



Writing a Critical Analysis

Many students believe the term “criticism” has a negative connotation and that it means condemning others’ ideas. However, criticism focuses on evaluating both the positive and negative aspects of a particular work. **Your main purpose is to examine how the writer expresses their opinions and to determine if they succeed in making a point**, not merely providing a summary of what the author says.

Step 1: Things to look at while reading

Author’s Purpose

- Is the author writing to prove a point, share an opinion or information, or just because they have the desire to write?
- Why did the author write this text? To inform, persuade, entertain, describe...?
- Who is the intended audience?

Structure

- How does the text begin? With its subject and its thesis, a foreshadowing of its conclusions, and any suggestions as to why the author wrote it? With an anecdote? With something that seems unrelated?
- How are the main ideas organized?
- Is explanation and interpretation found throughout the text, or in a separate section of the text, such as the conclusion?

Thesis and Support

- What is the author’s main idea?
- Does the author address all aspects and possible points of view on the topic?
- What kinds of sources do the author’s information come from (primary, secondary, empirical research, etc.)?
- Are visuals used to help illustrate the main idea?

Tone of Voice

- Does the text’s word choice and tone of voice match its format and intended audience? *Remember that different genres of writing utilize different tone of voice and word choice.* For example:
 - Scholarly articles are written in a serious, formal manner, and the word choice includes jargon and technical terms that imply that the author is an expert.
 - Reflective essays or personal pieces are written in a less formal matter, with a conversational, even humorous, tone. The words are less technical, and the text may include slang.
- Are the words chosen used for emotional effect?

Step 2: Evaluating the author’s ideas

- Can you identify any gaps or contradictions in the writer’s logic?
- Does the author provide appropriate research to support the main point?
- Are the facts used accurate?
- Are all important terms defined?
- Does the author address opposing points of view?
- Is the organizational structure of the text effective? Are the author’s ideas logical? Are the ideas well-organized?
- Is the text appropriate for the intended audience?
- Does the style and wording help or hinder the author’s purpose?
- What was your reaction?
- Did you finish reading the article with unanswered questions or confusion? Did you feel satisfied with the author’s approach? Why or why not?

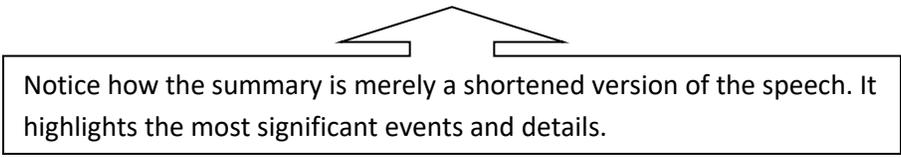
Step 3: Plan and write your critical analysis

- Determine your viewpoint based on what you noticed about the text during Step 2
- Begin with an introduction, including a thesis statement, that defines **the subject** of your critical analysis and **your viewpoint**
- Use evidence from the text to support your ideas either by paraphrasing or quoting a passage directly (be sure to include citations!)
- Remember: you must always **explain** how the evidence you are using supports your larger point
- Follow the author's organization when organizing your analysis
- Explain the author's ideas and give your own opinion about the author's argument and text
- Include specific passages from the text to support your ideas (remember to properly cite these)

What is the difference between summarizing and analyzing?

Summary:

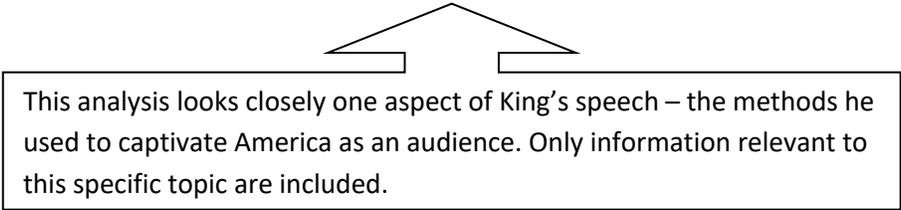
Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech discusses human equality. King describes how men are created equal and should be treated as equals; he describes the unfair treatment of blacks to support his notion that equal treatment is not present in America at this time.



Notice how the summary is merely a shortened version of the speech. It highlights the most significant events and details.

Analysis:

Martin Luther King Jr. utilizes many tactics to make his push for human equality appeal to every American during his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. He cites the Declaration of Independence, the US Constitution, and the Emancipation Proclamation to prove that his message is relevant to all Americans, regardless of their race and background. He also uses terms like "we" and "our" to further promote the idea that his beliefs are important for the entire country. These two techniques allow King to present his message to all Americans, not just whites or blacks.



This analysis looks closely one aspect of King's speech – the methods he used to captivate America as an audience. Only information relevant to this specific topic are included.

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