The performance arts: reviews and critiques

VOCABULARY PRACTICE
UPPER-INTERMEDIATE | B2

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 Match each precise term with its definition.

1 nuanced performance ____	**a** a performance showing subtle, carefully judged detail
2 pacing ____	**b** the speed and rhythm at which a story unfolds
3 derivative ____	**c** unoriginal, closely imitating existing work
4 visceral ____	**d** producing a strong, instinctive emotional or physical reaction
5 tour de force ____	**e** an outstanding display of skill or artistry
6 understated ____	**f** restrained and not showy, though effective
7 self-indulgent ____	**g** excessively focused on the artist's own preoccupations
8 disjointed ____	**h** lacking a clear or logical connection between parts
9 mesmerising ____	**i** so captivating that one cannot look away
10 uneven ____	**j** inconsistent in quality across a work

2 Choose the word with the most suitable connotation.

1 For a performance with subtle, carefully judged detail: nuanced / crude.

2 For an unoriginal work closely copying others: derivative / groundbreaking.

3 For an outstanding display of skill: tour de force / mediocre effort.

4 For a restrained yet effective performance: understated / flashy.

5 For a story that unfolds too slowly or unevenly: poorly paced / well paced.

6 For a performance excessively focused on the artist's own preoccupations: self-indulgent / disciplined.

7 For a captivating, attention-holding performance: mesmerising / forgettable.

8 For inconsistent quality across a production: uneven / consistent.

3 Complete the critique collocations with one word.

1 a _____ performance (= subtle and detailed)

2 _____ pacing (= too slow or badly timed)

3 a _____ tribute (= closely, perhaps too closely, imitating another work)

4 a _____ reaction (= strong, instinctive)

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5 a true _____ (= a display of exceptional skill)

6 an _____ delivery (= restrained but effective)

7 a _____ narrative (= lacking logical connection)

8 an _____ quality (= inconsistent across the work)

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4 Complete the case notes with words and phrases from the box.

derivative | disjointed | mesmerising | nuanced | pacing | self-indulgent | tour de force | uneven | understated | visceral

Case A: Critics praised the lead's 1 _____ performance, calling it a genuine 2 _____ of technical control.
Case B: Others found the second act 3 _____, criticising the 4 _____, which dragged unnecessarily before the climax.
Case C: Some reviewers dismissed the film as 5 _____, arguing it borrowed too heavily from earlier work in the genre.
Case D: The final scene produced a genuinely 6 _____ reaction in the audience, several of whom described the choreography as 7 _____.
Case E: While the director's earlier films were criticised as 8 _____, this new work favoured a more 9 _____, restrained style.
Case F: Overall quality was 10 _____ across the production, with some scenes far stronger than others.

5 Read the text and answer the questions briefly.

The critic's dilemma

Professional theatre and film critics face a persistent tension between honest assessment and fair acknowledgement of artistic intent. A performance that appears self-indulgent to one reviewer may strike another as a bold, nuanced artistic risk, particularly when a director deliberately departs from audience expectations. Pacing presents a similar difficulty: what one critic calls disjointed, another might describe as an intentional, unconventional structure. Because critique inevitably reflects individual taste as well as technical judgement, the most valuable reviews tend to distinguish clearly between subjective preference and observable craft, allowing readers to weigh the critic's perspective against their own.

1 What persistent tension do professional critics face? _____
2 How might a self-indulgent performance strike a different reviewer? _____
3 What difficulty does pacing present, according to the text? _____
4 What does critique inevitably reflect, besides technical judgement? _____
5 What do the most valuable reviews tend to distinguish between? _____
6 What does this distinction allow readers to do? _____

6 Rewrite each sentence using the word in capitals. Do not change the meaning.

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1 The performance showed subtle, careful detail. NUANCED _____

2 The film borrowed too heavily from earlier work. DERIVATIVE _____

3 The pacing was too slow and dragged badly. UNEVEN _____

4 The scene held the audience completely spellbound. MESMERISING _____

OVER TO YOU

Write a 120-150 word critical review of a performance (real or imaginary), distinguishing subjective preference from observable craft.

[ ] Use at least twelve target expressions. [ ] Control connotation carefully. [ ] Avoid unsupported assumptions.

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ANSWER KEY

1 Precise terms

1 a 2 b 3 c 4 d 5 e 6 f 7 g 8 h 9 i 10 j

2 Connotation

1 nuanced 2 derivative 3 tour de force 4 understated 5 poorly paced 6 self-indulgent 7 mesmerising 8 uneven

3 Collocations

1 nuanced 2 uneven 3 derivative 4 visceral 5 tour de force 6 understated 7 disjointed 8 uneven

4 Case notes

1 nuanced 2 tour de force 3 disjointed 4 pacing 5 derivative 6 visceral 7 mesmerising
8 self-indulgent 9 understated 10 uneven

5 Reading - suggested answers

1 A tension between honest assessment and fair acknowledgement of artistic intent.
2 As a bold, nuanced artistic risk.
3 What one critic calls disjointed, another might describe as an intentional, unconventional structure.
4 Individual taste.
5 Subjective preference and observable craft.
6 Weigh the critic's perspective against their own.

6 Rewriting - possible answers

1 The performance was nuanced. 2 The film was derivative.
3 The pacing was uneven. 4 The scene was mesmerising.

Over to you

Answers will vary. Check lexical precision, appropriate connotation and separation of fact from inference.