HOW TO WRITE THEATRE REVIEWS

Student Handout — KS3 English

1. What is a Theatre Review?

A theatre review is **persuasive writing** that helps readers decide whether to see a show. A good review does three things:

INFORM	Give facts: title, venue, creative team, running time, what it's about
ANALYSE	Explain WHY things worked (or didn't) with specific examples
RECOMMEND	Give a clear verdict: Should readers see this show? Who would enjoy it?

2. The Five-Step Structure

Every great theatre review follows the same basic structure:

Step	Section	What to Include
1	**Introduction**	Title, venue, creative team, running time + YOUR VERDICT
2	**Plot Summary**	What the show is about — NO SPOILERS!
3	**Performance**	How well did the actors perform? Name them + give specific examples
4	**Design Elements**	Sets, costumes, lighting, sound, choreography — name the designers
5	**Reaction**	Your personal response + clear recommendation + who should see it

> **KEY POINT:** Give your verdict in the FIRST paragraph! Don't make readers wait until the end.

3. The Three Powers of Persuasion

The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle identified three ways to persuade people. Use all three:

Power	Meaning	How to Use It
ETHOS	Credibility — making readers trust you	Name directors, designers, actors. Use correct terminology. Mention awards.
PATHOS	Emotion — connecting with readers	Describe how the show made you feel. Note audience reactions.
LOGOS	Logic — supporting with evidence	Give specific examples: quote dialogue, describe particular moments.

4. Good vs Weak Examples

Introduction

✓ GOOD	✗ WEAK
Fourteen years into its West End run, Matilda The Musical remains as fresh and revolutionary as the day it opened. Quite simply, it is a masterpiece.	*Last Saturday I went to see Matilda at the Cambridge Theatre. It was quite good. The show is based on the book by Roald Dahl.*

The good example includes: run length, specific praise, and a clear verdict. The weak one tells us nothing useful.

Performance Analysis

✓ GOOD	✗ WEAK
John Leader's BFG is vocally extraordinary — his voice fills the theatre with both power and tenderness. His handling of 'human beans' is both hilarious and oddly touching.	*The actor who played the BFG was really good. He was funny and made me feel emotional. His voice was nice.*

The good example names the actor, describes specific vocal qualities, and quotes actual dialogue. The weak one gives no evidence.

5. Vocabulary Toolkit

For Describing Performances

commanding	nuanced	compelling	captivating
understated	powerful	vulnerable	electrifying

For Describing Production

atmospheric	immersive	spectacular	minimalist
innovative	evocative	seamless	breathtaking

Useful Phrases

For Praise	For Balance	For Recommendations
• A tour de force... • Left the audience spellbound... • Theatrical triumph...	• While the first act dazzles... • Despite some uneven pacing... • Though not without flaws...	• Essential viewing for... • A must-see for anyone who... • Best suited to audiences who...

6. Writing Checklist

Use this checklist before submitting your review:

THE FIVE-STEP STRUCTURE
☐ INTRODUCTION: Title, venue, creative team, running time included?
☐ INTRODUCTION: Clear verdict in the first paragraph?
☐ PLOT SUMMARY: Story context without major spoilers?
☐ PERFORMANCE: Named actors with specific examples?
☐ DESIGN: Sets, costumes, lighting, sound discussed?
☐ REACTION: Personal response and clear recommendation?

THE THREE POWERS
☐ ETHOS: Named creatives and used correct terminology?
☐ PATHOS: Described emotional responses honestly?
☐ LOGOS: Supported opinions with specific evidence?

FINAL CHECKS
☐ Checked spelling of all names?
☐ Is the verdict clear?
☐ Would a reader know whether to see this show?
☐ Is it interesting to read — not just informative?

7. Common Mistakes to Avoid

The Plot Dump	Don't spend half your review summarising the story. One paragraph is enough.
The Spoiler	NEVER reveal twist endings, surprise deaths, or major plot revelations.
Empty Praise	'It was amazing!' means nothing without evidence. WHY was it amazing?
Personal Diary	'I went with my mum and we had pizza first...' — nobody cares! Focus on the show.
Fence-Sitting	Give a clear verdict! 'It had good and bad parts' helps nobody.

Remember...

"A good review does not just tell people what you thought.
It helps them decide for themselves."

Now go write your own!