



## What is an article review?

An article or book review is not just a summary of the content of the article or book, but it should include the breakdown of the following:

- A statement of the aims or goals of the article or book.
- The review should assess how well the author achieves his or her aims or goals.
- The review should contain adequate reasons or evidence to support your view.

Remember, your opinion matters, but it will need to be supported with adequate evidence and reference to relevant sources.

The five steps in critiquing an article or a book

- Step 1 – Getting an idea
- Step 2 – Weighing up what you think are the pros and cons
- Step 3 – Getting a better understanding and looking at other literature
- Step 4 – Structuring the review

### Step 1: Getting an idea

- Look at the title, contents page, abstract and introduction in order to gain an understanding of the central focus of the book or article.
- Scan the introduction and conclusion. This should help you to determine the research questions, hypotheses and objectives and see whether the author has been successful in achieving these.
- Skim quickly through the whole article. Look at the opening and closing sentences of paragraphs; check the headings if there any; look at any graphics or tables. All this should give you a sense of the argument being developed.
- Does the bibliography make reference to suitable and adequate sources?
- You will probably get an idea of the methods used and you might start asking yourself why these methods were used and whether they are relevant or not. In addition, you'll probably wonder why there were certain limitations to the study and how these might have been overcome, and in what way these might effect the study.

### Step 2: Weighing up what you think are the pros and cons

Once you have gained an idea of what the book is about, it is important to sit down and begin to weigh up what you think are the pros and cons. Remember as you go through this process you will need to be thinking about how you can support what you are going to say. It might simply be a note to yourself to find a theory or reference to support this point, or page numbers referring to the point in the article or book you are reviewing. Here are list of questions you might want to consider:

- What are the important ideas?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the article / book?
  - Style – informal / formal



## Critiquing a Journal Article or Book

- Content – is there a clear line of argument? What methodology has been used? Is this suitable?
- Conclusion – Has a clear conclusion been given? Does the conclusion agree with the objectives set?
- Presentation – Is the book/article well laid out?
- Argument – Are there flaws in the argument? Are there biases in the methodology? What assumptions have been made? Are these correct?

### Step 3 – Getting a better understanding and looking at other literature

It is now time to start reading other literature related to the article or book you are reviewing. You will then be able to use this information to critique and support your arguments about the article or book. This will involve making notes from other sources, and keeping a record of any quotes or references you may need. It is always helpful to write down the reference with the page number, so that it will be easy to go back to the source if necessary when writing the review.

While reading, you will want to be asking particular questions (for information on critical reading skills see advice sheet Critical Reading). Some questions you might want to consider are as follows:

- How does the article or book relate to other literature in the area?
- How does the author's position compare to other authors positions?
- Is the argument similar or different? How?
- Are the ideas put forward current? Are they saying something which has not been said before?
- Given the other literature that is available, how useful is the article or book? Is it a necessary addition to the literature?

### Step 4: Structuring the Review

- Initial identification of article: author, title, date of publication
- Brief paragraph of the aims and contents of the article
- Core of review:
  - Selected topics to analyse
  - Could be methods, literature review, discussion
  - Support what you say – use the article and other sources
- Conclusion

For further guidance on how to critique a journal article or book, have a look at the following references:

Craswell, G. (2005). *Writing for Academic Success*. London: Sage Publications

Crème, P. & Lea, M.R. (2008). *Writing at University: A Guide for Students*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

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