

## So You Want to Write an Album Review for *Discorder*

### Pointers for Writing an Exceptional Album Review:

- **Research** the artist. Try to get a sense of their music or their genre so that you can place the album you are reviewing in a larger context.
- Make **clarity** a priority. Ask yourself “does this make sense to someone who knows nothing about this artist/album?”
- Have a larger concept behind your writing like an **argument or thesis**. Use specific information to back up your criticism. Doing this effectively will add a broader significance to your album review.
- If you’re not sure how you want your album review to shape up, **read other reviews to see how it’s done**. (You can look at past *Discorder* reviews and those from other music publications).
- **Get someone to look over your review** before your editor does. This will allow you to correct obvious mistakes that you’ve lost sight of during your writing process.
- Use a **critical voice**, and remember your position as a critic. Taking a poetic approach in your prose, or other alternative approaches, is great, so long as this prose can’t be confused with the rhetoric of PR prose.

### Under Review Basics:

- Album reviews should contain the Band Name, Album Name, Label (in brackets), and release date at the top (Day/Month/Year)  
Broken Social Scene  
*You Forget It In People*  
(Arts & Crafts)  
15/10/2002
- Album reviews are **always** written in present tense.  
Death metal soothes the soul. [Correct]  
Death metal soothed the soul. [Incorrect]
- Put lyrics in in quotation marks, capitalizing the first word of each line and separating them with slashes separated by a space on each side. For example: "I come with that ol' loco / Style from my vocal / Couldn't peep it with a pair of bifocals"
- In the review text, song titles should go in quotation marks and album names should be italicized. Eg: The guitar solo is reminiscent of “Trapped Under Ice,” a song from Metallica’s album *Ride the Lightning*.
- If you're talking about a band with the word *and* in their name replace the *and* with an ampersand (&). This prevents confusion when a sentence could easily be about two bands



as it is about one.

- If a band’s name is stylized lowercase, do not capitalize their name at the beginning of a sentence.

Grammar and Conventions:

- Avoid using American spelling. Examples would be: color and honor should be colour and honour; center and somber should be centre and sombre.
- When writing dates, write the month name in full and write the day numerically (no sts, ths or nds needed) always. You can drop the day of the week and the year unless they are necessary for clarity:
  - The concert is happening on November 24. [Correct]
  - The concert is happening on Friday, Nov. 24th, 2010. [Incorrect]
- Do not include any additional spacing between paragraphs and avoid using indents. Indesign does this all for us. Also, DO NOT double space after a period. One will do just fine.
- Commas and periods ALWAYS go inside quotation marks, REGARDLESS. I.E. He told me he “doesn’t know what I’m doing.”
- Words that end with an S do not require the possessive ‘s, simply the apostrophe ’. i.e. “This is Frog Eyes’ third album,” rather than “This is Frog Eyes’s third album.”
- HOW TO MAKE A PROPER EM-DASH — In Word on a PC, type the word preceding the dash, type --, then start typing the next word without a space, then after this second word press SPACE and BOOM — the perfect dash. Alternately, on a PC if you're not using word you can type one by holding down the RIGHT-ALT and hitting 0151 in sequence on the number pad. On a Mac, press SHIFT OPTION and - and you will make an em-dash. Simple.
  - Speaking of em-dashes, there should be spaces on both sides of them — like this.
  - Note: em-dashes do not go in place of regular dashes, as in power-pop, indie-rock, etc.

	RIGHT	WRONG
nonetheless		none-the-less, none the less
rock 'n' roll		rock 'n roll, rock n roll, rock-n-roll [see previous exception]
'90s		90s, nineties, 90's, Nineties
hip-hop		hip hop, hiphop, hippity hoppity [OK if discussing how a rabbit or frog gets around]



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EP, LP	ep, e.p., lp, l.p.
p.m., a.m.	PM, P.M.
a.k.a.	AKA, aka
DIY	d.i.y., d-i-y, D.I.Y.
43-year-old	43 year old, 43-year old, 43 year-old, forty-three-year-old
prog rock	Prog rock, progrock, prog-rock
lo-fi, hi-fi, low fidelity, high fidelity, <i>High Fidelity</i> [movie or novel]	lofi, low fi, hifi, high-fi, high fi
frontman, frontwoman, front person	front-man, front man, front-woman, front woman, front-person
R&B	rhythm and blues, R & B, r 'n' b
okay	ok, O.K., OK, oh kay
Seven-inch	7", seven inch, 7-inch, 7 inch
Singer-Songwriter	Singer songwriter

### **Bonus Material: Bits & Pieces from William Zinsser's *On Writing Well***

Adverbs: "Most adverbs are unnecessary. You will clutter your sentence and annoy the reader if you chose a verb that has a precise meaning and then add an adverb that carries the same meaning. Don't tell us that the radio blared loudly — "blare" connotes loudness."

Adjectives: "Most adjectives are also unnecessary. Like adverbs, they are sprinkled into sentences by writers who don't stop to think that the concept is already in the noun...Redundant adjectives are only part of the problem. Most writers sow adjectives almost unconsciously into the soul of their prose to make it more lush and pretty...the rule is simple: Make your adjectives do work that needs to be done."

Little Qualifiers: "Prune out the small words that qualify how you feel and how you think and what you saw: "a bit," "a little," "sort of," "pretty much," "in a sense," and dozens more. They dilute your style and persuasiveness...Don't say you were a bit confused and sort of tired and a little depressed and somewhat annoyed. Be confused. Be tired. Be depressed...Don't tell us that you were *quite* fortunate. How fortunate is that?"

The Period: “There’s not much to be said about the period except that most writers don’t reach it soon enough.”

The Exclamation Point: “Don’t use it unless you must achieve a certain effect...Instead construct your sentence so that the order of the words will put the emphasis where you want it.”

The Semicolon: “There is a nineteenth-century mustiness that hangs over the semicolon...the semicolon brings the reader, if not to a halt, at least to a considerable pause. So use it with discretion, remembering that it will slow to a Victorian pace the late twentieth-century momentum you are striving for.”

The Dash: “The dash is used in two different ways. One is the amplify or justify in the second part of the sentence a thought you have stated in the first part...By its very shape the dash pushes the sentence ahead and explains why they decided to keep going. The other [sets] apart a parenthetical thought within a longer sentence...An explanatory detail that might otherwise have required a separate sentence is dispatched along the way.

The Colon: “[The colon] serves well its pure role of bringing your sentence to a brief halt before you plunge into, say, an itemized list.

Mood Changers: “Learn to alert the reader as early as possible in a sentence to any change in mood from the previous sentence. At least a dozen words will do the job for you: “but,” “yet,” “however,” “nevertheless.” I can’t overstate how much easier it is for readers to process a sentence if you start with “but” when you’re shifting direction...”

Contractions: “Your style will obviously be warmer and truer to your personality if you use contractions like “I’ll” and “won’t” when they fit comfortably into what you’re writing.

Overstatement: “It’s like being trapped with a man who can’t stop reciting limericks. Don’t overstate. You didn’t really consider jumping out the window. Life has more than enough truly horrible funny situations. Let the humour sneak up so that we hardly hear it coming.”

Credibility: “Don’t inflate an incident to make it more flamboyant or bizarre than it actually was. If the reader catches you in just one bogus statement that you are trying to pass off as true, everything you write thereafter will be suspect. It’s too great a risk, and not worth taking.

Concept Nouns: Nouns that express a concept are commonly used in bad writing instead of verbs that tell what somebody did. Here are three typical dead sentences:

“The common reaction is incredulous laughter.”

“Bemused cynicism isn’t the only response to the old system.”

“The current campus hostility is a symptom of the change.”

What is so eerie about these sentences is that they have no people in them., The reader can’t visualize anybody performing some activity; all the meaning lies in impersonal nouns that embody a vague concept... Turn these sentences around. Get people doing things.

“Most people just laugh with disbelief.”

“Some people respond to the old system by turning cynical; others say...”

“It’s easy to notice the change—you can see how angry all the students are.””

Creeping Nounism: This is a new American disease that strings two or three nouns together where one noun — or better yet, on verb — will do. Nobody goes broke now; we have money problem areas. It no longer rains; we have precipitation activity or a thunderstorm probability situation. Please, let it rain

Sexism: *Note: Obviously language continues to evolve, and context is everything. Please use judgement.* “...the hundreds of words that carry an invidious meaning or some overtone of judgement. They are words that patronize (“gal”), or that imply second-class status (“poetess”) or a second-class role (“housewife”) or a certain kind of empty-headedness (“the girls”), or that demean the ability of a woman to do a man’s job (“lady lawyer”), or that are deliberately prurient (“divorcee,” “coed,” “blonde”) and are seldom applied to men. Men get mugged; a woman who gets mugged is a shapely stewardess or a pert brunette.

Just as damaging — and more subtle — are the countless usages that treat women as possessions of the family male, not as people with their own identity: “Early settlers pushed west with their wives and children.” Turn those settlers into pioneer families... Don’t ever use constructions which suggest that only men can be settlers or farmers or cops or firefighters. Good writers and editors are now pushing these stereotypes out of the language.”

Paragraphs: “Keep your paragraphs short... Short paragraphs put air around what you write and make it look inviting, whereas one long chunk of type can discourage the reader from even starting to read.