

Mini-Writing: Reviews

In most cases, reviews will not be part of your academic writing experience. The majority of your evaluation writing will occur in the form of a reflection or a critical reading analysis. That being said, there will be many situations in your life that call for a review of a product or experience. For that reason, this chapter will focus on preparing you to write effectively for the purpose of review.

Purpose

Reviews exist to give potential future consumers or participants of a product or experience an idea of what to expect from the service based on your own experience. The review can also benefit the provider by giving them feedback on what was successful or what needs to be improved.

For this chapter, when the word product is used, it is referring to items or articles that are typically purchased:

- items such as electronics, books, clothing, games, software, artwork, movies etc
- consumable substances such as food, drinks, candy, beauty supplies, art and craft supplies etc

When the words experience is used, it includes either a place/event or treatment and assistance from a specialized workers :

- places like hotels, vacation resorts, salons, businesses, etc
- events like concerts, art shows, festivals, university courses, etc
- services like repair or maintenance work, healthcare, customer support, public transportation, education, application processes etc

As you can see, there are many different contexts that can lead to either formal or informal reviews.

You are often prompted to leave a review after purchasing a product online. While not required, your insight can be very beneficial. Reviews can also be given for experiences like a performance, vacation, or even a course. The majority of these situations allow you to choose whether or not you give feedback. However, in a context like the English Language Center, you are required to give end of semester feedback.*

Because the feedback you provide on the product or service can have a strong influence for change, it is important to carefully craft a review so that it reaches the widest audience and provides focused feedback.

*This is because the ELC is a lab school, meaning many of the teachers are in training and need to get input from the students to improve their teaching. It is also because the administrators are constantly trying to improve the student experience and need to hear directly from the target audience.

1 Exercise: Online shopping reviews

Work with a partner to discuss the following questions.

1. Do you read reviews before buying something online? Do you read the reviews before agreeing to a service or experience? Why or why not?
2. Do you follow any social media influencers? Why do you follow them?
3. Have you ever purchased a product or experience because of a review? Why or why not?
4. How often do you write reviews (your native language included) about products or experiences you purchased? How often do you review them informally (such as in a conversation or social media post)?

2 Exercise: Reviewing reviews

As a group, choose a product or experience that you are either familiar with or are interested in knowing more about. Follow the steps below to complete this exercise.

1. Search online to find reviews.
2. Read one positive review (4 or 5 stars, 9/10 or 10/10, etc).
3. Read one negative review (1 star, 0/10 or 1/10, etc).
4. Discuss what details, examples, or other points in the two reviews had the most influence over your opinion.
5. After reading the reviews, do the members of your group feel more or less confident in the product or experience?

Prewriting

Before you begin to write a review, you need to brainstorm about your own experience. Remember that a brainstorm does not require complete sentences, it only requires you to make a list of ideas to help you begin the writing process. To create your brainstorm, you can try asking yourself the questions below to generate your list:

1. Why did you choose this product or experience?
2. Describe your perspective of it. Focus on choosing your adjectives carefully.
3. Did the product or experience live up to your expectations?
4. What are the positive aspects? (pros)
5. What are the negative points? (cons)
6. Do you think others should participate or purchase this?

Once you have your list of ideas, it helps to read through it and mark the most important points. This narrows down the scope of your review and keeps it at paragraph length instead of feeling like an essay.

3 Exercise: Brainstorm

As a class, you will choose a general product or experience that everyone is familiar with. For example, you may choose cellphones or your experience traveling to the United States.

Use the questions above to create a brainstorm for your review. Compare your brainstorm with a partner.

Writing

When writing a review, it is always important to keep your intended and unintended audience in mind. An intended audience would be the people you expect to read the review. This could be a potential consumer before committing to the product or experience. An unintended audience is often an employee over online customer service for the related company. This person is monitoring the customer satisfaction levels based on this feedback and reports back trends or patterns (both positive and negative). Remembering that your review will be read by both types of audience is key to writing an effective review.

An effective review is defined by four main characteristics

1. **Honesty:** Submitting a review that inaccurately presents your experience is both unethical and unhelpful. You should avoid purposefully inflating the popularity or effectiveness of something as well as purposefully damaging a reputation without cause. Simply limit your review to truth without exaggeration.
2. **Clarity:** If a review is not clear in presenting ideas, it will be disregarded completely. Your opinion, advice, and/or recommendation should all be easily recognizable.
3. **Specificity:** The brainstorm helps to refine your focus so that your review does not ramble with unnecessary detail or overlook needed support.
4. **Politeness:** Always remember that a review is communication, so on the otherside of your often anonymous review is an actual reader. Especially when dealing directly with a company, recognize that your review may have an impact on someone. This understanding should not come at the cost of being honest, but it should influence your tone.

Organization

The review should begin with a brief description of the context for the use of the product or your experience. For example, knowing that your negative review of a flight is given in the context of an unexpected snowstorm gives the readers context of how much of your review is applicable to their situation. Another example would be if you used a security camera inside a building instead of outside, it can help a reader know if your context is similar. Keep this section short and specific.

Your thesis statement for this type of writing will be your overall opinion, advice, or recommendation. This should be very clear and obvious.

Next, explain both the positives and negatives you identified in your brainstorm. These points should highlight the parts of your own experience that you think someone needs to know before continuing. Online reviews will often include bullet points to list the pros and cons. This simplifies

reading the review and makes it easier for someone to process. Bulleted items will often be reduced to phrases rather than sentences. For example, the bulleted pros and cons list of a review for a camera battery might say: *lasts for seven hours, takes too long to charge, not worth the cost* etc.

Remember to restate your thesis so that your purpose in writing the review is abundantly clear to the readers.

The length of a review response should be around a paragraph. If the paragraph is any longer, readers will either skim or move to a different review. A longer response typically does not narrow the focus enough on the most important ideas to share with a reader.

In some online review contexts, photos or videos can be helpful additions to clarify your bullet point pros/cons. For example, describing a festival as well-attended or organized will not be as powerful to a reader as seeing videos or pictures that show crowds of people or short lines.

4 Exercise: Write a product review

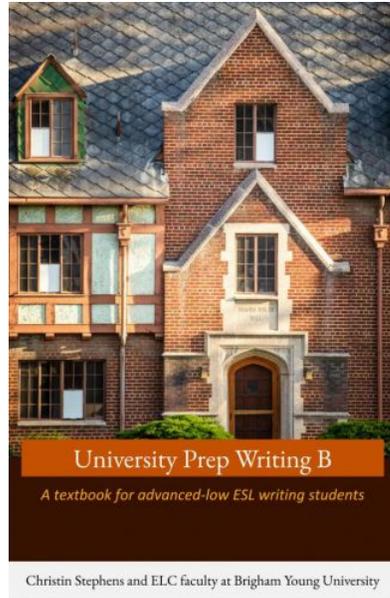
Choose a product that you recently purchased to use as the focus of this review.

1. Decide on your intended audience, but keep the unintended audience in mind.
2. Brainstorm using the questions in this chapter.
3. Write a product review draft

5 Exercise: Write an experience review

Choose an experience that you recently participated in to use as the focus of this review.

1. Decide on your intended audience, but keep the unintended audience in mind.
2. Brainstorm using the questions in this chapter.
3. Write a product review draft



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