

## Critical reviews

During your studies, you may be asked to write a critical review of a book, a book chapter or a journal article. This form of assessment requires you to critically examine a piece of writing in the light of what you know about that field of research. Your critical review is written for a reader (your lecturer or tutor) who is knowledgeable in the discipline and is interested not just in the coverage and content of the writing being reviewed, but also in your critical assessment of the ideas and argument that are being presented by the author.

### Key steps in beginning your review

To begin the task, you need to read and critically analyse the article. When reading the text, have some questions in mind to guide your analysis and help you to focus on areas to critique. The following questions are some ideas on how to engage with the text and help you form your critical analysis:

- Objectives: what does the article set out to do?
- Theory: is there an explicit theoretical framework? If not, are there important theoretical assumptions?
- Concepts: what are the central concepts? Are they clearly defined?
- Argument: what is the central argument? Are there specific hypotheses?
- Method: what methods are employed to test these?
- Evidence: is evidence provided? How adequate is it?
- Values: are value positions clear or are they implicit?
- Literature: how does the work fit into the wider literature?
- Contribution: how well does the work advance our knowledge of the subject?
- Style: how clear is the author's language/style/expression?
- Conclusion: a brief overall assessment.

When critically analysing the text, consider how it relates to your course materials, to the other articles or books that you have been reading and the lecture material. This can help you find supporting evidence or alternative theoretical models or interpretations of data.

### Structuring the review

The following is a suggested structure for your review.

#### Introduction

Initially, identify the text (author, title, date of publication and other details that seem important), indicate the main points you will be discussing and state your overall message regarding the text.

#### Body

Briefly summarise the range, contents, and argument of the text. Occasionally you may summarise the entire text, but in a short review (1000-1500 words) you usually pick up the main themes only. This section should not normally take up more than a third of the total review.

Critically discuss 2-3 key issues raised in the text. This section is the core of your review. Make clear the author's own argument before you criticise and evaluate it. Support your criticisms with evidence from the text or from other writings. You may also want to indicate gaps in the author's treatment of a topic, but it is seldom useful to criticise a writer for not doing something they never intended to do.

#### Conclusion

Evaluate the overall contribution that the text has made to your understanding of the topic (and maybe its importance to the development of knowledge in this particular area or discipline, setting it in the context of other writings in the field).

### Compare and contrast critical review

Sometimes you will be asked to compare and contrast two or more journal articles in a critical review. The process is the same as above, however you will need to think about the following questions:

- What do the authors agree and disagree about?
- Which author's argument do you agree with the most, and why?

Keep these questions in mind as you read your journal articles and start to compare and contrast them. They will also help guide you in structuring your critical/analytical response. Your structure might look like this:

#### Introduction

Initially, identify both the texts (author, title, date of publication and other details that seem important), indicate your answer to the questions posed above (or any specific question you have been given by your lecturer) and the main points you will be discussing about the texts.

#### Body




Briefly summarise the range, contents, and arguments of both the texts picking up the main themes only. This section should not normally take up more than a third of the total review.

Critically discuss 2-3 key issues raised in the texts. This section is the core of your review. As you are comparing and contrasting, at this point you need to show how the author's agree and/or disagree around your chosen issues. Use evidence from the texts to illustrate and support your views.

Conclusion

Evaluate the overall contribution that the texts have made to your understanding of the topic and how they agree or disagree with each other.

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