

The Mentor

The Mentor

Following the Rules

As a Mentor, you are responsible for making sure everything done during and after Cappies Shows, by the host school, by Critics, and by you and your fellow Mentor, follows the rules.

Please read (and, when requested respond to) Cappies emails. Through the year, please make sure your school's database is complete and accurate, with correct names, phones, and emails.

Here are the key things you should know. The complete rules are provided, in these materials, for reference purposes only. Some key rules are set by the Steering Committee of your Cappies Program. They will advise you of those.

Getting Started as a Cappies Mentor

Each participating school must have one or two mentors. Each must be either a high school teacher or administrator currently employed, full-time or part-time, at the school, but some exceptions are allowed. (See the rules.)

The Cappies program has a number of very clear rules, developed over years of experience in programs across the nation. It is very important for you to follow those rules. Please learn and know the basics before Mentor your first Cappies Show.

TRAINING

If you are a new Mentor, you must attend a training session. If you've been a Cappies Mentor before, you should review rule changes with the Lead Critic at your school. If you are a Mentor not affiliated with any participating school, you will need to attend training annually.

SCHEDULES

At the start of the year, you'll need to learn which shows you'll mentor. Usually, that means being a Discussion Mentor once and an Editor Mentor once. You can always check your schedule on CIS. If your Cappies program allows one Cappies Show per school, you will need to be a Mentor twice during the school year. If your program allows two Cappies Shows per school, you will need to be a Mentor four times. (If your school has two mentors, you can split this.)

Each Cappies Show has an Editor Mentor and a Discussion Mentor. If you have two Mentor assignments, you will probably -- but not necessarily -- be each of these once. You may, if you wish, switch roles with the other Mentor at a Cappies Show. If you desire to do this, please alert the Program Director.

The Program Director sets the Mentor schedule, and makes Mentor assignments, after the initial Critic Team schedule has been set. The Program Director may add one more Mentor for a Cappies Show, especially if large numbers of Critics are expected.

Whoever submitted your school's on-line application was required to indicate your "unavailable" dates through the school year. If no such dates were entered there, and if you know of such dates, you should alert the Program Director -- if possible, before the Mentor schedules are set.

If you wish, you may request preferred dates and Cappies Shows. The Program Director will try to honor those requests, but is not required to do so.

Once you are assigned to be a Mentor at a Cappies Show, please try to hold that date. Mentor switches can be complicated to do, especially during the busiest weeks of Cappies Shows.

If necessary, you may ask the Program Director to change your Mentor date, not later than three weeks before a Cappies Show.

If you have a sudden illness or personal emergency, you may decline a show at any time, by emailing and telephoning the Program Director. This will be considered an excused absence, but please do not request this lightly. Realize that it will probably result in the other Mentor having to carry the entire workload, as Editor and Discussion Mentor both. The Program Director will try to find a replacement for you, but this is not always possible, at short notice.

When declining or requesting a change, please give the Program Director a complete list of dates through the remainder of the year on which you cannot be a mentor. You will then receive a new assignment -- possibly as a third Mentor at a Cappies Show.

Under the rules, every school's Mentor (or mentors) must fulfill the required number of assignments. If this does not happen, your school will be asked to provide one more Mentor date than the number normally required in the next year.

SANCTIONS FOR ABSENCE

It is quite important that every Mentor honors his or her Cappies commitments. It's not good when a Critic on an attendance list fails to show up, but it's far worse when this happens with mentors. If you are absent from an assigned show, this can create serious problems -- at a minimum, extra work for the other Mentor.

At a minimum, you will be assigned another Cappies show. Under the rules, the Steering Committee of your local Cappies program may ask your school to replace you as Mentor. In persistent cases of Mentor absence, the Steering Committee may disqualify your school's Cappies Show from top award categories, or even bar your school from participating in the Cappies in later years.

GUESTS

You may bring one or more guests (spouse, friends, or colleagues) to a Cappies Show, but your guests must purchase tickets from the school box office. To be safe, in case the show is a sellout, your guest should call the performing school to reserve a ticket. If there are Critic no-shows (and there often are some), your guests can use those tickets, but should offer to pay for them.

Your guests may sit with you in the theater. (Please note that Critics may *not* sit with their guests.) Your guests may enter the Cappies Room, and share in the refreshments, if they have no connection to the performing schools and agree not to disclose anything discussed in the Cappies Room.

Preparing for a Cappies Show

The number of Critics who attend a show will depend on the size of your program, the week of your show, and other factors. In small programs, during busy periods, the number may be ten or fewer. In large programs, especially at year end and during weeks when not many schools have shows, the number of Critics could swell to more than fifty.

Two weeks, one week, and two days before the show, you'll get an email telling you about your Mentor assignment, and indicating how many Critics are expected.

On your CIS page, you can find the name, phone number, and email address of the other Mentor, and you'll see who will be Editor Mentor and who will be Discussion Mentor. If you wish to share the Editor Mentor load, you may want to do this before the Cappies Show. (The Editor Mentor can do this on CIS)

If you're the Discussion Mentor, you can help serve the learning purposes of the Cappies if, before you come to the Cappies Show, you do a little on-line research about the history (the original show, story, and creative team) of the show being performed.

Both mentors should bring their Mentor Binder to the Cappies Show.

Please plan on a very long evening, when you're the Mentor at a Cappies Show. Leave for the show early enough to enable you to arrive at least 45 minutes before curtain, giving allowance for traffic. That's when Critics are asked to arrive, which gives them plenty of time for getting lost and getting settled. Please plan on staying until the last Critic leaves or is picked up. That's usually about 45 minutes after a show is over, but often there's a Critic whose friends or parents are a little late picking them up. If so, you will need to stay until the ride gets there. We don't want any teenager stranded at an unfamiliar school, ever.

If you are a Discussion Mentor, plan on spending at least one hour (possibly longer) on Sunday, shortly after the review deadline, reading reviews and making selections with the other mentor.

If you are an Editor Mentor, plan on spending roughly three hours (possibly longer) on Sunday, editing reviews and submitting them prior to the Mentor deadline.

If you are the Editor Mentor, please bring a list you can use to take attendance. The best list to use is a print-out of the Cappies Show's attendance list on the Editor Mentor's CIS page. As a less up-to-date alternative, you could also use the final (two-day) pre-show reminder email you received.

MENTOR CHECKLIST

As you prepare to Mentor a Cappies Show, while at the show, and afterwards, you may wish to keep handy the four-page "Mentor Checklist." Two copies are provided in this Mentor Binder. This is especially helpful when you are doing this for the first time.

Mentoring a Cappies Show

When you're the Editor Mentor, you're the Cappies supervisor at the event -- in theater parlance, the house manager. You're in charge of everything, except leading the discussions. Most items here are tasks for the Editor Mentor, but the two mentors should work as a team. If a third Mentor is present (which may happen, especially during shows where many Critics are expected), the mentors can share tasks in any way decided by the Editor Mentor.

ARRIVAL

Both mentors should arrive at the school 45 minutes, remain approximately 45 minutes after curtain -- or as long as it takes. One must remain at the school until the last Critic has left for home. You must attend the entire performance, and remain present during the pre-show, intermission, and post-show discussions and evaluations, except as necessary to attend to other matters (or take brief breaks).

When you arrive at the performing school, please say hello, and express thanks, to any parent Boosters, or anyone else from the performing school that is helping out.

CAPPIES ROOM

Find the Cappies Room. It can be a school room, chorus room, cafeteria, or something like that. If it's possible, set the room up in a way that best promotes discussion between whatever number of Critics you're expecting. If you're expecting fewer than 30, you might do it in a large circle, or all around one very large table.

Make sure directions are clear on the walls and doors, so Critics can find the Cappies Room easily when they arrive. Check in with the Show Director and parent Booster of the host school. Find the usher. See if a microphone and speaker have been provided. (They're recommended for Cappies Shows expecting 20 or more Critics, if the school has the equipment available.)

The performing school is required to provide complimentary refreshments in the Cappies Room -- something to drink, perhaps some chips and cookies, something comparable to what the audience can buy at intermission. Many schools' Boosters provide far more than the minimum, which is greatly appreciated by mentors and Critics. Please thank them, on behalf of the Cappies, if they do.

Please advise whoever is handling refreshments that they cannot be in the room during intermission and after the show, when the Critics are discussing anything. Those conversations are highly confidential. This means that parents will have to wait until the Critics are finished before they can start cleaning up.

If a large number of Critics are on the attendance list, schools are asked to provide a simple microphone and speaker for the mentors to use.

The school should provide at least one student usher, to stand outside the door of the Cappies Room and escort the mentors and Critics to their seats right before the show starts, and again after intermission. While the Critics are in the Cappies Room, the usher should stay by the door, in case there are any questions. However, please make sure they are not able to listen in on the Critics' conversation.

Please confirm with the usher that the stage manager will not start the show, or resume after intermission, until all Critics and mentors have been seated.

Make sure the Cappies Room will be secure, and locked, during the Cappies Show. If it is not, you will need to advise Critics to take all valuables with them into the theater. Students can sometimes be careless with their belongings -- and they (and their parents) can understandably get quite upset if anything is lost or stolen.

MATERIALS

Before starting work on your Cappies Show, please consult the Award Category Eligibility Form. On it, pay particular attention to the eligibility rules for non-performing categories, like Costumes, Props & Effects, Costumes, Choreography, Orchestra, and Creativity. For students to be eligible for award consideration in some of those categories (see the Form), the performing school must provide specific information (for example, about the extent of adult involvement) prior to the show.

Under the Rules, the performing school must provide the Mentors with a completed Award Category Eligibility Form not later than 30 minutes prior to curtain. On this Form, any item marked with an asterisk (***) must be answered, prior to a show, for a student who does that work to be considered for award eligibility in that category. This is required for categories (i.e., Costumes, Props & Effects, Orchestra, Choreography, Creativity, Dancer) where it is helpful, and sometimes essential, for Critics to know what to consider, as they watch and listen to a show.

If the performing school does not provide you with an Award Category Eligibility form, give a blank form to the Usher and ask that it be completed immediately by the Show Director or Stage Manager and returned to you before the show. (You have one in your Binder. Note that it is two pages.) If you do not receive this information in time to tell Critics before the Cappie Show, it will be up to you to decide how necessary it was for Critics to have it in advance, and whether the show should be declared eligible or ineligible in that category.

For each non-performing category that involves a group of more than four persons (like an orchestra), the Show Director should provide a name for the group. No more than four individual names may be listed in any one category.

The performing school may provide Critics with other materials, but may not offer any guidance on whom the Critics might consider for the performing categories. That is for Critics to decide on their own.

The school must provide show programs to all mentors and Critics. Confirm with the usher that all student and character names are spelled accurately there -- and spelled the same, every time they appear. It does occasionally happen that programs misspell (or inconsistently spell) student or character names. If you notice this, ask the usher for clarification. If, later, names are misspelled by Critics in published reviews because of errors in the program, the Cappies cannot take responsibility for those errors.

TICKETS

As soon as you arrive, make sure enough tickets are being provided.

Under the rules, the performing school must provide complimentary tickets to Critics and mentors. The school is encouraged, but not required, to provide excellent seats -- preferably center section, about rows five to seven. The Critics need to sit where they can see and hear well (even if sound and light problems arise), appreciate the intensity of the performances, and feel the energy of the audience response. At a musical, it's best if Critics are not seated too close to the orchestra, to make sure they can hear the vocalists well. Even in a black box theater, it's best not to seat Critics in the first row or two -- that can distract your performers.

Make sure the location where the Critics are going to sit is roped off, and make sure your ushers enforce this until the Critics arrive. It can be quite awkward when Critics enter the theater, right before curtain, and do not have enough seats, or have to sit around others in their seating area. Unless there is full house and every seat is needed, it's a good idea not to have parents of students at your school, or anybody else, sitting next to Critics. The Critics like to write down notes during shows, and they don't like to do it when somebody from the school is sitting next to them, peering onto what they may be writing.

Under no circumstances can a performing school fail to provide tickets to all Critics who are present and who were on the final (48-hour) attendance list, and to the designated mentors and program officials. Failure to do so can result in sanctions for the show, including possible disqualification from awards. If a show is oversold, you will face the awkward but necessary circumstance of having to ask the Show Director to ask others to relinquish their seats.

The school must hold tickets for Critics only until five minutes prior to curtain. If it's a sellout, the school can sell any tickets set aside for any Critic who arrives later than five minutes before curtain. Late-arriving Critics can, therefore, be denied admission and sent home -- but only if the show is a sellout.

Supervising Critics at a Cappies Show

BEFORE THE SHOW

You must take attendance as the Critics arrive. *This is very important.* Right before the Critics enter the theater, you should confirm that everyone has checked in with you. (You might need to do this at the start of intermission, as well.) Make sure that friends or family members of Critics are not in the Cappies Room at any time.

Hand out the show programs, and make sure everyone has an evaluation form. If any Critic does not have an evaluation form, another Critic might be able to share one. (You might bring along a few as extras, just in case.)

Confirm the review deadline with the Critics. It is always on Sunday. Ordinarily, it is 10 AM Sunday for Cappies Shows on Friday evenings or before, noon Sunday for Cappies Shows on Saturday afternoons, 2 PM Sunday for shows on Saturday evenings, and 9 PM for Cappies Shows on Sunday evenings. (You may, if you wish, extend that deadline to as late as 11 PM, but you must submit all review selections and all edited reviews within three hours after the new deadline. Please notify the Program Director when you do this.)

Make sure all Critics know how to use CIS and know their usernames and passwords (especially early in the year). Anyone can get that information by going onto the log-in page, clicking on to the "I forgot something" link, and typing in an email address. (You should know how to do this yourself.)

Before entering the theater, instruct Critics to turn off beepers, cell phones, and other noise-making devices before entering the theater. Cell phone noise can be particularly embarrassing when others in the audience hear it coming from the Cappies seating area.

Remind Critics not to reveal their opinions of the Cappies Show, by comment or gesture, while in the theater, except in the manner of normal applause, laughter, and end-of-show ovations. Remind them to be careful, when walking to and from the Cappies Room, not to discuss the show in any way, even quietly to another critic, since those conversations might be overheard.

The usher will notify you when it's time for the Critics to enter the theater. The usher will lead the Critics to their seats. Make sure that the show doesn't start until the Critics and mentors are all seated. (The Show Director should know this rule.)

DURING THE SHOW

Critics may sit anywhere in the Cappies section. They may sit with other Critics from their school, if they wish. Their friends and family members may *not* sit in the Critics' seating area.

Watch the show with the Critics. It helps if you sit in the furthest back of the rows provided for the Cappies, so you can observe the Critics as well as the show.

Make sure Critics do not reveal their opinions of the Cappies Show while in the theater, except as normal members of the audience might do -- and do not openly discuss any aspect of the performance within earshot of any member of the audience.

Also, make sure Critics do not socialize with any friends at the performing school while at the Cappies Show (including texting or social media), whether before, during, or after the show. They may not greet or even gesture to anyone in the performing cast or crew. (They can congratulate their friends after they submit their reviews.)

Make sure Critics exit the theater promptly, at intermission, and after final bows.

CRITIC DECORUM

Critics are required to show good decorum, and represent the Cappies well, at all times. It is the mentors' responsibility to make sure this happens. If you feel that a Critic is dressed inappropriately, say so. If a Critic is using vulgar language that can be overheard by others, or littering, or acting rudely in some other way, please ask that Critic to stop.

The Cappies works best when mentors do not speak sharply with Critics. The Cappies is a learning program, not a custodial one. Try to help keep it fun for the Critics. If difficulties arise, try to maintain an upbeat overall tone. It works best to handle any individual problems privately, without raising your voice.

In case of serious misbehavior, you may reprimand a critic. If the misbehavior persists, you may ask that Critic to give you his or her name and school name. Afterwards, please advise the Program Director of the incident, by an email report through CIS The Program Director and the Advisor at the critic's participating school will determine whether any disciplinary action is warranted.

If you notice a pattern of rudeness, other misbehavior, or persistently negative tone from any one group of Critics, they are probably from the same school. Find out the name of the school, and notify the Program Director.

Do not order a Critic to leave the Cappies Room, or the school, unless the Critic is engaging in misbehavior so disruptive that it would require substantial disciplinary action in a school setting.

Please encourage Critics to help clean up the Cappies Room.

Leading Discussions

A Discussion Mentor is part teacher, part mediator. The best way to lead a discussion -- before the show, during intermission, and after the show -- is to do it the way you would lead a class.

The rules require you to lead discussions of at least 10 minutes before the show, during intermission, and after the show (*not including* time spent with Critics' Choices).

PRE-SHOW DISCUSSION

From 45 minutes before curtain until 20 minutes before curtain, your task will be to take attendance and make sure all arrangements (Cappies Room, usher, tickets, seating area, materials) are satisfactory. Try to answer any possible question about award eligibility for any category. During this time, the Critics are free to socialize, have refreshments, and look through materials.

The pre-show discussion should begin promptly, 20 minutes before curtain. Spend 10 minutes (1) discussing the history (the original show, story, and creative team) of the show being performed, (2) identifying any aspect pertaining to award eligibility for any category, and (3) reviewing materials provided by the Show Director.

The director of the Cappies Show may speak to the Critics during this pre-show discussion. During and after the show, however, the director may speak to them only if invited, to answer specific questions mentors or Critics might have.

INTERMISSION DISCUSSION

Nearly all Cappies Shows have an intermission. Confirm with the Show Director (or usher) that the intermission will be not less than 15 minutes, to give the Critics time to have a good discussion. If a show has more than one intermission, it's fine to have discussions during only one of those intermissions. If a show has no intermission, the post-show discussion should be 20 minutes, before starting Critics' Choices.

During intermission, do not start discussions until you are certain no one is present from the performing school. Sometimes a parent might be adding another tray of cookies, so you have to watch for that. And please make sure no one (including the usher) appears to be listening outside the door. That can sometimes be a problem.

Two minutes after the end of the first act, close the door, and start the discussions. Do not wait until all Critics have returned to the Cappies Room. (Some may be still in a restroom, in which case the usher can let them enter.)

Take charge. Make sure there's only one conversation going -- yours. Ask Critics to raise hands, so you can call on them before they talk. Ask them to stand when making comments. Keep their comments brief, so as many Critics as possible can make their points.

Invite brief comments from as large as possible a number of Critics, and make sure they are respectful of other opinions. Encourage Critics with contrasting points of view to speak out. Take firm action to prevent anyone from dominating, "showing off" their knowledge of the theater in an intimidating manner, or belittling any other Critics who may disagree with them.

Welcome comments from Critics who may be new at this, or who may not be theater students. Critics should not be reluctant to ask questions if they are confused about a rule, or about some technical aspect of theater. (Experienced Critics can sometimes help answer those questions.)

Do your best to guide the Discussion in a fair, balanced, and constructive direction.

Keep the tone as upbeat as possible. It's best to start each discussion with an open-ended question like, "What's working in act one?" What do you like best about the show, so far?" And then, after a few minutes, ask "What's not working quite as well, so far?" "What could be a little better?" You should allow critical comments, as long as they are stated fairly, reasonably, and constructively. It's fine for Critics to make any comments they want, and be as critical as they want, as long as things don't get out of hand -- too harsh, too belabored, or in any way sarcastic. Critics can mention performers by name, or (better) by character name, during discussions.

You may need to remind some Critics that this cast, crew, and director may do theater a little differently from the way their own school does things -- and to respect that difference. You might at times need to point out how differences in budgets can influence the quality of the tech work. If the comments start taking an overall negative tone, try to steer the conversation back in a more constructive or balanced direction.

If any Critic makes a comment that is grossly unfair or unreasonably harsh, you might gently urge that Critic to keep things within bounds, and ask that no further comments of that kind be made.

You can raise issues, ask questions, provide expertise, and request contrasting points of view, but please do not do anything that might be perceived by Critics as an attempt to shape or alter Critics' opinions.

Try to say as little as possible about what you thought of the show. If the Critics are overlooking something you think is important -- good or bad -- ask a pointed question. If the orchestra was terrific, don't say "Wasn't the orchestra terrific," but instead ask "How did you like the orchestra?" Or, if some of the costumes were out of period, don't say that, just ask the Critics "Were the costumes in period?"

During discussions, the Critics might have some questions. They might want to know the name of a particular dancer, or who painted a backdrop -- things like that. If so, the Editor Mentor should try to get the answer, either from the usher or (if necessary) from the Show Director.

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION

The post-show discussion should last about 45 minutes. If it's much shorter than that, you're not having enough discussion. If it's much longer than that, you're keeping the Critics from returning home in a timely way.

If the host school has any post-show recognitions, Critics should exit the theater before those start. (This is a rule, and the Show Director should alert you in advance if this is planned.) If these recognitions start without Cappies Critics being excused, you should signal to the Critics to stand and leave as quietly as possible. Afterwards, please apologize to the Show Director for having done this, but remind the Show Director that this is a Cappies rule, to enable Critics to have a post-show discussion and still return home at a reasonable hour.

Before starting the post-show discussion, once again make certain no one is present from the performing school, and that no one (including the usher) appears to be listening outside the door.

Two minutes after final bows, close the door, and start the discussions. Do not wait until all Critics have returned to the Cappies Room. (Some may be still in a restroom, in which case the usher can let them enter.)

Spend the first 5 minutes discussing the second act, much as you did with the first act during the intermission discussion. Ask the Critics, "What worked in the second act?" "What did you like best?" And then, after a few minutes, ask "What didn't work quite as well in the second act?" "What could have been a little better?"

Spend the next 5 minutes discussing the entire show. "What worked really well through the entire show?" "What did you like best?" And then, after a few minutes, ask "Where did the entire show fall a little short?" Try to end the post-show discussion with a final round of very quick words of praise, something like, "OK, real fast, let's go around the room, what did you like best about the entire show?"

Then it's time to do the evaluation forms -- "Critics' Choices." People sometimes call these "nominations," but they're not. What you're doing is deciding what will be on the nomination ballot.

Determining Critics' Choices

Do not start Critics' Choices until you have had at least ten minutes of discussion. Your goal should be to enable Critics to depart for home not later than 45 minutes after final bows, but no one can leave (except in case of emergency) until all the Critics' Choices are selected.

Be prepared for some people -- most often Critics' parents, but also possibly some parent Boosters from the performing school who would like to clean up, and school custodial personnel -- becoming a bit impatient as they wait outside the Cappies Room for the discussion to end. If so, please remind them that the rules require a discussion, careful selection of Critics' Choices, and preliminary award scoring -- and that this usually takes about 45 minutes.

POST-SHOW EVALUATION FORMS

Start by asking all Critics to get out an evaluation form. (They should have these in their Critic Binders.)

Tell them that they will use these evaluation forms to select Critics' Choices and to give preliminary scores and points to these Choices. Tell them that the Choices will appear on the year-end award ballot, but that these post-show scores are preliminary only, and may be freely changed by them when they cast their award votes at the end of the year. (Partway through the year, Critics will know this.)

Through the fall season, it's a good idea to read the ten-point scoring scale, at the bottom of the form. (In time, Critics will know this scale well.)

CRITICS' CHOICES

A Critics' Choice is not a nomination, but rather a decision to place a candidate on the year-end award ballot. Mentors often like to ask Critics, "Who would you like to nominate for" a category, but that expression is a little misleading -- and can cause Critics to refuse to select someone who is "best in show" but whom they do not believe deserves a Cappie nomination. It's more correct to say "Who would you like to select as a Critics' Choice for" that category.

When Critics decide their Critics' Choices, you may first have to confirm that a candidate qualifies for a category, under the rules. In the non-performing categories, you can rely on information provided by the Show Director. If this wasn't provided you when you arrived, you must ask the usher to help get it. (Try not to wait until the post-show discussion to do this, or you could cause everyone to stay later than would otherwise be necessary.)

Sometimes, especially with the performing categories, you may need to consult the eligibility rules for a category. If any eligibility question arises, you are required first to consult with any Lead Critics who may be present. They should each have the Award Category Guide with them (as you should). At the top of each category is the rule. Ask a Lead Critic to read it aloud, and ask other Lead Critics to comment. If there is disagreement among Lead Critics, you may wish to summon them to the front of the room and have a brief conversation, just with them. In the end, the decision is made by you as the Discussion Mentor. If there is a shade of doubt, decide in favor of declaring the candidate eligible for the category.

If, after you make an eligibility determination, you are not sure you were correct, email the Program Director after you return home, to ask for clarification. If any Lead Critic strongly disagrees with your determination, invite him/her to email a brief statement to that effect to the Program Director. Procedures exist for revising Critics' Choices, if rules have not been applied correctly.

You can do Critics' Choices in any order. Usually, it works best to do all the non-performing categories first. For the performing roles, it's important to draw correct distinctions among performers who qualify for featured, supporting, and lead categories. The Critics then decide who their "Critics' Choices" are for each award category for which the show qualifies. They do this by consensus, or if necessary by vote.

To make a Critics' Choice, Critics will select whomever they would score the highest in that Category -- the "best in show" in that category. Even if the Critics have a low opinion of that person's work, and intend to give that person a low score, if that person is "best in show," he or she should be named as a Critics' Choice. There is no minimum evaluation score to become a Critics' Choice, and there need be no expectation that a Critics' Choice will later be voted a Nominee.

For any category except Play, Musical, and Song (in a Musical), Critics may decide by consensus or vote to select no Critics' Choice. Critics may only do this if the mentors determine that, under the rules, no candidate qualifies for this Category.

There can be only one Critics' Choice per Category.

There is no limit to the number of times any one individual can be named a Critics' Choice in any Cappies Show. Do not allow Critics to "spread things around," and name different people as Critics' Choices in different categories -- unless each of them was, in fact, "best in show" in that category.

VOTES

When there is disagreement among Critics about who the Critics' Choice should be for a particular category, have a very brief discussion -- not to exceed one minute. Then take a vote.

Critics will decide Critics' Choices by consensus or vote, as required. If there's any disagreement, hold a vote (by hand). If there are multiple suggestions being voted upon, do an initial vote to narrow it down to two final choices, and then have a vote between those two.

If the vote ends up as a tie, take another vote. If that second vote ends up as a tie, the two mentors will decide. If the mentors disagree, the Editor Mentor will decide.

After each Critics' Choice is selected, the Editor Mentor should read the cast or crew member's name (or names), and spell them. Groups of more than four students (and the orchestra) should be listed by the group's name, which can be provided by the Show Director (or usher).

SCORES

Critics then score all the Critics' Choices, using the ten-point evaluation scale noted on the forms. All Critics should score each Critics' Choice, and all Critics have to score the same Critics' Choice in each Category. When scoring them, Critics must do so independently, and may not consult with other Critics.

On their forms, Critics should make notations about whether they might think of giving any candidate an award or nomination point when they vote, at year-end. They can make any other notes they wish on their forms.

CONFIDENTIALITY

After leaving the Cappies Show, Critics may not discuss anything said about the show in the Cappies room.

Remind the Critics that their scores and points are strictly confidential, and must never be discussed with anyone, including each other -- and their theater directors.

EXCUSING CRITICS

When the discussion is over, Critics can be excused to leave for home. Ask the Critics who finish a little early to help clean up the Cappies Room while the others are still marking their forms.

Please remind Critics to take their show programs home with them, for them to use when writing reviews *and confirming the correct spelling of performer names and character names*. (Please take your show program home, also, so you can double check the correct spelling of performer names and character names.)

If you're the Editor Mentor, you must do attendance on CIS as soon as you get home. That's important. If you forget, or wait too long, Critics can be marked as absent, and automatic emails to that effect will go to their teachers, causing the Critics some undeserved embarrassment.

COLLECTING (AND FORWARDING) FORMS

As Critics leave, collect their Post-Show Evaluation Forms. If a program official is present, the official should take the forms. If no program official is present, you must (1) log in to CIS and enter the Critics' Choices for that show, and (2) mail the forms to your Program Director within three days. Please do not delay doing this. If the Critics' evaluation forms are lost or mislaid, it creates a major problem.

Ensuring Critic Safety and Security

Please don't let any Critic leave early, before the post-show discussion has concluded, unless there's a real emergency. If a Critic leaves before a Cappies Show ends, that Critic may not review (or score) the show.

The safety of Critics is of paramount concern. No Critic may be left alone, late at night, at an unfamiliar school. Under the rules, one Mentor is required to remain at a performing school until the last Critic has left for home. *This is an absolute rule -- no exceptions*. If it's inconvenient for both mentors to stay, the Editor Mentor should be the one to stay.

Critics are told to alert a Mentor if they have to wait for rides, but mentors should keep an eye out for Critics who are lingering by a school door, after the post-show discussion is over.

Please help Critics take care of their valuables. If the Cappies Room is not secure, and locked, during the performance, ask Critics to keep valuables with them at all times.

Reading and Selecting Reviews for Publication

RECEIVING REVIEWS

All Critics who attend a show are required to submit a review. In most Cappies programs, somewhere between 90% and 95% of all Critics who attend a show do submit a review before the final deadline (the Wednesday following a show -- three days after the original deadline, which is Sunday).

Unless you're told otherwise by the Program Director, the Critics' review deadlines will be on Sunday -- at 10 AM for a Cappies Show that takes place on Friday (or before), 12 noon for a Saturday afternoon show, 2 PM for a Saturday night show, and 9 PM for a Sunday afternoon show.

If, for a good reason, you need to accelerate the Critics' deadline, please contact the Program Director no later than two weeks before the show. This can sometimes, but not always, be done.

You will receive all reviews via CIS (See the CIS Instructions.)

After the Critics' deadline, you should read all the reviews that were submitted on time, get in touch with the other Mentor, and together decide which ones will be forwarded for publication. CIS will tell you how many to select. It's OK to select a late review, if you both feel strongly about that, but we recommend that you only select reviews that were submitted on time. The late ones will appear in red on CIS, so you'll know which ones they are.

Whether you wish to consider late reviews for publication is up to you, and may depend on when you read them. However, you must edit all reviews, including late ones, for compliance with the rules on criticism.

Critics are encouraged to write reviews of between 300 and 400 words. Reviews shorter than 200 words are not acceptable. While there is no upper word limit, you should normally try not to select reviews that have fewer than 250 or more than 500 words in length.

SELECTING REVIEWS

After the Critics deadline, the Editor Mentor and Discussion Mentor will read all reviews and jointly select those to be submitted to the media. (Your CIS review editing page will tell you how many reviews you are to select.) The two of you should select these by consensus. If, for any reason, you cannot agree, the Editor Mentor's choice will prevail.

You need to make these choices carefully, consistent with the rules. Critics should not be given the impression that the way to get their reviews published is to make the show sound better than it was. At every Cappies Show, it is an important responsibility of the Mentors, in fairness to everyone, to make sure this is not the case.

When selecting reviews for publication, you are determining which reviews will be "of record," and shared with the public. It often happens that a Mentor is a friend or professional colleague of the show director whose Cappies Show is being reviewed. Having two mentors gives each of you what a politician calls "wiggle room" to make the right choice. And it gives the Cappies some integrity.

Of course, the director, cast, and crew at the performing school will want you to pick reviews that are totally positive about everything. Newspaper editors call those reviews "letters to grandma." Editors want real-world reviews, with a little edge to them -- and criticisms, where warranted.

Selecting the right reviews is more an art than a science, but over time, the Cappies will work better, and be respected more, if every Mentor team makes sound choices. We do not want people saying that all published reviews sound the same, no matter how good the shows were. You should not select reviews that lie about a show. People at the school -- and Critics -- will see through that, and it will hurt the Cappies.

Under the rules, no one at the performing school may express any objection to selections after they are published. This happens extremely rarely, and never in most Cappies programs.

MAKING SELECTIONS BY THE RULES

The rules require you to select reviews that (1) accurately and fairly describe the show, (2) are well written, (3) reasonably reflect the Critic consensus, as revealed during discussions, and (4) spell all names correctly.

Do not necessarily pick the most supportive reviews, or the most interesting or literary ones. Instead, look for the best-crafted, most readable descriptions that reflect what you and the other Mentor feel is the right judgment about the show, being mindful of what you heard the Critics say during discussions.

The first factor is accuracy and fairness. Look for an honest description of what actually happened on stage. The praise and criticism should be proportionate, within the range of fair comment. The review should include solid analysis of theater.

Think like a Critic yourself. Was it an A-plus show? Then the published reviews should sound like an A-plus. Rave worthy shows deserve rave reviews. Was it a B-plus show? Then you should pick reviews that don't use words like "amazing," "fantastic," or "incredible." The praise should be slightly hedged, and the review should include some mild criticism.

Was it more of a B-minus show (or worse)? If so, the published reviews should include praise for what was good, but criticism of what could have been better -- and, perhaps, might include more description of the history of the show, or a lengthier summary of the story. Please do not be reluctant to select reviews that include criticisms, as long as the points are justified and stated in ways that are within the rules.

The second factor is quality of writing. The review should be in an engaging and creative style, of interest to readers who did not see the show. It should include a succinct background of the play, and a brief synopsis of the story.

To understand what is good writing in a Cappies review, read through the "Review Writing" section of your binder. Critics are asked not to write in certain ways (for example, mixing their tenses, or putting themselves too much in the review, or praising performers in a list of names, or using theater clichés) -- and the obvious corollary is that Mentors should not select for publication any reviews that are written in those ways -- or, if you do, you need to edit that.

The third factor is that a published review should reasonably reflect the consensus of Critic opinions during the discussions. The reviews you select can and should express a Critic's own point of view, but if the Critics as a group broadly praised a show, then you should ordinarily select reviews that do the same. If the critics were a little lukewarm (or highly critical), then -- unless both Mentors believe that their opinions were plainly wrong -- you should select reviews that are measured in their praise and include criticisms that reflect the gist of what was said in the Cappies room.

The fourth factor is correct spelling of all cast, crew, character, and other names. If name spelling is sloppy in any review, please do not select it for publication.

If your major newspaper publishes two reviews, you might want to pick two well-written reviews that cover different items, or reflect slightly different points of view.

Your Mentor Binder includes some useful examples of well-written reviews of two hypothetical shows (*South Pacific* and *Hamlet*). For each show, four reviews are provided -- for an outstanding show, a good show, an average show, and a below-average show. Please note the measured differences in the praise and criticism about various aspects of each show. These sample reviews provide you with some implicit standards you can apply, when selecting reviews for a Cappies Show.

Once you've made the selections, the Discussion Mentor is done -- unless both Mentors have agreed to share the editing task.

Editing Reviews Selected for Publication

If you're the Editor Mentor, you need to edit very carefully all the reviews you've selected for publication.

DOUBLECHECKING FOR CORRECT SPELLING

Make sure all names are spelled correctly -- that's very important. Performer names, character names, composer and playwright names. Use your show program to do this.

This name spelling point is so important, let's state the issue directly: *The number one worry that newspapers have about Cappies reviews is that names may not be spelled correctly.* When this happens, they often receive a complaint from the parent of the kid whose name was misspelled, and they have to post a correction in a subsequent edition. Everyone looks bad -- the critic, the Mentor, the Cappies, and the newspaper itself. One way to stop a newspaper from publishing Cappies reviews is to send them reviews with names misspelled.

EDITING REVIEWS

You selected this review to be published, so it's now your job to make sure it reads clearly and intelligently. Correct for grammar and punctuation. Edit for style. Fix word choices. Make sure words like "wonderful" are used only once. Trim out "throat clearing" words and phrases. Make sure a Critic doesn't use thirty words to say what could have been said in ten. (If a review is written like that, perhaps you should select it for publication.)

Make sure praise isn't given without explanation. A publishable review shouldn't just say what was good, it should say why it was good. Praise should not be given in the form of a list. Newspapers do not like to print passages like: "Also giving commendable performances were A, B, C, D, and E."

You can tone down criticism -- or praise -- if you think the Critic went a little overboard. If a review says a lead performer is "Broadway-bound," you might want to change that to "outstanding," unless you really can imagine going to Broadway in a few years to watch that performer. Please do not change a critic's basic opinion of a show, or add anything to a praise or criticism. You can delete, or de-hype, a comment -- but you cannot add, or hype up, what the Critic has written.

You can -- and, in reviews selected for major dailies, you should -- add description about the history of the show, or about the underlying story, if a review is otherwise excellent but thin in those areas.

Especially for reviews submitted to a major daily newspaper, be careful about the quality of the writing. Make sure the writing will engage a reader who has not seen the show. The plot needs to be presented in an interesting way. The words of praise need to say not just that some aspect of a performance was good, but *how and why* it was good.

You do not need to edit all reviews to this extent. You must only do so only for those you select for publication. For these, please take the time to edit them carefully. If you do not do so, you are passing on that work to program officials -- or to the newspaper editors, who will think less of the Cappies as a result.

Editing All Reviews

For all reviews, you need to do something simpler and less time-consuming -- but just as *You need to make sure every criticism is stated in a way that follows the rules.* It's very important to read all reviews with real care. If you let harsh criticisms slip through, that can cause hurt feelings, create a problem for the show director at the school, or even cause a school to want to stop participating in the Cappies.

ENFORCING THE RULES ON CRITICISM

Critics are encouraged to include criticisms in reviews. A review should normally raise at least one point of criticism, unless a show is so good that it warrants nothing except praise -- which is true for some shows, but not many.

Here are the rules on criticism:

In a review, a Critic may make criticisms that are:

- Within the range of fair comment.
- Stated constructively.
- Combined with praise, to the extent an honest description will allow.
- Presented as observation, not as advice. (*A Critic should not tell a performer, or director, what he or she should have done.*)
- Not longer than necessary to state a point. (*Criticisms cannot be harsh, sarcastic, or belabored.*)

Criticisms may not be directed toward

- Any named student or character. (***This is very important.***)
- Any unnamed student, or group of students, in grade 8 or below. (*They can be praised, but not criticized.*)
- Any adult in any performing or non-performing role, including an adult director, choreographer, or tech designer. (*They can be neither praised nor criticized.*)
- Any composer, playwright, or lyricist, except to the extent necessary to introduce or provide context for the Cappies Show.

The real bottom line on editing for criticisms is this. If you wonder about any particular item, think how kids at your own school would feel if they read something like that about their show. But at the same time, you have to let the Critics have their say. It's all a matter of balance, and being sensible.

The most important rule is that no cast or crew member can be criticized by name. If a singer was way off-key, it's within the rules to say "some singers were off-key," but not to say "so-and-so was off-key." If the sound is criticized, the review should not mention the name of the sound person. If a review is so negative, or so contrary to the rules, that it cannot be edited -- or if it is less than 200 words -- the Editor Mentor needs to flag it to the program director, who will not forward it to the performing school, but to the critic's own theater director instead.

EXAMPLES OF CRITICISMS THAT ARE WITHIN THE RULES

Here are samples of criticisms that appeared in reviews that were selected by mentors for publication in newspapers, here in the National Capital Area Cappies. Some were edited, and others were not. Some are mildly critical, others more so, but all are stated in a manner and tone consistent with the rules. All these criticisms were reasonable, and well-stated. Some of them were the only criticism made in the entire review -- the one point the Critic felt had to be made, in a fair and balanced review.

- *Overcoming a few irregularities in costume and pantomime, and a few lost high notes, the entire cast gave a focused performance, maintaining composure throughout.*
- *Despite a few slipped-up lines and some visibly unsettled nerves, the cast settled down and handled a long and difficult script nicely.*
- *Though the show lacked polish, the cast conveyed the message of the play joyfully.*
- *Unexpected set glitches threw a show into moments of chaos, but the cast handled these with poise and grace.*
- *Although there were lines lost from actors speaking too quickly or the orchestra overpowering them, the performers kept their energy constant and strong.*
- *Despite some physically demanding dance numbers that had a few slip-ups, the cast's drive to entertain the audience always prevailed.*
- *While the set consisted only of a few painted flats with no levels, it left it to the actors to step up and bring the stage to life.*
- *Some of the actors performers seemed unsure onstage early on, but, thanks to a great audience, they warmed up by the second act.*
- *Even if the cast and crew did not have the best of luck in their opening night show with all the technical problems, they accomplished the job they set out to do, to win the hearts of their audience -- and by the look in the smiles and cheers of the crowd, they did a very good job.*
- *The show was filled with fun songs, but the majority of the performers never quite reached the energy level that they should have through physical movement, aside from the screaming and squealing.*
- *The difficult, sitcom-like nature of dialogue was sometimes lost in the brisk delivery required by the fast-paced story.*
- *The characters had such high energy that sometimes they had too much, talking all at the same time or not clearing space for someone else to come forward with a line.*
- *Although some sound cues were a bit loud, they were nothing compared to the audience's laughter.*
- *The cast had good comic timing for the most part, but neglected to hold for laughs a few times.*
- *Some of the performances were forced and distracting, but the cast, as a whole, handled the difficult material well.*
- *Despite a few slipped-up lines and some visibly unsettled nerves, the cast nicely handled a very long script.*
- *Though the upstage movie detracted slightly from one sonorous solo, it definitely added humor to another song.*
- *Modern music that was incorporated into the scenes sometimes was effective in creating atmosphere and enhancing the show, but at times separated the audience from the story.*
- *The set, though lacking the technicolor zest of most comic book-based productions, included a well-defined newsroom studio complete with camera man and graphic effects.*
- *Every flubbed line was covered nicely.*
- *Handling technical problems with professionalism and poise, the cast proved to be cool and collected.*
- *The exaggerated style in which some actors performed sometimes prevented them from believably sinking into their characters.*
- *Although the cast was very amusing, some of the townspeople made sudden comments that sounded too intelligent for fit their characters.*
- *Despite a disruptive audience and problems with lighting in the first act, the cast was very animated.*
- *Overcoming some stumbling on lines, most performers warmed up to their parts as the play progressed, and their articulation improved throughout the play.*
- *Some characters seem contrived, and awkward transitions broke up a few tender moments, but the performers nicely expressed high level of emotion and held focus throughout the show.*
- *While the language of Shakespeare can and sometimes did sound arcane, and a few lines were rushed the cast demonstrate a solid understanding of the words.*

Please note how criticisms work best when combined with praise -- and, even so, a few critical words can carry plenty of punch, when read by students at the performing school.

EXAMPLES OF HOW TO EDIT CRITICISMS

Here are five examples of how reviews should be edited, to conform with the rules on criticism. The Editor Mentor always has the option of simply deleting a criticism. As your time permits -- and, especially, in any reviews you select for publication -- it's a good idea to help the Critic make a point the right way.

Example 1: *The production was unfortunately marred by several technical difficulties, and a few characters could have used more time to learn their dances correctly.*

This is an example of grinding in a valid criticism a bit too much. A review should simply state a criticism, and move on. It should not include words like "unfortunate," or state (beyond just making the point) that it marred the show. The Critic had no idea how long the dancers rehearsed -- and should never try to tell the director what should have been done. Instead, the Editor Mentor could rewrite this to read: *The production had several technical difficulties, and a few characters did not execute their dances properly.*

Example 2: *Michael Givens had low energy in act one, and had some trouble reaching the high notes, but came on strong in act two, when his deep baritone rocked the house.*

A Critic cannot criticize by name, even when combined with praise. The Editor Mentor should fix it by splitting the comment. At one point, the review could say: *Michael Givens came on strong in act two, when his deep baritone rocked the house.* Elsewhere, the review could say: *Early in the show, some moments had low energy, and some of the high notes didn't quite land.*

The point would be made. In all likelihood, the director (and Michael Givens) will know who missed those high notes, but it's inappropriate to make that connection directly, in a review of a high school performer.

Example 3: *The lighting, done by a crew led by Helen Smithies, was generally effective, but appeared to miss some important cues.*

The Critic might have thought she was being nice by mentioning the head of the crew, but as with performers, a review should refer to the problem only, not to anybody by name. The Editor Mentor could rewrite this as: *The lighting was generally effective, but appeared to miss some important cues....* Or: *The lighting, done by a crew led by Helen Smithies, was generally effective...* and, elsewhere in the review, to be honest about the show, the review could say: *Some important tech cues were missed.*

Example 4: *The show was brilliantly directed by Blue Ridge High School's theater director, Robert Green. The emotional climax might have been more successful, though, if it had not included so many elementary school children.*

The purpose of Cappies reviews is to comment on the work of high school cast and crew. A review cannot praise an adult, either by name or by function, can only comment on the quality of the direction if the show has a student director. A review can praise performers younger than high school students, but cannot criticism them, even in gentle ways, and even if names are not mentioned. The Editor Mentor should delete comments like this.

Example 5: *In three years as a Cappie critic, I have never seen such an embarrassingly weak scene as the end to act one, in which the acting was incredibly pathetic.*

This is clearly a flagrant violation of the rules on criticism. When you get something like this, don't edit it. Instead, alert the program director, who can forward the review to the critic's theater director, who can speak to the Critic about this.

The real bottom line, as you're editing reviews, is: Suppose these reviews were about students you know, in your school. Are they fair and accurate? Are they constructive? Will reading them be a useful learning experience for the cast and crew?

Submitting Edited Reviews

Being an Editor Mentor takes time. It can require two or three hours to read all reviews, select the ones for the papers, edit those, and lightly edit all the others. The length of time will vary, from show to show, depending on the number of reviews and on the quality of the show itself. It can take more time when the reviews contain more criticisms.

If a large number of Critics attended a Cappies Show, and there are a lot of reviews to edit, the two mentors may wish to share this task. One could edit the reviews for publication, and the other could scan all the reviews to make sure they meet the rules. If the Program Director has added a third Mentor, that person can help spread out the editing load.

Please realize that one hurtful review, if it slips through, can overshadow all the good work done by other Critics (and by mentors).

When you've done all your editing, you'll forward the reviews to the program director. Normally, the Editor Mentor's deadline for submitting reviews is 8 PM Sunday, except for Sunday afternoon shows, in which case the Editor Mentor's deadline is 12 midnight on Sunday evening. Please don't miss that deadline. If you do, you're adding greatly to the work of your local program officials -- and creating the risk that reviews won't be sent to major newspapers on time, as promised.

After you have submitted the reviews, a Cappies official in your local program will take one last look at them. If you don't complete your work, editing carefully all selected reviews and making sure all reviews comply with the rules on criticism -- you'll be creating extra work to program officials. That work could extend late into Sunday night or the early hours of Monday morning, as they do what the mentors should have done. They're volunteers too, so please help them out by taking care with your editing work.

Your selections can be altered only if a program official determines that a review selected for a major daily paper would be rejected by the editor there. This is done very seldom.

Being a Cappies Mentor involves several hours of volunteer work, on the show date and again on Sunday. Thank you for that. Those hours are bringing a lot of learning, and excitement, to a lot of students.

Scanning for Internet Copying

In recent years, Cappies officials have uncovered two examples of Critics copying sections of reviews posted on the Internet. We don't think this happens much, but it shouldn't happen at all. There's a way to spot-check for Internet copying, and it only takes a minute or two per review.

Each Cappies program is authorized to set its own rules for mentors spot-checking for internet copying, alias plagiarism. The Governing Board recommends that before the top-ranked reviews are forwarded to major dailies, the Editor Mentor should scan those reviews (and only those reviews) for Internet copying.

Here's how to do it: Look through the review's description of the story, its history, or a character. Find a brief phrase that's somewhat unusual. Copy it. Click onto www.google.com. In the search box, type the title of the show, with quotation marks around it. Then paste (or type) the phrase you are testing, also with quotation marks around it. Click enter. Look through the first page of links. See if you can find any matches. If you do, click onto that link, and compare what's there with the Critic's review.

For practice, try an actual example of a plagiarism by a Critic that was in fact discovered. Go to Google. Click on "Arms and the Man". Then try any of these phrases:

- "a spirited quirkiness"
- "an air of charm and level-headedness"
- "a jolly, rotund officer"
- "bluster and bark"
- "a smooth, sly manner"

For any review you're spot-checking, do this twice, with two separate phrases.

If both phrases result in no match, then you can reasonably conclude that the review has not been copied from the internet.

If you find a match, look closely at the Critic's review and whatever link you found that matched. If a Critic's review includes more than one phrase identical to phrases in the other linked item, do not select that review for publication -- and notify Cappies officials.

When Critics are aware that Mentors are spot-checking for Internet copying, they are far less likely to plagiarize. This helps teach them an important lesson about standards applied in the real world of professional writing, while maintaining the integrity of Cappies reviews.

LETTER FROM A CRITIC

I'm Will Burress, a Critic from Cincinnati Cappies -- and let me welcome you to the greatest thing to happen to high school theater. As a Mentor, you will have the chance to interact with high school students from all over your region, and discuss theater in depth with these students at least twice over the span of this Cappies season.

I've reviewed 28 high school plays and musicals over two years. I guess you can tell that I like doing this. The knowledge I gained through simply watching these shows is vast. Cappies is a great learning experience, and you have the chance to help teach a new set of students about theater and writing.

In that vein, when you are a Mentor, learn a little about the show before you attend. Even if it's The Sound of Music or Oklahoma!, chances are there's at least one person in the room who is totally clueless as to what the show is about. Any information on plot, time period, or style can help the Critics better understand the show, and in turn, write better reviews.

Get to the show on time (when we do, 45 minutes before curtain), and take attendance. It's really a bad situation when a critic's Advisor gets an e-mail saying that they weren't at a show, but they were. As we all know, nothing is worse than the wrath of a theater teacher.

Suppose it's a 7:30 show. When the clock hits 7:10, it's time to shush us up and get to work. That's when you should alert the Critics if any technical categories are not eligible (if any). There's a form for this -- you should be given it, filled out, by someone at the host school. This will allow the Critic to hone in on what they need to watch and score.

When you enter the theater, make sure there are enough seats in the Cappies section for the Critics. If an audience needs to change seats, please ask an usher.

Let me be completely honest here. During the show, there will probably be some talking. Put a bunch of high school theatre students together, and...it gets chatty. It's not ideal, but it will happen, and you're there to keep it from getting out of hand. Make sure the Critics know that they are audience members too,...not in a soundproof booth. We forget sometimes.

During intermission and after the show, start the discussions promptly. Sometimes shows I saw were over an hour away from home, ...and the last thing I wanted to do was sit and do nothing while we waited for other Critics to get that last plate of carrots and dip (which were usually marvelous). Two minutes after intermission starts is about right -- and again two minutes after it ends. I know, it makes for not much time off, and maybe you need a quick stop before, but that's why Mentors get to sit on the aisle.

Most likely, you will have many different breeds of Critics. There's the enthusiastic Cappie, the Cappies who were coerced to join by the enthusiastic Cappie, and the rare journalism Cappie. Encourage other Critics who aren't as enthusiastic, or who might not know much about theater, to join in the conversation. Ask them what their favorite part was. It's best if a full range of opinions are involved.

Although you have the chance to teach the Critics, make sure you DON'T teach them your opinion. Be completely unbiased. Cappies draws its strength from its "for students by students" quality. If you tell them the lead actor was horrible, most of the Critics will believe you. But let them form their own opinions. Plus, it's not fair for you, as a Mentor, to tell them things that might cause them to score somebody higher or lower than they would otherwise.

Because Critics will ask you lots of questions regarding eligibility, you should know what works and what doesn't (especially during fall season shows). Read the Award Category Guide, and keep it handy, in case questions pop up.

Sometimes, in discussions, Critics can rag on a show a little too much. Maybe it isn't that good a show, or maybe it is, and some Critics are just venting because their school did the exact same show a different way the year before. Whichever, it's hard for any of the rest of us to change the tone once people start carping. That's your job.

Some discussions can get a little tense, especially after shows, and even more especially after shows that are a little below par. A lot of us (maybe you too) have driven a long way and want to get home. It's not great when Critics get grouchy, but it's even worse when Mentors are like that. Shush us if we're chit-chatting too much, and maybe we agree with you that Critic so-and-so is being a little disrespectful toward all of us, but please try to keep things upbeat, no matter what happens. You need to keep order, but a Cappies Room shouldn't feel like detention. We're counting on the Mentors to make the discussions a fun learning experience for everyone.

After the show, you'll want to get home (it's late, don't we all?), but if we have to wait for rides, we feel a lot better having an adult we know (you) waiting with us. It's really creepy to have to wait outside an unfamiliar school waiting for your ride. Most Critics will be able to drive, but some will not. Keep an eye out for lingering Critics.

When you pick the reviews for the show, you'll sometimes have to read through a lot of them. We know how hard it must be to choose, but please remember that we've put a lot of time and sweat into writing these, so please give each of them a look. Don't be like that dreaded college admissions officer who gives each application essay a 20-second read before sending out one of those thin envelopes.

For the ones you pick, make certain the reviews match up with the quality of the show. No one (including the performing school) wants to read a review that is inaccurate. You saw the show, and you heard the discussions. You know what most Critics thought about the production -- its tech, its leads, its music, and so on. The reviews you select for the papers should be ones that respect our point of view.

When we're writing reviews, we don't want to think that the best way (or even maybe the only way) to get published is to write a rave review, when we know that's a lie. Not every review sent to the papers has to be shining, especially when a show was not. Then again, make sure the Critics whose reviews you pick give praise where praise is due -- and nearly all of us try to do that, in what we write.

You have the chance to teach the Critics a little bit of theater. The questions you ask and knowledge you impart will stick with the Critics for a long time. Make sure they have a great experience, like I did. Good luck!