

HOW TO CRITIQUE A JOURNAL ARTICLE

So your assignment is to critique a journal article. This handout will give you a few guidelines to follow as you go. But wait, what kind of a journal article is it: an empirical/research article, or a review of literature? Some of the guidelines offered here will apply to critiques of all kinds of articles, but each type of article may provoke questions that are especially pertinent to that type and no other. Read on.

First of all, for any type of journal article your critique should include some basic information:

1. Name(s) of the author(s)
2. Title of article
3. Title of journal, volume number, date, month and page numbers
4. Statement of the problem or issue discussed
5. The author's purpose, approach or methods, hypothesis, and major conclusions.

The bulk of your critique, however, should consist of your qualified opinion of the article.

Read the article you are to critique once to get an overview. Then read it again, critically. At this point you may want to make some notes to yourself on your copy (not the library's copy, *please*). The following are some questions you may want to address in your critique no matter what type of article you are critiquing. (Use your discretion. These points don't have to be discussed in this order, and some may not be pertinent to your particular article.)

1. Is the title of the article appropriate and clear?
2. Is the abstract specific, representative of the article, and in the correct form?
3. Is the purpose of the article made clear in the introduction?
4. Do you find errors of fact and interpretation? (This is a good one! You won't believe how often authors misinterpret or misrepresent the work of others. You can check on this by looking up for yourself the references the author cites.)
5. Is all of the discussion relevant?
6. Has the author cited the pertinent, and only the pertinent, literature? If the author has included inconsequential references, or references that are not pertinent, suggest deleting them.
7. Have any ideas been overemphasized or underemphasized? Suggest specific revisions.
8. Should some sections of the manuscript be expanded, condensed or omitted?
9. Are the author's statements clear? Challenge ambiguous statements. Suggest by examples how clarity can be achieved, but do not merely substitute your style for the author's.
10. What underlying assumptions does the author have?
11. Has the author been objective in his or her discussion of the topic?

In addition, here are some questions that are more specific to empirical/research articles. (Again, use your discretion.)

1. Is the objective of the experiment or of the observations important for the field?
2. Are the experimental methods described adequately?
3. Are the study design and methods appropriate for the purposes of the study?
4. Have the procedures been presented in enough detail to enable a reader to duplicate them? (Another good one! You'd be surprised at the respectable researchers who cut corners in their writing on this point.)
5. Scan and spot-check calculations. Are the statistical methods appropriate?
6. Do you find any content repeated or duplicated? A common fault is repetition in the text of data in tables or figures. Suggest that tabular data be interpreted or summarized, not merely repeated, in the text.

A word about *your* style: let your presentation be well-reasoned and objective. If you passionately disagree (or agree) with the author, let your passion inspire you to new heights of thorough research and reasoned argument.