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


**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 useful to any student of nineteenth century British literature.” You can place the author in context by mentioning similar authors or works. Next, state your thesis.
2. **Write the main body of the critique.** In writing your critique, it is important to give a short overview and summarize only the main points of the book. The summary should be brief and can come before your critique, or you can integrate summary of the book with your critique. In your evaluation, consider what the author has proved or not proved, addressing questions that you considered as you read the book. The most common mistake students make is to include too much summary.

**Some Guidelines**

1. Take care to make a clear distinction between the author’s views and your own.
2. Do not model the organization of your critique after the organization of the book – that is DO NOT go through the book in the order it was written.
3. Avoid too much summary. The bulk of the paper should be your own analysis.

*Complied by Maggie Carey ’96*