

# Critical Reviews

## **The Structure of a Journal Article**

Most journal articles follow this structure:

### *Introduction*

- The introduction will set up a relevant context for the position that is being argued in the paper.
- It will state the central issue and often establish a context by identifying how others have perceived the issue.
- It will state the purpose and scope of the paper and give an overview of how the paper is organized. The thesis or claim will be stated.

### *Background*

- The background section will give a review of the literature relevant to the topic and describe the research of others out of which the present work grew.

### *Body*

- The body of the paper will consist of evidence that supports the thesis/claim.

### *Opposing Views*

- This section acknowledges opposing points of view and their differences from the writer's point of view. This section need not be positioned at the end.

## *Conclusion*

- The conclusion sums up the argument and makes a final statement about the thesis/claim.

## **Critical Reading/Critical Analysis**

### *Critical reading*

- Read the paper several times for comprehension.
- Summarize the paper. First summarize paragraphs, then sections, then the paper as a whole.

### *Critical analysis*

- Research the **academic context** for the paper. How have others responded to the issue?
- Analyze the **argument** presented in the paper using the eight questions below and the Toulmin model for analysis on the following page.
- Find the **assertion/claim**. Is it specific and detailed?
  - Are signal words used to identify the claim?
    - Should, must, have to, etc.
  - Are qualifiers used to restrict the claim and make it more defensible?
    - On the whole; typically; usually; most of the time.
  - Are exceptions to the claim stated openly?
- Identify and evaluate the **reasons** that support the claim.
  - Are the reasons relevant to the thesis?
- Are **assumptions** made explicit?
  - If not find out which assumptions are implied by the argument. Test them.
- Accumulate and evaluate the **evidence** used to support the reasons.
  - Is the evidence: sufficient, representative, relevant, accurate, testable?
- Are the **key terms** defined?
- Are **opposing views** considered?
- Is the material sequenced according to a **persuasive strategy**? Has the writer anticipated the readers' reaction to the material?

- Is the writer **credible**? Does he or she come across as open, honest, accurate, unbiased etc. or does the reader have reason to doubt the writer?

## **A Toulmin Model for Analyzing Arguments**

### *The Case*

*The model below can help you formulate the case for your argument. Use it as a form to fill out.*

Your claim needs to be warranted. You should think about what warrants your claim and what exceptions there could be to this claim.

**Your Claim:**

**The qualifier:**

**The exceptions:**

Reason 1 for claim:

- What makes this relevant?
- What evidence supports this reason?

Reason 2 for claim:

- What makes this relevant?
- What evidence supports this reason?

Reason 3 for claim:

- What makes this relevant?
- What evidence supports this reason?

### *The Refutation*

Anticipate what people might say to refute your claim and rebut their arguments.

Objection 1:

- Rebuttal:

Objection 2:

- Rebuttal:

Objection 3:

- Rebuttal:

Remember that each argument is different. Some arguments may be based on just one reason, while others will be based on several related reasons.

## Planning a Critical Response

- **The issue:** What is the issue you are responding to?
- **Your thesis:** what are you claiming?
  - Does your claim clearly address the issue involved?
- **Your audience:** What do you know about your audience and their views on the issue?
- **Your character/voice:** What is your relationship with the audience? How do you want to be perceived?
- **Your subject matter:** What does your thesis obligate you to discuss? What do you need to learn more about? How do you plan to get this information?
- **Your organizational plan:** What should you talk about first? Where might that lead? What might you end with?

## Mapping Out Your Critical Response

- **Narrow your assertion** to a specific and detailed claim in one sentence.
  - Use **signal words** to identify the claim.
  - Use **qualifiers** to restrict your claim and make it more defensible.
  - Openly state **exceptions** to your claim.
- Identify and evaluate the **reasons** that support your thesis.
  - Are the reasons relevant to the thesis?
- Make your **assumptions** explicit.

- Find out which assumptions are implied by the reasons you use to support your thesis.
- Accumulate and evaluate the **evidence** you use to support the reasons.
- Define **key terms**.
- Consider **opposing views**.
- Arrange the material according to a **persuasive strategy** by anticipating the reaction of your readers to your material.
- Test your **credibility** as a writer. Do you come across as open, honest, accurate, unbiassed etc. or does the reader have reason to doubt you?

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