Critical reviews

Why should I write critical reviews?

In many professional contexts, you'll need to be able to read and understand specialised texts and provide a reasoned evaluation of them. Other people can then use your review to decide whether it is relevant and helpful for their purposes.

Writing critical reviews at uni gives you practice in carefully reading and analysing a specialised text and communicating your evaluation of it clearly and convincingly.

What's a critical review?

The purpose of a critical review is to summarise and evaluate a text. It usually focuses on a single text (e.g. a book, journal article, or government report), but occasionally you may be asked to review 2 or 3 texts.

What's in a critical review?

You may have written a review for a product or service before. If so, you will be able to build on your understanding and skills from doing that. Consider the following online review of a food delivery service:

Terrible service

[1] I ordered from a shop that's a 5 minute walk down the road. [2] I couldn't go as I'm at work but needed lunch. [3] Order status has been "being prepared" for the past hour and a half with no option to cancel my order. [4] Food arrived 2 hours later cold and hard. [5] Do not recommend.

The example above has three main parts:

→ Sentences 1-2: a **summary** of the person's experience using the service (what happened)
→ Sentences 3-4: an **evaluation** of the service (negative, implied in the complaint about not being able to cancel the order and the food arriving late and cold)
→ Sentence 5: a **recommendation** based on the evaluation

A critical review usually includes the same kind of parts as the example above:

→ a **summary** of the text you are reviewing
→ a **critical analysis and evaluation** of the text you are reviewing (could include both positive and negative evaluations)
→ some **recommendations** based on your review

A critical review is usually written in an essay structure. The key elements of an essay are the **argument** and the **reasoning**. The argument is what you're trying to convince the reader about.

In a critical review, you are making an argument about the text you are reviewing, e.g. its main contribution, its value for understanding a topic. The reasoning is how you show that your argument is worth believing. It could include **evidence**, **explanations**, or **examples**. The evidence you use should include evidence from the text itself (e.g. what the writer said or how they conducted their research) as well as evidence from other texts (e.g. other ways of doing the research, other writers' critiques of the text you reviewed).

Example

Introduction

Body

→ Summary of the text
→ Critical analysis point 1
→ Critical analysis point 2
→ Critical analysis point 3
→ [More points as needed]

Conclusion

Reference list

Common problems

→ Irrelevant content or ideas not well organised – use the Essay drafting tool to help organise your ideas or read the Essay structure guide

→ Informal/inappropriate tone – read the Essay tone guide

→ Not enough evidence to support your reasons - go to the Library's Referencing and Citation Guide for help with correctly formatting your citations and references

Activity

1. Look at your critical review task/question and rewrite it in your own words. Do you understand what it is asking you?

2. Write your response to the question (your argument) in one sentence. This is your thesis statement.

3. What three main points of reasoning could you use to support your argument?

   1.

   2.

   3.

Next steps

→ Learn about how to critically analyse the text as you read by working through the Study Smart Note-making for critical thinking guide.

→ Make notes on the text using the Study Smart Reading graphic organiser.

→ Draft your summary of the reviewed text using the Study Smart Paraphrasing tool.

→ Draft your critical review based on the points you came up in the Activity above using the Study Smart Essay drafting tool.

References

Josie (2020). *Terrible service* [Review]. ProductReview.com.au. https://www.productreview.com.au/listings/uber-eats