



THOMAS ADEWUMI UNIVERSITY, OKO, KWARA STATE, NIGERIA

FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF MASS COMMUNICATION

PROGRAMME: BSC MASS COMMUNICATION

COURSE: CRITICAL REVIEW AND WRITING

COURSE CODE: MCM 202

LECTURER: MRS FALOPE B.G

Email: blissing.falope@tau.edu.ng

NOTE THAT STUDENTS TAKING THIS COURSE SAW THE FOLLOWING MOVIES AND READ THE FOLLOWING BOOKS RESPECTIVELY:

American movie: ACRIMONY BY TYLER PERRY
Nigerian movie: BROTHERHOOD
Nigerian play: LION AND THE JEWEL by Wole Soyinka
Book: RICH DAD, POOR DAD
Music video: GOD ONLY KNOWS BY FOR KING AND COUNTRY
Advert: MAMA DO GOOD INDOMIE ADVERT

ALL THE ABOVE SERVED AS THE SUBJECT FOR CRITICISM AND REVIEW ASSIGNMENTS AND CLASS DISCUSSIONS.

OVERVIEW OF CRITICAL WRITING

Everybody can write but journalistic writing is meant for those that are mindful of the business. Generally Journalists are believed to be creative writers who have the ability to think and create balance while writing. Critical writing is not just limited to one's ability to create stories, but it spans to one's ability to write using the 6th sense by observing the similarities and dissimilarities as well as possessing an active listening capacity and a sharp sensitivity.

DEFINITION

Critical writing, then, is the writing of essays and articles either for broadcast or publication which appreciates and judges the arts. It is an expression of opinion which may be positive or negative.

According to Wilson (2000), critical writing is the literary art of assessing or examining the judgement on it; an art which is employed in the textual criticism of books, artistic and aesthetic appreciation of place, movies, music and other public event.

C.T Winchester (1973) defines criticism as the intelligent appreciation of any work of art and by consequence the just estimate of its value and rank. Logan and Cockelreas (1971) opine that critical writing or analysis is not an attempt to discover what is wrong with a work rather it is a process by which the whole work is separated into part and those part are examined to discover their nature functions and relationship.

Pope 2002 identifies four basic meaning of criticism:

- Finding a fault and pulling to pieces (the text) in a negative sense.
- Analysing and pulling to pieces (the text) in a neutral sense.
- Interpreting (the text) with a view to establishing its meaning and understanding.
- Evaluating (the text) with a view to establishing its relative and absolute worth.

Generally if critical reading is the attention we pay to the relationship we have with language, critical writing is the attention we pay to sharing that relationship with others.

TYPES OF REVIEW

Basically there are three types of review they are:

- Pro review
- Con review
- Neutral

A pro review is the kind of review written to recommend the work of arts to others. It is when the reviewer shows the positive side of a work over the negative side. Note that the reviewer will not just choose to show the positive side over the negative but the reviewer would have discovered after criticism that the positive surpasses the negative.

Con review is the kind of review where the weakness of the work outweighs the strength. It is generally called the opposite of pro review. It means that the reviewer after criticism found so

many faults in the work and will not recommend it to others. Please note that a total condemnation of any work can discourage the author so reviewers should be careful in their presentation.

Neutral review is the middle ground of a review. It is neither pro nor con but the reviewer decides to balance both the positive and the negative aspect of the book. The problem with this kind of review is that it leaves the readers hanging as they do not know whether the work is good or not. This type of review is not encouraged since the reviewer does not tell the audience whether the work is weak or strong.

FUNCTIONS OF CRITICAL WRITING AND REVIEW

1. **RECOMMENDABILITY:** Critical and reviewing writing is written to assess the success or recommendability of the work of art which the reviewer is concerned with appraising - news books, musical performance, Book, radio and TV programs. While doing this, review helps in motivating the opinion of the audience.

2. **INFORMATION:** Oscar Thompson (Woleseley, 1959:24) says criticism “has one clear function, so central and dominating that all others may be regarded as subsidiary or supplementary”. Criticism conveys information if capably written. Generally, it performs the information function by telling the viewer or reader what the book or movie is about

3. **INFLUENCE:** critical reviews do not just stop at dishing out information but it propels a behaviour. Generally readers see reviews or comments as a determinant to whether the book or movie is worth their time or money as it were.

4. **PROMOTION:** The Function of Promotion Another function of criticism is that it must promote. To many in the media industry, criticism is, primarily, a publicity tool, a factor in developing a favourable public attitude toward the work of art in question.

5. **ADVERTISING:** Another function of criticism is to earn money directly for the medium through advertising. Criticism is regarded, by some entrepreneurs of the arts also, as a means of attracting advertising accounts. Space, in some Nigerian dailies, is devoted to certain of the arts, seasonally because of advertising.

6. **PRESTIGE:** The Function of Prestige Critical writing, sometimes, is published for prestige by publishers or producers who want their publications or programs to be at the right places. So long

as the rest of the publication earns sufficient revenue, the luxury of prestige-getting is continued. However, according to Wolseley (1959:23) , a journalist who understands that his/her writing has to guide, inform, influence, and entertain the intended audience, and promote the art itself- so that it attracts advertising , and “ lends prestige to the magazine or paper, must be a super journalist indeed”

QUALITIES OF A GOOD REVIEWER

1. A Good reviewer must be able to write without using ambiguous words.
2. He/she must have a handful of knowledge about the work to be reviewed.
3. He/she must know how to write for different publications.
4. A good reviewer must keep the audience in view.
5. A good reviewer must learn to write without bias.

ROLES OF REVIEWERS AND CRITICS

1. Reviewers serve as source of information to the audience..
2. Reviewers serve as check and balance for different sectors hereby influencing standards in the community.
3. Reviewers serve as an influence in the choice of what people will buy or watch or read
4. Reviewers preview work ahead to help advertise and wet appetite of the audience
5. Reviewers record history

CRITICAL THINKING

According to Dewel (1933) critical thinking is an active persistent and careful consideration of any believed or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that supports it's and the further conclusion to which it's tends. This means that when a work of art is trending, you intend to find out what exactly makes it trend. Price (2004) defines critical thinking as an analytical and strategic knowledge used to practice strategies. Fisher (2001) says that critical thinking is the intellectual disciplined process of actively and skilfully applying, analysing, synthesizing and evaluation of information gathered from or generated from observation experience, reflection, reasoning or communication as a guide to believe and action.

Generally, critical thinking is the mental process of actively and skillfully analysing and evaluating information to reach a conclusion. It is also a process by which we use our knowledge and intelligence to effectively arrive at the most reasonable and justifiable position on issues.

CRITICAL WRITING AND CRITICAL THINKING

Critical thinking involves analysing information and expressing ideas in a thoughtful manner. When reading critically, you explore various perspectives with an open mind, assess your own stance, and determine if a viewpoint is convincing. Writing critically involves articulating your conclusions clearly and logically to persuade others. Clarity of thought is crucial for effective journalistic writing. In critical writing, like in other journalistic styles, the writer must think critically and express ideas clearly. According to Wolseley (1973:7), critical thinking requires specific mental tools: objectivity, understanding of prevailing opinions, familiarity with evaluation methods, and insight into the subject and audience. These attributes distinguish journalistic critics from their peers, although not every journalist naturally possesses them; however, they can be developed through study and practice.

REQUIREMENTS FOR EFFECTIVE CRITICAL THINKING

According to Cottrell (2005) and Allen (2004), critical thinking and critical writing share a set of skills:

1. **Analysis** is like taking things apart to understand how they fit together. It's about figuring out the connections between different ideas or experiences. For example Melinda's process of breaking down her relationship with Robert into different parts to understand what went wrong.
2. **Synthesis** is when you combine information from different places to create something new. It's about seeing patterns and using that to support your ideas. For example Melinda tries to piece together her memories and emotions from various sources to create a coherent story of her relationship.
3. **Interpretation** is about understanding what things mean. It's like decoding information to see the bigger picture and express its importance. For example Melinda looks at the events in her life and tries to understand their deeper meanings and implications, like how she interprets Robert's actions and motives.

4. **Evaluation** is making judgments about things, like deciding if something is good or bad, true or false. It involves checking the credibility and logic of what you're looking at. For example when Melinda starts judging the value and meaning of her experiences, questioning the fairness and truthfulness of her own beliefs and judgments.

5. **Inference** is about reading between the lines and drawing conclusions based on what you know. It involves making educated guesses and thinking about the consequences of different ideas. For example Melinda when she draws conclusions about Robert's intentions and behavior based on the information she has.

6. **Explanation** is about sharing your reasoning and backing it up with evidence. It's about presenting your ideas clearly and logically. For example when Melinda tries to explain to herself and others why things happened the way they did, providing evidence and reasoning behind her actions and decisions.

7. **Self-regulation** means consciously applying analytical and evaluative skills to one's own reasoning, questioning, confirming, validating, or correcting reasoning or results as needed. When Melinda reflects on her own thoughts and actions, questioning and validating her own reasoning and judgments throughout the story.

CRITICAL WRITING AND OTHER FORMS OF WRITING

Critical Writing and News Writing: Critical writing shares characteristics with news stories. A News story is an objective writing. It is a straight forward presentation of fact and a record of timely event without opinion. Critical writing seems to be quite subjective as it expects the writer to give his/her own opinion. While news stories present objective facts without opinion, critical writing focuses on expressing opinions about artistic efforts.

Critical Writing and Broadcast Commentary: Both critical writing and broadcast commentary are subjective, aiming to provide a critical perspective and influence the audience. Critical writing evaluates and appreciates art, while broadcast commentary primarily aims to correct errors, prove points, or explain processes, without necessarily appreciating the art itself.

Critical Writing and Editorials: Both express opinions and seek to influence the audience. Editorials represent a collective voice on public interest issues, while critical writing informs readers about the artwork, offers opinions, guides readers on whether the work is worth their attention, and also entertains them with humor when appropriate. While a critical writing must tell

the audience what the work of art is all about (information), what the critic thinks of the work (opinion), whether the work is worth spending time on (guidance) and also to entertain the readers (humour).

Critical Writing and Feature Writing: **Critical writing** involves analysing and evaluating works of art or literature, providing insights, opinions, and interpretations. It aims to assess the quality, significance, and impact of the subject matter. **Feature Writing** involves storytelling and in-depth exploration of topics beyond the news. It often includes human interest stories, profiles, and investigative pieces, aiming to inform readers through narrative techniques.

Critical Writing and Column Writing: **Critical Writing** typically found in reviews, critiques, and scholarly analyses, critical writing delves into the strengths, weaknesses, and overall merit of a subject, offering a nuanced assessment and informed opinions. **Column Writing:** Involves regular commentary or opinion pieces by a specific writer, known as a columnist. Columns may cover a wide range of topics, including politics, culture, lifestyle, and personal experiences, offering a unique perspective or argument on current issues or trends.

APPROACHES TO CRITICISM

The **moral approach to criticism** looks at how art reflects basic human values like fairness and self-control. For instance, in Tyler Perry's "Acrimony," critics using this approach might focus on how the characters' actions relate to ethical standards, like whether seeking revenge is justified.

The **psychological approach** studies how art reflects people's emotions and behaviors. In "Acrimony," this could mean analysing the main character's feelings of anger and betrayal, and how her mental state affects the story.

The **sociological approach** looks at how art reflects society. For example, in "Acrimony," it might explore how the film portrays relationships and gender roles, and what that says about our culture.

The **formalistic approach** focuses on the artistic elements of a work, like the visuals and storytelling techniques. For "Acrimony," this could mean looking at how the film uses camera angles or symbols to convey meaning.

The **archetypal approach** looks at how art taps into universal themes. In "Acrimony," this might involve exploring how the story's themes of betrayal and redemption resonate with audiences on a deeper level.

THEORIES OF CRITICISM

The Authoritarian Theory

The authoritarian critic believes in fixed standards for evaluating new works of art like books, paintings, or performances. They insist that all art must conform to these established criteria and criticise any deviations from them. This type of criticism relies on historical, moral, judicial, classical, and scientific models already considered good. The authoritarian critic assesses new works by comparing them to their knowledge of past art, shaping their perspective.

This approach is seen as rigid and inflexible because it prioritises adherence to established rules. Authoritarian criticism develops after years of studying and experiencing past art, aiming to enforce strict adherence to these rules on all artists. To the authoritarian critic, criticism is only meaningful if it follows their established standards and is respected by others.

The Impressionistic Theory

The impressionistic critic operates without strict rules or established standards. Following Anatole France's perspective, this critic narrates personal experiences with art without relying on fixed criteria. Instead of adhering to external measures, the focus is on the critic's own impressions and feelings about the artwork. Unlike factual or descriptive assessments, this approach prioritizes subjective reactions and the impact of the artwork on the critic. Rather than comparing a piece to past standards, the impressionistic critic evaluates it based on its unique qualities and emotional effect. While knowledgeable about established critics, the impressionistic critic relies on internal insights rather than external authorities.

WRITING A REVIEW

Requirements for writing a review

As a critic, therefore some requirement that must be met before writing a review.

1. Make yourself an expert: a good technical knowhow as to how criticisms of books, films, plays and other works of art are done gives the reviewer an upper edge as to the best way to critic the work

of art. The more you know about the area you are writing on (music, drama film), the more authoritative you become and the better you can handle your criticism.

2. Do not flaunt your expertise: Do not write over the head of your readers, teach but do not assume to much about what the audience know

3. Do not talk down on your audience as a reviewer, you must always understand that readers are intelligent, you must not take them for fools in your review writing.

4. Do not over use the plot: always put issues into proper perspective. It is expedient to refer to the plot of the work of art under review but too much emphasis should not be laid on it.

5. Relate the work/review to life: relate the review to life. This will help the audience know how important the particular work of art is towards life. A proper display of importance will help the audience pick lessons from the work of art under review.

6. Find a strong lead and conclusion: Be specific and arresting in your lead so that your audience will derive satisfaction from it.

7. Sight specific examples to support your views: If you say the work is good or bad , sight specific examples on your review and show readers by providing the bases for your decision

8. Write well and cleverly: the use of language should be accurate and with little or no grammatical errors. You have to be good before you can condemn someone else's work.

9. Write with conviction: Write with confidence and assurance

10. Have a little charity: Although critical reviews unlike news writing are quite subjective however it is wise for the reviewer to maintain a level of charity. Be objective and take all factors into consideration before drawing conclusions. When you say you love or hate the work, it would be justified. Do not just condemn.

WRITING A FILM REVIEW

WRITING A BOOK REVIEW

WRITING A STAGE PLAY REVIEW

WRITING AN ADVERT REVIEW

WRITING A MUSICAL VIDEO REVIEW

RECOMMENDED TEXTBOOKS/MATERIALS

Fisher, A. (2001). Critical Thinking: An Introduction. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Barrett, T. (1994). Criticising Art: Understanding the Contemporary. California: Mayfield Publishing Company.

Webster's New Millennium Dictionary of English. (Preview ed.).

<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/critical>

Wolseley, R. E. (1959). Critical Writing for the Journalist. New York: Chilton Book Company.