

What is a Critical Review?

The purpose of the critical review is to review or critically evaluate an article or book.

What is meant by 'critical'?

To be critical means that you are required to:

- ask questions about the ideas and information presented in the text and;
- to comment thoughtfully by engaging in a process of evaluating or;
- making judgements about the validity or relevance of the text to your research or field of study.

Part of the process of being critical is to use the information gathered from questioning to understand the topic from different perspectives and in relation to relevant theoretical frameworks in the field. Furthermore, asking the right questions will help you to make links with previous information, develop a position and arguments to support it.

What is meant by evaluation?

Evaluation is the process that encourages you to show an understanding of the text content by analysing the purpose and the structure of the text, assessing and making judgements about its appropriateness according to various academic criteria.

What is meant by analysis?

To approach a topic analytically is to examine carefully the content, issues and structure, by separating them into component parts and explaining how they interrelate.

The ability to summarise is another skill that is essential to writing a critical review. To summarise means to express the main points of an idea or topic in fewer words and without including examples or details.

Criteria For Evaluating Academic Texts

Critical evaluation necessitates understanding and analysing the text and then evaluating according to various criteria. The following is a list of criteria that can be referred to when reviewing academic texts and included in your critical commentary.

- Writing and structure of the article or book. (e.g the style and expression)
- Argumentation and use of evidence
- Methodology
- Relevance
- Significance and contribution to its field

There will also be other criteria for evaluating texts which are specific to individual disciplines and will vary from one discipline to another.

Questions To Consider When Evaluating Research

- Questions that help to identify the type of study e.g. theoretical article, report on an experiment or review of research.
- Establish problem or the aim and discuss the extent the aim has been achieved.
- How logical is the argument supporting the hypothesis? How is the argument supported? Is it supported well?
- How relevant is the evidence? What type of evidence is used?
- Is the evidence valid? Is the evidence accurate and relevant?
- Does the research seem objective? Consider the methodology.
- What conclusions are drawn by the experimenter on the basis of the finding? Do you consider that these are justified by the results or has the experimenter made unjustifiable conclusions?

Critical Review Structure

The Critical Review has a specific structure:

Introduction

- The title of the article or book.
- The author
- An overview of the article or book stating its aim and identifying the aim argument
- Your response to the article (positive, negative, mixed (For an article the introduction should be about one paragraph; for a book review the introduction should be about two - three paragraphs))

Summary

- The main points and arguments presented in the article should be summarised (this section should be no longer than one quarter to one third of the review).

Comment critically on the text including:

- discussion of the points raised,
- questioning the arguments,
- expressing agreement / disagreement,
- considering agreement / disagreement.
- positive and / or negative judgements on the author's ideas, methods, argument, expression, organisation etc.
- suggestions for how the article could be improved can be explained here also.

Conclusion and Discussion

- What conclusions are drawn by the experimenter on the basis of the findings?
- Do you consider that these are justified by the results or has the experimenter drawn unjustifiable conclusions?

Source: University of New South Wales, The Learning Center