



WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Writing about Theater

The most common writing assignments for undergraduate and graduate courses in theater include one or more of the following: a review of a play or staged performance, a response or analytical essay that may or may not require using secondary sources, and/or a documented research paper on a particular topic pertaining to a specific course (i.e., biographical treatment of an actor, director, playwright; literary analysis of a dramatic work; features of an historical period; discussion of trends and movements). The questions below suggest ways of thinking about theatre in relation to performance that are meant to help in formulating your ideas and opinions.

ACTING AND DIRECTING

Acting

- What was the performer's interpretation of her/his role?
- How did the performer use voice, movement, or gesture to convey her/his interpretation?
- Which performers did you like best? least? why?

Remember: when you think about acting, you must separate the performer from her/his role. You might dislike a character in the play but admire the way the actor performed the role.

Directing

- Has the director helped the actors to perform convincingly?
- Has the director helped the actors to perform as an ensemble?
- Has the director staged the play well?
- Is it easy to see and hear what is going on?
- Are the entrances and exits smooth?
- Is the performance space well used?
- Has the director set the performance in the right rhythm? at the proper pace?
- Has the director used all the elements—actors, sets, costumes, lights—to convey a strong sense of the play?

ENVIRONMENT AND DESIGN

Environment

- What is the size and shape of the theater building?
- What is the atmosphere of the performance space?
- What is the stage arrangement (proscenium, thrust, round, other)?
- What kind of actor/audience relationship does the space create?
- Is this space a proper environment for the play?

Scenery

- Does the scenery make a symbolic statement about the play in its shapes and/or colors?
- How does the scenery contribute to the mood and style of the production?
- Is the scenery helpful to the play and to the performers or is it distracting, overbearing, intrusive?

Lighting

- Is the lighting realistic, nonrealistic, or fantastic?
- Does the lighting create a mood?
- Are the performers properly lit?
- How does the lighting use color and direction?
- Are lighting changes quick or slow?

Costumes

- How do costumes define period, style, individual character, social class?
- Are there differences in costumes of major and minor characters, differences between one faction in the play and another?

MEANING AND STRUCTURE

Content

- What are the play's subject and theme?
- How is the theme developed through dialogue? action? symbols?
- Does the author take sides, or is he/she neutral?

Type

- Is the play serious or comic?
- Does the play mix serious and comic elements?
- Is the play naturalistic or fantastic?
- Does the play mix naturalistic and non-naturalistic elements?
- Does the play simply present a situation or does it have a message?

Structure

- Is the play written in the climactic, episodic, or some other form? Give specifics.

You might write a paper on one or several of these elements. Your paper should not be a mere list of brief answers to the questions above. Instead, you should develop your discussion of the element in question so that the reader of your paper will understand how it contributed to the thoughts and feelings the performance prompted in you.