

WRITING A CRITICAL REVIEW

What is a critical review?

A critical review is the summarization and evaluation of the ideas and information in an article. It expresses the writer's (your) point of view in the light of what you already know on the subject and what is acquired from related texts. Reviewing critically means thinking carefully and clearly and taking into consideration both the strengths and weaknesses in the material under review.

Two skills to employ when asked to write a review:

Seeking information: Scanning the literature efficiently to become well-informed on the subject.

Reviewing effectively: Questioning the information in the text and presenting an evaluation, or judgement, of it.

Efficient reviewing, or evaluating, requires an awareness of the gist (central idea), the purpose and the intended audience of the text. The text is looked at from a variety of perspectives (from related sources) and evaluated in relation to the theories, approaches and frameworks of the expected task. This evaluation involves analyzing the content and concepts of the text, separating them into their main components, and then understanding how these interrelate, connect and influence each other.

Some questions to ask when starting to write a critical review:

- What is the main area under review discussion?
- Where does the writer's data and evidence come from?
- What are the main issues raised by the writer?
- What are the major interpretations made by the author in terms of the issues raised?
- Is the text balanced? fair? biased?
- How well does all this relate to other literature on the topic? your own experience?
- How can you summarize all of the above points?

THE CONTENT OF A CRITICAL REVIEW

A critical review is generally one to four pages in length and has a structure similar to the one given here.

INTRODUCTION

Starts with opening sentences that state the writer, the title and give a brief explanation of the topic of the text. The aim of the text and a summary of the main findings or key argument are presented. At the end of the introduction, a brief statement of the evaluation of the text is given.

SUMMARY

Gives a summary of the main points of the article and a few examples. A brief explanation of the writer's purpose and the organization of the text can also be added. This section of the critical review should be no longer than one third of the whole.

MAIN BODY (CRITIQUE)

Discusses and evaluates the strengths, weaknesses and important features of the text. The discussion should be based on specific criteria and include other sources to support it (with references).

CONCLUSION

Concludes the review with a restatement of the overall opinion of the text. It can also include recommendations and some further explanation of the judgement to show that it is fair and reasonable.

REFERENCES

A list of references should be included at the end if other sources have been used.