

Critical Analysis

Critical analyses are some of the most common types of assignments in university, especially in the social sciences, humanities, and arts.

What is a critical analysis?

A critical analysis is a **close reading and detailed examination of a particular text/literary work**. A critical analysis does one of two things:

Reveals **the gaps, 'blind spots,' or underlying assumptions** in someone's work (weakens their argument)

or

Suggests **the legitimacy of particular claims, ideas, and concepts** using supportive evidence (strengthens their argument)

There are two parts to a critical analysis:

1. **Interpretation and explanation**

Fair and value-free (objective) account of the work; concise summary of the author's main points/key claims; shows comprehensive understanding of the work.

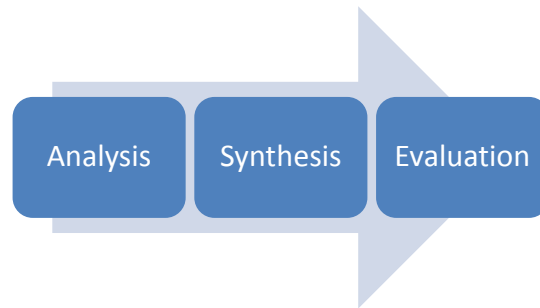
2. **Evaluation**

A critical assessment and evaluation of the effectiveness/ineffectiveness of the work.

Types of questions to ask:

- Does the author's evidence support their argument?
- What kinds of appeals and strategies does the author use to persuade the reader? Is he/she biased in any way?
- Does the author exclude or ignore important evidence? For example, does he/she leave out information that is contrary to their perspective/argument?

Process



Step 1. Analysis (*separation*)

To ‘analyze’ means **breaking something down into its smallest constituent parts**, and then **studying the parts separately**; e.g. a “detailed examination of the elements or structure of something.”¹

- Focusing on individual paragraphs, words, phrases, lines, etc.

Step 2. Synthesis (*connection*)

The next step is to reveal the unique connections, relationships, and patterns between the parts. It is a process of ‘building’ the parts back up into a comprehensive whole.

- Deducing and inferring conclusions from the available evidence
- Uncovering the ‘hidden’ messages
- Showing different links and patterns

Step 3. Evaluation (*critique*)

The last (and most important) step is to evaluate the effectiveness of the work. This involves analyzing the work as a whole (main argument), *as well as* examining the individual parts (particular evidence, claims, concepts, ideas). It involves

- Examining how well claims are supported, arguments are formed, and conclusions are reached.
- Analysis is objective and logical (value-free), and not emotionally or subjectively driven
- Considers alternative perspectives – seeing both sides of an issue, being open to new evidence that disconfirms your ideas

¹ Oxford English Dictionary. “Analysis” definition. Accessed Nov. 22, 2016 at <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/analysis>