

ARTICLE REVIEW/CRITIQUE

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What is an article review or critique?

An article review or critique is a specialized form of writing in which the reviewer **engages** with a scholarly source — usually a journal article or academic book — **by reporting** its main ideas, claims, positions, or findings, and the reasoning which supports these ideas and **by critiquing** its contribution to knowledge in the discipline in which it is published. Thus, scholarly review or critique consists of **summarizing and evaluating** an academic source that is of interest to academic audiences.

How are academic or scholarly critiques different from other reviews I have read?

You may have written book or movie reviews or critiques or read such reviews in newspapers and magazines in the past. The academic or scholarly review is likely different, however, from these types of reviews in terms of its audiences and goals. Most book and movie reviews published in magazines or newspapers assume a general reader or moviegoer. They advise the general audience to either buy a certain book or see a particular movie. They offer an opinion which may be based on expert knowledge or not and which may be supported with reasoned proof or not. These reviews are not generally written to advance understanding in an area of research, but to offer a persuasive opinion.

The scholarly critique or review, on the other hand, usually offers an actively engaged response to a scholarly writer's ideas, which represents more than simply an opinion, and the informed engagement that the reviewer offers is always supported by thoughtful reasoning and proof. Hence, writing an article review is a way for university students to display their knowledge of a scholarly topic; to engage with ideas, theories, research and information in their disciplines or programmes; to rethink and extend ideas in their field of study; and to show how their analytical response to an article is worthy of consideration. Critique signals the reviewer's contribution to existing scholarly knowledge, and critiques are an important way for novice scholars to do authentic academic work.

What are the roles of critiques in an academic context?

Academic readers, like your instructor, don't just want to know if you enjoyed an academic article or disliked it. Rather, academic readers, much like you, highly value reviews of articles and books because they do the important work of pointing out the useful contributions that an article or book makes to an area of research. Reviews can also steer the academic reader away from a source that does a limited job of contributing to the ongoing conversations and store of knowledge of researchers and scholars on valued research topics. When you write a critique or review, when you critique the scholarly work of others, you signal your active participation in these important conversations since the basis of participation in scholarly conversations is the analysis and extension of existing ideas and findings.

Can't I just say I liked the article or not? A word on the meaning of critique in an academic context.

The term "critique" sounds, well, critical, and it sounds negatively critical, too, as if the only response to a writer's work might be negative judgement and condemnation. And since one of the goals of review is to offer an evaluative judgement of the source, sometimes reviewers sound negative, too. However, the term "critique" has a rich meaning in a scholarly setting since it signals a productive range of analytical positions that are possible when engaging with the ideas of others. When we set out to critique or review in an academic context, our goal is to make a contribution to existing knowledge on a topic of scholarly

interest; to make that contribution, we need to do much more than say whether we liked the article or not. We need to make our own thoughtful contributions to the article's analysis, and we need to support or offer proof for our thinking in any of following ways:

- By reporting the type of analysis the writer performs (anecdotal, quantitative, qualitative, case study) and assessing how this type of analysis supports the writer's reasoning and claims
- By examining whether the writer's analysis adequately supports the writer's findings
- By suggesting new information, methods of analysis, or theoretical approaches that might make a contribution to the writer's reasoning
- By comparing the writer's reasoning with another expert's approach to the topic
- By discussing how the same topic is examined in another discipline or from another perspective
- By pointing out conclusions or causes or effects of the writer's reasoning that he or she has not addressed or anticipated
- By examining the article for signs of coherent connections between ideas and, if appropriate, by showing how the lack of connections between ideas leaves the writer's conclusions or findings unsupported
- By suggesting how to shore up the writer's claims with further study, information, data or analysis
- By discussing what remains to be examined on the topic
- By extending the writer's attempts to make coherent connections between ideas with your own reasoning
- By showing your agreement with the writer's lines of reasoning and claims and explaining why they are a good fit with your own knowledge and experience
- By supporting aspects of the writer's claims and analysis and withdrawing your support in relation to other ideas, revealing how, in places, the writer does not offer convincing proof or analysis of claims or findings
- By considering interpretations of data and information the writer has not by imagining alternative claims, positions, and theories in relation to findings
- By bringing new analytical terms to an analysis of the topic that the writer has not considered
- By suggesting new processes of reasoning or methodology by which the writer might arrive at new, productive conclusions or thinking

Clearly, scholarly engagement and evaluation take many forms. And we can see by this list of possibilities that critique involves expressing a position of analytical engagement with another writer's ideas. Your job as a critique writer in an academic context is to show your understanding of an article's ideas and to develop a thoughtful response to those ideas.

Who am I to critique experts?

Sometimes, as a student writer of the article critique, you might ask yourself "Who am I to *critique* this writing, written as it is by a professional in the field. Who wants to know what *I* think about it? What can I say about it; I am just learning about this topic. Moreover, I am learning about this topic by reading just such an article as this one. I am not even sure I completely understand this article." What follow are some steps towards writing the article review, and ways to think of yourself as a writer with something to say to others in your field of interest. (Remember that different disciplines have slightly different approaches to the review task, so always check with your instructor regarding the exact requirements of your assignment.)

GETTING STARTED:

1. **Read the article carefully to discover its main topic. What is the big term or concept**, familiar to those in this field, that organises this material? Words and phrases like "masculinity," "physical work capacity," "metaknowledge," and "acute and chronic exercise" are examples of such terms which act as organizing concepts for the article. Make notes about what you find to be the main topic. There may be a few such key terms; pay close attention to the writer's definition of these terms if they are offered. Knowing the key terms helps you summarize for your reader the **gist** or

main ideas of the article. You can use these main terms to organize your article review since they will represent the topic around which the writer's research and conclusions are organized.

2. **Re-read the article (maybe several times) and determine, and write down! the argument(s) it makes or engages with, regarding the big terms.** Articles in academic disciplines represent an ongoing conversation about topics that matter in the field. Articles represent a kind of "knowledge building." People publish articles as a way of showing their research to others in their field. Others in the field read these articles and either are glad to accept these findings as ways to see important information, or to dispute or disprove others' research, on the basis of their own statement that makes and supports a claim about the nature of something in the world. "The presence of pets in a care facility tends to increase lifespan and quality of life" is an example of a claim. Support for the argument might be in the form of statistics or anecdotes. In your review, tell your reader how the article supports its claims, explain the support it offers, and examine how thorough or effective this support is.
3. **Ask yourself about what else you know about the topic,** have heard about it, read about it, and in particular what you may have discussed about it in class. Have you heard the same point made this way, or a different view of this point? Does the article you are reviewing mention other articles, other work in the field? Does it agree or disagree with such work? Does your article **build on** this other knowledge in the field or does it **make distinctions between** its findings and those you have seen in other articles? This is how you can begin to take a critical approach to the article you are reviewing. You can say how similar or different it is from other views you have seen on the topic. You can say how well it makes its main point, how much of a contribution to knowledge on this topic it makes. Does it present enough support, enough evidence for the claim it makes? Does it make a big new claim, or does it work on supporting, finding evidence for, a familiar claim? Is its evidence recent or not very recent? Tell your reader what the article's claim looks like to you from the point of view of these questions.

Writing critiques is about beginning to notice what topics are important in your field, what kinds of claims are being made about these topics and how what you notice fits with what else you know in the field about the topic.

Critiques generally follow this structure, but variations do exist, so always ask your instructors about their preference:

- introduce the name of the article/book and name of author(s)
- summarize the article/book's main claim, goals, methods, and findings
- show how the article/book supports its claims
- indicate the main position or claim that your review will make in response to the article
- develop your critique in relation to aspects of the article/book, offering thoughtful, well-supported proof for your claim(s)
- conclude by pointing to the scholarly value (worthy or limited) of the article, suggesting particular audiences who might benefit from the work and proposing further directions that research might take in relation to the article's topic

The Writing Centre at the University of the Fraser Valley

- *promotes and researches writing as a foundational activity connected to critical thinking and learning in a post-secondary setting,*
- *provides a confidential service offering writing instruction to students who wish to become effective writers in their fields of study, and*
- *engages in dialogue with UFV's community of learners about the teaching of writing in discipline areas.*



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