



Critical Essay

"Critical" here is not used in the sense of "to criticize"--to find the faults in. Instead, "critical" is used in the same way "Critical Thinking" is used. A synonym might be "interpretive" or "analytical."

Characteristics of a Critical Essay

1. It is an argument, persuasion essay that in its broadest sense makes a point and supports it.
2. The "point" or "thesis" of a critical essay is interpretive in nature. That means the point is debatable and open to interpretation, not a statement of the obvious. The thesis statement is a clear, declarative sentence that comes at the end of the introduction.
3. Since the author of a critical essay can typically assume there is an informed audience, plot summary is inappropriate and not necessary.
4. Organization: Like any essay, the critical essay should have a clear introduction, body, and conclusion. As the author supports his or her point in the body of the essay, the author should "divide up the proof," which means to put only one primary support per paragraph.
5. Support:
 - a. The primary source for support in the critical essay is from the text (or sources). The text is the authority, so using quotations is required.
 - b. The continuous movement of logic in a critical essay is "assert then support; assert then support." No assertion (general statement that needs proving) should be left unsupported (with specifics, often from the text(s))
 - c. In general, for each assertion you need at least three supports.
6. A critical essay will always "document" its sources and clarify where outside information came from (following the rules of MLA Documentation Style or any other style you may be asked to do).
7. Whenever the author moves from one main point (Primary Support) to the next, the author needs to clearly signal to the reader that this movement is happening. The topic/transition sentence must link back to the thesis as it states the topic of that paragraph.

Tips for Writing Critical Essays

1. Get comfortable with the text or topic you will be writing about.
 - a. Reading the text multiple times can help you understand the text better. You might catch things that you didn't notice the first time.
 - b. Use active reading skills, such as annotating, when looking at the text.
2. Be sure you know the topic well enough to talk and write about it.
 - a. You can do research in order to improve your knowledge on the topic. If you use any of the information from your research in your paper, be sure to cite the source(s) according to the style you are using.
3. Move past summary and surface level understanding of the work. Make sure your paper digs deeper and is an analysis that utilizes critical thinking skills.