

## Notes on Writing a Critique

A *critique* is an analysis or review of a particular work. In this course a work critiqued is usually an article describing the results of a research project. The purpose of a critique in this course is twofold. First, the critique should provide a general overview of the article itself, and, second, it should critically evaluate the research project and results described in the article.

To evaluate an article critically does not necessarily mean that we should “find fault with” the article. Critical evaluation involves, as the Greek root of critique suggests<sup>1</sup>, the separation or sifting out of something; in this case the sifting involves separating that which has value from that which does not. So, critical evaluation has both a positive and a negative aspect. In the critique it is the responsibility of the author to determine the positive and negative facets of the article and to evaluate both. In papers as short as the critiques written for this class, not all positive and negative aspects can be covered. The author should focus on one or two key ideas and develop them fully.

An effective technical paper usually has the following structure: first, “tell them what you are going to tell them,” then “tell them,” and finally, “tell them what you told them.” The critiques written for this class are no different. A critique should begin with a paragraph that briefly presents the central points of the article under consideration. The opening paragraph should be written in careful, standard English and be clear, concise, and non-redundant. Its final sentence should provide a smooth transition into the critique that follows. (That is, “tell them what you are going to tell them.”) The middle paragraphs should present a convincing evaluation of the *positive* and/or *negative* issues. If the evaluation is positive, the points presented should be defended; if it is negative, then arguments for the appropriate position should be set forth. (That is, “tell them.”) Finally, the closing paragraph should summarize the appropriate points. It should present no new information. It should be strong and unambiguous. (That is, “tell them what you told them.”)

In writing the paper it is important to avoid “buzzwords,” jargon, and words that were coined in the discipline. The purpose of the paper is to illuminate the work being critiqued not to obscure it with disciplinary jargon. As we write, it is also important to remember where we are in the paper at all times—remembering not to draw conclusions in the opening paragraph, not to summarize the article during the evaluation, and not to introduce new ideas in the conclusion.

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<sup>1</sup> The Greek root of critique is *krinein*, which means “to separate” or “to sift.”