

Everyone's a Critic

But only a few can write good reviews

What can students review?

- Television
- Film
- Dance
- Theatre
- Concerts
- Albums
- Books
- Restaurants
- Video Games
- Web Sites
- Tourist Attractions
- Technology
- Apps
- Colleges
- Cars

- Critics are usually experts
- Critics are going to understand the nuances of the subject

Critics vs. Reviewer

- Reviewers are usually generalists
- Reviewers typically have an interest in the topic

A reviewers tasks

- To compare and contrast
- To say what kind of work is being reviewed and what the work is about
- To give an informed judgment as to whether or not it is worth the time and / or money
- To back up with evidence and persuasive language based on knowledge and experience

Review samples

- These lines form reviews of 2005 movies would probably tell the reader not to bother:

Into the Blue

- “Not a thriller so much as an extremely violent swimsuit calendar.” —Justin Chang, variety.com

Sound of Thunder

- “Edward Burns is the kind of actor you cast as the hero when a piece of wood is unavailable.” —Jason Andrews, Globe and Mail

Dukes of Hazzard

- “The film’s ambitions are so low that it’s hard to imagine how it fell short of them.” —Jay Chandrasekhar, tvguide.com

Elektra

- “The resulting action leads to levels of excitement typically attained by proofreading science textbooks.”
—Sean O’Connell, filmcritic.com

Keep reviews short

- Reviews do not have to be long
- Readers want to know the recommendation and why...don't waste their time
- You can write a good review in 300 words or less
- This review for “Star Trek” comes in at 185 words

Short "Star Trek" Review

- by Leah Rosen, *People*
- Chris Pine, Zachary Quinto, Zoe Saldana, Leonard Nimoy, Eric Bana / PG-13 / ★★★★★
- Director J.J. Abrams has put the pop back in summer popcorn movies. His Star Trek, an exciting and sassy revamp of the classic sci-fi TV show and film series, is a blast in every sense of the word. Coming as it does on the heels of an uninspired X-Men Origins: Wolvering, Trek is a kick-ass reminder that in

Short "Star Trek" Review

right hands and with savvy casting, anything old can be gloriously new again.

This Trek starts with the birth of James Tiberius Kirk (Pine, boyishly engaging) during a space disaster. It then briefly visits him as a reckless child, a rebellious young man and finally as a Starfleet Academy cadet who sneaks aboard to join the crew of the newly built starship USS Enterprise as it heads off on a dangerous mission.

Short "Star Trek" Review

- In introducing other familiar characters (Look, it's Spock! It's Bones!), the film pays respect to tradition while fondly tweaking it.
- There's much with here, bang-up action scenes and a twisting plot that will make sense to those who truly care to follow it. May this latest incarnation of the series live long and prosper.

What made it work?

- References to Star Trek Lingo
- Clear recommendation
- Compare / Contrast with X-Men: Wolverine
- Witty phrases and use of word play

Reviews can be longer

- There is no set length for a review
- If you go over 500 words, you have probably given your reader more than he/she wants
- The following review is 422 words, and it says enough

Night at the Museum:

Battle of the Smithsonian

by Owen Gleiberman, Entertainment Weekly

Usually, when characters in a movie are one-dimensional, that's not a good thing. But in *Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian*, the waxworks figures who come to life after sundown aren't crassly sketchy or dramatically lacking. They're one-dimensional, all right, but knowingly, delightfully so. Even at their most pop-up brash, they're true to the way that kids see history. They're like characters out of a cool yet innocent mischief-at-midnight children's book—a *Where the Wild Things Are* of global story-time kitsch. And they give you a lift.

Night at the Museum:

Battle of the Smithsonian

The movie, make no mistake, is clownishly silly, a lark as high as balsa wood. If anything, though, it's a faster, wittier spin on the formula of its predecessor.

Released in 2006, *Night at the Museum* was a family popcorn extravaganza that touched a chord even its producers may not have anticipated. In the sequel, Ben Stiller, as the former night guard Larry Daley (he's now a successful entrepreneur...of flashlights), spends one long night infiltrating the galleries of the Smithsonian Institution where he attempts to rescue the exhibits

Night at the Museum:

Battle of the Smithsonian

- rescue the exhibits he first got to know at the American Museum of Natural History. (He's trying to get his hands on the magical Egyptian tablet that brings them to life.)
- The T-Rex, the capuchin monkeys, Attila the Hun—all have been shipped to the archives of the Smithsonian. And all are as feisty as ever. But *Battle of the Smithsonian* tilts away from the zoological. The film is a history-of-the-world burlesque in which such drolly self-centered icons as General Custer (Bill Hader), Ivan the Terrible (Christopher Guest), and Kahmunrah (Hank Azaria)—a made-up pharaoh who lisps with the enthusiasm of Boris Karloff on his own reality show—collide

Night at the Museum:

Battle of the Smithsonian

- happily with a living army of Albert Einstein bobblehead dolls, plus stone-carved angels who sing “More Than a Woman” and The Thinker come to life as a Brooklyn deadbeat. This is what you call a wholesome kiddie movie on drugs.
- It all works because Stiller, with his eager-to-please anxiety and his incredulous double takes, is the perfect addled straight man for a hellzapoppin history show. And it works because Amy Adams as Amelia Earhart, has the breathless, daffy-sexy vivacity of a ‘30s screwball heroine, her eyes lit with fire, her delivery as sharp as cut glass as she rat-a-tats out lines like “You haven’t been able to take your cheaters off my chassis since we met!” *Battle of the Smithsonian* has plenty of life, but it’s Adams who gives it a zing.

Did the review work?

- Was it too long?
- What could have been cut from the review?
- Which lines did you like?
- Where was the compare / contrast?
- What was the recommendation?

Reviewers must do homework

- Reviewers must do everything they can to familiarize themselves with the...
 - genre
 - director
 - actors / actresses
 - food
 - game
 - music
 - venues
 - similar styles
 - tv show and similar styles
 - similar apps
 - audience

Gradings and Ratings

- Stars
- Letter grades
- Thumbs up / down
- Paws
- Forks / Spoons
- Film reels

Whatever rating system your staff chooses, make sure it stays consistent so the reader isn't confused.

Ratings can be unique and match the purpose of the piece.

Gratings and Ratings

- For movies, give the G, PG, PG-13, or R rating and explain why
- Also provide the running time (for plays, too)
- Your staff must decide if it wants to include R-rated movie reviews and why, and put this policy in your Editorial Policy

Gradings and Ratings

- For Restaurant Reviews, give the price ranges, appropriate dress, hours of operation, address, phone number, web site, reservations information, and parking information

Review Conclusion

- Should always loop back to what the lead said
- Sometimes reviews will withhold the recommendation until the end, but that recommendation should connect to an aspect discussed in the lead

Reviews in general

- They should be fun and interactive.
- They should be ethical—plagiarism is not legal. Don't use what isn't yours.
- Reviews can be simple (like a top 10 with possible justification).
- They are great ways to generate responses from readers on a web site.

Want more?

- For more examples of collected reviews, go to www.chspasaw.org
- NY Times, the Chicago Sun, and U.S.A Today have great reviews
- You can also show students sites like Rotten Tomatoes or Fandango for examples of non-expert reviews

Thanks to H.L. Hall for the
majority of this information