

# Writing about Theatre

## I. General Purpose

People write about theatre to understand their own responses to a play; to convince others of a position; to explain or introduce new concepts, artists, directors, or plays; to compare plays, directors, actors, or eras; or to connect to a culture or field. **Audiences** include theatre professionals (actors, writers, directors, producers, technicians, musicians), teachers, administrators, school personnel, students, audiences, and the general public.

## II. Types of Assignments

- Review response
  - Recommendation and opinion
- Production Response
  - Evaluation of quality of play or production
  - Critical Analysis (of plot, direction, acting, design, venue)
  - To demonstrate an understanding of stagecraft involved
- Analytical Theatre Essay
  - Form and content of a play (conflict, plot, pace, mood, style, theme, language, symbols)
  - Theatrical history (social/ political / historical/ artistic contexts, author's background, history)
- Character/ Scene Analysis
  - Objectives of character, action, rhythm, tempo, obstacles, climax
  - Structure of plot in a scene
- Research paper
  - Theatrical history (social/ political/ historical/ artistic contexts, material conditions of past theatre events)
  - History of productions of a particular play
- Audience interpretive materials
  - Webpages and lobby displays with information about plays, playwrights, themes, and production histories
  - Program notes describing the concept and rationale for a production

## III. Types of Evidence

- Observation, research
- Primary sources (play scripts, firsthand performance accounts)
- Secondary sources (critiques, reviews, historical documents)

- Textbooks, biographies and memoirs, critiques, reviews, historical documents, posters, handbills, scripts, firsthand accounts, newspapers, photographs, video recordings, museums

#### **IV. Writing Conventions**

- Create a “grabber” introduction.
- Include a description of play and production.
- Create a strong, clear focus/ thesis statement.
- Provide an opinion, evaluation, or argument (question of taste vs. opinion).
- Writing should flow and be organized.
- Support an opinion or evaluation with relevant details and evidence.
- Tone, style and language should be “relatively formal.”

#### **V. Terms/ Vocabulary/ Concepts**

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|------------------|--------------------|
| • Genre          | • Tragic flaw      |
| • Tone           | • Soliloquy        |
| • Style          | • Stage directions |
| • Diction        | • Blocking         |
| • Plot           | • Realism          |
| • Climax         | • Expressionism    |
| • Dénouement     | • Gesturing        |
| • Tragedy        | • Empathy          |
| • Comedy         | • Parody           |
| • Tragicomedy    | • Burlesque        |
| • Opposing force | • Objective        |
| • Protagonist    | • Tactic           |
| • Antagonist     | • Obstacle         |
| • Farce          |                    |
| • Satire         |                    |

#### **VI. Citation Style**

Usually MLA (Modern Language Association)

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Source:

**Ferguson, Marcia L. *A Short Guide to Writing About Theatre*. New York: Pearson-Longman, 2008.**