

Critical Review

You have been given an assignment to review a book, article, poem, play, movie, musical composition, or other work. This handout will guide you to some of the resources available in the library that can help with critical writing.

What is a Critical Review?

“A critical review is a paper involving an opinion of, as well as some information about, a piece of writing, a play, or a program. It is **not** a summary of plot, a paraphrase, an outline ... it includes a statement of what the author or producer has tried to do, it evaluates how well (in the opinion of the reviewer) this person has succeeded, and it presents evidence to support this evaluation.”

Allen, Eliot D. *A Short Guide to Writing a Critical Review*. Rev. ed. Deland: Everett, 1975.
NVCC Library call number: PN98.B7A4 1975

First, you should use an active, critical reading process when you approach the piece you'll be writing about. In other words, on the first read-through, appreciate & enjoy this work for all its worth. Then, on the second read-through, look for strengths & weaknesses, and pay attention to such areas as organization, presentation, style, setting, and content -- all with a mind toward your review. You'll need to take it apart to examine it, then put it back together to make sense of it to your reader.

Online Writing Help

NVCC Writing Center http://www.nvcc.commnet.edu/resources/writing_center.shtml

Other Online Writing Centers:

- Handouts from Bowling Green State
www.bgsu.edu/offices/acen/writerslab/handouts/index.htm
- University of Maine's Online Writing Resources
www.ume.maine.edu/~wcenter/
- E-handouts from RPI
www.wecc.rpi.edu/handouts.html
- Review writing
<http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/CriNonfiction.html>
- Revising & editing
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/general/index.html>

Tip: You can get online feedback on your writing! Go to <http://www.etutoring.org/> to create a Student Account --it's free!

Finding Examples of Reviews

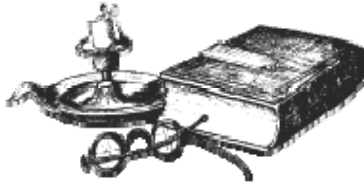
For a look at review **excerpts**, see the handout "Finding Literary Criticism."

For a look at **complete** reviews, go to the Electronic Databases page from the library's website. Use InfoTrac OneFile or other periodical databases to search with a specific title, if you have one, or use a subject term and the word "review" in your keyword search. For instance, if you're looking for a review of a book on U.S. history, your search phrase would look like this:

(United States history) and (book review)

See the handout "Finding Periodical Articles" for more help.

Hint: Use Full-text limiters when available to get the most accessible articles.



For a look at **complete** reviews in print publications (magazines, journals, newspapers here in the library), you can browse through our current periodicals. Most academic and professional journals feature book reviews in a special section of each issue, listed in the Table of Contents. Some suggested general NVCC periodical titles to look at for examples of reviews:

- African American Review
- American Historical Review
- American Music
- Atlantic Monthly
- Contemporary Sociology
- Dissent
- Families in Society
- Film Quarterly
- Foreign Affairs
- Hispanic American Historical Review (HAHR)
- Historian
- HortScience
- Journal of Criminal Law
- Journal of Marriage & the Family
- Metropolis
- NY Times Book Review
- New Yorker
- On the Issues
- Physical Therapy
- Rolling Stone
- Science
- Scientific American
- Sloan Management Review
- Smithsonian
- Teaching Sociology
- World & I

See the handout "Finding Periodical Articles" for more help.

For lots of informal, web-published reviews, visit
<http://dir.yahoo.com/Arts/Humanities/Literature/Reviews/>

Ask your friendly Reference Librarian
whenever more help is needed.