

Critical Response Process

The object of a critical response is to provide a thorough explanation of *your understanding* of an essay or story. You do not necessarily have to find fault with an author's opinion, style, method, or expression, but you will likely find one or more aspects of a paper that are less to your liking than others.

1. Read the essay, story, or book you want to respond to carefully at least once. Jot down your rhetorical analysis

See "[Rhetorical Analysis](#)" resource.

2. Provide a summary statement. A critical response always starts with a *strong summary statement* that lets your reader know the topic of the essay to which you respond.

See "[Summary Process](#)" resource.

3. Once you have your summary, formulate some initial personal responses and jot down questions you may have about the text and its content. Keep your own knowledge of the topic in mind and when you can (outside exam situations) do the necessary additional research to make sure your knowledge is accurate and complete.

4. Reread the essay, book, or story and ask yourself if you find that the text supports (illustrates or exemplifies) its thesis (theme or topic) effectively. Decide whether the text persuades or not and *why* it does or does not do so. Check for obvious biases, flawed logic, false arguments and so on, *including your own*. It may be helpful to read the text once with the belief that the author is absolutely right and tells the truth convincingly and once with the belief that the author is full of nonsense and lying through his or her teeth: jot down the 'truths' and the 'untruths' during both readings and compare them at the end to see which ones hold up in your mind and which ones do not.

5. Write a position statement—your thesis—that you can use to centre your response.

6. Make a list of arguments you consider (potentially) useful to make your point.

7. Select your strongest arguments, and arrange them into a logical order (narrow to wide, or wide to narrow).

8. Write your opening paragraph(s) to include a brief summary of the essay you respond to, your position statement, and the main points you plan to raise to make your case.

9. Write your concluding paragraph to include a reference to the essay you critique, a consolidation of the points you have raised, and the result of the reasoning you have applied: your conclusion, that is, your position statement in different words.

10. Write the middle part of your response to follow the order of the various arguments you have listed for yourself.

11. Check to make sure that opening, body, and conclusion form a logical and coherent whole. Look out for transition problems.

12. If all looks well, read, revise, and edit it again to take out grammar, mechanics, and stylistic errors.

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