Writing A Critical Review

You are a student at Pomona College and you have been asked to write a critical review. Never mind the fact that you have probably never encountered such a thing, you just so happen to have a million and one other things to do. Fear not, this worksheet will get you through it.

What is a critical review?

A critical review, sometimes referred to as a critical book review, is a summary and analysis of the information and argument of a text in light of your own personal opinions. Those personal opinions, however, should be informed by what you have learned in class through readings, lectures, and discussions, along with any guidelines your professor may set.

How do I write a critical review?

So, you have the prompt in one hand and this worksheet in another. Let’s get this critical review underway.

Step 1. Reread

To begin, you need to reread the material that you are supposed to review. How can you effectively critique a text that you can’t remember? Reread, my friend.

Step 2. Identifying Key Information

In order to sift through the mass of information that many readings are riddled with it is helpful to ask yourself a few framing questions.

1. Who is the author’s intended audience?
2. What major questions did the text address?
3. What is the core issue?
4. How is the text framed? As a gender analysis? Something else?
5. How is it organized?
6. Is the argument clearly demonstrated?
7. What kind of evidence has the author used? Laboratory or clinical research? Surveys? Expert opinions?
8. Have they used facts, opinions, both?
9. Is their language or perspective neutral or biased?
10. Is there an argument against something?
11. Is there a bigger picture?
12. Is there another way to examine the subject?
13. Why does the author speak of or believe in what they do?
14. Is the reasoning behind their argument sound?
15. What do you know about this topic? Is it different from what the author is saying?
16. Why did your teacher assign this reading?
17. Summary of the article:
18. You personal critique:
19. Are there any questions you have concerning this work and the issue it addresses?
20. Where might the discussion proceed?

_Step 3. A Critical Review is 1/3 summary 2/3 your critique_

As you summarize a text within your critical review, your professor is looking to see how well you have discussed important arguments, trends, ideas, and themes in light of your own thoughts and opinions. That means you are not to spend the whole review talking about what the author said and not following up with what you believe, whether you agree or not.

Remember, college writing insists that you come from behind the author and speak up for yourself.

Your critical review need not be a comprehensive report on the whole text, it just has to discuss a few main issues that you may have agreed, disagreed, or partially agreed/disagreed on.

**Conclusion**

Now that you have got a few guidelines on how to right a critical review, you can expect to have a solid paper. Remember, you are engaging in a conversation with the author of a text, don’t let the conversation become the author’s monologue!