

# How to Write a Critique

*A critique is a short paper, usually about one book or article. First, it gives a short summary of what the author has said. Second, it looks at the work critically. You will need to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the piece of research or writing. It is important to remember that criticism can be positive as well as negative.*

## Why write a critique?

A critique is an exercise in judging the value of a piece of writing or research. It is also a way of improving your own skills by looking at the way other writers and researchers work. It is a valuable exercise in the careful reading of text that will increase your understanding of a particular subject.

## Getting Ready to Write a Critique

- 1 Read the whole book or article thoroughly – highlight text that you think important or make notes as you go along.
- 2 Think carefully about what you have read and ask yourself questions about the material. You should try and establish:
  - The main points that the author is trying to make
  - How does the author back those points up? In other words: what evidence is provided.
- 3 Re-read the material to make sure that you have understood the author's ideas.
- 4 Try to summarise what you have read. You may wish to do this by way of bullet-pointed notes, a spider diagram or mind-map. Use whichever technique suits you.
- 5 Think about different points of view:
  - How do the author's ideas compare to other writers on the subject?
  - Do you agree or disagree with the author? You should say why. This might mean backing up your own views with academic opinion, so you will need to read around the subject area.

The following pages provide **steps** to writing a critique and a **structure** to use as a guide.

## Steps to Writing a Critique

It is important that your critique has a definite structure and is easy to follow. You will need to think logically about how you sequence your work. Below is a pattern that you might like to use.

### 1 Analyse the text

This should include some or all of the following:

- set out the main purpose of the author's book or article.
- identify the main point that the author is making.
- discuss the arguments that are used to support the main point and the evidence that supports them.
- explain the conclusions reached by the author and how they have been reached.

### 2 Evaluate the text

You will need to comment not only on the content of the piece but also on the way in which it has been written. Consider the following:

- is the argument logical?
- is the text well organised, clear and easy to read?
- have important terms been clearly defined?
- are the facts accurate?
- do the arguments support the main point?
- is there sufficient evidence for the arguments?
- does the text present and consider opposing points of view?
- does the material help you understand the subject?
- what questions/observations does this article suggest?
- what does this text make you think about ?

### 3 Write in standard essay form

A critique should be written in an essay format. It will need an introduction, a main body of text and a conclusion. You will need to prepare a rough draft of your essay.

The following ideas may help you:

- a) Prepare an outline. State what the main points of your work will be and the evidence that you will use to back them up.
- b) Set out in your introduction HOW you will approach your task.
- c) Consider ending your introduction with a THESIS STATEMENT. This is a statement of your position on the issue you have chosen. It may be a sentence or two, and should announce what you want to argue.
- d) This is a brief summary of what your work will demonstrate (i.e. your conclusion).
- e) The main body of your essay should deal with the detailed analysis of the subject matter.

- f) Conclude by re-emphasizing your argument or point of view and stating why you have reached a particular conclusion. Avoid sweeping generalisations that you cannot support with evidence. Do not at this stage introduce any new material.
- g) Don't forget: proof read, revise, and edit your first draft.

## How to Structure a Critique

### Introduction

- Define the subject of your critique and your point of view
  - Background to Research
    - Article/Author information
    - Summarise the author's main points and purpose
- (1 or 2 paragraphs)**

### Main body

- Begin with a brief summary describing the project. You might include:
    - The aim of the research
    - What was done (method)
    - To whom was it done (subjects)
    - Why was it done? What were the expected results (Hypothesis)
    - What was found (actual results)
    - What did the author say the results mean? (His/her conclusions)
- (1 paragraph)**
- Discuss the strengths of the article
  - Discuss the weaknesses of the article
- Things to look at to help you decide these include:**
- How appropriate was the title, the abstract and the introduction
  - Strength of the methodology (refer back to other literature for ideas on what is good/bad methodology in research)
  - Is the argument logical and is there sufficient evidence to support it?
  - Does the research advance the field or replicate work already done?
  - If it advances what new knowledge does it bring?
  - Clarity of data presentation (readability of graphs and tables)
  - Appropriate statistics, were the right analyses done?
  - Are the appropriate conclusions drawn? (some researchers are conservative and do not draw conclusions that are evident from their data; others are liberal and draw conclusions not supported by their data).
  - Does the article present and refute opposing points of view?
- (2-5 paragraphs depending on the article and the word count)**

## **Conclusion**

- Re-emphasise your argument/point of view
- Make final suggestions and/or positive and negative criticisms on the book or article you critiqued
- What questions/observations does the article suggest?  
**(the final paragraph)**

## **References and further reading:**

Adapted from:

Brock University *Tips for student success: how to write a critique*. Available at:  
<http://brocku.ca/sdc/learning/studywrite/critique.html> (no date) (Accessed: 03 February 2004).

Kenyon College *Writing an article critique*. Available at:  
<http://psychology.kenyon.edu/labs/405/critique.htm> (no date) (Accessed on: 03 February 2004).