

## Writing a Critical Review

### **What is a critical review?**

A critical review is a review of an article that combines a summary and a critical comment.

### **Why are you asked to write a critical review?**

Students in the Australian School of Business are required to write critical reviews in some of your courses to enable you to demonstrate that you can:

- ★ read to understand the main points in an article
- ★ analyse the findings or argument of the article
- ★ decide the appropriate criteria by which to evaluate the article
- ★ provide a critical evaluation of the article based on the criteria selected.

The ability to read critically is not only important in academic study, it is also important in business because critical abilities enable practitioners to keep up to date and adjust to change; to assess and comment on problems and proposed solutions published in professional literature; and to evaluate and comment on solutions proposed in the workplace.

### **What steps should you take in summarising an article?**

#### 1. Take a quick overview of the article by reading

- ★ the title
- ★ the abstract
- ★ the introduction
- ★ the subheadings
- ★ the conclusion

#### 2. Read the article without taking notes in order to gain an overall idea of its aim and main idea.

#### 3. Read the article again analytically and make notes of main ideas and main topic.

- ★ Highlight important ideas.
- ★ Make brief notes in the margin or on paper.

#### 4. Check your notes to ensure that they include:

- ★ the main aim of the article, e.g. to analyse, explain, evaluate, argue, criticise, discuss opposing views
- ★ the methodological approach, e.g. empirical research, financial analysis, textual analysis
- ★ the main findings/conclusions

#### 5. Use your notes to write a summary

#### 6. In your summary ensure that you have paraphrased not plagiarised the authors' words and used quotations sparingly.

### **What is involved in commenting critically on an article?**

Commenting critically on an article involves analysis and evaluation. Analysis of the article involves dissecting the information presented in order to identify the purpose, the main points, the methodology and the findings or conclusions of the article (This is done in the initial summarising step).

In addition, analysis for critical comment involves identifying:

1. unstated assumptions
2. steps in the argument that are not logical
3. any additional purposes of the article that are not explicitly stated.

Evaluation of the article involves making judgments about the value (both positive and negative) of the article against specific criteria.

### **What criteria can be used for evaluating an article?**

The following criteria are useful; however, not all of them will be relevant for evaluating all articles:

- the timeliness of the article
- the degree to which the article makes an original contribution
- the logic of the view put forward
- the validity of the evidence put forward
- the theoretical framework used
  - Is the framework valid?
  - Has the framework been applied appropriately?
- the methodology used
  - Is the methodology appropriate?
  - Is the methodological approach explained clearly?
  - Does the methodological approach have any weaknesses?
  - Is the study sufficiently comprehensive and thorough?
  - Is anything important omitted in the research?
- the findings
  - Are the findings presented and described clearly and fully?
  - Do the findings seem sound?
  - Could the data be interpreted in another way?
  - Do/does the author(s) account for everything in the data or do they ignore something that might be important?
- the validity of the conclusions
- the thoroughness with which the article treats the topic
- its value compared to that of other articles on the topic
- the appropriateness of the article for the intended audience
- the extent to which it might satisfy the specific needs of a specific user.

## **What is the structure of a critical review?**

Like most other writing you do at university a critical review has an introduction, a body and a conclusion.

### **Introduction**

In the introduction you should:

- provide a context for the article (background information or shared knowledge)
- give the title of the article and name of author (full name is possible here with subsequent references to the family name only)
- identify the writer by profession or importance if appropriate
- include some indication as to why the subject is important and thus worth writing about
- identify the purpose of the article
- give an indication of your overall impression of the article in general terms.

### **Body**

In the body you should:

- summarise and analyse the contents of the article
- make clear by frequent reference to the author(s) of the article that you are presenting the author(s) views, not yours
- evaluate the article.

The following is a suggested structure:

- an analytical summary of main findings/arguments/conclusions of article
  - strengths/usefulness of article
  - weaknesses/limitations/problems of the article especially for your purposes
- (Or you might put these together so that each paragraph includes all four.)

### **Conclusion**

In the conclusion you should:

- summarise the previous discussion
- make a final judgement on the value of the article
- comment on the future of the issue/topic or implications of the view expressed.

## What makes a good critical review?

A good critical review:

- gives correct information about the author, date and article in the introduction
- summarises the purpose and main idea of the article in the introduction
- shows evidence of analytical thinking in the summary section
- evaluates the article against a number of criteria
- provides a final evaluation indicating the balance that is seen to exist between the strengths and weaknesses of the article
- makes sufficient reference to the author of the article
- makes appropriate use of reporting verbs
- makes appropriate use of summarising vocabulary - words that sum up the ideas in previous sentences and paragraphs
- makes appropriate use of evaluation vocabulary
- provides clear transitions between paragraphs that are helpful in guiding the reader through the review
- provides full bibliographical details of the article at the end of the review.

