperbole: the worst, the best, the most

Use active rather than passive voice:

Active: The dancer strained against invisible binds as the music changed tempo

Passive: As the music changed tempo the dancer could be seen staining against invisible binds.

The Format

- Your paper should be double spaced and printed with standard margins.
- No hand written work is accepted. The cover sheet should include your name, your instructor's name, the course number and section, the date, and a title for the paper.

- Be accurate. Check the program for the correct spelling of choreographers', dancers', and composers' names. The title of a dance is in quotation marks. The title of an evening length's work is underlined or in italics.
- Use your dance vocabulary correctly. You have attended a dance concert, not a recital. You are describing Dances, works or pieces, not routines.
- Language, spelling and grammar are important, and count heavily toward your grade. Be sure to proof read your paper before handing it in. Reading your paper aloud can help you find errors, and having a friend proofread is also helpful.

You may seek help at the university's writing center (703 993-1200).