

Critical Reading and Critiques (from *Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum*, Behrens)

A good critique depends on critical reading. You need to be able to summarize and evaluate a presentation.

You need to ask and answer the following questions:

- 1. What is the author's purpose in writing? Does the author succeed in this purpose?**
- 2. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the author?**

Writers write to:

Inform

Persuade

Entertain

Most of the essays that you read for this class are ostensibly designed to inform. However, almost all essays contain at least an element of persuasion, a position that might be either overt—right out in the open—or covert—between the lines. Your job in writing a critique is to determine the author's position.

Organize your critique into five sections:

**Introduction**

**Summary**

**Assessment**

**Response**

**Conclusion**

## Introduction

In your introductory paragraph:

- a. Identify the essay that you are critiquing by author's name, essay title, date of publication (if known).
- b. State the author's purpose and thesis.
- c. Briefly state whether the author succeeds on his or her own terms.
- d. State your own thesis. In a critique, your thesis states the following question: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the author? Why?

## 2. Summary

Just as you did in your summary paper for Unit 1, summarize the essay that you are critiquing.

Your summary should consist of 3 – 5 paragraphs that identify the author's thesis and summarize the essay in sequence, from beginning to end.

Remember to continually refer to the author and to use signal phrases like:

“Jefferson writes that...”

“Jefferson states that...”

“Jefferson notes that...”

“Jefferson argues that...”

“Jefferson goes on to say that...”

Of course, every sentence isn't going to start like this. You'll vary the pattern by using pronouns:

“He then explains that...”

“He notes that...”

“He argues that...”

“He goes on to say that...”

You can also use phrases like this:

“For Jefferson...”

“In Jefferson's view...”

And in some sentences, when the context is clear, you won't need to begin with a signal phrase at all.

### 3. Assessment

Your assessment should consist of 3 – 5 paragraphs in which you evaluate the essay by answering any or all of the following questions:

- Is the information in the essay accurate?
- Is the information significant?
- Is the information interpreted fairly? Is it interpreted logically? Is it oversimplified?
- Are terms clearly defined? Are loaded terms used?
- Does the author use *ad hominem* attacks?

### 4. Response

Your response should consist of 3 – 5 paragraphs in which you “state as clearly as possible what *you* believe, . . . [defining] your position in relation to that presented in the piece” (Behrens 34).

“Be precise in identifying points of agreement and disagreement with the author” (Behrens 34). You might agree with some points and disagree with others.

Note that the **Response** and **Assessment** are logically separate. That is, you might assess an essay as logically sound but in the response you might disagree with its conclusions. Or you might assess an essay as logically weak, but feel that you agree with its conclusions.

For example, you are critiquing an essay that supports the war in Iraq. You find that the essay is logically weak, yet you support the war in Iraq.

### 5. Conclusion

In your concluding paragraph, state “your conclusions about the overall validity of the piece—your assessment of the author’s success at achieving his or her aims and your reactions to the author’s views. Remind the reader of the weaknesses and strengths of the passage” (Behrens 38).