

## Critical Analyses

A critical analysis is an evaluation of a particular work. This work might be a piece of literature, a film, an essay, an advertisement, a symphony, or a sculpture. Essentially, the writer does a close reading of the piece and then breaks it down to more fully understand what is being communicated and how. The writer then explains the composer's central points and provides her own evaluation of whether the composer's argument was or was not successful.

Critical analyses are commonly assigned in academia. In literature classes, you often undertake a literary analysis to gain a deeper understanding of literary elements. In a composition class, you might be assigned to read an argumentative essay and then analyze how the writer supports his position in order to help you make your own arguments. In a film studies class, you might be assigned to write a critical analysis of a documentary film to see how a director mediates truth.

The ultimate purpose of a critical analysis is to evaluate and understand how another writer/artist/composer created meaning.

### WRITE

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What types of critical analyses do you enjoy reading, viewing, or listening to? Have you ever composed one outside the classroom (for example, have you posted a review of a business on a Web site like Yelp)? If so, what was it, and what was your purpose? Make a two columned list. In one column included the types of analyses you enjoy reading, viewing, or listening to and in the other column include all the analyses you've composed.

## Analyzing Critical Analyses

**Purpose** Writers critique a work to provide a deeper understanding of how a piece works and to evaluate it. Their purpose is to take a stance on the work and provide evidence from the work to support that stance.

**Audience** When a critical analysis is written for a school assignment, the audience is usually the teacher and the secondary audience might be peers in the class if they are going to read or peer-review the piece. A critical analysis of a literary work published in a literary journal is written for an audience of scholars wanting to understand more about that particular work.

**Rhetorical appeals** Writers of critical analyses rely on ethos and logos to make their points. Since a critical analysis is essentially an argument, writers must first establish ethos to gain the reader's trust. For example, to indicate their expertise, they would use terminology associated with the genre they're evaluating. Someone analyzing a poem would use terms such as *meter* and *tone*, while someone analyzing a scientific report might use terms such as *methodology* and *materials*. Writers also rely on logos, supporting their claims with evidence from the text they're analyzing.

**Modes & media** Critical analyses are most often published as text. When they're part of an academic assignment, they usually must be submitted as written words. They might have visual elements combined with the text if appropriate. For example, if you were analyzing a painting, you might include small visuals that illustrate the part of the painting you are discussing. A critical analysis could also use the mode of audio. The evaluation and analysis could be delivered on the radio as part of a news program or a podcast. Critical analyses are available in both print and digital formats.

**Elements of the genre** Critical analyses use the following conventions. Composers:

- *Introduce the work being analyzed.* Since a critical analysis focuses on a particular piece of literature, a film, or something else, the writer always introduces that work to the reader. Sometimes this can be done through the title of the analysis. In addition, an introductory paragraph usually provides the reader with information about the work. If the critical analysis is about a work of art, the writer would provide the reader with the title of the artwork, the name of the artist, the year it was created, and its medium.
- *Provide a summary or description of the work.* The summary is usually brief and only provides the necessary information a reader needs to understand the evaluation.
- *Identify the work's central point or thesis.* What is the central point that the artist, writer, or composer of the piece being analyzed makes? Since an analysis evaluates the success of the piece's argument, it's important to clearly state what the writer believes the composer is attempting to achieve. Besides identifying a central claim, the writer also examines the evidence provided to support this claim.
- *Make a clear evaluative claim.* The writer takes a position about the work being analyzed. It's clear what the writer thinks about the work that is being analyzed. The writer doesn't just restate the work's central point, but judges or evaluates it.
- *Provide evidence from the work to support claims.* Assertions are supported by specific evidence from the text, artwork, or piece being examined.