



Critical reviews

Why should I write critical reviews?

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.

In many professional contexts, you'll need to be able to read and understand specialised texts. You'll also need to be able to evaluate them and explain your evaluation of them. Other people can then use your review to decide whether the text is relevant and helpful for their purposes.

Professional texts you might have to evaluate include:
lesson plans, technical reports, policies, syllabi, case reports, research reports.

What's a critical review?

The purpose of a critical review is to summarise and evaluate a text and provide a recommendation based on your evaluation. 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?

A critical review usually includes the following parts:

Summary

- What is the text about? What is the aim of the text?

Critical analysis & evaluation

- Both positive and negative evaluations, e.g. What does the text contribute to the field? What are the limitations of the writer's approach/conclusions?

Recommendation

- In light of your analysis and evaluation, how should others view this text? What are the practical implications of the research?

Example

Consider the following online review of a food delivery service. Maybe you have written something similar before.

Terrible service

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

Source: ProductReview.com.au. Retrieved from <https://www.productreview.com.au/listings/uber-eats>

The example above has the same 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 when the writer complains about not being able to cancel the order and the food arriving late and cold)
- Sentence 5: a **recommendation** based on the evaluation

When you write a critical review at uni, you structure these three main parts of a critical review as an essay (see table below). You make an **argument** about the text you are reviewing, e.g. its main contribution or its value for understanding a topic. You use **reasoning** to show that your argument is worth believing.

Tip: For more detailed information about structure, see the [Essay structure guide](#).

Your reasoning 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)
- evidence from other texts (e.g. other ways of doing that kind of research, other writers' critiques of the text you reviewed).

You structure your argument and reasoning in a particular way. The table below shows a typical structure (middle column) and an example (right hand column). Elements of a critical review (especially the evaluation/critical analysis points) may vary depending on the purpose of the review and the texts that are being reviewed.

	Typical structure	Example
		Task: Find and critically review two studies about attitudes to bilingualism.
Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → General statement about the topic → Introduction to the text(s) → Outline of the points of analysis you will make 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → General statement about bilingualism and attitudes to bilingualism → Introduction to two studies focusing on bilingualism in Tunisia and Cyprus → Outline of main points of analysis
Body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Summary of the text(s) → Evaluation/Critical analysis point 1 → Evaluation/Critical analysis point 2 → Evaluation/Critical analysis point 3 → [More points as needed] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Summary of the two articles → Critical analysis point 1: comparison of aims and hypotheses of the two studies → Critical analysis point 2: comparison of methods and participants of the two studies → Critical analysis point 3: comparison of results of the two studies
Conclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Summary of analysis and evaluation → Recommendations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Summary of analysis and evaluation → Recommendations for further studies into attitudes towards bilingualism in Tunisia and Cyprus
Reference list	→ References	→ 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? If not, check with your tutor, post a question on the Discussion Board in vUWS, or talk to a **Study Smart Officer**.
2. Summarise the text(s) in 1-2 sentences (use the **Summarising guide** to assist you). This will be the basis of your summary.
3. What three main points of critical analysis (including evidence, explanations, or examples) could you discuss in your critical review?
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.

Next steps

Use the following resources to help you develop your critical review:

- [Study Smart Note-making for critical thinking guide](#) or [Study Smart Reading graphic organiser](#) for taking notes on the text
- [Study Smart Paraphrasing tool](#) to develop your paraphrasing skills
- [Study Smart Essay drafting tool](#) to organise your ideas, starting your draft with the points you came up with in the Activity above
- [Study Smart Essay tone guide](#) to help you choose appropriate language for your review
- [Referencing and Citation Guide](#) for help with correctly formatting your citations and references



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