

COURSE GUIDE

MAC 313 CRITICAL WRITING AND REVIEWING

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INTRODUCTION

MAC 313 Critical Writing and Reviewing is a two credit-unit course designed to drill students of journalism or mass communication in the principles of critical writing and reviewing and in the theories and methods of criticism. This course guides you in the preparation for journalistic use of various kinds of critical articles and reviews dealing with the fine and popular arts. The course is designed for professional and academic needs of students running first degree in Journalism and Mass Communication.

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN IN THIS COURSE

The overall aim of this course is to expose you to the basic concepts in journalistic criticism as a means of giving guidance in reporting and criticising the arts. The meaning, structure, components and functions of criticism will be treated along with creative essentials of critical writing. This course will also assist you to appreciate the major differences between a review and critical article and their similarities with other forms of writing.

Your understanding of Critical Writing and Reviewing will prepare you to be schooled in the fine and popular arts and mastery in knowledge of the arts will help you surmount challenges that go with analysis and appreciation of value of arts in our lives. The course will stimulate students to think and write about the arts critically and professionally. It will enhance students' understanding of power of arts not only as a source of treasure but a means of knowledge and a guide to action. The course will nurture the students into professional art critics who will appreciate the power of the fine and popular arts in our individual and collective lives.

COURSE AIMS

The major aim of this course is to expose you to the general principles and practices of critical writing and reviewing, this will help you to learn how to apply the basic techniques of criticism and be an increasingly effective critic of value. The course also aims at helping you realise the full extent of your responsibility as a critical journalist; so as to remain aware of your readers' needs, but go beyond these to assist readers in forming and tastes.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

At the end of this course, you should be able to:

- explain how to appreciate the fine and popular arts and apply the basic principles of criticism in reporting and evaluating them
- discuss the approaches, components and techniques of critical writing and how to write critical articles and reviews on the fine and popular arts.

WORKING THROUGH THIS COURSE

You are expected to read the recommended texts and other materials provided by the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) to effectively harness and retain the rich information in this course. In each unit, the self-assessment exercise spelt out must be done; you are expected to submit these assignments for periodic assessment. There will be an examination at the end of this course.

COURSE MATERIALS

The main components of the course are listed below.

1. Course guide
2. Study units
3. References
4. Assignment file
5. Presentation

STUDY UNITS

There are 17 study units in this course. These are as listed below.

Module 1

- Unit 1 Meaning of Critical Writing
- Unit 2 Critical Writing and Critical Thinking
- Unit 3 Critical Writing and other Forms of Writing

Module 2

- Unit 1 Functions of Criticism
- Unit 2 Theories of Criticism
- Unit 3 Approaches to Criticism

Module 3

Unit 1	Components of Criticism: The Critic
Unit 2	Components of Criticism: Direct Data
Unit 3	Components of Criticism: Indirect Data

Module 4

Unit 1	Writing a Review
Unit 2	Writing a Critical Article
Unit 3	The Reviewer and the Critic
Unit 4	The Critical Writer's Style

Module 5

Unit 1	Reviewing the Fine arts
Unit 2	Reviewing Books
Unit 3	Reviewing Stage Play or Drama
Unit 4	Reviewing Music
Unit 5	Reviewing Television and Motion Pictures

Each unit has a number of self-assessment exercises which are drawn from what you have already studied. The exercises are purposely meant to keep you focused. It is believe that if properly utilised, an excellent combination of the exercises with tutor-marked assignments will certainly lead to achievement of overall objectives of this course.

ASSIGNMENT FILE

In the assignment file, you will find details of the work you are expected to submit for marking to your tutor. Marks you obtain for these assignments will count towards the final grade you obtain in this course.

PRESENTATION SCHEDULE

The presentation schedule included in your course materials sets important dates for attending tutorials and for completing tutor-marked assignments. You are required to submit all your assignments by the dates due. You must be careful not to fall behind and delay your studies.

ASSESSMENT

The assessment of the course has two aspects. These are Tutor-Marked Assignments and the final written examination. Tutor-marked assignments are based on information and knowledge gained in this course. You must submit assignments to your tutor for marking

according to deadlines set in the assignment file. The assessment will count for 30% of your total grade. You must sit for a final three-hour examination at the end of the course which will account for 70% of your total course grade.

TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

There are seventeen tutor-marked assignments in this course. You need to submit all the assignments. The best four (i.e. the highest four of the fifteen marks) will be counted. The total marks for the best four (4) assignments will be 30% of your total course grade. Assignment questions for the units in this course are contained in the assignment file. Use the information contained in study units of your course and recommended textbooks to complete your assignments. However, you are advised to read additional reference materials to broaden your knowledge and understanding of the subject.

When you have completed each assignment, send it to your tutor. Make sure that each assignment reaches your tutor on or before the deadline given. If, however, you cannot complete your work on time, contact your tutor before the assignment is done to discuss the possibility of an extension.

FINAL EXAMINATION AND GRADING

The final examination for this course will be of three hours' duration and have a value of 70% of the total course grade. The examination will consist of questions which reflect the type of *SAEs*, practice exercises and tutor-marked assignments you have come across. All areas of the course will be assessed.

You are advised to revise the entire course after studying the last unit before you sit for the examination. You will find it useful to review your tutor-marked assignments and the comments of your tutor on them before the final examination.

COURSE MARKING SCHEME

This table shows how the actual course is broken down.

Assessment	Marks
Assignments 1-20	20 assignments, best four marks of 20 count @7.5% (on the averages) = 30% of course marks
Final Examination	70% of overall course marks
Total	100% of course marks

HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM THIS COURSE

The study units replace the university lecturer in distance learning. One of the great advantages of distance learning is that you can read and work through specially designed study materials at your own pace, and at a time and place that suit you best. Reading the lecture serves instead of listening to a lecturer. In the same way that a lecturer might set you some reading to do, the study units tell you when to read your set books or other materials. Just as a lecturer might give you an in-class exercise, your study units provide exercises for you to do at appropriate points.

Each of the study units follows a common format. First, there is an introduction to the subject matter of the unit and how a particular unit is integrated with the other units and the course as a whole. Next is a set of learning objectives which let you know what you should be able to do when you have completed the unit. Use these objectives to guide your study and check whether you have achieved the objectives at the end of each unit. To significantly improve your chances of passing this course, you must make a habit of checking whether you have achieved set objectives. Remember that your tutor's job is to help you. So, do not hesitate to call and ask your tutor when you need help. In addition, you are to note the following.

1. Read this course guide thoroughly
2. Refer to the presentation schedule for details to help you organise your own study schedule. Note the time you are expected to spend on each unit and how the assignments relate to the units. Whatever method you chose to use, you should fashion out your own convenient schedule for working on each unit.
3. Once you have created your own study schedule, do everything you can to respect it. A major reason while students fail is that they do not respect their schedules. So if you get into difficulties with your schedule, please let your tutor know before is too late for help.
4. Turn to unit 1 and read the introduction and the objectives for the unit.
5. Assemble the study materials. Information about what you need for a unit is given as applicable.
6. Work through the unit. The content of the unit itself has been arranged to provide a sequence for you to follow. As you work

through the unit you will be instructed to read sections from your set books or other articles. Use the unit to guide your reading.

7. Review the objectives for each study unit to confirm that you have achieved them. If you feel unsure about any of the objectives, review the study material or consult your tutor.
8. When you are confident that you have achieved a unit's objectives, you can then start on the next unit. Proceed unit by unit through the course and try to keep yourself on schedule.
9. When you have submitted an assignment to your tutor for marking, do not wait for its return before starting on the next unit. Keep to your schedule. When the assignment is returned, pay particular attention to your tutor's comments, both on the tutor-marked assignments form and also on what is written on the assignment. Consult your tutor as soon as possible if you have any questions or problems.
10. After completing the unit, review the course and prepare yourself for the final examination. Check that you have achieved the unit objectives (listed at the beginning of each unit) and the course objectives (listed in this course guide).

FACILITATORS/TUTORS AND TUTORIALS

There are 8 hours of tutorials provided in support of this course. You will be notified of the dates, times and location of these tutorials, together with the name and phone number of your tutor, as soon as you are allocated tutorial group. Your tutor will mark and comment on your assignments, keep a close watch on your progress and on any difficulties you might encounter and provide assistance to you during the course.

You must mail your tutor-marked assignments to your tutor well before the due date (at least two working days are required). They will be marked by your tutor and returned to you as soon as possible. Do not hesitate to contact your tutor by telephone, e-mail, or discussion board if you need help. The following might be circumstances in which you would find help necessary.

Contact your tutor if:

- you do not understand any part of the study units or the assigned readings,
- you have difficulty with the self-tests or exercises,

- you have a question or problem with an assignment, with your tutor's comments on an assignment or with the grading of an assignment.

You should try your best to attend tutorials. This is the only chance to have face to face contact with the tutor and to ask questions. You can raise any problem encountered in the course of your study. To gain the maximum benefit from course tutorials, prepare a question list before attending them. You will learn a lot from participating actively in the discussions.

SUMMARY

This course is packaged to introduce you to the basic concepts and principles of editorial writing. Upon the completion of the course, you will be able to answer the following questions among others:

- what is the meaning of critical writing?
- how can you distinguish between a critical article and a review?
- what are the functions of criticism?
- what are the major theories and approaches to criticism?
- what are the components of criticism?
- how do you review and criticise different genres of the arts such as books, music, drama and others?



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MODULE 1

Unit 1	Meaning of Critical Writing
Unit 2	Critical Writing and Critical Thinking
Unit 3	Critical Writing and other Forms of Writing

UNIT 1 MEANING OF CRITICAL WRITING

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	3.2 What it Means to be Critical
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The fine arts such as painting, sculpture, architecture and the popular arts (motion pictures, radio, television, photography) though neglected, underrated and underreported have remained a critical part of human life. They prove how far man has gone in his civilisation. When properly explored and exploited, the arts offer tremendous economic and socio-political opportunities.

The arts are treasures in themselves, and the use of the arts to criticise society has continued to draw the ire of leaders, all over the world. Power of the arts has, thus, placed enormous responsibility on professional communicators to, not only help readers have value for money, but also preserve the values of truthfulness and openness in our society. This unit defines critical writing with particular emphasis on what it means to be critical.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- define what criticism is
- describe what it means to be critical.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Definition of Critical Writing

Criticism is an appraisal, evaluation or judgment offered on a piece of art, performance or production- which may be positive, negative or both. Criticism implies a deeper knowledge of the art, performance or production under consideration; it also implies an understanding of the standards of measurement. C. T. Winchester (Wolseley, 1973), one of the classic writers on the subject defines criticism as: “the intelligent appreciation of any work of art, and by consequence, the just estimate of its value and rank” and “the general nature of the functions of criticism is much the same whether the object criticised be literature, or painting, or sculpture, or painting”.

Wilson (2000) says critical writing is the literary art of assessing or examining the merit of any work or art and giving judgment on it; an art which is employed in the textual criticism of books, artistic and aesthetic appreciation of plays, movies, music, creative and fine arts and other public events. It, usually, involves a detailed critical examination, marked by careful attention to the history, origin (an inward look at its type) set against standards that seem universal. Pope (2002: 43) identifies four basic meanings of criticism, namely:

1. finding fault and pulling to pieces [the text] in a negative sense
2. analysing and pulling to pieces [the text] in the neutral sense of taking apart
3. interpreting [the text] with a view to establishing [its] meaning and understanding
4. evaluating [the text] with a view to establishing [its] relative or absolute worth.

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.

From the foregoing, it can be concluded that critical writing:

- appreciates or shows a clear perception of the aesthetic qualities of an object, performance or production and
- passes judgment because it, basically, evaluates the value of a work of art, necessarily, on qualities which make it a unique work of art
- expresses an opinion about a performance, a book, a recital, a dance, an art, exhibition, a movie, or some other evidence of an art

- demands that you have deep knowledge of the subject matter or that you know your field and be familiar with the standards of measurements and of looking at all aspects or parts of a text, object, performance or production.

As Wolseley (1973) concludes, critical writing is informed by a sense of discussion. 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.

3.2 What it Means to be Critical

At the university level, to be critical does not mean to criticise in a negative manner. Rather, it requires you to question the information and opinions in a text, object, performance or production and present your evaluation or judgment. To do this well, you should attempt to understand the subject matter from different perspectives and in relation to the theories, approaches and frameworks in your course.

Basically, to criticise means to appreciate and to pass judgment with some measure of analysis. To appreciate is to have a clear perception of the aesthetic qualities of an object. To judge is to evaluate. Evaluation is the process of examining a subject and rating it based on its important features. To evaluate is to pass judgment upon or to indicate the value of a work of art. We determine how much or how little we *value* something, arriving at our judgment on the basis of criteria that we can define. Here, you decide the strengths and weaknesses, usually, based on specific criteria. Evaluating requires an understanding of not just the content of the object, but also an understanding of its purpose, the intended audience and why it is structured the way it is. Analysing requires separating the content and concepts of an object into their main components, and then understanding how these interrelate, connect and, possibly, influence each other.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

- i. In your own words, define criticism.
- ii. Briefly outline how you can write a critical article.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, you have been exposed to the concept of criticism and how you can be critical in your writing. Also, this unit has made it clear to you that criticism is, at once, an appreciation, an evaluation or judgment and an opinion based on deep knowledge of the subject matter and standards of measurements. You have also been made to know that

criticism concentrates on the results of an artist's efforts and is directed at the fine or popular arts to indicate their value. It, therefore, offers the journalistic critic a powerful skill for intelligent evaluation of any work of art.

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit has exposed you to the meaning of criticism and what it takes to be critical.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

- i. What is criticism?
- ii. Explain how to write a critical article.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Pope, R. (2002). *The English Studies Book*. London & New York: Routledge.

Wilson, D. S. (1977). *Introduction to Print Media: Readings in Nigerian Journalism*. (ed.). Ibadan: Stirling Horden Publishers.

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

UNIT 2 CRITICAL WRITING AND CRITICAL THINKING

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- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Definition of Critical Thinking
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 - 3.3 Critical Writing and Thinking
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

One of the primary aims of this course is to develop citizens who are able to engage in critical thinking and clear writing. NOUN attaches much importance to enhancing critical thinking and writing competencies among its students. Critical writing and thinking encompass much of what we do when using our brains. Critical writing and thinking skills, particularly, are not restricted to a particular subject area, but are at the heart of what it means to be a scientist, researcher, scholar or professional in any field. Whatever you are studying, critical thinking is the key to learning and to making progress. Critical writing and thinking is therefore one of the most important skills to be learnt at this university.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- state what critical thinking is
- highlight some critical thinking skills
- explain the relationship between critical writing and critical thinking
- differentiate between critical writing and other forms of writing.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Definition of Critical Thinking

Critical thinking has been variously defined over the past 80 years. Let us consider some of the definitions of critical thinking which have been put forth. According to Dewey, critical thinking involves “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends” (Dewey, 1933, p. 118). Also, critical thinking has been defined as “purposeful, self-regulatory judgment which results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference, as well as explanation of the evidential, conceptual methodological, criteriological, or contextual consideration upon which that judgment is based” (Facione, 2006, p. 21).

Furthermore, take a look at the following definitions:

- i. critical thinking “is analytical and strategic, linking knowledge bases to practice strategies” (Price, 2004, p. 47)
- iii. “critical thinking...includes interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, presenting arguments, reflection, and dispositions” (Jones, et al., 1995)
- iii. “critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualising, applying, analysing, synthesising, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action” (Fisher, 2001).

From these definitions, there appears to be a consensus to the effect that critical thinking is the mental process of actively and skillfully analysing, synthesising, and evaluating information to reach an answer or conclusion. It is a process by which we use our knowledge and intelligence to effectively arrive at the most reasonable and justifiable positions on issues.

3.2 Requirements for Effective Critical Thinking

According to Cottrell (2005) and Allen (2004), critical thinking shares the following skills with critical writing.

Analysis- examine the material by breaking it into its component parts to better understand the parts and the whole (*identifying, classifying, categorising, comparing*); that is, examine how the key components fit

together and relate to each other or otherwise identify the intended and actual inferential relationships among statements, questions, concepts, descriptions, or other forms of representation intended to express belief, judgment, experiences, reasons, information, or opinion.

Synthesis- to *synthesise* is to weave together material from several sources, including your personal, prior knowledge, to create a new whole; making connections between the parts and the whole to see the pattern of relationships (*organising, connecting, designing, predicting*); that is, bring together different sources of information to serve an argument or idea you are constructing. Make logical connections between the different sources that help you shape and support your ideas.

Interpretation- this entails examining the connection (s) between the parts and the whole to make inferences about the implications and meanings of the pattern(s) (*associating, inferring, decoding*); that is, comprehending and expressing meaning or significance of wide variety of experiences, situations, data, events, judgments, conventions, beliefs, rules, procedures, or criteria.

Evaluation- this means forming judgments about meanings, qualities and values (*justifying, critiquing, verifying, and deciding*); that is, you are assessing the credibility of statements or other representations which are accounts or descriptions of a person's perception, experience, situation, judgment, belief, or opinion. As well, evaluation relates to assessing the logical strength of the actual or intended inferential relationships among statements, descriptions, questions, or other forms of representation

Inference- when you look for inference, you are seeking to understand what is suggested or implied, but not stated; also you are seeking to identify and secure elements needed to draw reasonable conclusions; to form conjectures and hypotheses; to consider relevant information & to educe the consequences flowing from data, statements, principles, evidence, judgments, beliefs, opinions, concepts, descriptions, questions, or other forms of representation.

Explanation- Here, you state the results of your reasoning and justify your reasoning in terms of evidential, conceptual, methodological, and contextual considerations upon which your results were based; and you present your reasoning in the form of cogent arguments.

Self-regulation- this means, consciously, applying skills in analysis and evaluation to your own inferential judgments with a view toward

questioning, confirming, validating, or correcting someone's reasoning or results.

3.3 Critical Writing and Critical Thinking

Critical thinking involves both reading and writing, critically. Reading critically means examining different points of view with an open and enquiring mind, evaluating your own position, and drawing conclusions as to whether a particular point of view is persuasive. Writing critically means presenting your conclusions in a clear and well-reasoned way to persuade others.

Clear thinking helps to produce clear journalistic writing. In critical writing, just as in other forms of journalistic writing, the journalist must be able to think, critically, as well as clearly. Critical thinking, Wolseley (1973:7) says, demands certain mental equipment:

- a measure of objectivity
- realisation of the climate of opinion
- awareness of the methods of making estimates or arriving at judgment
- perspective gained through knowledge of the art being evaluated and understanding of the audience.

These qualities separate the journalistic critic from virtually all his peers in journalism. Not every journalist possesses these qualities, of course; but these can all, necessarily, be achieved by the student through study and practice.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Discuss critical thinking skills as they relate to critical writing.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, you learnt that critical thinking is the process of applying reasoned and disciplined thinking to a subject. To do well even in your studies, you need to think 'critically' about the things you have read, seen or heard. Acquiring critical thinking skills helps you to develop more reasoned arguments and draw out the inferences that you need to use in your assignments, projects, examination, and later, in your work as a critic. These skills are essential if you want to obtain high grades in your university study and, like other skills, they improve with practice.

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit provides a general orientation to critical writing and critical thinking. It examines what is meant by ‘critical thinking’; the skills associated with it, the relationship between critical writing and critical thinking, and the affinity critical writing shares with other forms of writing.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

- i. Define critical thinking in your own words.
- ii. In what five specific ways can critical thinking help you as a journalistic critic?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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Jones, E. A., Hoffman, S., Moore, L. M., Ratcliff, G., Tibbetts, S., & Click, B. A. L. (1995). *National Assessment of College Learning: Identifying College Graduates' Essential Skills in Writing, Speech and Listening, and Critical Thinking*. Washington, D.C.: US Department of Education.

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UNIT 3 CRITICAL WRITING AND OTHER FORMS OF WRITING

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 - 3.2 Critical Writing and Editorial
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 - 3.4 Critical Writing and Feature Writing
 - 3.5 Critical Writing and Column Writing
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
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- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Critical writing shares affinity with other forms of journalism. This unit shall examine the relationship between critical writing and other forms of writing in order to help you distinguish them.

2.0 OBJECTIVE

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- differentiate between critical writing and other forms of writing

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Critical Writing and Broadcast Commentary

Critical writing and broadcast commentary express opinions, and both are subjective writing. Both provide the reader with a critical view and hope to convince and influence; but critical writing, basically, evaluates and appreciates what makes an object or idea a work of art, and necessarily, a unique work of art. Critical writing makes use of tastes and standards to determine how the object may be perceived by the reader.

Broadcast commentary does not, necessarily, appreciate. It is, mainly, to point out an anomaly, correct a wrong, prove a point or explain a process or concept or simply tell a story to amuse or amaze. Both critical writing and broadcast commentary, however, demand that you have

deep knowledge of the subject matter. Critical writing, particularly, insists that you be familiar with the standards of measurements

3.2 Critical Writing and Editorial

The editorial and the critical article all express opinion; they evaluate, interpret, and are subjective and hope to influence. An editorial could be defined as a corporate voice of a medium on issues of public interest; it is an opinion a newspaper writes to inform or explain, persuade or convince, and stimulate insight, sometimes, in an entertaining or humorous manner.

Critical writing does all that and also offers some measure of entertainment. A humorous piece of criticism, certainly, is a must read. Aside from influencing readers, criticism also serves as a guide to the reader. A book review for instance, says Wolseley (1973), must tell the reader what the book is all about (information), what the critic thinks of the book (opinion, influence), whether the book is worth spending time on (guidance); and also, entertain the reader (humor).

3.3 Critical Writing and News Writing

Critical writing shares characteristics with news stories. A traditional news story is an objective journalistic piece. It is a straightforward presentation of facts, a recounting of factual and timely events devoid of personal opinion. Critical writing for journalism is not news report of art shows. Critical writing emphasises opinion, but news writing emphasises information. A news report of art shows is not critical writing. Critical writing concentrates on the results of the artist's efforts.

3.4 Critical Writing and Feature Writing

A feature is a creative journalistic article which informs, explains analyses, interprets, and exposes issues; it is a colorful story about people, events, places and life. Features may be about artists and about their work, about art history; features could be personality sketches and biographies of artists and human interest sidelights on the arts, but they are not critical writing because they are not ordinarily about evaluation (Singer, 1974). Critical writing appreciates; feature writing emphasises human interest.

3.5 Critical Writing and Column Writing

A column expresses the opinion or view of persons who work for the newspaper or magazine, and who are thereby known as columnists. Uyo (1987:15) defines a column "as an article, usually with some permanent

or obvious title, that is written regularly by the same person, or in some cases, different persons, who express (es) their opinion on diverse matters, from the most mundane to the most profound.”

The columnist is usually an expert or specialist in the subject or field he writes about. A critic can maintain a column in a newspaper or magazine. The columnist therefore shares characteristics of a critic; he/she is, traditionally and largely, a critic, and criticism demands of him expertise in the subject being evaluated. Most newspapers and magazines have review or criticism columns on a wide variety of subjects – books, arts, dance, plays/theatre, radio and television, films, etc. These are usually featured in special sections and are so labeled.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Outline the differences between critical writing and other forms of journalistic writing discussed.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Critical writing shares affinity with other forms of journalism such as broadcast commentary, editorials, the traditional news story and the feature. The critic can also use several types of composition such as description, exposition and argumentation. However, in all these, the journalistic critic must concentrate on the results of the artist’s efforts and appreciate or exercise judgment.

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit has exposed you to the affinity critical writing shares with other forms of journalism such as broadcast commentary, editorials, the traditional news story and the feature; but it emphasised the distinctive mark of the journalistic critic which is appreciation or exercise of judgment.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

- i. Which of the journalistic forms writing discussed shares the closest affinity with critical writing? Justify your answer.
- ii. What common characteristics do broadcast commentary and the editorial share with Critical writing?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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

Rivers, L. W. & Somolkin (1988). *Writing Opinions Reviews*. Ames, Iowa: University Press.

Singer, L. S. (1974). *The Student Journalist and Reviewing the Performing Arts*. New York: Richards Rosen Press Inc.

Uyo, A. O. (1987). *Mass Media Messages in a Nutshell*. New York: Civiletis International

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

MODULE 2

Unit 1	Functions of Criticism
Unit 2	Theories of Criticism
Unit 3	Approaches to Criticism

UNIT 1 FUNCTIONS OF CRITICISM

CONTENTS

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objective
3.0	Main Content
	3.1 The Function of Information
	3.2 The Function of Influence
	3.3 The Function of Promotion
	3.4 The Function of Advertising
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignment
7.0	References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The functions of critical writing coincide with those of all journalistic writing. The principal purposes of journalism are to inform, entertain and influence. Criticism does all these but it emphasises the function of influence. This unit shall to you through the major functions of criticism.

2.0 OBJECTIVE

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- identify the major functions of criticism.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Function of Information

This is the function of reporting- on this, 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”. Oscar further avers that it “is to hold up a mirror to what has been composed or performed and to the performance”.

Criticism conveys information if capably written, and if indeed well written it offers even a measure of entertainment.

3.2 The Function of Influence

In fulfilling its function of influencing readers, criticism also serves as a guide. A movie or book criticism performs several functions for the viewer or reader at once- it performs the information function by telling the viewer or reader what the book or movie is about. It also performs the function of influencing by telling the viewer or reader the reviewer's opinion or what the reviewer thinks about the book or movie. Then, it offers guidance when it tells the viewer or reader whether the book or movie is worth his time or money; and finally, it entertains the viewer or reader if he/she enjoys reading the review itself.

3.3 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 favorable public attitude toward the work of art in question.

3.4 The Function of Advertising

Another function of criticism is to earn money directly for the medium through advertising. This is the tie with commerce which tends to stultify honest criticism. 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. However, Singer (1974) says its effectiveness, as such, varies according to the art form, the type of publication and the community.

3.5 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”.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Which of the functions of criticism do you consider most important? Why? Fully justify your answer.

4.0 CONCLUSION

You as a journalistic critic must understand the impact of these functions and commerce on criticism. A pure task of informing, influencing is, immensely, difficult, for in discharging it honestly, you may ruin advertising accounts or offend a friend etc.; it takes a bold critic to damn a book, play, or movie when he/she knows that the same medium will carry a sizeable volume of advertising for the same book, play, or movie.

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit has exposed you to the functions of critical writing and the commercial and social difficulties associated with performing them. This is to help you understand how, increasingly, hard it is to ignore the impact of commerce and social relations as a journalistic critic.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

- i. What are the major functions of criticism?
- ii. What do you consider to be the impact of commerce and society on criticism?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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

Rivers, L. W. & Somolkin (1988). *Writing Opinions Reviews*. Iowa: University Press.

Singer, L. S. (1974). *The Student Journalist and Reviewing the Performing Arts*. New York: Richards Rosen Press Inc.

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

UNIT 2 THEORIES OF CRITICISM

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 The Authoritarian Theory
 - 3.2 The Impressionistic Theory
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

There are two broad theories of criticism. Criticism relies on both the intimate experience the critic has with the work of art he/she is judging and his possession of reliable criteria of criticism. These criteria act as useful guides to writing the criticism.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- describe the major theories of criticism
- illustrate the practices of the best journalistic critics.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Authoritarian Theory

The authoritarian critic believes that there exist fixed standards with which to judge a new book, painting or some other composition or performance. He/she uses these standards and insists that all works of art must conform to these standards and any deviation from these standards is condemned.

Authoritarian criticism, usually, consists of judging particular works by historical, moral, judicial, classical and scientific models which already have been accepted as good. The authoritarian critic judges new works by comparing them to his/her knowledge of what has gone before. It is knowledge of what has gone before that gives the critic his/her perspective. You can say that the authoritarian critic is rather fixed, inflexible and rigid in his/her evaluation of works of art.

Authoritarian criticism is produced only after years of study and exposure to the art of the past. It seeks to impose on all writers the strict observance of rules. Thus, to the authoritarian critic, criticism is meaningless, unless the yardstick of the critic is visible and respected.

3.2 The Impressionistic Theory

The impressionistic critic has no rules; he/she, likewise, has no standards. The impressionistic critic who follows Anatole France's (Wolseley, 1959:75) "is he who narrates the adventures of his soul among masterpieces". This means that the impressionistic critic has no respect for fixed standards with which to judge a new book, painting or some other composition or performance.

It is his/her own impressions of the work of art under review that are important to him/her. He/she emphasises his/her own impressions, rather than the facts or simple description. That is, he/she does not judge a work of art on how nearly it approaches the qualities or characteristics of an earlier work but on its own merits and on its effect upon him/her. The impressionistic critic, at his/her best, may possess knowledge of the authoritative critic but he/she draws upon himself/herself, rather than on outside authorities

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Which of the theories do you consider most dominant? Why? Fully, justify your answer.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Theories of criticism are the points of view of the critic on his/her subject. Most criticism combines the authoritarian and impressionistic theories, and few, dominantly, fall within either of the two.

5.0 SUMMARY

Critical theories are many, but we have reduced them to two here, for working purposes. These distinctions, it must be remembered, are theoretical. The journalistic critic simply performs his/her job, though he/she benefits from understanding and using these theories consciously until they become part of him/her (unnoticed), yet in use.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

A good critic “is he who narrates the adventures of his soul among masterpieces”. Discuss this statement with reference to theories of criticism.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Singer, L. S. (1974). *The Student Journalist and Reviewing the Performing Arts*. New York: Richards Rosen Press Inc.

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

UNIT 3 APPROACHES TO CRITICISM

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objective
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Moral Approach
 - 3.2 Psychological Approach
 - 3.3 Sociological Approach
 - 3.4 Formalistic Approach
 - 3.5 Archetypal Approach
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Regardless of which theory of criticism is dominant, Scott (1977) suggests that five approaches can be employed by critics in providing access to a particular work of art. These will be the focus of your study in this unit.

2.0 OBJECTIVE

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- describe the major approaches to criticism.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Moral Approach

The moral approach uses ethical principles of human conduct such as ‘order, restraint and discipline’ as basis to criticise life, creative or literary art. To the moralist, criticism becomes “a repository of basic human conduct” (Wilson, 2000) which is used in criticising works of art.

3.2 Psychological Approach

The psychological approach uses the tools of psychologist such as ‘Oedipus complex’ to explain acts or characters in any work of art. This method also studies the lives of authors as means of understanding their art.

3.3 The Sociological Method

The sociological method presupposes the interrelatedness of art and society and evaluates a work of art within its social context.

3.4 The Formalistic Approach

The formalistic approach is a method of contemporary criticism which emphasises a close study of the text or work, rather than, seeing “the work merely as an expression of social, religious, ethical or political ideas” (Wilson, 2000). The formalistic method is also referred to as the “aesthetic, textual, or ontological approach, or new criticism” with journalism as its official organ. This method is, easily, the most influential of the critical methods.

3.4 The Archetypal or Totemic approach

The archetypal or totemic approach is often referred to as ‘mythological or ritualistic’ method. It is a demonstration of some basic cultural pattern from which it draws great meaning and appeal in a work of art.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Define each of the approaches discussed here in your own words.

4.0 CONCLUSION

This unit has considered the major approaches to criticism. These are no set rules, but they are to serve as useful guides to the critic. A critic may use several of these approaches, depending on the work of art under consideration.

5.0 SUMMARY

The approaches discussed here are related. The moral and psychological are related, while the sociological and archetypal are also similar. These distinctions are therefore not watertight, and one approach can dissolve into another in a criticism.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Compare two approaches of your choice, and show the strength one against the other.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Wilson, D. S. (1977). *Introduction to Print Media: Readings in Nigerian Journalism*. (Ed.). Ibadan: Stirling Horden Publishers.

MODULE 3

- Unit 1 Components of Criticism: The Critic
- Unit 2 Components of Criticism: Direct Data
- Unit 3 Components of Criticism: Indirect Data

UNIT 1 COMPONENTS OF CRITICISM: THE CRITIC

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 The Critic's Background
 - 3.2 The Critic's Attitude
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

A distinguished Greek-French author and critic, M.D. Calvocoressi (1923), was among the first to analyse the components of musical criticism. He noted that there are three major factors in appraising a work of music; these, we may apply to appraising any work of art. The first is the critic, the human factor in the communication- who encodes, composes, and calls up messages.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- define and classify the background of critics
- describe how a critic's background and prejudices can affect the work being appraised.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Critic's Background

The critic's qualifications, then, according to Wolseley, (1959) are that- he/she must like what he/she does, have an absorbing interest in the art form itself, possess an understanding of the art form, have the ability to transmit in words his/her reactions and judgments, know more than

his/her subject. An editor and publishers cannot tolerate ignorance in their critics and tacitly encourage it. The critic's background include the body of knowledge he/she possesses, his/her diverse interests, his/her tastes- inborn and or acquired.

Also, the critic's background relates to the following- his/her likes and dislikes, prejudices for, sense of judgment, experience and observation, formal schooling and elaborate training, an analytical mind and ability for self expression. Words for instance, are a critic's tools. He/she can add up his/her vocabulary by judicious reading. He/she can, and should, supplement his/her background experience by acquiring great knowledge about his/her chosen field (which could be theatre, cinema, television, music, literature, art).

Of course, all these fields have some relationship to one another. All that the critic needs to know is everything about every art, history, sociology, economics, philosophy, language, and religion. You may think this sounds impossible, but do the best you can to build your background as you work. A firmer base or standard is established by greater background and the journalistic critic should not be unwilling to invest ten years of his/her life into an area without any guarantee of getting anything back, except personal satisfaction (to secure the background a critic must have). Exposure strengthens standards of judgment. These help you know, not only what has gone before so that you are a better judge of originality and treatment, but you also know what standards can be achieved in writing and performance.

3.2 The Critic's Attitude

The critic holds a mirror to the performance, an intensifying mirror, and acts as a funnel; but as a human being, the critic is subject to varying moods which make him see things differently. His emotional stability – even his disposition at the time of appraisal - a deep personal problem, an illness, perhaps a quarrel with his wife – may put him in varying moods. He should be aware of 'out-of-sorts' feelings.

The critic's predispositions are an important factor. Just how important depends on the critic's edibility to detach himself emotionally from what he is writing long enough to assess his emotions as well as what he is writing about. The critic must make sure that his own background and prejudices do not blind him to the merits and demerits of the work he is appraising. A critic must repress his personal inclinations but not his standards of taste and performance.

All his life, a critic must therefore retain an open mind, and respect the expert practitioner in any field of performance and creative arts. Open-

mindedness here is not to the point of vacuity but to the extent of avoiding dogmatism. The real value of open-mindedness is the willingness to try to understand the strange, the obscure, or the off-beat. When a critic avoids closed-mindedness, his own tastes, but not his standard probably will broaden. But Wolseley (1959) says when he starts to constrict, it is time to retire as a practicing critic.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Who is a journalistic critic?

4.0 CONCLUSION

This unit teaches that, basically, the critic should be an intelligent observer of works of art; that he/she should train himself/herself and develop a background against which he/she can convey and pass on his/her impressions coherently and accurately, put them into perspective as possible, by reading and experience. He/she should also acquire certain ideals of taste.

5.0 SUMMARY

No human is objective; each of us possesses certain prejudices and preconceptions and the criticisms we write reflect these predilections. For a critic to be successful, he/she must be equipped with background knowledge through conscious observation and study, and formal schooling. The critic must, therefore, do something about his/her conscience and overcome all background deficiencies and afflictions of his/her attitude so that they do not get into his criticism.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

- i. Itemise and briefly describe ten qualities of a good critic.
- ii. In not less than three pages of A-4 sized paper, discuss how a critic can add problem to critical writing.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Singer, L. S. (1974). *The Student Journalist and Reviewing the Performing Arts*. New York: Richards Rosen Press Inc.

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

UNIT 2 COMPONENTS OF CRITICISM: DIRECT DATA

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objective
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Material
 - 3.2 Form
 - 3.3 Workmanship
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The late Oscar Thompson (Singer, 1974) in his *Practical Musical Criticism* refined Calvocoressi's analysis of the components of criticism and noted that direct data – the music itself – can be divided into three major factors of material, form and workmanship. This formula can be applied to any work of art being reviewed, whether a stage play, movie, television documentary, book, the fine arts as well music.

2.0 OBJECTIVE

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

highlight the variables that can make or mar criticism.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Material

Material is the work itself. It may be a book, a film, a stage play, a poem, a piece of music, a painting, or sculpture. If it is a book, the quality of paper or wood comes into consideration; if it is stage performance, the costume or setting.

3.2 Form

Form is the label or parts in which you breakdown a book, performance or production. If a book- is it biography, or drama or prose or poetry? If it is music- it could be pop, gospel, classical, symphony, reggae etc. In discussing material and workmanship, form sometimes is crowded out. Form may be only label. That is, a play may be advertised as comedy or

tragedy. Various terms such as rhapsody, drama, concert, symphony, musical drama, tragedy, musical comedy, operetta, light opera, comedy and other terms may describe the form of the creation being reviewed and the critic may agree with this label or not. One may accept a label as to form, even though the technical qualifications are not always met.

The element of form – the firmness of structure or lack of it – also overlaps into material and workmanship. The basic worth of the material of a play may be appraised in terms of universality. Could the setting of the play be transferred to another time or place with equal effect? The quality of universality aids any creative work. The quality of performance can override deficiency in the work performed.

3.3 Workmanship

Workmanship is effort or craftsmanship expended on the work of art. These are the creative aspects of a work of art: inspiration, originality, freshness, conviction, soundness of structure. You have to say whether the new work has inspiration. The inspiration may be in the originality of a play's plot or musical composition, or in its expert craftsmanship. The play or movie or musical composition or painting can have originality or it may use a previous playwright, composer, or artist's idea, or structure and give it a new twist.

Your experience and abilities should help you make comparisons. New writer or composer may have used a previous practitioner's idea, or structure, and given it a twist. He may, thus, bring freshness of treatment to the work. In this case, workmanship may be principal factor for examination. However, whether old or new, it is how convincing the playwright or composer is- in what he/she says (material) and how he/she says it (workmanship). The creative artist may have a good idea (material), but may not have developed it to its fullest extent (workmanship).

Again, he/she may have a good play idea, the plot may teem with possibilities, yet the overall structure may not take advantage of all the material; or the plot may be top – heavy with subplots that impede the principal action. Here, the imbalance of material and form makes a faulty structure. Judgment of musical composition, course, also employs standards of material, form and workmanship. Does the music have basic worth? Is there sufficient thematic structure?

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Discuss what elements you would consider in evaluating workmanship in a work of art.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, analysis of material, form, and workmanship has been suggested as an aid to the critic. After some practice, such appraisal will become subconscious or second nature. The critic will strive to appraise the basic worth of any new work – whether it has genuine substance or is of the fashion of the day, whether there is sound workmanship or merely a high technical finish.

5.0 SUMMARY

Direct data is everything present in the music (or other creative work). Direct data provide the principal basis for appraising a new work of whatever medium. Direct data is everything present in the performance or creative work under review. It involves the creative aspects of a new work of art such as inspiration, originality, freshness, conviction, and soundness of structure.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Using your knowledge of direct data studied in this unit; criticise a review on any work of art published in any Nigerian daily (attach photocopy of the review).

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

- Rivers, L. W. & Somolkin. (1988). *Writing Opinions Reviews*. Iowa: University Press.
- Singer, L. S. (1974). *The Student Journalist and Reviewing the Performing Arts*. New York: Richards Rosen Press Inc.
- Wolseley, R. E. (1959). *Critical Writing for the Journalist*. New York: Chilton Book Company.

UNIT 3 COMPONENTS OF CRITICISM: INDIRECT DATA

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objective
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Indirect Data
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Indirect data stem, solely, from outside the creative work itself. It is everything external to the work. Indirect data may be useful in your review. It may even influence your judgment. This will be the focus of your study here.

2.0 OBJECTIVE

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

explain what indirect data is in critical writing.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Indirect Data

Indirect data are:

- the artist's or artiste's intention, expressed, disavowed, or not expressed at all
- the place or position of the work in the artist's or artiste's output
- the position of the work in its contemporary setting, or place in history(whether the work has any significance, or any intent).

Such indirect data must be considered. First of all, there is a label of the author himself, whether he is well known or not. The name of the author should, however, not predispose the critic; and each work should be judged solely on its own merit. When reviewing a new artistic work by a prominent creator, it is valid to appraise it in terms of the man's previous output but only as an aid and not to mislead or to be an end in itself.

In reviewing plays or movies or books, the indirect data can be helpful or otherwise. If it is drama or play, first ask yourself whether the play has any true life connections or connotation? A play may have fictional characters that may have coincidental semblance with people living or dead. If a book is a biography, how true to life does it appear? Has the biographical order of events been followed faithfully or have they been juggled? Have characters and or events been added or omitted – added for dramatic effect, omitted to avoid cluttering the script? All these are interesting as to factual accuracy. But what is important is whether the tempering with biographical facts enhances or detracts from the quality of the book.

Music is full of examples of indirect data- avowed and disavowed. First of all, there is programme music-music with a title that tries to tell a story, in contrast to pure music, which is solely for its own sake. Such music may be inspired by a natural phenomenon or poem and although your knowledge of the story or poem may enhance your enjoyment of the music, it may not necessarily make the music itself any greater.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Choose a particular art form, describe and give examples of indirect data that can be useful in its criticism.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, it has been made clear to you that indirect data, though useful in criticism and may have a bearing in what you include in your review, it can sometimes be misleading. The name of the author, for instance, may sometimes predispose the critic and make criticism an unwilling apologist. You must be careful to judge each work, solely, on its own merit- though this is sometimes hard.

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit focused on indirect data as a major component of criticism. Indirect data comes from outside the work of art and is extrinsic to it. It may be the artist's or artiste's intention, the place or position of the work in the artist's or artiste's output, the position or place of the work in contemporary setting or history, or it may the work's significance or intent. You must note, however, that indirect data is determined largely by the individual work of art under review.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

- i. What is indirect data in critical writing?
- ii. How can it help you in criticising say a poem?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Rivers, L. W. & Somolkin. (1988). *Writing Opinions Reviews*. Iowa: University Press.

Singer, L. S. (1974). *The Student Journalist and Reviewing the Performing Arts*. New York: Richards Rosen Press Inc.

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

MODULE 4

- Unit 1 Writing a Review
- Unit 2 Writing a Critical Article
- Unit 3 The Reviewer and the Critic
- Unit 4 The Critic's Style

UNIT 1 WRITING A REVIEW

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Writing the Review
 - 3.2 Preparation of Copy
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

A review is a short piece of critical writing for a newspaper or magazine, about a particular art event. It is distinguished here from the full length criticism known as the critical article. In writing a review, you may follow a more or less fixed pattern, especially, as a beginner or follow no regular pattern.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- state how to write reviews
- construct a critical review.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Writing a Review

You can write your reviews in two basic formats. You can write your review in form of pure reporting that amounts to a news story about the material viewed or heard. You can also write a review that may incorporate expression of opinion and not merely describe through the senses but attempt to evaluate or appreciate. No accepted pattern of any

sort exists for writing reviews; but for the less experienced reviewer, it is safe to emphasise reporting over criticism, and merely describe and report the news. And because the review is largely news, it is advisable that it should follow the traditional inverted-pyramid pattern of news writing.

Journalistic critics therefore develop their reviews in different ways. Established critics can develop their reviews:

- By constructing the review around personal experience, such as recalling an encounter with a star or artist at the start of the performance; or
- By dispensing first with the news aspect, then launching a generalisation about the event and backing it up with evidence; or
- By relating an anecdote or reporting an incident which leads into the opinions or evidence to be presented.

As a beginner however, your reviewing can be reduced to a formula. Depending upon your purpose, you may, intentionally, devote certain amounts of space to particular types of content; but the structure of a review suggested here is, however, meant as a guide and not to stifle your creativity as a critic.

The beginning- is the most important and difficult part of the review. The beginning should be well thought of. This part can be called the lead or opening paragraph or intro. A straight news story usually has the most important facts in the lead. As with a good news story, the lead should be as interesting as possible and it should incorporate or emphasise any of the journalistic five *Ws* and the *H*, and immediately, give the reader information about the what, where, when, who, why, and how - depending on which is more dominant.

This is a desirable format of all journalistic writing. There are several straight news attention-getting leads you can experiment with. The commonest is the summary lead which encapsulates or provides a synopsis of the plot or action or description of appearance.

The main body- this can divide the five (5) *Ws* and *H* and your views, unfolding the details in decreasing order of importance. Some parts can be criticism, either all authoritative or all impressionistic or both and some parts review. This part of the review can contain the heart of your views and must be constructed to carry your essential summaries and opinions and should be brisk and concise.

The ending- this is the second most important part of the review after the opening paragraph and is almost as difficult to construct as the beginning; but several sound possibilities exist for you. One is that your review can end with your (critic's) main points. Another is that you can end your review with a major point that is an integral part of the body of the review.

3.2 Preparation of Copy

Here, you are to note the following considerations.

Selecting material- constructing a review is a process of selecting material. As a journalistic critic, decide what you shall include in your review by deciding what you want to say about the art, thinking what your readers may require of you. A review should however tell all the news of the event, anything worthy of mention.

Taking notes- you must also understand that note-taking is fundamental to your success as a beginning critic. It is therefore wise to make notes while listening to music or watching a play or movie or wandering about an art gallery or reading a book. The notes you taken will add spice to your review. It is even wiser that you take more notes than you need so that you can choose the more important items and omit the rest.

Length- you must be conscious of the length of your review. Length, usually, is determined by the medium; therefore, you must familiarise yourself with length policies of different publications. Ordinary newspaper criticisms however run from 300 to 600 words in length.

Using quotations- use quotes in your review. If it is a book or some such art, include quotations from the original, alternating between direct and indirect quotes, for they give the reader a clue to the author's or artiste's style and lend authenticity to the review.

Use of pronoun- here, be careful how you use pronoun in your reviews. Remember that you are speaking for your newspaper, avoiding the first-person pronoun makes your review appear more factual, rather than being just one man's statement of opinion. Therefore, let your review speak for itself. It carries more weight when expressed in impersonal terms.

Using words- words are a reviewer's stock in trade. The bigger your vocabulary, the better equipped you are. Words help you to express yourself precisely and to convey fine distinctions. Avoid flamboyant phrases and esoteric words that are understood by only a minority of readers or those that send your readers to the dictionary.

Beginning and ending- facts at the beginning and end of a review often carry more weight than if placed deeper into the story. Therefore, do not start or end your review with an observation that is an exception to your general premise.

The legal angle- you cannot safely be ignorant of the laws of journalism that cover libel and slander, plagiarism, copyright, and related topics. Knowledge of these has particular pertinence for you, since as a critic, you express opinions and opinions are the commonest source of libel and slander. As a critic, you are at liberty to say what you wish about a work of art but you must be careful not to reflect upon the artist in a way that damages him or her, professionally.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Discuss some of the common ways used by critics in developing their reviews.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, it has been made clear to you that no accepted pattern of any sort exists for writing reviews. Experienced critics begin framing their reviews while watching or hearing what they are to criticise, and the opening paragraphs occur to them, effortlessly. By the time the critic settles down to write, the body of the review may take shape also and he/she has, well in mind, what he/she wishes to say. For a beginner, a formula is of considerable help, until you learn, eventually, to dispense with the pattern.

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit considered possible ways of writing reviews. The unit acknowledges that while no accepted pattern of any sort exists for writing, it is better for a beginner to reduce his/her reviewing to a formula which may serve as a guide.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Reduce reviewing to a formula and discuss your formula with practical reference to a particular work of art.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Singer, L. S. (1974). *The Student Journalist and Reviewing the Performing Arts*. New York: Richards Rosen Press Inc.

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

UNIT 2 WRITING A CRITICAL ARTICLE

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 The Critical Article and the Critic
 - 3.2 Writing a Critical Article
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Writing the critical article is a major test of the critic's abilities. The critical article is more extensive than the review. It is also more intensive, more penetrating, and analytical. In a critical article, you cannot stop at merely describing or reporting, but you must also dissect.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- identify a critical article at first sight
- write a good critical article
- state the conventional features of a critical article.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Critical Article and the Critic

The critical article, like the essay, is difficult to define, for it has no special form, as does the news story. It resembles the essay in that it, too, is a short piece of prose, with less emphasis on style, and wider purpose. It may be intended to inform, guide, entertain, and influence and it is collection of facts or ideas assembled to gratify on or more of these intentions. Largely, the critical article can be defined as a piece of prose which is intended to analyse some phase of the arts, and attempts to evaluate them. To Wilson (2000), the critical article is a careful composition that evaluates and appreciates the whole body of a writer's work, the whole career of a singer or the complete field.

Whatever it is called or however it is classified, on important thing is that, as a critic, you must be dominantly idea-minded as opposed to

thing-minded. Some persons react most strongly to things – persons, facts, events; others attend more spontaneously to ideas, notions, generalisations, and thoughts about things. The reporter gives pictures of persons, things, and events in writing; the critic explains, relates and analyses them and points to opinions and conclusions resulting from his cerebration. The writer of the critical article therefore should be idea-minded.

3.2 Writing the Critical Article

In writing the critical article, you can find the following steps very useful.

Step 1- you are endowed with an idea or you are given an idea by an editor; either way, you obtain a topic or subject for the critical article.

Step 2- you research and gather facts and opinions relating to your subject. Research can come from your observation, from interviews, books and other media.

Step 3- after research, you analyse and relate facts gathered to gain new insights pertaining to the general purpose of the article in question. Also, you are to reflect on the different dimensions of the subject, on available alternatives and consequences, discount prejudices and biases. You can record your observations and makes use of your notes, clippings, letters and other sources.

Step 4- you can prepare an outline at this stage and list words, phrases, and sentences that represent all the different items that will go into the article regardless of relationship or order. Analyse this list in turn, group related items together, or arrange them in any desired order. You may wish to write a paragraph setting forth the purpose of the article at this point, as a starter.

Step 5- design an attractive opening or ending; you can begin with strong news- peg based on news event relating to the subject of the article among other openings. Your ending should grow naturally from the beginning or from the theme of the article. It may repeat the beginning to clinch the idea, or it may be an anecdote which emphasises the chief message of the article.

Step 6- next, you develop methods of presenting you materials in the body of the article. You can use either the deductive method or inductive method. The deductive method proceeds from general to the particular. Using the deductive method you may start with a general statement that follows an example or incident, and then provide minor details, all

leading to the general statement of the original proposition. The inductive method proceeds from the particular to the general; it begins with minor and works up to the general proposition which is usually stated at the end as a sort of conclusion.

Step 7- to write is to write and re-write, and write until the critical article is ready after a number of drafts. You may allow a more experienced person to read your copy before you finally submit for publication along with whatever necessary pictures or artwork.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Examine some newspapers and magazines, identify critical articles- those run as regular parts of publications and those which appear under special features. Can you discern any conventional pattern? Analyse any of them in terms of structure or design.

4.0 CONCLUSION

As you can see from this unit, the design of the critical article is not very different from that of the critical review. It has a beginning, middle and an end. Its structure resembles that of a human being- it has a head, a body and feet. These distinctions must be different. The head must be smaller than the body, and the feet are of different construction compared to either of the two.

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit has exposed you to the fact that there are two common methods of developing a critical article. If you plan to begin inductively, there are various choices for the opening. You can begin with an anecdote, or an incident, or a news-peg, or an example which sets forth the detail, or a slight descriptive passage. You must not forget that the body of the article stems, naturally, from the type of beginning. If your article begins with a generalisation, you must proceed to supply the support for that generalisation in the body. Your ending should grow, naturally, from the beginning or from the theme of the article.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Submit a three-paged critical article on A4-sized paper, with 1.5 spacing on any work of art of your choice. Try to follow the steps suggested in this unit. You may shuffle them to suit your purpose.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Singer, L. S. (1974). *The Student Journalist and Reviewing the Performing Arts*. New York: Richards Rosen Press Inc.

Wilson, D. S. (1977). *Introduction to Print Media: Readings in Nigerian Journalism*. (Ed.). Ibadan: Stirling Horden Publishers.

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

UNIT 3 THE REVIEWER AND THE CRITIC

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objective
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 The Reviewer
 - 3.2 The Critic
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

A true critic is not, necessarily, a reviewer; a reviewer is not necessarily a critic- in fact, and he/she rarely is. Each has his/her rightful place and are really quite different.

2.0 OBJECTIVE

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- differentiate between a reviewer and a critic.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Reviewer

A reviewer is not a critic, even though he/she too must be critical. He/she is a reporter who writes what amounts to a follow-up news story about the material viewed or heard. He/she, therefore, avoids opinion. He/she merely reports; that is, describes through the senses without attempting to evaluate or appreciate.

A review is objective reporting. You report what goes on outside you. You take note of first hand events; consult reference books for facts about the artist and their schools; familiarise yourself with catalogues, ask the artist direct questions, talk to the guards and people at an exhibition, ask the ticket taker for facts about attendance, report on special events, incidents, or whatever else that may make attractive copy, but you do not enter the area of criticism.

As a reviewer, you are, fundamentally, a newsman, and the review is basically a piece of news. You are, temperamentally, very different from

the critic. Your philosophy of writing is objectivity; as much as possible, be accurate, thorough, and well rounded. Your strong points are speed, topicality, wit, and fact.

As a critical reviewer, you should be able to summarise the performance so well that you not only satisfy the man who was not there but add something to the overall impression, perhaps by some enlivening details to the man who was. As such, the reviewer should also help the reader or listener make up his mind what he thinks of the movie, play, or concert he attended night before.

3.2 The Critic

The critical article is a subjective reporting. The critic expresses an opinion about a performance or a work of art or music. You tell your readers what goes on inside you. As such you must go beyond reporting or reviewing into the realm of the subjective. You must move from the objective the subjective. As a critic though, you too must at least meet all standards of good reporting then add what converts a report into criticism- your opinions and comments.

The critic publishes several months after the reviewer has forgotten what the work of art was even about. As a critic, you are really a kind of a 'garden-variety' philosopher. Your virtues are long meditation, a firm historical sense, profound insight, and truth-(absolute truth). Your audience finds the reviewer flashy and cheap, the master of snap judgment. Consequently, you must be overly elaborate bearing in mind that your arguments may even change the reader or listener's mind.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

In a logical sequence, outline how a reviewer thinks and writes.

4.0 CONCLUSION

For you as a new writer of critical material The value of these distinctions between the reviewer and the critic is that if you feel you are not grounded enough in the art form at stake, you can skip the critical writing and confine yourself to objective reporting so that you can produce something that is fair and usable.

5.0 SUMMARY

You have learnt from this unit that the reviewer and the critic write in different ways, in different places, for different audiences. They operate

on different levels and they think in different ways. Nevertheless, as you can notice, there is a thin line between the two; the same person can sometimes do the same jobs, sometimes even fuse the two activities.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Discuss the similarities and differences between a critic and a reviewer.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Singer, L. S. (1974). *The Student Journalist and Reviewing the Performing Arts*. New York: Richards Rosen Press Inc.

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

UNIT 4 THE CRITIC'S STYLE

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 The Critic's Style
 - 3.2 The Tone of Criticism
 - 3.3 Developing your Style
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The journalistic critic's style is limited by the type of publication in which his or her work appears or the audience he/she addresses. The critic's writing must be suitable for most publications or other media, and for the not too literate, as well as the technically well-informed readers he or she tries to serve.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- describe the style of a critique
- cultivate your own style.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Critic's Style

For a journalistic critic, it is advisable to conform to the stylistic traditions of the press. The journalistic critic's style is characterised by use of short sentences, simple words, brief paragraphs, and avoidance of foreign terms and exotic references and, except where inescapable, of technical terms; brightness and newness of tone and an introduction of human interest where possible.

However, as a critic, you share the editorial and article writer's measure of freedom; and since you are thought to appeal to a somewhat better educated group of readers, you are allowed to use a few of the technical words of your occupation and the specialised language of the art you are evaluating.

Style refers to the method, the manner, and the personality of the writer; but Percy Marks (Wolseley, 1959:93) says “personality is as elusive as it is real and important. If we could define personality, we could define style...” He adds that the style of writing should reflect the personality of the writer, and that when as a student critic you have learned to give a true expression of yourself, you have achieved style.

Your goal as a critic therefore, according to Oscar Thompson (Wolseley, 1959:97-98), is to “rid writing of its last suggestions of effort, by perfecting a technique that reads as if it took care of itself”. You must go straight to point, paragraph by paragraph, sentence by sentence, and word by word. There should be no waste, no padding, no clutter, or circuitous phrases. You must say what you wish to say, no more, no less. Yet you must never be curt and must never spare. The amplitude of your ideas should prevent that. Your style should be as mellow and easy as it is precise and clear.

Vary your sentence structure. Each sentence should be a complete idea in itself and each sentence should be related to what precedes and follows; but at the bottom of all is the use of words. As Oscar Thompson (Wolseley, 1959: 98) again says, “none has a happier faculty for finding the exact and illuminative term”. Your words must be reasoned and organized. When you express any opinion, and you are expected to – your words must buttress your opinion. Remember that your opinions are the main points of his story. While the general reviewers with nouns and verbs, the most interesting words in a critical review are the adjectives and adverbs.

3.2 The Tone of Criticism

The tone of criticism has various characteristics resulting from the nature of the writer. Some of these include simplicity, smartness, banality, pomposity, and humour. As a beginning critic, you must learn never to pretend to be radical and pass judgment in alarming manner or feign dignity of mind and solidity of judgment when actually you are concealing the fact that you have nothing to say. Be wary of humor, wisecracking and punning.

Humour is always difficult to write. You must use an expression only because it says what you mean and not because it makes you look bright and clever. You must be mindful also at whom you direct your barbs for they may be out of place. Avoid ornamentation of style, excessive resort to technical jargon and appallingly stale expressions. Chesty writing and such triteness shows you have a barren vocabulary and no taste. It is possible for you to be simple and direct without being commonplace in style. You must not over-quoting from a book being reviewed or

paraphrasing such that you distort the original and employing words inaccurately.

3.3 Developing Your Style

Now that you are dumped into critical writing responsibilities, it is necessary you consider what is involved in developing your own style. First, if you are sincere in seeking after a useful and effective style, it is helpful if you devote many hours reading writings of established writers on the subject.

Also, if you are to become a master critic in your profession, you must begin to write, write and write for many years. You must not imitate the styles of others as a means of developing your own and do not try to develop a style before you begin to write. Thirdly, understand that a good style should show no sign of effort. Therefore, you must never take the smallest pains with your style or think about it or try to know whether it is style at all. Just continue to write as your personality directs and you will arrive at your objective.

Lastly, try to understand the forms of discourse, that is, description, exposition, argumentation, and narration as a way of increasing the attractiveness of your writing in both form and style.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Is there any ideal style? Fully justify your answer.

4.0 CONCLUSION

It is clear from this unit that style is a personal characteristic. If it does not come to you naturally, you can and should acquire it. And you can always improve your style through borrowing the characteristics of others, through practice, and through self-criticism.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you learnt that the journalistic style must first conform to the stylistic traditions of the press though you share the editorial and article writers' measure of freedom. You have learnt also that you can achieve style through honest self expression, practice, and self-criticism, and that your style need not be, unnecessarily, ornamental.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

A good style must show no signs of effort. Discuss.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Singer, L. S. (1974). *The Student Journalist and Reviewing the Performing Arts*. New York: Richards Rosen Press Inc.

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

MODULE 5

- Unit 1 Reviewing the Fine Arts
- Unit 2 Reviewing Books
- Unit 3 Reviewing Stage Play **or Drama**
- Unit 4 Reviewing Music
- Unit 5 Reviewing TV and Motion Pictures

UNIT 1 REVIEWING THE FINE ARTS

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objective
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Reviewing the Fine Arts
 - 3.2 The Art Review
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The fine arts- painting and sculpture- come under the broad subject of arts. They have been with mankind for long, particularly sculpture. Their value appreciates with time; many see them as a good investment and they are increasingly receiving attention in the media in form of exhibitions and shows.

2.0 OBJECTIVE

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- discuss the nitty-gritty of art reviews.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Reviewing the Fine Arts

The fine arts, painting and sculpture are the most subjective of arts and the pose problems for the reviewer. Probably, nowhere in the arts forms is the field more bewildering as on the fine arts themselves-painting and sculpture. The reviewer of these and other visual arts has a problem, unlike those who deal with books which have a more or less fixed

physical form. A critic need not worry whether a book is set in a particular font or typeface or its cover has a particular color.

Now, as a reviewer of an exhibit of paintings you have to watch out for many different points on which you are expected to have something to say such as the quality of color, the pigment used, techniques employed in laying it on canvas, the portrayal of reality and meaning, method of presentation, artistic philosophy, the context in which the work appears, the painting's frame, its lighting, and the type of work. In an exhibit of from two to three hundred paintings or works of sculpture, the complexity of your task is obvious.

Yet you may utilise the material-form-workmanship formula as a reasonably objective standard and a workable process in appraising any work of art. You may ask, as with other art forms, what the artist is trying to do (or say) and how well he does it. Instead of working in abstracts you can deal in concrete terms. You can name the materials, try to analyze the form, qualify the workmanship.

Remember time has changed everything. Canvas is no longer the only surface for painters. Marble and bronze are no longer the only materials for sculptors. In fact, the line between painting and sculpture is sometimes blurred. A painter today does not always use odds and ends from the woods or the rubbish heap and use spray gums on them. The sculptor may work with time-honored materials or he many use plastic, welded steel plates, wood, foam, or a combination, and may paint over the entire objected art.

Since the materials and the form are on display, concentrate on the direct data-form, material and workmanship. Where today critical judgment comes into play is in the matter of originality and workmanship. Who first used spray paint on flotsam and jetsam and sold the results to art connoisseurs, for instance? Is it this artist's own idea or is he following in the path of past practitioners? The artist may use a previous practitioner's idea and give it new horizons and new force.

As a critic attending exhibitions by new artists, you must broaden your own standards. When an exhibit by an acknowledged master arrives, or when your local museum acquires an expensive masterpiece, you the art critic must interpret these "standard" works for your audience; why are they masterpieces? What is so wonderful about them? Your study of the history of art, your background, and your knowledge of art will help you here. Your background is most helpful in detecting originality.

Just as a music critic should be able to delineate the fine points of a concert to his readers, you should, as an art critic, be able to write why

an artist is great; why a painting or a sculpture is great. You should also be able to distinguish between an etching; a print, and a lithograph; water color wash, and gouache; glass, stone, concrete, wood, or plastic, and how oil looks on these various materials.

Ask yourself whether the artist is consistent in his execution. One work will usually stand out in an exhibition and others may be judged, in relation to it. A retired art critic once suggested the impressionistic approach for reviewing the arts- take a look at any work of art; ‘shut your eyes, open them suddenly, and write about your first instantaneous impression’; but ask yourself if the artist’s methods and style, that is, his signature, are his own or a forgery.

3.2 The Art Review

Since art productions are shown in galleries, museums, and other exhibition places and open only between certain dates and hours, journalism critics on painting and sculpture often must give considerable news emphasis to their reviews. Members of the public can more easily read books, hear music on radio and watch TV shows, film, drama and dance but not many have opportunities of direct contact with these arts.

Hence, as a reviewer of these arts, you tend to be first of all a reporter than you need be for the other arts. The event you cover is news of a specialised nature. The articles therefore are written not in the strict inverted-pyramid form but in the form of the journalistic straight news format. The art review should, thus, have a certain general construction. As with any good news story, the lead should be as interesting as possible. The body will detail the materials, try to analyse the form, qualify the workmanship. Concentrate on what the artist is trying to do or say, that is, the meaning being conveyed, how well he does it, and conclude with a wrap – up comment.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

What makes the fine arts difficult to review?

4.0 CONCLUSION

The fine arts- painting and sculpture, are the most subjective of arts, and they pose problems for the reviewer. Formal training for effective art reviewing is.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that the fine arts are a bewildering field, especially for a beginning critic. The best option for you is the material-form-workmanship formula. It is a workable process in appraising any work of art. And the basic format for presenting art reviews is the news format.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Explain, in detail, how you would approach a review of the arts.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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

Singer, L. S. (1974). *The Student Journalist and Reviewing the Performing Arts*. New York: Richards Rosen Press Inc.

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

UNIT 2 REVIEWING BOOKS

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objective
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Reviewing Books
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Books are a storehouse of knowledge. They help the progression of civilisation. Books are reviewed for several reasons; you may be entitled to free copies; you may influence readers' opinions whether to buy or not. You review books not only for flaws but for the message of the book or the theme (which few books have).

2.0 OBJECTIVE

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- assess the value of books.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Reviewing Books

When you review books, first get a notebook handy and make notes as you read through the book. Quote page references for startling revelations and unusual twists as you jot down important points. Write down striking passages and your reactions to them. Did the book hold your attention? Classify the book as to biography, fiction, drama, tragedy, comedy, romance, etc.

Describe its content- give a synopsis of what the book is all about; communicate something of its quality of paper make, quality of content, plot, setting, grammar, and such other elements. Also, you are to pass judgment upon it; in other words, you have to assess whether the dialogue was natural and true, whether it was didactic or not. You also have to compare it with previous works by the same author or similar works by other authors.

At the top of your review, put the title of the book, author, publisher's price, date of publication and number of pages. Do not forget to talk about its style, typography, type of binding (hard or soft). Higher standards of book reviewing generally require that you answer the following , crucial questions, especially in historical writing:

- Does it establish its factual details by a strict of the historical method?
- Does it have a philosophy or frame of reference" that is of a more than transient and local significance?
- Is it written in a style that helps rather than impedes the reader's understanding?
- Is it merely a piece of hackwork repeating an already known story, or does it present new data or new interpretation of old data?
- No matter how limited its subject may be, does the author seem aware of the questions that men at all times in all places persist in asking?

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Assess book reviews in Nigerian newspapers in terms of whether they are regular, what type of books are featured most; and make an observation about the structure and style of such reviews.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The fact of book reviews is that they enrich your knowledge and help you to be a better writer. You improve your writing style; improve yourself intellectually by writing and reading. Books help you to read wide and reading wide is the prescription for good writing and intellectual richness.

5.0 SUMMARY

There is no acceptable formula for reviewing books. You only say it how you see it and how you feel; call a spade a spade and not a farming implement. Ask yourself what the author has set out to do and how well he has done it; who is expected to buy his work; how well he has competed with other books on the subject and what chances he has of success.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

What six ways can you make a book review complete and interesting?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Singer, L. S. (1974). *The Student Journalist and Reviewing the Performing Arts*. New York: Richards Rosen Press Inc.

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

UNIT 3 REVIEWING STAGE PLAY OR DRAMA

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objective
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Reviewing Stage Play or Drama
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Drama is a part of our culture, and the stage has long been a forum for projecting national image. Before the advent of television, theatre had been a place of entertainment and it has continued to fascinate and attract large audiences. It has still been able to survive television and motion pictures. Many plays are still being written. So many things can be dramatised—books, stories; life itself is drama acted daily by people.

2.0 OBJECTIVE

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- evaluate stage drama performances.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Reviewing Stage Play or Drama

There is no fixed pattern for reviewing drama, but the following suggestions can be useful and valuable, particularly, to a new reviewer. When you review a play, first find out if it is a new one. If it is not new, do not spend much time on it, since people already know it. Now, if it is a new one, give a synopsis of what the play is all about. You can also provide a capsule description of the play and, if possible, your verdict early in the article, but not necessarily in the first sentence.

Sometimes, the pluses and minuses of a new play may be so balanced that you cannot reach a clear-cut decision. Your review should reflect this; but if full consideration of all the factors leads to indecision, by all means, stay on the fence. However, stay on the fence only as a last resort; habitual fence-sitters have few readers. So, come to a favorable or unfavorable conclusion whenever necessary; if readers do not get this,

they are disappointed, especially, those who depend on your verdict to guide them whether they should or should not spend their money on that show. Then, consider the following specifics.

- Evaluate the plot of the play- does it have universality? Is the story believable? Is the plot well drawn or it is taut, or does the playing at leave any loose ends?
- Consider the congruity of the technical factors-setting, costumes, lighting - whether outstandingly good or bad.
- Consider stage management and direction also as well as transitions from scene to scene; are the actions logical? Is that how things happen or are the actions so contrived that you have unnatural coincidence
- Are the actions chronological?
- Are the exits and entrances merely artificial devices to get characters on and off stage?
- Does the drama or comedy move forward steadily, or is it uneven in pace? Are there interruptions or digressions of unnecessary character - that serve only to pad the story?
- Asses the quality of production whether everything flows-whether there is organic unity.
- Distinguish between acting and actor's role. Acting is effective portrayal of the designated character; role may be to do bad things only or to provide comic relief- are the characters true representative of the types they portray in real life or are they superficial caricatures? That is, are characters true representative of the types they portray in real life or are they superficial caricatures; that is, are the characters drawn true to life? Are they humanly etched?
- Does the playwright write with insight? Evaluate the ability of the playwright to present and achieve his purpose. Has he achieved his objective? Does he dip beneath the surface in plot construction and character analysis?
- Does the play have a message? A message is perfectly acceptable in a play. If a play does not convey some message or moral, expressed or inherent, it is liable to be dull. When a play has a message, the reviewer should be careful to check his feelings. He may agree or disagree with the playwright's precepts; but whether the author is wrong or right, the important thing is- how well does he say it?
- Did the playwright face the problem squarely or is such a problem simply falsely simplified as something not really as difficult as people believe? This is, however, not to suggest that you as a reviewer should not have feelings about any controversial or non-controversial subject. Reviewers too are human.

- Classify the play as comedy, tragedy, historical or otherwise.

After you have finished the business of summarising the play, get down to the business of explicit credits.

- List the players in meritorious order.
- When mentioning characters, do not mix your performers and the characters they play. Do not contradict yourself in appraising details.
- Give credit to directors and producers equally as to actors but without mentioning names. Identification of actors, players, producers-in movies, plays or television all vary according to the familiarity to the reader of your review.
- The review should tell all the “news of the event”, in other words, anything worthy of mention.
- The review of a new play, however, should include a few words, about the playwright. And it is news when a first play is a hit.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

As a reviewer, what critical standards provide your basis for evaluating play content and performance?

4.0 CONCLUSION

The suggestions on the structure of stage review are meant as guidelines, not as strait-jacket. As one must crawl before one can walk, these set of guidelines may be welcome to a genuine reviewer but you have the liberty to ignore them later provided you write intelligently and convincingly.

5.0 SUMMARY

As with any art, the review is not necessary written in the inverted pyramid style but an attention getting lead is desirable. Main body of the review then will detail the nature of the show, a minimum appraisal of individual performance and consideration of such technical credits as writing, direction and the conclusion will be a wrap up comment. The first paragraph will summarise your impression of the play. Just as types of news leads in basic reporting are varied, the leads on show reviews are equally diverse.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Using your knowledge of stage performance review, provide a three-page criticism of any stage review published in any of the dailies in

Nigeria. Endeavour to attach a photocopy of the article you are criticising.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Barranger, M. S. (1995). *Theatre: A Way of Seeing*. New York: Wadsworth Publishing.

Singer, L. S. (1974). *The Student Journalist and Reviewing the Performing Arts*. New York: Richards Rosen Press Inc.

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UNIT 4 REVIEWING MUSIC

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objective
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Reviewing Music
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Music is the most subjective and ephemeral of the arts. Some performance can move one listener to tears and make another gnash his teeth; it can keep others on the edge of their seats and bore others. Musical compositions are also a broad category - pop, classical, reggae, soul, blues, jazz, etc.

2.0 OBJECTIVE

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- appraise any musical composition or performance.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Reviewing Music

As with many other medium of performance - stage, film, television - many general comments apply here; but certain factors are unique to music, technical perfection is one of them. The efforts of producers and sound engineers, including the balancing and mixing of sound tracks into finished product are among factors that help differentiate a recording from a live performance. How well the recording is done should be a prime criterion for the music reviewer. So, comment, generally, on the technical quality.

Technical perfection achieved through careful editing may sometimes rob a performance of spontaneity and urgency. These qualities may be more apparent in a recording made from a live concert-hall or theatre along with audience applause and perhaps, coughs or laughs. At any rate, the reviewer of music tries to assay the effectiveness of the performance – play, dance, musical concert, poetry, musical composition

or whatever. To do this well, he must have a good stereo-system or good sound re-producing equipment on which to listen. The goal of record reviews is to capture the sound at its best.

Therefore check for proper balance of voices and instruments and for “presence” for surface noise, or other intrusion of extraneous sound. You check also for realism and balance. A stereo, generally, provides a better more realistic reproduction of a stage show or other musical event involving more than one performer. Look at the harmony between voice and instruments and the balancing of the instruments with the lyrics whether the base overrides the lead guitar; the quality of recording itself, whether it is concert, mono or stereo recording.

There may be many tracts but one message. Use your judgment as a reviewer and say whether the record does satisfy the taste of potential buyers. Do not forget to classify the record as to rock, pop, highlife, jazz, and reggae or otherwise. A record reviewer should comment not only on the quality of the performance but also how it stacks up to others of the same work. Your reader may want to buy this new recording upon your recommendation or he may be interested in how his copy rates in comparison to a new one. You have the problem of balancing phonographic and interpretative factors in making recommendations to him.

Do not fall prey to the occupational hazard of becoming too engrossed in recorded music such that you neglect performances in the concert-hall. Always remember that recordings spring from live performances. Continuing attendance at shows and musical events will keep your mind refreshed, help maintain your sense of proportion and equip you to point out the trends.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

What makes music difficult to review?

4.0 CONCLUSION

Reviewing music is compounded by many factors. Just as much as in the live performing arts, reviewing music demands taste and background. Besides, the art has many experimenters and innovationists than theater, movie, literature or dance.

5.0 SUMMARY

Today, millions of recordings are available and their types are becoming complex as a result of the various speeds they are produced and

numerous devices on which to play them. All - music channels and stations are also springing up and blooming. These pose problems for the reviewer. Each age seems to have something different from the last. The music critic must update his knowledge and sharpen his tastes to be able cope with the times.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

If you are assigned to cover a live musical performance, how best would you approach your assignment?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Singer, L. S. (1974). *The Student Journalist and Reviewing the Performing Arts*. New York: Richards Rosen Press Inc.

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

UNIT 5 REVIEWING TELEVISION AND MOTION PICTURES

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objective
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Reviewing Movies
 - 3.2 Reviewing Television Programs
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Both television and motion pictures are entertainment media. The screen dominated the screen until the arrival of television which has made it possible for people to enjoy movies and other programmes indoors; because they have much in common, they are treated as such in reviews.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- appraise movies
- criticise television programs.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Reviewing Movies

The recipe for the basic structure of a stage-play review applies to movies as well, but there is the principal additional factor of the use of camera. The screen is two dimensional, the stage is three dimensional, but astute camera work can more than make up the difference. The camera is free and can rove and roam beyond the confines of stage and all sorts of “prick and special effects” are also possible.

The reviewer essays camera work in the whole pattern- is the trick photographing a substitute for substance, or does it enhance the story? Does it help carry the action along or is it merely a gimmick? The mobile camera is more mobile than the human eye and can achieve effects impossible in a live stage. The reviewer should not only attempt to see the movie from the stand point of the group for which it is

primarily intended but should also appraise the picture in general terms while still mentioning its specialised appeal.

The reviewer should also decide whether nude scenes (if any) are properly a part of the story or whether they are tastefully done or merely inserted for sensationalism. Most of all, the critic should essay the movie on all its points – plot, characterisation, technical effects, material, form and workmanship - in terms of the cinematic medium.

3.2 Reviewing Television Programs

There are several points unique to the television medium; the time allotted for programmes is one- the show must be within 15,30,60,90, or 120 minutes- minus time for commercials and stations breaks. Movies and stage shows rarely have such a strict time limit. You should check whether the program has conformed to the time limit. Be conscious also whether the program is appropriate to the time of the day. A station may present a program at an hour inconvenient for most of its potential audience.

You should also question whether the length of time is ideal for the presentation- is it a drama compressed into half an hour or an hour, but which cries for lengthier production? Is it a wispy comedy spread out over an hour or more, but which deserves much less? Is it a show that would profit by being presented in installments? The television medium is “prey” to cycles: the western, the situation comedy, the spy story, the supernatural either in comedy or melodrama, the variety show and subdivisions of these categories. Has the program rhymed with its circle? Program cycle can be in terms of climatic conditions or program type or seasons. Do not forget to state the sponsors of what program you are reviewing.

Classify the program as to type - drama, documentary, newscast, as general or specialised, and whether it is meant for women, children or adults. Hardly any television program is duller than a static documentary. So the primary consideration is- is it interesting? Other factors are- does the program cover the subject adequately in the allotted time? Should the program have been longer or shorter? Does it probe the question in-depth or skin the surface? If the documentary deals with a controversial subject, does it shun the controversial aspects of plunge right in? Are both sides presented? Is the treatment convincing? Does the program make its points persuasively? Does it leave the viewer satisfied? Or is something missing? Or is the program top-heavy in some aspect? It is up to you the reviewer to essay the favorable and unfavorable points, the active credits, and the sins of omission as well as commission.

Many programmes appeal to certain portions of the population, women or children, for instance. The reviewer should try to assess their quality and effectiveness from the viewpoint of the designed audience; also whether such program will appeal to the population at large. Specialised programs of quality usually have wider appeal. Watch out for the advertisements in the program. Has their placement distorted the story line? Advertisements in between may destroy the program entertainment value and may even be irritating. Sometimes their sound level could be more than the program itself.

There are regulations for placement. Some regulations say they should come at the beginning, some say at the end so as not to break the program. Watch out for the ground level. It may not be uniform and may fluctuate - goes down at one point, booms at the next. This is noise; watch out for it and how it affects the program.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

How does the review of television program differ from motion picture reviews?

4.0 CONCLUSION

Because television and motion pictures have much in common, they are treated the same in reviews. The movie critic must be capable of criticising everything- acting, directing, photograph, staging, casting, writing, music, news, sports, or any other subject matter visible or invisible on television.

5.0 SUMMARY

You can see that the criteria used for a movie apply to a drama or comedy on television-i.e. freshness and originality of story, quality of action, direction and physical production. The last factor includes optimum use of camera and, if warranted, special effects.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Discuss seven characteristics peculiar to television and motion picture reviews.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Singer, L. S. (1974). *The Student Journalist and Reviewing the Performing Arts*. New York: Richards Rosen Press Inc.

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