

# Critiques

The Writing Center  
At Rensselaer

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A critique is an essay which analyzes, interprets, and evaluates specific material. A critique is NOT simply a summary! A summary reports what the text said; that is, it answers only the question “what?” A critique answers the questions “how?” “why?” and “how well?”

The success of the critique you write will depend on your close consideration of the course assignment, purpose and audience, writing process, content and format, and citation of course material.

## **Purpose & Audience**

A critique is written to fulfill a course assignment. Instructors generally assign critiques for one or more of the following reasons: To make sure students complete course readings, to make sure the students understand the course material, to get their students to read and think critically, to integrate course readings and classroom discussions.

Therefore, your critique may need to do one or more of the following:

- demonstrate that you have completed course readings
- demonstrate that you understand the course material
- demonstrate that you are able to read and think critically
- demonstrate that you are able to integrate course readings and classroom discussions

To produce a successful critique, you need to determine what the instructor expects. Look back on your class notes to determine the goals, values, and expectations of your instructor. These expectations may be either explicit or implicit, so you should also study your assignment very carefully.

## **Writing Process**

1. Ask yourself the following questions as you read or view the material you plan to critique:

- What is the author's thesis or purpose?
- What are the author's underlying assumptions or biases?
- Who is the author's intended audience?
- What arguments does the author use to support his or her thesis?
- What are the author's main conclusions?
- What evidence does the author use? Is this evidence accurate, complete, and fair?
- Are the author's methods and interpretations valid?
- Is the text well organized, clear, and easy to read?
- Does the text contribute to an improved understanding of the subject?
- How does the text compare with others on the same subject?
- Do you think the author succeeds in what he or she sets out to do?

2. Make notes in response to the above,

3. Find overall patterns

4. Form conclusions and opinions based on these patterns.

5. Develop your thesis from step 4.

6. Draft your essay.

7. Revise.

8. Proofread.

Visit the Writing Center at any stage in the above process.

## **Content & Format**

A critique should be written in standard essay form, with this general format:

1. Begin with an introduction that defines the subject of your critique and your thesis.

The thesis usually consists of a statement of evaluation, based on what you have learned in the course.

2. Develop your analysis in the body of your paper. It's generally best not to follow the author's organization when organizing your analysis, since this approach lends itself to summary rather than analysis. Rather, organize your information in a way that best

supports your thesis, perhaps by measuring the material you are critiquing against certain explicit or implicit criteria, or by comparing it to other similar material.

It is usually a good idea to use precise terminology from your class lectures, discussions, and readings. It is also good idea to cite course material, especially your instructor if you are using course notes from lectures or class discussions.

3. End with a conclusion that summarizes your argument and re-emphasizes your thesis.

### **Citing Course Material**

To demonstrate to your instructor that you are using course notes, that you pay attention in class, and that you appreciate and are able to apply course contents, it is frequently a good idea to cite course material, including lecture, class presentation, and class discussion.

The following indicate the MLA citation style of course material for the “Works Cited” page. Parenthetical citations include only the first word of the citation, unless two sources begin with the same word. If you are using another style, adapt the citations appropriately.

#### *Lecture:*

Professor’s Name. Class Lecture. Dept & Course Number: Name of Course. Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. Date [ex. Fall 2001].

#### *Class Presentation:*

Name of Presenter(s). Class Presentation: “Title of Presentation.”  
Dept & Course Number: Name of Course. Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.  
Date [ex. Fall 2001].

#### *Class Discussion in which you can’t remember exactly who said what:*

Class Discussion. Dept & Course Number: Name of Course.  
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. Date [ex. Fall 2001].