

Writing Center

Book or Article Review or Critique Guidelines

Note: Always check your teacher to make sure you understand the *specific* requirements of any assignment. This handout contains *general* guidelines.

Purpose

The purpose of a *review* of a work (book or article) is generally to let readers know what the work is about and what its merits are so that readers can decide whether they want to read the work. Because the readers of a review probably have not read the work under discussion, you must describe the work as well as evaluate it.

For a *critique* or *critical review*, readers may have read the work; therefore, you need to give less attention to description and summary but more attention to evaluation.

Choosing a Work

Sometimes your teacher assigns a particular book or article; however, your teacher may give you a list of works from which to choose or a broad field will have to narrow-first to a specific area and then to a specific work. If you are given a choice, try to find a work that interests you.

1. Ask someone whose judgment you trust to recommend a work or try to find a work by an authority who is respected in the field. Your textbook may contain a helpful bibliography.
2. Examine the work carefully to see whether the subject and treatment are appealing to you. Check contents, indexes, and introductions.
3. Flip through the text, reading portions in order to determine whether the vocabulary and style are clear and comprehensible to you.

Content of the Review or Critique

All reviews should (1) identify the work and the author, (2) include a summary of the work, and (3) include an evaluation. Other elements may be requested by your teacher, if you are uncertain, ask the teacher. A review or critique may include some or all of the following:

1. An abstract, summary, or synopsis to summarize the essential contents and main ideas-more detailed in a review than in a critique;
2. A statement or thorough discussion of the author's theme (main underlying idea),

- purpose, and methods of development;
3. A brief biographical sketch of the intellectual life of the author, linking the work under discussion to the author's other works;
 4. A discussion of the relationship between the work being reviewed and the other works in the field;
 5. Evaluation of the work, clearly presented and well supported;
 6. Selected short quotations from the work that are representative of the theme, tone, and style.

Organization

The following structure is a recommended rather than a requirement. Many reviewers successfully interweave the elements of the body paragraphs.

Title

Your title is not the same as the title of the work under discussion but may include the work's title. Do not underline or write quotation marks around your own title; do underline the titles of books and periodicals and place quotation marks around article titles.

A Critique of J. I. Rodale's The Synonym Finder

Introduction/Opening Paragraph

1. Clearly and accurately present full bibliographical information about the work: titles, publishing information for books, dates and pages for articles.
 - a. Some teachers prefer that you incorporate bibliographical information into the text of your paper.

EXAMPLE/BOOK: Dr. Jane Smith's revolutionary examination of the declining morality of college students is aptly titled Sin Among Students (New York: Ethics Press, 1984).

EXAMPLE/ARTICLE: "Better Essays in Sixty Minutes" by Ronnie Right (Study Tips for Serious Student, 12 Sept. 1984: 327-29) offers a step-by-step procedure for better writing.
 - b. Some teachers prefer that you present the bibliographical information in a separate listing, beneath the title or at the end of the paper.

EXAMPLE/BOOK: Smith, Jane. Sin Among Students. New Ethics Press, 1984.

EXAMPLE/ARTICLE: Right, Ronnie. "Better Essays in Sixty Minutes." Study Tips for Serious Students 12 Sept. 1984: 327-29.
2. Include one or more general statements that give a quick indication of the work's contents and your reaction to it.

Example: Students are always searching for ways to improve their essays but are often frustrated by the similarity of most composition guides. Ronnie Right's suggestions in "Better Essays in Sixty Minutes" (Study Tips for Serious Students, 12 Sept. 1984 327-29) not only differ from the advice found in most texts but also work quickly and effectively.

Body/Supporting Paragraphs

The number of body paragraphs varies according to the nature of the assignment and the extent of what you have to say. In general there will at least one paragraph of summary and at least one paragraph of evaluation.

1. In your summary, include all the significant points of the work, including the points the author emphasizes.
2. Explain the purpose of the work, and, if appropriate, the author's background and methodology (often found in the preface, foreword, or introduction).
3. Present your critical evaluation, discussing both positive and negative features as appropriate. Support all your judgments with evidence from the work, paraphrasing and quoting excerpts. Is the work thorough? fair? clear? convincing? significant? How does the work relate to other works in the field or to your general understanding of the subject?

Conclusion/Ending Paragraph

Give an overall evaluation as the conclusion of what you have said so far. In a review, make a recommendation about the type of reader likely to enjoy or benefit from the work. In a critique, include an indication of the work's merit in the field.

Format

The paper should be typed, double-spaced on one side of white standard (8 1/2-by-11-inch) paper. Provide margins of one inch on all sides. Number all pages except the first page. Proofread your final copy carefully and make corrections neatly in ink.