

The Critique Essay

It's your first essay in ENG 112, and, of course, you want to do well. This handout offers some helpful hints for writing the first essay—The Critique.

Remember the author!

The critique essay is not about concerned with the content of the article – but whether or not the AUTHOR of the article presented an effective (or ineffective) argument.

EXAMPLE – Dr. John Stamos writes an article about polka music (he's in favor of more polka music on the radio). Do not focus on polka music – you can love it or hate it, but you AREN'T WRITING ABOUT POLKA. The Critique Essay is about Dr. John Stamos – does Dr. Stamos write an effective article? Does he babble incoherently? Did he consider his audience? Does he have a bias? What is his tone? Is his tone appropriate? (etc., etc.)

The Summary – Ice Cold

The summary of the article should be CONCISE and PRECISE. Summarizing can be complicated, and harder than you might think. Write only major points. Do not judge the article – not yet. The summary is free of emotion; it's ice cold.

EXAMPLE – When summarizing a movie, for example, it's tempting to say, “Kevin Spacey was the main character, and his acting was superb.” But in the summary of an essay, we remain ice cold. “Kevin Spacey was the main character. He played the role of an advocate for the death penalty, etc.” Think of the most important parts in the article, the main arguments. Don't make the summary too long, though; if I want to read the article, I'll read the article, not your summary.

Criteria – How to Be a Judge

What criteria should you use? Below is a list for you to consider, compiled by Neil Berg, BGSU writing consultant. Other criteria are available; it's worth discussing with your instructor.

EXAMPLE –

Audience: is the article appropriate to its audience?

Informative: was it informative? was it meant to be?

Useful

Structure: was it structured for a certain task, or a specific audience?

Logic: did it make sense? were there jumps in logic?

Examples: did the author's use of example help the argument? were there enough?

Clarity

Scholarly: well referenced?

Bias: could also be called “balance”; were there two-sides of an argument presented?
Tone

Analysis – The Judgment (with supporting reasons)

This is the heart of your essay (if your essay is alive and has a heart). Here, you use the criteria mentioned in your thesis statement to judge the article. Don’t forget to use examples.

EXAMPLE – “Joey Lawrence, in his article, ‘Where’s the Beef?’, fails to show evidence to support his argument. When he explains that Burger King is overpriced, he gives no fact to prove or disprove his claim (i.e. the Whopper costs three dollars more than the Big Mac). Instead, he merely writes, ‘Whoa!’ and continues with his pithy tirade.”

Conclusion – Don’t Hang Up

Instructors vary. Make certain to read your assignment sheet closely! Some instructors may want you to restate your thesis – if so, this is self-explanatory. Repeat your thesis statement (note: you may consider rewording it *a little bit*, but don’t change the criteria at the last minute). If your instructor does not want you to restate your thesis, simply sum everything up.

A conclusion is necessary because you don’t want to “hang up” on your reader. Like a phone call, you say good-bye in your essay. To do this, you summarize your arguments for or against the effectiveness of the article.

Consider bringing your perspective back at the very end. Would you recommend this article to its intended audience? If the article were written for college students, would you recommend it to your friends?

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