

# CRITICAL DANCE WRITERS' GUIDELINES

(April 10, 2015)

Welcome to the CriticalDance Writing Guidelines detailing our courtesy policies; general advice for authors of reviews, articles and interviews; and specific guidance on CriticalDance style.

CriticalDance strives to promote quality writing presented in a quality manner. As such, it is essential that we remain courteous and maintain a single, professional approach and look. That also helps our legitimacy with companies, theaters and within the industry. Having said that, we value greatly the range of personal writing style and individual turn of phrase that our writers around the globe bring.

At CriticalDance, we like to think we are flexible within reason, and this guide reflects that. If you wish for special consideration for a submission, or to present something in a different way from usual, please contact the editor. We are more than happy to consider it. However, such requests should not become the norm.

We would really appreciate everyone following the Guidelines. We can cope with most things when editing, and in general it is easy to edit out the many and various individual quirks when going through copy line by line (some can be done by bulk “find and replace”), but sometimes it’s trickier, and following the Guide helps us and speeds up the process.

## COURTESY

We cannot stress too much how important it is that the courtesy guidance is followed.

Where we believe these guidelines have been breached, we will usually contact the author first, but we will take direct and immediate action if necessary. The decision of CriticalDance staff is final. Repeated breaching of the guidelines, or single instances of libelous postings, may lead to CriticalDance may refusing further submissions from authors and/or revoking posting rights in the forum.

Guidance	Notes and advice
<p><b>It’s your opinion</b></p> <p>Critics and writers of articles should restrict themselves to their own opinions and not be guided by what they read elsewhere.</p>	<p>Under no circumstances should authors attack or attempt to discredit the views of another critic fairly stated, directly or indirectly; they are entitled to their opinion as much as you are to yours.</p>
<p><b>Negative comment and criticism</b></p> <p>Fair comment and criticism can be negative.</p>	<p>But if you comment on a dance or anything else you didn’t care for, it is helpful to say exactly what you disliked about it, and why. Remember, when you write you are putting your credibility on the line as much as the choreographer or dancer does on stage.</p>

Guidance	Notes and advice
<p>Passion is fine, but should be treated with caution when applied to negative criticism.</p> <p>You should be happy and able to defend your words in person to the individual concerned.</p> <p>Avoid negative generalizations.</p>	<p>Moderate language and a constructive attitude will enhance your credibility.</p> <p>Imagine yourself in that position and if it would cause you undue embarrassment then don't write it.</p> <p>Regardless of how disappointing a particular performance by a dancer or a company may have been, avoid generalizations such as "X is a sloppy dancer."</p> <p>Although many of us may make such quiet remarks in private about performances to close friends, they are usually unsuitable for publication.</p>
<p><b>Gushingly positive comment and criticism</b></p>	
<p>Overly gushing positive comment should also be avoided.</p>	<p>Mark Morris once commented that he would rather read constructive criticism than bland appreciation.</p>
<p><b>Humor</b></p>	
<p>Be wary of humor.</p>	<p>One person's joke can very easily be another person's point of offence. Cheap laughs are not acceptable under any circumstances.</p>
<p><b>Copyright Infringement</b></p>	
<p>Quoting more of an article or review than is allowed under the "fair use" doctrine is copyright infringement.</p>	<p>It is disrespectful to the original author and is against the law.</p>
<p><b>School Performances</b></p>	
<p>Young performers deserve particularly sensitive attention.</p>	<p>Age and experience are all-important. Overall comments about performance standards or style are acceptable, but in the context of the School. It is reasonable to treat final year student graduation performances at the School of American Ballet Annual Workshop or an English National Ballet School annual performance almost as professional performances, but what is appropriate for them is not suitable for younger students still in training.</p>

Guidance	Notes and advice
<p><b>Rehearsals and Classes</b></p> <p>Classes or rehearsals are not performances and the dancing of individuals in them should generally not be discussed, positively or negatively.</p> <p><b>Gossip, hearsay and supposition</b></p> <p>Do not engage in or repeat gossip.</p> <p>Do not indulge in supposition.</p> <p>Do not give credibility to gossip under the caveat, "...assuming it is true..."</p> <p>If you are in any doubt, get the facts substantiated officially by the press office of the company, or directly from the artist, in writing, and with their permission for release.</p>	<p>Discussion of the procedures, atmosphere and arrangements are fine.</p> <p>It can be hurtful to artists and those associated with them, or be a liability at a time of contract negotiation.</p> <p>Unsubstantiated stories which fall under the category of gossip may include word of promotions, exits, hirings, firings, and recruitments; off-stage relationships; pregnancies; and injuries.</p> <p>Information shared on a dancer or company's official, public Twitter or Facebook page is fine, but information shared on a personal Twitter or Facebook page (i.e. not open to the general public) is not permissible.</p> <p>This includes supposing or presuming dancers may be injured, or suggesting the nature of a company's financial situation when not in full possession of the facts.</p>

## GENERAL NOTES

Guidance	Notes and advice
<p><b>Which English?</b></p> <p>British-English, American-English (or any other sort) spelling is fine.</p>	<p>Please be consistent within articles</p>

Guidance	Notes and advice
<p><b>Local idioms and slang</b></p> <p>It is acceptable to use local idioms and references.</p>	<p>Remember that CriticalDance is an international publication and it is important that they are understood by readers wherever they are.</p> <p>Some terms may carry particular connotations not meant by the author (or even be offensive) in other countries. The editors will keep a look out for these, but your help is appreciated.</p>
<p><b>Tenses</b></p> <p>In general, descriptions of works should be in the present tense.</p> <p>Events particular to the performance should be in the past tense.</p>	<p>For example, it is “The ballet opens with 17 women standing in the moonlight,” since that is the way it always opens. Use of “opened” would imply that it may be different on another occasion.</p> <p>For example, it is “Cojocarú showed great pleasure...,” since on another occasion she may not.</p> <p>Mixed tenses in the same paragraph usually works fine, but we accept that it can get confusing on occasion, and that some personal judgement may be called for.</p>
<p><b>Foreign language submissions</b></p> <p>Reviews and articles must be in English but may also be translated (in full or summary) for publication alongside the original.</p>	<p>Although CriticalDance is an English language publication, we welcome translations, including in non-Roman script such as Chinese. The author, however, bears full responsibility for the accuracy of the translation.</p>
<p><b>Checking names</b></p> <p>Please check all spellings of names and titles.</p> <p>Please also inform the editor whenever there is quirky syntax or anything unusual about a name or title, or if you have been unable to type it in the correct format yourself.</p>	<p>See also notes below under General Style Points for detail on styling.</p> <p>For example, the New York City Ballet piece, <i>Rōdēō</i>, or Marie Chouinard’s work, <i>bODY_rEMIX/gOLDBERG_vARIATIONS</i>.</p>

Guidance	Notes and advice
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**Notes of future performance and tour dates, and links to company or theatre websites**

These are welcomed where appropriate.

If a production or program continues for a significant time at the same theatre, or continues on tour, please say so at the end of the review, and provide a link to the appropriate company or theater webpage.

If referring to a forthcoming season, please provide a link to the appropriate webpage where details can be found.

Such links are appreciated by companies.

**REVIEWS**

Guidance	Notes and advice
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**General observations regarding content**

A review is a personal response to the evening.

It is not a documentary statement of what happens in the work(s).

A review should convey to the reader the essence of the evening, including your feelings and opinions about the work(s) in question, the highlights and the lowlights.

This is especially important for introductions; the reader’s interest has to be captured inside the first few sentences.

Reviews should be kept concise and to the point.

Do not pad the text with unnecessary detail, facts or asides.

For galas and other evenings comprising large numbers of works or excerpts (or distinct sections within a work), it is not necessary to detail every piece performed. It is usually better to highlight those that deserve it, and to just say that “also danced were...” or words to that effect.

Avoid storytelling and blow by blow accounts of the choreography at all costs.

Explaining every aspect of the evening is not necessary. Concentrate on the things you feel are really noteworthy and provide your opinion on those moments.

If you feel a synopsis is necessary, keep it brief.

We accept a synopsis may be necessary, especially for new works, but it should only be an outline.

Guidance	Notes and advice
<p>Do not include detailed, stand-alone accounts of the dance or narrative.</p> <p>Do not give away details of any surprises.</p> <p>Avoid lengthy notes about the choreographer's or the dance's background or history.</p> <p>Do not copy passages verbatim from the printed theater program.</p> <p>Do not include long lists of dancers' names.</p> <p>Keep to your own opinions.</p>	<p>Reviews should not include, blow by blow accounts (of the style 'A does this, then B comes on and does that, before C appears and...') or otherwise, and especially ones that are devoid of comment.</p> <p>Such accounts are generally disliked strongly by choreographers and companies who see it as 'giving the story away.'</p> <p>A far better approach is to build the narrative into the commentary on the performance.</p> <p>By all means drop hints and tell readers that something special happens, just don't say what.</p> <p>Notes are sometimes necessary to place things in context, but a review is not a dance history paper.</p> <p>Short quotations may be appropriate provided they are clearly marked as such.</p> <p>Reviews are not cast lists. While it may be reasonable to include a note of the dancers in a pas de trois, for example, if comment is being made, lengthy lists and notes such as "The male corps of A, B, C...H...danced with gusto" (simply say "The male corps danced with gusto") or "The cast of six were A, B, C, D, E, F" should be avoided.</p> <p>Be very careful about referencing other reviews and other critics.</p> <p>Anything questioning the opinions of other critics will usually be edited out.</p>
<p><b>Headlining</b></p> <p>Please suggest headlines.</p> <p>Headlines do not have to include the ballet company name.</p>	<p>We encourage the use of newspaper-style headlines for reviews, interviews and features. e.g. "Palermo, Palermo: A slice of Sicily Pina Bausch style."</p> <p>The editors may or may not accept the author's suggestion, and may insert their own.</p> <p>It is impossible to read even a summary of a review on the site without seeing what is immediately beneath the headline, which is where we will put the ballet company and name if it is not clear.</p>

Guidance	Notes and advice
<p><b>Header</b></p> <p>The first four lines of the submitted copy should be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Headline (optional).</li> <li>• Company name: name(s) of works danced.</li> <li>• Name of theater etc., city, state/country; performance date.</li> <li>• Author name.</li> </ul> <p><b>Length</b></p> <p>In general, reviews should be between 600 and 1,200 words.</p>	<p>Please type in bold, regular font, except for names of works, which should be italicized.</p> <p>See notes below re names of companies and works.</p> <p>Please type the date in the format “name of theater, city, state/country; month day, year.”</p> <p>Just the name; do not include “By.”</p> <p>But much depends on writing style, the nature of the performance, how interesting is the review, and just how much there really is to say. We accept that sometimes reviews need to be longer, especially for the likes of new productions and galas. However, we stress, “sometimes.”</p> <p>Equally, there sometimes really is little to say, and submitting less than 600 words is also fine.</p> <p>It is also not the case that, “if it’s below 1,200 words, then it’s OK.” All submissions will be edited as usual, regardless of length.</p> <p>Please bear in mind that very long reviews are often more difficult to read (especially if there are few photographs) and should not be the norm.</p>
<p><b>Phraseology</b></p> <p>We embrace and encourage personal style.</p> <p>Be wary of and in general avoid:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overuse of “I...”</li> </ul>	<p>But again, we stress that CriticalDance is not a personal blog. Published copy must reflect that and will be edited accordingly.</p> <p>Please avoid digressions about the likes of your journey to the theatre, family and anything else unless immediately relevant to what happened on stage and your thoughts about it.</p> <p>Your name is at the top. You don’t need to keep emphasizing that it’s your view.</p>

Guidance	Notes and advice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “In my opinion...,” “I think...” and such like.</li> <li>• “Some may disagree.”</li> <li>• “As I said last year...”, then repeating what has been written previously.</li> <li>• “I will return to this later” and the like.</li> <li>• Stating that it is the first (or tenth) time you have seen a company or dancer in a role.</li> <li>• Lengthy comparisons with other works.</li> </ul> <p>Avoid repeating names, verbs or nouns in close proximity to one another.</p>	<p>Always be definite in opinions.</p> <p>Again, the reader knows it is your opinion; your name is at the top. The phrase also implies that you think you might be incorrect.</p> <p>Some will always disagree. If using comments of this nature, be definite and say who.</p> <p>It makes it sound like a formal presentation where you are trying to convince someone of your case.</p> <p>It’s irrelevant unless you are making a very specific, pertinent point about it that is related to your views of the performance in question.</p> <p>Comparisons with signature works, or other works by the same choreographer, are productions are sometimes valid, but they should be brief. Always remember that the reader may not have seen that other work.</p> <p>A good motto is always to, “Review what it is, not what it is not.”</p> <p>Once you have established in the paragraph who or what you are discussing, it should not be necessary to repeat his or her name, or the ballet’s title.</p> <p>Constant repetition is unnecessary and frequently reads poorly.</p>

## ARTICLES, FEATURES AND INTERVIEWS

Guidance	Notes and advice
<p><b>Length</b></p> <p>2,000 words should usually be sufficient for articles, features and interviews.</p>	<p>However, we accept that they may need to be longer on occasion; presenting interviews in the Q-A format invariably leads to greater wordage.</p> <p>Monthly columns dealing with multiple performances and events are also likely to be longer.</p>

Guidance	Notes and advice
<p><b>Focus</b></p> <p>Articles, features and interviews must have a main focus, should be kept to the point.</p> <p>Interviews should be about the interviewee, their thoughts, opinions and comments, and not those of the interviewer.</p> <p>Do not aim for interviews in the Q-A format to be absolute verbatim records</p>	<p>Do not try and cover every possible topic in print (even if they were discussed in real time). ‘Cover-all’ submissions can get extremely long and rarely make good copy. In general, that primary focus should be up front with anything else dealt with later.</p> <p>Some sense of the interviewer will always come through in Q-A format interviews, but it should not be forced.</p> <p>While it’s often unavoidable to avoid at least some personal anecdotes and reminiscences in real time, these should, in general, not appear in the submitted copy.</p> <p>Interjections (‘yes’, ‘oh’, ‘I see’ and such like) should be removed, as should anything else not immediately relevant.</p>
<p><b>Timing of publication</b></p> <p>If the publication of features, interviews and previews is time critical, let the editors know in advance of submission.</p>	<p>For example, a preview or interview connected with a premiere.</p>

## GENERAL STYLE POINTS

Guidance	Notes and advice
<p><b>Font and spacing</b></p> <p>Copy may be submitted in any font.</p> <p>Please adjust the spacing after each paragraph so that white space is automatically left rather than hitting return twice.</p> <p>Single-space after a full-stop or other period.</p>	<p>Although please make it 12pt for ease of reading.</p> <p>Our publishing software automatically converts the font when we draft the web page.</p> <p>This will help the editors. Our software inserts the correct white space and hitting return twice effectively creates a blank paragraph that only has to be removed during editing.</p> <p>Again, our software inserts the correct white space. Double-spacings can usually be corrected easily in bulk, but we would prefer not to have to keep an eye open for it.</p>

Guidance	Notes and advice
<p><b>Paragraphing</b></p>	
<p>Avoid long paragraphs</p>	<p>It's not always possible, but short paragraphs are easier on the eye and easier to read than long ones.</p>
<p><b>Names of people</b></p>	
<p>The first time a name is given, state both first name and surname</p>	<p>The exception is if the individual's surname only is in common use.</p> <p>For what might be called iconic names, for example, Balanchine, Robbins and those of well-known composers, it is fine to use the surname only throughout.</p>
<p>Subsequent references should use the surname only.</p>	<p>As a rule, do not use the 'Mr. Surname' format.</p> <p>Authors may use their discretion where confusion could be caused by two dancers having the same surname; either using 'Mr.' or 'Ms.' or repeating the first name, may be appropriate.</p>
<p>For East Asian dancers based in the West, use the name in the form used by the company and that is in common use, which may be first name-surname, or vice-versa.</p>	<p>In East-Asia, names are generally written with the surname first.</p> <p>So, for example, it is 'Li Cunxin' (surname first), but 'Yuan Yuan Tan' (surname last).</p>
<p>For East Asian dancers based in Asia, the format is always surname-first name.</p>	<p>Many in East Asia find turning names round wrong, and some get angry about it (and it is almost unheard of for Western names to be reversed in Asia to suit local conventions).</p>
<p>Interviews in prose format may use the interviewee's first name rather than surname where appropriate.</p>	
<p><b>Names of ballets and other works of art</b></p>	
<p>Names of ballets and works of art should be written in italics.</p>	<p>This includes shortened versions of names (e.g. <i>Fille</i>).</p>
<p>Names of dances within ballets should not be italicized or put in quotation marks.</p>	<p>For example, Pas de Quatre.</p>
<p>Names of other publications are not italicized.</p>	

Guidance	Notes and advice
<p><b>Names of characters in ballets</b></p> <p>Names of characters, groups or roles in ballets should be as given as in the program and capitalized accordingly.</p> <p><b>Non-English names of ballet companies and ballets, and translations</b></p> <p>Where companies have a non-English name, the name used by the company in English literature should be used.</p> <p>Where companies use a non-English title for a work when performing in English speaking countries, always use that non-English title.</p> <p>For performances in non-English speaking countries, judgement needs to be applied.</p>	<p>Do not put them in quotation marks.</p> <p>So, for example, it is Staatsballett Berlin, not the Berlin State Ballet. But is it the Paris Opera Ballet, and not Ballet de l'Opéra de Paris.</p> <p>It may however be appropriate to put a translation in brackets immediately afterwards.</p> <p>If the original title is fully understandable, it may be left in the original form, for example, <i>Roméo et Juliette</i>.</p> <p>Titles not immediately understandable should be translated where there is an English form in common use, for example <i>Die kleine Meerjungfrau</i> is <i>The Little Mermaid</i>.</p> <p>Do not translate titles where there is no English translation of the ballet title in common use. For example, do not change <i>Notre-Dame de Paris</i> to <i>The Hunchback of Notre Dame</i>, even though that is the story.</p> <p>The above also applies to names of characters.</p>
<p><b>Names and titles in non-Roman script</b></p> <p>Names of dancers and titles of works in non-Roman script (e.g. Chinese) should be Romanized in the form used by the dancer or company, or translated as best possible.</p>	<p>It is most useful, though, to also give the original name in the appropriate script in round brackets immediately afterwards.</p> <p>CriticalDance has significant readership in East Asia and this also helps visibility in search engines.</p> <p>Great care should be taken with translations of titles. All languages are packed with words that have multiple subtleties and even totally different meanings. It is very easy to get it totally incorrect.</p>

Guidance	Notes and advice
<p><b>Foreign terms (including ballet terms)</b></p> <p>Foreign terms and phrases should not be italicized if they likely to be familiar to the reader.</p> <p>Do not italicize dance and theatre terms, and ballet vocabulary.</p> <p>Within that, and in general:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Italicize the word the first time it appears only.</li> <li>• If two foreign words or phrases appear next to each other, one familiar and one unfamiliar, italicize both of them.</li> <li>• Common Latin words and abbreviations like etc., et al., and ibid. should not be italicized.</li> <li>• If the foreign word is a proper noun, do not italicize it.</li> <li>• If an entire phrase or sentence appears in a foreign language, type the passage in plain type and put it in the appropriate quotation marks.</li> </ul> <p><b>Italics for emphasis</b></p> <p>Italics may be used sparingly to add emphasis.</p> <p><b>Inserting accents</b></p> <p>Please insert accents etc. in people's names and in ballet names and terms.</p> <p><b>Subheadings within articles</b></p> <p>In general these should be avoided.</p>	<p>If it's in an English dictionary, then it can be regarded as familiar.</p> <p>As a publication dealing with theatre, ballet and other dance forms, it is reasonable to assume that our readers will be familiar with these, and therefore they should be in regular font.</p> <p>Using italics for each reoccurrence may become distracting to readers.</p> <p>This aids consistency and appearance.</p> <p>The exception is sic, which should be italicized and placed in square brackets.</p>
	<p>For example, as in Compañia de Danza, jeté, <i>Coppélia</i>.</p> <p>But we accept there are occasions when they are useful to break up the constant flow of text, or to highlight something to the reader.</p>

Guidance	Notes and advice
<p><b>Quotation marks</b></p> <p>Use single or double quotation marks according to local practice.</p> <p><b>Brackets and parentheses</b></p> <p>Round brackets (also called parentheses, although strictly speaking the parenthesis is the text inside the punctuation marks) are used to insert additional information in text.</p> <p>Round brackets should be used when indicating a dancer's name in connection with a role.</p> <p>Round brackets may be used sparingly to insert an aside.</p> <p>Round brackets may be used to show that a word could be either singular or plural.</p> <p>Square brackets are used to add information that explains the text it follows, or to make text in a quote to make the quote clearer for the reader.</p> <p>Square brackets are also used around “[sic].”</p> <p><b>Numerals</b></p> <p>Context is all-important and there are always exceptions, but in general rule, numbers written as a single word should be spelled out. Those written as two or more words should be written as numerals.</p> <p>Numbers associated with measure words should be written as numerals.</p> <p>Try not to begin sentences with numerals.</p>	<p>Any period is usually within the quotation marks.</p> <p>If you were to remove the brackets and the information inside, the text would still work. For example, “Set in the Romantic era, <i>Giselle</i> (<i>Giselle, ou les Wilis</i> as it was originally called) is set to music largely by Adolphe Adam.”</p> <p>For example, “The Prince (Ivan Vasiliev) appears from nowhere...”</p> <p>These may also be done using commas and dashes, although be aware that overuse of the dashes can appear stark.</p> <p>For example, “ballet(s).”</p> <p>For example, “Sir Peter Wright insisted it [<i>Giselle</i>] was his favorite ballet.”</p> <p>In connection with a quotation, to indicate that a grammar error in the text was written by the original author.</p>
<p>Context is all-important and there are always exceptions, but in general rule, numbers written as a single word should be spelled out. Those written as two or more words should be written as numerals.</p> <p>Numbers associated with measure words should be written as numerals.</p> <p>Try not to begin sentences with numerals.</p>	<p>Remember that hyphenated words count as one, so, for example, “thirty-six” would be written out.</p> <p>When small and large numbers occur together in a group, set them all in numerals for consistency.</p> <p>For example, it would be “the 20-minute ballet” or “the 20-dancer company”</p> <p>Rephrase the sentence if necessary.</p>

<b>Guidance</b>	<b>Notes and advice</b>
<p>Use numerals for act numbers in works and other numbered items.</p>	<p>Acts in works may be written as Arabic or Roman numerals (so, “Act 2” or “Act II” for example), but be consistent.</p> <p>Note that “Act” is capitalized if referring to “Act 2” but not if referring to the “second act.”</p>