

Critical Review

What is a Critical Review?

A critical review is your opportunity to analyze the content and presentation of a book or an article objectively. You determine the strengths and weaknesses of the text and provide an evaluation of the author's discussion of the subject matter. A critical review is an assessment of the author's thesis and evidence to support it. However, it is not your platform to write a summary or present your opinions about the subject matter.

To write an effective critical review, you'll need to do more than understand the key ideas of the text. Remember, your end goal is to analyze and evaluate the text's arguments.

Four Steps to Write a Critical Review

As with most assignments, there can be many steps that you need to address before you can start the formal writing process. A critical review involves reading, analyzing, and writing. Follow these four steps to get started:

Read

1. Skim over the text

Examine the organization of the text. How is it divided and what sections are there? Can you identify the thesis and the evidence that supports it?

Answering these questions will help you understand how the supporting points relate to the thesis or argument.

Analyze

2. Read critically and take notes

Identify the thesis. As you read the text, summarize the key ideas of each section or chapter and question how they connect back to the thesis.

Try to answer these nine questions to start your critical review. If you develop more questions as you read, note them down and see if you can answer them.

Nine Questions to Start Your Critical Review

1. What is the thesis of the work? Was it clear? Why or why not?
2. Does the author make an argument? Is it valid? Why or why not?
3. What kinds of evidence does the author use to back up his or her argument? Is the evidence used effectively? Why or why not?
4. If appropriate, does the author use both primary and secondary sources? Are these sources used effectively? Why or why not?
5. What is the overall organization of the piece? Is the structure effective? Why or why not?
6. Does the article or book contribute to the scholarly discussion or to topics in your course?

7. Does the author set out plans for future discussion? What are these plans?
8. Does the author have a bias? Is it problematic or explicable? Why or why not?
9. What are the credentials of the author?

Support your responses to each of your questions by addressing the reasons behind your observations.

Write

Now you can begin writing your critical review. Your goal is to argue if the text was effective in its intentions. Justify your arguments with evidence from the text.

3. Create a thesis based on your evaluation of the text

Was the text effective in its intentions? Comment on both the strengths and weaknesses of the text.

4. Select a structure to organize your work

Make sure that your critical review meets your professor's expectations. Check your assignment instructions to determine if what you've included is acceptable.

Here is a general format that can be used for a critical review:

Introduction

Introduce the text you reviewed and comment briefly upon its subject matter. Refer to the text's thesis. Establish your thesis.

Summary

This section is often one third of the total length of the critical review. Include only the need-to-know information about the text: its thesis, main claims, and structure.

Analysis

Assess the strengths and weaknesses of the text. You may want to comment upon its sources and its organization. Regardless of what you write, remember that you are analyzing the text's claims and NOT its subject matter. You may not agree with the thesis, but you need to comment upon how well the author argued the thesis and supported it with logic and argumentation. Support your arguments with evidence from the text.

Conclusion

Sum up the most important points and restate your evaluation of the text.

More resources for critical reviews

Get feedback on your writing and discuss your thought process. Book an appointment with an Instructor: <http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/asc/appointments-undergraduate>.

Looking for more learning strategies? Visit us at: <http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/asc/>.