

CRITICAL ACCOUNT OF SCIENTIFIC READING

PREPARATIVE EXERCISE 1: WHAT DOES 'CRITICAL' MEAN?

Study actual published accounts. These model critiques of scientific literature should help you understand the task you are being set by the examiners.

1 Read a review

Find a recent book review. New Scientist magazine or broadsheet newspapers are good sources. Read it...

- First gain an overview by reading the title and any subtitles, looking at pictures or diagrams and their captions.
- Now get a quick idea of the structure and content by reading just the first sentence of each paragraph. (A well-written piece should start each paragraph by taking you into its content from the content of the previous paragraph)
- Now that you know roughly what the piece is about and where it is going, read it through.

2 Consider what the review has told you

- Do you have an idea of what is in the book?
- Do you know more about the author of the book?
- Do you know more about the subject of the book?
- Do you know what the critic thought of the book?
- Do you know what type of reader the book is aimed at?
- Do you have an idea whether you would want to read the book or not?

3 Analyse the review

Examine the structure of the review more closely. Taking each paragraph in turn, note the main or most important content:

- Background information on the author?
- Background information on the field/subject?
- Publication details (Title, Author, price, and so on)?
- Major themes of the book?
- Particular examples of the book's content?
- Quotes from the book?
- Comparison with other similar books/authors?
- The critic's own view or additional points?
- Personal reaction to the content?
- Comments on style?
- Comments on presentation?
- Comments on overall content (such as the presence of an index, bibliography)?
- Comments on accuracy?
- Agreement or disagreement with arguments in the book?
- Recommendation to read or not?

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PREPARATIVE EXERCISE 2: 'CRITICAL' MEANS POSITIVE TOO!

Look at accounts written by previous students and the marking scheme which the examiners use. This exercise should help you appreciate which aspects of the task you have been set are of real interest to the examiners and, later, to check through your own account to make sure you have gained as many marks as possible.

Your supervisor can provide you with access to

- a sample account,
- the marking criteria,
- the actual marks given to the samples.

1 Read the sample account

Make a note of anything which you might do — or not do — in your own account.

2 Read the marking criteria

- Discuss the marking criteria.
- There are two sets of marks to be given to the account, make sure you understand how many marks are given in each section and what the marks are given for.

3 Mark your sample

Take each set of criteria ('Science ideas and general ideas about science'; 'Personal response and discussion') in turn...

- Look again at the sample account you were reading and give it a mark.
- Now explain in discussion what mark you have given and why. As a result of discussion you might change the marks you have given.

4 Compare the actual mark

Compare your marks with the actual marks given.

- Did you agree with the rank order? The actual marks?
- Can you see how the marks were gained?

Discuss your marking with your teacher.

Make a careful note of any more points which might help your own account write-up.