

Writing a Critical Analysis

The purpose for writing a critical analysis is to evaluate somebody's work (a book, an essay, a movie, a painting...) in order to increase the reader's understanding of it. While a summary is a small repetition of the main points of a passage, a critical analysis expresses the writer's opinion or evaluation of a text. Analysis means to break down and study the parts. Writing a critical analysis requires two steps: critical reading and critical writing.

Critical reading:

1. Identify the author's thesis and purpose
2. Analyze the structure of the passage by identifying all main ideas
3. Consult a dictionary or encyclopedia to understand material that is unfamiliar to you
4. Write your summary of the work before writing the critical analysis.
5. Before actually writing the critical analysis, answer the following questions:
 - What is the source of the material?
 - What are the author's qualifications?
 - Are there more facts or opinions given?
 - What is the author's purpose?
 - Is there any bias present in the passage?
 - Who is the author's intended audience?
 - What is the tone of the passage?
 - What is the intended meaning of the passage?

Critical Writing:

1. Start your critical analysis by giving the title, author, and purpose of the passage.
2. Choose several of the areas that you analyzed in your critical reading that are noteworthy and discuss them in several sentences.
3. Finish your critical analysis with a total assessment of the article. What is your overall view of the article? Is it well-written?
4. What should not be in a critical analysis:
 - a. I liked this article because...
 - b. I didn't like this article because...
5. Check to be sure that you do not summarize the reading selection. You should only be analyzing it.

(OVER)

Sample critical analysis for *A Whale of a Survival Problem*:

“A Whale of a Survival Problem,” a selection from the textbook *The Nature of Life* by Postlethwait and Hopson, informs the student audience about the size of the blue whale and the challenges it faces. Since the article is from a textbook, it has gone through both a peer-editing process and an editorial board, which makes it fairly reliable. The authors, using a serious tone, present a great deal of statistics to emphasize the massive size of the blue whale compared to both humans and other animals. In addition, the authors use factual information about the blue whale to write their article and keep their opinions to a minimum. It is very apparent that the authors are impressed by the blue whale by their opening comments in Paragraph 1. It is there that they dramatize the whale’s size to attract the readers’ attention. Overall, the authors do a fine job of letting the incredible facts about the blue whale speak for themselves.”

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