**INTRODUCTION**

The critical review is a writing task that requires you to summarize and assess a text

using critical lense or question. The critical review can be of a book, a chapter, or a

journal article. Writing the critical review further requires you to read the selected text in

detail and to also read other related texts so that you can present a reasonable evaluation

of the selected text. It requires you to question the information and opinions in a text and

present your evaluation or judgment of the text. To do this well, you should attempt to

understand the topic from different perspectives and in relation to the theories,

approaches and frameworks in your course. Evaluation itself is a complex process that

requires an understanding of not just the content of the text, but also an understanding of

a text’s purpose, the intended audience and why it is structured the way it is. Analyzing

requires separating the content and concepts of a text into their main components and

then understanding how these interrelate, connect and possibly influence each other. This

unit is specifically placed in this course to enable teachers analyze and review the content

they teach and also what they interpret from their own teaching.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**

At the end of this unit you will be able to:

1. conduct review and analysis of spoken words and written text and literature

2. practice reflective and critical writing

3. adopt journal writing as a reflective practice

7.1 CRITICAL REVIEW AND ANALYSIS

A great deal of one’s time is spent in thinking; thinking about what people have said,

thinking about what one has read, one has thought and how one’s thinking has been

changed. It is generally believed that the thinking process involves two aspects: reflective

thinking and critical thinking. They are not separate processes; rather, they are closely

connected (Brookfield 1987).

A critical review is much more than a simple summary; it is an analysis and evaluation of

a book, article, or other medium. It is a formal discussion of the contents, implications,

and quality of an academic or professional text: a nonfiction book, essay, or article. It

may be defined as, “A critical review evaluates the clarity, quality and originality of

research, as well as its relevance and presentation”. Sometimes non-text materials, such

as educational videos, also are discussed using this formal model of reviewing. A critical

review is not a book report, nor is it a literary analysis, literary review, movie review, or

other arts review that works with the elements of literature or art. Rather, a critical

review is a thorough, usually formal discussion that uses a variety of critical-thinking

tools, especially

(a) Logical, accurate summary;

(b) Discussion or analysis of arguments, implications, and responses; and

(c) Evaluative weighing of the quality of the writing, organization, and contents.

**7.1.1 Goals of Critical Review & Analysis:**

The goal of writing a critical review and analysis is to help readers decide whether to read

or view a text. Summarizing gives readers a thoughtful, unbiased account of what the

work says. Opinions from the public or experts help readers understand how the work

might be perceived from several differing viewpoints. And evaluation of quality helps

readers decide whether the work is presented well. Most reviews follow this pattern of

three functions by starting with summary and ending with evaluation, but there are not

always clear-cut sections: the types of thinking may even be thoroughly intermixed.

However, if you wish to write a simple critical review with all of its major structural

elements in it, you can simply develop your review in three body sections: summary of

the work; arguments, responses, and/or implications; and evaluative judgments.

**7.1.2 Steps to writing an effective critical review:**

Writing a good critical review requires that you understand the material, and that you

know how to analyze and evaluate that material using appropriate criteria. Following

steps are involved in a critical review process:

**a) Reading:**

 Skim the whole text to determine the overall thesis, structure and methodology.

This will help you better understand how the different elements fit together once

you begin reading carefully. Read critically: It is not enough to simply

understand what the author is saying; it is essential to challenge it. Examine how

the article is structured, the types of reasons or evidence used to support the

conclusions, and whether the author is reliant on underlying assumptions or

theoretical frameworks. Take copious notes that reflect what the text means AND

what you think about it.

**b) Analyzing**

 Analyzing requires separating the content and concepts of a text into their main

components and then understanding how these interrelate, connect and possibly

influence each other. It is to Examine all elements: All aspects of the text—the

structure, the methods, the reasons and evidence, the conclusions, and, especially,

the logical connections between all of these—should be considered. The types of

questions asked will vary depending on the discipline in which you are writing, but

the following samples will provide a good starting point:

**Structure**

What type of text is it? (For example: Is it a primary source or

secondary source? Is it original research or a comment on original

research?)

What are the different sections and how do they fit together?

Are any of the sections particularly effective (or ineffective)?

**Methodology**

Is the research quantitative or qualitative?

Does the methodology have any weaknesses?

How does the design of the study address the hypothesis?

**Reason/Evidence**

What sources does the author use (interviews, peer-reviewed journals,

government reports, journal entries, newspaper accounts, etc.)?

What types of reasoning are employed (inductive, deductive, and

abdicative)?

What type of evidence is provided (empirical, statistical, logical, etc.)?

Are there any gaps in the evidence (or reasoning)?

**Conclusion**

Does the data adequately support the conclusion drawn by the

researcher(s)?

Are other interpretations plausible?

Are the conclusions dependent on a particular theoretical

formulation?

What does the work contribute to the field?

**Logic**

What assumptions does the author make?

Does the author account for all of the data, or are portions left out?

What alternative perspectives remain unconsidered?

Are there any logical flaws in the construction of the argument?

**c) Writing**

 Once you have carefully read your reading, start writing. You can start by free writing,

by organizing/outlining, by collecting and/or expanding upon your critical-reading

notes you've already made, or simply by writing, point-by-point. As you start,

. You might want to begin with the facts--the main points of the reading itself.

. You also may start with arguments for and/or against the author's main

position(s), or with implications--hidden meanings of the reading or what the

reading may cause to happen.

. A third way to start is to begin by evaluating how well or poorly the text is

written, organized, styled, or researched.

The tone with which you begin should be whatever tone works for you in the beginning

in order to get your thoughts on the page. In other words, if you must have or develop a

strong feeling--such as pleasure, dislike, indignation, surprise, etc.--to begin discussion in

your first draft, then do so. However, sooner or later--in the first or a later draft--the tone

you need to achieve is one of calm, reasoned, fair, balanced reason. Mild indignation or

disagreement is to some extent acceptable in some courses or publications, especially if

you use an ironic tone or one of regret; however, in some disciplines and publications--

especially, for example, in the sciences--your tone should be of rigorous, absolutely

balanced and logical analysis. You must, in other words, in tone and word choice, imply

that you are being very logical.

When you start focusing on organizing--at whatever stage of writing you choose--you'll

need to be sure in the very first sentence of each major type of thinking you are

performing--summary, response/implications, or evaluation--that your readers understand

exactly what you are doing. This means having clear section topic sentences if you are

dividing these three functions into three topic sections; if you are dividing these three

main functions into multiple paragraphs, be sure that each major paragraph's topic

sentence clearly indicates what kind of function you are about to perform.

Also be sure--as you build your paper--that you have plenty of quotations from the author

so that the reader can see exactly how the author develops his/her thinking. If you are

assigned to do so, you may need quotations from other sources, as well, primarily to help

support the points you are making. Because you, yourself, are not a professional expert,

you are depending--in a research paper--on quotations and paraphrases from the

professional experts.

7**.1.3 The Visual Plan/map of Critical Review**

Your Own Unique Title

OR, for one reviewed work only,

Critical Review of "Essay"/Book

Introduction

Type of paper. Source info: Author's Name, "Essay"/Title,

& author's main argument. Brief statement(s) of the work's

contents, the arguments/implications you will discuss, and

your overall opinion of the work's value. Introductory

quotation/details

Summary

Summary of the work(s) you are reviewing: (a) topic sentence, (b)

summary using paraphrases (and possibly a few summarizing quotations)

from your reading's text, and (c) a brief, concluding sentence or

paragraph.

Arguments AND/OR Implications

Discussion of public and/or professional responses, arguments, and/or

implications (meanings/results): topic sentence, discussion with quotes,

supporting details, & conclusion.

Evaluations

Evaluation using a set of criteria: topic sentence, discussion with quotes,

supporting details, & conclusion.

Conclusion

 Source (author and/or title). Your overall evaluative

conclusion. Final quotation/details.

Works Cited/Bibliography

Jones, A.J. Book One, et al.

Smith, B.K. Book Two, et al.

Create an alphabetized bibliography on a separate page, according to the

requirements of your discipline/instructor.

**7.1.4- Final Revision and Editing:**

In revision of a critical review following four focuses may help you in better finish:

1- SUBJECT: If possible, choose a reading about a subject you know well. As you

read it, brainstorm a list of summarizing points, arguments, responses, implications,

and/or evaluations. Choose several such points. Will they appeal to you

throughout your writing time? Do you have enough details or examples to support

what you are saying, or can you find supporting details easily? Can you write

about your subject fully and logically? What are some problems and solutions your

paper could present? Will your audience find your paper and its solutions

appropriate and interesting?

2- FIRST & SECOND DRAFT: Start with one or two methods that work best for

you, but develop the others in later drafts.

a. Read critically: take your text apart so that you understand its contents and

structure thoroughly.

b. Free-write: write as much as you can quickly on what you know about your

text or your own viewpoint(s).

c. Gather details: mark or type the quotations in your text that best summarize

the points you hope to make. Write descriptions or a list of the details you

have to support your points--facts, quotations, and/or experiences.

d. Write for your audience: visualize it. What details does it need to take

seriously your critical points of view?

e. Organize: make an outline using the structure above or whatever structure

your instructor suggests.

f. Research: if required, mix research of your summaries, arguments, and

evaluations with the above methods to develop a first draft during your

research.

3- STYLE, TONE, and WRITER'S ROLE: Develop (in early or late drafts) an

academic style and tone of calm, reasoned, fair, balanced logic. In your role as a

writer, you should remain a neutral observer, simply applying the analyses in a

balanced, logical, consistent manner.

4- AUTHENTICITY: Be as real and meaningful as you can to your audience, your

content, and yourself. First, respect your audience: try as fully as you can to

consider its own beliefs about your text. Second, find the heart of the meaning in

both your reading and your examination of it, and write about them clearly using

high-quality supporting details. Third, make your analyses your own: develop

them in a way as meaningful to you as possible.

The key to the overall organization of a critical review often is to provide a broad number

of issues that vary widely in their perspectives. A critical review is, after all, a type of

paper highly focused on its audience: it is a review made specifically for an audience to

read. Unlike the typical academic paper that may only be read by one person, an

instructor, or a typical business report that may be briefly digested and then filed, reviews

are read by large numbers of people. For this reason, you need to fairly and broadly

represent the reviewed text for a wide variety of people, perspectives, and opinions.

Good critical reviews recognize the breadth and variety of differing audience members

interest and then develop arguments/implications and evaluative criteria that are useful to

that audience.

**7.2- REFLECTIVE WRITING**

Reflection is a form of personal response to experiences, situations, events or new

information. It is a 'processing' phase where thinking and learning take place. There is

neither a right nor a wrong way of reflective thinking; there are just questions to explore.

Reflection offers you the opportunity to consider how your personal experiences and

observations shape your thinking and your acceptance of new ideas. One tentative

definition of reflection is offered by Moon (1999):

‘... a form of mental processing with a purpose and/or anticipated outcome

that is applied to relatively complex or unstructured ideas for which there is

not an obvious solution’.

If one is unaware of one’s own thought and action it is quite difficult for that person to

alter his or her thought or behavior. It is through reflection that new information is

processed and connections to prior learning are made. Reflection clarifies the concepts.

By taking the time to consider our own thoughts we gain increased understanding and

control of our self and the environment in which we live.

Reflective writing can help you to improve your analytical skills because it requires you

to express what you think, and more significantly, how and why you think that way. In

addition, reflective analysis asks you to acknowledge that your thoughts are shaped by

your assumptions and preconceived ideas; in doing so, you can appreciate the ideas of

others, notice how their assumptions and preconceived ideas may have shaped their

thoughts, and perhaps recognize how your ideas support or oppose what you read.

**7.2.1-Purpose of Reflection:**

We reflect in order to:

. Consider the process of our own learning – a process of metacognition

. Critically review something - our own behavior, that of others or the product of

behavior (e.g. an essay, book, painting etc.)

. Build theory from observations: we draw theory from generalizations - sometimes

in practical situations, sometimes in thoughts or a mixture of the two.

. Engage in personal or self development

. Make decisions or resolve uncertainty...

. Empower or emancipate ourselves as individuals (and then it is close to self-

development) or to empower/emancipate ourselves within the context of our social

groups.’

So reflective writing is writing which involves '… consideration of the larger context, the

meaning, and the implications of an experience or action' (Branch & Paranjape, 2002, p.

1185). It is:

. One’s response to experiences, opinions, events or new information

. One’s response to thoughts and feelings

. a way of thinking to explore One’s learning

. an opportunity to gain self-knowledge

. a way to achieve clarity and better understanding of what is learning

. a chance to develop and reinforce writing skills

. a way of making meaning out of what One has studied

Reflective writing is not just conveying information, instruction or argument. It is not

pure description, though there may be descriptive elements. It does not include straight

forward decision or judgment (e.g. whether something is right or wrong, good or bad). It

is neither a summary of course notes nor a standard essay.

**7.2.2- Types of Reflective Writing:**

There is no one set for reflective writing. It may take the form of several types. Some

examples might include:

**a- Learning Logs/Journals**

 Learning logs/journals can be used in different ways. Sometimes they may be a formal

part of reflective writing, or sometimes they may form the basis of a later reflective

assignment. The aim of a learning log/journal is partly to reflect on events and your

actions as they happen, but also to chart your development as you learn.

**b- Presentations**

 If you have taken part in a practical exercise or a work placement, either as part of

a group or as an individual, you may be asked to give a presentation on what you

have learnt in practice.

As a presentation is much more conversational, and sometimes interactive, than an

essay or a learning log, it might be tempting to make this more about illustrating

what you have done to your audience, rather than reflecting upon it. This is

especially true if you have been on a long work placement, in a lot of things will

have happened! Nevertheless, your audience still want to see how you have

critically reflected on your performance and actions to really learn from your

experiences.

**c- Reflective Essays**

 Theoretically, this is probably the type of reflective writing that you are most used

to. Much of what is expected of you in a normal academic essay is still expected of

you in a reflective essay. You will still be expected to analyze what you are saying,

reference any sources that you have used (and you should use sources) and have a

clear structure to the essay. Thinking about what you want to include in the essay,

and how you will structure it, is often key to getting the reflection right. Think

about all of the incidents or events that have most contributed to your learning.

**7.2.3-The Reflective Writing Process**

“A big reason for reflective writing is that it’s a means of thinking for me. Writing freely,

whether it’s jotting down ideas on the spur of the moment or sitting down deliberately to

think and work through ideas, helps the ideas to come. And beyond that, once the ideas get

down on to paper writing about them helps me to clarify them in my mind.” (Burton, 2007)

The reflective writing process begins with a description of, for example, an incident, a

phenomenon observed, or an unresolved puzzle. Choose a simple incident or concern.

Write a description of the incident, topic or problem.

This process generates Type 1 reflective writing (see Table 1.1). Just get the basic facts

down, as you know them. Write as simply and clearly as you can. Your description can

be a narrative, a journal entry, an account of a conversation you overheard, for example.

With this piece of writing, whatever its form, you have started the process of reflection.

Although what you wrote may seem to be just a simple description of a problem or

something that happened, its narrative structure and presentation and content are actually

the result of decisions and preferences, whether you were conscious of them at the time

or not. Another student would write a different account. You now have a text to examine

and have positioned yourself to probe your topic more deeply. Lu(1998), reflects

eloquently on experiencing this process that every time he read or wrote, the stance he

negotiated out of these voices [in his mind or writing] would always be at some distance

from the stances he worked out in his previous and later readings or writings.

**Q 1. How does/did it happen?**

Write a commentary on your first piece of writing. With this step, reflection begins to

deepen. Writing in response to a “how” question generates Type 2 reflective writing (see

Table 1.1) because it enables you to comment on what you wrote before, to revise or

elaborate it. But your reflection shouldn’t finish here.

**Q2. Why does/did it happen?**

Writing again, tries to explain your earlier pieces of writing. Now write a response to a

“why”-type question and generate Type 3 reflective writing (see Table 1.1). As you write

on the cause, effect, and meaning of your incident, topic or problem, you will find that

you are beginning to theorize and relate your writing to other events or reading resources.

**Q3. What does my previous reflective writing mean to me now (and later in the light**

**of subsequent experience)?**

Over time, continue to write reflectively on your earlier reflective writing in the light of

subsequent experience and understanding.

You can continue to write reflectively in response to questions such as “What does this

mean to me now?” (See Table 1.1, reflective writing Types 4 & 5) On each occasion, you

give yourself further opportunities to deepen and broaden your reflections and link them,

for example, to reflections on other experiences.

When following the process outlined above, write systematically and flesh out (i.e.,

conceptualize) your writing. Being systematic and contextualizing what you write enable

you to explain your reflections later on so that they have lasting credibility and

continuing potential for further learning. Even though reflective writing is a relatively

straightforward process, it is a skill, and as with any skill or art, it can be learned and

practiced.

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