

Reviews A real service we can offer our readers is help in determining how to spend their time and money. Whether we provide traditional entertainment reviews – movies, TV, music, books – or explore a wider variety of areas, such as Web sites, plays, restaurants, coffee shops, fashion... well, the list is only limited by your readers' interests.

Below is a "general assignment" given to everyone on the newspaper staff this semester. General assignments are used to insure that everyone on the staff is getting an opportunity to report and write, no matter what specific assignments they might be given for that issue. Some of the resultant reviews end up being published in the newspaper or yearbook (reviews in a yearbook?). Others can be shared through your Web site. All eventually are graded and are part of the publications class course grade.

Your Review

First full, typed draft is due _____

The Review Cycle

You will write one 150-300 word review from the following five categories, eventually cycling through all five categories this semester (one per issue). The five categories include: movies, TV, music, Web sites, and books. Your first category is _____

Rules of Thumb

1. Good reviews are based on solid research. Within the first couple paragraphs, readers should realize that you know what you are talking about.
2. Good reviews entertain readers while they are informing them. Our review categories all involve popular culture and what people do for fun. Our writing needs to be fun, as well.
3. Good reviews go beyond what the casual consumer already knows. Surprise readers. Provide a new way to look at the same old show, to listen to the same band, etc.
4. Good reviews have a clear "voice" – one that intrigues, entertains, informs. Take a stance. Back it up. Challenge people. Have fun.

Check out the sample review

We learn right away the reviewer's basic position on this new film (using the star rating system), and the bulk of the review consists of examples that support the reviewer's positive reactions. The reviewer provides all the "ethos" readers need by her obvious knowledge of other films in this genre and her familiarity with other work of the director and the stars. Note the minimal summarizing of the plot and the emphasis on the performances, particularly of Ellen Page. This review is 425 words – longer than yours will be, though you may be asked to expand your review, based on editor decisions.

USA Today

Unconventional 'Juno' strikes right comedic balance

by Claudia Puig

Juno (* * * * out of four), a likably cynical comedy, is actually about hope.

That sense of hope plays out on several levels. The most obvious is the story line in which a bright teenage girl turns an unwanted pregnancy into a boon for adoptive parents yearning for a child.

The film itself signals hope for moviegoers tired of formulaic stories with cliché-soaked dialogue. There is none of that in the splendidly written Juno. It's for those looking not merely to be distracted, but also to admire the entertainment they lose themselves in.

It's a rare pleasure to sit through a movie with lines that are so consistently witty as well as recognizably natural. "I'm wearing a fat suit I can't take off," says Juno of her pregnant state. "I'm a planet."

In addition to the excellent cast, anchored by a wonderful Ellen Page in the title role, kudos go to Hollywood's "it" screenwriter Diablo Cody. At the helm is director Jason Reitman, who has a gift for picking good scripts and drawing the best performances from ensemble casts, as well as an ability to showcase snappy, clever dialogue that never feels precious or forced. He was similarly deft with his last film, "Thank You for Smoking."

Page as the 16-year-old Juno continues to impress with her whip-smart, sprightly quality. Though she gave a powerful performance in last year's "Hard Candy," the rather stomach-turning premise hampered its widespread appeal.

In Juno, Page plays a sharp-tongued teen whose single sexual encounter with her geeky but sweet friend (Michael Cera) results in pregnancy.

In the annals of teen comedies, hers is a singular character. She has depth and wisdom in as much abundance as snarky attitude. And in a welcome deviation from stereotype, her parents (J. K. Simmons and Allison Janney) do their best to be supportive — even though they are deeply disappointed. Juno decides to have the baby and give it up for adoption. She is adamant about selecting the prospective parents.

She cheerfully opts for an eager, childless professional couple (Jennifer Garner and Jason Bateman).

But things don't always go as a 16-year-old might want them to, and Juno must cope with the disappointment that comes of inexplicable adult actions. How this plays out is what makes Juno unpredictable.

The engaging story, coupled with the character's likable quirkiness, makes for a film bristling with vitality and heart, without resorting to glibness or sentimentality. With its original performances that can't be reduced to simplistic labels, Juno is charming, honest and terrifically acted.

(Rating: PG-13 for mature thematic material, sexual content and imagery. Running time: 1 hour, 32 minutes. Opens today in New York and Los Angeles.)

Best Web site ever for reading reviews: www.metacritic.com

This site gathers dozens of reviews of movies, TV, DVDs, games, etc., written by the top professional reviewers in the nation, all in one place. It even gives them a composite score out of 100. Hours of fun on a snowy afternoon, but also a great source for models of great review writing. Check it out!

Jack Kennedy, Rock Canyon HS – as always, feel free to adapt this lesson or simply throw it on a copier for an instant handout