

THE FOUR-STEP CRITIQUE

Figure 1d-1

Step One: DESCRIBE
Step Two: ANALYZE
Step Three: INTERPRET
Step Four: EVALUATE

STEP ONE—DESCRIBE

PURPOSE: To get a detailed picture of the work

MAIN QUESTION: “WHAT DO YOU SEE?”

- Describe the dance. Identify everything you see. Which dance elements stand out? Describe the movement, the set, the colors, the costumes. Observe as much detail as possible including shapes, postures, gestures, patterns, use of space, use of time and timing, use of effort, and relationships. Describe all noticeable aspects. Create a “word collage” that serves as a vivid snapshot of the dance to help you remember its details.

STEP TWO—ANALYZE

PURPOSE: To look at its parts

MAIN QUESTIONS: “HOW ARE THE DANCE ELEMENTS USED?”

“HOW IS THE WORK ORGANIZED?”

Look at the parts. Notice how the choreographer uses the dance elements. Analyze the use of space and time. Analyze the dynamic qualities and accents. Where does it build relationships; describe them. Analyze the choreography separately from the performance of it. Identify the work’s form and structure. Find evidence of the “core four” principles of choreographic design: unity, repetition, contrast, and variety. Notice how the dancer executes the moves as you analyze the performance quality.

STEP THREE—INTERPRET

PURPOSE: To decode its meaning

MAIN QUESTIONS: “WHAT IS HAPPENING?”

“WHAT IS THE CHOREOGRAPHER SAYING?”

Take all clues collected in Steps One and Two to now uncover what the choreographer is saying in the work. What is the dance’s intent? What does it seem to convey? What is going on? Find the motivation behind the choreography.

STEP FOUR—EVALUATE

PURPOSE: To judge its artistic value

MAIN QUESTION: “HOW EFFECTIVE IS THE DANCE WORK?”

Assess the artistic merits of the work. Evaluate how well the dance is put together. Judge the degree to which the choreography succeeds or fails. Make artistic judgments about the whole dance (now that you have analyzed its parts). How effectively does the work achieve the “core four” principles of design? How effectively does the work achieve other design principles? Use the principles of design as measurable criteria.

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