



Writing a Critique

“A critique is not a listing of complaints or faults, but a careful analysis of an argument to determine what is said, how well the points are made, what assumptions underlie the argument, what issues are overlooked and what implications can be drawn from such observation” (Behrens and Rosen 37-38).

A critique, therefore, is a reader’s personal reaction (positive or negative) or an evaluation of what an author has to say. The writer of a critique has a responsibility to explain how they reached their critical conclusions about the piece. Thus, statements such as “This book is fascinating” do not communicate much to the reader of a critique without an explanation of *what* is fascinating and *why*. A critique should differ substantially from a summary.

Reading for a Critique

1. What is the nature of the piece? Who wrote it? Why was the piece written? Who was the intended audience? Was it intended to inform, persuade, argue, or entertain?
2. What is the significance of the piece? What relation does it bear to other material on the same subject or to other material by the same author?
3. What are the objectives of the piece? What kind of material is presented to achieve those objectives? Are the objectives achieved by the author?
4. What is the design, plan, or method of the piece? Is it well conceived?
5. What is the particular appeal (or lack of appeal) of the piece? What are its most striking qualities? What are its most striking deficiencies?
6. What assumptions underlie the piece? Are they explained or implied? Are any of the assumptions offensive? What biases pervade the piece? Are the assumptions and biases obvious, or do they lurk behind a stance of neutrality and objectivity?
7. Do the assumptions and biases affect the validity of the piece? How do the assumptions of the author compare with my assumptions? Are there flaws in the author’s logic? What evidence or idea has the author failed to consider? Do I support the author’s position?

Writing the Critique

1. Introduce the subject of the critique and identify the author. Give some preliminary information indicating the main point to be discussed. Review any background facts or issues that must be understood before the point of the article being critiqued can be appreciated. Possibly include additional biographical data. Is this one of a series of essays on this theme? This portion should be brief.
2. Briefly summarize the argument of the author. Be as objective as possible so that the reader understands what the article said.
3. Analyze the author's presentation based upon points presented and whether or not the author succeeded.
4. Respond to the presentation or focus upon the assumptions the author makes. State your reaction to, opinion of, and evaluation of these assumptions or assertions. Clearly support any reactions so that they do not appear to be arbitrary judgments. This may be accomplished by adding support from authority, using logic, observation, or personal experience. What emerges from the analysis?
5. Finally, state your conclusions about the overall piece reviewing the strengths/weaknesses.

Reference: Behrens, L. and Rosen, L.J. Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum. 6th ed. Boston: Little, 1994.