

How to Write a Critical Review of a Journal Article

What is a Critical Review of a Journal Article?

A critical review of a journal article evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of an article's ideas and content. It provides description, analysis and interpretation that allow readers to assess the article's value.

Before You Read the Article

- What does the title lead you to expect about the article?
- Study any sub-headings to understand how the author organized the content.
- Read the abstract for a summary of the author's arguments.
- Study the list of references to determine what research contributed to the author's arguments. Are the references recent? Do they represent important work in the field?
- If possible, read about the author to learn what authority he or she has to write about the subject.
- Consult Web of Science to see if other writers have cited the author's work. (Please see 'How to use E-Indexes'.) Has the author made an important contribution to the field of study?

Reading the Article: Points to Consider

Read the article carefully. Record your impressions and note sections suitable for quoting.

- Who is the intended audience?
- What is the author's purpose? To survey and summarize research on a topic? To present an argument that builds on past research? To refute another writer's argument?
- Does the author define important terms?
- Is the information in the article fact or opinion? (Facts can be verified, while opinions arise from interpretations of facts.) Does the information seem well-researched or is it unsupported?
- What are the author's central arguments or conclusions? Are they clearly stated? Are they supported by evidence and analysis?
- If the article reports on an experiment or study, does the author clearly outline methodology and the expected result?
- Is the article lacking information or argumentation that you expected to find?
- Is the article organized logically and easy to follow?
- Does the writer's style suit the intended audience? Is the style stilted or unnecessarily complicated?
- Is the author's language objective or charged with emotion and bias?
- If illustrations or charts are used, are they effective in presenting information?

Prepare an Outline

Read over your notes. Choose a statement that expresses the central purpose or thesis of your review. When thinking of a thesis, consider the author's intentions and whether or not you think those intentions were successfully realized. Eliminate all notes that do not relate to your thesis. Organize your remaining points into separate groups such as points about structure, style, or argument. Devise a logical sequence for presenting these ideas. Remember that all of your ideas must support your central thesis.

Write the First Draft

The review should begin with a complete citation of the article. For example:

Platt, Kevin M. F. "History and Despotism, or: Hayden White vs. Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great." *Rethinking History* 3:3 (1999) : 247-269.

NOTE: Use the same bibliographic citation format as you would for any bibliography, works cited or reference list. It will follow a standard documentation style such as MLA or APA.

Be sure to ask your instructor which citation style to use.

The first paragraph may contain:

- a statement of your thesis
- the author's purpose in writing the article
- comments on how the article relates to other work on the same subject
- information about the author's reputation or authority in the field

The **body** of the review should:

- state your arguments in support of your thesis
- follow the logical development of ideas that you mapped out in your outline
- include quotations from the article which illustrate your main ideas

The **concluding** paragraph may:

- summarize your review
- restate your thesis

Revise the First Draft

Ideally, you should leave your first draft for a day or two before revising. This allows you to gain a more objective perspective on your ideas. Check for the following when revising:

- grammar and punctuation errors
- organization, logical development and solid support of your thesis
- errors in quotations or in references

You may make major revisions in the organization or content of your review during the revision process. Revising can even lead to a radical change in your central thesis.