



WRITING CRITICAL REVIEW PAPERS

Critical review essays have been the bane of my existence recently. Although I enjoy writing, and can usually offer an opinion if necessary, when it comes to critiquing a scientific article, I suddenly have nothing to say.

The name is somewhat misleading. For my first critical review assignment, my initial thought was that I needed to point out the negatives. While that may be somewhat true, a critical review also includes analyzing and evaluating another's work, not just criticizing it.

Although I am still getting comfortable with deciding exactly what to include in my review essays, suggestions from others have helped me develop a routine:

- ◆ I start by skimming the work (usually the abstract, introduction, and conclusion) to understand the main ideas. I don't take notes at this point since I simply want to get an idea of what the article is about.
- ◆ When I'm ready for more in depth reading, I get a pen and paper (or laptop) for notes.
- ◆ To help me organize my thoughts and make writing my draft easier, I'll then group my notes into areas such as main ideas, strengths and weaknesses of the study, support for my arguments, conclusion, etc. This allows me to skim through my notes to be sure I include the points I want to address in my analysis, as well as any questions I may still have after reading the article.

Although critical reviews may seem like yet another writing assignment, I realize I am developing my own analytical skills while reviewing the work of others. This practice will eventually help me in my own research, even though I may not fully appreciate it at the moment.

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