

Genre

The performance review encompasses all levels of artistic performance. Some of the more common performance reviews come in the form of stage plays, ballets, concerts, dramas, operas, recitals, poetry readings, and even live radio broadcasts or YouTube videos.

Before and During the Performance

To write a successful performance review, you will need to prepare your thoughts and notes in advance. Be aware of the kinds of observations you need to make based on the type of performance you are attending. Here is a general list of notes to prepare you for your performance review:

1. Read the prompt

A review for an academic assignment will be different than that written for a newspaper, blog post, or magazine. Some professors may even prefer these reviews to be written in blog or conversational style. Make sure you are aware of your professor's specific expectations.

2. Buy your ticket

Attending a performance requires preparation, especially if you are attending a formal concert. Make sure you have ticket in hand or can pick it up at will call the night of the concert. In case of online performances, make sure that you know the web link and are able to access it with your computer's software. Be aware that tickets at student rates might be available.

3. Make a list of observations

In the case of a musical performance, write down things you see and hear. Your list may include instruments, players, conductor(s), audience reaction (positive or negative), applause (length and strength), placement of stage, type of venue, time of day, and even cost of ticket. For a stage play, ballet, or drama, your list will be comparable to that of a musical concert. Observations may include cast members, audience reaction, background music (if any), lighting, set, color, costume, and - of course - perceived quality of delivery. Use these lists as templates for any kind of performance you attend and try to write down as many details as you can.

4. Review the performers

Consider the criteria you will use to assess both the individual and overall quality of the performance. Did the instrumentalists play well? Did the singers sing well? Did the actors act well? How did the audience respond and how many people were there? Were you inspired or bored? Was there any particular part of the performance that you found more interesting than other parts?

After the Performance

When you get home from the performance, write down as much as you can remember. If the performance is more formal, you may not have gotten a chance to jot down your thoughts in the venue. Make sure that you capture your immediate impressions as soon as possible after you leave the performance venue, then use these notes to write the review.

1. Introduction

This part of the review describes the time, place, and type of event to your reader. Mention the title of the performance (if any), time of day, and type of venue.

2. Description

In this “body” of your review, be as specific as possible. Try to include a discussion of each element of the performance. If you attended a play, make sure you describe all acts. If you attended a concert, describe all the musical works on the program. Try to be as specific as possible without including field-specific language, unless you have been instructed to do so. If you have program notes, you may use those as a general guide, but do not quote or paraphrase them unless your professor has given you citation guidelines.

3. Evaluation

This section of your performance review should provide your thoughts and opinions. Think about which parts of the performance stood out and which didn't. How did the audience react to more dramatic sections? How did you react overall? Do you think that the venue, costumes, set, lighting, acoustics, or audience behavior affected the quality of the performance? Be honest but also introspective. If you did or did not enjoy something, give a good reason.

4. Conclusion

As in a standard argument paper, do not include any new information in the conclusion. Summarize your thoughts and impressions. Make sure you refer back to the prompt for any instruction on wrapping up your performance review.

Links

Examples of good performance reviews may be found in most nationally syndicated newspapers or periodicals. Check the arts sections of newspapers like the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, or *Los Angeles Times* to get an idea of the kind of information that goes into a performance review. The following links also gives helpful performance review guidelines:

Classical and Opera: <http://www.musicomh.com/opera/>

Music and Theater: http://www.bbc.co.uk/oxford/stage/be_a_reviewer.shtml

Dance: <http://www.dancemagazine.com/reviews>

Performing Arts: <http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/ArticleArchives?category=863476>