

## The Critical Thought Paper

### An Overview of the Critical Thought Paper

The purpose of a critical thought paper is to show understanding of and reflection upon assigned articles that discuss current, often controversial, issues in the health care industry. It is your job to determine why the discussion of these issues is meaningful, and why the questions raised are significant, considering the present state of the Public & Non-Profit Health Administration field. Critical thought papers communicate not only the main ideas of an article, but expand upon those main ideas to discuss the strengths/weaknesses of the article, the article's relevance to current Public/Health Administration issues, and the connection between the article and concepts presented in class.

#### Audience

Your primary audience is your professor. However, keep in mind that critical thought papers resemble reports that are written in the field of Public & Non-Profit Health Administration, so your tone should be professional. These reports are written with a supervisor or co-worker in mind, whose time, like yours, is valuable, so be concise and to-the-point. Your writing should be clear enough that academic audiences outside the field can understand your analysis and discussion.

### Organization

Most critical thought papers are brief - your professor will inform you of specific length requirements, but the average critical thought paper is no more than three pages. For this reason, analysis and criticism should be succinct, and your discussion of the article should be to the point. Use the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th edition) for citing and formatting, unless otherwise directed by your instructor.

#### Introduction

Your introduction should introduce your audience to the article or articles you are reviewing, by including a brief summary of the article's purpose and by highlighting the article's main points. It is often helpful to refer to the main points of the article in your thesis statement, as a way of letting your audience know which points you plan to analyze in more depth.

#### Body

The body of your paper should do the following:

- Summarize the main ideas and arguments of the article - What issue/hot topic does the article address? Why is this issue current and relevant? What position does the author take on the issue?
- Analyze the author's argument(s) - Why does the author argue this? What evidence does the author provide to support his/her argument? Is that evidence viable or lacking?

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### Questions to Consider in the Body of the Paper

- What issue/hot topic does the article address?
- Why is this issue current and relevant?
- What position does the author take on the issue?
- Why does the author argue this?
- What evidence does the author provide to support his/her argument?
- Is that evidence viable or lacking?
- Do you agree with the author's argument?
- Why/why not?
- What evidence supports your position?

- Critique the author's argument(s) - Do you agree with the author's argument? Why/why not? What evidence supports your position?

## Conclusion

In your conclusion, you should summarize your argument, restate why the issue is relevant, and reiterate why you agree or disagree with the author of the article. By synthesizing the main points you discussed in your paper, the reader is left with an overall understanding of how your thoughts connect to form a thorough, worthwhile argument.

*For more help writing introductions and conclusions, see our website, <http://www.gvsu.edu/wc>.*

## A Process for Writing Critical Thought Papers

A very small portion of your critical thought paper should be devoted to summary. You should summarize only where background information offered by the article is necessary to understand/support your point. Instead, the majority of your critical thought paper should be personal reflection and detailed analysis. To help in the analysis process, the first, and perhaps most important, step in writing a critical thought paper is careful and close reading.

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Here are some tips for close reading:

1. Read the article once, all the way through, without interruption. Only stop to look up vocabulary that is unfamiliar or undefined in context. If you don't understand a passage/concept, read the selection a time or two more. If the passage/concept is still unclear or confusing, mark it and return to it later. Save more thorough note-taking for subsequent readings.

2. After the first reading, return to the article with the following questions in mind:

- What is the author's perspective? What perspectives are missing from the article?
- Is the author biased? Why or why not? What information, or lack of information, creates this bias?
- How does the author support his or her opinion? Is the author's data reliable/verifiable?
- What is the supporting, factual information the author provides?
- Is there evidence the author should have considered, but did not? Why is this evidence, or lack thereof, significant?
- What is the real world significance posed by the article? If you were a Public Admin/Health Admin employee, what pertinent information would you relay to your supervisor?

*After taking notes, put the article aside for awhile to let the information simmer and to consider what further questions you have.*

The purpose of these questions is to familiarize you with the type of research/evidence the author uses and to increase your understanding of the author's main point/purpose. Highlight or mark sections of the article that answer these questions - this will make it easier for you to find the information again when you start writing your paper. After taking notes, put the article aside for awhile to let the information simmer and to consider what further questions you have.

3. Before beginning your third reading, contemplate what lingering questions you may have.

- Are these questions addressed in the article?
- Does the fact that these questions are not addressed contribute to the article's weakness?

- Are these questions that you might recommend be answered in order to strengthen the author's argument?
- What is your recommendation?

Following this multiple-reading process will help you develop a well-informed, evidence based critique of the article. Remember, you are not expected to agree with everything you read. Think about what you're reading, don't take it at face value - you aren't being force fed; you are allowed, and encouraged, to have an opinion. More importantly you are encouraged to support that opinion with scholarly and real-world evidence. Your argument should be based on facts, not on feelings.

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## A Process for Evaluating Your Draft

- Did you accurately, fairly, and objectively characterize the article's arguments and research in your introductory summary?
- Did you avoid quoting from the author's own summary or thesis statement when summarizing the study in your paper? The urge to do so may indicate that you haven't yet grasped the author's main point(s), and you may need to re-read the article. Note: Direct quoting is acceptable, and encouraged, when analyzing, but should be avoided when summarizing.
- Is your summary of the article the right length? If your professor does not specify a required length, a good guideline is that the summary should be no longer than a couple sentences of each paragraph of analysis. After all the point of the assignment is to analyze, not summarize!
- Does your analysis account for the majority of the essay? If not, you probably need to re-read the article and your marginalia to generate more ideas.
- Does your analysis explain how the author supported his or her main points with specific research, data, historical events, professional trends, theory, ethical framework, etc.?
- Does your analysis point out any weaknesses in the author's argument(s), data collection strategies, or findings?
- Does your analysis describe specifically what the article contributes to the topic you're studying?
- Did you show how this article compares and contrasts to other pieces you've read this semester, or to class discussions and lectures?
- If required by your professor, did you describe your own view of the topic in light of having read the article?
- Throughout the entire essay, did you maintain a professional tone? That is, when you disagreed with the author of the article, did you do so respectfully?
- Overall, have you demonstrated that you've read and thought about the article carefully?

*See our website for a link to a website that can help you with paraphrasing and summarizing: <http://www.gvsu.edu/wc>.*

## Prompts for Writing Consultations

- Begin by talking about the article under analysis. What is the article's main point? What new information is offered by the article?
- Talk about the writer's process of reading the article. What was difficult to understand? Are there terms, data, or passages that the writer hasn't quite grasped?
- Analyze the writer's summary of the article? Is it brief, objective, and clear? Does it avoid quoting from the article itself - that is, is the writer able to articulate the information in his or her own words?
- Discuss the analysis. Is most of the essay dedicated to analyzing how the

parts of the article fit together and how the article fits into a larger discussion of the topic? Are the author's premises and evidence identified and analyzed? Does the paper demonstrate deep thought throughout?

- Discuss the writer's response to the article. Does it remain professional in tone? Does the writer support his or her assertions or recommendations with research or fact-based evidence?
- Is the writing effectively organized? Does it flow logically from summary to analysis? Does it fit with the professor's requirements for the assignment?
- Are sources correctly documented in APA format? Are sources integrated smoothly into the discussion? Is paraphrasing used commonly and direct quotation used sparingly? Is proper credit given to the ideas of authors of secondary sources?
- Is the writing well edited? The most common errors to look for include problems with commas and semi-colons, awkward word choice and phrasing, the use of second person ("you"), and subject-pronoun agreement.