

Critical Analysis and Evaluation



Many assignments ask you to **critique** and **evaluate** a source. Sources might include journal articles, books, websites, government documents, portfolios, podcasts, or presentations.

When you **critique**, you offer both negative and positive analysis of the content, writing, and structure of a source.

When you **evaluate**, you assess how successful a source is at presenting information, measured against a standard or certain criteria.

Elements of a critical analysis:



opinion + evidence from the article + justification

Your **opinion** is your thoughtful reaction to the piece.

Evidence from the article offers some proof to back up your opinion.

The **justification** is an explanation of how you arrived at your opinion or why you think it's true.

How do you critique and evaluate?

When critiquing and evaluating someone else's writing/research, your purpose is to reach an **informed opinion** about a source. In order to do that, try these three steps:

- 1 Read and react to the piece. As you read, take notes. Record what the article means AND how you feel about it. Identify the parts that are worth talking about by asking:
 - How do you feel?
 - What surprised you?
 - What left you confused?
 - What pleased or annoyed you?
 - What was interesting?
- 2 Ask deeper questions based on your reactions above.
 - What is the purpose of this text?
 - Who is the intended audience?
 - What kind of bias is there?
 - What was missing?

See our resource on analysis and synthesis ([Move From Research to Writing: How to Think](#)) for other examples of questions to ask.



Tips

3 Form an assessment.

The questions you asked in the last step should lead you to form an assessment. Here are some assessment/opinion words that might help you build your critique and evaluation: illogical/ helpful/ sophisticated/ simplistic/ concise/ clear
interesting/ undocumented/ insightful/ confusing/ disorganized
creative/ deep/ superficial/ powerful/ not cited/ unconventional
inappropriate interpretation of evidence/ unsound or discredited methodology
traditional/ unsubstantiated/ unsupported/ well-researched/ easy to understand

4 Write your critique or evaluation using the **opinion+ evidence from the text + justification** model. Here is a sample:

Opinion: This article's assessment of the power balance in cities is **confusing**.

Evidence: It first says that the power to shape policy is evenly distributed among citizens, local government, and business (Rajal, 232)

Justification: but then it goes on to focus almost exclusively on business. Next, in a much shorter section, it combines the idea of citizens and local government into a single point of evidence. This leaves the reader with the impression that the citizens have no voice at all. It is **not helpful** in trying to determine the role of the common voter in shaping public policy.

Sample criteria for critical analysis



Sometimes the assignment will specify what criteria to use when critiquing and evaluating a source. If not, consider the following prompts to approach your analysis. Choose the questions that are most suitable for your source.

1 Content

- What do you think about the quality of the research? Is it significant?
- Did the author answer the question they set out to? Did the author prove their thesis?
- Did you find contradictions to other things you know?
- What new insight or connections did the author make?
- How does this piece fit within the context of your course, or the larger body of research in the field?

2 Structure

- The structure of an article or book is often dictated by standards of the discipline or a theoretical model. Did the piece meet those standards?
- Did the piece meet the needs of the intended audience?
- Was the material presented in an organized and logical fashion?

Writing/language

- Is the argument cohesive and convincing? Is the reasoning sound? Is there enough evidence?
- Is it easy to read? Is it clear and easy to understand, even if the concepts are sophisticated?