

Writing a Critical Analysis

Many non-literature courses have writing assignments that ask you to write a critical analysis of an assigned book. A critical analysis is a kind of book review that requires you both to summarize and evaluate the book.

Read carefully.

If your teacher has given questions as guidelines for your critique, consider them as you read. Take notes; they'll be useful when it comes to organizing your review. Look for the author's thesis (what the author is trying to prove in the argument). Evaluate the author's argument.

1. Is the argument valid (internally consistent, logical)? Do conclusions follow from the premises?
2. Is the argument supported by evidence?
3. Is information accurate and fairly interpreted?
4. Does the author leave out important information?

Develop your own thesis.

Although you must identify the author's thesis, you must also develop and support your own thesis about the author's work. In your thesis, identify the author's main argument, and state whether or not you think the author achieves this purpose. Here is an example:

In *What Jane Austen Ate and Charles Dickens Knew*, Daniel Pool constructs a useful social history of eighteenth and nineteenth century England, by providing a brief overview of various facets of daily life.

Organize your analysis.

1. Include essential information in the Introduction. First, introduce the book you'll be evaluating and the author. Place the work in context, i.e., provide the reader with some background information, such as the period in which the book was written, or why the topic of the book is of interest to your audience as well as you. For example, "Pool's social history is