

**Guidelines for Contributors: Performance Reviews**  
*Journal of American Drama & Theatre*  
(Updated January 2024)

Thank you for agreeing to contribute a performance review to the *Journal of American Drama and Theatre (JADT)*, a journal sponsored by the American Theatre & Drama Society (ATDS) and the Martin E. Segal Theatre Center at The Graduate Center, CUNY. Founded in 1989, this peer-reviewed journal is a proudly fully online and freely accessible journal publishing thoughtful and innovative work by leading scholars on theatre, drama, and performance in the Americas—past and present.

Entries in *JADT* are aimed at promoting research on theatre of the Americas and encouraging historical and theoretical approaches to plays, playwrights, performances, and popular theatre traditions. Whereas a popular performance review is focused on selling tickets, scholarly performance reviews are time capsules for a given production, meant to give a reader some sense of the experience of being in the room (where it happens). They are structured much like mini essays, with a thesis statement about the overall importance of this particular production. As such, they should touch on the themes of the play, specific details of performances, design (set, costumes, lighting, sound, projections, etc.), and perhaps even program notes or other dramaturgical offerings. Please refrain from a literary analysis of the script, although a brief description of plot is often helpful, especially when discussing new work.

**BEST PRACTICES:**

Scholarly performance reviews differ from popular press reviews in a few important ways. Scholarly reviews should not be thought of as a “thumbs up” or “thumbs down” assessment of a production, but rather as a historical record of the production choices that were made and the relative strengths and weaknesses of those choices. Imagine that your audience only has your words as documentation of both the visual elements of the performance and how the performance *felt*. To that end:

- Use present tense for discussions of the play, past tense for discussions of the production elements (design, performances, direction).
- Feel free to use the first person.
- Spend more time discussing production elements than literary analysis. Make sure to pay attention to lighting, sound, costumes, and set design in addition to the performances and directorial choices that stood out to you.
- The most successful performance reviews are structured like short essays, with a clear argument about the overall takeaway or value of a given production. This can also involve stating what you see as the overall vision of the production, even if it was not successful.

- It is hard work to make theatre. No one sets out to make a bad show, so try to show grace and appreciation for the work put into a production. It is more than fair to call out where productions fall short but aim to do so in the spirit of improvement rather than condemnation.

#### **NUTS & BOLTS: A GUIDE AND, PLEASE, A LAST-STEP CHECKLIST**

- Reviews must be 800–1200 words in length. Please.
- Use the current version of MS Word.
- Use Times New Roman, 12-pt., throughout.
- Use 1” margins, all around; justify left margin only.
- Begin paragraphs with standard tabulation, not by entering multiple spaces.
- Double-space the full manuscript.
- Do not insert extra line-spaces between paragraphs.
- Avoid indented (or “block”) quotations.
- Set one space, not two, following periods and other units of punctuation.
- Use the “Oxford comma,” e.g., “O’Neill lived in Connecticut, Georgia, and California” (not “. . . Connecticut, Georgia and California”).
- Spell out ordinal numbers, e.g., “nineteenth-century drama” (not “19th-century drama”).
- Dates: e.g., 1931–39 (not 1931–1939); October 16, 1888 (not 16 October 2004)
- Use en dashes, not hyphens, to separate spans of numbers and dates. The en dash is symbol #2012 in MS Word 2016, accessible via Symbols/General Punctuation.
- Form em dashes—for interruptive passages like this one—with two hyphens, closed to the preceding and succeeding elements. Word will convert the hyphens to an em dash, unless you have disabled this feature. Alternatively, use symbol #2014 in MS Word 2016, accessible via Symbols/General Punctuation.
- *Italicize* titles of plays and films.
- Prefer “theatre” to “theater,” except when names of venues stipulate otherwise.
- “act 1, scene 2,” not, e.g., “Act One, Scene Two”
- Short forms for subsequent uses of titles are acceptable (e.g., *Long Day’s Journey, Desire*)
- Please secure 1 or 2 production stills, either as .tif or .jpg files at 300 dpi, properly sized. These should be available from the theatre or production company. Signal suggested placement by inserting “<fig. 1>” or “<fig. 2>,” angle-bracketed and boldfaced, in your text. Record suggested captions in a separate Word document, clearly keyed to the

images. Captions should identify the photographer and the actors represented. See also “Routing,” below.

## **HEADING YOUR REVIEW**

EXAMPLE:

*Title of Play*

By Author’s Name

Directed by Director

Name of Venue

City, STATE

[Date you saw the production e.g. March 14, 2023]

Reviewed by Your Name