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, unbiassed etc. or does the reader have reason to doubt the writer?

### A Toulmin Model for Analyzing Arguments

**The Case**

*The model below can help your 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:
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?

© Emmy Misser, Writing Centre