

CRITICAL ANALYSIS ESSAYS

Developed by the Center for Global Communication and Design
Revised 06/26/2018

When college professors ask you to write a critical analysis of a text (or multiple texts), they usually expect you to analyze and evaluate, not just summarize. A summary merely reports what the text said; that is, it answers only the question, "What did the author say?" A critique, on the other hand, analyzes, interprets, and evaluates the text, answering the questions how? why? and how well? A critique does not necessarily have to criticize the piece in a negative sense. Your reaction to the text may be largely positive, negative, or a combination of the two. It is important to explain why you respond to the text in a certain way.

Step 1. Analyze the text

As you read the book or article you plan to critique, the following questions will help you analyze the text:

- What is the author's main point?
- What is the author's purpose?
- Who is the author's intended audience?
- What arguments does the author use to support the main point?
- What evidence does the author present to support the arguments? What are the author's underlying assumptions or biases?

You may find it useful to make notes about the text based on these questions as you read. See the Note-Taking handout for a helpful strategy to help you think about these questions and more as you read.

Step 2. Evaluate the text

After you have read the text, you can begin to evaluate the author's ideas. The following questions provide some ideas to help you evaluate the text:

- Is the argument logical?
- Is the text well-organized, clear, and easy to read?
- Are the author's facts accurate?
- Have important terms been clearly defined?
- Is there sufficient evidence for the arguments?
- Do the arguments support the main point?
- Is the text appropriate for the intended audience?
- Does the text present and refute opposing points of view?
- Does the text help you understand the subject?
- Are there any words or sentences that evoke a strong response from you? What are those words or sentences? What is your reaction? What is the origin of your reaction to this topic? When or where did you first learn about it? Can you think of people, articles, or discussions that have influenced your views? How might these be compared or contrasted to this text?
- What questions or observations does this article suggest? That is, what does the article make you think about?

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Step 3. Plan and write your essay

Write your analysis in standard essay form. It is generally best not to follow the author's organization when organizing your analysis, since this approach lends itself to summary rather than analysis. Begin with an introduction that defines the subject of your critical/analytical point of view. Defend your point of view by raising specific issues or aspects of the argument. Conclude your critique by summarizing your argument and re-emphasizing your opinion.

- You will first need to identify and explain the author's ideas. Include specific passages that support your description of the author's point of view.
- Offer your own opinion. Explain what you think about the argument. Describe several points with which you agree or disagree.
- For each of the points you mention, include specific passages from the text (you may summarize, quote, or paraphrase) that provide evidence for your point of view.
- Explain how the passages support your opinion.

Resources

Rosen, Leonard J. and Laurence Behrens, eds. *The Allyn & Bacon Handbook*. 1994.