



lingoda

Writing a review

WRITING

LEVEL
Advanced

NUMBER
C1_1072W_EN

LANGUAGE
English






Goals

- Can identify and explain the important elements of a successful review.
- Can write a successful review of a film, book, TV series or theatre play.





In this review, **I will discuss** Arthur Conan Doyle's celebrated collection of short stories, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. A **captivating** and **diverse** collection, it is at the same time an entertaining read and **a source of insight** into life in Victorian London.



Reviews

- Reviews are formal texts which provide an overview and critical analysis of a cultural object – a book, film or television series.
- In this lesson, we will learn about and discuss the features of reviews and write our own using content that we have covered in the C1.1 unit.



George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* is a **fantastically staged** portrayal of a brutal zombie attack on humanity, and deserves all of its **positive commentary**.



Warm up

Where do you normally see reviews?

blogs

scholarly journals

film magazines



Warm up

Why do we need reviews? Do they play an important role in your life? Why (not)?





Balance your opinions

- We give our opinions on things all the time in everyday situations, such as when talking to friends or expressing our views on social media.
- We use adjectives like interesting, dull, funny, (un)exciting and flat. Alternatively, we use emojis to make our opinions known.
- Mostly, we express our **subjective** opinion and don't necessarily support these views with **objective** evidence.

- Reviews **contain** opinions.
- However, opinions in reviews are **more balanced**; we use **evidence** from the text to back them up! This makes the opinion more **objective**.
- We also acknowledge **other** opinions, mostly from **critics**.





Components

- Below are some examples of components of a review.
- Take note of the useful vocabulary structures; they might help you when you write your own review at the end of this lesson!

Components	Vocabulary structures
Summary of the plot	firstly, subsequently, thereafter, to finish
Objectivity	in light of, it is evident that, provided that, given that, it is generally agreed that
Critical opinions	universal acclaim, critics are divided over
Consideration of the target audience	aimed at, caught the attention of



Myth busting

Here are some examples of things you should **not** find in a review!

Avoid!

Giving subjective opinions without providing evidence from the text

Verdicts in “black and white.” A book/film/TV series is never simply good or bad!

Long, boring summaries of the plot. Remember that your reader might still want to read the book!





Fill in the gaps

Fill in the table using the information from the previous slides.
Can you complete the table of what a review should and shouldn't contain?

Should contain:	Should not contain:
1) A _____ of the plot	2) _____, 3) _____ summaries
Objectivity	4) _____
5) Opinions from _____	Verdicts in black and white
Consideration of the target 6) _____	Lack of evidence



Opinions, opinions, opinions

Are opinions important when writing reviews?
Discuss this question in relation to the previous slides.



Writing a Book Review

The following slides aim to talk you through a possible structure for formulating a book review in advanced English



Where do you see book reviews? How do they help you?



Preparing to write

- First, select your subject and **read** from cover to cover, without stopping for too long or worrying about memorising key passages or quotes. Start to **think about what you would like to say** about the piece.
- Next, go back, read or watch again and **pick out** the aspects of the text that strike you. You could make a note of quotes, themes, characters, etc.
- By this stage, you will have developed **your own opinion** of the book. Write down your ideas as done in the examples below.

■ *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* by Arthur Conan Doyle

- It is a collection of 12 **short stories**, each of which can be read quite quickly. Each story **follows a pattern** of beginning, middle and end: there is a mystery introduced, the characters work hard to figure out the truth behind it, the truth is finally unveiled.
- It is written using fairly plain English and the stories don't waste time on too many descriptions. This works well for detective stories as the reader wants to find out what happens.



Acknowledging critics' viewpoints



- Only now that you have noted your own opinion should you **research** the views of critics.
- If you research critics' views before noting your own, you risk becoming **influenced** by their convincing arguments.
- Reviews are best when they express an **original** opinion, not a copy of existing viewpoints.

Critical views on *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*:

- Many critics believe these stories are trying to make a point about social class. Most of the 'mysteries' are simply misunderstandings among middle class people. Whenever aristocrats are involved, they are judged heavily.
- Some critics also believe these stories were trying to make Victorian London seem less intimidating. Because a lot of the mysteries involve either only small-scale crime, or in most cases no crime at all, it is thought these stories were trying to challenge the idea that Victorian London was full of crime.



Planning your review

- It is always advisable to **plan** a review.
- The table below shows some **guidelines** for what to include in your introduction, main body and conclusion.
- You don't have to follow these to the letter! **Adapt** the structure to whatever text you are reviewing, and what you are comfortable writing.

Introduction	Main body	Conclusion
Basic information about the author or director	Plot summary	Summary of your points so far
Context: when was it published/released and where?	Summary of your opinion	Draw any additional conclusions from your points so far
Brief outline of setting, main themes, characters, etc.	Critical opinion	Would you recommend the text?
Who is the target audience?	Your full opinion	Who do you think will enjoy it the most?



Style Tips

Here are some tips to help you achieve the right **tone** and **style** for a review.

- When you talk about what happens in a book or film, you always use the **present tense**, not the past
- **Paraphrase** content from the book and critics' opinions; avoid quoting too much from anywhere.
- Use a **formal** tone – avoid use of slang words.
- Use **adverbs** and **adjectives** to give your point of view in a clear way e.g. Conan Doyle writes insightfully from the point of view of a doctor.





True or false? Explain the correct answer when the statement is wrong.

	TRUE	FALSE
1. You should make extensive notes when you first read the book.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Generally use the past tense when describing what happens in a book or film.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Lots of long quotes are good; they show off everything that you have read!	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Adverbs and adjectives are a helpful way to show your opinion without using too many words.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Slang can be good in formal reviews.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Ignore the target audience of a book; it's the content that's important!	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Choose a Topic

- In the next few slides, we will review some of the units that you covered in the C1.1 module.
- This will help to provide content material and inspiration for the review that you will write at the end of this lesson.



You completed a unit!

Unit 2: Moby Dick

- Discussed the concept of a literary classic, taking **Moby Dick** as an example.
- Looked closely at an excerpt which looked at the setting of the **Pequod** (an 1850s whaling ship).
- Looked at the narrator's descriptions of a whale's breathing system.
- Discussed why some authors become famous posthumously.



Were you affected by the description of the whaling ship? How so?

Unit 2: Sherlock Holmes

- Read a text about the history and timelessness of the Sherlock Holmes series
- Discussed author's choices about his characters
- Discussed the idea of timelessness in literature



Why is a detective story from the late 1800s still talked about today?

Unit 3: The Tell-Tale Heart

- Discussed the horror and mystery genre.
- Thought about how language can be used to make a situation seem frightening and tense.



He gave a **groan** of **mortal terror**!



I was **chilled to the marrow of my bones**!

Unit 4: The Picture of Dorian Gray

- Read about the Irish author, Oscar Wilde.
- Discussed approaches to beauty in the text.
- Read an excerpt from the text which included different opinions on beauty.



Do you believe people with good looks will suffer?

Unit 4: Early animated film

- Discussed the different kinds of techniques used in early animated film: stop motion, flip book and stitching together.
- Talked about Emile Cohl, who made the first fully animated film: *Fantasmagorie* (1908).
- Practised describing animation and visual material.



Fantasmagorie features **hectic** action, with objects constantly changing size and transforming. The film has a definite dream-like, **stream-of-consciousness** feel to it.

Unit 6: The rise of the anti-hero

- Discussed the different features of the anti-hero and the background of how this kind of character came about.
- Learned vocabulary that could be relevant to writing a review about TV shows, films or books which feature anti-heroes:

protagonist
loner
amoral
apathetic
nuanced
complex
relatable

An **anti-hero** is far more relatable than a **hero** due to the more **nuanced** and **complex** nature of the anti-hero's character.



Discuss these questions with your teacher

Which lesson stood out for you? Why?

Which of the books or TV series do you feel most comfortable discussing?

On which of the books or TV series can you relate to critics' opinions?

What have you learned so far from reading English literature?



The medium is the message

List any extra elements you should take into account when writing a review of a film, television series or documentary (e.g. techniques of film, such as lighting, effects, camera angles, etc.)

A sheet of white paper with a spiral binding on the left side. The paper has horizontal lines for writing. The spiral binding is on the left edge, and the paper is otherwise blank.



Sample review: introduction

Read the example of an introductory paragraph of a review below.

Arthur Conan Doyle's short story collection *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* was the first of Conan Doyle's successful writing featuring the much beloved characters, Sherlock Holmes the detective and his trusted sidekick, Dr John Watson. Published in 1892, it was a collection of twelve separate short stories which Conan Doyle originally wrote for *The Strand*, a very popular magazine at the time. This magazine featured various human interest articles, quizzes, games, and above all, fiction. These short and varied detective stories were written for the average middle class worker needing to commute to work on the train, such that each story could be read in the 45-minute window of time an average commute would take. At the time, the Sherlock Holmes stories were a sensation with the public and were significantly responsible for the vast popularity enjoyed by *The Strand* magazine. Read today, this short story collection would suit any curious person with an interest in mystery or an interest in what it is about a work of fiction that captivates audiences spanning over a century.

Can you pick out the four necessary components for an introduction?



Over to you!

Use your notes from the brainstorm exercise to write the introduction to the review of your chosen text.

Remember

Introduce your text by referring to:

- author/director
- cultural context
- public reaction
- target audience



Sample review: main body

Read the example of a middle paragraph of a review below.

Each of the twelve stories in *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* follows a satisfying structure, ideal for a detective story. Holmes and Watson are typically approached by a person in trouble at the beginning of each story, and the mystery or problem is explained. Then, Holmes and Watson begin their investigation and gather information. Each story ends with an unveiling, where Holmes explains the mystery and either speaks to the culprit to ensure they don't do the same again, makes an arrest, or explains a complete misunderstanding. If you happen to be an impatient person and the slow-burning mystery of a long detective novel is too much suspense for you, these stories are perfect as you can dip in and out of the stories without waiting too long for a resolution. This format of exposition, investigation and resolution follows that outlined in Tzevetan Todorov's 'Typology of Detective Fiction,' which was a set of rules written in 1939 – almost 50 years after the publication of Conan Doyle's collection. In fact, it's likely that Conan Doyle's writing had an influence on the 'Typology' given Conan Doyle's prominent place in the canon of detective fiction.

**Can you pick out the necessary components for a middle paragraph?
Does this middle paragraph differ in any way from the guidelines on the
table above?**



Sample review: main body

There are no hard and fast rules to review writing! If you have a lot to say, and you feel one middle paragraph isn't enough, feel free to add a second!

Many critics have commented on the fact that many of the twelve stories don't feature any crime at all! In fact, Holmes only makes one arrest in the entire collection, which is particularly unusual for the detective genre. Many of the stories simply feature curious misunderstandings between ordinary middle class people. One or two of the stories include aristocratic villains, who are always portrayed in a negative light. It is one of these aristocrats who is arrested. Other villainous aristocrats avoid capture, adding a more threatening overtone to the collection. This is especially interesting given the awareness of theories about the serial killer Jack the Ripper, who operated in London around the time the collection was written. Many people hypothesised that Jack the Ripper came from a wealthy family of aristocrats. There is plenty of food for thought throughout the collection besides the immediate enjoyment of the mysteries themselves. The advanced reader is very much encouraged to think about messages being sent about social class and safety in Victorian London owing to the interesting authorial choices throughout the collection of stories.

Now go back through the example paragraphs and pick out as many adjectives and adverbs as you can! Are there any phrases or expressions that you think might be useful for your own review?



Summarise

Summarise the story of your chosen text into six sentences. Two for the beginning, two for the middle, and two for the ending.



Beginning

Middle

End



Middle section – main body

Use your summary from the activity above to begin your middle section.

Remember

Once you have given a brief summary, remember to discuss:

- critics' opinions on the text
- your own opinions and observations
- any conclusions or ideas you have made from these opinions



Sample review: conclusion

Now read this example conclusion paragraph. Summarise the points you have already made, and draw small conclusions from these to end the review.

In summary, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* is a collection of twelve varied stories, each dealing with different themes but united by their structure, which follows the standard format for detective fiction of exposition, investigation and resolution. This text is diverse in its stories' different plots and mysteries, and features interesting characters and narration. There is a level of suspense as is desirable in the detective and mystery genre, however the unveiling of the resolution is only ever around the corner. This short story collection will suit people who like to dip in and out of a book and people who prefer to read with attention to detail alike. On the surface, these are entertaining detective stories, but on closer reading they give a wealth of insight to a reader's understanding of the late Victorian era, both through the themes explored and the unusual authorial choices.

What is good or bad about this conclusion? Do you feel it follows or breaks any of the guideline rules?

Are you tempted to read this collection now? Why (not)?



Nearly there!

Now, write a short conclusion. Work from the points you have already made in the middle section and use this paragraph to explain to your reader what they will benefit (or not benefit) from reading or watching your chosen text!

Remember

- Briefly summarise what you have said already.
- Would you recommend this text?
- What kind of person or people would you recommend it to?



Reflect on the lesson

Take a moment to review any new **vocabulary, phrases, language structures** or **grammar points** you have come across for the first time in this lesson.

Review them with your teacher one more time to make sure you don't forget!



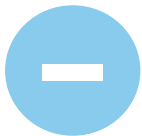


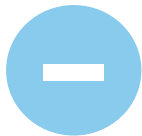
Reflect on this lesson

Think about everything you have seen in this lesson.
What were the most difficult activities or words? The easiest?









If you have time, go over
the most difficult slides again

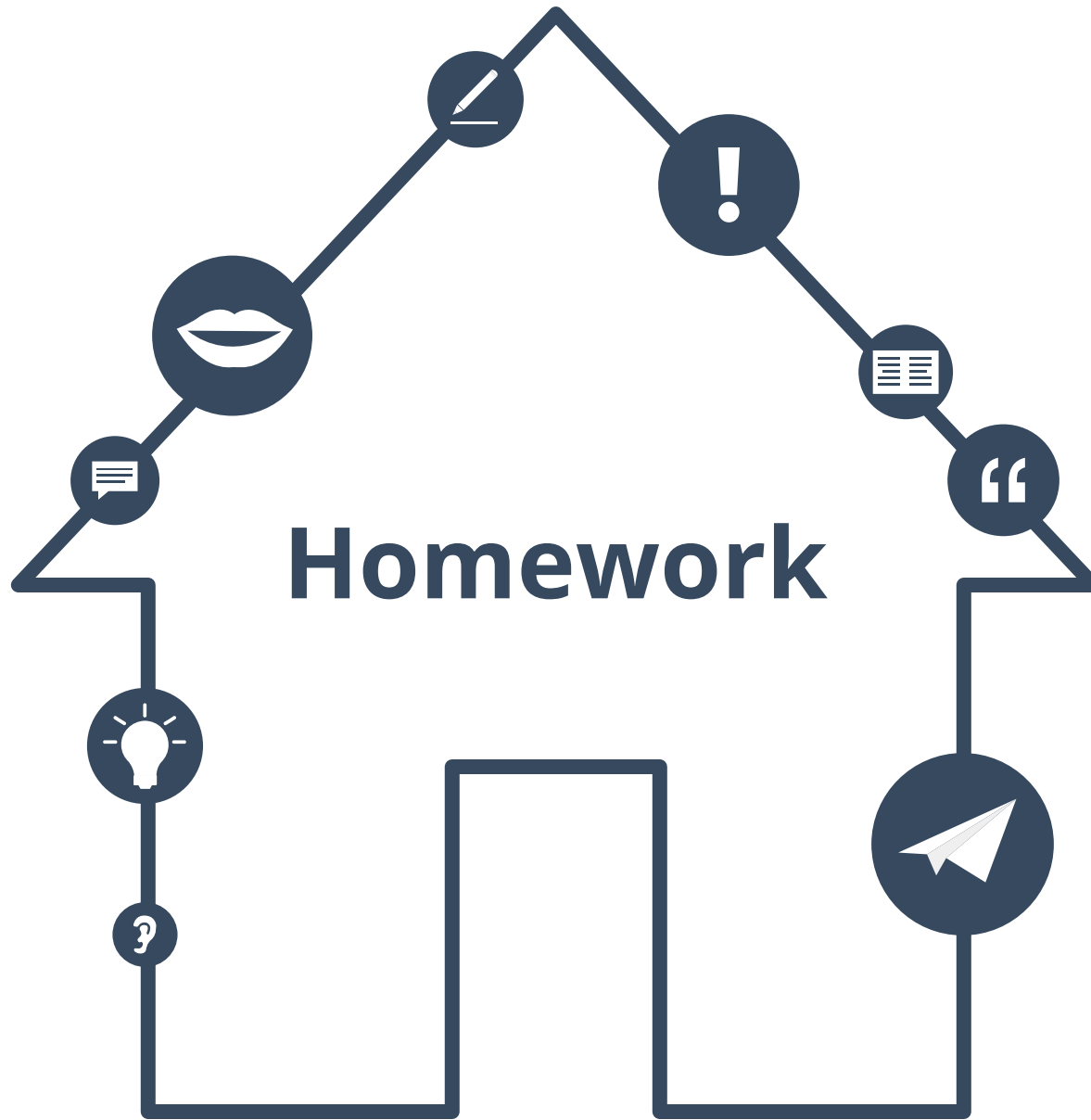




Answer Key

Questionnaire:
1) False (present tense)
2) False
3) False
4) True
5) False
6) False

Gapfill:
1) Summary
2) Long
3) Boring
4) Subjectivity
5) Critics
6) Audience





Optional extension

Now write an email to a newspaper, journal, magazine or blog to suggest that they publish your review. Be bold!

-	□	×
To: Journal of English Detective Fiction		
Subject: Sherlock Holmes review		
To whom it may concern, Please find attached a review that I have completed on I am an avid reader of your journal and feel that my review fits the style and tone perfectly. What may interest you in particular is...		



Practise the art of review

Write a second review. This time try to choose a text with a different theme, or a different type of text, like a TV series if you chose a book previously, or vice versa.

Don't forget!

- Your own opinion
- Do some research
- Write originally and honestly

Moby Dick is a timeless novel whose narrative centres on the story of...



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