A stack of several books with light-colored pages and dark covers, viewed from the side, creating a sense of depth and academic focus.

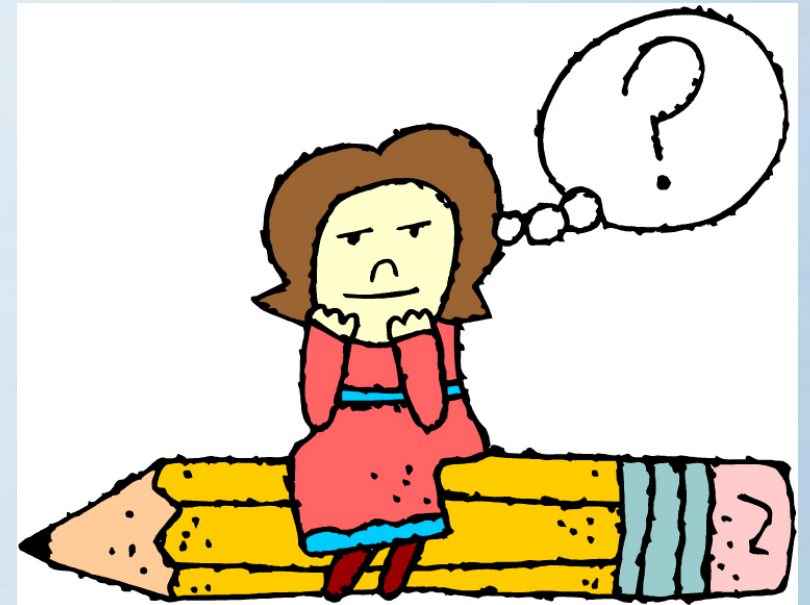
How to Write a Critical Response

WE ARE

WRITING TUTORS

What is a Critical Response?

An opportunity to respond to a specific piece of writing.



What's the Structure of a Critical Response?

1. Introduction
2. Summary
3. Analysis
4. Response
5. Conclusion

How Do I Develop My Response?

1. Read actively
 - With a pencil in hand, highlight, underline, and identify important elements of the writing that you want to respond to.
2. Determine the author's main point (the thesis)
3. Determine your position on the topic
 - Look for elements that will support your response



Ok, great.

Now, how do I write this thing?!

Introduction

This is the reader's first impression of a piece of writing.

- Provide **CONTEXT** so your ideas and point of view are understood.

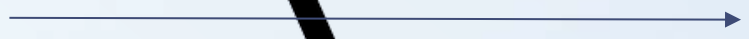
First sentence: Mention the name of the author and the title of the work you're responding to

Second sentence: A general statement about the topic

Next 3 or 4 sentences: Share the author's thesis and mention the key points

Last sentence: Your thesis (you can agree, disagree, build on, highlight, or question the author's point of view)

General opening statement



1

Relevant background information



2

Author's thesis statement



3

Author's supporting point(s)

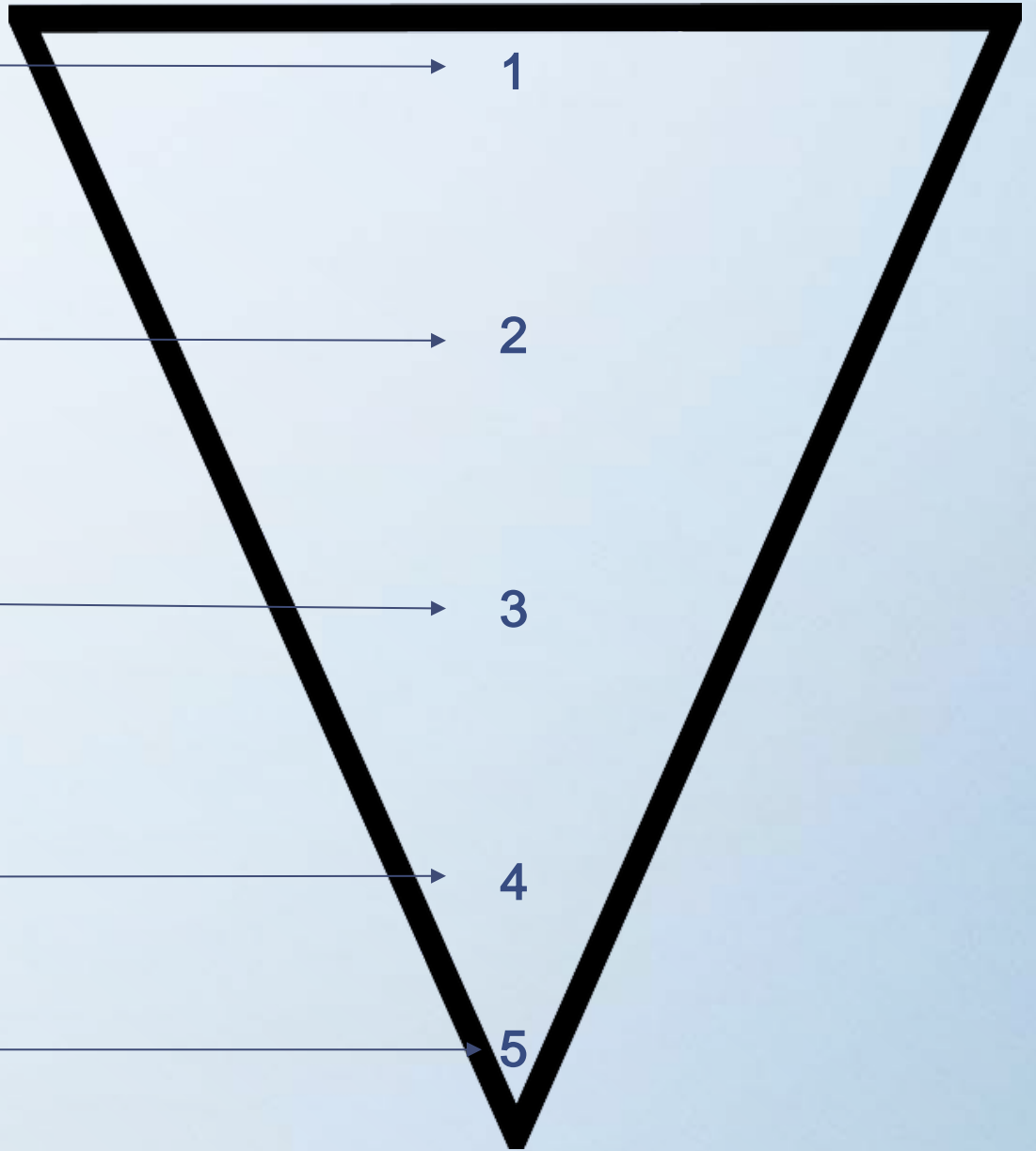


4

Your thesis statement



5



Sample: Effective Introduction

In John Smith's article, *The Failings of a Student*, students are described as bored and distracted in class. They pass notes to each other, play with their cell phones, tune out the teacher, hand in assignments late, and do as little as possible to prepare for tests. These students don't try because they have no motivation to try. Even worse, they blame teachers when they fail. However, these students are shortchanging themselves. Rather than throwing their tuition fees away, as they do when they fail courses because of their lack of motivation, they should take responsibility for their own learning because they will gain independence, learn leadership, and feel pride in their accomplishments.

Summary

- A few paragraphs

**1/3 of the
original**

- Summarize the article to your reader
- Explain the author's purpose (why did they write this piece?)
- Offer additional points that support the author's argument/purpose
- Paraphrase key points
- Do not give your own opinion; you will have time to do this later



Sample: Effective Summary

“Our Schools Need to Help Our Boys Become Men” by Calvin White is an article that was published in the Globe and Mail on September 9th of 2013 to cover the growing academic and support gap between boys and their female peers. White’s article goes a good job of raising the issue of the lack of support services targeted to boys.

Things to notice:

“Our Schools Need to Help Our Boys Become Men” by Calvin White is an article that was published in the Globe and Mail on September 9th of 2013 to cover the growing academic and support gap between boys and their female peers. White’s article goes a good job of raising the issue of the lack of support services targeted to boys.

1. The author and title of the article are mentioned
2. It’s direct, but to the point
3. Mentions the author’s thesis
4. Limits personal opinion and invites the reader to want to read more

Weak Example #1

“The Trouble with Online Education”, was written by Mark Edmondson in July 2012. Mark was a professor at the University of Virginia. University of Virginia recently signed on with a company by the name of, Coursera. Coursera creates a online education program for students who attends the University, and wishes to take an online course.

- Using what you know, how could this be improved?
- If this were your own writing, how would you revise and edit it?
- If you could talk to the author of this sample, what questions woul you still have after reading the summary?
- What was missing? What else needs to be said?

Weak Example #2

In the article “Don’t Blame the eater” written by David Zinczenko, Zinczenko states that the fast food industry should not be able to market product off to teens without a warning label. He thinks this because in his past he was not sure what was in his food? and how much calories he was eating because of the given affordable prices. Throughout the article he talks about the negatives in what could have happened to him. How could these effected him if he were to continue his eating habits. Furthermore what could have been the results of this, but instead he took a health way out.

- Using what you know, how could this be improved?
- If this were your own writing, how would you revise and edit it?
- If you could talk to the author of this sample, what questions woul you still have after reading the summary?
- What was missing? What else needs to be said?

Analysis

- A few paragraphs
- Discuss HOW the author presented their argument/main point
- Comment on the validity of the author's point of view
- Identify and review the author's purpose
 - Are they... persuading?
 explaining?
 informing?
- Use quotations, add support, and reference all of the information above
- Comment on the author's persuasive techniques

Some helpful topics to analyze

- Was the author successful in persuading their point of view?
- Was the article accurate, biased, or both?
- What type of language was used? How was it used?
- Who was the intended audience?
- What was the author's tone? What was the style of writing?
- Examine the support the author used
 - Was it relevant? current?
 - Was it biased?
- Was the author logical? Are there flaws in the logic?

****Remember: be selective of what you comment on; not everything in the article is worthy of mention**

Sample: Effective Analysis # 1

The audience of students and teachers may not find this article very stimulating, and will probably refer to it as nothing more than an opinion. As a reader the message in the article, on Edmundson's opinion about online education was clear, however the article failed to deliver actual facts and evidence to his arguments. Edmundson did offer many personal opinions on why he feels online education isn't the best form of learning, but no argument was backed up by any studies, surveys or opinions of anyone else besides Edmundson himself, which makes it hard to convince an audience that online education is not as effective as in class.

Notice:

- Personal opinion is not used
- The author comments on how the piece was written
- It supports claims with evidence
- Discusses the author's support to prove or justify the claim

Sample: Effective Analysis #2

Since the article was written by a professor from Harvard University, it is directed to a more mature audience. The article uses language like, dexterity, defiant, dumbfounded, and impetus etc to specifically express how he feels. The article was written in a logical manner and progressed down the page in a structured layout. Lots of loaded language was used to show his opinion on the negative attributes of students, words like, hurt, lost, sad and dumbfounded were used to prove his points. Scholzman uses a big comparison between the old and new generation throughout the article, as well to paint a clear picture to the reader of the differences between these two different worlds. The tone of the article is abrupt and straight to the point, not giving much breathing room towards students.

Notice:

- Personal opinion is not used
- The author comments on how the piece was written
- It supports claims with evidence
- Discusses the author's support to prove or justify the claim

Weak Example # 1

The author is persuasive by using this languages, such as students feel engaged in class and teachers knowing when students are lacking in learning when in a lecture. The author also states that, students and teachers come together and create an immediate and vital community of learning.

The author is overall persuasive in using these languages but not logical, as he has no logical facts.

- How could this be improved?
- If this were your own writing, how would you revise and edit it?
- If you could talk to the author of this sample, what questions would you still have after reading this analysis?
- What is missing? What else needs to be said in the analysis?

Weak Example # 2

Throughout the article David Zinczenko expresses his opinion on the fast food industry from his personal experiences and provides facts and examples to prove how obesity is continuing to grow through time because of false judgement and affordable food. False judgement of food is becoming a big thing in the food industry and Zinczenko proves this by showing how an average salad at McDonalds is normally 150 calories not knowing that everything involved with that salad is not advertised with it, thus could be possibly making people even bigger without them seeing it. He also proves that even though its affordable for mostly teens it's not in fact the safest from how much the cost for health care has gone up for diabetes. Furthermore, bringing up tobacco ads and how much more efficient they take their business. They actually show how the health issues that could happen whereas fast food has no warning labels towards obesity. This article met expectations because Zinczenko proved a lot of detail and information to support his facts and examples.

- How could this be improved?
- If this were your own writing, how would you revise and edit it?
- If you could talk to the author of this sample, what questions would you still have after reading this analysis?
- What is missing? What else needs to be said in the analysis?

Weak Example # 3

Edmundson, uses past teaching experiences in his article to support the claim which is valid. “Can they grasp the concepts of Shakespeare’s plots? If not, it’s worth adding a well-made film version of the next play to the syllabus.

(Edmundson, 2012, para 8) using that as evidence is supporting the claim “online education is one-size-fits-all endeavor (Edmundson, 2012, para 12).” The writer has persuaded the reader into believing that online courses are made for selective people and proves his points in virtual classrooms as a better route.

- How could this be improved?
- If this were your own writing, how would you revise and edit it?
- If you could talk to the author of this sample, what questions would you still have after reading this analysis?
- What is missing? What else needs to be said in the analysis?

Response

- This is your chance to argue
- Argue, disagree, argue for or against, question, or offer new ideas
- Was the author persuasive with the argument?
- Persuade your reader of your point of view
- Use examples, quotations, and support to build and prove your argument
- Put your ideas in logical order (don't jump from 1 idea to the next)
- Ensure your stance matches your originally stated thesis

1 idea
=
1 paragraph

Sample: Effective Response # 1

The article could have been much more convincing if the author didn't begin most of his back-up arguments with "I", it gave the article a complaining and ranting tone, when an argument is explained like "a real course creates intellectual joy, at least in some. I don't think an internet course ever will" (para 14), is like backing-up every argument with "because I said so". It seems as if a better title for the article would have been 'The Trouble with Online Education In My Opinion.' This way the arguments would make sense and be able to actually be taken seriously.

Notice:

- Personal opinion is used
- Reflects on specific elements, not the entire article
- Supports claims with evidence

Sample: Effective Response #2

In my opinion, clear instructions are not always effective in the prevention of cheating. This is true for take home assignments, as a 'take home' assignment is synonymous with 'use the internet'. The easiest way to make sure this does not happen is to simply do in-class assignments and exams. However, if students are doing a research assignment, then they cannot avoid using the internet. Therefore teachers should use online sites that validate a student's work and ensure that they have not simply copied from an online source. Lastly, should a student be caught cheating, the punishment is usually a mark of zero on their paper. However, that does not seem to be enough and therefore teachers should make the punishment for severe, like permanently failing the class or be expelled from the school.

Notice:

- Personal opinion is used
- Reflects on specific elements, not the entire article
- Supports claims with evidence

Weak Response # 1

In the article “Don’t Blame the Eater” written by David Zinczenko, Zinczenko argues about the contrasts between tobacco ads to fast food ads. He thinks if fast food followed tobacco ads by showing what their food could do to people what could be the result how much lives could they save; as well as, how much diabetes health care cost can decreased? I agree with David Zinczenko’s argument because from my personal experience of eating fast food you never know what might be in the food, how much chemicals are in it? No, there is physically no possible way to figure out what’s going on in your body. I think that if people saw what was going on in their bodies they would want to switch around their life like Zinczenko and not take a fast food diet where it does not help at all.

- How could this be improved?
- If this were your own writing, how would you revise and edit it?
- If you could talk to the author of this sample, what questions would you still have after reading this response?
- What is missing? What else needs to be said in the response?

Weak Response # 2

I agree with Scholozman article, because although students cheat all the time, professors do need to explain and be specific on what cheating is, because the more the students are informed the more they'll be scared to cheat if professors can speak about plagiarism to their students all the time and students have yet to do so, professor should be able to talk more on cheating. What made me agree even more with what Scholozman was saying was because although professors are not use to the social media, they still should find a way to know more about it, that way they will be more informed on what their students are doing on social media and find out if their students are cheating.

- How could this be improved?
- If this were your own writing, how would you revise and edit it?
- If you could talk to the author of this sample, what questions would you still have after reading this response?
- What is missing? What else needs to be said in the response?

Weak Response # 3

Steven Scholozman, M.D., is a educator himself. And in his argument, he is confused about the accusation against these 125 students, because the older generation has little or no knowledge of this era of new technology. There are no guidelines of which the students are to follow, so the students use methods they know they are familiar with in order to complete their take-home exam. There to be a definition for the word cheating, the students was not told using social media is a form of cheating. Schlozman appeal to other educators is very strong, when (Schlozman, 2013, p.10) "teachers are in over their heads with regard to these modalities." Schlozman appears to be confuse and angry by going back and forth with the same argument. Schlozman made some valid points, (Schlozman, 2013, p.4) "these tools are part of their routine and everyday lives. Therefore, I am at a loss as I consider how one might feel about using these tools to share ideas and information.

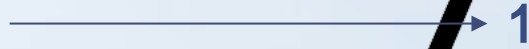
- How could this be improved?
- If this were your own writing, how would you revise and edit it?
- If you could talk to the author of this sample, what questions would you still have after reading this response?
- What is missing? What else needs to be said in the response?

Conclusion

- Final paragraph
- Restate your thesis points
- Remind readers of the points discussed
- Avoid quotations or additional arguments
- Offer a final thought that encourages your reader to continue to think about your argument

Conclusion

Restate your thesis + supporting points



1

Conclude your thinking and/or argument

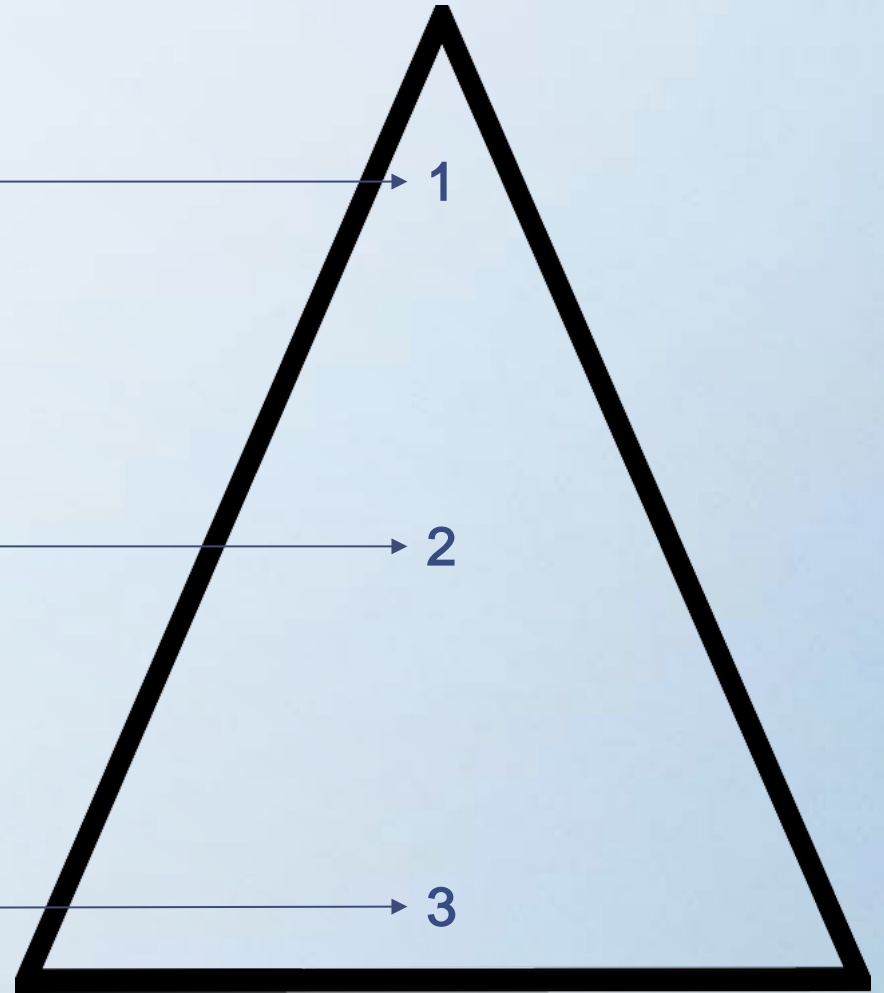


2

General closing statement



3



Sample: Conclusion

By taking responsibility for their own learning, students learn the importance of being independent. They develop their leadership skills when they are mature enough to be responsible for other people. Most importantly, they will learn what it's like to feel pride in the work they do, and pride in themselves. Some students may feel bored and distracted, but life doesn't have to be like that. Students can participate and learn new things. The most important thing they will learn is what it takes to be a mature, confident person. They will learn this by taking responsibility for themselves and for their learning.

Reminders

- Do NOT offer new ideas
- Give a very brief summary of what you've written
- Restate your thesis
- Offer a final thought to your reader

Example: Full Critical Response

This is a working draft of a critical response, so the errors demonstrate that it is a work-in-progress. Each paragraph clearly relates to the structure of a Critical Response.

By Leon Lewis

In the Toronto Star's article dated 2010, the author alerts readers about the Canadian Immigration testing components. This testing would apply to applicants who desire to obtain their Canadian Citizenship. Although immigration lawyers are against how the Federal government tests the language skills for applicants, it would only apply to those who are 18 to 54 years old. The main argument is that while applicants should be aware of the changes, they should understand it helps them to integrate and adapt to the Canadian culture easier by understanding there country's government and history. Further, it creates an environment where applicants can socialize in a classroom rather than being tested.

The author's purpose is to inform Canadians about the requirements for citizenship in Canada. Canadians need to be aware of the language skills assignment because immigrants would be able to adapt to the Canadian Culture. While the Federal Government used to test written language they would like to include oral and listening skills has Immigration lawyers dispute this change. Some lawyers were annoyed by the additional requirement, but the author believes in order to be a Canadian citizen one should understand the Canadian culture. Most importantly this change would require people to be proficient during their working years.

Example: Full Critical Response (continued)

The author notes that some experts are against immigration testing while some experts support it. Lawyers opinions are valid because they work with applicants first hand and experience the challenges they face. A professor believes there are slight adjustments for the applicants applying for Canadian Citizenship testing. However, her opinion cannot be compared to a lawyers perspective since she does not work with applicants directly. The author achieves the purpose of informing Canadians about what can transpire and take effect in the future of immigration.

It is my opinion that the Federal government should not test applicants in the proficiency in English or French. Further, I strongly disagree that the Federal government should add an oral and listening skills component. Instead, it is my belief that the Federal government can be more effective by having those who wish to apply for their Canadian Citizenship attend mandatory classes where they can be taught about Canadian history. Mandatory classes would help applicants integrate easier by socializing with others as they learn from different cultures and their teacher. If applicants are taught instead of tested, they would not feel the pressure of failing the Canadian Citizenship test. By implementing Mandatory classes, it creates an environment where people can relax and learn at their pace. The government should examine the economic and other costs related to testing as supposed to teaching.

In conclusion, applicants who apply for a Canadian Citizenship should be aware of the current and additional components the Federal government tests in language proficiency. Applicants should be effective communicators, so it can help them integrate easier and adapt to the Canadian culture. Although some immigration lawyers are concerned about the changes the Federal government implements, these changes would benefit applicants by being knowledgeable about the country's government and history. It is highly recommended that applicants are taught by educators first before writing the Canadian Citizenship tests so they would be more successful by the knowledge they have gained.

Good luck!

If you've found this helpful, please speak to one of the Writing Centre Tutors to find out how you can view these slides on your own time.

