

# WRITING THE CRITICAL RESPONSE

--adapted from Simon & Schuster Handbook for Writers, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, Writing: Invention Forma and Style by Podis & Podis, The Purposeful Writer by Donna Gorrell

A critique is an analysis of and a commentary on another piece of writing. It generally focuses on technique as well as on content. A critical response essay (or interpretive essay or review) has two missions: to summarize a source's main idea and to respond to the source's main ideas with reactions based on your synthesis.

## **Summarizing**

The first step to writing is to read actively and thoughtfully, seeking answers to the following questions as you go:

- What are the main points, ideas, or arguments of the work (book, article, play essay, etc.)?
- How is the work organized?
- What evidence/support does the author give?
- What is the primary purpose of the work?

(For further guidance on summarizing, see our handout Five Keys to Writing Effective Summaries.)

## **Analyzing (interpretation and evaluation)**

To help you generate content for your analysis, consider the following questions:

- Does the work achieve its purpose? Fully or only partially?
- Was the purpose worthwhile to begin with? Or was it too limited, trivial, broad, theoretical, etc.?
- Is any of the evidence weak or insufficient? In what way? Conversely, is the evidence/support particularly effective or strong?
- Can I supply further explanation to clarify or support any of the main points, ideas, arguments?
- Are there sections you don't understand? Why?
- Was there any area where the author offered too much or too little information?
- Is the organization of the work an important factor? Does its organization help me understand it, hinder my understanding, or neither?
- Is anything about the language or style noteworthy?

## **Organization**

The length of your essay and whether you respond to a single passage or to an entire work will vary with the assignment. Regardless of length and breadth, all critical responses include the following basic elements:

- Introduction:
- Body:
  - Summary
  - Transition
  - Analysis: Evaluate the evidence: sufficient (enough evidence, examples), representative (large enough pool/sample), relevant (accurate correlations), accurate, claims fairly qualified
  - Transition
  - Response: base reaction on your own experience, prior knowledge, and opinions (?)
- Conclusion:
- Documentation:

Within the body, you may choose from three basic patterns of organization: write all the summary paragraphs first, followed by the analysis portion; alternate between summary and analysis paragraphs so that each paragraph of summary is followed by a critique of the summarized information; or combine a summary and critique of each idea within each paragraph of the body.